From Cambridge to Charlottesville: Media outlets and the relation between social media and far-right radicalisation

Pasko Kisic Merino

Supervisor: **Catarina Kinnvall**

MSc programme: **Global Studies**

Major: **Political Science**

From Cambridge to Charlottesville: Media outlets and the relation between social media and far-right radicalisation

Abstract

Far-right radicalisation and social media are subjects that are increasingly addressed in a joint fashion. However, a nuanced understanding of the features of this relationship remain elusive due to their novelty, research emphasis in large organisations, and the difficulty to access radical groups and individuals. Online media outlets are one of the few channels through which these features can be addressed, yet their lecture is affected by critical sociopolitical contexts and their own political agendas. Consequently, to understand the debate between far-right radicalisation and social media expansion I, first, examined the way in which online media outlets portray the three key elements of their relationship – *social media*, the *far-right*, and the process of *radicalisation* – and, second, I examined the way in which these portrayals shape the debate itself. By cross-analysing 24 articles from the UK and the US with 19 in-depth analytical questions I established three common "struggles" by which online media shape the debate by portraying the violent relationship between the three core elements: anti-establishment tension; the reshaping of social relations; and control of information.

Keywords: *far-right, social media, radicalisation, political psychology, communications, United States, United Kingdom, Charlottesville, Donald Trump, Tommy Robinson, Cambridge Analytica.*

Word count: **21995**

Acknowledgements

Table of Contents

Section 1: Introduction

On the 12th of August 2018 a few dozen far-right activists gathered in Washington D.C. in an attempt to commemorate the one-year anniversary of the Charlottesville riots, or what was called the "Unite the Right" rally. Back in 2017, these riots positioned the myriad of US radical far-right movements in the eyes of major media outlets and, consequently, the world. A successful commemoration of this "historical" event was not meant to be, however. News media networks mocked the far-right activists due to their few numbers and limited support (Andone et al., 2018; Fausset, 2018; Lopez, 2018). Political commentators, however, issued a common warning: these far-right radicals have not disappeared, they feel safer to engage into radical online activism and to rethink their strategies in social media (Nwanevu, 2018; Weaver, 2018).

Coincidentally, Charlottesville's riots anniversary also marked the development of a major media-related event. One hundred US newspapers, led by the Boston Globe, organised a campaign to publish editorial responses simultaneously against the continued attacks of US President, Donald J. Trump, against news media outlets (Lyons, 2018; Riotta, 2018). Trump's preferred platform for performing these attacks and discrediting media has been the social media site Twitter, and his continued efforts are credited for over half of Republicans considering that "the media is the enemy of the people" (Martinez, 2018).

While seemingly disconnected, the contexts and consequences of these events are heavily intertwined. Social media provide a platform that allows radical individuals and groups to gather and disseminate information without control over its content, as well to form communities and recruit impressionable online users. Simultaneously, they provide a platform for political leaders, such as Donald Trump, who through their bigoted, racist and generalised hateful speech can legitimise and normalise the violent discourse and behaviour of far-right radicals.

The relation between *far-right radicalisation* and *social media massification* is a new phenomenon and debate, and its theoretical and empirical background point to numerous epistemological gaps. By analysing the **portrayal that online media outlets**[1] make of this debate, I will attempt at bridging some of these gaps and open more avenues for research.

1.1.   Research problem and research question (RQ)

The main objective of this thesis is exploring and analysing how online media outlets portray and shape the debate on **far-right radicalisation and social media massification.** Specifically, it aims at addressing the issue of how *social media massification*[2] is related to *far-right*[3] *radicalisation* in the US and UK, and how online media outlets portray this relation and implications through their lenses.

Radicalisation in this context is composed by a series of overlapping processes (Wiktoroicz, in Kinnvall & Nesbitt-Larking, 2011, p. 145), which have been substantially transformed by the growing penetration and presence of social media as spaces of new cultural and political socialisation and mobilisation. These processes of radicalisation characterise periods of perceived ontological insecurity from host societies. In the context of the globalisation process, these populations perceive threats

---

[1] By *social media outlets* I refer to news media, newspapers, NGOs, civil society organisations, and national and international organisations that use official online sites (websites) to disseminate information related to the main debate on a regular basis.

[2] By *social media massification* I refer to the process by which social media i) are widely used by individuals, organisations, political leaders, and news media outlets in the UK and US; and ii) conform part of of the quotidian socialiastion process of individuals and communities in these countries (Fuchs, 2014, pp.32-34).

[3] In general terms, by *far-right* I refer to organizations which enact and promote discourses that are characterized by "…nativism (i.e. a combination of nationalism with xenophobia), authoritarianism (law and order issues), and populism (a populist critique of liberal democracy rather than outright anti-systemic opposition)." (Copsey, 2013, pp. 2–3).

to numerous spaces, practices, cultures, and rights that are identified as cardinal for the construction of communities, individual selves, and national identities (Arnett, 2002).

A key question concerning these radicalisation processes, and their interaction with "crisis" contexts, is how individual and collective perceptions of the individual and collective "self" and "other" are portrayed and brought to fruition, and how they are rearranged into tools for political manoeuvring (Brubaker, 2005, 2017). This process of categorising and creating perceptions and conceptions of reality have historically resided upon centralized political, social, cultural and religious institutions, that gradually ceded their monopolies of "truth" in favour of a fast-paced processes, decentralized structures and alternative stakeholders – represented by modern media outlets, international organizations, civil society organizations, private individuals (Turner-Graham, 2014).

In contemporary times, monopolies over information and "reality content" are more challenged than ever. *Social media*, through their array of technologies, platforms, and networks allow real-time, mobile, direct, horizontal, anonymous, individualised, and active ways to acquire, interpret, internalize, reproduce and disseminate information.

As Altheide & Schneider state, online media outlets are an integral actor of this sociopolitical process of interpretation, reproduction, and dissemination of information, gradual construction of meaning, and ultimately portrayal of notions of "truth" (2013, Chapter 1, pp.19–20). As such, analysing these interconnected phenomena through the lenses of online media outlets aims at bridging knowledge gaps on the three main study fields (*far-right, radicalisation, social media*) as well as to open new research avenues within them.

The main RQ for this thesis is: *"How do online media outlets portray and shape the debate on the relationship between social media massification and far-right radicalisation in the UK and the US?"*

1.2. Background

While the major context of far-right expansion and social media massification take into account several decades of development, I will focus the contextual background on two paradigmatic cases which developed simultaneously during 2017. These cases illustrate how the process of political radicalisation has framed the relationship between far-right expansion and social media massification.

One of the cases is that of the "Unite the Right" rally, performed in Charlottesville (Virginia), in August 2017. This rally was staged and coordinated online in response to the Charlottesville city council's decision to remove the statue of the Confederate general, Robert E. Lee, from a public park. The council made this decision in the context of fierce debates regarding the removal of similar monuments throughout the US. These debates confronted groups that, on the one hand, favoured preserving these statues as they are part of their "national heritage", against those that, on the other hand, considered these as reminders of a racist, violent, and oppressive past. This ruling prompted the mobilisation of several far-right organisations and individuals between May and August 2017 towards Charlottesville. Counter-protesters descended towards the city to face these extremists, which resulted in two of the highlights of the long-standing rallies (Hansler, 2017). First, the infamous "tiki-torches" march on the 11th of August acted as the prelude for the most violent parts of the rally. In this visually-stunning episode, white supremacists marched towards the Robert E. Lee monument while chanting slogans that are a testament to their overall discourse: "Jews will not replace us!"; "White lives matter!"; "Blood and soil!" (Edison Hayden & Nestel, 2017). Second, the 12th of August marked the day in which the far-right massively clashed

against counter-protestors in the streets of Charlottesville, unleashing massive riots that provoked several violent incidents (Lubben, 2018), ending with the murder of the counter-protestor, Heather Heyer, by the hands of far-right activist, James Fields (Liautaud, 2017).

In both cases, media captured paradigmatic images and actors that embodied this rally. Two young white men, radicalised into these "fringe" far-right movements and manifestations through social media, exemplify the end-points of the radicalisation spectrum. The first, Peter Cvjetanovic, limited his involvement to using blatantly violent, fascist and racist language (see: https://goo.gl/5YnZAD); the second, James Fields, transformed violent discourse into action by running over counter-protestors with his automobile and murdering Heather Heyer (see: https://goo.gl/GAmMbo).

In this context, the irresponsive behaviour of American President, Donald J. Trump, was also linked to the rise in radical far-right behaviour in the US. The media portrayed Trump as exceedingly reticent in denouncing these radicals, and even when doing so, failing to isolate them as the culprits of the violent aftermath in Charlottesville (Gantt Shafer, 2017; Nakamura & Horwitz, 2017; The Associated Press, 2017). This problematic behaviour unveiled bigger issues in the context of contemporary American culture, with media criticising the President for his use of inflammatory, racist, misogynist, and xenophobic language almost exclusively through Twitter (Beutel, 2018; Gantt Shafer, 2017; Grewal, 2018). Trump's behaviour and beliefs, interpreted through social media, supported the argument that he provided legitimacy and protection to the discourses and actions perpetrated by the far-right in the US, and further, that it emboldened them to engage in violent manifestations against minorities (Grewal, 2018).

Media do not portray Trump as being the sole culprit of the phenomenon of far-right expansion and radicalisation through social media, however. Media portray this

phenomenon and his election in 2016 as the consequence of i) the sum of critical contexts over the past decade, and ii) a case of massive techno-political manipulation. First, the aftermath of the economic crisis of 2008, the continued wars in the Middle East, the expansion and ubiquity of social media, and the so-called immigration crises are the major components of a highly conflictive social context that correlate with the expansion of the far-right (Dixon Kavanaugh, 2016; Gantt Shafer, 2017; Jost et al., 2018). Second, Trump's election was the result of a campaign based on generating extreme political polarisation and dependency on social media by targeting US voters. This campaign was funnelled to the US political arena by Trump's former Strategist-in-Chief, Steve Bannon – a well-recognised far-right leader – and directed by the tech company Cambridge Analytica (Cadwalladr & Kirchgaessner, 2018; Scott, 2018; Walters, 2018).

This company made use of a highly-complex algorithm capable of making unerringly accurate predictions regarding people's behaviours, subjects of interest, voting patterns, and political affiliations to systematically target them through Facebook with the intent to gradually manipulate their newsfeeds, and eventually, their voting choices. The systematic deployment of this algorithm created a highly biased and distorted image of reality for thousands of Facebook users regarding the maladies of liberal elites, immigration, and the "corrupt" government (Cadwalladr & Graham-Harrison, 2018; Graham-Harrison & Cadwalladr, 2018; Grassegger & Krogerus, 2017).

Cambridge Analytica also targeted UK audiences before the critical Brexit referendum. Just as with the case of the US and Donald Trump, Cambridge Analytica's meddling in domestic politics greatly aided the far-right (Cadwalladr & Graham-Harrison, 2018; Franceschi-Bicchierai, 2018; Grassegger & Krogerus, 2017). One case that portrays Cambridge Analytica's success in the UK is that of the rallies in support of far-right leader, Tommy Robinson. Robinson, a former leader of the far-right group English Defense League, received massive online support from far-right radicals after his arrest

for court contempt in May 2017 (The Independent, 2018). Online support quickly transformed into public demonstrations of "solidarity" with his cause – "free speech" –, but also acted as a vessel for the anti-EU and anti-immigration demands from the British far-right. Also, Robinson became an international symbol of the far-right (Hume, 2018), who cast their support almost exclusively through social media as these allowed their message of "martyrdom" to resonate with a larger number of sympathisers and supporters (Jones, 2018). Robinson's case embodies one of the critical themes embedded in media discourse regarding the far-right and social media – that of victimisation and freedom of speech, and thus of an example and a hero of "the oppressed" (Ebner, 2018).

The cases of Charlottesville, Cambridge Analytica, Trump, and Robinson are specific manifestations of the relation between the larger phenomena of *social media massification* and *far-right radicalisation*. The contexts under which these phenomena have developed will be addressed in Section 4, while in the analysis section, I will touch upon several other cases that illustrate these phenomena and the relationship between them.

1.3. Thesis plan

After the introduction to the background and research problem, this thesis will develop in five more sections. In Section 2 I will briefly detail previous research conducted in the intersection between the theories on far-right radicalisation and social media massification. In Section 3 I will propose the theoretical framework, which encompasses the three main theoretical approaches that stem from my research question: far-right, radicalisation, and social media theory. In section 3.3 I will present the operational definition of *power* in relation to the main research problem. In Section 4 I detail the methodological approach to address the research problem and establish

the criteria for analysing the research material. In Section 5 I develop an in-depth compared analysis under the frameworks established in the theory and methodological sections. Finally, in Section 6 I provide concluding remarks to this thesis.

Section 2. Previous research

The study of far-right networks, often in relation to social media technologies, has been focused on the "new" tendencies of the movements, parties, and ideologies, which have quickly and efficiently adapted to changing environments (Bos, Brug, & Vreese, 2011; Braunthal, 2010; Doerr, 2017; Duerr, 2015; Ellinas, 2010; Padovani, 2016; Schmuck & Matthes, 2015; Simpson & Druxes, 2015; Turner-Graham, 2014).

Doerr (2017) and Berlet & Mason (2015) focus on how far-right activists use popular imagery online to further their anti-immigration agenda, ingroup strengthening, and national and international "trans-linguistic" solidarity between far-right groups and individuals. Doerr argues that the simplified "cartoon" language that online far-right activists use for "othering" immigrants has effectively trumped linguistic and geographical barriers that prevented the spread of the core features of the far-right agenda in Europe (2017). Schmuck & Matthes (2015) focus on how the portrayal of symbolic and economic threats shape networked far-right advertisement that targets youth in Europe – and how they especially affect those with lower levels of education.

Braunthal argues that electronic networks – i.e., social media and internet sites – are one of the main tools by which contemporary extremist right-wing groups and individuals spread their propaganda (2010). These tools are critical for the development and integration of far-right groups and individuals, as they have been traditionally ostracised or decide to remain in relative social isolation (Ibid, p.124). Electronic sites and activities – which are extremely difficult to monitor and sanction by authorities – provide safe spaces in which these actors can further their political, social, and cultural interests, as well as develop a sense of communities (Ibid, p.125).

A different yet related body of literature attempts at addressing how social media can be a vehicle and a space through which individual and group emotions and moral

stances interact with socio-political processes, and thus determine social, political, and cultural influence (Brady, A. Wills, Jost, Tucker, & Van Bavel, 2017; Crockett, 2017; Persson, 2017; Soral, Bilewicz, & Winiewski, 2017). Soral et al. argue that constant exposure to online hate speech gradually turns the recipients less sensitive and empathic towards the victims of it, in practice sustaining and increasing outgroup prejudice (2017). Emotions expressed through "strong" language are, as Persson argues, a "central discursive resource" for the modern development of socio-political processes (2017). Persson argues that the use of this kind of emotional language is a key component for the formation of groups and collective identities.

Several authors state that social media are merely "neutral spaces" in which individuals and collectives can deposit their already-formed opinions and emotions (Crockett, 2017). However, Crockett argues that there is a strong correlation between the use and massification of online spaces and the effectiveness and prevalence of "outrage-inducing content" (2017, p. 3), or in the words of Brady et al. "moralised content" (2017). For the latter authors, the successful spread of political ideas and beliefs through social media (what they label "moral contagion") necessarily depends on the diffusion of "moralized emotion", particularly within common sociopolitical groups (2017, p. 4).

Several authors explore how social media relates to strong emotional manifestations that portray radicalised individuals and groups (Doerr, 2017; Gantt Shafer, 2017; Koehler, 2014; Turner-Graham, 2014). Gantt Shafer argues that the behaviour and opinions of the US President Donald J. Trump, on social media, centred on the struggle against "political correctness", has normalised racist and xenophobic content and behaviour in online spaces (2017). Emboldened by Trump's behaviour in social media, the battle against "political correctness", under the misplaced neoliberal veil of "truth-telling" (i.e., "political *in*correctness"), has become a commonplace rhetorical element used by radicals and white supremacists in the US (Gantt Shafer, 2017).

By interviewing eight former right-wing radicals in Germany, Koehler attempts to understand the role that the internet has on the process of radicalising individuals (Koehler, 2014). Koehler finds that the internet is highly dependent on fast and constant human interaction, and simultaneously provides an illusion of a "sense of community". This dependence frames the internet as an ideal space for developing radical views on society, individuals, groups, and ideologies (Ibid, p. 126).

Another group of authors has addressed the dynamics between sociopolitical mobilisation and social media interaction (Fullam, 2017; Jost et al., 2018; Parmelee & Bichard, 2012; Simões & Campos, 2016; Trottier & Fuchs, 2015). From a youth mobilisation perspective, Fullam argues that i) social media acts as mediators, not as producers of sociopolitical activism; and that ii) social media cannot replace face-to-face as mediums for political and personal engagement, even within a "closed" group (2017). Bridging political protest and youth participation through social media, Simões & Campos argue that political mobilisation is currently impossible without the significant use of social media. These media, not only represent a space in which information is shared and distributed but also where individuals actively and "freely" deliberate and create specialised networks that further develop their engagement with different groups (2016).

Parmelee & Bichard addressed readership, social media usage, and political participation, and focused on the role that Twitter plays in modern-day politics. Parmelee & Bichard argue that the directness of Twitter facilitates adopting a notion of closeness and connectedness between users and political leaders, and more abstractly, between "the people" and "the government" (2012, pp. 3–4). Social media platforms can reframe sociopolitical relations and thus grant leaders the power to influence processes, relations, groups, and individuals (Ibid, pp. 24–25).

Section 3. Theoretical framework

This section will explore and establish the key theoretical framework that articulates the literature review, methodologies, and analysis of the relation between *radicalisation*, the *far-right*, and *social media*[4]. Also, I will propose theoretical links between these selected approaches, in order to provide the rationale of the main analytical section of this thesis.

The following section is divided into four parts. In the first part, I propose an understanding of the expansion of the modern *far-right*, as the main ideology and discourse that propels organisations and individuals into action. Second, I explore the main debates on political *radicalisation*. Third, I address *social media* theory and its effects on political participation and socialisation.

3.2. Expansion of the far-right in Europe and the US

3.2.1. Definitions of the far-right: what does the FR encompass?

Defining what encompasses the *far-right* is a field of study on its own, and the only agreement regarding its study seems to be on its level of terminological complexity (Blee, 2007; Ellinas, 2010, pp. 10–11; Pelinka, 2013; Wodak & Khosravinik, 2013). The terms related to the *far-right* are also used interchangeably in the literature (Goodwin, 2006, pp. 347–348). Among many variations, some authors prefer to use the terms "populist radical right" (Mudde, 2017b), "extreme right" (Blee, 2007), "right-

---

[4] While my topical interest is on far-right radicalisation, the analysis and findings of this thesis and the theorisation process do not necessarily exclude links for addressing left-wing / far-left radicalisation. As I will address the nuances of the relation between political radicalisation and social media technologies, these links and conceptualisation could potentially contribute to the study of the relation between left-wing radicalisation and social media usage. This specific relation, however, will not be the focus of this thesis at any point.

wing populist parties" (Pelinka, 2013; Wodak & Khosravinik, 2013), and "radical right-wing populist parties" (Wodak, 2013). For Mudde, we can understand this definitional issue considering that i) scholarly work on the "far right" (particularly regarding its political parties) "[trumps] all other party families together" (2017b, p. 4); and ii) the fact that populist radical right parties "[…] do not self-identify as populist or even (radical) right." (Ibid). Also, the difference between political parties and sociopolitical movements sets another layer of definitional issues regarding the far-right: this ideology encompasses parties, social movements, cultural groups, among other actors (Blee, 2007).

Despite the extent of this definitional spectrum, there are some common features that portray the far-right as an ideology and as an organisation family, all of which develop founded on the process of *othering* (Kinnvall & Nesbitt-Larking, 2011, pp. 62–63; Wodak & Boukala, 2015, p. 88; Wodak & Khosravinik, 2013, p. xvii).

Mudde proposes a "minimum definition" of the ideology of the far-right: "The populist radical right shares a core ideology that combines (at least) three features: *nativism, authoritarianism, and populism*" (2017b, p. 4). First, *Authoritarianism* refers to a belief in strong submission to rules, authority, and punishment (Ibid). Second, *nativism* refers to the "[…] distinction between (good) 'natives' and (evil) 'aliens'", social groups which compete for the same space, sense of belonging, and sociocultural benefits which are mainly attached to *new* exclusive nationalist imageries (Wodak & Boukala, 2015). Kinnvall & Nesbitt-Larking argue that this *new nationalism* differs from its traditional conception in that the animosity towards the "immigrant others" has replaced the one towards "other nationalisms" (or states) (2011, pp. 62–63). Blee furthers this point by arguing that the distinction between "us and them" is not limited to national and political spaces, but also to cultural ones – thus discriminating against other opposing "natives" is a commonplace occurrence:

"*From the outside, extremist right-wing movements appear to coalesce around ideas and ideologies, but internalist studies show that culture is also key to the attraction and durability of the far right*." (Blee, 2007, p. 124).

The social dichotomisation – *us* v. *them* – is the epistemological "bridge" to what Mudde describes as the distinctive focus of the third feature (*populism*), which purposely antagonises "[…] the "people" and the "corrupted elites" " (2017b, p. 5).

According to Wodak & Khosravinik, this simplistic process of antagonization is a key characteristic of far-right extremism, as "media-savvy" charismatic populist leaders profit from the "[…] growing apathy of the general public to mainstream politics [i.e., the discourse of the "corrupted elites"]" (2013, p. xviii). This stark antagonization process is what differentiates *right-wing populism* from other kinds (Ibid, p. xx). At the same time, this process represents its greater conceptual weakness: According to Pelinka, defining "us", or "the people" depends on circumstantial "[…] self evidence for the inclusion as well as the exclusion from 'the people" (2013, p. 3). These "people" exist and dispute another abstract yet allegedly "self-evident" space: the nation.

While not explicitly included in Mudde's "minimum definition" of the far-right (or rather, *populist radical right*), the phenomenon of *nationalism* is intrinsically present in all three features – in particular, within *nativism*. "Us" and "them", under this pretence, requires a space of confrontation, competition, veneration, and protection: the "mythical idea of the nation" (Kinnvall & Nesbitt-Larking, 2011, p. 61; Wodak, 2013, p. 25). As I mentioned before, *new nationalism* (Kinnvall & Nesbitt-Larking, 2011, pp. 62–63) is specifically relevant at this point, as it deals with the shift in focus of the key element of "the other" towards immigrants and refugees. While stating that the focus on immigration, nationalism, and racism are the "minimum common" similarities between European and US far-right groups, Pelinka argues that different

types of nationalistic manifestations[5] do not necessarily prioritize anti-immigration stances at their core, but rather respond to specific economic, cultural, and sociopolitical developments (2013, pp. 12–17).

3.2.2. Epistemological issues of the study of the far-right

In addition to the existing debate on far-right terminology, the production of knowledge regarding these phenomena represents a challenge for theorists and researchers. These epistemological issues range from the diverging focus on collectives (groups, movements, parties, communities) and individuals, to the "ease of access", and political animosity that researchers experience about far-right groups and individuals.

One of the key epistemological debates addresses the "externalist" vs. "internalist" approaches used to study the far-right over the past three decades (Blee, 2007). According to Blee and Goodwin, the externalist approach has been imperative in scholarship: it focuses on addressing the causal and environmental issues related to the growth and emergence of "[…] organized racism and right-wing extremism" (Blee, 2007, p. 120). However, this approach does not address how the far-right *itself* develops and behaves - i.e., the internalist approach. Goodwin argues that the externalist approach focuses heavily on the electoral success of the far-right, leaving aside its internal machinations (2006, p.347). This focus responds to a generalised "[…] lack of empirical analysis when studying the extreme right parties themselves […]" (Ibid), which maintains a marked distance from studying the individuals, culture, and

---

[5] In this progressive confrontation against increasingly multicultural Western societies, new nationalism redefines the rhetoric of exclusion and identification (Wodak & Boukala, 2015) and manifests it through far-right organisations and discourses. Wodak mentions some of these discourses, including instrumentalization of minorities as scapegoats; exploitation of imageries and adaptation to other ideologies; targeting of issues related to globalisation; dependence on exploitation of media; focus on charismatic male leaders; exploitation of celebrity culture; anti-intellectualism and celebration of ignorance; endorsement of "pseudo-emancipatory gender policies"; strength by being the opposition to the government, not the government itself; and finally, the unequivocal claim to represent "the people" (2013, pp. 26–27).

organisational dynamics of the far-right. According to Blee, another factor that helps explain the nature and "bias" favouring the externalist approach is the "ease of access" to direct sources of information on the far-right:

> "*Even many studies that focus on far-right movements directly are externalist in the sense that they rely on publicly available data* […] [which] *may not accurately reflect the internal ideology of members or even goals of groups*" (Blee, 2007, pp. 120–121).

Mudde also weighs in this debate from his approach, criticising the over-reliance and almost "exclusive" focus on the "[…] *demand side* of populist radical right politics" (2017a, p. 424). This focus generates the widely held assumption that "[…] the radical right constitutes a pathology in (post-war) western society and its success can only be explained by 'extreme conditions' (i.e. 'crisis')" (Ibid). This epistemological position is what he labels as the "Normal Pathology Thesis". He argues that this thesis cannot sustain empirical testing – reflected for instance in its severe limitation for comparing far-right cases between and within countries. Subsequently, Mudde proposes a paradigm shift incarnated in the "Pathological Normalcy Thesis", which at its core states that "[…] the radical right constitutes a radicalisation of mainstream views" (Ibid, p. 432) which are inherent in modern societies, instead of a mere sociopolitical pathology manifested solely in crisis periods.

The lack of focus on the "internalist approach" and the "supply-side" to the study of the far-right is also symptomatic of how organisations and individuals within this framework are studied. For instance, Blee argues that there is a marked absence of scholarship surrounding the dynamics of far-right movements, in particular of modern right-wing extremism, in contrast to political parties (2007, p. 119). This limitation hampers the possibility of comprehensively addressing constantly-changing issues such as recruitment, micro-mobilisation, identity formation, and appeal. Goodwin

argues that few scholars have sought to directly engage with key radical or heavily politicised individuals (2006, p. 354). As a result, the knowledge created about the far-right seriously lacks an integrated understanding of its ideological and organisational development (Ibid, p.352), as information gaps are many times masked with "[…] stereotypes and assumptions concerning the extreme right homo politicus […]" (Ibid, p.354).

The final epistemological approach refers to the focus on studying *media behaviour* in contrast to electoral processes to inform the development and evolution of the far-right. This approach follows the "externalist vs internalist" debate - however, it resides "midway" between these diverging perspectives, as online sources allow the close inspection of new media behaviour, yet they still portray a distant representation of reality. Ellinas argues that media behaviour is both increasingly a prominent factor explaining the expansion of the far-right (2010, p. 4) and a complex actor due to the multiplicity of forms it can adopt (Ibid, pp. 7, 216), political stances it forms (Ibid, p.205), and networks it develops (Ibid, p.216).

3.2.3. Discourse and narratives of the far-right

The study of media behaviour regarding the far-right phenomena engages with the narratives and discourses that these organisations and individuals construct and profess, and their integration into constantly-shifting sociopolitical contexts. This thesis articulates all discursive elements and variations of the far-right under three core characteristics presented by Mudde: *nativism, authoritarianism, and populism* (2017b, p. 4). The manifestation of these elements focuses on the normalisation of the process of "othering" (Wodak, 2013, p. 26). Wodak argues that the of normalisation of the far-right discourse "[…] is occurring at all levels of society, ranging from the media, political parties and institutions to everyday life interactions." (Ibid).

The success and expansion of these far-right discourses reside in the construction and opposition to sociocultural identities, or how Kinnvall & Nesbitt-Larking label it, "core identity signifiers" (2011, p. 60). By identification and opposition, populist far-right leaders portray stereotypes of nation, race, and religion (Ibid). The far-right link these "[…] ethnoreligious and cultural considerations […]" (Ibid) to issues of welfare and security, which help justify exclusionary rhetoric and policymaking in the public sphere, as well as the characterisation of the far-right institutions and individuals as "[…] the saviours of the Occident' […]" (Wodak & Boukala, 2015, p. 97). Further, Kinnvall & Nesbitt-Larking identify three common beliefs that characterise the discourse of the "new racists": i) that "[…] cultures and communities are under attack [from] newly arrived immigrants […]"; ii) that these societies share "[…] a common past, typically mythologized, in which communities were coherent and cultures singular."; and iii) that the only solution for sociocultural and economic maladies that societies experiment is "[…] the recreation of social endogamy, the exclusion of the other, and of outsider […]." (Kinnvall & Nesbitt-Larking, 2011, p. 61).

Paradoxically, the mainstreaming of identity concerns at the core of sociopolitical discourses has opened a wide debate on the understanding of a "new" congruent identity of European societies (Wodak, 2013, p. 26). For the far-right, Europe represents the epitome of "Western Christian civilisation" (Pelinka, 2013, p. 16), and as such it must be actively defended from "the others" (Wodak & Boukala, 2015). The far-right deems the European Union – and the liberal values and policies it stands for – as one of the most critical enemies of "their" Europe. As such, this abstract actor is considered among the "others" that threaten the continent (Pelinka, 2013, p. 16). Moreover, the far-right conceives the possibility of becoming "[…] a European party family of post ethno-nationalist populist parties translating the ethno-nationalist agenda into an agenda of exclusion […]" (Ibid).

The discursive construction of the "other" occurs in two dimensions: *external* and *internal*. Both dimensions are affected by the same principles: i) monism, which entails "[…] seeing the people as ethnically and morally homogeneous […]" (Mudde, 2017b, p. 6), and ii) anti-pluralism (Ellinas, 2010, p. 11; Mudde, 2017b, p. 6).

The *external* dimension of othering refers mainly to immigrants, asylum seekers, and refugees from the "global South" (Kinnvall & Nesbitt-Larking, 2011, pp. 60–61; Wodak & Khosravinik, 2013, p. xxiii). This dimension also includes the European Union, liberal globalist organisations, and left-wing political parties. This process of external othering is tied to the self-portrayal of the far-right as the "[…] defenders of the Christian West, and its liberal democracy and respect for human rights, against the perceived totalitarian ideology of Islam." (Kinnvall & Nesbitt-Larking, 2011, p. 61). This confrontational discourse resonates with the "programmatic appeal" of the far-right – namely, by addressing the *external* threats by creating and enforcing policies and linking sociocultural issues to ethnic minorities (Ellinas, 2010, p. 11).

Second, the *internal* dimension of othering entails a confrontation between "the people" (*us*) against the "powerful corrupted elites" (*them*). A common characteristic of this discourse is denouncing the maladies that the elites have caused on the "people", as well as positioning the far-right as defenders of the latter. As in the case with the external dimension, this process entails "[…] positive self-presentation as courageous and defiant […]" (Wodak, 2013, p. 24).

The contexts that shape the contents of far-right discourses affect their rhetorical manifestations to the point that the latter attempt to respond to electoral preferences instead of offering ideological coherence (Wodak, 2013, pp. 25–26; Wodak & Boukala, 2015; Wodak & Khosravinik, 2013, p. xvii). This principle of "political practicality" resonates with the discursive principle of modernisation and "respect" for democracy. The far-right – at the party level – constantly manifest that they "play by the rules" and

abide by the general forms of democratic governments (Ellinas, 2010, p. 10; Mudde, 2017b, p. 6; Wodak, 2013, p. 25).

3.2.4. Expansion and internationalisation of the far-right

The contexts in which the far-right has surged since the 1980's have been subject to intense research and debate – however, there is little doubt that far-right has indeed *expanded* in Europe and other parts of the world (Blee, 2007; Mudde, 2017b, p. 2; Wodak & Khosravinik, 2013, pp. xvii–xviii). This "[…] spectre of radical right-wing populism" (Wodak, 2013, p. 24) has been increasingly normalised into mainstream politics in Europe and the US (De Lange, 2017, p. 97). Despite the existing animosity against their agendas (Blee, 2007) the core features of *nativism, populism*, and *authoritarianism* are still blatantly present and "[…] often interconnected in the propaganda of the [far-right] parties" (Mudde, 2017b, pp.5-6). Ellinas argues that this propaganda is heavily funnelled via increasingly complex media outlets (2010, p.207). This combination of mainstreaming, complex use of media, and specific contextual developments can help explain i) how the far-right has expanded or "resurged" (Blee, 2007); and ii) the development of its discourses and behaviour, at an ideological, collective, and individual level.

The development of sociopolitical, cultural, and economic phenomena propelled by the unforeseen consequences of globalisation throughout the past decades can help explain the surge of the far-right. While the identity issues that most societies deal with are not new (Ellinas, 2010, p.4), globalisation has provoked adverse psycho-political responses in them, which have "[…] helped push [social identity] issues into the political mainstream by giving parties incentives to "ethnicize" politics in search of new electoral niches." (Ibid, p.2). This "neo-conservative backlash", as Ellinas labels it, feeds from the identity crisis caused by globalisation, effectively "[…] eroding the link

between citizens and states [which] reinforces the need for national identification and creates demands for cultural protectionism." (Ibid, p.6).

To politically capitalise on the effects of this highly conflictive sociocultural environment, the far-right had to modernise itself at the discursive and strategic level. To legitimise itself as a conduit for popular demand, the far-right has discursively pledged itself away from neo-fascist rhetoric and consequently to respect specific manifestations of the democratic system, such as the electoral process (Pelinka, 2013, p.17; Wodak, 2013, p.25). Strategically, the most important development has been the strengthening of new media capacities and the intelligent use of mainstream media to assure their presence in domestic political debates, regardless of their relative electoral prowess (Wodak, 2013, p. 27). These "media-savvy" strategies have targeted not only the discourses, movements, and parties, but also the individuals that carry these messages and insert them into national and international debates: the leaders of the far-right (Ibid). These leaders are tasked with "[…] rallying people around simplified social identities" (Kinnvall & Nesbitt-Larking, 2011, p. 60), which is accomplished by intensive media usage (Wodak, 2013, p. 27).

The convergence of simplified elements of social identities has also affected the expansion of the far-right by merging "traditional" and "street" politics – blurring the barriers between political parties, social movements, and individuals. Increasing Euroscepticism and social conflict focused on immigration processes have greatly deepened this merging process, shown by the replication of "street politics" (e.g. neo-nazi demonstrations) into mainstream politics (Mudde, 2017b, p.6). The modernisation of the far-right also implies an increased dependency on individuals or "activists" (Goodwin, 2006, p. 353). However, there is a major lack of understanding on how "micro-mobilisation" occurs within the far-right, and in particular "[…] why people are attracted to such groups." (Blee, 2007, p. 120). Undoubtedly, as media has affected

the expansion of the far-right, it has also gradually affected how individuals relate to these groups and discourses (Ellinas, 2010, pp.7, 216).

The role of the media in the growth of the far-right cannot be understated (Wodak, 2013, p. 32; Ellinas, 2010, p.3), as it facilitates its expansion by i) easing the access to the electoral market; ii) granting legitimacy; and iii) portraying an image of "mass following" (Ellinas, 2010, pp.204-205). Even when directly opposed to the far-right (Ellinas, 2010, p.205), media outlets provide legitimacy and political support by inevitably providing coverage to their discourses, stories, and activities (Wodak, 2013, p.32), effectively controlling "[…] the gateway to the electoral market." (Ellinas, 2010, pp.3, 7). Moreover, Ellinas argues that even "hostile" coverage has been excellent publicity for these parties and movements, by providing spaces for communicating their views on critical social identity issues (2010, p.206). While Mudde believes that mainstream media has greatly exaggerated the reach and power of the far-right (2017b, p. 10), it is precisely this "excessive exposure" that has helped trigger their marked success relative to their size (Wodak & Khosravinik, 2013, p. xvii). The far-right has actively reaped the benefits of the culture of "media democracy" to make up for their internal organisational and political limitations (Ellinas, 2010, pp. 3, 7; Wodak & Khosravinik, 2013, p. xvii). The far-right has thus developed a clear strategy focused on "[…] [setting] the agenda and distract the media from other important news." (Wodak, 2013, p. 32). This dynamic is what Wodak labels "*The Right-wing Populist Perpetuum Mobile*", and it comprises several stages, ranging from intentionally provoking a scandal, to self-adjudicating the status of the *victim*, and finally conspiracy-building (Ibid, pp.32-33).

3.3. Radicalisation

The concept of "radicalisation"[6] has come into question especially since the 9/11 attacks, after which the literature on radicalisation, extremism, and terrorism[7] expanded considerably. Despite this epistemological expansion, radicalisation constitutes a heavily ambiguous concept (Neumann, 2013, p. 873).

I will focus on the debate concerning the concept of radicalisation in two major areas: First, the academic and political divide which emphasises *cognitive radicalisation* (radical or extremist beliefs) and on the other hand, *behavioural radicalisation* (radical or extremist behaviour and actions). Second, the theoretical tension between the *individual* causes and characteristics of radicalisation, in contrast to the *collective* ones.

3.3.1. First area of debate: The "end-points" – cognitive v. behavioural radicalisation.

Whereas most scholars agree that, to different levels of complexity, radicalisation is a process and that there is no single influence that triggers extremism[8] (Costanza, 2015;

---

[6] "At the most basic level, **radicalisation** can be defined as the **process** whereby people become extremists." (Neumann, 2013, p. 874). Neumann argues that the definitional issue is not so much agreeing that radicalisation is a process, but rather to define what does it constitute to be an extremist, or what does **extremism** mean – understood as the *"end-state"* of the process of radicalisation. The debate regarding radicalisation, at its core, hinges precisely on this definitional issue: "The more ambiguous part of the definition is the concept of extremism, which—according to Roger Scruton—can have several meanings. It may describe political ideas that are diametrically opposed to a society's core values, which—in the context of a liberal democracy—can be various forms of racial or religious supremacy, or ideologies that deny basic human rights or democratic principles. Or it can mean the methods by which actors seek to realize any political aim, namely by 'show[ing] disregard for the life, liberty, and human rights of others." (Scruton, 2007, in Neumann, 2013, p. 874-875).

[7] "**Terrorism** is an act of violence (domestic or international), usually committed against non-combatants, and aimed to achieve behavioral change and political objectives by creating fear in a larger population." (Doosje et al., 2016, p. 79).

[8] Radicalisation tends to be theoretically attached to notions of terrorism – namely, diverse forms of Islamic terrorism –, however this is not the focus of my analysis. Methodologically and theoretically, I will look to instead understand and analyse *radicals*, namely *"cognitive radicals"*, linked to far-right discourses and agendas, that have been under the influence of social media technologies.

Doosje et al., 2016; Jasko, LaFree, & Kruglanski, 2017; Kinnvall & Nesbitt-Larking, 2011; Kruglanski et al., 2014; Malthaner, 2017; Neumann, 2013), less consensus exists regarding what *concept of radicalisation* better suits social phenomena. One of the resulting debates is focused on the "end-points" of radicalisation: this is, cognitive radicalisation (development of radical thoughts, ideas, and beliefs), and behavioural radicalisation (development of radical actions and behavioural patterns) (Neumann, 2013, pp. 874-876; Malthaner, 2017, pp. 371-372). Also, whereas there are other radicalisation fault-lines analysed by Malthaner (e.g., collectives v. individuals; and situational radicalisation), the behavioural-cognitive debate acts as a core conceptual umbrella for these sub-discussions (2017, p. 372).

This area of debate develops by focusing on the concept of extremism, – which represents the "end-point" of radicalisation. The "difficulty" inherent in this debate resides on how extremism can be understood as political ideas or beliefs, or (violent) methods related to a specific political aim (Borum, 2011, p. 9; Kruglanski et al., 2014, p. 71; Neumann, 2013, pp. 874–875). By "cognitive radicalisation", in the same line as Borum (2011, p. 30), Neumann refers to a phenomenon that culminates in the establishment of radical ideas formulated about society, culture, and policy (2013, p. 875). In contrast, "behavioural radicalisation" is interpreted as violent and coercive actions that are taken based on the development on radical ideas (Malthaner, 2017, p.372; Neumann, 2013, p. 875).

While the connection between "actions" and "ideas" can seem obvious in the context of the study of radicalisation, it is precisely the main point of theoretical contention. On the one hand, authors such as Horgan (2008, 2011), Borum (2011), and Costanza (2015) argue that cognition and behaviour in the context of radicalisation constitute separate phenomena. For them, the correlation between ideas and beliefs on the one hand, and violent action and behaviour, on the other, cannot be established as a necessary causal relation. Moreover, it hampers efforts to understand the different

"pathways" by which an individual can become radicalised: "Horgan claimed that academics' emphasis on cognitive radicalisation has produced the widely held— yet, in his view, fundamentally flawed—assumption that extremist beliefs are the [necessary] precursor to violent action." (Neumann, 2013, p. 878-879).

On the other hand, authors such as Neumann (2013), Doosje et al. (2016), Kruglanski et al. (2014) and Malthaner (2017) argue that while context is critical to understand the different ways in which radicalisation occurs, it is precisely because of this inherent social, cultural, and political complexity that it is impossible to separate cognition from behaviour. Simply put, all extremist behaviour through radicalisation is bound to a political belief. Neumann argues that weakness in Horgan and Borum's argument lies in their assumption that radicalised individuals compose "ideologues" or "true believers", who fully understand and support radical political discourses with high levels of ideological sophistication (2013, p. 879). Contexts, social organisations, and diverse cultural arrangements prevent that specific processes of radicalisation develop in the same path, under the same criteria, and following similar profiles[9].

3.3.2. Second debate: collective v. individual approaches to radicalisation

The second debate is that of collective and individual understandings of the process of radicalisation. Whether these encompass vast literature and theoretical approaches, they are not necessarily conceptually and systematically opposed. Moreover, it would be fruitless to attempt to provide a nuanced understanding of the current debates in radicalisation without intertwining the individual and collective levels. This discussion on individual and collective approaches to radicalisation focuses on the *dynamic* between cognition and behaviour, rather than confronted approaches. In addition, via

---

[9] Neumann sums up the "pro-cognitive" argument, indicating that: "[…] any attempt at understanding individuals' 'action pathways' without looking at the social movements and counter-cultures from which they have emerged is bound to be shallow." (2013, p. 879).

the exploration of the debate on *collective radicalisation* I will set how this thesis uses the concept of *power relations* in the frame of my research methodology (*qualitative media analysis*) to improve the analysis of the relationship between social media massification and far-right radicalisation from the lenses of online media outlets.

3.3.2.1. Radicalisation at the collective level

The fundamental feature regarding radicalisation at the collective level resides in the *interaction* within and between different groups, ideologies, and institutions; and the often-violent reactions[10] to the activities and discourses taken by the "opposing side" (Della Porta, 1995, p. 8; Malthaner, 2017). The premise of escalation provides the analytical standpoint for addressing this interaction. Under this premise, radicalisation is a product of the escalation of an action/reaction dynamic, and not solely the result of the interaction between "opposing ideologies and social groups" (Malthaner, pp.373-374). According to Della Porta (in Malthaner, 2017, pp. 373-374), to further understand the interaction-escalation relation, it is key to consider the changing *environmental conditions* under which the process of radicalisation occur (Della Porta, 1995, p.83).

Della Porta portrays the key elements of the interaction-escalation relation: i) interaction with other groups, ideologies, and institutions; ii) escalation, from xenophobic and nativist rhetoric, to marches and violent physical confrontation; and iii) environmental conditions that trigger the use and "diffusion" of violence (Della

---

[10] *Violence* is both a complicated and inescapable concept to help define radicalisation. Della Porta indicates that using this concept in absolute terms is analytically useless as it is impossible to properly operationalise (Della Porta, 1995, p.4). Violence might be discursive, cognitive, behavioural, or somewhere in between, and it does not entail the same meaning and is engaged in the same manner by societal norms given different spaces and periods of time (see middle section: "The transversal analytical factor: the relevance of context and normative"). However, radicalisation can be hardly understood with a propensity to violence at different scales and circumstances, hence the concept cannot be taken out of the analytical framework (Della Porta, 1995, p.4-5).

Porta, 1995, p. 83)[11]. Along with this behaviour-oriented process, constant reinterpretations of actors, and the space in which they develop, are deemed critical to understand how radicalisation occurs collectively. This constant process of interpretation and reinterpretation is what Malthaner labels as *cognitive dynamic of radicalisation* (2017, p. 374).

Malthaner proposes *four key characteristics* on collective radicalisation based on the discussion of the main elements related to this process – specifically, "at the intersection of social movements and political violence studies" (2017, p.375).

First, collective radicalisation is characterised by "its emphasis on relational dynamics *in explaining violence*, combined with an understanding of violence as emergent." (Malthaner, 2017, p. 375). In the line of the ongoing discussions led by Della Porta, understanding which typology of violence and what manifestation of it I am using is critical for linking this approach to the issue of the massification of social media. Based on her research on political violence and social movements, Della Porta portrays four types of violence based on two variables - the *degree of violence* and *degree of the organisation* of the author of the violent act. These types are:

- "i) unspecialized violence - or low-level, unorganized violence;
- ii) semimilitary violence - still low-level, but more organized;
- iii) autonomous violence - used by loosely organized groups that emphasized a "spontaneous" recourse to high-level violence; and

---

[11] Specific mechanisms of radicalisation at the collective level frame the patterns, interaction, and development of the elements of the interaction-escalation dynamic. I find that Della Porta's "organisational compartmentalisation" and "ideological encapsulation" mechanisms provide a better analytical framework for the study of radicalisation about social media. Organisational compartmentalisation refers to patterns of social isolation, while ideological encapsulation addresses the "cognitive dynamics that trigger a shift towards more exclusive ideological frameworks" (Malthaner, 2017, p.375).

- iv) clandestine violence - that is, the extreme violence of groups that organized underground for the explicit purpose of engaging in the more radical forms of collective action." (1995, p. 4).

While my research sample addresses expressions of violence that run throughout this spectrum, I will deal with types 1 and 2 as the main analytical levels for the scope of this thesis. Therefore, I am understanding ***power*** *as a manifestation of these specific relational dynamics* within the frame of my research sample. As power can manifest in different ways, this will allow the analysis to stay open to the many possible ways these dynamic relations could manifest in. As I will show in Section 5.2, these dynamic relations are i) online and offline clashes with political opposition, ii) psychosocial manipulation, and iii) online censorship.

Second, collective radicalisation implies "the analytical embedding of radical movements and militant groups within a broader relational field of actors involved in political conflict." (Malthaner, 2017, p. 375). This characteristic implies that contextualisation, definition, and opposition of "enemy" groups, ideologies, and institutions trigger the constant (re)definition of the radical groups themselves.

Third, collective radicalisation implies "a process of cognitive transformation, without, however, considering both to be identical (Malthaner, 2017, p. 375). *Cognitive transformation* does not happen in a vacuum. Whatever its degree, radicalisation under this approach depends on a dynamic interaction process between "environmental, cognitive, and relational mechanisms" (Malthaner, 2017, p.376). In other words, *perceptions* and *beliefs* of what reality represents under specific contexts, which are exploited and experienced by these groups, shape their perceived level of radicalisation. Citing Della Porta (1995, pp.179-181), and Cross and Snow (2011, pp.

33

118–119), Malthaner summarises this characteristic as the constant "transformation of notions of collective identity as a process of identification" (2017, p.375-376).

Fourth, collective radicalisation pays "[…] particular attention to social environments and spatial settings, such as micromobilization settings in the form of countercultural milieus[12], radical milieus, or radical networks emerging at the fringes of social movements as well as movement safe spaces […]." (Malthaner, 2017, p.376). The advent of the massification of social media could challenge the traditional understandings of social environments and spatial settings in the context of collective radicalisation.

Polletta addresses the features of this spatial setting regarding collective radicalisation. Polletta labels these specific forms of spatial settings as "safe spaces" or "free spaces" – a combination of physical, linguistic, and "cyber" spaces in which collectives can develop their beliefs and practices (Malthaner, 2017, p.376). Some fundamental characteristics of these "safe spaces" include their small-scale, protection from authority, and opportunities for sociocultural challenge that fuels political mobilisation (Malthaner, 2017, p. 376; Polletta, 1999, pp. 5–7)[13]. This approach considers "small-scale" settings as a characteristic of collective radicalisation, which does not resonate with the ubiquity and outreach power of social media. My analytical framework can interpret these "small-scale" settings as the social media *accounts* and *sites* that far-right organisations manage, promote, and use to configure the individual and collective identity of its members. Also, these small-scale settings strongly resonate with Della

---

[12] Definition of milieu: "the physical or social setting in which something occurs or develops". Source: https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/milieu

[13] "Free spaces or safe spaces denote small-scale settings within a community or movement that are to some extent removed from the control of authorities or opponents, and play a crucial role in allowing for movement activities that generate the cultural challenge that precedes or accompanies political mobilization and facilitate the formation of mobilizing networks." (Malthaner, 2017, p.376)

Porta's portrayal of types (1 and 2) of violence ("low-level") and thus helps me frame the dynamic relations I am interpreting as *power*.

3.3.2.2. Radicalisation at the individual level

Paraphrasing Malthaner, at the core of the tension between the approaches to collective and individual radicalisation, lies the scepticism regarding the individual paths to cognitive and behavioural violence caused by psychosocial pathologies (2017, p. 376). From this perspective, individual radicalisation is understood and studied as intrinsically *relational*, despite potential diverging paths between the specific contexts, environments, actors, and discourses that can shape individual behaviour and cognition (Malthaner, 2017; Della Porta, 1995, pp.183-185). Malthaner and other authors are critical of this "sceptical" approach to individual radicalisation and point towards the importance of linking broader sociocultural contexts and influences over individuals, on the one hand, to emotional and affective drivers for extremism, on the other. In connection with radicalisation at the collective level, emotions are interpreted as "patterns of relationships".

Capelos attempts to address the effects of emotions and affect over political behaviour in relation to political manipulation (2010). She cites several studies to argue that emotions and thoughts are intrinsically interrelated in the field of politics and that individuals form their judgement based on a "push-and-pull" dynamic between these. Emotions, she finds, affect the formation of ideas and attitudes regarding actors and discourses, as "there can be no decision making without emotions and […] affect often operates without conscious awareness" (2010, p. 11). Emotions act as "cues" to interpret and process otherwise overwhelming political realities and information from a uniquely personal perspective (2010, pp.12-13).

Malthaner proposes an alternative perspective to individual radicalisation: The *relational* individual approach. First, Malthaner argues that participation in radical groups is the result of processes "often initiated via personal (friendship or kinship) ties to activists that precede involvement […]." (2017, p.377). Citing Della Porta and McAdam, Malthaner argues that this process of bonding should be understood in the framework of "subcultural milieus and radical frameworks" (2017, p. 377), in which *trust* and *social pressure* (regarding commitment to the radical "cause", ideology, rhetoric) from the ingroup develop in parallel to each other. In the context of my thesis, social media can represent these "subcultural milieus" and radical frameworks.

Second, Malthaner argues that the individual's transition between *different kinds of activism and ideological standpoints* occurs gradually through this process of trust-building, bonding, and socialisation within the radical ingroup (2017, p. 377). The level of ideological synchronicity and involvement into the group's activities gradually escalates from "low-risk" to "high-risk" activism given *enough* ingroup pressure and motivation. Citing McAdam (1986), Malthaner argues that this kind of "low-risk" activism provides the individual with a safe space to gradually get involved, particularly at the cognitive level in the radical group, which boosts socialisation, strengthens the bond to it, and builds-up the psychological resolve for potential escalation. As Malthaner puts it: "[individual] cognitive radicalization, from this perspective, is intimately linked to social processes of dense interaction in radical networks and groups." (2017, p. 377).

Third, *sociocultural environments* frame the processes by which an individual bonds and transitions through different degrees of radical activism. Citing Della Porta, Malthaner argues that personal networks and transitions between types of activism cannot explain individual radicalisation on their own (2017, p. 378). The confrontation arising from this interaction is crucial for shaping the experience of activism, and may result in strengthening their commitment to the group and ideology. As Malthaner puts

it: "[…] episodes of collective action entail experiences that re-shape perceptions and frames of interpretation [of the radicalised individuals]" (2017, p. 378).

A situated examination in the context of my thesis reveals the critical limitations of these characteristics considering the advent of social media and its effects on far-right expansion. These limitations are: i) dependency on personal and emotional bonds and networks; ii) transition between different types of activism and ideological standpoints; and iii) influence of environment and oppositional threat (Malthaner, 2017).

3.4. Social media theory

Social media is a concept with many definitions related to complex processes of sociocultural interconnectedness and the usage of advanced communications technologies (Fuchs, 2014, p.48). According to Fuchs, social theory has started to use the term "social media"[14] in a plethora of ways to attain a more nuanced understanding of the evolution of human relations and processes with and through technology. For the objectives of this thesis, I will understand social media as "[…] online facilitators or enhancers of human networks – webs of people that promote connectedness as a social value" (Van Dijck 2013, p. 11; In Fuchs, 2014, p. 36). Thus, while the technological approaches to social media theory are overall relevant and increasingly significant for addressing social, political and cultural phenomena (Fuchs, 2014, pp.71-73), for this theoretical framework I will focus on the processes of socialisation involved with the performance of social media.

---

[14] According to O'Reilly, the main characteristics of Web 2.0 (of which social media is part of) can be summarized as: "[…] radical decentralisation, radical trust, participation instead of publishing, users as contributors, rich user experience, the long tail, the web as a platform, control of one's own data, remixing data, collective intelligence, attitudes, better software by more users, play, and undetermined user behaviour" (Fuchs, 2014, p.32).

3.4.1. Social media as a socialisation and information channel

While the emergence of social media dates back to the late 1990's (Fuchs, 2014, p. 34), its "massification" and current development at technological levels relate to the advent and increasing levels of interactiveness of social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, blogs, Instagram, Reddit, YouTube, Torrent streamers) and the socialisation practices they provide (Fuchs, 2014, p.32). Following this expansion on socialisation interfaces, the space in which social media operates depends decisively on constant human activity, just as on technological platforms (Fuchs, 2014, p.37).

Social media are not solely technologies but rather compose advanced "techno-social systems." (Fuchs, 2014, p.37). Taking from Gidden's concept of the "duality of structure", the interaction between the technological and social levels of social media is manifested through the dynamic of both *enabling* and *constraining* "[…] human activities that create knowledge that is produced, distributed and consumed with the help of technologies in a dynamic and reflexive process that connects technological structures and human agency." (Fuchs, 2014, p. 37). Consequently, the multiple ways in which information is channelled, processed, interpreted, expressed, and shared through social media are "[…] the medium for and outcome of human agency." (Fuchs, 2014, p. 37). Stemming from this process, control over the "outcome of human agency" (manifested in information flows and the composition of *meaning*) can decisively shape thinking as well as behaviour – which in effect constitutes the *social* dimension of social media (Fuchs, 2014, p.37).[15]

Fuchs adapts four forms of sociality to social media dynamics – i.e., the *social* dimension – at the level of human agency to. These forms of sociality or *socialisation*

---

[15] In addition, the *agency outcome* of social media could potentially open a correlational and epistemological "Pandora box" regarding the theories of the processes of cognitive and behavioural radicalisation (See Section III: Radicalisation).

can help to understand the *meaning* of social media as a social channel, structure, product, and knowledge enabler. These forms stem from four key positions on social theory: The Social as Social Facts (Durkheim), The Social as Social Relations (Weber), the Social as Community (Tönnies); and the Social as a Co-operative network (Marx) (Fuchs, 2014, pp.38-40).

Under Durkheim's theory, all social media (software and actors) can be understood as "[…] social in the sense that they are products of social processes" (Fuchs, 2014, p. 38) which interact by *objectifying knowledge* (i.e.: "human interests, understandings, goals and intentions") stemming from independent social structures (i.e. social media platforms) (Fuchs, 2014, pp.38, 45). Under Weber's theory, socialisation in social media can be understood mainly as the *interactive symbolism* represented by behaviour (i.e. "social action") between humans – in this case, via social media platforms (Fuchs, 2014, p. 39). Under Tönnies' theory, the sense of belonging and mutual dependence (i.e. "feeling of togetherness") determines the *awareness of community* (Fuchs, 2014, p. 40). This interpretation translates to the existence of several online layers or sub-communities where people develop this social sense of belonging and dependence (Fuchs, 2014, p.45). Finally, Fuchs interprets Marx's approach to *cooperation* to obtain commonly shared goods. According to Fuchs, this approach confers a socialised meaning to social media as "[the] web platforms that enable the collaborative production of digital knowledge are social." (Fuchs, 2014, p.45).

These forms of socialised meaning – *objectification of knowledge, interactive symbolism, awareness of community*, and *co-operative production network* – exist, evolve, and manifest simultaneously in increasingly complex techno-social systems, platforms, and processes. As the earliest form of internet socialisation, online *fandom* can help me understand these forms of socialised meaning under the frame of political participation.

3.4.2. Early form of online socialisation: fandom

Henry Jenkins (2008) has tried to establish a link between online fandom and the political realm, which he argues, act as a form of "empowerment" for online consumers (fans) (Jenkins, 2008, in Fuchs, p. 57-58). Fuchs criticises Jenkins' assumptions of an "automatic connection with fandom in popular culture and political protest" (Fuchs, 2014, p. 58) under the frame of social media participatory dynamics. The issue that Fuchs points to has to do with the assumed *politicisation* of fandom and the subsequent equation of it to that of online *political communities*.

While Fuchs (2014, p. 59) rejects that engaging into fandom socialisation dynamics (e.g. listening to specific music bands, playing video games, or watching movies) is "political" by itself, there is an undeniable increase in the complexity of relations between the distinct cultural niches that fandom can encapsulate. These types of engagement relate to political activism (i.e. far-right associated to gaming culture, music bands, specific fashion styles, reading materials), which are integral symbols and social rituals related to the process of radicalisation (Malthaner, 2017, p. 376).

So far, I have explored how the technological and social aspects of social media operate by enabling and constraining knowledge – and thus mediate human agency –, and how socialisation dynamics confer meaning to social media. However, as I have shown with the extrapolation of the "fandom" sociocultural dynamics to that of political activism, some theoretical approaches further focus these dynamics on *political participation*.

3.4.3. Social media and political participation

Jost et al. (2018) address the relation between social media and socialisation focused on political participation. Social media have substantially challenged the classical conceptions of human communication and socialisation, in particular regarding the

cost-benefit calculation on political participation (i.e., what are the social, economic, and political costs of engaging in political activism, such as protests) (2018, p. 87). The way in which information flows has drastically changed due to the advent and massification of social media, in comparison to newspapers and television (Jost et al., 2018, pp. 109–110).

There are two key aspects to this "new political participation" related to the swift changes in the transmission of information. First, users choose a specific social media and get involved in different online communities (Jost et al., 2018, p. 110). The hierarchy or "verticality" of traditional information flows (e.g., mainstream news media reports) gives way to a more "horizontal" way in which users decide to address information. Jost et al. argue that this type of personalised choice to access information has a considerably larger impact on behaviour than the traditional "top-down" news media information flow (Ibid).

Second, individuals in online social networks tend to accept and replicate information that has been "pre-validated" by the online groups they feel a greater emotional attachment to (Del Vicario et al., 2017, p. 6; Jost et al., 2018, p. 110). These two aspects – choice of alternative media and replication by emotional attachment – strongly correlate to the formation of political attitudes and participation in online spaces, both depending on strong emotional attachment and mutual validation, as well as the "freedom" of engagement with information flows: "[…] the informational and motivational effects of social media are mediated by or transmitted through social networks […]" (Jost et al., 2018, p. 110).

Information flows regarding online political participation also relate to the capacity that individuals and collectives have to adapt to the complexity of social media interactions. By addressing Bang's concept of "everyday makers", Iosifidis and Wheeler (2016, pp. 25–26) further help assemble the link between socialisation and political participation

by framing how this link develops in social media spaces. For Bang, "modern" political participation correlates with how people and groups adapt to fast – and increasingly complex – social change (Iosifidis & Wheeler, 2016, p. 26). In the context of the massification of social media, this adaptation implies that people combine the development of two factors: "engagement norms" and "a project identity", in detriment of "duty norms" and "oppositional identity" (Iosifidis & Wheeler, 2016, p. 26). In practical terms, this implies that modern citizens actively engage in politics in a more personalised fashion, with less regard to projected authority: "[Citizens] are increasingly reflexive, drawing on their own experience and engaging on their own terms." (Iosifidis & Wheeler, 2016, p. 26)[16].

While these characteristics can help explain the motivations behind social media dynamics and discourse other authors argue that the empirical testing of these factors only partially holds up (Iosifidis & Wheeler, 2016, p. 26-27). Bang's theory, despite its limitations, shows that modern participation in politics is rapidly changing to challenge most forms of pre-conceived sociopolitical hierarchy and that the engagement between social media and "modern engaged citizens" leads this process (Iosifidis & Wheeler, 2016, p. 28).

3.4.4. How does social media challenge modern socialisation?

Social media represent five distinct challenges tied to this "modern" socialisation dynamic, in particular regarding their "contribution to the democratic order" (Iosifidis

---

[16] Bang identifies five key characteristics of "everyday makers: "(a) their participation is ad hoc, cause-specific and part-time, and thus not driven by organisational membership; (b) everyday makers have minimal interest in party-based and organised politics, and stay away from state-based participation such as consultation exercises, thereby distinguishing themselves from expert citizens, who operate in partnership and collaboration with the state; (c) everyday makers' participation is grounded in their lived experiences and is thus immediate and local, certainly non-ideological, but driven by a project identity; (d) they are not interested in idea-driven social and political change, but rather in issue- or cause-driven projects; (e) finally, they are involved in politics for fun and to express themselves." (Iosifidis & Wheeler, 2016, pp. 26–27)

& Wheeler, 2016, p. 28). First, some authors argue that the "chaotic" nature of social networks prevents meaningful and structured engagement in politics. This non-hierarchical nature (Del Vicario et al., 2017; Jost et al., 2018) attempts against any sustained efforts for establishing a politically-driven organisation. Citing Morozov, Iosifidis & Wheeler indicate that on top of these systemic limitations for socialisation, online communities are rarely focused on political issues, and instead focus on entertainment cultures and sub-cultures (Iosifidis & Wheeler, 2016, pp. 27–28).

Second, while the internet is a space in which information is created and shared with outstanding pace, user-generated content is mostly an unreliable source of information which is often disseminated in an unregulated, biased fashion, and is hostile to external counter-postures and assessments. (Dahlberg, 2007, in Iosifidis & Wheeler, 2016, p. 29; Del Vicario et al., 2017).

Third, through censorship, many authoritarian governments can steer modern socialisation norms. The massification of social media further dents the development of healthy sociopolitical dialectical processes (Iosifidis & Wheeler, 2016, pp. 30–31).

Fourth, citing Fuchs, Iosifidis & Wheeler point to the pervasive power that global corporations have over the free flow of information in social media, among other faculties, by monitoring online activity and tailoring content for individual consumption. Taking advantage over these "tailor-made" social media spaces in which new socialisation occurs, these actors play a substantial role by influencing how information is produced and disseminated: "Fuchs [...] contends that large corporate […] actors dominate and therefore centralise the formation of speech, association, assembly and opinion on social media." (Iosifidis & Wheeler, 2016, pp. 31–32).

Finally, Iosifidis & Wheeler argue that there is a major absence of critical discussion in social media. Improved "access to information" not necessarily results in better-

informed dialogue, which is blatantly evident in social media interactions (Iosifidis & Wheeler, 2016, p. 33).

3.5. Theoretical wrap-up

My RQ has been disaggregated into three main interlocking components, which are informed by this theoretical exploration, and inform the methodological focus of the analytical section. Under this model, the *far-right* encompasses an ideology, a discourse, and an actor, all of which are the main objects of analysis. Second, *social media* are both the technological platforms under which the far-right develops and interacts with other ideas and actors and social phenomena that have drastically affected the ways in which individuals and collectives politically socialise. Third, *radicalisation* is the psychological, political, and social *process* and *action* that guides the analysis of the interaction between the far-right and social media.

Throughout this theory section, I have identified key theoretical approaches and epistemological issues for the interlocked study of the three main components. Whereas I have strictly focused on relevant approaches to theories of the far-right, it is its constantly changing relation to *media* that creates an epistemological bridge to social media theory and the processes of online radicalisation. These processes do not happen in a vacuum, but are rather reinforced by online socialisation, which results in engaging in practices that oscillate between hateful online commenting and violent political participation. Together, these three approaches can shed some light on significant "internal" knowledge gaps regarding the behaviour, beliefs, and discourses of far-right radical groups and individuals in an online space, its portrayal by online media outlets, and the resulting manifestations of power brought by the dynamic relations of violence imbedded in the sample.

Section 4: Methodology

As my research question (RQ) states, the main issues that I will explore focus on two main analytical elements: *social media massification*, and *far-right radicalisation*. After the initial theoretical examination and discussion, I will explore these elements using two sub-research questions.

The influence that social media massification has on far-right radicalisation (and other forms of political extremism) has been largely established in literature, albeit using specific theoretical foci and cases (Berlet & Mason, 2015; Braunthal, 2009; Doerr, 2017; Ellinas, 2010; Fuchs, 2014; Gantt Shafer, 2017; Koehler, 2014; Mudde, 2017b; Padovani, 2016; Parmelee & Bichard, 2012; Persson, 2017; Simões & Campos, 2016; Turner-Graham, 2014; Wodak & Khosravinik, 2013). My objective is to explore the nuances of the relationship between these phenomena via the lenses of online media outlets.

4.1. Research design

In "Qualitative Media Analysis", Altheide & Schneider (2013) propose a series of steps to analyse media-related documents regarding their content, context, and social ramifications. In the context of my thesis, the *content* is inescapable in its relation to different kinds of social media and the different documents that display it. This methodology allows to analyse and understand not only the symbolic content of these documents but also their contexts, consequences and potential sociopolitical ramifications focused on gradually-complex communicative process embedded in new media technologies.

Qualitative media analysis follows 12 steps (summarised in 5 stages) which rest on very broad methodological avenues, depending on the research subject at hand (Altheide & Schneider, 2013, Chapter 3, p.2)[17]. A recommended step that I took was to create "sub-questions" for my research (SRQs), which link the complex main RQ to more empirically-grounded questions. Figure 1 shows my tentative research design, following both Altheide & Schneider's model and my input. As the figure shows, the main criterion behind this design is to allow for conceptual and methodological fluidity, as well as constant feedback processes, which will help me to interpret and understand the content of (and the relation between) the units of analysis.

In media analysis, establishing the criteria for the selection of documents is a crucial part of the methodological process, which begins with familiarising oneself with the subjects at hand, the collection process, the context of document production, and the discourses and rhetoric that flow through them. The sub-questions attempt at grasping the complexity of this methodological and theoretical interaction. My criteria for selecting documents is determined by how extensively and directly they i) address topics of socio-political radicalisation; b) address topics of the expansion of the far-right; and c) present in the format and content the "presence of intersection between culture, politics, technology, and communication" (Altheide & Schneider, 2013, Chapter 3, p.6).

---

[17] Altheide & Schneider summarise the main methodological process in five steps: "Figure 3.1 illustrates the 12 steps as a process involving five stages: (1) documents, (2) protocol development and data collection, (3) data coding and organization, (4) data analysis, and (5) report." (2013, Sect 3, p.2)

*Figure 1: **Research design draft (adapted from Altheide & Schneider, 2013)***
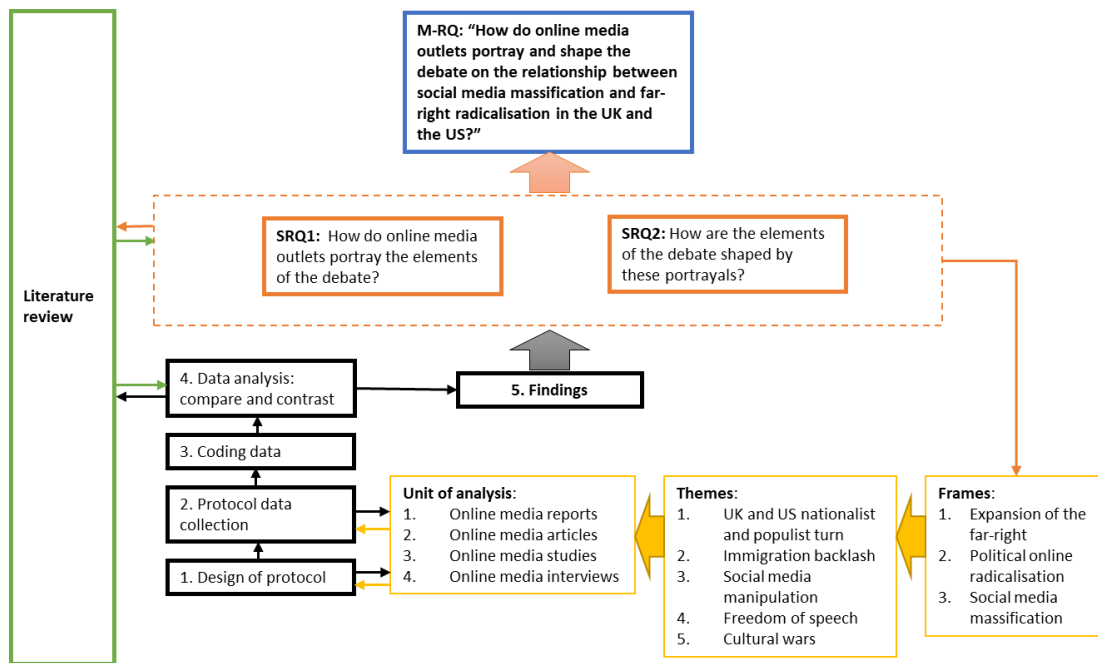
Perhaps the more complicated stage was designing my protocol for analysis. A protocol is the batch of common questions I will ask to all my documents to ask each of the SRQs. This step was the least static, as it required constant feedback with the analysed content upon several "beta" versions of testing.

Finally, it is important to establish the limitations of this research design. Because I am undertaking a heavily qualitative approach to address the research problem, any attempt to clearly "settle down" with a research scheme or model (Figure 1) or establish a clear causal relationship between different phenomena based on it, could potentially be counterproductive to the entire research process. Most of the information I use stems from secondary sources (online news outlets), and as such, they provide inputs to perform a nuanced *exploration* of the relation between social media massification and far-right radicalisation.

4.2. Justification

Media analysis provides a pinpoint approach to address the relations between radicalisation, the growth of the far-right, and social media massification. As Altheide & Schneider state: "Broadly conceived as ["cultural studies"] this approach seeks to examine the complex interaction between individual perspectives and patterns of meaning and symbolic ordering to understand new sources of social definitions and sort out their consequences." (2013, Chapter 1, p.19). The dawn of social media technologies has further enriched this approach. Consequently, the mutable structure of this methodology allows testing the applicability of new issues and communications technologies to address complex social phenomena.

Media analysis also constitutes a theoretical framework that will work alongside my three core theoretical approaches (radicalisation, far-right, and social media theory). This methodology contemplates that different kinds of media constitute highly influential actors, capable of tremendous amounts of social, political, and cultural influence over time and space. Citing a study made by Gitlin (1980), Altheide & Schneider state the following, which strongly resonates with the focus of my thesis and the RQ:

> "Gitlin's (1980) observation about the role of themes and frames in shaping the student protest movement is an apt illustration of their significance for news content. Gitlin notes that *the media influenced the movement by drawing on certain frames that helped the activities and meanings*, although very selectively" (Altheide & Schneider, 2013, Chapter 3, p.18).

Online media outlets possess several crucial qualities that have transformed their capacity to influence entire processes, groups, organisations, and individuals. The

process analysed in this case is radicalisation, the *medium* is social media, and the *key actor* and *discourse*, the far-right.

4.3. Operationalisation of research

As summarily shown in Figure 1, the coding and analysis protocols shown below are informed and framed by the SRQs. These SRQs have been created to "bridge" the main research problem (RQ) with the knowledge gaps and epistemological challenges I stated earlier. These SRQs respond to theoretical problems and empirical research possibilities. The theory behind the main analytical relation (far-right radicalisation + social media massification) will constantly frame and guide the analysis of the main findings.

4.3.1. Sub-research Questions (SRQs)

The SRQs constantly overlap with one another related to the core debate of the thesis. As such, these SRQs and their protocol act as a guideline, but not a methodological straitjacket. These questions address the main debate of the thesis: **The relationship between far-right radicalisation and social media use and massification.**

- SRQ1: How do online media outlets portray the elements of the debate?

SRQ1 addresses the portrayal of key *concepts and ideas* (labelled as "elements") linked to the process of far-right radicalisation in the US and the UK. These portrayals (and the relation between them) compose my main analytical tool.

- SRQ2: How are the elements of the debate shaped by these portrayals?

After unearthing my analytical tool, I will address how these same elements (and thus, the debate) are *shaped* by this tool.

4.3.2. Operationalisation framework

4.3.2.1. Frames of analysis

Via preliminary assessment of reports, opinion pieces, articles, interviews, and studies; I have established three frames of analysis that respond to the RQ and SRQs:

- Expansion and modernisation of the far-right (as an ideology, discourse, and actor)
- Online political radicalisation.
- Social media usage and massification.

4.3.2.2. Themes of analysis

These themes are the result of the preliminary assessment of online media outlets and social media accounts on the frames of analysis. These themes will allow me to focus on addressing the SRQs as well as recent "critical" events in the US and the UK.

- The European and US nationalist and populist turn
- The international immigration backlash
- Social media manipulation
- Freedom of Speech
- Cultural wars and racial displacement

4.3.2.3. Units of analysis

The main units of analysis are 24 documents – newspaper and digital media articles – produced and published by different online media outlets in the US and the UK[18]. I collected these documents have since August 2016. Also, the different formats (reports, opinion pieces, news articles, studies) of these documents provide a richer pool from which to extract linkages, attributions, attitudes, and track the formation of ideas and beliefs on the matter at hand.

These documents were analysed and deconstructed according to 19 "items" – that resulted in the selection and analysis of 988 references –, which comprised the main study protocol (see below), for a total of 456 analytical responses. For this coding and analysis process, I used the qualitative analysis software, NVivo 12.

4.3.2.4. Protocol of analysis

In simple terms, the "protocol for analysis" is the batch of 19 questions (labelled as "items") that I asked to each of my units of analysis, considering the themes, frames, and SRQs that have led to their selection. These *items* are not meant to be monolithic but rather change and adapt to the documents and their context. The aggregate, complementary, and compared analysis of the answers to these items was addressed using relevant literature, and together provided answers to the SRQs and the main RQ.

---

[18] The selection process for these units was "aided" by the search and interest Facebook algorithm. This means that my personal and academic interest in the two main topics of this thesis (far-right radicalisation and social media massification) were operationally translated by Facebook, targeting me with specific online news outlets and posts – in a similar fashion that many of the subjects of analysis were targeted with far-right propaganda. I believe this is a valuable reflection and methodological exercise, which basically allows an outside technological mechanism (in the form of a primitive AI) to learn from my interests, decisions, and online behaviour to feed me with specific information. Methodologically, I believe it represents an advanced form of convenience sampling – a sort of methodological and operational "mirror" to the object and subjects of analysis –, however, aided by a primitive AI which in practice acts as both a filter and influencer. It should be clear, however, that this "aid" **only acted as a first filter of information**, and that I made use of the selection criteria presented in this section to carefully prioritise and select the final 24 documents out of an initial batch of 314.

General Questions

1. What is the sociopolitical context?

2. What is the political orientation of the document's source?

3. What is the document's main theme?

4. Is there an international approach to the document?

5. What type/style of language does the document use?

SRQ1: How do online media outlets portray the elements of the debate?

1. How is social media portrayed?

2. How is the far-right portrayed?

3. How is the process of radicalisation portrayed?

4. How is social media linked to the way individuals engage with groups?

5. What are the key terms which portray the far-right?

6. What are the key terms which portray the process of radicalisation?

7. What are the key terms with which social media are portrayed?

SRQ2: How are the elements of the debate shaped by these portrayals?

1. Is there any sociopolitical objective explicit or implicit in the document?

2. How are power relations portrayed?

3. How are the main involved actors portrayed?

4. Are social media feeds used to inform and narrate the reported event?

5. What are the emotions associated with far-right activism?

6. How are social media linked to violent behaviour and content?

7. Is technological manipulation and interference associated? How?

Section 5: Analysis

"From Cambridge to Charlottesville" implies the development of two different yet highly interrelated processes. First, the process by which the expansion of the "new" far-right has become a trans-Atlantic phenomenon. Second, the title references the process by which social media has been used to influence citizens with political propaganda (i.e., Cambridge Analytica), which has eventually led to violent manifestations (i.e., the Charlottesville riots). These processes are strongly related to the sociopolitical context that produced the analysed articles, and in general, they have set a reactive yet "long-term" cautionary narrative approach[19].

The cases tend to focus and causally circumscribe all far-right violent manifestations in the US and the UK to the 2016 Donald J. Trump campaign and eventual election (Cadwalladr, 2018; Hume, 2018; Manjoo, 2018; Neiwert, 2017). With Trump's election as a main contextual node, these articles are both reactive to major sociopolitical events and reflexive on their medium and long-term effects on offline and online communities.

Different forms of far-right political mobilisation (Goodwin, 2006, p. 353; Mudde, 2017b, p. 6; Wodak, 2013, p. 27) are commonplace contextual settings, however their motivation and nature (offline and online) change and interrelate according to the cited actors, editorial stance, and timing of the event. For instance, whereas three different articles address the behaviour of individuals during the Charlottesville riots – a.k.a. "Unite the Right" rally – they focus, respectively, on the disturbing emotional effects that far-right online socialisation has on familial ties (McCoy, 2018); the accelerated recruitment and socialisation practices within inter-Atlantic far-right groups (Illing,

---

[19] As a quick note for the reader: when I refer to "**articles**" in this section, I invariably refer to **online media articles**, not academic ones.

2017); and the process of online radicalisation of James Fields, the suspect indicted for the murder of counter-protester Heather Heyer (Liautaud, 2017).

Following the coverage and analysis of far-right political mobilisation, online media outlets in my sample also focus on the aftermath and long-term consequences of these demonstrations, specifically regarding "wanting" attitudes and policies from governments and social media companies. For instance, the apparent "passivity" of the Trump administration regarding online and offline demonstrations (as well as the election process) from the far-right were laid bare after the exposure of Steve Bannon – Trump's former Strategist-in-Chief – as the operational liaison between the Trump campaign and Cambridge Analytica (Cadwalladr, 2018).

In a contrasting case, the media outlets accused Twitter and Facebook of inefficiency, hypocrisy and lethargy in dealing with hate speech and far-right accounts. The accusations focused on the association of the aftermath of these violent events to the "legitimacy" that Trump and other populist leaders provided via social media. The media outlets produced these articles in contexts where the "momentum" of these leaders' support for hate speech hit a high note – in effect, emboldening and popularising far-right movements and their discourse[20].

---

[20] This "momentum" relates to the division between radical and "moderate" Alt-Right supporters in the US (Resnick, 2017); the endorsement and recruitment by UKIP of UK social media personalities who blatantly weaponize hate speech (Oppenheim, 2018); to the weaponization of social media by high-profile politicians in the UK to attain Scottish independence after Brexit (McDonald, 2017); and the association between the marked increase in hate crimes in the US – and the spikes in online support to the European far-right – to Donald Trump's tweeting activity against minorities and liberal media (Grewal, 2018; Hume, 2017).

The articles are not composed in a political "clean slate", but rather obey to social, political, and cultural agendas and orientations. I considered the political orientations of these online media outlets when attempting to understand how the massification of

*Figure 2: **Word cloud - Main online outlets***

social media and far-right radicalisation are linked, and the content of this relation portrayed to the public (Altheide & Schneider, 2013, Chapter 1, pp. 19-20). Arguably, the portrayal of all other related elements – themes, power relations, context, links between violence and social media usage, socialisation – are at the same time affected by the political orientation of the online outlet.

*Figure 3: **Word cloud - political orientation of sources***

The vast majority of publishers and content creators that compose my sample are identified as "liberal" and "centrist" – regardless of their left-wing or right-wing tendency. From these, the majority of publications stem from four outlets: The Guardian (UK), VICE News (US), Vox (US), and Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC, US). These sources are highly critical of Donald Trump's administration, as well as of right-wing and far-right politicians in the UK – in most cases, linked to the Brexit process and anti-immigration agendas.

5.1.   SRQ1: How do online media outlets portray the elements of the debate?

*Figure 4: **Word cloud - keywords for social media***

Here I will explore the portrayal of the debate on the relation between *social media massification* and *far-right radicalisation* by addressing three interlocked questions: i) How are social media portrayed?; ii) How is the far-right portrayed; and iii) How is the process of radicalisation portrayed?

5.1.1.   How are social media portrayed?

The central element of the portrayal of social media resides in its "social" element – that is, the capacity to redefine social spaces, interactions, and conveying meaning (Fuchs, 2014, p. 34). Even when the sample describes social media as a "tool" or weapon related to political influence, the *socialisation* element of social media is strongly related to socially-dangerous processes, which are harmful to democratic principles and inefficiently managed. This finding resonates with the concept of "duality of structure", interpreted as the way in which social media both *enables* and *constraints* individual and group activities linked to the creation of knowledge and meaning, thus affecting human and social agency (Fuchs, 2014, p. 37). Figure 4 is a visual representation of the main keywords used to portray social media massification in my research sample.

This generalised criticism is focused on the incapacity or unwillingness of social media companies to systematically tackle hate speech, the formation of violent content, and

the online radicalisation of the far-right. This "incapacity" resonates with Iosifidis & Wheeler's argument regarding the unprecedented pace with which social media-fuelled (and citizen-driven) political participation challenges most forms of political hierarchy – and the effect on the capacity that social media themselves have to tackle online violence (Iosifidis & Wheeler, 2016, p. 28).

For instance, both social media and their parent companies (Facebook, Twitter) were portrayed as "reactive" in the aftermath of the Charlottesville riots – in particular, in reaction to the murder of counter-protestor Heather Heyer (Gibbs, 2017; Manjoo, 2018). In the first example, the criticism focuses on systematic long-term unwillingness and incapacity from social media companies. In the second, Manjoo portrays tech companies as solely reactive against extreme violence:

> "*Social media companies – which have previously come under fire for not doing enough to stop the spread of hate speech – also took action against neo-Nazis on Tuesday. Both Reddit and Facebook confirmed they were actively banning groups and pages linked to far-right extremists.*" (Gibbs, 2017).

> "*After the horror of Charlottesville, internet companies began banning and blocking content posted by right-wing extremist groups. So far their efforts have been hasty and reactive*" (Manjoo, 2018)

Online media outlets often portray this alleged inefficiency as social media acting as *enablers* for the expansion of the far-right discourse and activities, further reinforcing the image of social media as "safe spaces" for domestic and trans-Atlantic socialisation of far-right radicals – in effect "betraying" its original conception as a public good (Bartlett, 2017; Hume, 2017; Neiwert, 2018; Owen, 2018b; Romano, 2017).

The conception of safe "cyber" spaces (Polletta, 1999, pp. 5–7) frame the portrayal of social media as technically efficient in generating, maintaining, and connecting safe spaces for political socialisation. This process is particularly pernicious as it involves attracting vulnerable, distrustful young white males who feel socioculturally displaced from spaces and context they deem as their own (Ansari, 2017; Bartlett, 2017; Neiwert, 2018; Resnick, 2017). One of the most cited ways to involve these actors is by exploiting the architecture of online fandom communities, focusing on a large number of cultural manifestations like memes, video games, and music (Owen, 2018a), but also on politically interactive practices such as "trolling" or "triggering" of left-wing and liberal social media users (Nagle, 2017):

> *"It's not cool to be Klan anymore, but white supremacy is alive and well in the growing "alt-right" movement that embraces a khaki-and-memes aesthetic [...]"* (Owen, 2018a)

> *"The anonymous forum 4chan provided another portal into the nascent* [far-right] *movement. Some of the young geeks who populated the site were interested in transgression for transgression's sake—the fun of trolling what they saw as an increasingly politically correct culture."* (Nagle, 2017).

The focus on cultural and subcultural niches resonates with Henry Jenkins' (2008) argument that the relation between *online fandom* and the *political realm* relate to a process of gradual empowerment of the "fans" – in this case, young far-right activists (in Fuchs, 2014, pp. 57–58).

Extreme manifestations occur as social media provide socialisation spaces that otherwise have disappeared as physical possibilities for far-right groups. This disembodied characteristic of online socialisation, however, allows for greater

international connection and support from fellow isolated far-right individuals (Barrouquere, 2018; Illing, 2017). Fuchs focuses on specific manifestations of *sociality* that resonates with this process of replacement of physical spaces for online ones in an international dimension. Consequently, two interrelated forms of *socialised meaning* can help understand social media: Social media as conveying *awareness of community*, and ii) social media as a *co-operative production network* (Fuchs, 2014, p. 45). Online socialisation also allows to gradually build momentum for embodying the discourse into a public manifestation, such as the continued rallies in favour of freeing far-right UK leader, Tommy Robinson (Hume, 2018), and the Charlottesville riots (Barrouquere, 2018; Neiwert, 2017).

Following the online socialisation feature, social media is also largely portrayed as a springboard for real-life action. Here, Iosifidis & Wheeler argue that forced *adaptation* to fast-changing environments determines modern participation. Under this framework, the advent of social media has changed these adaptation dynamics, and decisively broker the way in which individuals engage in politics: in a highly personalised fashion and with disregard for social norms (Iosifidis & Wheeler, 2016, p. 26). In one of the articles of my sample, Patrik Hermansson, an infiltrated activist, described how the international far-right visualises social media, and how critical it is for bridging online and offline activism in order to win the "cultural war" professed by the far-right:

> "*They want to be able to express their racist ideas in the public square so that they can be openly talked about. This is why they focus so much on the media, because media is how we change culture. That's why they're so active and so savvy on the internet, on social media, on all these alternative sites.* […]. *They want to spread these ideas like a virus, and they're succeeding at it.*" (Illing, 2017)

Social media is stripped of its aura of "technological innocence" and portrayed as a "propagation mechanism" for the manifestation of different forms of political violence. On this issue, Del Vicario argues that the architecture and massification of social media allow for a process of online "massive-scale contagion" as it affects individuals and collectives at an emotional scale (Del Vicario et al., 2017, p. 6). These violent forms include the portrayal of burning of mosques in the US (Neiwert, 2018) and public "displays of power" from the far-right in the US (Barrouquere, 2018; Liautaud, 2017). One of these manifestations is that of the international online support for Tommy Robinson, which Hume portrays in the context of an international campaign for strengthening the far-right:

> "*Robinson's case has become the focal point of an extraordinary international campaign, as far-right and populist movements across the West unite behind the #FreeTommy hashtag. Observers say Robinson's emergence as an international cause celebre for the far-right show the extent of the deepening cross-border ties between populist anti-Islam movements, as they rally behind the figurehead of Robinson to build momentum.*" (Hume, 2018)

The bridging between online socialisation and real-life action is only deemed successful given the capacity to influence mass behaviour while conferring legitimacy to the discourse and actors involved. These two aspects also portray social media in their relation to the far-right, according to my sample. On this issue, Del Vicario et al., and Jost et al. argue that individuals tend to replicate and support information that has been "pre-validated" by fellow members of the group they feel emotional attachment to, thus legitimising the content and strengthening the ties of political participation (Del Vicario et al., 2017, p. 6; Jost et al., 2018, p. 110).

Some authors portray social media as a "weapon" used to politically influence individuals, collectives, and whole political systems (Manjoo, 2018; McDonald, 2017). For instance, this reflects the case of Cambridge Analytica working with former US Chief Strategist, Steve Bannon, to weaponise Facebook profiles to benefit candidate Donald Trump in 2016 (Cadwalladr, 2018), as well as the case of the multi-organisational alliance for enabling the far-right to march on Charlottesville (Illing, 2017).

> "[…] *as* [Christopher] *Wylie* [the Cambridge Analytica whistle-blower] *describes it, he was the gay Canadian vegan who somehow ended up creating "Steve Bannon's psychological warfare mindfuck tool"*." (Cadwalladr, 2018)

Due to their ubiquity and "horizontality", social media helps individuals engage with political leaders, and as such, they are portrayed as providing a large degree of legitimacy to these types of discourses and even actions, effectively emboldening would-be radicals to engage in activism and political violence (Grewal, 2018; Hume, 2017; Liautaud, 2017). Social media has become a vessel through which individuals and political leaders commute based on the idea and language of "legitimacy". One clear example is that of Donald Trump's tweets correlating with spikes in hate crimes against minorities:

> "[The authors of the study] *point out that their findings are consistent with the idea that Trump's presidency has made it more socially acceptable for many people to express prejudicial or hateful views that they already possessed prior to his election*." (Grewal, 2018)

In this sub-section, I presented the main findings concerning the portrayal of social media in its nature, scope, and social role. In the following, I will present that of the

main actor and discourse involved with the usage and exploitation of social media: the far-right.

5.1.2. How is the far-right portrayed?

The far-right is portrayed in the sample unequivocally as an unexpected, dangerous, and unstoppable international phenomenon. Online media outlets portray the far-right according to its behaviour in online spaces, ideological and discursive representations, collective features, individual behaviour, and radical real-life manifestations. These portrayals concentrate and connect some common keywords, which can help visualise how the articles in my sample conceptually address the issue of the far-right (See Figure 5).

*Figure 5: **Word cloud – keywords for the far-right***

The sample portrays the far-right as strongly attached and dependent on social media, to which it owns its capacity for operation, recruitment, and international expansion (Ansari, 2017; Bartlett, 2017; Cadwalladr, 2018; Foster, 2016; McCoy, 2018). Social media has provided the far-right with an increased capacity for strong and swift political disruption, in effect enabling them to surpass many of their "physical" operational limitations (Cadwalladr, 2018). For instance, the far-right uses social media

to improve their capacity for confronting political opponents and ideologies publicly. Media portrays them as social media and internet-savvy in this regard:

> "[…] *the young men who found brotherhood and a sense of purpose in the movement have not disappeared. In the immediate aftermath of Charlottesville, forums like 4chan's politics board were full of discussions about the need to shift tactics and do damage control.*" (Nagle, 2017)

My analysis shows that without the modern ability to manage micro-communities in the US – both for coordination and for building camaraderie – the 2017 "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville would have been impossible to organise (Barrouquere, 2018; Bartlett, 2017; Manjoo, 2018). Goodwin argues that the modernisation of the far-right has required to increase its dependency on individuals for politically capitalising on sociocultural strife (Goodwin, 2006, p. 353). At the same time, the far-right has been able to publicly thrive thanks to the public (and oftentimes international) legitimacy conferred by political leaders who normalise the exposition of hateful behaviour in detriment of established social norms:

> "*Steve Bannon — the former Breitbart chairman and one-time White House chief strategist — underlined the transatlantic support for* [Tommy] *Robinson's cause, when he made a fiery defense of the activist on a London radio show. When another panelist pointed out Robinson had broken the law, Bannon replied: "A lot of people would say that law is very restrictive.*" (Hume, 2018).

Hateful content and behaviour are manifestations of ideology and discourse that, surprisingly, tend to be portrayed in contrasting fashion in the articles: for some, the discourse and ideology of the far-right are entirely predictable, while for others, new

contexts and socialisation dynamics challenge the traditional concepts of it. Besides traditional portrayals – such as anti-Semitism, racism, xenophobia, nationalism, and nativism (Kinnvall & Nesbitt-Larking, 2011, p. 61; Mudde, 2017b, p. 4) – the far-right makes constant use of two interlocked narratives in the context of their constant struggles: victimisation and freedom of speech (Bartlett, 2017; Hume, 2017; Illing, 2017; McCoy, 2018; Oppenheim, 2018). Narratively, the role of victims originates from the alleged social and political oppression the far-right faces, and at the same time acts as their justification for their pathological logic of *eliminationism* of social elements that feed-off the dominant status quo, and that threaten the Western, Christian and White civilisation:

> *"Eliminationist rhetoric is common to Alt-America, as the public frequently saw in the Trump campaign [...] The campaign's opening salvo, against Mexican immigrants, was openly eliminationist in calling for their mass deportation, and soon included similar demands for Muslims and the LGBT community. Trump's constant campaign message was unmistakable as to just how he intended to "make America great again": get rid of these people, deport them, prevent them from ever entering the country in the first place, and lock up or silence the rest of them."* (Neiwert, 2017)

The far-right reinterprets all forms of perceived repression as an assault on their freedom of speech. Further, media portray this "fundamentalist" approach to freedom of speech (Bartlett, 2017) as a narrative element used by the far-right to capture the right to proclaim itself as heroes or defenders of freedom of speech against oppressive elites (Illing, 2017; Jones, 2018; Oppenheim, 2018). For instance, Jones depicts Tommy Robinson's followers, demonstrators and supporters (both offline and online) as false martyrs and self-proclaimed victims in the context of the arrest of the far-right leader. These manifestations of self-repression focused on UK authorities allegedly

attacking the "freedom of speech" principle by incarcerating Robinson and resisting the protestors:

> "*They are the victimisers who clothe themselves in the garb of victimhood. "Free speech" is their mantra, but it is nothing more than a political ploy, a ruse, a term the far right wilfully abuse to spread hatred*" (Jones, 2018)

On this finding, Kinnvall & Nesbitt-Larking draw a parallel to the self-proclamation that the far-right has made as "defenders of the Christian West" against Islamic culture and Muslims (2011, p. 62). For Wodak, victimisation is a well-thought stage in a grand sociopolitical dynamic developed by the far-right to set the debate agenda in their host countries (2013, pp. 32–33).

The far-right reinforce both struggles through the consumption of conspiracy theories, and in many cases, these begin to integrate part of their political discourse as they emphasise the sociocultural displacement of "the white race" in favour of social, ethnic, and racial minorities. Social media has changed the way in which conspiracy theories are generated, disseminated and consumed (Illing, 2017). For instance, some portrayals of profiles of Alt-Right supporters in the US showed that the increased consumption of conspiracy theories – framed in internet culture as "taking the red pill", a reference to the 1999 movie, *The Matrix* – directly relates to beliefs of social control by political elites and a "veiling" of reality:

> "[…] *what is new, and unusual, about today's far right is the large number of young people, most of them men, who have been drawn into its orbit—or, as they would put it, "red pilled." The metaphor comes from The Matrix, the dystopian science-fiction movie in which the protagonist, Neo, is offered a red*

pill that allows him to see through society's illusions and view the world in its
true, ugly reality." (Nagle, 2017)

Regardless of the way in which they manifest their radicalism, online media outlets portray contemporary far-right groups as media and internet-savvy in their ability to connect and strengthen like-minded communities (Ansari, 2017; Bartlett, 2017; Cadwalladr, 2018; Hume, 2017; Illing, 2017; McCoy, 2018; Neiwert, 2018). Media outlets portray far-right groups as having developed a strong "siege mentality" against opposing outgroups, normally using the fluid architecture and language of social media to cynically dismiss any criticism against them or their content (Bartlett, 2017; Beutel, 2018; Liautaud, 2017; Nagle, 2017). For Blee, the connection of like-minded individuals relies on the ability that the far-right has for using cultural expressions and idiosyncrasies to portray itself as more attractive and resilient (Blee, 2007, p. 124).

Their offline portrayal follows this "siege mentality" principle. However, far-right groups engage into real-life action also to become visible to the public, and moreover, to normalise their presence, discourse, and behaviour (Manjoo, 2018) – all of which is greatly aided by the coverage that news media outlets provide (McCoy, 2018):

> "'*Their goal is to change the culture, and that means making their ideas mainstream," […] 'They want it to be okay to hold their opinions in public. They want to be able to express their racist ideas in the public square so that they can be openly talked about*." (Illing, 2017)

The multidimensional portrayals of young, radicalised far-right individuals are a statement of the complexity of the contexts these grow and develop in, as well as the different influences that eventually lead them to the enactment of violent acts (Resnick, 2017). Just as far-right groups, these easily manipulable youth (Beutel, 2018) have a

need and desire to be heard and publicly exposed (Manjoo, 2018; McCoy, 2018), and ultimately to be recognised as *heroes* in defence of freedom of speech and their oppressed group, just as the case of James Fields in Charlottesville:

> "*'James Fields clearly was part of a wider group, and he saw himself fighting for that group and movement,"* […] *"This 'hero' identity fighting for the unjustly suppressed – in his mind the white supremacist movement – is a very common element and is used by these extremist groups to incite most brutal acts of violence in the name of 'fighting for a just cause.'* " (Liautaud, 2017)

After exploring the multidimensional portrayal of far-right individuals, groups, and discourses, I will address how online media outlets portray the process by which they become radicalised in the context of social media massification.

5.1.3. How is the process of radicalisation portrayed?

My analysis reveals that online media outlet portray a systematically increasing level of sociopolitical radicalisation in the US and the UK stemming from the far-right, which is highly correlated to the massification of social media, and the legitimacy that right-wing political leaders in these countries confer (Ansari, 2017; Bartlett, 2017; Cadwalladr, 2018; Chrisafis, 2016; Grewal, 2018; Hume, 2017; Illing, 2017; Neiwert, 2017, 2018). Figure 6 shows the frequency of words and terms used in my sample and associated with processes of radicalisation in the four main analysed dimensions: individual radicalisation, collective radicalisation, cognitive radicalisation, and behavioural radicalisation.

*Figure 6: **Word cloud – keywords for the process of radicalisation***

The process of individual radicalisation is portrayed as difficult to grasp due to the myriad of external factors that are correlated with it (Hume, 2017). Social media, however, is portrayed as the main factor related to its accelerated process (Ansari, 2017; Hume, 2017; Manjoo, 2018; McCoy, 2018) as they disrupt the development stages in which radicalisation occurs. This disruption proposes an interesting theoretical challenge for the consensus that regards radicalisation as a process (Doosje et al., 2016; Jasko et al., 2017; Kruglanski et al., 2014; Malthaner, 2017). On this issue, Doosje et al. proposed a process of radicalisation that follows specific phases: i) sensitivity to an issue or cause related to identity and significance – ii) group membership – iii) violent action (2016). My analysis shows that, because of the impact of social media, phases 1 and 3 develop in constant and interrelated motion, not necessarily obeying an established sequence between cognition and action. For example, Neiwert portrays the 2017 mosque arsonist, Marq Vincent Perez, as a contradictory figure. Despite his publicly bigoted behaviour against Muslims, he only focused his *full range* of prejudiced and violent expressions on safe social media spaces. This portrayal points to a merger and disruption of the way in which Doosje et al. argue that cognition precedes behaviour through socialisation:

> *"[…] it was on Facebook that he devoted most of his anti-Muslim energy, sharing stories and posts from a variety of anti-Muslim hate groups and other organizations, as well as from other activists.*" (Neiwert, 2018)

Online media strongly tie the disruption of radical socialisation processes to the way in which far-right social media capitalise on emotions of sociopolitical isolationism and disenchantment on mainstream politics and media. For instance, the British far-right provide alternative channels which are tailor-made to suit the interests of highly-impressionable individuals:

> "[UKIP] *has opened its doors to three controversial YouTubers - Mark Meechan, Carl Benjamin, and Paul Joseph Watson - all of whom have substantial followings on the video streaming website. The latter is editor of far-right conspiracy website InfoWars which is known for peddling false and outlandish conspiracy theories.* […] *A spokesman for Ukip* […] *admitted Mr Watson, who has over 1.2 million subscribers on his YouTube channel, has "some unpleasant followers". But he insisted the three new members' ability to stoke controversy would be a positive force in the Eurosceptic party.* (Oppenheim, 2018)

The deployment of emotional manipulation strategies by the far-right resonates strongly with Capelos' assertion that emotions affect the individual's formation of ideas, beliefs, and attitudes by helping them interpret an otherwise incredibly complex reality – in this case, a cultural war (Capelos, 2010, pp. 11–13). My analysis reveals that radicalisation is portrayed as the consequence of creating a gross "critical mass" of tailored misinformation which successfully manipulates individuals and reinforces the development of extreme attitudes (Cadwalladr, 2018; McDonald, 2017) which in many cases coalesce in the form of dehumanisation, as one interview portrays:

"'*If you look at the mean dehumanization scores,* [the far-right are] *about at the level to the degree people in the US dehumanize ISIS,"* Forscher says. *"The reason why I find that so astonishing is that we're engaged in violent conflict with ISIS.*'" (Resnick, 2017)

The process of radicalisation is not only portrayed by the experiences and cases of individuals but most importantly by those of groups and collectives. All the articles of my sample portray far-right radicalisation as a communal process: Despite the social and technical advantages provided by social media, building the motivation for engaging in politically radical actions greatly depends on how the individual engages with the community, both online and offline (Ansari, 2017; Hume, 2017; Illing, 2017; Manjoo, 2018; McCoy, 2018). Manjoo illustrates that despite the changes in political socialisation in radical spaces, the relationship to the group is what narratively links the online activities to offline extremism:

"*Where the pre-internet Ku Klux Klan grew primarily from personal connections and word of mouth, today's white supremacist groups have figured out a way to expertly use the internet to recruit and coordinate among a huge pool of potential racists. That became clear two weeks ago with the riots in Charlottesville, Va., which became a kind of watershed event for internet-addled racists.*" (Manjoo, 2018)

Over time, this engagement grows stronger as a myriad of quotidian facets of individuals and groups get jointly re-purposed into causes that fit the agenda of the far-right – in effect, strengthening the degree in which groups radicalise by attaching discursive meaning to emotional activities (Illing, 2017). This finding resonates with the understanding of group emotions as "patterns of relationships": groups interpret how sociocultural environments interact with collective traumas linked to self-

identification, thus engage into collective action by developing a sense of purpose and belonging (Demertzis, 2014; Kinnvall, 2013). Online media portrays gradual socialisation as critical for the efficient radicalisation of the group as a *united* front. The resultant formation of a sense of communal identity and public exposure – as a manifestation of group pride – is deemed as critical for the success of the far-right's agenda (Manjoo, 2018).

The portrayal of the unifying role that leaders have through social media complements that of group identity-building, as these individuals act as *examples* of camaraderie for the far-right community. Malthaner argues that groups define themselves by the process of relational conceptualisation – that is, of both "enemy" groups (e.g., immigrants) and perceived allies (2017, p. 375). For instance, the case of the international support movement in favour of Tommy Robinson – the English far-right leader and agitator indicted for breaking the law on court reporting on a child-molestation case – triggered wide social media support from right-wing and far-right leaders from the US (such as Steve Bannon, as seen in the Tweet excerpt 1). This media outlet identifies this sense of camaraderie, oppositional

*Tweet excerpt 1: **Steve Bannon's support of UK far-right leader, Tommy Robinson***
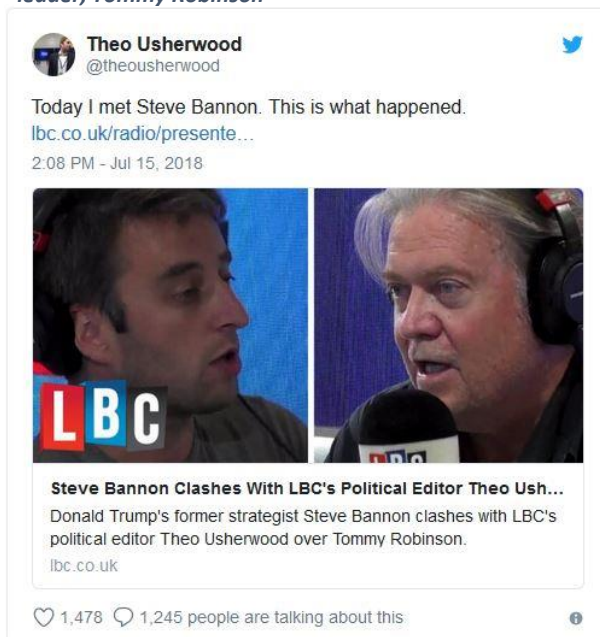
identification ("*Fuck you* […] *you fucking liberal elite*") and belonging as one of the essential components for the success of the modern far-right:

> "*Robinson's appeal against his sentence Wednesday is ongoing, but regardless of the outcome, observers say his case has served an important role for international far-right movements in rallying support for their causes, regardless of their understanding of the specifics of the case. They're determined to push back.*" (Hume, 2018)

The "radical portrayal" of manifestations of support and emotional attachment to group dynamics, such as Bannon's online defence of Tommy Robinson, resides in the argument that these processes of familiarisation and integration direct the group to exert great pressure on the individuals to accept – normally at the expense of evidence or challenging facts – different forms of violence as inevitable for the survival of their causes and identity (Illing, 2017).

Following this argument on cognition by social pressure, the portrayal that my sample makes of the *cognitive end-point of radicalisation* strongly resonates with how emotions and information coalesce into politically-charged environments (Malthaner, 2017, pp. 371–372; Neumann, 2013, pp. 874–876). For instance, the process by which quotidian manifestations integrate into the radicalisation process lays out particular adaptations of sociocultural expressions:

> "*White supremacist groups have also been proficient at spreading their messages using the memes, language and style that pervade internet subcultures. Beyond setting up sites of their own, they have more recently managed to spread their ideology to online groups that were once largely apolitical, like gaming and sci-fi groups.*" (Manjoo, 2018)

"Posters in these online forums became adept at using offbeat humor and new media to wrong-foot the establishment. Anyone caught fretting about the right's online youth movement was met with the contention that the entire thing was a joke—and anyone taking it at face value was a clueless outsider." (Nagle, 2017)

Further, my analysis shows radicalisation as gradually dependent on challenging established channels of information and facts. The collective sense of betrayal and deception portrayed in my sample as perpetrated by political elites resonates with a collective "quest for significance": "The quest for significance is the fundamental desire to matter, to be someone, to have respect [as well as] the need for esteem, achievement, meaning, competence, control" (Kruglanski et al., 2014, p. 73). Neiwert portrays this challenge as a full reinterpretation of reality (*Alt-America*), which is fundamental for the success of radical agendas in the US:

"In this other America, suppositions take the place of facts, and conspiracy theories, often pedalled by media outlets from Infowars to Fox News, become concrete realities. Its citizens live alongside us in our universe, but their perception of that universe places them in a different world altogether, one scarcely recognizable to those outside it." (Neiwert, 2017)

By making use of these emotional and cultural bonds, online media portray cognitive radicalisation as the most successful "product" of campaigns for massive techno-social manipulation, such as the case of Cambridge Analytica (Cadwalladr, 2018; Manjoo, 2018). On this issue, Malthaner argues that cognitive radicalisation implies group bonding, in which trust *and* social pressure develop in parallel to specific platforms – in this case, social media (2017). Social pressure from the ingroup stems from peer pressure *and* the rhetoric created by external actors, such as Cambridge Analytica. Media portrays this event as evidence that social media represents a space in which

73

cognitive radicalisation can flourish with no major opposition, as users truly feel entitled (*and* socially pressured) to show their *true selves* given the protection, directness, and sense of legitimacy that these spaces confer:

> "*Among other pathologies, many Alt-Americans freely fantasize, in print and on YouTube, about their desire to execute liberals, terrorists, "race mixers," and other traitors. I call this desire eliminationism – a politics, and its accompanying rhetoric, whose goal is to excise whole segments of the population in the name of making it "healthy""* (Neiwert, 2017)

The "step-up" to behavioural radicalisation – violent actions such as riots, bombings, harassment, and arson – is also described considering the combination between enabling spaces for radical political manifestation (social media), and the legitimacy conferred by right-wing political leaders in politically-charged contexts. As it is the case with cognitive radicalisation, behavioural radicalisation implies integrating and normalising quotidian activities in the framework of political action. Barrouquere portrays how one of the "Unite the Right" rally coordinators, the far-right podcaster Michael Peinovich, *normalised* the description of his activities and discourse during the rally, in his defence in court regarding the aftermath of the Charlottesville riots:

> "*Peinovich emphasized a tweet he sent out before the rally warning about possible violence. Peinovich also said he brought body guards with him before speaking that weekend. 'I approached the park with a couple of friends to watch my back,' Peinovich said. 'We love white people and there's nothing wrong with that.'*" (Barrouquere, 2018)

For Neumann, this "quotidian connection" between cognition and behaviour precisely illustrates that political radicalisation does not necessarily depend on developing

sophisticated ideological mindsets, but rather is strongly tied to quotidian interpretations of sociocultural contexts and movements (Neumann, 2013, p. 879).

My analysis shows that the political action that arises from these interpretations is growing rapidly yet it is highly dependent on social media (Manjoo, 2018), to the point that some of these publications focus on scientific studies that correlate behavioural radicalisation with social media activity:

> "*Our results suggest that social media can act as a propagation mechanism between online hate speech and real-life incidents*" (Neiwert, 2018)

> "[Karsten Muller and Carlo Schwarz's] *study used Twitter and FBI hate crimes data to come to a stark conclusion: hate crimes against Muslims and Latinos occurred shortly after Trump made disparaging tweets about Muslims and Latinos. Moreover these anti-Muslim and anti-Latino hate crimes were physically concentrated in parts of the country where there is high Twitter usage.*" (Beutel, 2018)

One of the key portrayed differences with cognitive radicalisation resides in the extent by which cognitive radicals dehumanise other groups and individuals (Barrouquere, 2018). Online media portray this augmented dehumanisation as the key cognitive process that springboards radicals to perpetrate every possible form of physical violence against the outgroups (Resnick, 2017). Neumann, for example, argues that extremist manifestations (e.g., dehumanisation of the *other*) are necessarily politically bound to both a critical sociocultural environment and a personal system of belief, which eventually can lead to behavioural radicalisation (2013).

5.2.   SRQ2: How are the elements of the debate shaped by these portrayals?

After unearthing my analytical tool – the *portrayals* of the elements of the debate – I will address how these same elements (and thus, the debate) are *shaped* by this tool. As I expressed in my theoretical framework, the process of shaping implies the presence of a *power relation* embedded in the narratives of my samples.

I framed the power manifestations in light of the explicit and implicit *political objectives* of the media articles in my sample. These documents combine denouncing different manifestations of violence caused by the far-right and tech companies, while at the same time proposing the need to clarify public portrayals of far-right radicals. This criticism expands to denounce the racism and prejudice stemming from political parties (GOP, UKIP, Britain First) and leaders and their administrations (Donald Trump, Nigel Farage). By exposing the far-right, these outlets attempt at reversing the figure by which mainstream media has aided the former (Wodak, 2013, p. 32). My sample argues that mainstream media has historically misportrayed and misrepresented the far-right, in favour of the latter. These channels have failed to present these radicals as systematic threats to modern societies and democratic systems. In summary, in line with their political orientations, the objectives of these sources are to **expose, denounce**, and further maintain relentless media **pressure** on governments and competing media outlets.

5.2.1.   Fight the power: The struggle of the far-right against the liberal establishment

The main power relation embedded in this debate is that of resistance against perceived hegemonic sociocultural structures – specifically, multiculturalism, liberalism, and

globalism. The *far-right* is portrayed invariably as highly subversive against established systems and democratic values, and *social media* as the enabling vessel for this process of sociopolitical disruption. Far-right organisations, individuals, and political leaders actively link their roles as social victims to the advancement of cultural displacement policies promoted as a form of "war" by liberal elites and racial minorities (Hume, 2017; Illing, 2017; Jones, 2018; Liautaud, 2017; McCoy, 2018; Resnick, 2017).

According to Della Porta's theory, the violent manifestations related to this resistance – discursively framed as "cultural war" – are considered, regardless of their online or offline nature, as a *semi-military* type of violence, as they demand a high level of coordination, yet their degree of violence is arguably limited to occasional riots and online hate speech (1995, p. 4). I interpret the power relation as the violent dynamic between two processes affected by social media: cultural displacement and anti-establishment demonstrations (Turner-Graham, 2014, pp. 417–418). My analysis frames this collective power struggle as the result of a troublesome context portrayed and distorted by media and social media feeds, which managed to gain a universal presence in the imaginaries of groups and individuals. The immigration crises, the challenges to supra-national institutions (such as the EU and the UN), and the pushback against corrupt corporate and political interest, embodied by liberal political elites in the US and the UK, compose this context. Chrisafis illustrates this "collective struggle" with the massive support that the European far-right provided the British far-right after the Brexit vote:

> "*A jubilant Le Pen delivered a Brexit victory speech from her party's headquarters outside Paris, styling the UK referendum result as just the start of an unstoppable new wave of support for parties and movements like the Front*

National. "The UK has begun a movement that can't be stopped," she said."
(Chrisafis, 2016).

One of the key manifestations of this power struggle is that of the defence of freedom of speech. "Free speech" is one of the key rhetorical elements by which far-right supporters frame their victimhood – and thus, their struggle against the established power structures (Hume, 2017; Jones, 2018, 2018). As framed by my sample, I interpret this specific violent manifestation as a power struggle surrounding the interpretation of the concept of "free speech", and the dynamic between the processes of victimisation and censorship (Ellinas, 2010, p. 11). One key example is that of the court hearing against the high-profile far-right leaders accused of conspiring to incite violence via hate speech before and during the violent events at the 2017 "Unite the right" rally in Charlottesville. The interpretation of the US First Amendment used by the defence of the accused – Jason Kessler, Christopher Cantwell, Michael Peinovich, and Richard Spencer – is critical to understand the self-proclamation as defenders of this principle. Media outlets portray the ability to defend themselves *with* the "Freedom of Speech" principle as directly proportional to the "defence" they *provide* to it, and further to their right to enact hateful speech:

> *"Attorneys for the alt-right figures all made similar arguments: The lawsuit filed against them fails to allege a conspiracy of any kind and all the actions during the rally and weekend are protected speech.*
>
> *James Kolenich […] said legal precedents protect his clients' comments, no matter how offensive some may find them."* (Barrouquere, 2018)

Freedom of speech is also strategically used to justify the far-right discourse focused on "bringing back" white sociocultural hegemony in the UK and the US (Jones, 2018).

The resistance and rejection of the multicultural, liberal, and globalist establishment are directly re-interpreted as the re-foundation of an alternative power structure: that of a white, Christian ethnostate where traditional nativist values are the cardinal norm (Ansari, 2017; Foster, 2016; Jones, 2018; McCoy, 2018).

Tweet excerpt 2: **Gerard Batten (left) declaring support of Tommy Robinson (right)**

Gerard Batten MEP
@GerardBattenMEP

Today I will be speaking at the Free Tommy Robinson Rally at Whitehall at 3pm.

10:26 AM - Jun 9, 2018

♡ 2,472 ○ 1,172 people are talking about this

Regarding this manifestation of "free speech", I interpret the power relation as the violent dynamic between two critical sociopolitical processes: i) multicultural integration, and ii) nativist essentialism (Kinnvall & Nesbitt-Larking, 2011, p. 62). The interaction between these two power struggles (freedom of speech and white supremacy) is exemplified in the case of the official support from Gerard Batten, the UKIP leader and Member of the European Parliament, to Tommy Robinson via social media (Oppenheim, 2018). The political implication of this portrayal is that these far-right agendas trump even official positions from governments that are supposed to uphold liberal European values. Further, online media portray political leaders such as Batten as subverting the system with an

entertaining tale of modern heroism: the high-profile politician, and the street-wise agitator, fighting together in the name of freedom of speech (See tweet excerpt 2).

The online media outlets portray far-right groups and individuals – somewhat contradictorily – as ultimately desiring to become part of mainstream politics, for their discourse to become normalised, and for the forms and institutions they express themselves through to become legitimate in the eyes of *their* society (Hume, 2017, 2018; Illing, 2017; Manjoo, 2018; McDonald, 2017). As they aim at being reckoned universally as a force of "public good", they attempt at replicating structures recognised as legitimate carriers of diverse forms of power – from policing to knowledge creation, and government. I focus this specific power struggle on the effort to subvert existing institutions that possess legitimate control over the use and definitions of violence. The power relation follows a dynamic struggle for the allocation and exercise over legitimate violence.

For instance, one "umbrella" organisation that tries to associate, organise and mainstream the efforts of different (and often conflicting) far-right organisations in Europe and the US (*London Forum*) is self-described as a think-tank (Illing, 2017). The explicit association, in this case, is with a power structure that provides legitimacy by gathering and creating scientific knowledge and exerting political pressure.

5.2.2. The falsity of martyrdom: far-right and the reshaping of social relations

While my sample portrays several dimensions in which the debate disputes power relations, the authors and outlets that produce them unmistakably point the finger to far-right leaders and organisations as the main culprits of a process of drastically (re) shaping social relations in the US and the UK. The far-right have affected social relations in these countries by normalising dehumanising and hateful language and

behaviour, especially against racial, religious and ethnic minorities (Ansari, 2017; McCoy, 2018; Nagle, 2017).

According to Della Porta's approach, I categorise the psychosocially violent manifestations embedded in this process of relational reshaping as a merger between the *unspecialised* and *semi-military* types of violence. Online media portrays these manifestations as highly dependent on social media, as they combine i) chaotic, low-level degrees of violence stemming from forums and social media feeds, with ii) more organised dissemination of radical discourses and community creation policies (1995, p. 4). Further, I interpret this power relation as the violent dynamic between two overlapping processes: interpersonal emotional manipulation, and accelerated behavioural radicalisation (Ibid, p.181).

This process of relational manipulation is, however, not monolithic: the sample portrays an inner power struggle between "cognitive" and "behavioural" far-right radicals. This struggle resides on their differences in opinion regarding i) how people should get radicalised; ii) how to disseminate the discourse; iii) how to overturn the liberal political establishment (Nagle, 2017). As framed by my sample, this dynamic relationship manifests as a power struggle focused specifically on the end-points of cognitive violence, and as such, it entails a violent dynamic between two approaches to the process of radicalisation (Malthaner, 2017). The difference lays on the end-points of the radicalisation process – either turning to physical violence or restricting violence to online echo-chambers – of this group of young white males, which media portray as "The young men of the alt-right [who] could define American politics for a generation." (Nagle, 2017):

> "*Charlottesville splintered the alt-right, though along fault lines that had appeared well before the violence there. The rally had been dubbed Unite the*

Right, but it proved to be the culmination of a vicious period of internecine squabbling. In June, the alt-right and the alt-lite had held rival free-speech rallies in Washington, D.C., with Spencer whipping up the hard-liners at the Lincoln Memorial while Cernovich hosted a tamer group outside the White House. Spencer accused the alt-lite of being "cucks." Cernovich said the alt-right's "big tent" had folded after "Hail-gate." After Charlottesville, he disparagingly called its members "Nazi boys." (Nagle, 2017)

Regardless of their strategies, online media equals the power that these organisations exert over young vulnerable white men to that of a "cult", which threatens to distort and supplant familial and amical ties by relentlessly bending their conceptions of truth, reality, and emotional connections. The case of Kam Musser, a young far-right activist, and her mother Kirsten precisely portray this issue of cognitive and behavioural manipulation, and through simple language acts as a representation of a common familial drama in the US:

"Who was he becoming? What was this group doing to him? Was it a cult?

She couldn't put it off any longer. She had to know. She reached for her phone. She plugged in the name that for so long she had tried to ignore.

"Traditionalist Worker Party."

*Said Wikipedia: ". . . neo-Nazi, white nationalist group . . ."*

Said the Southern Poverty Law Center: ". . . advocates for racially pure nations and communities and blames Jews for many of the world's problems."

Said a party tenet: "Citizenship in the ethno-state must therefore be limited to White persons, and White persons alone."

She shook her head, sighed, looked at her son, put down the phone.

"It makes my stomach hurt," she said" (McCoy, 2018)

Tweet excerpt 3: **Dutch far-right leader, Geert Wilders, celebrating the Brexit vote and congratulating UKIP leader, Nigel Farage**
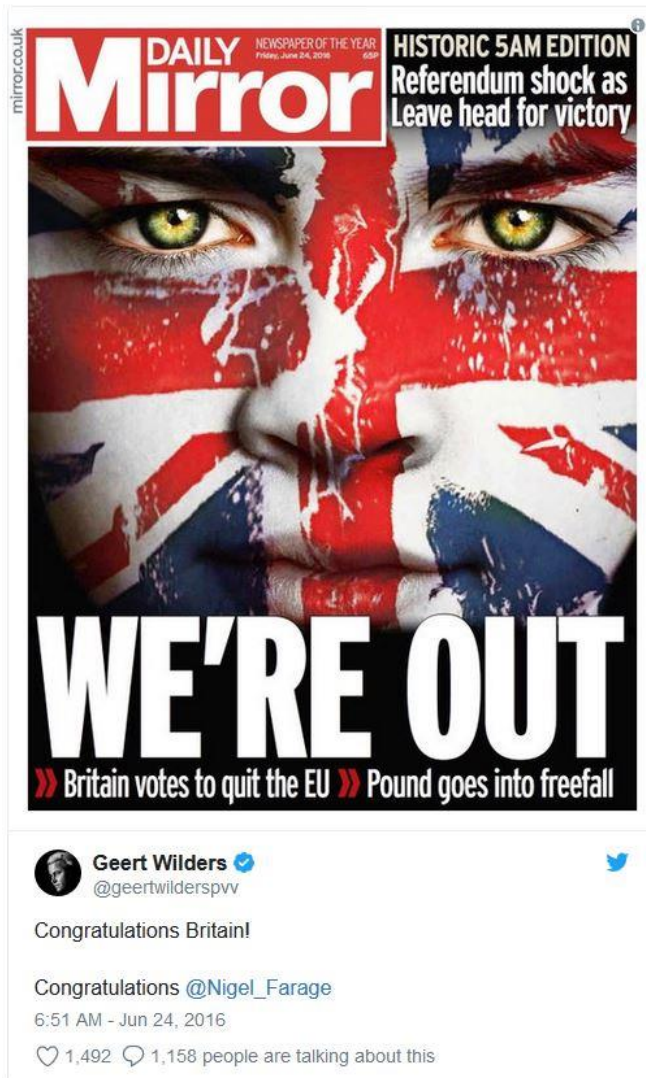
Online media also portrays the far-right as particularly effective at altering sociopolitical processes internationally. My analysis portrays the far-right as changing social relations by gradually distorting what sociocultural attitudes and behaviours are deemed "acceptable" and "normal" in distant societies. In this case, the power relation can be interpreted as the violent dynamic between two heavily opposed critical ideological principles: cosmopolitanism and nationalism (Turner-Graham, 2014, pp. 417–418).

Paradigmatic cases show how politicians and personalities used Twitter and other social media to gradually pressure the UK government to release far-right "thug" Tommy Robinson (Hume, 2018), to congratulate Boris Johnson, Nigel Farage and UKIP for the Brexit victory (Chrisafis, 2016, see Tweet excerpt 3), and to share Islamophobic material posted by Britain First (Hume, 2017):

"*Jayda Fransen's Britain First is a marginal and toxic presence in the U.K., viewed as a hate-preaching street movement that is far beyond the bounds of political respectability. Trump's implicit endorsement of their agenda when he retweeted a handful of anti-Muslim videos has been universally condemned in Britain*" (Hume, 2017).

These "normalised" radical attitudes tend to centre on racial, ethnic and religious minorities in these countries. For instance, online media portrayed the Trump retweet of Britain First's Islamophobic post as a piece of support and "legitimation" of actions targeting Muslim communities (Beutel, 2018; Hume, 2017), in particular by retweeting a group well known for its open vigilante and militia practices (Foster, 2016).

5.2.3. Is big brother watching? The attempts and failures to control the far-right online

The illegal policing of minorities in the UK and the US as a consequence of political pressure from foreign political actors are just an example of the wide range of ways in which the far-right has extended its operations. In order to halt these processes, governments and tech companies have set up policies and procedures that attempt at tackling the effects of hate speech and techno-political manipulation – however, far-right leaders and organisations have tried to resist and even hit back against these policies. This policy tension is also frequently portrayed in my sample regarding power struggles between inefficient social media control systems and relentless far-right organisations.

"When it comes to fighting white supremacists [...] much of the tech industry has long been on the sidelines. This laxity has helped create a monster" (Manjoo, 2018)

"Twitter's "purge" is continuing, and hasn't caught every prominent neo-Nazi and white supremacist who uses the site in its net — nor is it guaranteed to do so. The account of Jason Kessler, the white nationalist who organized the Charlottesville rally and whose brief verification by Twitter in November ignited a firestorm of outrage, is currently still active. So is that of Richard Spencer, the neo-Nazi who gained overnight prominence due to the far-right rallies he organized following Trump's election [...]" (Romano, 2017)

The violent manifestations related to this resistance – framed under the clashing narratives of "freedom of speech" and "hate speech" – are categorised as a *semi-military* type of violence, as they demand a higher level of coordination between far-right organisations, yet their degree of violence is normally restricted to non-physical manifestations (1995, p. 4). Under the notion of social media as an *enabler* and *constrainer* of human agency, I interpret this power relation as the violent dynamic related to two processes entirely dependent on social media mechanics: online community surveillance and reactive policymaking (Fuchs, 2014, p. 37).

In most aspects, online media portray these control attempts as "hunts" of hateful speech and extremists online that have the ultimate goal of halting the process of far-right radicalisation (Gibbs, 2017; Manjoo, 2018). These hunts, however, have been limited to i) "damage control" after grave incidents such as the murder of Heather Heyer in Charlottesville, and ii) to banning the social media accounts of leaders and organisations. While deemed as well-intentioned, online media portray these attempts for controlling the far-right as reactive, inefficient, and symbolic gestures that bear little

to no power to deal with the complexity of social media architecture and media-savvy far-right users (Gibbs, 2017; Romano, 2017). According to my sample, I interpret these processes as a power struggle regarding the (in)capacity that social media companies have to limit highly-organised violent online manifestations, as organisational principles, technological platforms, legal tenants, and political pressure from mainstream media constrains them operationally and politically (Ellinas, 2010, pp. 204–205).

Despite these "PR efforts" in several instances social media companies (such as Facebook and Twitter) have been negatively portrayed as upholding the power structures that allow harassing and attacking minorities by harbouring vast numbers of far-right radicals and radical content in their servers:

> "[…] *it's not clear whether any of these measures would have stopped someone like* [the mosque arsonist] *Marq Perez from spreading hatred of Muslims and organizing to take violent action against them.*
>
> *Moreover, Facebook has become a home for anti-Muslim hate in recent years, in large part because its standards are not rigorously or consistently applied. In particular, antigovernment Three Percenters have been permitted to openly publish material that clearly violates the platform's community standards, as well as to organize their anti-Muslim activities using the platform.*" (Neiwert, 2018)

In part, media portrays this "protectionism" of far-right groups and individuals as the consequence of the historical tendency by mainstream media to misrepresent and provide small coverage of them (Manjoo, 2018; Neiwert, 2017). In line with Altheide & Schneider, the way that media conceptualise groups, ideologies, and social phenomena has enormous consequences for the efforts of understanding how power is

distributed and affects sociocultural processes in politically-charged communities and contexts (2013, Chapter 3, p.6).

Section 6: Conclusions

This thesis has attempted to answer the question "*How do online media outlets portray and shape the debate on the relationship between social media massification and far-right radicalisation in the UK and the US?*". The research process has involved the disaggregation of large amounts of data from different online articles, which have subsequently been reinterpreted in line with the sub research questions. Hence, I am now able to reflect upon the relationship between the major epistemological gaps in the debate and my analytical findings.

Mudde and Blee state that the lack of empirical testing regarding how **far-right** organisations and individuals behave and relate to each other is one of the key epistemological challenges in this field of study (Blee, 2007; Mudde, 2017a, p. 424). Here Ellinas argues that, as a unique communication channel, the emergence of social media has only increased the need for improving our knowledge on how it is related to the far-right (2010, pp. 4, 216). Due to its "semi-internalist" approach (Blee, 2007; Goodwin, 2006) based on media portrayals, my study offers clues to how these epistemological challenges are linked. In the context of my study, the marked increase in social media use, and its dependency among far-right groups and communities, has resulted in online media outlets being able to gradually portray more nuanced illustrations of their behaviour, motivations and activities. Media link this increased use to both to the wide availability of social media platforms and the mainstreaming of the narrative of "free speech". This narrative works in an interlocked process with that of sociocultural victimisation, which provides both a definitional tool for far-right individuals and communities, as well as a framework for radical political action. Victimisation framed under "free speech" strongly relates to social media-fuelled efforts to distort portrayals of reality under the guise of conspiracy theories. These conspiracies speak to the core of the individuals' and movements' processes of

representation of reality, as they imply "truths" that the liberal establishment keeps hidden, thus solidifying their power by effectively controlling knowledge over reality. Under this narrative, far-right individuals and fragmented communities desperately depend on social media to uncover these truths, build a common identity, and unearth the "heroes" of the movement – all of which coalesces into radical necessary, yet normalised, (online and offline) action.

In the case of **radicalisation**, Neumann and Malthaner state that the enormous ambiguity of the term is not aided by the lack of knowledge on how *cognitive* and *behavioural* radicalisation intersect (2013, pp. 874-876; 2017, pp. 371-372). I explore this intersection in relation to the more "internalist" perspective provided by the analysis (and lenses) of online media outlets on radicalisation. The most blatant portrayal of the complexity of this intersection is precisely on how social media drastically affect the process of far-right radicalisation by accelerating it beyond the theorised "steps" and by blurring the line between these steps. This process of *accelerated radicalisation* is heavily tied to the constant bombarding that far-right social media feeds provide on alternative views and facts of society, which help to develop a sense of purpose and community with those sharing the same online echo-chamber. Media portray this sense of communal purpose, however, as forming a cognitive momentum that leads to different manifestations of dehumanisation in social media. In the context of accelerated radicalisation, online media portrays this self-contained and exclusive *relationship* with the group as the nexus between cognitive and behavioural radicalisation. "True" isolationism of radicals, in this sense, cannot occur in contemporary times – media portray far-right activists as permanently finding different socialisation avenues, either online or offline, all who work towards increasing the chances of engaging into violent acts. Finally, online media portray these socialisation ties as increasingly dependent on quotidian cultural expressions, which are presented as essential for "smoothing" the transition between cognitive and

behavioural radicalisation. This intersection is further exploited thanks to social media, as they act as enabling spaces for these kinds of manifestations – as we saw in the analysis, ranging from "boys clubs" to online trolling and the use of memes.

In Fuchs terms, one of the key epistemological challenges for the study of **social media** resides in unearthing how their "social" aspect relates to political processes. This *social* aspect refers to the capacity of social media to convey notions of meaning to individuals and groups by *enabling* and *constraining* human agency. From the lenses of online media, my study could help address this gap by exploring how social media influence psychosocial and political changes (Fuchs, 2014, p. 37). Online media outlets develop a scathing portrayal of social media, which, according to Fuch's framework, focus almost exclusively on their *enabling aspect* regarding human agency. In the case of my thesis, this portrayal translates as *social media enabling far-right* radicals. As a critical portrayal it characterises social media as harmful to peace, liberal values, and democracy. Online media outlets thus portray social media as generally incapable and unwilling to tackle far-right hateful content and radical socialisation networks, despite reactive attempts after major incidents (e.g. the death of Heather Heyer during the Charlottesville riots in 2017). According to my sample, the incapacity and unwillingness of social media to tackle these violent expressions have narratively transformed into a *culture of enabling*. The most glaring manifestation of this culture is that of creating *safe spaces* in which all degrees of radical far-right manifestations can be designed, disseminated and propelled into real-life action. The pace with which this process of radicalisation occurs, however, is unprecedented. My sample portrays social media as enabling these accelerated *adaptations* to even faster-changing social, economic, cultural, and political environments, and thus facilitating faster yet more chaotic processes of political participation (including violent manifestations, such as the "Unite the Right" rally). Media portray these enabling processes of accelerated sociopolitical adaptation as being both the consequence and the cause of the success of

massive propaganda mechanisms in favour of far-right causes, such Cambridge Analytica favouring the Trump election and Brexit vote in 2016.

After addressing how media have portrayed the three elements (social media, radicalisation, far-right), I analysed how these specific portrayals *shape* the **debate** around them – namely, the relation between far-right radicalisation and social media massification. I framed this process of *shaping* through the notion of *power relation*, which was understood as the narrative of violence.

The struggle over definitions of reality and facts between the far-right and the perceived "liberal elite" in online media spaces is the main element that shapes the core debate of my thesis. This "definitional" war represents a major power struggle that pins the radical far-right against a very abstract enemy, interpreted in a myriad of forms – as ideologies (liberalism, globalism, multiculturalism), actors (Democratic Party, liberal opinion leaders, Facebook, ethnic and racial minorities, immigrants), institutions, and laws. This portrayal follows the liberal editorial lines, political stances, and the political objectives of the majority of my sample which also shape this debate by opposing directly or indirectly the far-right discourses and actions. Crucially, while I have identified three distinct power struggles embedded in the debate of this thesis (*struggle against liberal establishment, reshaping of social relations; media control*), media outlets shape the debate by positioning *themselves* within these power struggles. This positioning is always limited to the analysis of the narrative and political orientation of the media outlets, and it is not always intentional.

In the case of the first power struggle (*against the liberal establishment*), media directly position themselves on a middle ground between the liberal establishment and the critics of it – they acknowledge that the failings of mainstream media and tech companies have allowed for the successful massive online radicalisation of far-right

individuals and communities. In the case of the second power struggle (*reshaping of social relations*) media pin the effects of far-right radicalisation into a more troublesome, familiar narrative – that of the online manipulation of young white men by far-right groups and the consequent effects that the process of radicalisation has on psychological, familial, and amical ties. Media outlets position themselves as the "front-line" against the virulent social effects of this power struggle, as they are markedly affected by the far-right narrative *trifecta* of victimisation, martyrdom, and heroism. Finally, and more evidently, media weave themselves into the power struggle for *controlling online content*. As far-right online communities are portrayed as "protected" or disregarded by major social media policing agents (Facebook, Twitter), online media outlets position themselves as procurers of political judgements, warnings, and alerts against hateful content and the individuals that disseminate it.

References

Altheide, D. L., & Schneider, C. J. (2013). *Qualitative media analysis* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications.

Andone, D., Simon, M., & Sidner, S. (2018, August 13). White nationalists dwarfed by crowds of counterprotesters in Washington. Retrieved August 14, 2018, from https://www.cnn.com/2018/08/12/us/unite-the-right-charlottesville-anniversary/index.html

Ansari, B. A. (2017, December 30). This was the year global terror became mainstream. This is what we're doing to tackle it. *The Independent*. Retrieved from http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/radicalisation-online-twitter-extremism-isis-far-right-international-efforts-a8134606.html

Arnett, J. J. (2002). The psychology of globalization. *American Psychologist*, *57*(10), 774–783. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.57.10.774

Barrouquere, B. (2018, May 25). Hatewatch: Full court press [Civil Society Organisation]. Retrieved June 18, 2018, from https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2018/05/25/full-court-press

Bartlett, J. (2017, August 31). From hope to hate: how the early internet fed the far right. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from http://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/aug/31/far-right-alt-right-white-supremacists-rise-online

Berlet, C., & Mason, C. (2015). Swastikas in Cyberspace: How Hate Went Online. In P. A. Simpson & H. Druxes (Eds.), *Digital media strategies of the far-right in Europe and the United States* (pp. 21–36). Lanham ; Boulder ; New York ; London: Lexington Books.

Beutel, A. (2018, May 18). How Trump's nativist tweets overlap with anti-Muslim and anti-Latino hate crimes [Civil Society Organisation]. Retrieved June 18, 2018, from https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2018/05/18/how-trump%E2%80%99s-nativist-tweets-overlap-anti-muslim-and-anti-latino-hate-crimes

Blee, K. M. (2007). Ethnographies of the Far Right. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, *36*(2), 119–128. https://doi.org/10.1177/0891241606298815

Borum, R. (2011). Radicalization into Violent Extremism I: A Review of Social Science Theories. *Journal of Strategic Security*, *4*(4), 7–36. https://doi.org/10.5038/1944-0472.4.4.1

Bos, L., Brug, W. van der, & Vreese, C. de. (2011). How the Media Shape Perceptions of Right-Wing Populist Leaders. *Political Communication*, *28*(2), 182–206. https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2011.564605

Brady, W., A. Wills, J., Jost, J., Tucker, J., & Van Bavel, J. (2017). Emotion shapes the diffusion of moralized content in social networks. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, *114*, 1–6. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1618923114

Braunthal, G. (2009). *Right-wing extremism in contemporary Germany*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Braunthal, G. (2010). Right-Extremism in Germany: Recruitment of New Members. *German Politics & Society*, *28*(4), 41–68. https://doi.org/10.3167/gps.2010.280403

Brubaker, R. (2005). The "diaspora" diaspora. *Ethnic & Racial Studies*, *28*(1), 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1080/0141987042000289997

Brubaker, R. (2017). The New Language of European Populism. *Foreign Affairs*. Retrieved from https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/europe/2017-12-06/new-language-european-populism

Cadwalladr, C. (2018, March 18). 'I made Steve Bannon's psychological warfare tool': meet the data war whistleblower. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from http://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/mar/17/data-war-whistleblower-christopher-wylie-faceook-nix-bannon-trump

Cadwalladr, C., & Graham-Harrison, E. (2018, March 18). Pressure mounts on Cambridge Analytica and Facebook over data scandal. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from http://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/mar/18/cambridge-analytica-and-facebook-accused-of-misleading-mps-over-data-breach

Cadwalladr, C., & Kirchgaessner, S. (2018, June 7). Cambridge Analytica director "met Assange to discuss US election." *The Guardian*. Retrieved from http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/jun/06/cambridge-analytica-brittany-kaiser-julian-assange-wikileaks

Capelos, T. (2010). Feeling the Issue: How Citizens' Affective Reactions and Leadership Perceptions Shape Policy Evaluations. *Journal of Political Marketing*, *9*(1–2), 9–33. https://doi.org/10.1080/15377850903583038

Chrisafis, A. (2016, June 24). European far right hails Brexit vote. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jun/24/european-far-right-hails-britains-brexit-vote-marine-le-pen

Copsey, N. (2013). 'Fascism… but with an open mind.' Reflections on the Contemporary Far Right in (Western) Europe. *Fascism*, *2*(1), 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1163/22116257-00201008

Costanza, W. (2015). Adjusting Our Gaze: An Alternative Approach to Understanding Youth Radicalization. *Journal of Strategic Security*, *8*(1), 1–15.

Crockett, M. J. (2017). Moral outrage in the digital age. *Nature Human Behaviour*, 1. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-017-0213-3

De Lange, S. L. (2017). A new winning formula? The programmatic appeal of the radical right. In C. Mudde (Ed.), *The Populist Radical Right: A Reader* (pp. 83–102). Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY: Taylor & Francis.

Del Vicario, M., Zollo, F., Caldarelli, G., Scala, A., & Quattrociocchi, W. (2017). Mapping social dynamics on Facebook: The Brexit debate. *Social Networks*, *50*, 6–16. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socnet.2017.02.002

Deland, M., Minkenberg, M., & Mays, C. (Eds.). (2015). BOOK REVIEW: In the Tracks of Breivik: Far Right Networks in Northern and Eastern Europe, *4*.

Della Porta, D. (1995). *Social movements, political violence and the state : comparative analysis of Italy and Germany*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Demertzis, N. (2014). Political Emotions. In P. Nesbitt-Larking, C. Kinnvall, T. Capelos, & H. Dekker (Eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Global Political Psychology* (pp. 223–241). Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Dixon Kavanaugh, S. (2016, August 3). Europe's Radical Right Is Flourishing On Social Media. *Vocativ*. Retrieved from http://www.vocativ.com/347806/europes-radical-right-is-flourishing-on-social-media/

Doerr, N. (2017). Bridging language barriers, bonding against immigrants: A visual case study of transnational network publics created by far-right activists in Europe. *Discourse & Society*, *28*(1), 3–23. https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926516676689

Doosje, B., Moghaddam, F. M., Kruglanski, A. W., de Wolf, A., Mann, L., & Feddes, A. R. (2016). Terrorism, radicalization and de-radicalization. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, *11*, 79–84. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2016.06.008

Ebner, J. (2018, July 16). Tommy Robinson's cheerleaders are hypocrites, but his strategy is working. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/jul/16/tommy-robinson-cheerleaders-hypocrites-far-right

Edison Hayden, M., & Nestel, M. L. (2017, August 15). Timeline: What led to the violence that unfolded in Charlottesville [Newsite]. Retrieved May 7, 2018, from https://abcnews.go.com/US/timeline-led-violence-unfolded-charlottesville/story?id=49207428

Ellinas, A. (2010). *The Media and the Far Right in Western Europe: Playing the Nationalist Card*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Fausset, R. (2018, August 13). Rally by White Nationalists Was Over Almost Before It Began. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/12/us/politics/charlottesville-va-protest-unite-the-right.html

Foster, P. (2016, June 16). Britain First: Who are the far-right group whose name was "shouted by Jo Cox gunman"? *The Telegraph*. Retrieved from http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/06/16/britain-first-the-far-right-group-with-a-massive-facebook-follow/

Franceschi-Bicchierai, L. (2018, March 19). Why We're Not Calling the Cambridge Analytica Story a "Data Breach." Retrieved March 20, 2018, from https://motherboard.vice.com/en_us/article/3kjzvk/facebook-cambridge-analytica-not-a-data-breach?utm_source=dmfb

Fuchs, C. (2014). *Social media: a critical introduction*. London: SAGE Publications.

Fullam, J. (2017). Becoming a youth activist in the internet age: a case study on social media activism and identity development. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *30*(4), 406–422. https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2016.1250176

Gantt Shafer, J. (2017). Donald Trump's "Political Incorrectness": Neoliberalism as Frontstage Racism on Social Media. *Social Media + Society*, *3*(3), 2056305117733226. https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305117733226

Gibbs, S. (2017, August 16). Daily Stormer jumps to dark web while Reddit and Facebook ban hate groups. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/aug/16/daily-stormer-forced-dark-web-reddit-facebook-ban-hate-groups

Goodwin, M. (2006). The Rise and Faults of the Internalist Perspective in Extreme Right Studies. *Representation*, *42*(4), 347–364.

Graham-Harrison, E., & Cadwalladr, C. (2018, March 17). Revealed: 50 million Facebook profiles harvested for Cambridge Analytica in major data breach. *The*

Guardian. Retrieved from
http://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/mar/17/cambridge-analytica-facebook-
influence-us-election

Grassegger, H., & Krogerus, M. (2017, January 28). The Data That Turned the World
Upside Down [Journalism]. Retrieved March 13, 2017, from
https://motherboard.vice.com/en_us/article/how-our-likes-helped-trump-win

Grewal, D. (2018, June 26). Do Trump Tweets Spur Hate Crimes? *Scientific
American*. Retrieved from https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/do-trump-
tweets-spur-hate-crimes1/

Hansler, J. (2017, August 12). Bipartisan condemnation for "Unite the Right" rally
[Newsite]. Retrieved May 7, 2018, from
https://www.cnn.com/2017/08/12/politics/parties-condemn-white-nationalist-
rally/index.html

Hume, T. (2017, November 30). Bigots in Europe are living for Trump's
Islamophobic retweets [Newsite]. Retrieved December 1, 2017, from
https://news.vice.com/story/bigots-in-europe-are-living-for-trumps-islamophobic-
retweets

Hume, T. (2018, July 18). American populists are desperate to spring British far-right
activist Tommy Robinson out of jail. Retrieved July 22, 2018, from
https://news.vice.com/en_us/article/kzyw5x/tommy-robinson-far-right-american-
populists-bannon

Illing, S. (2017, October 11). A grad student spent 12 months undercover in Europe's
alt-right movement [Newsite]. Retrieved December 3, 2017, from
https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2017/10/11/16424576/europe-alt-right-
nationalism-racism-trump-brexit

Iosifidis, P., & Wheeler, M. (2016). *Public Spheres and Mediated Social Networks in
the Western Context and Beyond*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.

Jasko, K., LaFree, G., & Kruglanski, A. (2017). Quest for Significance and Violent
Extremism: The Case of Domestic Radicalization. *Political Psychology*, *38*(5), 815–
831. https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12376

Jenkins, H. (2008). *Convergence Culture*. New York: New York University Press.

Jones, O. (2018, May 31). 'Tommy Robinson' is no martyr to freedom of speech. *The
Guardian*. Retrieved from

http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/may/31/tommy-robinson-freedom-of-speech-far-right

Jost, J. T., Barberá, P., Bonneau, R., Langer, M., Metzger, M., Nagler, J., … Tucker, J. A. (2018). How Social Media Facilitates Political Protest: Information, Motivation, and Social Networks. *Political Psychology*, *39*, 85–118. https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12478

Kinnvall, C. (2013). Borders, Security and (Global) Governance: An Introduction to the Special Issue. *Global Society: Journal of Interdisciplinary International Relations*, *27*(3), 261–266. https://doi.org/10.1080/13600826.2013.790792

Kinnvall, C., & Nesbitt-Larking, P. W. (2011). *The political psychology of globalization: Muslims in the West*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.

Koehler, D. (2014). The Radical Online: Individual Radicalization Processes and the Role of the Internet. *Journal for Deradicalization*, *0*(1), 116–134.

Kruglanski, A. W., Gelfand, M. J., Bélanger, J. J., Sheveland, A., Hetiarachchi, M., & Gunaratna, R. (2014). The Psychology of Radicalization and Deradicalization: How Significance Quest Impacts Violent Extremism. *Political Psychology*, *35*, 69–93. https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12163

Liautaud, A. (2017, August 14). How the Charlottesville suspect became radicalized [Newsite]. Retrieved October 9, 2017, from https://news.vice.com/story/how-the-charlottesville-attacker-became-radicalized

Lopez, G. (2018, August 12). Unite the Right 2018 was a pathetic failure. Retrieved August 14, 2018, from https://www.vox.com/identities/2018/8/12/17681444/unite-the-right-rally-dc-charlottesville-failure

Lubben, A. (2018, May 22). Neo-Nazi who beat a black man with a 2-by-4 in Charlottesville pleads guilty [Newsite]. Retrieved June 18, 2018, from https://news.vice.com/en_us/article/wjbndn/neo-nazi-who-beat-a-black-man-with-a-2-by-4-in-charlottesville-pleads-guilty

Lyons, K. (2018, August 13). More than 100 US newspapers plan editorials decrying Trump media attacks. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/media/2018/aug/13/more-than-100-us-newspapers-plan-editorials-decrying-trump-media-attacks

Malthaner, S. (2017). Radicalization: The Evolution of an Analytical Paradigm. *ARCHIVES EUROPEENNES DE SOCIOLOGIE*, *58*(3), 369–401.

Manjoo, F. (2018, January 20). A Hunt for Ways to Combat Online Radicalization. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/23/technology/a-hunt-for-ways-to-disrupt-the-work-of-online-radicalization.html

Martinez, G. (2018, August 14). Half of Republicans Believe the Media Is the Enemy of the People: Poll. *Time*. Retrieved from http://time.com/5367145/republicans-media-enemy-of-the-people-poll/

McCoy, T. (2018, February 23). 'I don't know how you got this way:' A young neo-Nazi reveals himself to his family. *Washington Post*. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/local/wp/2018/02/23/feature/i-dont-know-how-you-got-this-way-a-young-neo-nazi-reveals-himself-to-his-family/

McDonald, H. (2017, March 20). Far-right millionaire: I'll use social media network to back Scottish independence. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/mar/20/jim-dowson-back-scottish-independence-patriotic-news-agency-far-right?CMP=fb_gu

Mudde, C. (2017a). The populist radical right: A pathological normalcy. In C. Mudde (Ed.), *The Populist Radical Right: A Reader* (pp. 424–438). Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY: Taylor & Francis.

Mudde, C. (2017b). *The Populist Radical Right: A Reader*. Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY: Taylor & Francis.

Nagle, A. (2017, December). The Lost Boys. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/12/brotherhood-of-losers/544158/?utm_source=facebook&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=the-atlantic&utm_content=cm

Nakamura, D., & Horwitz, S. (2017, August 14). 'Racism is evil,' Trump says, condemning 'white supremacists' and hate groups. *Washington Post*. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/racism-is-evil-trump-says-condemning-white-supremacists-and-hate-groups/2017/08/14/0af638a0-810c-11e7-902a-2a9f2d808496_story.html

Neiwert, D. (2017, October 26). Alt-America: the time for talking about white terrorism is now. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from http://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/nov/26/alt-america-terrorism-rightwing-hate-crimes

Neiwert, D. (2018, July 13). Accused mosque arsonist favored Facebook for spreading hate [Civil Society Organisation]. Retrieved July 22, 2018, from

https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2018/07/13/accused-mosque-arsonist-favored-facebook-spreading-hate

Neumann, P. R. (2013). The trouble with radicalization. *International Affairs*, *89*(4), 873–893. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2346.12049

Nwanevu, O. (2018, August 13). The Lessons of Unite the Right. Retrieved August 14, 2018, from https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2018/08/the-lessons-of-unite-the-right.html

Oppenheim, M. (2018, June 26). Ukip gains 500 new members since allowing prominent far-right activists to join party. *The Independent*. Retrieved from https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/ukip-alt-right-members-paul-joseph-watson-mark-meechan-carl-benjamin-a8418116.html

Owen, T. (2018a, February 21). White supremacists are ditching the Klan for khakis and memes, new study shows [Newsite]. Retrieved March 18, 2018, from https://news.vice.com/en_us/article/437qzw/white-supremacists-are-ditching-the-klan-for-khakis-and-memes-new-study-shows

Owen, T. (2018b, May 2). Facebook apparently thinks left-wing bias is as bad a problem as hate speech [Newsite]. Retrieved May 7, 2018, from https://news.vice.com/en_us/article/3kj3n3/facebook-apparently-thinks-left-wing-bias-is-as-bad-a-problem-as-hate-speech

Padovani, C. (2016). The media of the ultra-right. *Journal of Language & Politics*, *15*(4), 399–421. https://doi.org/10.1075/jlp.15.4.02pad

Parmelee, J. H., & Bichard, S. L. (2012). *Politics and the Twitter Revolution: How Tweets Influence the Relationship Between Political Leaders and the Public*. Maryland: Lexington Books.

Patton, D. U., Hong, J. S., Ranney, M., Patel, S., Kelley, C., Eschmann, R., & Washington, T. (2014). Social media as a vector for youth violence: A review of the literature. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *35*, 548–553. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2014.02.043

Pelinka, A. (2013). Right-Wing Populism: Concept and Typology. In R. Wodak, M. Khosravinik, & B. Mral (Eds.), *Right-wing populism in Europe: politics and discourse* (pp. 3–22). London: Bloomsbury.

Persson, G. (2017). Love, Affiliation, and Emotional Recognition in #kämpamalmö:— The Social Role of Emotional Language in Twitter Discourse.

Social Media + Society, *3*(1), 2056305117696522. https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305117696522

Polletta, F. (1999). "Free Spaces" in Collective Action. *Theory and Society*, *28*(1), 1–38.

Resnick, B. (2017, August 15). Psychologists surveyed hundreds of alt-right supporters. The results are unsettling. [Newsite]. Retrieved October 9, 2017, from https://www.vox.com/science-and-health/2017/8/15/16144070/psychology-alt-right

Riotta, C. (2018, August 13). Over 100 newspapers to publish damning editorials against Donald Trump's attacks on the press. *The Independent*. Retrieved from https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/donald-trump-press-enemy-of-american-people-boston-globe-newspaper-editorials-a8490361.html

Romano, A. (2017, December 18). At long last, Twitter has begun banning (some, not all) Nazis [Newsite]. Retrieved January 14, 2018, from https://www.vox.com/2017/12/18/16790864/twitter-bans-nazis-hate-groups

Schmuck, D., & Matthes, J. (2015). How Anti-immigrant Right-wing Populist Advertisements Affect Young Voters: Symbolic Threats, Economic Threats and the Moderating Role of Education. *Journal of Ethnic & Migration Studies*, *41*(10), 1577–1599. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2014.981513

Scott, M. (2018, March 18). Politicians worldwide raise questions about Cambridge Analytica's use of Facebook data. *POLITICO*. Retrieved from https://www.politico.eu/article/a-time-of-reckoning-for-facebook-and-politics-online/

Simões, J. A., & Campos, R. (2016). Youth, social movements and protest digital networks in a time of crisis. *Juventude, Movimentos Sociais e Redes Digitais de Protesto Em Época de Crise.*, *13*(38), 126–145. https://doi.org/10.18568/1983-7070.1339130-150

Simpson, P. A., & Druxes, H. (Eds.). (2015). *Digital media strategies of the far-right in Europe and the United States*. Lanham ; Boulder ; New York ; London: Lexington Books.

Soral, W., Bilewicz, M., & Winiewski, M. (2017). Exposure to hate speech increases prejudice through desensitization. *Aggressive Behavior*, n/a-n/a. https://doi.org/10.1002/ab.21737

The Associated Press. (2017, August 15). Trump again blames "both sides" for Charlottesville violence. Retrieved May 7, 2018, from

http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/trump-charlottesville-al-left-blame-violence-1.4248466

The Independent. (2018, May 27). Hundreds demonstrate in Downing Street after far-right figure Tommy Robinson arrested. *The Independent*. Retrieved from https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/tommy-robinson-protest-downing-street-whitehall-free-latest-arrest-police-a8371616.html

Trottier, D., & Fuchs, C. (Eds.). (2015). *Social media, politics and the state : protests, revolutions, riots, crime and policing in the age of Facebook, Twitter and YouTube*. New York: Routledge.

Turner-Graham, E. (2014). "Breivik is my Hero": the Dystopian World of Extreme Right Youth on the Internet. *Australian Journal of Politics & History*, *60*(3), 416–430. https://doi.org/10.1111/ajph.12070

Walters, J. (2018, March 22). Steve Bannon on Cambridge Analytica: "Facebook data is for sale all over the world." *The Guardian*. Retrieved from http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/mar/22/steve-bannon-on-cambridge-analytica-facebook-data-is-for-sale-all-over-the-world

Weaver, C. (2018, August 14). The alt-right is revising its online strategy after a backlash. Retrieved August 14, 2018, from https://www.ft.com/content/c94642da-9f08-11e8-85da-eeb7a9ce36e4

Wodak, R. (2013). 'Anything Goes!' – The Haiderization of Europe. In R. Wodak, M. Khosravinik, & B. Mral (Eds.), *Right-wing populism in Europe: politics and discourse* (pp. 23–37). London: Bloomsbury.

Wodak, R., & Boukala, S. (2015). European identities and the revival of nationalism in the European Union: A discourse historical approach. *Journal of Language and Politics*, *14*(1), 87–109.

Wodak, R., & Khosravinik, M. (2013). Dynamics of Discourse and Politics in Right-wing Populism in Europe and Beyond: An Introduction. In R. Wodak, M. Khosravinik, & B. Mral (Eds.), *Right-wing populism in Europe: politics and discourse* (pp. xvii–xxviii). London: Bloomsbury.

Appendix 1: Research sample – 24 online articles

1. Ansari, B. A. (2017, December 30). This was the year global terror became mainstream. This is what we're doing to tackle it. *The Independent*. Retrieved from http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/radicalisation-online-twitter-extremism-isis-far-right-international-efforts-a8134606.html

2. Barrouquere, B. (2018, May 25). Hatewatch: Full court press [Southern Poverty Law Center]. Retrieved June 18, 2018, from https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2018/05/25/full-court-press

3. Bartlett, J. (2017, August 31). From hope to hate: how the early internet fed the far right. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from http://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/aug/31/far-right-alt-right-white-supremacists-rise-online

4. Beutel, A. (2018, May 18). How Trump's nativist tweets overlap with anti-Muslim and anti-Latino hate crimes [Southern Poverty Law Center]. Retrieved June 18, 2018, from https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2018/05/18/how-trump%E2%80%99s-nativist-tweets-overlap-anti-muslim-and-anti-latino-hate-crimes

5. Cadwalladr, C. (2018, March 18). 'I made Steve Bannon's psychological warfare tool': meet the data war whistleblower. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from http://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/mar/17/data-war-whistleblower-christopher-wylie-faceook-nix-bannon-trump

6. Chrisafis, A. (2016, June 24). European far right hails Brexit vote. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jun/24/european-far-right-hails-britains-brexit-vote-marine-le-pen

7. Foster, P. (2016, June 16). Britain First: Who are the far-right group whose name was "shouted by Jo Cox gunman"? *The Telegraph*. Retrieved from http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/06/16/britain-first-the-far-right-group-with-a-massive-facebook-follow/

8. Gibbs, S. (2017, August 16). Daily Stormer jumps to dark web while Reddit and Facebook ban hate groups. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/aug/16/daily-stormer-forced-dark-web-reddit-facebook-ban-hate-groups

9. Grewal, D. (2018, June 26). Do Trump Tweets Spur Hate Crimes? *Scientific American*. Retrieved from https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/do-trump-tweets-spur-hate-crimes1/

10. Hume, T. (2017, November 30). Bigots in Europe are living for Trump's Islamophobic retweets [VICE News]. Retrieved December 1, 2017, from https://news.vice.com/story/bigots-in-europe-are-living-for-trumps-islamophobic-retweets

11. Hume, T. (2018, July 18). American populists are desperate to spring British far-right activist Tommy Robinson out of jail [VICE News]. Retrieved July 22, 2018, from https://news.vice.com/en_us/article/kzyw5x/tommy-robinson-far-right-american-populists-bannon

12. Illing, S. (2017, October 11). A grad student spent 12 months undercover in Europe's alt-right movement [Vox]. Retrieved December 3, 2017, from https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2017/10/11/16424576/europe-alt-right-nationalism-racism-trump-brexit

13. Jones, O. (2018, May 31). 'Tommy Robinson' is no martyr to freedom of speech. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/may/31/tommy-robinson-freedom-of-speech-far-right

14. Liautaud, A. (2017, August 14). How the Charlottesville suspect became radicalized [VICE News]. Retrieved October 9, 2017, from https://news.vice.com/story/how-the-charlottesville-attacker-became-radicalized

15. Manjoo, F. (2018, January 20). A Hunt for Ways to Combat Online Radicalization. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/23/technology/a-hunt-for-ways-to-disrupt-the-work-of-online-radicalization.html

16. McCoy, T. (2018, February 23). 'I don't know how you got this way:' A young neo-Nazi reveals himself to his family. *Washington Post*. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/local/wp/2018/02/23/feature/i-dont-know-how-you-got-this-way-a-young-neo-nazi-reveals-himself-to-his-family/

17. McDonald, H. (2017, March 20). Far-right millionaire: I'll use social media network to back Scottish independence. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/mar/20/jim-dowson-back-scottish-independence-patriotic-news-agency-far-right?CMP=fb_gu

18. Nagle, A. (2017, December). The Lost Boys. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/12/brotherhood-of-losers/544158/?utm_source=facebook&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=the-atlantic&utm_content=cm

19. Neiwert, D. (2017, October 26). Alt-America: the time for talking about white terrorism is now. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from http://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/nov/26/alt-america-terrorism-rightwing-hate-crimes

20. Neiwert, D. (2018, July 13). Accused mosque arsonist favored Facebook for spreading hate [Southern Poverty Law Center]. Retrieved July 22, 2018, from https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2018/07/13/accused-mosque-arsonist-favored-facebook-spreading-hate

21. Oppenheim, M. (2018, June 26). Ukip gains 500 new members since allowing prominent far-right activists to join party. *The Independent*. Retrieved from https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/ukip-alt-right-members-paul-joseph-watson-mark-meechan-carl-benjamin-a8418116.html

22. Owen, T. (2018, May 2). Facebook apparently thinks left-wing bias is as bad a problem as hate speech [VICE News]. Retrieved May 7, 2018, from https://news.vice.com/en_us/article/3kj3n3/facebook-apparently-thinks-left-wing-bias-is-as-bad-a-problem-as-hate-speech

23. Resnick, B. (2017, August 15). Psychologists surveyed hundreds of alt-right supporters. The results are unsettling. [Vox]. Retrieved October 9, 2017, from https://www.vox.com/science-and-health/2017/8/15/16144070/psychology-alt-right

24. Romano, A. (2017, December 18). At long last, Twitter has begun banning (some, not all) Nazis [Vox]. Retrieved January 14, 2018, from https://www.vox.com/2017/12/18/16790864/twitter-bans-nazis-hate-groups