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Combating Cyber-radicalization: Have we paid attention to attention?

Research-in-Progress

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ABSTRACT

Terrorist activities and the tragic events they cause spurs research aimed at predicting and preventing radicalization. With the pervasiveness of social media and easy access to extremist rhetoric, researchers have focused on understanding the relationship between social media or internet-driven radicalization (i.e., cyber-radicalization) and its disastrous consequences. A significant phase in cyber radicalization is cognitive radicalization, an antecedent to radical behaviors. Although scholars have explored cognitive aspects of radicalization, there is a need to better understand the role of the IT artifact in the radicalization process. In particular, the IT artifact's potential to reduce cognitive cyber radicalization is under-explored. Intervention strategies such as positive nudging choice architectures and reflection-inducing systems are known. However, designing appropriate implementations remains challenging. One reason is that individual social media users employ different and varied cognitive processes when they consume social media content. Also, different users may be at different points in their radicalization journeys, making a one-size-fits-all approach to IT interventions ineffective. In this ongoing research, we investigate the effectiveness of nudging choice architectures as an intervention against cognitive cyber-radicalization, drawing on cognitive attention theory. Our study explores how user attention impacts the efficacy of nudges in mitigating cognitive cyber-radicalization. By examining the interplay between attention theory and changes in choice architectures, we aim to improve the current understanding of the cognitive drivers of cyber-radicalization and contribute to designing more effective IT interventions.

Keywords

Attention theory, cyber-radicalization, nudging, cognition.