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Detours and Diversions
Online strategies for the dissemination of right-wing extremist content

2021 Summary report on the research project »Countering radicalisation in right-wing extremist online subcultures«

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Key Findings

- Far-right actors use established internet platforms strategically in order to link to smaller, unregulated platforms. As a result of strict regulations and moderation, the language on the established platforms is also adapted in order to avoid interference. While the established platforms are dominated by deliberately 'softer' content and subtle 'dog-whistles', more radical or extreme content can also be found on alternative platforms.

- Individual 'power users' play a central role in the linking process on established platforms, and on Telegram. Their strategic approach aimed to promote their own profiles on a variety of different channels.

- In both of the examined datasets, Telegram emerged as the key alternative platform. Other alternative platforms are not (yet) of great importance in the German right-wing extremist online milieu. The messaging service was often linked to on the established platforms as well as within the platform itself.

- Established platforms play an important role in the far-right online environment because a larger number of users can be recruited there.

- On established platforms, about half the links examined led to other established platforms. Among the alternative platforms, Telegram was the most popular. Links on Telegram in particular led to audio-visual platforms, such as YouTube, Dlive.tv, wtube.org or veezee.tv.

- Telegram serves as a catch-all platform for individuals and organisations whose profiles have been deleted from larger platforms.

- The types of data that can be collected using APIs differ between platforms. For example, Facebook limits data collection options to publicly accessible pages or groups, while YouTube allows for the collection of comments. These differences limit the possibilities of a comparative analysis. At the same time, the limits that platforms set in their APIs provide information about their technical, economic and ideological orientations.

Glossary

Affordances: Affordances (functionality) describe the specific technical possibilities that individual platforms offer their users.

Blockchain: Blockchain technology, which was developed specifically for alternative currencies, is characterised by its unique data structure. It is considered particularly secure against forgery due to its transparency and decentralised structure, in which data is stored in many different locations and regularly verified. Blockchain technology enables anonymous transactions and exchange - a fact that also makes this technology attractive to criminals and extremists.

Deplatforming: Deplatforming refers to the blocking of social media accounts and groups. It regularly results in these groups losing audience reach and revenue sources for their agenda. At the same time, deplatforming and the fear of accounts and websites being blocked or deleted has contributed to the emergence of alternative social media platforms.

Media Outlets: The accounts coded as media outlets in this report are accounts, whose function leads us to assume that they largely refer to their own channels and websites. The range of accounts included here encompass established media, smaller blogs and disinformation actors who edit content in the form of news websites in order to appear more credible.

Alternative Platforms: Commonly called 'alternative platforms' are used by groups and individuals who, because of their political views, no longer feel welcome on the major social media platforms due to restrictions imposed by the law or by the platforms themselves.

NetzDG: The Network Enforcement Act (NetzDG) is a law that came into force on 1 October 2017 and was last amended in May 2021 with the aim of strengthening law enforcement on the internet. The aim of this Act is to take action more effectively against illegal hate speech and other punishable content on social networks. Its scope of application includes platforms with at least two million registered users in Germany and the obligation to remove unlawful content.

Platform: Platforms are internet sites or apps through which users can communicate with each other. Particularly relevant here are the so-called social media or social networks and messenger services.

Right-wing extremism: According to ISD's working definition, right-wing extremism refers to a form of nationalism that is characterised by its reference to racial, ethnic or cultural supremacy.

Radical Right-wing: Right-wing radicals share ideological reference points of right-wing extremism, but they do not reject democracy as a form of state to the same extent as right-wing extremists do.

Introduction

Analysis by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) on the enormous growth of far-right Telegram channels in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic has shown that the channels with the most followers in this space grew by 350%[1] between the start of the pandemic and September 2020. Among them were groups that actively opposed the government's vaccination campaign. Since the beginning of the pandemic, its main drivers — new agers, conspiracy ideologues and right-wing extremists — have been organising disinformation campaigns that sowed doubt about the COVID-19 vaccine. Right-wing extremists, in particular, discovered early on that protests against COVID-19 measures were a space for radicalisation and recruitment, and supported them offline and online.

However, far-right online networks have been a problem since before COVID-19. Hate speech and incitement have long been a part of everyday life on the internet. Social media, in particular, has regularly become the battleground of disinformation and intimidation campaigns. Neither civil society interventions nor state regulatory approaches, such as the NetzDG, can completely stop this phenomenon. Instead, actors who share such content adapt to the new rules. Instead of explicit content, extremists use codes to avoid prosecution. Other actors are moving away from established platforms and toward alternative platforms. There, they continue to share illegal content, network with others and coordinate political actions, both online and offline. However, others combine both strategies, using alternative platforms as a 'retreat' where they can plan and coordinate for their activities on big, established social media platforms.

ISD has been investigating right-wing extremist actors on established and alternative platforms on the internet since the beginning of 2021 as part of the project Countering Radicalisation in Right-Wing Extremist Online Subcultures, funded by the German Federal Ministry of Justice and Consumer Protection.
This three-year project aims to research the right-wing extremist online milieu on alternative social platforms using state of the art methods of digital empirical data analysis, as well as qualitative and ethnographic research.

In 2021, ISD Germany published three research papers that explored the extreme right-wing milieu on these platforms and examined its behaviour in more detail.

The first publication »Escape Routes«[2] focused on established platforms, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube, all of which are subject to the Net Enforcement Act. It looked at the strategies used by right-wing extremist actors on these platforms, analysing the linking activity of key far-right actors.

The second publication »Signposts«[3] presented the theoretical, methodological and historical contexts in which the research for the project is taking place. The third report »Telegram as a Buttress«[4] built on the findings of the first study, placing Telegram at the centre of the analysis.

This report is a summary of the key findings of this project in 2021. It also includes a comparative analysis of the strategies and linking activity of far-right actors on established and alternative platforms.

Background

In order to identify the key actors and platforms, an analysis of the current existing research was carried out at the beginning of this project, including academic publications, books, trade journals and daily newspapers. The aim of this analysis was to identify research gaps and to locate this investigation in the context of existing research.

The internet was already being used in the 1990s by right-wing extremist actors in German-speaking countries for agitation and political coordination. Right-wing extremist content has increased since the 1990s, alongside the number of different platforms that the internet offers.[5]

A range of internet forums were primarily used for internal information exchange and coordination, as well as for international networking. The number of right-wing extremist websites in Germany grew consistently from the 1990s onwards. The added possibility of sending private messages between individual users also strengthened the social aspect of these forums. Over the years, various German and international forums have formed, which were either openly right-wing extremist in nature or spread other antidemocratic content, as well as conspiracy theories internationally.

The internet has opened up new options for right-wing extremist actors to offer and sell radical literature. Thanks to the internet, such actors can reach much bigger markets and consequently generate higher revenues. Online mail orders are still an important source of income for right-wing extremist actors.

In addition to forums, various blogs also became increasingly popular in the right-wing extremist online milieu in the 2000s and 2010s.

Many could not be categorised as subscribing to one coherent ideology. Blogs like 'Politically Incorrect' were — at least for a while — rhetorically moderate and avoided openly extremist statements. Through this approach, the radical and extreme right managed to exploit and deepen political divisions within the mainstream political center.

Social media was also quickly discovered by right-wing extremists as a vector for political action[6]. As these platforms are designed to facilitate easy connections and exchanges, they are well suited for political activism. Right-wing media portals have used and continue to use various mechanisms on social media to promote messages from right-wing media platforms that fit their own agenda and to create the impression that right-wing extremist attitudes have significant societal support.

Right-wing influencers combine a political message with a personal brand. For many of these influencers, political agitation is supplemented by an interest in self-promotion.

In recent years, the largest social media platforms have increasingly started to block right-wing extremist accounts for spreading hate speech or disinformation. This has contributed to the emergence of alt-tech, i.e. platforms designed specifically for extremist users.

Conceptual Groundwork for the Research Project

In addition to the identification of research gaps, methodological and conceptual preliminary work was conducted to provide the framework for empirical research. In particular, this involved the working definition of the term 'right-wing extremism', which had to be established in order to be able to secure systematic research into the object of study. This definition had to be precise in order to enable a target-oriented analysis and at the same time broad enough to cover new trends and actors.

Currently, there is no universally accepted definition of the term 'right-wing extremism' and, as with other definitions, the term is the subject of academic and political debates. Various organisations, such as public institutions or NGOs, use different terms in this context.[7]

In order to find a precise definition of right-wing extremism, ISD Germany organised four workshops where ISD staff discussed and developed the following definition:

»Right-wing extremism is a form of nationalism characterised by its reference to racial, ethnic or cultural supremacy.«

Obstacles and Challenges

Within the framework of this and other projects, ISD has partnered with CASM Technology, which provides and develops the technological research infrastructure. This long-standing partnership has already resulted in various new components and methodologies for social media research, which have been implemented through a software tool called Method52.

Method52 is an in-house platform for researchers that enables Big Data analysis through the visual construction of connections (pipelines) between data collection and data analysis components, even without in-depth software coding expertise.

A wide range of components are available, from data collection on online platforms and database creation, to natural language processing components and machine learning models. Method52 uses public APIs for data collection where available. The tool can theoretically collect data from any platform that allows for collection using APIs.

Since this project is looking for new platforms on which extremist actors network and communicate with each other, the research also includes creating components that allow for a detailed study and data collection on these new alternative platforms. Unlike established platforms, these platforms have only been researched scarcely, posing new challenges for researchers, including technical challenges along with ethical or legal ones.

ISD identified a total of 28 platforms considered to have potential for the exploration of the extreme right-wing milieu.

Technical Hurdles and Research Ethical Challenges

The most common technical hindrance was the lack of a publicly available API, including access to the API requiring user identity verification, unclear information regarding the scope or documentation of the API, or that the client library did not work.
Depending on the platform, the scope of access to the API and data differs. For example, Facebook limits data collection options to publicly accessible pages or groups, while YouTube allows for the collection of comments. Whether a platform's API is public, including to what extent they are public and allow access, is not just a technical matter. The nature of a platform's API offers insight into the economic and ideological stance of the platform and its founders.

The obstacles mentioned above regarding API access were encountered across several platforms, the most frequent problem being that there was no way to access the API. This occurred on platforms such as Parler, Gab, Bittube and Wtube. Without access to the API, this data would have had to be collected using what is known as 'web scraping'. From a legal perspective, this could be a violation of the websites' Terms of Use and data protection regulations; from an ethical perspective, it was challenging in terms of accessing potentially private data. Lastly, the web scraper would have to be programmed specifically for each website.

Another noteworthy problem is, that in using such a path of action, security risks would increase with the number of attempts made to access data, as websites or platforms could be alerted to these attempts. Apart from a lack of access to the APIs, legal and ethical challenges also occurred in due to the necessary assessment of the purpose of accessing the API. This was relevant in the majority of cases of available APIs. It is an issue concerning platforms with unclear ownership structures, or platforms which for ideological reasons present themselves as safe havens for privacy and free speech. ISD continues to engage with these questions in order to guarantee high ethical standards of its research and to minimise security risks. ISD will continue to deal with these challenges in 2022.

Technical barriers mainly included the data itself and the amount of data accessible through the APIs. Many platforms that support a public API do not provide detailed documentation on how the API is used and what data can be accessed. This means that some platforms only allow access to the required data within an organisation, or that the whole platform data is collected, not just the data relevant to the research.

Such ambiguities subsequently call into question the relevance and legitimacy of the data collection.

Finally, the type of data collected is also an obstacle. For example, audio or audiovisual data, may be of limited use for a quantitative analysis, as most quantitative analysis components only support text files. Audio and video data require new components and analysis methods.

Methodology

Link analyses were employed in the ISD research reports *Escape Routes* and *Telegram as a Buttress*. The *Escape Routes* report identified the alternative platforms, advertising tools and funding platforms that were shared particularly frequently on established platforms which are obliged to remove illegal content as per the NetzDG. For the link analysis in the *Telegram as a Buttress* report, internet addresses in Telegram channels were collected and examined in more detail.

Link analysis

Link analyses are used for various purposes in empirical, data analysis. For example, links that are created by groups or individual actors can provide information about their (online) networks and serve as the basis for a network analysis of their political milieu. In this way, the linking patterns of actors can be examined from a comparative perspective, for example, to learn more about how linking behaviour and ideologies are connected. Link analyses can also have an exploratory character, serving to discover previously unidentified internet sites or online spaces.

These analytical methods can be found in the reports *Escape Routes* and *Telegram as a Buttress*. The focus of link analyses her was on the identification of frequently shared alternative platforms, i.e. on th exploratory function of link analyses. For the link analysis in the *Escape Routes* report, data was collected from Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube, as they are major platforms covered by the NetzDG and known as spaces for right-wing extremist activities. For the second data analysis report, *Telegram as a Buttress*, data was collected from Telegram, which was frequently referred to in the dataset of the first report. By scrutinizing this platform, the report ties in with the results found in the first report.

Categorisation

To guide the data collection, seed lists were created for both reports in order to be able to distinguish between different groups of actors, and to enable a more differentiated analysis.

Lists of actors whose posts were treated as starting points for the study served as a basis for the selection of relevant accounts. These lists included actors that had been investigated in past ISD projects concerning the German right-wing extremist milieu on the internet.

These initial lists have been adapted and expanded on the basis of the definition of right-wing extremism used in this project. Based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria used in this definition, actors and accounts were added or removed.

In order to compare the data, categories of accounts were created and the accounts were then coded according to these categories:

· **Right–wing extremist** — Right–wing extremism is a form of nationalism characterised by its reference to racial, ethnic or cultural supremacy. Accounts adhering to such forms of nationalism are considered right–wing extremist.
· **Right–wing radicals** — Right–wing radical actors share similar ideological viewpoints to those of right–wing extremism, however, they do not reject democracy as a form of government to the same extent as right–wing extremists.
· **Media outlet** — Based on their function, accounts were coded as media outlets if it could be assumed that they mostly referred to their own channels and websites. These accounts ranged from established media outlets, smaller blogs to individual information providers who often presented their content in the form of news websites in order to appear more reputable.
· **AfD (Alternative for Germany)** — All accounts associated with the AfD–party or party members.
· **FPÖ (Austrian Freedom Party)** — All accounts associated with the FPÖ–party or party members.
· **Reichsbürger:innen ('Citizens of the Reich') and Sovereignists** — Accounts belonging to the various manifestations of the Reichsbürger:innen movement or other sovereignist movements. These, are not automatically right–wing extremists. The Reichsbürger:in-

nen, a German equivalent to the Souvereign Citizens movement, broadly believe that the Federal Republic of Germany is not a state but a corporation and that it is an illegitimate entity whose laws are not binding. Reichsbürger:innen and Sovereignists were included in this research because members of this movement use right–wing extremist and nationalist narratives, as well as propagate revisionist and distorted views of history that feeds into right wing extremist narratives. There is, nonetheless, a certain ideological diversity within this movement. Instead of the commonly used male form spelling »Reichsbürger«, this report refers to the members of the spectrum as »Reichsbürger:innen«, using a gender inclusive spelling.

· **Conspiracy ideologists** – Accounts featuring the dissemination of conspiracy narratives. These can be radical right–wing or extreme right–wing. The deciding factor for the posting behaviour of people falling under this category, independently from either extreme or radical tendencies, seems to be the affiliation with this politically broad and ideologically diffuse milieu.

· **Anti–lockdown Movements** – All channels that focus almost exclusively on disinformation and agitation around the COVID–19 pandemic. This especially included groups from the 'Querdenken' movement.

· **Others** – Accounts that belong to the online ecosystem of the extreme or radical right, but which could not (yet) be clearly assigned within this ecosystem (as of 2021).

Data Sets

In the Escape Routes report, data was collected for the period from 1 January 2021 to 13 May 2021. Using the dedicated analysis tool, a total of 253,814 posts were extracted, which were created by 29,050 accounts across four platforms.

For the Telegram as a Buttress report, the period between 1 January and 12 September 2021 was examined. During this period, the channels that were studied produced a total of 659,110 messages with 371,988 links.

Results of the Link Analyses

The same research methodology was used in both empirical reports. This enables a comparative analysis that provides additional information on the behaviour of right-wing extremist actors. However, the informative value of this analysis is limited by the fact that the datasets of the two empirical research reports cover different time periods.

The first report, Escape Routes, includes a link analysis of established platforms. The social media platforms that fall within the scope of the NetzDG were analysed, i.e. Twitter, YouTube, Facebook and Instagram. The Telegram as a Buttress report is based on the findings of the Escape Routes report. For this report, links shared on the platform Telegram were examined.

To take into account the different time span of both datasets, the category ‚Posts per day' was created to make the data comparable. This category makes it possible to identify the platform with the highest number of posts on average. Telegram clearly stands out as the platform with the most posts, where by far the most messages relevant to our study were found. Twitter accounts in the researched dataset posted just under 2,000 fewer posts per day, followed by YouTube and Facebook. The low number of links shared on YouTube was due to the fact that the posts were from the YouTube comments section. Instagram was an outlier in the results as hardly any messages from relevant accounts were found there; the number of accounts was also the lowest, with YouTube following as the platform with the second lowest number of accounts in the data set.

Platform	#Posts in Total	#Posts per Day	#Accounts/Channel	#Links Posted*
Telegram	659.110	2.701,27	238	371.988
Twitter	94.322	709,18	159	35.636
YouTube	81.414	612,14	92	757
Facebook	77.492	582,65	461	68.834
Instagram	584	4,39	95	135

Figure 1: Comparison of posting activity between platforms. *Number of links in posts to the same or other platforms.

Category	#Instagram Accounts	#Facebook Accounts	#Twitter Accounts	#YouTube Accounts	Total
Right-wing extremist	24	129	50	16	219
Right-wing Radical	7	30	60	46	143
AfD	26	256	29	15	326
FPÖ	4	0	0	0	4
Media Outlet	9	25	14	3	51
Reichsbürger:innen	0	14	0	0	14
Conspiracy Theorists	20	5	1	8	34
Others	5	2	5	4	16
Total	95	461	159	92	

Figure 2: Accounts by category type investigated in the Escape Routes report.

Category	#Channels
Right-wing extremists	81
Right-wing radicals	17
Reichsbürger:innen & Sovereignists	3
Conspiracy Theorists	53
AfD	5
Lockdown Opponents	53
Media Outlets	26
Total	**238**

Figure 3: Telegram channels investigated in the Telegram as a Buttress report according to category

The 'AfD' category encompassed the most users; more accounts were categorized as 'AfD' than fit the 'right-wing extremist' category mainly due to the large number of AfD Facebook accounts. More than half of all identified users were assigned to the 'AfD' category, which encompassed a total of 331 accounts. The category 'right-wing extremist' was the second most extensive in the dataset with 300 accounts. The category 'right-wing radicals' was the third largest. Accounts from this category were mainly found on Twitter. Overall, the most represented social network was Facebook with 461 users, followed by Telegram with 238 and Twitter with 159. A smaller number of channels was identified on Instagram. The platform with the fewest channels was YouTube with 92.

Established Platforms

The results of the Escape Routes report showed that about half of the links posted on the established platforms pointed to the original platform itself or to other established platforms. Links most frequently led to pages on the same platform on which they were shared. This is due to the way data is structured on established social media. It also demonstrates the important role that established platforms continue to play for right-wing extremist actors.[8]
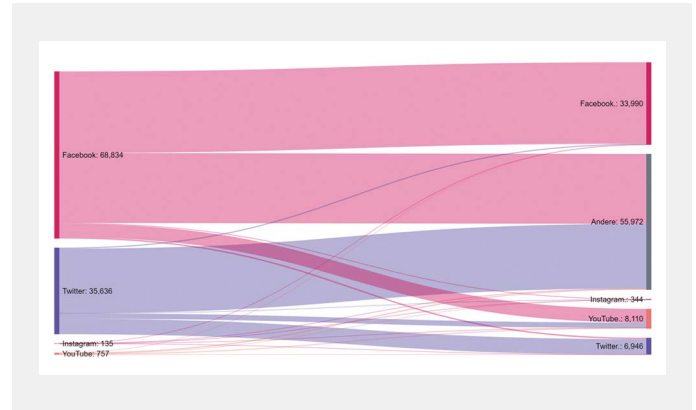

Figure 4: Links from established platforms to other established platforms and websites identified in the »Escape Routes« report.

Links posted on Facebook led mostly to established platforms; this applied to 58 percent of the links. Of these, Facebook itself accounted for 33,565 links, Instagram 283, Twitter 569 and YouTube 5,590 links.

In contrast to Facebook, on Twitter only 25 percent of the links led to established platforms. Of the links to established platforms, Facebook accounted for 411, Instagram 57, Twitter itself for 6,364 and YouTube for 2,188 links.

YouTube had 350 links (46 percent) to established social media platforms in the sample analysed, of which Facebook accounted for 12, Instagram for 3, Twitter for 12 and YouTube itself for 323.

Instagram was also an outsider. Other platforms were linked to more frequently on Instagram than Instagram itself.

Domain	#Total Links	#Unique Links	#Linking Channels	#Views*
youtube.com	47.367	26.623	195	576.652.105
twitter.com	10.821	6.147	141	223.912.491
facebook.com	2.419	1.140	135	30.042.463

Figure 5: Links to established platforms identified in the "Telegram as a Buttress" report. *Total of views of all posts with corresponding link

On Telegram, YouTube was the platform most linked to (47,467 times). This was a significantly larger number of links than other platforms[9]. Twitter was linked to almost 11,000 times and Facebook almost 2,500 times. The most linked to Twitter accounts belonged to the anti-lockdown movement, and mainly various local groups of 'Querdenken'. The most shared Facebook links were also mainly to pages from the anti-lockdown movement. What distinguishes the links to established platforms in the Telegram as a Buttress report, from the links to established platforms in the data set of the Escape Routes report was the significantly larger number of links on YouTube. Also, the number of links between Telegram and Facebook was comparatively lower. Facebook linked to Telegram less frequently than to Twitter in the dataset. The frequent linking of established platforms shows that they have retained their relevance for the online environment of right-wing extremist actors, despite being subjected to the NetzDG. Right-wing extremists continue to use established platforms despite moderation and legislation, and they also continue to link to their profiles on these platforms.

Alternative Platforms

Social Networks
The Russian platform VK.com was the most linked to alternative social networking platform on the established platforms. VK was linked to in 41 posts. The most frequent linking to VK was done by an Islamophobic Facebook page, which published identical content on both its Facebook and VK pages.[10] Close behind VK.com were Parler.com, with 37 links and Gab.com, with 26 links. The number of posts with links to alternative social networks was relatively low, relatively, its share decreas-

es even further if the hybrid messenger network Telegram is counted as a social network. Although Telegram was originally designed as a messenger service, several features have been added to the app over the years, making Telegram a hybrid platform. Telegram was linked to 2,951 times in the dataset of established platforms. This shows how important this platform is as an alternative platform for the far-right online community.[11]

Platform	Category	#Posts
t.me (Telegram)	Messenger Service	2.951
VK.com	Social Network	41
Parler.com	Social Network	37
Gab.com	Social Network	26
Joinclubhouse.com	Social Network	13

Figure 6: Number of posts with links to alternative social networks in the „Escape Routes" report.

The results that emerged from the study of the established platforms were similar to those that emerged from the analysis of Telegram. Telegram was shared most frequently in the dataset[12] and was also the platform with the second highest number of links to Telegram, i.e. itself. Only YouTube was linked to more often. As the case study of Attila Hildmann's network in the Telegram as a Buttress report showed, right-wing extremist actors often manage several channels or groups, posting their same messages across different platforms.

Similar to the established platforms, VK.com was also linked to relatively often on Telegram. Besides Parler and Gab, platforms such as Gettr.com or Discord.com were also found in the Telegram dataset.

Domain	#Verlinkungen insgesamt	#einzelner Verlinkungen	#verlinkender Kanäle	#Views
telegra.ph	12.727	12.031	64	59.970.142
vk.com	307	96	33	3.286.136
gettr.com	239	60	53	2.770.852
gab.com	230	108	32	3.771.868
parler.com	144	69	24	3.626.937
discord.com	19	10	8	221.323

Figure 7: Links to alternative social networks in the data set of the "Telegram as a Buttress" report.

Video Livestreaming Platforms

Among the established platforms, Dlive.tv was linked tomost frequently. The domain 'dlive.tv', which belongs to the live streaming platform DLive, was recorded in the dataset a total of 242 times. The site is very similar in structure and functionality to the Twitch platform. At the time of this study, most of the videos on the homepage were live gaming videos, as well as videos on cryptocurrencies and conspiracy theories[13]. The platform uses blockchain technologies for its servers and donation system. Links to veezee.tv and trovo.live were also shared frequently. Twitch was the least frequently linked to among live video streaming platforms.

Categroy	#Posts
dlive.tv	242
veezee.tv	176
trovo.live	113
twitch.tv	10

Figure 8: Number of posts in the dataset of the Escape Routes report that link to various livestreaming video platforms.

These platforms are particularly well-known in the gaming and e-sports community.

The same ranking of popularity of each livestreaming platform was found in the Telegram dataset.[14] The only difference was that Dlive.tv was shared more frequently on Telegram than on established platforms.

Video Hosting Platforms

Platforms where videos can be uploaded, embedded or archived were linked to frequently in both datasets. These platforms are predominantly geared towards sharing videos, the most popular among them being YouTube. Such platforms pose challenges for researchers because their data cannot be adequately captured by software that recognises text; researching video and audio files thus requires an ethnographical approach to analysis. Video hosting platforms are suitable for distributing short propaganda videos, as well as for uploading longer discussions. As alternative platforms are moderated to a lesser degree than their established competitors, linking to them can lead users to insular ideological spaces and away from wider, more controversial discussions.

Domain	#Total Links	#Unique Links	#Linking Channles	#Views
dlive.tv	3.001	255	87	44.882.320
veezee.tv	943	20	32	12.490.196
trovo.live	428	33	29	8.088.034
twitch.tv	350	50	50	3.901.773

Figure 9: Number of posts in the data set of the "Telegram as a Buttress" report that refer to different live video streaming platforms.

Platform	#Posts
3speak.online	173
bittube.tv	95
odysee.com	95
frei3.de	54
bitchute.com	50
youmaker.com	47
rumble.com	31
vimeo.com	28
gegenstimme.tv	12
lbry.tv	12

Figure 10: Number of posts in the data set of the »Escape Routes« report that refer to different video hosting platforms.

On the established platforms, the most frequently linked to platform was 3Speak.online. It uses blockchain technology and claims to protect freedom of expres-sion. The third most linked platform, Odysee.com, also uses blockchain technology. Odysee is the successor to the now defunct website LBRY.tv and was launched in 2020. While widely used platforms, such as Vimeo.com, were included, platforms with predominantly far-right and conspiratorial content, such as Bitchute, were also found.[15]

Almost twice as many domains were linked to on Tele-gram as on the established platforms. At the same time, some were frequently linked to in both datasets, such as Odysee.com. In the Telegram dataset, conspiratorial channels linked especially to Odysee, comprising of about 70 percent of all links.[16] The three channels that most frequently linked to this video platform belonged to the QAnon movement. Many popular German-lan-guage video platforms in the dataset are PeerTube ent-ities. PeerTube is an open-source video platform based on peer-to-peer technology. Users can create individual instances and design them according to their needs.

Domain	#Total Links	#Unique Links	#Linking Channels	#Views
odysee.com	2.816	965	112	84.608.358
tube.querdenken-711.de	1.900	210	51	28.813.936
bitchute.com	1.632	749	102	28.247.456
rumble.com	1.625	910	74	17.331.193
wtube.com	766	355	22	16.850.216
lbry.tv	582	189	58	7.757.373
vimeo.com	345	166	62	7.689.539
bittube.tv	337	238	25	2.226.602
youmaker.com	295	246	15	3.832.335
vdp.veezee.tube	186	80	9	5.539.172
frei3.de	157	67	22	1.426.525
veezee.tube	152	89	16	598.236
okitube.com	70	56	12	329.921
wirtube.de	61	21	15	2.177.273
gegenstimme.tv	55	39	13	206.681
dailymotion.com	44	25	23	1.377.864
dein.tube	42	24	13	103.910
wiki.tube.de	35	19	15	645.561
tube.klardenken.tv	26	8	19	329.865

Figure 11: Number of posts in the data set of the "Telegram as a Buttress" report that refer to different video hosting platforms.

Comparison of User Groups

Right-wing Extremists
On the established platforms, accounts from the 'right-wing extremist' user category linked to Telegram with particularly high frequency.[17] They often linked to video platforms such as Dlive.tv and Veezee, as well as to Bitchute or Frei3.com. On Telegram, it was mainly video platforms that were linked to by accounts in this category.[18] Dlive.tv was a platform that appeared in the dataset far more often than any other platform, it was also the most shared. In the dataset, about half as many links to Wtube.org and veezee.tv were established when compared to links to Dlive. The biggest difference between Telegram and the established platforms was how often Telegram was linked to by far-right accounts. On the established platforms, it was by far the most linked to platform, while on Telegram itself the hybrid messenger was not shared at all.

Right-wing Radicals
Users categorised as 'right-wing radicals' tended to share domains similar to those of right-wing extremists on established platforms, with a pattern of frequent linking to Parler, Trovo or BitTube.[19] Telegram was also linked to most frequently by this user group, followed by DLive.tv. DLive.tv was shared on Telegram in particular. This shows a similar behaviour to that of the right-wing extremists on Telegram.[20] The trovo.live, Veezee.tv and Odysee platforms were shared by the far-right in both datasets. However, these platforms were also often linked to by the far-right on Telegram.

Domain	Right-wing Extremist (#Accounts)	Right-wing radicals (#Accounts)
t.me (Telegram)	266 (35)	274 (40)
dlive.tv	111 (4)	119 (6)
veezee.tv	81 (1)	91 (2)
frei3.com	22 (3)	30 (4)
vk.com	18 (4)	16 (3)
bitchute.com	17 (5)	10 (2)
vimeo.com	10 (3)	6 (2)
gab.com	10 (2)	10 (3)
twitch.tv	10 (1)	0 (0)
odysee.com	6 (2)	76 (7)
gegenstimme.tv	4 (4)	8 (3)
anchor.fm	4 (4)	13 (6)
spreaker.com	3 (1)	40 (1)
lbry.tv	2 (2)	3 (1)
joinclubhouse.com	1 (1)	11 (2)
patreon.com	1 (1)	6 (3)
soundcloud.com	1 (1)	9 (5)
parler.com	0 (0)	32 (2)
trovo.live	0 (0)	106 (1)
bittube.tv	0 (0)	95 (1)
rumble.com	0 (0)	19 (4)
podbean.com	0 (0)	38 (1)

Figure 12: Comparison of cross-linking behaviour between right-wing extremist and radical right-wing accounts in the "Escape Routes" report

Other domains in the dataset

Other domains were also found on the established plat-forms during the link analysis, including several podcast hosting platforms. As linking to hosting platforms was often associated with linking to specific podcasts, both the specific media products and the platforms hosting them were considered here.

In addition to the types of platforms mentioned, mar-keting tools were also shared.[21] This includes software that distributes content on social media, as well as web-sites that provide free media or newsletter platforms. This indicates the strategic use of established platforms by right-wing extremist online actors to distribute their own content.

Online shopping websites were also among the domains shared on established platforms.[22] Amazon was the most frequently shared shop among these webpages. A large proportion of the links to Amazon led to the same spiritualistic book. The links were mainly shared by a conspiracist Facebook page from Austria. In ad-dition to Amazon links to various books shared on different platforms, the dataset also contained links to a podcast accessible via Amazon. This podcast was produced by a right-wing radical media activist from the conspiracy ideology space, who linked to his podcast on Twitter.

Domain	Right-wing Extremist (#Accounts)	Right-wing radicals (#Accounts)
dlive.tv	1.524 (18)	393 (5)
wtube.org	717 (7)	0 (0)
veezee.tv	669 (8)	196 (1)
bitchute.com	175 (23)	74 (7)
twitch.tv	174 (9)	17 (3)
odysee.com	168 (29)	225 (8)
vk.com	159 (5)	9 (2)
frei3.com	130 (13)	19 (2)
trovo.live	124 (6)	248 (2)
gettr.com	85 (16)	14 (3)
tube.querdenken-711.de	62 (2)	1 (1)
gegenstimme.tv	47 (7)	6 (4)
telegra.ph	32 (5)	23 (4)
vimeo.com	30 (9)	0 (0)
archive.org	30 (11)	31 (3)
gab.com	29 (3)	25 (5)
dein.tube	27 (4)	0 (0)
veezee.tube	17 (4)	0 (0)
rumble.com	16 (8)	132 (4)
discord.com	10 (2)	1 (1)
lbry.tv	8 (4)	5 (3)

Figure 13: Comparison of linking behaviour between right-wing extremist and radical right-wing users in the "Telegram as a Buttress" report.

In addition, the domain of a German publishing house that sells new age, conspiratorial and right-wing radical literature was shared. Advertising on platforms helps online shops in increasing their brand awareness and in gaining new followers, thus providing a source of income for the far-right scene.

Many links in the dataset of the Escape Routes report included payment services and donation platforms.[23]

Here, PayPal and Patreon stood out. While PayPal was mainly linked to by AfD-affiliated users and conspiracy media, Patreon was mostly shared by a conspiracy Facebook page from Austria and the Twitter account of a far-right video blog. Overall, in the period observed, it was mainly the PayPal accounts of alternative news sites or bloggers that were shared who were trying to finance their content through donations.

Conclusion

At the beginning of 2021, the conceptual foundation for research in the project Radicalisation in Right-Wing Extremist Online Subcultures was built.

This included preliminary methodological and conceptual work on the research gaps that needed to be filled, along with the development of a working definition of right-wing extremism to guide coherent and systematic research.

Empirical research usually involves working with technical data from platforms. Therefore, technical preparations were important for making empirical Big Data research possible in this project. For example, a dashboard was created to analyse the data, helping analysts examine trends and carry out accurate link analysis. This technical infrastructure has also been important for further research.

New platforms and accounts, which were discovered during the research as potential sites and drivers of radicalisation, were analysed and integrated into the data collection and analytical systems of CASM and ISD. Previous empirical research has shown where far-right users direct their followers. About half of all links shared on established platforms point to established platforms, i.e. social media platforms that are subject to the comprehensive NetzDG regulations.

In the dataset of the Escape Routes report, most of the links on the established social media also linked to the platform where the link was created, due to their data structure.

The messenger service Telegram is very important among the alternative platforms. Telegram is a platform that offers its users a variety of functions and is considered a hybrid between messenger service and social network. Also due to its functionality, Telegram has emerged as a pillar of right-wing extremist and conspiracy-ideological subcultures during the monitoring period.

In the second empirical report, a dataset for Telegram was collected. The report deals with right-wing extremist actors on Telegram, investigated which links were shared on the platform and how networks were formed.

The platform is used to distribute messages and links, as well as for file sharing. Links to video platforms are primarily shared via Telegram. Also, the large platforms that are required to delete content under the NetzDG are linked to more frequently in the analysed dataset than smaller, alternative platforms.

Generally, a variety of platforms, especially those for audiovisual content, was linked to in both datasets. Such content could not be sufficiently explored through quantitative and text-based analyses and was therefore analysed using ethnographic and qualitative methods.

For future research in the project, technical and methodological solutions, as well as research ethics guidelines, will continuously be developed. This will help with the analysis of large volumes of content across a wide variety of platforms, some of which is only accessible for a short time.

Outlook

As the project progresses, the research team will focus on new platforms and their integration into the Method52 system. The research results so far underline the important role of audiovisual platforms. CASM Technology and ISD Germany are jointly exploring technical solutions to analyse audiovisual platforms more comprehensively in future reports; expert interviews conducted prior to the analysis and the link analysis both confirmed the growing importance of these platforms.

Over the course of the project, platforms using blockchain technology will also be examined more closely. As already noted in the previous analysis, this technology is particularly popular among the alternative platforms. The decentralised structure along with the lack of moderation of extremist content is highly concerning with regard to the increasing popularity of these platforms.

In addition, the technical infrastructure of the platforms already studied is being expanded for further research. This includes research into Telegram and the functions that allow links to be embedded in the text of a message using hyperlinks, among other functionalities. These types of links could not yet be considered in the last empirical report, but they will be evaluated in future studies in this research project.

Deplatforming and persecution narratives will be considered in future analysis in order to better understand user migrations to different platforms. To further determine the relevance of the alternative platforms identified, various factors like the degree of extremism of content and the number of users will be included in an ethnographic analysis.

This analysis will also increasingly include newsletters and websites that have so far remained largely unexamined. In terms of content, various trends within the right-wing extremist online milieu and their platform-specific topics will be researched in-depth next year.

Endnotes

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5   See »Signposts« report, p. 6

6   See »Signposts« report, p. 8

7   See »Signposts« report, p. 11ff.

8   See »Escape routes« report, p. 11

9   See »Telegram as a Buttress« report, p. 25

10   See »Escape routes« report, p. 15

11   See »Escape routes« report, p. 12

12   See »Telegram as a Buttress« report, p. 21

13   See »Escape routes« report, p. 15

14   See »Telegram as a Buttress« report, p. 19

15   See »Escape routes« report, p. 16

16   See »Telegram as a Buttress« report, p. 13

17   See »Escape routes« report, p. 20

18   See »Telegram as a Buttress« report, p. 29

19   See »Escape routes« report, p. 20

20   See »Telegram as a Buttress« report, p. 29

21   See »Escape routes« report, p. 18

22   See »Escape routes« report, p. 18f.

23   See »Escape routes« report, p. 19

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