

SELF-RADICALIZATION ON THE INTERNET



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1.0 Introduction

The Internet is becoming an increasingly central tool for life in the 21st century. Numerous tasks and activities have been simplified by digitalization. Learning, shopping, writing, entertainment, and communication can occur online and from our homes, providing convenience in users' daily lives while simultaneously granting access to information and communication on a global scale. The benefits of the Internet were displayed and emphasized by society's shift towards digital substitutes for real-world interaction during the coronavirus pandemic. As technology and AI advance, our dependence on this technology is made more apparent, while the dangers less so. The very tools that help in everyday life may be the same tools that aid in the radicalization of an individual. Though the Internet is no longer a new and revolutionary tool, many issues relating to the Internet are uncharted territory, and the long-term effects are unknown. Making connections between online behavior and "real-life" consequences may show a dangerous trend. Using the Internet introduces a new way for people to interact. The Internet offers contradicting types of expression: one in complete anonymity, shielding individuals from accountability, and the other in blinding visibility, demanding to be seen and heard by the rest of the world. Both types differ significantly from how humans have connected for centuries. Communicating on a global scale in complete anonymity or publicly is nearly impossible in real life.

Though communication can be constructive, it can have its harmful sides, especially when we focus on the aforementioned methods of communication. More visible issues such as cyberbullying and peer pressure on social media have garnered attention in the last couple of decades, for a good reason. These issues show an apparent timeline of events where an interaction online can have real-world effects, especially since in cases like cyberbullying, there is a clear bully and victim. Other issues are not as visible as cyberbullying. Though many modern terrorist attacks can be traced back to and aided by the Internet, it is harder to find the root. Extremist ideologies and radicalization have flown under the radar because of its tendency to be a long process and because its origins cannot be pinpointed to an individual or a singular platform. One example of a terrorist attack that was inspired by, carried out on, and influenced others on the Internet is the Christchurch mosque shootings. This particular

terrorist attack will be a case study in this paper, as it displays how the Internet plays a significant role in the entire process of an individual's self-radicalization process. Recent incidents and conflicts suggest a link between the causes of such events to Internet culture and the algorithms that allow certain ideas to thrive. Until recently, there has been a lack of investigation of this phenomenon of typically young, white men who unconsciously or consciously become extremists by taking their radicalization into their own hands and using the Internet as a tool in this process. This pushed me to reach out to Lasse Josephsen, an expert on this topic. In an interview, we discussed the subject matter. This left me with a deeper understanding and better insight of the topic and inspiration that aided the writing process of my discussion and conclusion.

How do the fundamental composition of the Internet and online cultures lead to echo chambers and self-radicalization, particularly in the Christchurch terrorist attack of 2019? To answer this question and draw a conclusion, this paper will investigate the causes, execution, and consequences of the entire process of radicalization.

The background of the paper introduces the many features and platforms on the Internet and what they have directly and indirectly enabled. This chapter highlights both the obvious and underground misinformation and hate that have been sprouting online. Previously seemingly harmless activities such as making and sharing memes, or the exchanging of ideas online have been connected to something more sinister. This lays the groundwork for the discussion, which will question where social media companies' priorities lie and how it has enabled the growth of extremism to the extent that it has so far, and potentially to the point of no return.

2.0 Background

2.1 Key Features of the Internet

The tools and services on most websites that simplify and personalize the content we access are algorithms. In simple terms, algorithms are a piece of code that contains instructions on how to solve problems and make recommendations (Dewey). It is a simple tool to organize and simplify the large amount of available information on the Internet. The algorithm can extract user data and then automatically prioritize content based on users' online behaviors. This is what exposes users to recommended, personalized, and relevant content. This function is essential for using the Internet and is not new or necessarily exclusive to the Internet. Other forms of categorization of information exist and predate computers, such as the Dewey Decimal System. The algorithm records every single Internet interaction; likes, dislikes, amount of time spent on a post, and what people do – and do not – click on (Michigan State University). This paints a picture of users and their interests, helping the algorithm recommend even more content. YouTube, for example, utilizes the algorithm with their “up next” and “recommended” features, giving viewers more videos to watch after finishing the first one. Videos on YouTube start playing automatically unless this feature is disabled manually, giving the audience an endless stream of videos that are specifically picked out for them by the algorithm. In this case, the algorithm harvests information based on other users' online activity, in addition to the individuals' own activity history, meaning that others with similar interests determine recommended content. As a result, many people may be grouped together by the algorithm solely based on user activity. This is also exemplified by TikTok's “for you” page, which is much more hands-on, as users physically “swipe” away from videos they are not interested in, and “like” videos they are interested in. TikTok videos are also a lot shorter, making the entire process and subsequent recommendation system much faster.

Social media apps and websites are constructed to attract users and keep them online. Though most social media have a follower or friend system, its content is not limited to what users choose to follow. Apps such as Instagram and TikTok have pages dedicated to new and unexplored content based on user activity. The personalized, recommended content attracts

users and exposes an endless stream of similar content. This extends and expands the amount of time spent on social media, as well as the amount of content users are exposed to. Advertising is also prevalent on social media, both from influencers and directly from social media corporations. Entertaining content and advertising are not inherently harmful, nor new or exclusive to social media. The algorithms assist websites and social media platforms in exposing users to personalized advertisements. This is a great advantage to companies, as studies show that 90% of consumers dislike ads that are not personalized (Doty). Ad targeting also increases customer loyalty and has therefore been a huge benefit to businesses (Mailchimp).

Celebrities, social media influencers, in particular, play a significant role in social media advertising. The rise of influencers is unique and in accordance with the popularity of social media. Traditional celebrities have a godlike, untouchable status, making them unrelatable to their fans and the general public. Influencers use social media regularly and interact with their fans and followers. This has created the phenomenon of parasocial relationships, where the follower feels a deeper, friend-like relationship with the influencer as a result of influencers sharing many aspects of their personal lives. This makes influencers more favorable and likable than a traditional A-list celebrity. Influencers are also more trustworthy to their fans. They receive a larger platform, and as their name implies, more influence over fans.

2.2 Platforms and Content

2.2.1 Misinformation

Today, the majority of people with access to an Internet connection are on some form of social media. Social media is a way for people to share and stay connected with others. As the number of social media users grows, so does the content that is uploaded every day. Additionally, traditional news sources are becoming less popular, while social media sites like Facebook and Twitter have become people's primary news sources. This is an issue because social media does not require users to be experts or have any qualifications to spread and share information. This leads to fads, trends, and blurring the line between facts and

opinions. The coronavirus pandemic, among other important issues, has displayed the prevalence of misinformation and fake news online. For example, a study conducted by *Misinformation Review* found that people whose primary news source is social media are more likely to believe in fake news relating to the coronavirus (Escalante).

2.2.2 What is a Meme?

Memes are a form of a joke, often taking root in references and universal human experiences. Memes can be pictures or videos, often captioned or accompanied by text. The structure is simple enough for it to be duplicated, personalized, and slightly edited to suit different types of humor and experiences. The simplicity of memes makes them predictable, digestible, and viral. Very popular memes are well known enough to be able to reference by simply reciting a phrase or displaying shapes and figures that vaguely resemble the meme. Memes are, therefore, enjoyable and an outlet for creativity and humor for many young people. There can be different versions of a meme, referencing or having a similar structure to other memes. Thus, memes can be very complex and hard to understand without context or prior knowledge of the references. A common format is a comparison used to either display superiority or inferiority in the same fashion as most traditional jokes that either poke fun at others or have a more self-deprecating tone.

2.2.3 4chan, 8chan, and Telegram

Two sites that are mentioned frequently in discussions surrounding online extremism are 4chan and 8chan. These websites are anonymous messaging boards where users can discuss different topics but have also grown infamous due to their connections to numerous extremists and terror attacks (Wendling). There are many forums where people can discuss different topics such as literature, sports, news, and business, and many subcultures form within the forums. One forum in particular, /pol/, was originally established as a “politically incorrect” forum but eventually evolved into a Nazi forum with an aggressive atmosphere. 4chan is already notorious for trolling and pranking other websites, but the humorous atmosphere on 4chan transitioned into pure Nazism and hate speech (Josephsen). In the early days of 4chan, the target demographic was people with more “nerdy” interests, like anime or

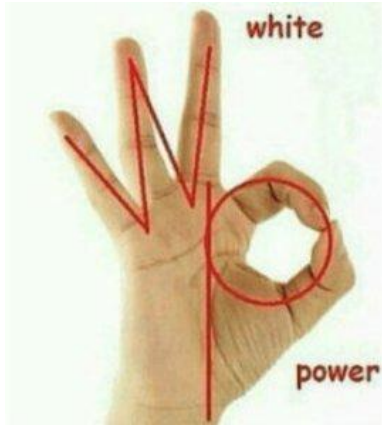

manga, who needed a safe haven to discuss and share their hobbies on anonymous forums or imageboards. This led to many lonely and bitter individuals congregating on 4chan, who share their resentment towards society due to their loneliness. This is often a starting point for incels. Today, 4chan has thousands of users and a reputation of containing humorous but also very graphic content. This draws in many young people, usually boys, who go on 4chan out of curiosity. Many neo-Nazis also come to 4chan to leave links to their own Nazi forums. Lasse Josephsen describes 4chan as “Humanity’s sewer” because it displays what humans take in, digest, and expel onto the Internet.

The spread of extremist viewpoints can be found on chan-websites and in recent years on an app called Telegram. This app is popular because it encrypts messages, making users anonymous and untraceable. It was established in 2013 by Pavel Durov. He created the app in response to Russian censorship on social media and the conflict he faced with Russian authorities after refusing to take down liberal media on Vkontakte, an older social media platform he established. Today, Telegram has 500 million users and is used by various activists and demonstrators worldwide (Selmer-Anderssen). Telegram grew in popularity after alt-right people got kicked out of mainstream social media like Facebook and Twitter. The extremist channels on Telegram are connected and have common goals and members who share propaganda. There is a network on Telegram called “terrorgram” where accelerationists go to spark and spread terror. This is where the most aggressive content is found and where extreme viewpoints are shared. People in the “terrorgram” channels also praise and celebrate violent extremists like Brenton Tarrant and encourage others to follow in his footsteps. Telegram has recently tried to remove accelerationist channels, with no success, as the accelerationists find methods to return to the app. 4chan and 8chan can introduce people to alt-right and white supremacist ideologies, but it is Telegram that finally radicalizes people and encourages extremism to the point where people commit violent attacks (Josephsen).

2.3 Online and Offline Extremism

The Internet's ability to connect people from around the world gives extremist movements and hate groups a larger platform. Though their reach may not necessarily immediately radicalize everyone they come in contact with, it gives them an amplified voice and following, which can create the illusion of authority. Chatrooms, websites, and apps aid the formation and organization of groups.

The growth of extremist and alt-right ideologies goes undetected and under the radar because of the use of dog whistles, "irony," humor (memes and inside jokes, in this case), and "trolling." Dog whistles can be words, symbols, numbers, or phrases with double meanings, making them unsuspecting and overlooked by the general public but instantly identifiable to other group members or people with similar ideologies. Dog whistling protects extremists from censorship and is extremely effective in upholding far-right presences online. An example of an alt-right and white supremacist dog whistle is the "OK" sign. This "OK" hand gesture is when the index finger and thumb join to create a circle while the rest of the fingers are outstretched, resembling the letters "OK" and has historically been used to show confirmation and agreement, like the thumbs-up. White supremacists have used the same sign to symbolize and spell out the letters "WP" which stands for "white power." This was originally a hoax created on 4chan in 2017 to provoke and incite a reaction from the general public, particularly liberal and left-leaning media. The use of the "OK" sign was strategic. This hoax's goal was to portray liberal media as reactionary and oppressive by assuming that the media would condemn the use of a widespread and harmless symbol. It was originally used ironically, but it has been used in the real world by white supremacists and terrorists (Anti-Defamation League). Brenton Tarrant, the Christchurch shooter, made the "WP" hand sign when he appeared in court. Though members of white supremacist Internet groups insist the content they share and publish is purely ironic and harmless, real-world usage of Internet terminology and symbols shows a clear and more serious connection between terrorism and Internet "irony." Dog whistling and using memes creates ambiguity among Internet discourse, blurring the distinction between right-wing extremist content and mainstream conservative content.

	
<p><i>“OK” hand gesture</i></p>	<p><i>Brenton Tarrant using the symbol in court</i></p>

2.3.1 Incels

The incel or “involuntary celibates” movement is an online subculture consisting of young, lonely men with unsuccessful dating lives and misogynistic attitudes. The incel movement was, ironically enough, founded by a woman named Alana. She created *Alana’s Involuntary Celibacy Project*, a website that came due to her challenging and confusing dating life in college in the 1990s. The website was intended for people to share tips, offer support, and get help from others in similar situations, but the forums quickly evolved into a more sinister platform. Today’s incels are resentful and misogynistic, faulting women for their loneliness. They have a highly pessimistic perspective of the world.

Incels use a term called “blackpilled,” which is a step further from the concept of the “red pill.” This is a reference to the movie *The Matrix* where the protagonist has to choose between a red pill, which reveals the painful truth, or the blue pill, which allows the protagonist to live in ignorant bliss. Incels believe in “taking the red pill” and seeing the painful truth. According to them, women will always prefer and choose men with the highest status and best physical appearance, regardless of personality. The black pill is a more extreme belief that there is a societal sexual class system in which people are classified based on attractiveness, particularly fixed and innate physical features, such as bone structure. Incels believe that they are genetically inferior to others based on their appearances. There is

a specific vocabulary that incels use to classify attractive and unattractive people. Attractive men are called “Chads” and can have different racial variants, including but not limited to “Tyrones,” “Changs,” “Chadpreets,” and “Chaddam.” Attractive women are called “Stacys” and exclusively date and have sex with “Chads” (Beauchamp, *Our Incel Problem*). Women are also referred to as “femoids” or “foids,” stripping them of humanity and reducing them to something robotic and specimen-like. Though their characterizations of people seem absurd and grounded in shallow stereotypes, it has had tragic results. Many incels take their own or other lives as a result of their extreme loneliness and self-hatred (Bu).

2.3.2 Accelerationism

The goal of accelerationism is to increase the level of conflict by provoking and inciting a reaction from the public (Josephsen). The end goal is to radicalize everyone and take part in an inevitable race war, collapse the government, and finally achieve white supremacy and world domination (Beauchamp, *Accelerationism*). There have been similar concepts and instances throughout history of terrorists who increase and accelerate conflict in a way that is both destructive to others and self-destructive. James Nolan Mason, a notorious and vocal American neo-Nazi, summarizes accelerationism by writing, “We do not wish to rock the boat; we intend to sink it” (Mason). This is a quote from his book *SIEGE*, which is a collection of all of Mason’s writings. Traditional neo-Nazis differ from accelerationists because neo-Nazis believe in “saving” the west from other ethnicities. In contrast, accelerationists take it a step further and believe that the west is beyond saving and that the only solution and exit is the total collapse of western society (Josephsen).

2.3.3 Christchurch Mosque Shootings

The Al Noor mosque in Christchurch reported an attack on the 15th of March 2019 at 13:40 local time. A gunman entered the front doors of the mosque and fired randomly from close range at the worshippers. Forty-two people were killed in the attack at Al Noor mosque. The gunman left after six minutes, drove to Linwood mosque, where he continued the massacre. The gunman shot the windows of Linwood mosque, unable to find the main entrance to the building. Several people were hit, but survivors had the chance to hide and escape, as the

gunman had not yet entered the building. Attempts were made to distract the gunman as he retrieved another gun from his car; however, he entered and fired at the prayer hall of Linwood mosque before driving away. Nine people were killed in the attack at Linwood mosque. The gunman was arrested 21 minutes after the first report from Al Noor. Police found explosives in a nearby car. Four suspects were arrested, but three were found not to be involved in the attacks (Bailey, Brown and Qurashi).

The main suspect, revealed to be Brenton Tarrant, had started a livestream on Facebook using a head-mounted camera. The footage begins with Tarrant driving to Al Noor mosque, and ends after the attack at Al Noor, during the drive to Linwood mosque. Tarrant's motive and goal in committing the mass shooting were made clear by investigating his online presence and history. This revealed a 16 500-word manifesto entitled *The Great Replacement*, in which he expressed his anger after visiting Europe and experiencing ethnic diversity in France and a terrorist attack committed in sympathy for the Islamic State in Stockholm. Tarrant's manifesto also shows that the Al Noor mosque attack was planned many months beforehand and was a specific target. The manifesto's general and main idea comes from the ethno-nationalist conspiracy theory of the same name, which sees globalization and ethnic diversity as a threat to white Europeans. The conspiracy theory states that non-white immigrants are beginning the process of completely replacing and reverse-colonizing the white population (Counter Extremism Project). French writer Renaud Camus is the creator of this theory. He published a book in 2012 called *Le Grand Remplacement*, or *The Great Replacement*, in which he describes the extermination of one ethnic group by the reproduction of another ethnic group. Camus claims that the ethnic identity is not significant and that any type of eradication of one group of people by another is to be avoided. However, the real-world racist and xenophobic attitudes that came as a result of the popularization of this conspiracy theory display the white supremacist message that can be read between the lines (Charlton). In recent years this fear of extermination, as described in the conspiracy theory, has been exemplified by the "Unite the Right" rally in 2017 at Charlottesville, where alt-right, white supremacist protesters chanted, "You will not replace us." This directly references *The Great Replacement* (Wildman).

Furthermore, Tarrant frequented Internet forums like 4chan and 8chan, and took part in extremist discussion boards, starting in his adolescence. In addition to forums, Tarrant credits YouTube as a factor in his radicalization (Perry). This is highlighted further by his endorsement of famous YouTuber “PewDiePie” during the livestream of the mass shootings. Tarrant tells the audience of the livestream to “Subscribe to PewDiePie,” in reference to the ongoing online competition between the YouTuber and another large YouTube channel that threatened to take his place as the most subscribed to channel on YouTube at the time. Though PewDiePie, or Felix Kjellberg, publicly denounced and distanced himself from Tarrant, the topic of online influencers, image, and responsibility can be addressed as a result of this connection (Flynn).

3.0 Main Discussion

3.1 Drawbacks of Internet Algorithms

The extreme personalization naturally creates a phenomenon called the “filter bubble.” This occurs when the personalization reaches a level where nearly all the content someone accesses are wholly homogeneous and cut off from the mainstream, isolating the user in an echo chamber. Once the algorithm pieces together a picture of a user’s interests, preferences, and opinions, it will begin to predict and recommend content based on the data it has collected. Eventually, the content and other individuals one reaches will fit the predictions made by the algorithm, preventing other viewpoints or information from reaching a user. This is not done in malice or to push propaganda or a certain narrative upon users but is instead a flaw in how the algorithm is programmed. The new and “foreign” content is filtered out because of its lack of “relevance” to users, isolating them in echo chambers.

In addition, personalization can be corrupt, being used for corporate motives and monetary gain at users’ expenses. As the AI figures out what users enjoy or spend the most time viewing, it will begin to show and suggest similar content. This increases the time spent online and allows websites to show more ads, earning them more money, but with little regard or knowledge of what ideas viewers are being exposed to.

3.1.2 The Alt-Right Pipeline

A trend in the radicalization of young men on YouTube can be observed. YouTube is a platform for online video-sharing that was created in 2005. Today, YouTube is a major source of free entertainment. Different YouTube creators produce unique types of content, often following trends. Popular topics are gaming, beauty, news, and politics. Many YouTube creators are also influencers. As discussed earlier, influencers are more appealing due to their down-to-earth and relatable nature. Many YouTubers gain subscribers from the YouTube algorithm. This encourages YouTubers to put out content that will be recommended to as many people as possible by the algorithm. This may entail using trending buzzwords in video titles, persuading people to click on and watch their videos, even if they are unrelated to the

video itself, or false advertising, sometimes called “clickbait.” YouTube’s “up next” feature speeds up the viewer’s exposure to new content. It automatically plays recommended videos immediately after the first video ends, meaning that without interference, YouTube automatically feeds users with endless content. This digs viewers into a rabbit hole of one-sided opinions, without any outsider input or counterarguments, which eases and coaxes them into picking up extreme ideologies (Roose).

Many alt-right creators have gained subscribers and success thanks to the YouTube algorithm. Their audience, usually young, unhappy white men, have so many similarities in their route to radicalization that the phenomenon has its own name: The Alt-Right Pipeline. Many of these young men start off liberal, or not necessarily conservative, and share feelings of loneliness, isolation, and failure because of economic and emotional struggle. YouTube becomes an escape and resource, and they often seek out self-help channels that, on the surface, seem apolitical, but down the line, begin to voice ideas about gender and race. These YouTube personalities often blame liberalism, feminism, and immigration for the obstacles that white men face. This is introductory to alt-right politics and extreme conspiracy theories. Viewers feel a sense of belonging among the other alt-righters, as they provide explanations and an “other” to blame (Cain). The stream of hyper-personalized content quickly and efficiently aids radicalization.

The observable trend of radicalization on YouTube shows a modern problem and very clear disadvantage of this technology. The efficiency of the process of online self-radicalization displays a serious problem and call for a reformation of what goes on online. Smartphones and personal computers have phased out other forms of entertainment or communication, in addition to the traditional forms of gaining information and news. A bias in the news or an advertisement of a product or lifestyle is unavoidable in a day and age where all recommended media is based on an intricate digital footprint that contains every single detail of every Internet user. It at best sells data to companies who want to push and endorse a product, and at worst, becomes the main factor of an individual’s quick and extreme radicalization.

3.2 Enablement of Hate

As we start to see the connection between terrorist attacks and online behavior, we may start to question the role and responsibility of certain websites and platforms. Many terrorists, as the name implies, thrive on instilling fear and terror. Their goal is to become infamous and to provoke and radicalize, which can be done effortlessly online. Facebook especially has been in the spotlight because of its general popularity and, in particular, after the Christchurch attacks because it was Tarrant's platform of choice when he livestreamed the shooting. Social media sites expressed their struggle to contain the recorded versions of the livestream, showing the lack of awareness of and technology to stop the graphic and hateful content that run rampant on their platforms (BBC News). Though there has been a push to remove certain content on social media, people have expressed concern about free speech and censorship. As private companies, Facebook and Twitter both have the right to block and silence anyone or anything that goes against their terms and conditions. Though this may technically be a removal of free speech, it can be argued that Facebook and Twitter are indirectly responsible for the terrorist attacks, meaning that they have the expectation from the public to prevent similar incidents, and as private companies that have the right and ability to do so. This is further underscored by social media's strict policy against and swift removal of nudity and sexual content, which, although inappropriate, isn't directly dangerous like hate speech is.

Social media have begun to crack down on users and content that are graphic, hateful, and violent in recent years, but this has opened the door to a new issue. Many radical accounts have been kicked out of and blocked from mainstream social media sites, but that has not removed hate speech and the spread of extremism on the Internet. There has been a mass immigration from the main and most popular social media sites like Facebook and Twitter to more anonymous platforms like Telegram. In some ways, the accumulation of extremists on Telegram is even more harmful than the presence of extremists on mainstream sites because it allows their ideologies to develop faster and accelerate freely. It is also more prone to becoming an echo chamber because of its stray from the mainstream light and interaction from other users with different opinions. This shows a dangerous trend of people who seek

out sites and apps that harbor extremists in an unrestricted setting. Either because of infamy or curiosity, 4chan and 8chan have been popular sites for young people to explore, sometimes with the intention to “bombard themselves” with the extreme content on those sites (Josephsen). Additionally, this may indicate that the damage of online radicalization is done because of how effective online extremist propaganda is.

3.3 Extremism’s Friendly Face

Josephsen describes the many layers of irony in alt-right environments to the point where the people making the jokes themselves struggle to distinguish between what’s humoristic and what’s serious. This normalizes extreme viewpoints that are promoted and represented as jokes and memes. Josephsen calls this “irony poisoning.” Memes are, therefore, a very advantageous mode of spreading propaganda because any discussion around or attention to the subject is ridiculed and not taken seriously because of the absurdity in meme culture, especially concerning serious topics like extremism and terrorism. “This is Internet humor that is bleeding out. Even though some of it is jokes and it’s shitposting and [there are] many layers of irony, it doesn’t make it less serious. They are still storming the capital even though they are an absurd bunch,” Josephsen says about the storming of the capital in January 2021. “People have to start understanding that even though something is packaged in an absurd exterior, it has an enormous influence” (Josephsen).

Brenton Tarrant used common memes within the environment of people who had fallen down the YouTube alt-right pipeline, meaning his ideas were not as obscure or hard to reach as one may think. The path to ideologies similar to Tarrant’s is not long or hard to find because there are many overlapping categories of alt-right philosophies that put together radicalize people (Cain). There are, for example, overlapping ideas between incels and race realists, who both believe in genetic or ethnic traits that give or remove value from a person. White supremacists, ethnonationalist, and anti-Semites all believe in a Jewish conspiracy that is the source of mass immigration and “anti-white” policies in Europe and the US (Anti-Defamation League). People who belong to one alt-right community are also not necessarily exclusive to those communities and usually share philosophies with a variety of

online alt-right groups. One very common idea among nearly all alt-right spaces is the idea of “taking the red pill,” or that one is more enlightened than the general public because they see the “truth” and the true nature of the world. This makes alt-righters’ ideologies very extreme, pessimistic, and similar to and a potential introduction to accelerationism.

The culture of alt-right environments appeals to young white men because of its use of humor, irony, and memes. Many of these cultures start from somewhere playful or lightly mischievous like a simple YouTube video or 4chan in its early days. Although the ideologies and philosophies turned more sinister, the memes and jokes stayed the same. This gave the Internet subcultures a façade of silliness while bigoted ideas were being exchanged behind the scenes. Additionally, the memes resonate with young people more than other means of communication because they are more grounded and personal. Though they definitely render alt-right philosophies harmless and have played a part in an increase in online radicalization, memes and the unique vocabulary of these environments may be one of the few ways to reach in and coax people out of the pipeline (Cain).

As discussed, the spread of extremism is not stopped by de-platforming users; people will find new methods and sites, often anonymous, to prevent suppression, to spread their ideologies. Though efforts have been made to take down online hate speech and hate groups, they have found ways to return, this time with more animosity after being silenced. This suggests a deeper-rooted issue that will not be halted by terms and conditions. In a way, the attempts at smothering extremism on the Internet at this point are futile. The echo chambers and accelerationism already exist, and measures to prevent the spread of extremism were long overdue by the time social media companies started taking action to remove hate speech. However, the companies are not solely at fault since this online radicalization phenomenon is recent and the link to terrorist attacks was not as clear as it is now. We have just recently caught onto what goes on online, and the network of radicals that explain the “lone wolf” attacks that have grown in popularity.

By observing the common denominators in the people who are most vulnerable to extremist groups and echo chambers, we can uncover deeper social issues of the 21st century, like loneliness, economic instability, competition, and isolation. The features that provide immense convenience, like the digitalization of many everyday tasks, also render social contact and face-to-face interaction useless and unnecessary. In very competitive societies with high expectations, there are people who are not able to keep up and eventually give up on becoming functioning members of society. They completely shut themselves off the rest of the world and spend all of their time alone in their room or houses, where their social interactions are limited to talking to people online. This phenomenon can be observed in high-competition countries like Japan, South Korea, the US, and in some areas in Norway like Bærum. This is further proven to potentially be a factor of what pushes someone to spend an excessive amount of time online, becoming isolated and vulnerable to the extreme ideas that come packaged as a comfort, escape, or outlet for lonely individuals. Norway's most notorious and recent white supremacist terrorists, Breivik and Manshaus, are from Bærum and west-Oslo. This disproves the misconception that low-income and working-class people tend to be more conservative and subsequently alt-right. Instead, we can observe deeper psychological issues that stem from high societal expectations and loneliness that play a part in self-radicalization. Loneliness in the age of the Internet can make young men vulnerable to picking up dangerous and destructive world views. Incels, for example, have violently misogynistic and dehumanizing opinions that stem from loneliness and later resentment. Many young white men who experience loss or struggle may feel resentment towards society, often not pinpointing a specific oppressor since they have a significant amount of privilege that women and minorities lack. This is why many extremists believe in conspiracy theories that scapegoat and eventually are violent towards different religions, women, and different racial backgrounds.

4.0 Conclusion

To summarize, there are tools and features on the Internet that have played a factor in a significant fraction of recent terrorist attacks. It has reached a point where silencing extremists is trivial because of their ability to fly under the radar, which they are able to because of their method and fashion of communicating and spreading hate. The most effective method is memes because of their sheer absurdity and ability to deflect any discussion surrounding hate speech between the lines. Being low-profile and unaffiliated with earlier terrorist attacks granted extremists some protection from censorship, and helped slowly normalize alt-right ideas in the mainstream media. Both are the factors to the large online presence of extremists and accelerationists. The choice in case study for this paper was meticulously selected from the many recent violent attacks that online extremists have committed. The Christchurch attack is unique in some ways and a representation of similar attacks in other ways. Tarrant was directly inspired by Breivik and his manifesto, which was amplified and accelerated by his online activity. The attack itself was livestreamed onto Facebook, one of the major social media platforms. Thereafter, the video was shared, and Tarrant received praise and was celebrated in accelerationist channels on Telegram, directly inspiring Manshaus, who committed a racially motivated murder just months after the Christchurch attacks. Tarrant's entire process, from online indoctrination to mass murder and finally inspiration to other violent extremists, thoroughly displays and reflects the ongoing radicalization of others and the potentially tragic outcomes. By exploring this case, we also see the common denominator in different individuals' radicalizations, and the thesis of the paper, which is how the Internet and online factors play a part in every step of this process. Furthermore, it highlights a trend that we are finally picking up on and investigating.

Removal and blockage of radicalized individuals from mainstream sites have pushed them onto anonymous sites like 4chan, 8chan, and Telegram, in other words being fruitless in eradicating hate speech and echo chambers online. Systems that drive individuals into extremist echo chambers do not solely exist on anonymous forums, as proven by YouTube and their role in providing an alt-right pipeline. My findings show a larger societal issue of

growing loneliness and isolation to be the root factor to people seeking fellowship in extreme environments and having higher vulnerability to alt-right propaganda. However, due to algorithms, AI, and online subcultures, the Internet plays a role that allows self-radicalization to happen at a level and speed like never seen before and has directly resulted in violence and tragedy.

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