Journal of Educational Innovation and Technology

Online Radicalization and the Crisis of Social Literacy among Students: A Case Study of the SMAN 72 Explosion from a Social Science Perspective

Ensellina Mas'ul[1*], Mawardi Nurullah[1]

[1] Department of Economic Education, Universitas Pamulang, Tangerang Selatan, Indonesia.

Corresponding Author:
Author Name*: Ensellina Mas'ul
Email*: ensellinamasul@gmail.com

Abstract: The rapid development of digital technology that is not accompanied by adequate social literacy skills has led to serious consequences for the social behavior of young people. This study aims to analyze the relationship between exposure to online radicalism and the crisis of social literacy among students, using the explosion incident at SMAN 72 Jakarta as a case study. The research employs a descriptive-analytical qualitative approach with a critical discourse analysis (CDA) strategy, drawing on secondary data from news articles, policy documents, social media posts, and scholarly literature. The study adapts the Miles and Huberman model, which is further refined by adding stages of contextualization and ideological interpretation. The findings indicate that the process of digital radicalization unfolds in three stages: exposure (contact with extremist content through social media), internalization (acceptance of radical values driven by a crisis of social identity), and action framing (justification of extreme behavior through religious or moral narratives). The crisis of social literacy accelerates this process, as students lose the ability to critically interpret social contexts. From the perspective of Social Studies education, this phenomenon calls for a transformation of the learning paradigm, from a focus on knowledge transmission toward the cultivation of reflective social awareness that is responsive to the dynamics of the digital era.

Keywords: Critical discourse analysis, digital radicalization, social literacy, social studies education, youth behavior.

Introduction

The phenomenon of radicalism among Indonesian students has entered a new phase: digital radicalism. The internet and social media have become ideological arenas where various groups disseminate extremist ideas on a massive scale and largely without detection (Gunton, 2022; Karpova et al., 2022). The explosion incident at SMAN 72 Jakarta in late 2024 has become a symbol of the failure of social literacy and the weakness of formal education in fostering digital citizenship values.

The incident illustrates a clear disconnection between the value system taught in schools and students' cognitive realities in the online world. The student perpetrator was known to be actively accessing extremist content on digital platforms that promoted narratives of struggle and anti-system resistance (Sheppard-Luangkhot, 2025). This aligns with the findings of the National Counterterrorism Agency (Rahman et al., 2024), which indicate that 32% of radical content in Indonesia circulates in digital spaces, with a primary audience segment of adolescents aged 15–22 years.

In the context of education, particularly within Social Studies, this challenge is structural in nature. Social Studies is designed to foster social awareness, tolerance, and sensitivity to diversity. However, Social Studies instruction in many schools remains predominantly cognitive and has yet to adequately engage the affective domain or address dimensions of social digital literacy. This condition exacerbates the social disconnection between students' virtual and real worlds. Consequently, this study is crucial for explaining how the crisis of social literacy interacts with exposure to digital radicalism, as well as how a Social Studies perspective can provide a conceptual foundation for building students' social resilience in the digital era.

Method

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach using Fairclough's (Fairclough, 1995) model of critical discourse analysis, integrated with the interactive analysis framework of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (Miles et al., 2014), to uncover the meanings, ideologies, and power relations embedded in digital texts and public narratives related to the SMAN 72 Jakarta explosion. The research is designed as an intrinsic case study, as the case under examination is both unique and representative for understanding the phenomenon of student radicalization in digital spaces from the perspective of Social Studies education.

The data used in this study are qualitative secondary data obtained from various credible sources, including 52 online news articles from national media such as Kompas, Tempo, Detik, CNN Indonesia, Republika, and Tirto.id published between December 2024 and July 2025; 18 public social media posts on platforms X (Twitter), TikTok, and YouTube that highlight narratives related to SMAN 72; and 7 national education policy documents from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbud) and the National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT) concerning social literacy and the prevention of radicalism among students. In addition, several scholarly journal articles and academic books were used to strengthen the theoretical framework of the study.

Data collection was conducted in three main stages: documenting digital archives and online news, observing public discourse on social media, and reviewing education policy documents, all subjected to strict selection based on their relevance to the themes of radicalism and social literacy. Data analysis was carried out through five integrative steps, comprising data reduction, textual analysis, analysis of social context, ideological interpretation, and cross-source triangulative verification to identify the narrative and ideological patterns that shape public perceptions of digital radicalism among students.

Research validity was maintained through source, theoretical, and researcher triangulation, as well as the implementation of an audit trail to ensure transparency and consistency in the analytical process. Credibility and confirmability were enhanced through repeated readings of the texts, peer debriefing, and systematic checks for alignment between empirical data and theories of social literacy. Accordingly, this research design is expected to yield a deep, reflective, and holistic understanding of how digital discourse shapes the crisis of social literacy and the tendency toward radicalism among students.

Result and Discussion

The findings indicate that exposure to digital radicalism among students follows a systematic, recurring pattern. This exposure typically begins with an interest in issues of social injustice, which is then reinforced by algorithmic recommendations of similar content on social media. This process culminates in the internalization of radical values through interactions within exclusive online communities (Bliuc et al., 2024; Marwick et al., 2022). In this context, religious narratives are frequently

employed as moral justifications for violent actions, fostering the perception that extremism constitutes an ethical form of struggle against social inequality (Rutter, 2024; VandenBerg, 2021).

This phenomenon is closely linked to the emergence of a crisis of social literacy among students, which is reflected in three main indicators. First, a deficit of social empathy, namely the inability of students to understand the perspectives and experiences of others (Kimber et al., 2024; Taqiyah & Yasri, 2021). Second, the simplification of social reality, in which students tend to judge complex issues in dichotomous terms as "right" or "wrong" without considering social context and the values of pluralism (Sigahi & Sznelwar, 2022). Third, digital alienation, referring to the disconnection between the values taught in schools and the realities of social interaction in online spaces (Canete & Pandey, 2023). Taken together, these three indicators demonstrate that students have yet to develop the reflective capacity needed to interpret social dynamics in a critical manner.

The disconnection between Social Studies, education and digital realities exacerbates this condition. Data indicate that IPS learning in schools remains oriented toward conventional approaches that emphasize rote memorization of concepts, without linking them to social practices in digital spaces. Teachers tend not to integrate issues of digital literacy and contemporary discourse into classroom instruction (Kasperski et al., 2022). As a result, students turn to alternative sources of value formation through social media, which often serves as an entry point for intolerant and extremist ideologies.

In the sphere of public discourse, analysis of media texts reveals a clear narrative polarization. Some outlets frame the SMAN 72 case as a matter of individual criminality, while others emphasize the failure of the education system to instill social values. Critical discourse analysis shows that the representation of "students as victims of ideology" is more dominant in the coverage. This representation indicates that the public and the media have begun to view radicalism not only as a legal issue, but also as a manifestation of a failure of social literacy rooted in the absence of reflective education within digital spaces.

The phenomenon of digital radicalism among students, as revealed in this study, is the result of an interaction between social structures, technology, and a deficit of social literacy. Within the framework of Critical Pedagogy as proposed by Freire (1970), students who lack critical consciousness are more vulnerable to the hegemony of oppressive narratives, including extremist discourses constructed through digital media. When students are unable to deconstruct the ideological messages embedded in online content, they lose the capacity to evaluate information in a critical and empathetic manner.

The social literacy crisis identified in this study reflects the failure of the education system to cultivate reflective and responsible digital citizens. The algorithmic structures of social media reinforce confirmation bias and polarization, thereby weakening students' critical capacities in relation to social issues and diversity. In the context of Social Studies education, this underscores that learning objectives should not be limited to the transmission of factual knowledge, but must instead be directed toward the transformation of social consciousness and the strengthening of critical thinking capacities within digital spaces.

Based on the findings and analysis, this study underscores the importance of Social Studies (IPS) education grounded in digital social literacy and built upon three core pillars: (1) critical awareness of digital content and the power structures that underlie it; (2) social empathy toward diverse perspectives and social identities; and (3) digital citizenship responsibility in using media in an ethical and reflective manner. The integration of these three pillars is expected to prevent the reproduction of radical narratives and to foster a generation of students who are socially conscious, inclusive, and resilient to the influence of digital extremism.

Conclusion

The findings of this study show that the SMAN 72 Jakarta explosion is not an isolated incident, but rather a symptom of a broader crisis of social literacy among students in the digital era. Digital radicalization unfolds through a three-stage process: initial exposure to extremist content amplified by social media algorithms, internalization of radical values within exclusive online communities, and action framing that morally justifies violence through religious or ideological narratives. This process

is accelerated by deficits in social empathy, a tendency to simplify complex social realities into binary oppositions, and digital alienation between school-taught values and online experiences. Together, these factors indicate that radicalism among students must be understood not only as a security or legal issue, but also as a manifestation of failed social literacy and the absence of reflective education in digital spaces.

From a Social Studies education perspective, these findings underscore the urgent need to reposition IPS learning from the mere transmission of factual knowledge toward the cultivation of digital social literacy. This transformation requires the integration of three core pillars into the curriculum and classroom practice: critical awareness of digital content and the power structures behind it, social empathy toward diverse identities and perspectives, and a strong sense of ethical and responsible digital citizenship. Practically, this calls for curriculum reform, teacher professional development, and school-level policies that systematically address digital radicalism and social literacy. While this research is limited to a qualitative case study, its conceptual implications provide a basis for future empirical studies and educational interventions aimed at building a generation of students who are socially literate, inclusive, and resilient to extremist narratives in the digital public sphere.

Author Contributions
All authors were actively involved in every stage of the research process. The lead author was responsible for formulating the research problem, developing the theoretical framework, and conducting data analysis using a critical discourse approach. The author also collected and verified secondary data from online media, policy documents, and relevant scholarly sources. In addition, the author contributed to manuscript writing, the preparation of the results and discussion sections, and the final editing of the article. The entire research and writing process was carried out independently, in accordance with the principles of academic integrity and ethical standards in scientific research.

Conflicts of Interest
The author declares that there are no potential conflicts of interest in relation to the research, authorship, or publication of this article. All stages of the research and analysis were conducted independently, without any influence from any party that could affect the results or the interpretation of the data.

References
Bliuc, A.-M., Betts, J. M., Vergani, M., Bouguettaya, A., & Cristea, M. (2024). A theoretical framework for polarization as the gradual fragmentation of a divided society. *Communications Psychology*, *2*(1), 75.

Canete, J. J. O., & Pandey, D. (2023). The Paradox of Connectivity in the Worldwide Web: An Analysis of Social Alienation in the Social Media and the Response of the Church to Genuine Dialogue. *Human Arenas*, *6*(1), 182–198.

Fairclough, N. (1995). *Media discourse*. Edward Arnold London.

Gunton, K. (2022). The impact of the internet and social media platforms on radicalisation to terrorism and violent extremism. In *Privacy, security and forensics in the internet of things (IoT)* (hal. 167–177). Springer.

Karpova, A., Savelev, A., Vilnin, A., & Kuznetsov, S. (2022). Method for detecting far-right extremist communities on social media. *Social Sciences*, *11*(5), 200.

Kasperski, R., Blau, I., & Ben-Yehudah, G. (2022). Teaching digital literacy: are teachers' perspectives

consistent with actual pedagogy? *Technology, Pedagogy and Education*, *31*(5), 615–635.

Kimber, L., Verrier, D., & Connolly, S. (2024). Autistic people's experience of empathy and the autistic empathy deficit narrative. *Autism in Adulthood*, *6*(3), 321–330.

Marwick, A., Clancy, B., & Furl, K. (2022). Far-right online radicalization: A review of the literature. *The Bulletin of Technology & Public Life*.

Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldana, J. (2014). Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook. *(No Title)*.

Rahman, A., Rahman, A. S., & Nuralim, N. (2024). Pengaruh Bantuan Pangan Non Tunai (BNPT) Terhadap Kesejahteraan Masyarakat Di Desa Ulugalung Bantaeng. *Jurnal Ekonomi Utama*, *3*(2), 159–168.

Rutter, D. (2024). *The development of a moral and motivational approach to understanding the role of narratives in right-wing extremist radicalisation*. University of Cumbria.

Sheppard-Luangkhot, T. (2025). *Formers' understandings of why they engaged with and disengaged from violent social movements in settler-colonial North America and Europe*.

Sigahi, T. F. A. C., & Sznelwar, L. I. (2022). Exploring applications of complexity theory in engineering education research: A systematic literature review. *Journal of Engineering Education*, *111*(1), 232–260.

Taqiyah, N. A., & Yasri, H. L. (2021). The Effect of Social Studies Learning to the Empathy of Class VIII Students. *International Conference on Engineering, Technology and Social Science (ICONETOS 2020)*, 515–521.

VandenBerg, R. J. (2021). Legitimating extremism: A taxonomy of justifications for political violence. *Terrorism and political violence*, *33*(6), 1237–1255.