COUNTRY-LEVEL REPORTS ON DRIVERS OF SELF-RADICALISATION AND DIGITAL SOCIABILITY

Introduction

DARE
Dialogue About
Radicalisation & Equality

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DARE: Dialogue about Radicalisation and Equality

D5.1 Country level reports on drivers of self-radicalisation and digital sociability

Introduction

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1. Introduction

1.1 Overall presentation of research on media assisted self-radicalisation within the DARE project

DARE is a 'Research & Innovation Action' collaborative research project funded under H2020, involving seven partners in seven countries, and runs from May 2017 to April 2021, involving 17 partners in 13 countries.

DARE aims to significantly enhance our understanding of why and how young people become radicalised, that is, adopt radical ideologies with the potential for violent action. It does so through conceptual innovation and refinement based on new empirical research on young people's encounters with messages and agents of radicalisation, their receptivity and responses to them and the paths they subsequently take. Radicalisation is defined within the DARE project as "*the process by which individuals or groups come to embrace attitudes, or engage in actions, that support violence in the pursuit of extremist causes."[1]* The project focuses on youth, a group targeted by recruiters and conventionally understood to be particularly receptive to radical ideologies. However, it approaches young people not as weak or failed citizens but as engaged, reflexive, often passionate, social actors in a world where the sources of and calls to radicalisation are numerous and encountered in conditions of widespread disillusionment with traditional ways of making sense of, and contributing to, society (via individual social mobility, political activism, conventional religious practices, etc.). Through sustained engagement in the lives of young people as they navigate personal and collective uncertainty and insecurity, researchers will generate high quality empirical data that will significantly improve our understanding of the scope, origins, causes and psychological, emotional and social dynamics of radicalisation. By addressing both dimensions of the topic - radicalisation, violence and hate crime, and radicalisation and religious fundamentalism – DARE will: broaden the scope of our understanding of radicalisation(s); demonstrate that radicalisation is not located exclusively in any one religion or community; and (through its focus on radical Islamists[2] and the extreme right as well as anti-Islam(ists)[3]) explore how radicalisation processes interact and may have cumulative effects in society.

The research has been conducted through a number of parallel studies including the systematic review of the evidence base to date, expert interviews with policy makers and practitioners, secondary survey

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[1] The definition of the concept as defined by the DARE project can be found at the following link: http://www.dare-h2020.org/concepts.html

[2] In the DARE research project, "*Islamism describes the interaction between Islam and politics, as manifested in the discursive and actual positions on ideology and governance in Muslim states and societies. Radical Islamism is often used as a synonym for violent expressions of Islamism such as Jihadism.*" When referring to the notion of "radical Islamists" we therefore seek to emphasise the violent expression of Islamism. (see concepts used in the DARE project at the following link: http://www.dare-h2020.org/concepts.html)

[3] The term anti-Islamist refers to people who engage in "*active opposition to what its proponents refer to as 'radical Islam' or the 'Islamification' of western societies but often includes a more general antipathy towards Islam or all Muslims.*" The term extreme right encompasses "*a political ideology characterised by opposition to democracy and which frequently espouse biological racism and anti-Semitism.*" Both expressions will be used to capture the work carried out in the reports associated with this General Introduction and more generally in the DARE project (see all major concepts used in the DARE project at the following link: http://www.dare-h2020.org/concepts.html)

data analysis, experimental surveys and ethnographic studies of radicalisation milieus. The part of the project reported on here concerns the role of the Internet and social media in processes of self-radicalisation. The term self-radicalisation refers to a type of radicalisation process that designates the radicalising individual as the instigator of the process. Self-radicalisation should be distinguished from radicalisation whereby an individual is recruited by a radical organisation and is subsequently radicalised, or a radicalisation process whereby the individual follows the radicalisation process of a collective entity that the individual identifies with. The DARE study investigates self-radicalisation specifically in relation to the role of participatory media in the process. In line with the dual focus of the DARE project as a whole, this study is concerned with the role of participatory media in the self-radicalisation of people identifying as supporters of i) radical Islamist and ii) anti-Islam(ist) or wider far right groups.

1.2 The role of the Internet in self-radicalisation processes

Discussions about young people's media practices and contemporary forms of radicalisation, namely jihadism and the far right, are often intermixed with clichés about how media affects behaviour and triggers violent acts. Taking part in social networks on Facebook, Twitter, or YouTube can be perceived as dangerous in that young people's consumption of propaganda messages circulating online could lead to enlisting in radical causes. Media have been said to contribute to the process of radicalisation, helping to explain how it occurs and spreads. Within the frame of such debates, the Internet and social media are implicated in both ideological radicalisation and recruitment through what is termed 'self-radicalisation'.

The relative importance of targeted 'recruitment', wider social networks and relations, and 'self-radicalisation' through the Internet was a key debate in the early years of 2010. Youth in particular were at the centre of debates as they had been identified as a target for 'fertilisers' or 'radicalisers' (O'Neill and McGrory, 2006; Hoffman, 2009). Cheong and Halverson (2010) for example published a paper in which they detailed the discursive strategies employed by Al Qaeda to construct a persuasive collective Jihadist youth identity. At that time, Al Qaeda had indeed successfully marketed its global identity as 'the aspirational brand' (Venhaus, 2010: 7). A similar analysis had been extended to ISIS as it exploited the potential of 'jihadi cool' (originally coined by Sageman in relation to Al-Qaeda) to encourage young western-born Muslims to identify with Islamist extremism (Picart, 2015: 361-4). While young men were the primary targets for recruitment at that time, ISIS also targeted young women, leading to what has been called a surge in 'jihadi girl power subculture', as young women who have travelled to Syria to marry radical jihadi warriors, promote their lives via the Internet (Saleh, 2014). Since the years 2010-2015, the geopolitical landscape has undergone drastic changes with the collapse of ISIS territorially, and numerous takedown campaigns on the Internet, that the medial and political landscape are quite different now. Massive crackdowns of the main digital platforms, such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, have become commonplace, preventing any actual direct recruitment to take place. Violent extremist accounts have a short shelf life, with takedowns being widespread, especially for accounts promoting Islam radicalism (Conway, 2019). Terrorist organisations themselves have been greatly diminished in the forces and in the field. Accordingly, extremist accounts on mainstream social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter generally have a short shelf life, with takedowns being widespread (prompting backup and secondary accounts). This has made it more difficult for communities or milieus of extremism to manifest, socialise and expand on such platforms.

The underlying debate nonetheless pertains. The Internet and social media provide violent radicals with a means of reaching larger and more diverse audiences (Conway, 2012). In this way, public debates frame advances in technology as a means for extremists to exploit disaffected youth, taking advantage of social networking sites, online video channels and radical chat rooms. Violent extremists exploit mobile technologies not only through their own dedicated websites but also by disseminating content via social networking sites such as Facebook and Bebo, video-sharing sites such as YouTube, dedicated blogs and Twitter.

These debates are of high relevance to the work carried out in the DARE project. However, we take a side step from most of this body of research since radicalisation is often framed as a mere 'effect' of reception of content. This approach is outdated in media studies; it goes back to literature from the 50's, often cited in reference to the 'hypodermic needle' theory. With the ethnographic turn of the mid 80's, media studies in general, and Internet studies in particular, no longer focus on reception - i.e. how people receive a message - but concentrate nowadays rather on how people are using social media and how they interpret their uses. To understand the processes of self-radicalisation online, it is therefore relevant to focus on users' media participation. In line with other elements of the DARE research, we are particularly concerned with whether we can observe the existence of online milieus in which young people participate and through which they encounter extremist content that may have a radicalising impact.

1.3 Media participation practices and access to the public sphere

The heuristic change in approaches reflects broader transformations of the political and media scenes. Over the last two decades, a growing process of mediatisation of social ties, linked to the development of the Internet and information and communication technologies (ICTs), has changed the ways in which people produce their identities, create new relationships and engage in politics. On the political front, the communicative practices of activists, non-governmental organisations and social movements are increasingly tied to social network platforms like Facebook, Twitter or YouTube. Such platforms provide activists with a number of resources, from organising offline events such as street mobilisation, to promoting ideological material. Primarily though, such platforms are used for their public sphere properties; as an access point to enter public debates and to engage in symbolic power struggles and conflicts between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic narratives (Cammaerts 2012). In this, communication devices connected to the Internet provide new opportunities for both activists and social movements (Della Porta and Diani 2006, Van Laer, Van Aelst 2010), and of course, extremist political organisations intent on building support beyond the walls of their followers.

This evolution, which is characteristic of a digital culture, started gaining momentum in the early 2000s with the dissemination of 'participatory media' (Deuze 2006), i.e. technological tools by means of which the user consumes, produces and disseminates cultural contents. This media could also be described as 'radical', 'autonomous', 'alternative', 'tactical', 'community' or 'citizens' depending on the author (Kidd, Rodriguez 2009). What all these terms have in common is that they emphasise the fact that the development of participatory media operates a major shift on the political scene; a large part of media content is now manufactured by users themselves, generating a transfer of authority from the cultural industries to their consumers (Jenkins 2006). Through this participatory turn, social actors play an eminently active role in the creation of culture by benefiting from direct access to the public sphere via the Internet (Livingstone 2013). Culture, understood in the anthropological sense of the term, is understood here as an everyday object (Hoggart 1957, Williams 1958, De Certeau 1980),

an object of self-determination and self-expression (Fiske 1989), as well as the site of symbolic struggles and hegemonic and counter-hegemonic power relations (Fraser 2005). The redefinition of the boundaries of the public sphere with the development of participatory media thus refers to an issue that is both ideological and political. Access to political representation through media arenas, i.e. websites such as Twitter or Facebook, facilitates the legitimisation or modification of the frameworks of interpretation, which in turn endorses or transforms this or that legislative and institutional arbitration. As the digital contributions of ordinary citizens are likely to weigh on democratic balances, there is no shortage of new forms of activism, resistance or dissent taking shape on the web.

When applied to self-radicalisation and the investigation under discussion in this report, social networking site platforms provide access to digital arenas of public debate and large communities of practices that could pave the way to recruitment or lead to self-radicalisation. In an era when counter-hegemonic groups may emerge through counter narratives, censorship from gatekeepers is weakened and know-how in terms of political tactics, techniques, and strategies is shared openly and freely, it is important to pursue the scientific understanding of the role played by social media in self-radicalisation processes. This is what the DARE study reported on here has set out to do.

2. Research questions

2.1. Objectives of the study
The DARE study of how digital media participation contributes to self-radicalisation focuses on:

- the means by which radicalisation is expressed including the formats adopted (e.g. whether content is political, promotional, fictional, etc.)

- the rationales participants identify with whether these rationales pertain to preferred topics of discussions, online leaders of opinions (typically digital influencers), or simply an overall style related to an ideological movement (through self-presentations of digital identities for instance); what are the main signifiers at play, that if properly identified helped determine how to de-escalate engagement in violence?

- the extent to which resources for radicalisation are conveyed through online publication and thus the potential for online content to persuade casual participants to join extremist groups;

- what makes these forms of digital sociability attractive? What do participants identify with? What does engaging in a community of like-minded people offer? Or help alleviate?

The overall objectives of the study are therefore:

- To determine how participatory media contribute to the process of self-radicalisation among young Europeans supporting Islamist and far right-wing ideologies.

- To identify sociological, linguistic and psychological group rationales behind the process of self-radicalisation.

- To identify online resources (persuasive means, sociotechnical resources, propaganda-type discourses) for self-radicalisation.

- To analyse gender differences between resources for, and processes of, media-assisted self-radicalisation.

- To suggest counteracting strategies and actions to media-assisted self-radicalisation.

2.2 Structure of country-level reports

The series of 7 country level reports that follow this General Introduction tackle these questions by using a mixed method approach, based on ethnographic observations and big data methods, that allow four levels of analysis to be developed. Accordingly, country-level reports are structured as follows:

1. Section 1 is an introduction to the country level report. Divided into 3 subsections, (i) it specifies the national media and political setting while presenting the role of the Internet in radicalisation of the given country, (ii) introduces the country-level sample and (iii) lays the basis for the analysis carried out in the following four sections by outlining the structure of the report.

2. In Section 2, a quantitative analysis of the country-level datasets allows us to outline the characteristics of each of the samples. Specifically, each country-level data set is described in terms of: quality of the data; distribution and representativity of samples; time periods of media activity; patterns of participation and levels of integration. Findings allow us to start considering whether the participants in each sample can be considered to constitute online milieus.

3. In section 3, the contribution to understanding offered by employing an ethnographic approach is showcased. In this section, we consider participants': repertoires of action (also discussed as 'formats of participation'); self-presentations; and internal and external labelling processes. The complementary approaches of staging and framing identities provides insight as to how people use Twitter, perform digital social identities on this public media stage, and finally, to what extent the conception of their identities as radicals is the by-product of internal and external labelling processes. In short, this section captures how people can be pictured as radical because of the tweets they publish, the identity they portray, and/or because of the ways in which people react to their media participation, or they themselves perceive their identity as radical.

4. Key themes and influencing factors, likely to support claims that the Internet harbours self-radicalisation triggers, are investigated in section 4. In this section we explore: what participants are saying; what the events are that influence what people are saying; and who influences these conversations. Throughout discrete sections covering content, events and influencers, we reflect on the role of online conversations and leaders of opinions for self-radicalisation, and question whether topics of discussion and direct access to leaders of opinions constitute persuasive threats.

5. In section 5, the existence of digital milieus of radicalisation are examined in each national context and/or in relationship to users in a national setting by using a network analysis

perspective. This section pays attention to: how connected people are online through a sample-based analysis of networks; who they are connected with; and how conversations are being conducted on the web.

It is important to stress that while the structure of each country level report is organised around 5 main sections, as we have detailed here, each section contains relatively autonomous subsections, representing at its own level an analysis based on specific methods and/or datasets/observations.

3. Methodological Protocol

3.1 Target groups: personal accounts of men and women from 7 European countries

The target groups for this study are people, generally born and raised in seven European countries (Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, the Netherlands, Norway and the United Kingdom) currently experiencing strong radicalisation trends with an increase in far-right votes and/or Islamist radicalism (e.g. through terrorist attacks) (see Figure 1).

Premised on the lack of a definitive split between 'self-radicalisation' and social contexts of radicalisation (Pantucci, 2011), the initial objective of the study was to compare the ways in which online networks of Islamist and far right radicalisation are formed via media participation in Facebook (FB) by studying personal pages and group-type pages.
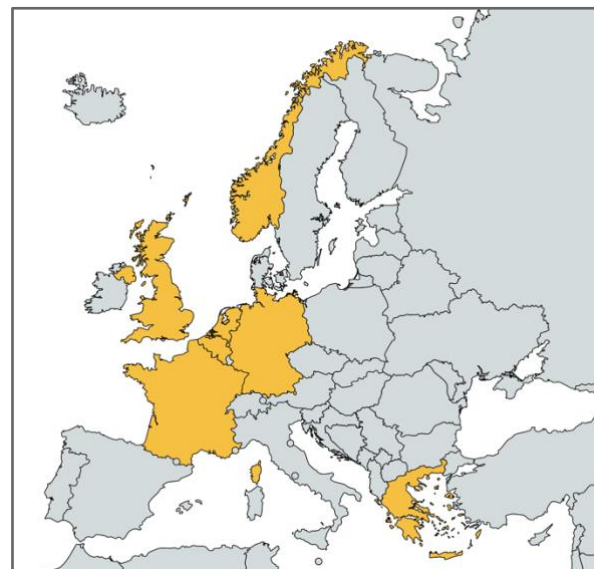

Figure 1 - Map of the countries investigated in this study

In the initial research design – constructed at the point of project proposal - 50 'personal' accounts (women, n=25; men, n=25) were scheduled to be selected from Facebook per stream of radicalisation, amounting to a total of 100 personal accounts per country. In addition to these 50 'personal accounts', the study aimed to consider group dynamics by selecting 20 group-type pages, i.e. 10 pages per type of radicalisation for each country. The kinds of pages that were intended for inclusion are illustrated in Plates 1-2.

Plate 1

Plate 2

Public groups (open to the public or private users) (Plate 1):

- Groups administered by moderators ;

- Content is open to be shared by members of the group if an open group, or private in the case of a closed group ;

- Publications and comments are available to all if an open group, or on the contrary, unavailable when closed.

Profiles (open to the public or private users) (Plate 2):

- Personal page of a user related to a single person;

- Openness and private property functions in the same way as for groups; open personal profile can be seen, commented on and shared by all; private profiles undergo a series of different sorts of restrictions.

The logic of this design was to shift study away from the usual focus in the study of radicalisation and extremism on opinion shapers or political organisations, in order to demonstrate how communication strategies of such entities have developed to incorporate the widespread use of ICT. In contrast, the focus in DARE on personal accounts was designed to capture bottom-up perspectives, providing insight into what strengthens radicalisation at the level of the public and their interpersonal communication. Notwithstanding the subsequent changes to the methodology described below, this commitment to focusing on personal account-type pages of random citizens (rather than political leaders) remained the guiding principle of the study.

3.2. Redesigning the study: From Facebook to Twitter

3.2.1 Using a cross-platform approach to select samples of personal accounts from Twitter

As outlined above, the original intention was to collect data from samples of personal profiles and group pages on Facebook. However, the study was overtaken by the profound changes in the availability of data for researcher access between the time of the original research design and that of implementation. Specifically, the Cambridge Analytica scandal transformed Internet-mediated research in general (Schneble et al. 2018)[4] and led Facebook to restrict access for researchers. By the time we came to implement the DARE study, therefore, researchers could no longer scrape large amounts of data from Facebook pages as originally planned.

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[4] https://www.embopress.org/doi/full/10.15252/embr.201846579

To work around the evolution of the landscape following the changes made to the Facebook platform, researchers decided to open the scope of observation to integrate Twitter and collect data from the latter platform to create a sample of 'personal accounts'. In short, we kept Facebook for group pages, and set out to retrieve 10 pages per country, per form of radicalisation. For personal pages, however, we switched over to Twitter in order to retrieve 100 pages per country, with 50 pages for each strand of radicalisation.

By integrating Twitter accounts into our sample, we developed what we could call a cross-platform approach. The reasoning behind the notion of a cross-platform approach consists in identifying personal accounts on Facebook and then finding their counterpart on Twitter. We know that users usually have accounts on different social networking sites, whether it be YouTube, Instagram, Facebook or Twitter. Thus, the intention was to use direct observation to identify a personal account on one platform - i.e. Facebook - then cross over to other platform - i.e. Twitter - and find the matching user account. Based on this reasoning, researchers could still use Facebook to identify accounts of interest, then scroll through Twitter to find the 'symmetric' account; both accounts were ultimately listed within the country-level sample. If a personal page on Facebook did not have a counterpart page on Twitter, it was not to be added to the country-level sample.

The cross-platform approach can be summarised as follows in plate 3:

Explanation of the cross-platform approach

All pages selected to create a sample are __open pages made public by the user__

1. **Selection of a sample through direct ethnographic observation**

   - Online direct ethnographic observation allows to select a sample of Facebook extremist accounts. __No deviation from the original plan__.
   - On the basis of this sample from Facebook (FB), corresponding Twitter accounts will be searched manually. If researchers do not find a sufficient number of accounts on Facebook due to the media landscape changes, they may also use Twitter to create their sample. __The main change here is that direct ethnographic observation is conducted on a second platform, that is to say Twitter rather than only Facebook.__

2. **Data Retrieval & Anonymisation through automatized processes**

   - At this point, an automated retrieval process can begin. __Concerning FB, the automated retrieval process *via* Netvizz software is the same as before.__
   - As for Twitter, the data retrieval process targets public open access accounts as stated above. Data collection is ensured by open source fairuse scripts. __This type of information is exactly the same kind of data as the partners had initially set out to retrieve on FB before the redesign of the platform. Therefore, this approach does not seek to collect any new type of material.__

   => **Once data is retrieved, we go back to the original plan: all data collected will be anonymised upon entry into the database.**

Plate 3

3.2.2 How the evolution of the media landscape affects the goals of the study
The change in methodological protocol has had consequences for the information we were able to retrieve and therefore it impacts on the analysis we can offer.

Nowadays, very little personal data is made public by websites, especially on a platform like Twitter, and it has also become illegal to retrieve such information since the passing of the GDPR laws. Given the lack of personal information about users on Twitter, we can no longer properly describe the socio-demographic profile of our samples as we had set out to do in the project proposal. We simply do not have any information on the education or the professional situation, and rarely have information on the age, of users.

Despite being unable to collect extensive personal data on individuals, we were nonetheless cautious to select accounts in which people specified their gender and their country of origin. We can still exploit a number of significant indicators that help portray a general picture of how random citizens are using the web to self-radicalise, as well as who is using online resources to carry out such an agenda. This information is of high importance and well-portrayed in section 3 of the country level reports.

Another consequence resulting from the change in platforms, is that it was scientifically irrelevant to present both material scrapped from FB and Twitter side-by-side, given that datasets are different in nature. Furthermore, there would have been too large a number of levels of analysis to include in a single report without affecting the readability and quality of the report. Researchers therefore only present results based on observation and datasets collected on Twitter. By doing so, the general focus remains on random users instead of political organisations.

3.3 Criteria for the selection of accounts

3.3.1 Sample: creation techniques

The main resource used to select accounts for the data-scraping phase and the collection of observations was direct ethnographic observation (Sept.-Dec. 2018). Techniques used in addition to direct observation: informant/ interviews, snowball technique, automated search based on keywords (e.g. see Table 2), and tracker accounts. Also 20+ criteria were used to single out the specificities of the accounts that researchers were looking for (see Table 1)[5].

List of criteria		
- Anti-immigration - Ultra-nationalism - Superiority - Focus on purity - Violence - Misogyny - Ultra-nationalism - Promotion of gender roles - Conspiracy - Racism	- Authoritarianism (hierarchical structure with a strong leader) - Anti-democratic - Victimhood (e.g. unjustly imprisoned) - Militaristic - Anti-system - Hate speech - Salafism	- Religious fundamentalism (Catholic, Orthodox or Islamic extremism) - Anti-politically correct - Anti-semitism - Martyrdom - Jihad

Table 1 - List of criteria used by most researchers to select accounts

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[5] Any deviation from this is described in the relevant country-level report.

In addition, researchers used a series of keywords, potentially able to help identify radical ideologies. For example, in the French case, the following keywords were used to try and identify accounts that would potentially fit the criteria of the study.

RIGHT-WING EXTREMISTS	ISLAMIST EXTREMISTS
Using publicly recognised extremist groups/organisations	
- Dissidence, Synthèse Nationale, Civitas, etc.	Daech, Boko Haram, Al-Qaïda au Maghreb islamique (AQMI), le Mouvement Unité et djihad en Afrique de l'Ouest (MUJAO), les shebaab, Ansar Dine, El Mourabitoun, Les Signataires par le Sang
Using infamous Extremists/Events well-known within a national context	
- Preachers (close to takfiri, khariji, salafis, djihad, khawarij) - Political party extremist leaders - Names of Attacks, Famous Protests, Radical acts of violence	In France, just by going on Google and searching for those who had made the headlines and were labelled as radicals, and were possibly in prison, opened the door to a sample.
Propaganda Outlets	
- al hayat media - ajnad media - amaq agency - alfurat news - rumiyah (for magazines like this, we add an issue number to the query to narrow the field e.g. rumiyah issue 4) - dabiq	

Table 2 - Keywords used to help identify samples

As this table illustrates, more keywords were used to identify the Islamist extremist samples than the right-wing samples, because online Islamist radicalisation was difficult to find for various reasons, as the country-level reports demonstrate.

In addition to these criteria and keywords, interviews with radicalisation experts could be carried out at the very beginning of the pilot phase to have a better understanding of the digital landscape and/or acknowledge publicly recognised influencers still active online. As for what was mentioned earlier as 'tracker accounts', they sometimes came in handy to find highly radical accounts on Twitter. Tracker accounts, also self-proclaimed 'hunting' accounts, are accounts operated by bots that search for pro-

ISIS accounts, for example. Once a handful of active accounts were spotted, the snowball technique was used to unravel more interlinked accounts.

In short, time was spent examining the overall dynamics and following the participation of strong contributors of the online scene of each social media platform in order to identify the most prolific and relevant accounts to select. The final selection of the most appropriate accounts was based on: gender; strong participation, on a weekly basis and/or over time; high connectivity with other self-proclaimed supporters of radical ideologies; status within the network observed; and representativeness of media participation in terms of material and positioning. As much as possible, only user accounts labelling themselves as radicals were selected. For example, in the case of the right wing, people who declare themselves as being 'fascist' in the presentation section of their Twitter page would be highly favoured over an account section without any type of social marker. In addition, users had to fit within the range of what was defined as radical by the researchers, based on a series of markers (see Table 1). As far as possible, all selected accounts had to correspond to at least 5 of these criteria to be considered as relevant to the study.

3.3.2 Limitations and shortcomings in selecting an online sample

Whilst accounts were selected through these general guidelines, it is important to highlight some of the limitations in selecting an online sample. Expert Philip Howard from the Oxford Institute of Internet Studies claims that 50% of all Twitter accounts are robots (2016). His numbers are quite close to the ones registered by the IT company Imperva Incapsula, recorded back in 2016[6]. Twitter is regularly the object of stories about the proliferation of robots and specifically robots meant to spam the platform with disinformation-type tweets. These robots - also known as 'bots' or 'automated entities' - exist all over social media websites. Over the years, bots have become notorious for the many purposes they serve: hijacking topics related to specific hashtags; substantially increasing follower numbers; distributing fake information; marketing products etc. Thus, researchers paid close attention to not add bots to their selected sample of accounts. Nonetheless, the methods used to analyse data collected in the study do not allow us to properly evaluate the role of bots in conversations or content production samples in general, which could affect lexical analysis carried out in section 4 of all country level reports.

Another element to keep in mind with online sampling, is that the Internet provides the opportunity for people to simulate their identity rather than state who they really are. However, as Cardon (2010) rightfully points out, this is truer of certain platforms than others. A platform such as LinkedIn harbours less simulated identities than one like Tumblr. Twitter is considered to be positioned around the middle of this spectrum; people can use pseudonyms to hide their real identities but are more often than not far from what is considered a simulated identity (ibid.).

However, either of these two factors could have led researchers to create a sample of 'fake' accounts and thus several measures were adopted to prevent this. While 50% of Twitter accounts may be robots, this does not mean we cannot identify which are the fake accounts, especially when conducting direct ethnographic observation. Also, websites call for different patterns of behaviour and thus some websites tend to harbour more fake identities than others. For example, LinkedIn hosts a larger number of real identities than Reddit. Internet researchers have made clear that platforms

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[6] https://www.imperva.com/blog/bot-traffic-report-2016/
https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/2b8f/dd673696a2f7b51b20c8b98ebfb5b4d04aaf.pdf

that call for personal social networking - i.e. establishing online relationships with close networks of family, friends and colleagues - are more likely to harbour actual identities. Hence Cardon states that Facebook and Twitter support real identities rather than simulated ones (Cardon *et al.* 2009). Yet, it is impossible to completely rule out the possibility of selecting fake accounts. As stated above, direct observation allowed us to quickly determine which accounts were operated by bots. Direct observation also helped identify which accounts were related to people, exchanging actively, with actual content, as opposed to pop-up like robot accounts pushing out random content.

3.3.3 Pro-ISIS VS. anti-ISIS online power struggle: example of accounts that were dismissed

We were able to observe the effect of bots on Twitter during the data-collection sample phase of the investigation. Over the course of several months of direct observation, we often came across bot-related operations opposing pro-ISIS accounts and anti-ISIS accounts.

These accounts are of a different nature to the ones we set out to study in the DARE project. What we observed were very lively and active online groups which were part of the greater ecosystem of what was happening on Twitter and more generally on the web. The online power struggle, tied to the use of online bots and automatic tracking systems, opposing pro-ISIS accounts to a global army of "hunters"/ anti-ISIS users that have been tracking, flagging and taking down content and user accounts on a daily basis over the past few years. Direct observation therefore revealed technical-type operations related to an online fight between publics and counter-publics. This struggle may be technically operated, however, it is nonetheless managed and operated by soft skills and people behind the screens (see Plates 4-5).

- Pop-up accounts attempt to create holes in censorship, understanding that these accounts will be deleted within a matter of hours, at best days;
- Automatised activity: robots scan platforms to identify pop-up accounts & robots that push content online.

Plate 4 - Example of a Pop-up account

Plate 5 - Example of a Tracker account

Even though these accounts exemplify how radicalisation is supported by social-technical means, being an active part of the Twitter ecosystem and contemporary trends, these accounts were not selected to be part of the final samples. They were considered to be out of scope. Since our focus is not on political organisations but random citizens, such accounts could not be selected because

nothing actually allowed us to know whether we were dealing with random citizens, fan boys or girls, leaders of opinion or actual members of ISIS.

While we set aside this specific repertoire of action, it is important to keep in mind that such trends exist on Twitter, for the Islamist accounts, just as much as for the far-right accounts.

3.4 Research methods

The mixed-method approach adopted for this study combined digital ethnography and big data techniques and was implemented across 3 phases (see Table 3):

1. Phase 1: Selection of a sample and collection of an account of ethnographic observations Creation of 7 country level samples via preliminary ethnographic fieldwork (direct observation combined with other techniques) to gather relevant Internet user accounts 2. Phase 2: Data Retrieval, Anonymisation through automatised processes, Creation of a Database & Preparation of the collected material for analysis Software (automatic collection of massive amounts of data, i.e. big data) to gather raw data on self-radicalisation & media participation, but also help organise data and analyse this material 3. Phase 3: Analysis of data sets and observations

Illustration 1: Locaux de l'IRIT - Campus Paul Sabatier

During phase 2, an academic partner in computer sciences from the University of Toulouse (IRIT Research Lab), was contracted to:
- Scrape & store data in a secure safe centre
- Organise data in a database
- assist in analysing data

Table 3 - Methodological protocol

3.4.1 Phase 1: Pilot study for the selection of a sample

A three-month pilot study, conducted from September to December 2018 (Month 17 to Month 19), served to select a sample of approximately 50 personal Twitter pages (n = 25 men and 25 women) and 10 Facebook (FB) pages per type of radicalisation studied (right-wing and Islamist extremists). Researchers set out to collect a total of 120 accounts (100 personal accounts from Twitter and 20 'pages' from FB) to create the sample for each country and populate the database (n=840).

At the end of phase 1, the number of accounts identified and selected was 730. The number of pages for each country and type of radicalisation was collected as follows. Exact numbers for each country, type of radicalisation and gender are presented in the country-level reports.

3.4.2 Phase 2: Data Retrieval, anonymisation, automatised processes and database creation

At the end of the data collection phase, a total of 596 Twitter accounts and approximately 572,207 tweets had been retrieved. These accounts covered a time frame from May 2009 to February 2019

and were scraped as far back as possible, i.e. from the first day of their existence[7] to the end of the data collection phase on 23 February 2019. It should be noted that 134 accounts from the original sample (18%) were deleted/suspended during this phase due to suppression of accounts by users or deletion of accounts by administrators. This left a total of 462 Twitter accounts in the final database (see Table 4).

TWITTER		UK		NOR		FRA		NLD		GRC		BEL		GER		Tot
		W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	
	IS	6	26	15	22	21	18	22	16	0	0	16	22	15	9	208
	RW	26	41	N/A	N/A	23	22	23	27	16	22	4	13	13	24	254
	Tot	32	67	15	22	44	40	45	43	16	22	20	35	28	33	462

Table 4 - Number of accounts collected for the Twitter sample for each country

As Facebook is not presented in the country-level reports that follow, details of these accounts are not provided here. However, it is important to note that 165 accounts were scraped and the total amounts of scraped publications per country are presented in Table 5.

Facebook		UK	NOR	FRA	NLD	GRC	BEL	GER	Tot
	IS	5184	7832	N/A	5525	1450	N/A	9172	29163
	RW	N/A	5611	2139	8021	8655	5611	9053	39090

Table 5 - Number of posts collected for the Facebook sample for each country

Facebook pages were scraped over a two-year period, from the autumn of 2016 to the autumn of 2018. For technical reasons, it was not possible to scrape further back in time. It was also necessary to abandon a larger part of the collection campaign due to the progressive limitations applied by Facebook in the course of the data collection phase, which continued three months after the pilot phase (from February 2019 to April 2019) because of an increase in limitations imposed by Facebook. Twitter pages, on the other hand, were scraped as far back as possible, collecting posts back to 2010 for some countries.

3.4.3 Phase 3: Analysis observations (phase 1) and data (phase 2)
This phase is the one presented in the reports, introducing findings and results based on observations collected during the pilot phase and datasets collected by means of the pilot phase, and scraped in the months after that phase. In each of the 5 sections and 16 subsections of the reports, the type of data analysed is specified.

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[7] At least in theory since technical glitches may prevent full reproducibility.

In the country level reports, we first present the findings for the RWE sample, then the results for the ISE sample. The data analysis techniques used to generate findings presented in the reports are identical, that is:

- Section 1 corresponds to a country-level review of the literature matching the country presented in the given report, plus specifications concerning methodological protocol adopted by the researcher(s) and an outline of the whole report.

- Section 2 is based on a quantitative approach of datasets meant to introduce characteristics of the sample as well as the time-frame studied; this provides insight regarding the quality of the dataset, and allows to identify whether each sample can be apprehended as online milieus.

- Section 3 relies on an ethnographic approach. Section 3.1 identifies what repertoires of action for each sample by offering a typology of the manners in which contributors are using their account (in relation to the topics of tweets, interactions between users, and description in the 'about' section of pages) and what justifications they provide to explain their participation. In one instance (French report), this approach is supplemented by pursuing a quantitative analysis of the links contained in the tweets, using the datasets retrieved for the investigation. In section 3.2, we use an ethnographic approach to study digital social identities forged through individual accounts. A particular interest for common signifiers is stressed, that is to say, the use of the same qualifiers - may they be symbols, icons, verbal expressions or hashtags, for example. These common signifiers show how people unite online and how they co-produce a collective identity. Section 3.3 tackles external and internal labelling processes. In the first part of 3.3, we rely on direct observations carried out during the data-collection phase to identify internal labelling tactics. In the second part of 3.3, we consider how public debates, moderation operations, actors of civil society as well as online interactions between both samples coproduce radicalisation.

- Section 4 is dedicated to studying main themes in conversations, as well as events and digital influencers impacting on conversations. The first two sections (4.1 and 4.2) rely on quantitative lexical analysis carried out by Iramuteq software. In section 4.1, there are three complementary perspectives: first, researchers examine the main themes for each stream of radicalisation by means of a dendrogram that presents a discourse analysis based on a descending hierarchical classification; then, researchers outline the structure of discussions to determine what topics are closely linked to one another and which discussions are possibly peripheral by pursuing the initial discourse analysis and carrying out a similarity analysis (also known as, a network of co-occurring words analysis); finally, we isolate a particular variable - i.e. gender - to detect structures of conversations by gender within each sample through a chi2 analysis allowing us to consider statistical overrepresentation (a higher proportion) or statistical underrepresentation (a lower proportion) of tweets, depending on whether tweets are produced by men and by women. In section 4.2, we prolong the quantitative analysis by isolating another variable; instead of looking into gender, we examine the impact of events on conversations through heat maps; we offer a month-by-month chronological representation of main themes to question the role of events, such as news coverage or the legislative agenda, on digital conversations of samples. The last section of part 4, section 4.3,

moves away from lexical analysis to focus on a quantitative analysis of influentiality. Measuring a ratio between followers/follows and responses to original content posted online highlights users whose content spreads the most and reaches the highest scores in retweets at the level of the Twitter platform; in turn, researchers portray the main online influencers for each sample.

- Section 5 resorts to network analysis by means of Gephi software to further our understanding of the role of digital sociabilities and online communication in self-radicalisation processes. Three subsections are developed to complete analysis; each subsection corresponds to a distinct level of analysis. In the first subsection, researchers complete a network analysis at the level of the sample to visualise the structure of the sample in the given country in consideration with all of the other countries in the full dataset. This approach highlights how people are connected to one another and emphasises national and international digital sociability in the twittersphere. Next, a network analysis of retweets is completed. This approach highlights flows of conversations. Researchers present how conversations are articulated to one another and discuss their overall structure to examine how communication is conducted. The final subsection is dedicated to a network analysis of mentions[8]. By studying mentions, it is possible to apprehend the level of interconnectivity as well as the centrality and the reputation of accounts that are interlinked through mentions. This helps reveal the accounts that are part of the conservation of radicalisation.

It is important to note that a subsequent phase of the research will be to provide a cross-country analysis report (D5.3) and a policy brief outlining key findings and policy recommendations (D5.4).

4. Ethics and security

All partners completed ethical clearance procedures before commencing fieldwork, either through their own institutional ethical review committees (and verified for compliance with DARE guidelines) or, in the cases where institutions did not have their own ethical review procedures, through a formally constituted procedure for ethical review via the DARE Ethics Sub-Committee (ESC). Ethical clearance was received by partners either through their own institutional and/or national ethical review committee or through the DARE Ethics Sub-Committee. All partners received ethical approval before commencement of empirical research.

The methodology employed in this study was ethically governed by the use of standard social science and humanities techniques linked with robotised data collection procedures, bound by the GDPR legislations and ensuring the use of automatic anonymising of personal data in a systematic fashion. This is described below.

4.1 Personal data procedures

Company and international laws restrict the use of digital data: all data published online remains in the public sphere unless specified otherwise. Public or not, data nonetheless remains the property of

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[8] A mention is signified with a special character like this @ and is immediately followed by the Twitter handle of an account.

its producer. This is why, this study adopts standard procedures in social sciences and digital humanities to ensure protection of personal data.

Specifically, the pages observed (10 FB group pages + 50 Twitter personal profile accounts/ country/ type of radicalisation) were manually selected by researchers through direct observation, based on criteria that fit the study, but also based on the fact they are public pages and as such, legally bound to laws regulating the public sphere. This task was conducted during the three-month data-collection phase, late 2018.

If personal details of users (i.e. names, age, gender, Facebook page ID, etc.) were observed when available - in order to select a sample - this information was not recorded or stored. However, some details of users were retained in order to ensure continued contact through the fieldwork period. When details were stored either in manual or electronic files, they were stored securely and completely separately from the empirical research data collected and kept in the safe storage space set up by the subcontracted IT team (i.e. a team from the IRIT research centre from the University of Toulouse).

4.2 Collecting and analysing data
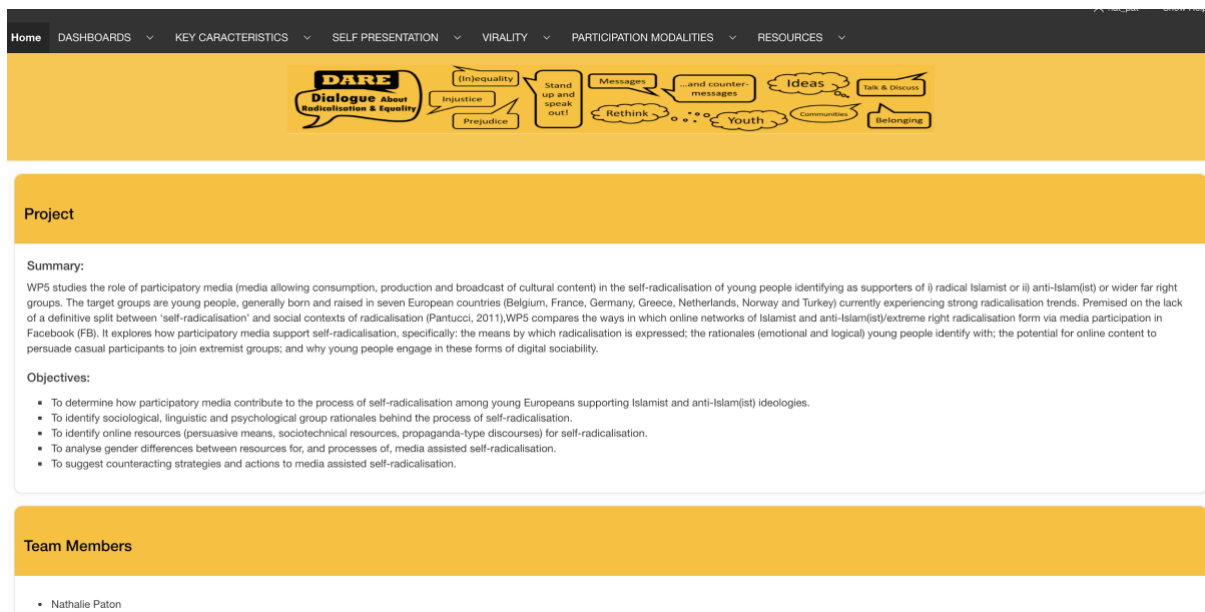
While the selection of the target sample is typical of Social Science approaches, data collection strongly relies on digital humanities procedures designed to automatically collect public digital data from a selected sample of webpages by means of computer software. The software used to collect data from Facebook was Netvizz. This open source software automatically anonymises data, making it impossible to trace data back to its producer. Moreover, the quantity of data collected in itself prevents the identity of participants in the sample being identified and thus respects personal data rights. In order to data crawl on Twitter, the study employed a bespoke script based on a Python library. Thus, personal data was used to inform the selection of pages to follow but stored separately from the research data on electronic files.

The scraped data from selected pages, automatically anonymised by software, offered 4 types of output:

    i)   A csv file synthesising the number of likes, shares, comments… and which content is attached to these numbers;

    ii)   A separate txt file of the discourse on the page, automatically shaped into blocks of coded texts (easy to digest then by the statistical lexical software used in the DARE project, i.e. Iramuteq);

    iii)   A file listing the type of content published (gifs, pictures, videos, text, etc.);

    iv)   The content itself (video, gif, picture, etc.).

If no personal information regarding the target sample is mentioned in either one of these files (e.g. no information on the name, gender, age, etc. of the person), no personal data could actually be retraced by means of these files, given the amount of data provided by this technique. Furthermore, accounts retrieved were very unstable, and most of them had a rather short lifespan. Finally, additional anonymity was ensured by the fact researchers never had access to the files described above; a subcontractor, hired to manage the data collection and ensure the storage in a secured safe centre, is the only partner with access to files.

Researchers accessed data through an online platform created for the purpose of this study. In the platform, data was restructured to fit the main approaches and goals of the investigation (see Plate 6 below).

Plate 6 - Screenshot of the main page of the platform used by researchers to access datasets