

In the blind spot – Right-wing extremists on alternative and established platforms

Third conference report by ISD Germany
on the state of research and options for
action with regard to right-wing extremist
radicalisation in digital spaces

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Editorial responsibility:

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Foreword

In September 2023, the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD Germany gGmbH) held its third conference entitled “In the Blind Spot – Right-Wing Extremists on Alternative and Established Platforms”. ISD Germany has held this conference once a year since “[Countering Radicalisation in Right-Wing Extremist Online Subcultures](#)”, a project funded by the German Federal Ministry of Justice (BMJ), began in 2021. The research of this long-term project focuses on online networking of German-speaking right-wing extremists, especially on “alternative platforms”. The project will conclude at the end of 2023.

In the first year of the project, the research team shed light on the “[escape routes](#)”,¹ used by the far-right and right-wing extremist milieu to avoid regulation by the German Network Enforcement Act (NetzDG), which was in force at the time. The team prepared a background report on the project to provide methodological and historical “[signposts](#)”.² They also investigated **Telegram**, a platform that constitutes an important “[buttress](#)”³ for the far-right scene in Germany. In the 2021 annual report, “[Detours and Diversions: Online Strategies for the Dissemination of Right-Wing Extremist Content](#)”,⁴ the researchers addressed the obstacles and challenges they encountered and compared the manner in which actors with various ideological orientations on different platforms linked content.

In 2022, the team published a brief analysis of the platform **GETTR**.⁵ In the second year, the focus of the project turned to investigating decentralised video platforms. The trend towards decentralised programs was advanced by both developments in Web 3.0 and a countermovement to what was perceived as the centralisation of internet services. The team therefore analysed right-wing extremists’ use of **Odysee**, a video platform that uses blockchain technology to

offer financial incentives to users⁶ and **PeerTube**, a free software program that allows people to build their own video platforms.⁷ Right-wing extremist and conspiracist actors use such software programs to create their own platforms and in so doing, prevent their videos from being deleted. The 2022 ISD annual report “[Inside the Digital Labyrinth: Right-Wing Extremist Strategies of Decentralisation on the Internet and Possible Countermeasures](#)”⁸ investigated the guiding principles behind these decentralised platforms and suggested options for regulation and moderation in decentralised contexts.

In 2023, a long-term study was conducted into the effects of the German Network Enforcement Act (NetzDG) and the legislation that replaced it, the European Digital Services Act (DSA), on far-right online milieus. The platforms investigated included small, less-known platforms such as Gettr, Odysee and **Dlive**, as well as large platforms, such as **Facebook**, **X** (formerly Twitter), Telegram, **Instagram** and **YouTube**. The closing conference in September 2023 provided an opportunity to share and discuss the preliminary results of the ISD study with the researchers present.

Representatives from academia and civil society also presented and discussed the research on which they were working on several panels. Furthermore, representatives from regulatory authorities, the platform economy and civil society discussed the effects of the DSA. High-calibre keynotes by Dr Julia Ebner, expert in extremism and Senior Research Fellow at the ISD, and Dr Matthias Becker, Project Lead for the interdisciplinary research project **Decoding Antisemitism**, were valuable additions to the conference programme. This report provides an overview of the most important findings from the conference. The abstracts provided by the researchers can be found in the annex.

Day One of the Conference

Project Lead Hanna Börgmann greeted the attendees and introduced the themes of the conference. This was followed by a welcoming address by Huberta von Voss, Executive Director of ISD Germany, during which she made an urgent appeal to focus efforts on promoting democracy and countering extremism:



“Liberal democracies are facing an exacting test. The centre is eroding and extremist parties are on the rise. There is a normalisation of hate and harassment. The depth of this crisis and its attendant psychological effects have created an almost perfect storm, allowing state and non-state actors to spread doubt about the efficiency of democracies. We must assume that the polarising forces will continue to increase in 2024, a year in which so many countries are going to the polls.”

Huberta von Voss



In the address that followed, Benjamin Strasser, Parliamentary State Secretary at the German Federal Ministry of Justice (BMJ), highlighted the particular risk the internet presents for far-right radicalisation:

“The ‘critical mass’ required to be able to express a view without encountering considerable resistance is much lower on the internet than in the analogue world, when you are in closed groups with other like-minded people. This facilitates the formation of far-right echo chambers, which are becoming increasingly radicalised.”

Benjamin Strasser

The project team at ISD Germany opened the conference proceedings by presenting the interim results of its long-term study. The initial findings include the **increasing importance** of X (formerly Twitter) and the **central importance of audiovisual platforms for the far-right online milieu**. The research team also discovered that right-wing online ecosystems are flourishing on large mainstream platforms, such as Facebook, YouTube, Telegram and X. It found that alternative platforms are not simply used as second-choice but rather as a complementary option as part of a **multi-platform strategy**.



Researcher Julia Ebner shed light on future trends in far-right extremism, specifically the **potential of new technologies for far-right radicalisation and mobilisation**. She concluded that not only hot topics such as ChatGPT and deep fakes but other relevant technological developments such as **artificial intelligence (AI) and blockchain require greater attention from policymakers and researchers**. She explained that **decentralized autonomous organisations (DAOs)** present practical and ideological incentives for far-right extremists. Ebner described how the decentralised aspect of such organisations offers a sense of protection from surveillance and restrictions on freedom of speech, as well as how users are enticed by the system of collective self-administration. She went on to say that even though there have been limited practical examples of far-right use of DAOs until now, there are a **wide range of options for extremists to exploit them**, including **campaigns of influence and manipulation, attacks on political opponents and attempts to radicalise sympathizers**.

The **first panel** concentrated on **strategic and discursive developments in the far-right online milieu** (see researchers' abstracts in the annex). One strategic instrument is **fear speech**, which is utilized particularly in times of crisis in order to increase the intensity of perceived threats, particularly with regard to the COVID-19 pandemic, migration, Islam, the energy crisis and the war against Ukraine. The intention is to engage (new) supporters emotionally or mobilise them. The results of an **investigation into far-right Telegram channels from the German federal state of Saxony** revealed that content resonated particularly with the milieu when it **referenced aspects of the users' everyday lives**, e.g. school and parenting. A similar pattern was revealed in a **case study focusing on the small town of Leisnig in Saxony**, where members of the "Völkische Siedler" (a movement that attempts to establish right-wing settlements in rural Germany) operate their own Telegram channel. In this case, attempts were made to access a wider section of society through protests against measures taken to counter the Coronavirus.

An important overarching finding made by the first panel was that far-right actors increased their use of the platforms in order to reach not only the ideologically resolute "hard core" but also a wider public by **playing on supposedly "softer" topics in order to gain sympathy**. As in the case of the Telegram channel in Leisnig, this is evidence of a **two-pronged approach** that includes non-political, "everyday" topics and glimpses into the rural lifestyles of the "Völkische Siedler", as well as conspiracist narratives and disinformation. One challenge that this approach poses for preventing and countering extremism is also underlined by the concept of fear speech. **In contrast to explicit hate speech, implicitly formulated and strategically "moderate" content is more difficult to regulate**, particularly if it does not fall under the existing provisions of the German Criminal Code, e.g. §130 StGB (Incitement of Masses) or §185 StGB (Insult). At the same time, they constitute a danger with regard to the success of their attempts to approach potential and new sympathisers and supporters.

In its "Aktionsplan gegen Rechtsextremismus" ("Action Plan against Right-Wing Extremism"), the German

government identified the exposure and cutting off of far-right financial activities as an important prerequisite for effectively countering far-right networks⁹. Accordingly, the second panel concentrated on the topic of far-right financing (see researchers' abstracts in the annex). The panel shed light on both the **violent far-right scene and looser networks of far-right online milieus and their sympathisers**. While as "entrepreneurs of extremism", the former group primarily use their platforms to market themselves and recruit new members using "traditional" online methods of financing (e.g. **merchandise shops, music labels and martial arts clubs**), the latter group also have new digital options for using the platforms for their own financial benefit, including **selling premium membership for YouTube channels and creating a cult of right-wing extremist influencers**.

Two other presentations shone further light on the effects of digitalisation on fundraising in the far-right online milieu. It became clear that far-right milieus use **a wide range of financing options**. Telegram channels share **traditional IBANs** as well as **PayPal accounts, wallets** and **crowd-funding campaigns**. They also **raise funds via live streams**. Researchers discovered that cryptocurrencies were sometimes used and that the converted value of such transactions **totalled several thousand Euros**, although the value of the transactions is dependent on the strong fluctuations of cryptocurrency value.



The panellists were in accord that **cutting off far-right financial channels** is crucial for repelling the milieu and that this requires **effective, determined cooperation between politicians, security authorities and financial institutions**. They also agreed that financial service providers and platform operators should be held accountable. Although the actors usually find a replacement quickly after closing an account or deleting a live stream (e.g. by opening a new account at another bank), this also ties up resources within the milieu that cannot be used for other activities, such as recruitment and mobilization.

Day Two of the Conference

After a welcome address and summary of day one of the conference by Project Lead Hanna Börgmann, the Project Lead for the interdisciplinary **research project Decoding Antisemitism, Dr Matthias Becker**, opened day two of the conference with a keynote. His research deals primarily with qualitative and AI-supported analysis of antisemitic hate speech in politically moderate online milieus. One of the questions his research addressed is how implicit hate speech is communicated in a socially acceptable manner. Becker identified a **diversification of communication patterns** among manifestations of antisemitism, some of which he regards as implicit and dependent on context. Becker asserted that as antisemitism is a key pillar of far-right ideology¹⁰, the **gradual normalisation of antisemitic language and thought patterns in analogue and digital spaces** is also a challenge for the prevention of right-wing extremism.



The **third panel** dealt with **challenges and opportunities in researching far-right online activities** (see researchers' abstracts in the annex). An analysis of the short video platform **TikTok** has until now posed a **challenge for research due to the difficulty of processing image and video data** on a large scale. Two multi-modal approaches were presented. These combined **manual annotation and image classification with machine-learning-based text analysis**. Tools such as zero-shot image classification were identified as being potentially important for these tasks.

The speakers demonstrated that in terms of content, **TikTok** is used on a huge scale by far-right online milieus for both **internal and external mobilisation**.

They were particularly struck by the **high level of professionalisation in the conspiracist milieu**. The speakers identified that TikTok, which tends to attract a younger audience, presents a risk due to the **lack of transparency in its algorithm**. **Combining extreme content with pop-culture elements** was also identified as an attempt to deliberately trivialise extremist content on TikTok and make it accessible to a wider audience. There was also a theoretical analysis of how the network resilience of far-right online networks can be empirically measured. In this context, the key significance of "bridge accounts" was emphasised, which connect different extremist clusters.

The **fourth panel** was characterised by a **practical focus on deradicalisation, online regulation and platform policy** (see researchers' abstracts in the annex). It became clear that **regulating how to deal with digital hate** and extremism went through several phases with regard to platform policy. Both **key events** such as the Arab Spring and **public pressure**, e.g. the "Stop Hate for Profit" and #metoo campaigns, played a role. From the platform perspective, it was argued with regard to **the moderation of content** that the **cases that cause the greatest difficulties are those that fall into a grey area** and do not, for example, use banned far-right symbols. It was also made clear that smaller platforms in particular have to consider security issues when deciding whether to report a person.

Digital civil courage was also cited as an important tool in dealing with online hate. Journalist and democracy trainer Gilda Sahebi made an urgent appeal to the panel to **proactively defend democratic values**, including listening to the other person but also taking a firm stand when certain lines are crossed. One example of deradicalisation activities provided was an online outreach project that works with antisemitic individuals on Telegram. This project concluded that success was dependent on a **direct, personal, non-public approach**, the **establishment of trust** and a conversation that **concentrated on the emotional level** rather than facts.

The final podium session of the conference was a **discussion panel on the European Digital Services Act (DSA)**. Sabine Frank (Google/YouTube), Dr Benjamin



Lück (Gesellschaft für Freiheitsrechte e.V. [a German non-profit human rights organisation]) and Stephanie Schulik (Task Force gegen Hass und Hetze [a coalition against online hate organised by the State Criminal Investigation Office [LKA] of the German Federal State of Baden-Württemberg]) discussed the effects of the DSA on combating online hate and extremism. The panellists agreed that although the DSA offers a welcome framework, it is essential to continue breathing life into it. They also emphasised the **central importance of access to research data** for combating online extremism and hate online, explaining that this is not only central to understanding and combating

far-right online activities, but helps monitor platforms' compliance with transparency requirements and their obligation to remove illegal content. The mandatory **risk assessment** the DSA stipulates for "very large online platforms" (VLOPs) with regard to the distribution of illegal content and possible negative consequences for fundamental rights, social discourse and electoral processes was **regarded as an opportunity**. However, the panellists explained that it remains to be seen how the platforms will actually be organised and emphasised the importance of **establishing a clear national framework for the implementation of the DSA in Germany**.

Conclusion

As in previous years, the conference again showed how important it is to bring together **different stakeholders** to successfully combat far-right online radicalisation. Thanks to the funding of the German Federal Ministry of Justice (BMJ) as part of the Countering Radicalisation in Right-Wing Extremist Online Subcultures project, ISD Germany was able to assemble 60 representatives from academic and non-governmental research institutions, regulatory authorities, the platform economy and civil society in order to discuss **new findings and solutions with regard to right-wing extremism online**. The attendees agreed that this task has never been as urgent as it is today. Not only did **far-right-motivated criminal offences continue to increase in 2022¹¹, a normalisation of far-right attitudes has begun to take place among the population^{12,13}.**

The online space has played a key role for the far-right milieu for years. **Platforms are strategically utilised to radicalise and mobilise sympathisers and supporters**. In the context of preventing and combating extremism, it is therefore essential to enable and expand research into digital phenomena in order to preserve the free democratic basic order and safeguard the dignity and security of every person living in Germany. Furthermore, in addition to established platforms such as Facebook, Telegram and X (formerly Twitter), the increasing **use of new technologies** (blockchain, AI, cryptocurrencies) and **audiovisual platforms** as well as the **mainstreaming of right-wing extremism** must be taken into account. As such, it is crucial to **adopt a holistic approach** to preventing and combating right-wing extremism online. In addition to **regulation** and **research, political education** and **deradicalisation work** should also be developed further and prioritised both socially and politically.

Abstracts

Panel I: What is happening? Discursive and Strategic Developments in the Right-Wing Extremist Online Milieu

Between Fear and Hostility: Narratives of Radicalization in Online Groups

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This paper addresses the role of fear speech in the context of various crisis topics in the communication of radical to extreme far-right groups during the period 2020–2022. Fear speech is understood as an element of strategic or targeted communication that addresses or generates fear through the portrayal of a group – usually minorities, but also elites – as potentially threatening. The target group is depicted as harmful to the in-group and its members, e.g., as a threat to the socio-economic status or as a threat to the cultural identity of one's own nation. Fear, when addressed as an emotion, can contribute to the construction of a (perceived) threat or victimhood (Marcks & Pawelz, 2022) and contribute to general climate of fear and especially hostility. Fear can not only increase susceptibility to radical ideologies but also provide justification for extremist actions (Buyse, 2014).

Initial analyses of social media data show that digital communication environments are deliberately used by far-right actors to spread elements of existential fear through fear speech (Saha et al., 2023). Fear speech is not only significantly more prevalent than hate speech, but it can also resonate more easily even among recipients that show no radical attitudes or that follow such narratives. While hate speech, which aims at the devaluation of another group, can pave the way for violence, the assumption is that fear speech is a much stronger indicator of impending violence (Simons & Mueller, 2001; Buyse, 2014).

In an initial approach, we examined far-right communication between 2020 and 2022 to determine which crisis-related online discourses particularly coincide with the spread and use of group-degrading

fear appeals. For this purpose, 105,000 messages from the Telegram communication of three movements (Identitarians, Qanon, Querdenken) were analyzed in terms of their discussed topics and the presence of fear appeals. Topic modeling was carried out using BERTopic and the extraction of fear appeals through a specially developed 'classifier', which was trained based on a manual annotation (N=2389) of a sample of the overall dataset.

The results show that the number of fear-inducing contents already reached its peak in spring and summer 2022 and tended to stagnate in the 'hot autumn'. Instead of a cumulation of online crisis events, it seems to be the case that the thematic differentiation through the multiple crises led to a decreased probability of a cross-group uniform crisis assessment.

Local Far-Right Extremism and the Use of Telegram

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This article analyses the online strategies of the “ethnic settler movement” (Völkische Siedler) who settle in far-right “ethnic communities” (Volksgemeinschaften) in rural Germany. By analyzing the LEISNIG.info Telegram channel, this article shows how ethnic settlers attempt to influence local everyday culture in a small town in Saxony. This article focuses on the question of which strategic functions LEISNIG.info fulfils for the ethnic settlers and which (communication) strategic content and practices it follows. It presents the channel's content, methods of communication, and target audiences, utilizing both quantitative and qualitative data for analysis. On this basis, the development of the channel into a central presentation platform for ethnic settlers between May 2021 and February 2023 can be empirically traced. The findings underscore the importance of considering both the virtual and real worlds in an analysis of threats to democracy. Furthermore, this article makes a significant contribution to the understanding of contemporary far-right extremism strategies in rural areas, given its socio-spatial focus.

The Extreme Right and Conspiracy Ideological Telegram Scene in Saxony Supply and Demand of a Locally Embedded Movement

*Johannes Kiess & Gideon Wetzel,
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Over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic and building on conspiracy theories, a strong far-right mobilization and radicalization has been observed, which crossed existing milieus and brought known right-wingers and previously politically inactive people together to take to the streets. Social media played a major role in this, with the platform Telegram standing out in Germany. Political entrepreneurs and the extreme right used the crisis to build up a supply of topics, ideas, and orientation via channels and by directly addressing their audience. At the same time, there is a considerable demand for such supply, as follower and view figures show. In this paper, we use a quantifying distance-reading approach to investigate how supply and demand in the far right and conspiracist Telegram scene in Saxony developed within half a year. In doing so, we elaborate on different communication patterns and - with the COVID-19 pandemic and especially the measures subsiding - identify a large thematic heterogeneity. The local Telegram groups in particular have established themselves as part of the reality of people's lives on the ground. The conspiracist content shared there poses a challenge to the democratic public sphere.

Panel II: Deep Dive Financing: Monetization in the Right-Wing Extremist Online Milieu

Follow the Money: Tracing the Role of Cryptocurrencies in Financing the German Far-Right, the Anti-Vax 'Querdenken' Movement and Conspiracy Theorist Scene on Telegram

*Harald Sick & Pablo Jost,
BAG "Gegen Hass im Netz" & Universität Mainz*

For protest movements, digital communication channels offer new ways to generate support. One important way to support political activism is donating

to organizations, alternative media outlets and political influencers. In addition to regular donations or crowdfunding, cryptocurrencies offer a way to digitally transfer financial resources. In recent years, cryptocurrencies have been of interest to researchers and policymakers, particularly in relation to their potential use to finance illicit activities, including terrorism and extremism. However, there is still limited empirical evidence on the use of cryptocurrencies by radical and extremist groups.

In our presentation, we will explore the role of cryptocurrencies in financing actors within the German far-right, the anti-vax "Querdenken" movement and the German conspiracy theorist scene on Telegram, a hotspot for extremist propaganda and crypto exchange. Furthermore, we are interested in whether the actors support each other financially or whether there are recurrent, major financial transfers external financiers of the scene.

Starting from a manually generated initial sample, we created a communication network, which we expanded using a non-discriminatory snowball sampling approach based on their forwarding behavior. In this way, we currently monitor around 3400 actors from the above-mentioned milieus. To answer our research questions, we search about 20 million messages for cryptocurrency fundraising appeals to investigate its use by these actors. In this way, we are able to assign the wallet addresses they mention to the respective actors. In a second step, we extract their transactions from the blockchain to analyze the extent to which they use cryptocurrencies, whether they support each other financially, and whether there are external financiers sponsoring multiple channels in our monitoring. To operationalise the latter and represent the flow of funds, we create interaction networks consisting of both the actors in our sample and the users of cryptocurrencies to whom they send remittances and, more importantly, from whom they receive remittances.

The acquired insights into the exchange of cryptocurrencies allows us to better understand the interconnectedness between different actors and the role of cryptocurrencies in financing extremist activities.

“Old School” and “New School” Strategies in Right-Wing Extremist Online-Monetisation

Alexander Ritzmann,
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Research conducted by the Counter Extremism Project (CEP) shows that a large part of the 'who's who' of (violence-oriented) German right-wing extremists is still present and active on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube. These key players, many of whom form the foundation of the (transnational) violence-oriented far-right milieu in Germany, use the platforms to advertise their merchandise stores, martial arts clubs, music labels, bands and prepper companies, reach new customers and recruit new members.

In terms of online monetization, two strategies can be identified: An “old school” approach that markets traditional far-right activities, e.g. through the sale of music and martial arts merchandise. And a “new school” approach that uses mainstream influencers as a model and sells YouTube channel memberships for up to €29.90 per month, for example. However, this new type of monetization is currently the exception. However, right-wing extremist key players in the UK and Austria have already developed this approach further and offer pay-per-chat via various platforms, for example.

The article discusses the lack of enforcement of their own community standards by the major social media companies and further approaches for effective disruption of far-right online financial strategies.

Right-wing extremist fundraising on Telegram

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Based on a CeMAS publication I co-authored to be released in early September 2023 this input would provide an overview of donation-based funding of far right actors from German speaking countries with a focus on Telegram. Financial support plays a central role in strengthening far right networks, with

digitalization enabling them to acquire donations particularly efficiently. Our research shows that the far right uses both established and alternative platform forms for fundraising purposes and the promotion thereof.

The input will highlight the right-wing extremist utilization of bank accounts, PayPal accounts, cryptocurrencies, crowdfunding and social payment platforms, and livestream sites. We analysed more than 1,297,000 messages between 2016 and 2023, from 419 German language far right Telegram channels. Specifically, we identified:

- 109 IBANs from banks from 13 European countries;
- 40 PayPal accounts, five “Donate” links and 20 “MoneyPools”;
- 94 cryptocurrency wallets of 28 far right actors from 15 different cryptocurrencies
- 258,058 euros were deposited into the accounts of the three most used currencies Bitcoin (37), Ethereum (13) and Litecoin (11);
- 28 crowdfunding campaigns, with donations totaling at least 45,332 euros. For 13 of the 17 utilized social payment services, the provider was Patreon.
- The far right also generate donations via livestreams. According to a 2021 study, Martin Sellner, for example, was able to earn more than 11,400 US dollars in a period of 10 months on DLive.

The input will also briefly touch on the technical and investigative limitations and difficulties for each fundraising platform that accompany research into far right online fundraising.

To limit the donation based financing of right wing extremist actors, increased cooperation between politics, security authorities and financial institutions is necessary. Financial service providers must be aware of the use of their services by right wing extremists and take appropriate measures to limit it. Platform operators should act more quickly to stop the financing of donations via social media.

Panel III: How to Capture? Challenges and Opportunities in Researching Right-Wing Online Activities

Analyzing Radical Visuals at Scale: How Far-Right Groups Mobilize on TikTok

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While TikTok recently generated worldwide discussions about data security, lack of content moderation and the great potential to persuade viewers, research examining radical and far-right visual communication and its manifestation on the trending platform is limited. This paper presents a novel methodological framework for studying mobilization strategies of far-right groups on TikTok, employing a multi-modal approach that combines manual annotation, image classification, and machine-learning-based text analysis to analyze the dynamics of radical accounts and their visuals at scale. Differentiating between internal and external mobilization, we use popularity and engagement cues to investigate far-right mobilization efforts on TikTok within and outside their community. Our findings shed light on the effectiveness of unsupervised image classification when utilized within a broader multi-modal framework, as each observed far-right group employs unique platform characteristics. While Conspiracists flourish in terms of overall popularity and internal mobilization, nationalist and protest content succeeds by using a variety of persuasive visual content to attract and engage external audiences.

The study contributes to existing literature by bridging the gap between visual political communication at scale and radicalization research. By offering insights into mobilization strategies of far-right groups, our study provides a foundation for policymakers, researchers, and online platforms to develop proactive measures to address the risks associated with disseminating extremist ideologies on social media. Ultimately, it sheds light on the central questions of the conference and concludes on the far-right use of trending topics and features of a platform, how the far-right positions itself and its narratives towards the Russian aggression in Ukraine and what empirical implications are observable, resulting from platform moderation and the EU Digital Services Act.

Towards Multimodal Campaign Detection: Including Image Information in Stream Clustering to Detect Social Media Campaigns*

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In this work, we explore the potential of including visual information from images alongside textual information in social media campaign recognition. The diverse content shared on social media platforms, including text, photos, videos, and links, necessitates a multimodal analysis approach. Previously, coordinated campaigns could be identified using content analysis solely based on textual information, e.g., Twitter posts. However, next to textual social media elements, images contain valuable information, both supplementary to a post's text and on their own. Further, multimodal content can have great emotional significance. We expect that images are often used to drive or even carry social media campaigns. With the emergence of Large Language Models (LLMs) and their integration with current vision-language models, there is now an opportunity to convert image content into textual descriptions. This enables the integration of contextualized visual information with textual information for a multimodal analysis using text-based campaign detection methods. We evaluate this approach by conducting a parameter study on a state-of-the-art model to assess differences in image captions resulting from various configurations. We then employ the results in a case study of Twitter posts around current, polarizing topics prone to radicalization (e.g., climate change) for examining the contribution of textualized image information to campaign recognition. The results from the case study indicate that by using image captions separately from or alongside tweet texts, connections between campaigns can be identified and new campaigns can be detected. Further, images might be utilized to stir emotions and even mislead by e.g., obfuscating an intent to radicalize. Thus, we explore the potential of utilizing the semantic fit between the textual contents and the images associated with it, as well as the similarity between these images, which might serve as a further indicator for a campaigns existence and purpose.

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The resilience of far-right online networks in the context of emerging European platform regulation efforts: theoretical and methodological reflections

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As large social media companies are increasingly banning extremists and hate movements, many far-right actors have migrated to less regulated online spaces like Telegram (Rogers, 2020). In Germany, even Telegram has recently begun to limit the use of its platform by some far-right actors, geo-blocking access to specific accounts and content to reduce their visibility.

While research on how “deplatforming” affects the discourse and speech on online platforms is growing (see e.g. Ali et al. 2021), less attention has been paid to how “deplatforming” as a regulatory practice shapes the structure and organisation of far-right online activity. Adopting the concept of network resilience from the field of social network analysis (SNA), this research investigates how “deplatforming” affects the topology of far-right online networks and hence the ability of far-right actors to exert discursive power within contemporary media systems (Jungherr et al., 2019). Using time-ordered far-right discourse networks on Telegram in the UK and Germany as case studies, the degree of network centralisation (Freeman, 1978; cf. Urman & Katz, 2020) and role of influential network brokers (Gould & Fernandez, 1989; cf. Caianni & Wagemann, 2009) are compared across two different regulatory contexts.

The findings may inform efforts to counter far-right online activity from a structural perspective. By operationalising time-ordered SNA for the analysis of discursive power in contemporary media systems, this study also seeks to contribute to the methodological toolbox of empirical media systems research through the introduction of computational approaches (cf. Lindgren, 2020).

Panel IV: What to Do? Deradicalisation, Online Regulation and Platform Politics

Platform politics. A genealogical look at tech companies' actions against hate and extremism.

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In times of hate and extremism online, platform companies such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter have become key political actors. They can influence the boundaries of exchange and the visibility of positions and individuals on their eponymous platforms, both through inscriptions in the technical underpinnings (Gillespie 2014) and through platform management (Dolata/Schrape 2022). Research has identified a tech-driven tendency towards polarisation on platforms (Bail 2021), which provides a breeding ground for hate and extremist agitation. Accordingly, the curation of content on digital platforms has grown in importance (Fielitz 2023), accompanied by increasing regulation of digital communication and changing conjunctures of platform politics, driven by political developments but also by economic indicators.

This paper addresses the question of what measures tech companies have taken and implemented, and when, to reduce and counter hate and extremism on their platforms. The content analysis aims to shed light on the factors influencing the implementation of relevant policies and the timing of turning points in public relations. To this end, a periodisation of the regulation of dealing with hate and extremism is proposed in order to better categorise the logics of platform policies.

The findings are based on the analysis of 403 official documents from corporate blogs with content on technical and analogous measures against hate and extremism, which were analysed using Mayring's qualitative content analysis. By text mining over time and identifying differences between time periods, we aim to classify self-regulatory policies and identify what influences the conditions of success for hate actors in the digital space.

The paper is based on the research of a subproject at the IDZ Jena, which is embedded in the BMBF-funded research network “Patterns and Dynamics of Conspiracy Theories and Right-wing Extremist Ideologies in Times of Crisis” (NEOVEX).

Challenges and solutions for combating right-wing extremism on gutefrage.net

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gutefrage.net works with a self-developed subcommunity tool that can track where individual users are active on the platform and with which parts of the community they interact. It shows which subject areas have a particularly high level of interaction with a particular user group and thus offers a way of tracking past and current activities. This can be used to monitor users specifically for moderation purposes, to facilitate contact in the event of policy violations or to take legal action if necessary.

The period from the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 and the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine in February 2022 to the present day is particularly critical in this context. Both events gave rise to emotionally charged exchanges on social networks, with many users starting to find out about world events online for the first time and expressing their political opinions. At times, the internet serves as the only place for group discussions. A clear shift in discourse can be observed here, in which previously taboo topics are brought into the realm of what can be said. Time and again, the phrase “but you're not allowed to say that these days” accompanies politically extreme statements. However, targeted messages can also be found in the masses of ill-considered statements. A few users interfere in the exchange in order to sow right-wing extremist ideas.

As an apolitical and anonymous platform, gutefrage.net basically offers the conditions to host critical and even extreme political views. It is precisely here that there is an increased need for action in order to adequately combat right-wing extremism. The presentation will explain how gutefrage identifies affected users with

the help of the platform's own moderation tools and what information can be gathered about them within a certain period of time. Furthermore, it will show the successes and hurdles that gutefrage has experienced in enforcing its own guidelines in order to continue to ensure an informative exchange within the community despite deliberately refraining from moderating content, while still weeding out right-wing extremist ideas.

(Coded) Anti-semitism on social media - what to do?

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In the lecture a new project will be presented, which is directed against anti-Semitism in the social media: “deras_on – Deradicalization Anti-Semitism Online”. The project is carried out by Drudel 11 e.V. and the Center for Research on Anti-Semitism at the Technical University of Berlin in cooperation.

Under the conditions of Web 2.0, there is a considerable presence of anti-Semitism on the net, especially in connection with age-old, more or less recycled, conspiracy-theoretical set pieces and with consequences for the analogue world as well. The latter has been highlighted in particular by the attempted attack on the synagogue in Halle (Saale) in 2019.

The project is aimed primarily at more subtle forms of anti-Semitism, such as those communicated by means of code words or rationalized in other ways – for example, when ‘globalists’ or symbols of financial power are mentioned. This is not merely a matter of contradiction on a rational level. Rather, it is important to try out ways of making contact and engaging in dialogue with people who are appropriately attuned. Emotions play an essential role here and must be adequately addressed.

The aim is therefore to establish the most personal contact possible with the target group. In addition, relevant information is to be provided. Even if the resistance of anti-Semitic world views based on corresponding personality structures is known,

the broadest possible intervention on the Net is indispensable – if only with regard to (young) fellow readers, who could be at risk of radicalization or the consolidation of corresponding world views.

The experiences made so far will be communicated in the lecture and put up for discussion.

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