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<u>Entitled</u>
UNDERSTANDING RADICALIZATION AND COUNTER-RADICALIZATION COMMUNICATION IN SOCIAL MEDIA: A TWITTER ANALYSIS
by

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<u>Abstract</u>

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) government has made countless efforts to fight radicalization propaganda in cyberspace. However, cyber technology evolution and the smart use of social media in fostering terrorist activities and radical ideologies have posed big challenges. Numerous studies have tried to understand online radicalization communication strategies, but very few have investigated the effectiveness of counter-radicalization programs in the UAE and the world in general. This research aims first to understand the network, communication, and narrative characteristics of radicalization and counter-radicalization accounts on Twitter. It also aims to explore factors that influence engagements for both types of accounts. Lastly, identifying the differences between radicalization and counter-radicalization accounts helps understand and evaluate the counter-radicalization efforts and programs. The research questions and hypotheses were based on the social identity model of deindividuation effect (SIDE) and the heuristic-systematic model of information processing (HSM). Twitter account context and content data were analyzed to test the hypotheses using the computational method. Social network analysis, content analysis, and statistical analyses, including multiple regression and non-parametric tests, were conducted to understand and compare the radicalization/counter-radicalization communication structures and characteristics. The results showed that radicalization network communities were separated based on Islam's two main denominations (Sunni and Shia Islam), and counter-radicalization network communities were separated based on narrative strategies (counter and alternative narratives). The research also identifies several content and context factors influencing engagement. In radicalization accounts, factors such as messenger type, sentiment, narrative, and hashtag use were found to have a positive influence on engagement. However, in counter-radicalization accounts, sentiment and narrative type are the only factors that influence engagement. Radicalization and counter-radicalization results were compared. It was concluded that religious scholars and social narratives play an important role in Twitter engagements, suggesting that incorporating religious scholars and social narratives in counter-radicalization programs will increase engagement and help online counter-radicalization.

Keywords: radicalization, counter-radicalization, Twitter analysis, computational methods.