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

France

DARE
Dialogue About
Radicalisation & Equality

NATHALIE PATON

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Contents

Executive Summary

This report summarises the findings of a study of the media participation of right wing and Islamist extremists, supporting radical ideologies on Twitter, in order to identify digital resources supporting self-radicalisation. Specifically, the report investigates: (i) the means by which radicalisation is expressed; (ii) the rationales people identify with; (iii) the potential for online content to persuade casual participants to join extremist groups; (iv) and why people engage in these forms of digital sociability. Based on a mixed-method approach - combining digital ethnography and big data techniques - and a sample of 104 French Twitter accounts, analyses are structured around five dimensions: (i) quantitative and qualitative appreciations of the sample highlight levels of integration, connectivity as well the possibility of observing an online milieu by means of the collected material; (ii) qualitative determination of the main repertoires of action and labelling processes coproducing social identities as well as groups of radicals; (iii) lexical and quantitative analysis of influencing factors likely to trigger media engagement, i.e. themes, events and online influencers, further illustrating rationales people identify with; (iv) network analysis of digital sociability of samples on a national and international scale.

Main findings: By means of expressing political opinions in public debates in the Twitter media arena, support for right-wing extremist ideologies is expressed through a classical form of 'media activism'; users intend to support a cause, the cause being the defence of national identitarian issues. This repertoire draws from a strong and vibrant national milieu of 'extreme rights' (Gimenez and Voirol, 2017) i.e. a well-established community of radicals from different parts of the right wing spectrum, supported by clear-cut markers of social identity related to anti-immigration/anti-Islam discourses, support of patriotic and nationalist ideologies, and defence of a 'supposed' French cultural and historical heritage. This milieu embraces the label of radicals and expresses violent intent and/or violent extremism. With dense threads of conversations uniting people on Twitter, the circulation of content is strong and visibility of material high. The content spread is partly crafted by alternative right-wing extremist media sources, also known as 're-information' media sources. In these respects, we can consider that a group of like-minded, well-connected, right wing extremists share their ideological standpoints in a dedicated milieu. The strength of this milieu is heightened by the fact there is a right-wing extremist global conversation, that goes beyond national borders.

In contrast, the study did not identify any clear-cut phenomenon of digital sociability related to Islamist radicalisation. The sample does not constitute a milieu, nor does it demonstrate strong digital ties. The users populating the sample deny the radical label and denounce violent extremism. As we show, the label of radical is the by-product of external labelling and content moderation activities. Even though this sample does not constitute an ideal-type radicalisation, it presents commonalities worth mentioning and showcases how Islamist extremists in France are using Twitter nowadays. Users are all related to Quietist Salafism and appear to adopt a similar format of participation - promoting ideological religious material, pertaining to a lifestyle, and guidelines on how to embody this lifestyle. Instead of using the platform to engage in public debate, they promote their brand of sorts (as a mosque, a school of thought, etc.), a store-front to the public sphere. They adopt social identities strongly marked by gender roles that embody obedience to their faith.

Another significant finding is that right wing extremists are connected to one another through their digital social identities rather than the news-related topics that they discuss. Topics of discussion appear ever-changing and calibrated to the flow of current events. Themes are second to social markers of identity. Self-presentations are therefore best suited to capture rationales behind self-radicalisation. Likewise, findings pertaining to influencers illustrate that those who could be spotted as potentially contributing to online radicalisation, are well-known right wing extremist political leaders, such as President Donald Trump. Yet the influencers who trigger threads of conversation

tell us less about the rationales behind radicalisation than they illustrate how the algorithm on the Twitter platform generates circles of influence, contributes to global right wing extremist conversations and contributes to creating a dystopic vision of national proximities. That is not to say a right wing extremist global milieu should not be further investigated; simply, conversations remain essentially nationally centred. On the back of these findings, it becomes clear that to understand self-radicalisation it is important to focus on social markers, encompassed in digital identities (i.e. belief in a simplistic line of heritage, nationalistic issues, etc). Rationales people identify with are related to stable markers of identity instead of everyday conversations.

It is easy for the mere bystander to engage in conversations online and find potential material to support further engagement in political matters, and possibly join the bandwagon of extremism and political radicalism. If we ponder on the advantages for joining the right-wing extremist movement through digital media participation, we can note collective and individual benefits that further our understanding of how media participation in Twitter supports radicalisation. From a collective perspective, by sharing common cultural codes related to a certain number of topics, contributors weave a collective fabric, essential to creating and upholding a digital milieu. Digital sociability presents the added benefit of providing a sense of self. Indeed, from an individual user standpoint, employing material that is part of a collective fabric reinforces subjective autonomy. Participation in an online milieu provides means for empowerment. People may not find support within their local inner-circles or close to where they live. By turning to online participation, however, contributors can find like-minded people with similar areas of interest, reinforce their tastes, express their opinions and lean on a sense of togetherness that helps support their ideals, political aspirations and ultimately a sense of identity.

1. Introduction

1.1 The role of the Internet in self-radicalisation in France

1.1.1 Relevance of studying radicalisation at the level of the French national context

This report focuses on the processes of online self-radicalisation in France by studying media participation on Twitter. France is a highly pertinent context for the study of radicalisation given the levels of political and violent extremisms it has witnessed in recent years. In the context of this report, radicalisation pertains to religious ideologies and/or political extremism. On the religious front, France can actually be singled out for the highest levels of violent extremism in Europe. With a first series of Islamist terrorist attacks in France in the mid-nineties and more recent attacks starting in the year 2010, France holds the unfortunate record of the country most affected by Islamist extremist attacks in Europe and North America (Vidino, 2017). Beyond this unprecedented series of attacks in France, several recent episodes of violent extremism, notably in the United Kingdom, Belgium, Germany and Spain, have paved the way to the rise in fear of terrorism throughout Europe (Nesser, 2018); France is no exception (Wieviorka, 2013). France is forerunner on the political extremist front too, namely right-wing extremism, with the electoral rise in the early 1980s of the National Front, which was created in 1972 (Giblin, 2012). Since then anti-Islamist and anti-immigration sentiments have spread. Fear of immigrants as a threat to national identity and values of the nation has become a common ideology (Rinke, 2018), supported by elected officials in high-placed democratic offices throughout Europe and beyond (Schain, 2018). The rise of radicalism in Europe - from the increase of right-wing extremist electoral support or Islamist attacks throughout Europe - does not erase the peculiarities of national situations, and in the present case, the relevance of studying national contexts such as that of the French case.

In France, political parties, social movements or groups associated with the expression 'right-wing extremism' cover a wide variety of ideological stances and organisational forms (Perrineau, 2002; Camus, 2015), including populist and xenophobic movements stigmatising immigrants, groups of neo-Nazis hostile to democratic processes and nostalgic for past forms of fascism, as well as ultra-conservative and populist political parties trying to win over the population and gain power through the polls with anti-establishment discourses (Fielitz and Laloire, 2016; Traverso, 2017). As Gimenez and Voirol explain, the French political landscape is witness to a variety of 'extreme rightS' - with insistence on the plural (2017). Practices of these organisations are diverse, but they all favour self-identity affirmations with features pertaining to racial, ethnic or national identity. They construct a sense of 'otherness' and all promote an authoritarian conception of politics (François and Lebourg, 2016). Three main tendencies are often cited: i) groups based on identitarian discourses, supposedly part of a faschosphere; ii) conservatives ; iii) 'laicitists' (Laurent and Ferret, 2019). Rather than narrow the scope of this study by elaborating a narrow definition of French right-wing extremism or seeking to map the actual political situation in the country, in this report, we apply a consciously broad understanding of 'right-wing extremism' (RWE). In this way, we allow the full spectrum of contemporary French 'right wing extremismS' to come under scrutiny.'

When deliberating Islamist extremism (ISE), we are in just as murky waters as for RWE. The radicalisation of young Muslims has become an issue of high priority for public policymakers in France, Europe and beyond (Hannah et al., 2008; Aly et al., 2017) since the early 2000s (Sfeir, 2001), since the emergence of what Khosrokhavar calls 'new jihadism' (2014; 2015; 2018). France is at the heart of this type of practice with the highest counts of its youth leaving for Syria in the mid-2010s (2014[1]) to join the ranks of the Islamic State of Iraq (ISIS), in addition to the fact that the country has borne witness to half a dozen terrorist attacks since 2015. Yet identification of what is at stake remains blurry with

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[1] https://www.bfmtv.com/international/carte-qui-sont-les-europeens-partis-faire-le-jihad-834703.html

daily headlines showcasing perpetrators of violence, such as armed groups and well-identified organisations, typically the Islamic State, Al Qaeda, Boko Haram, the Somali Al Shabaab, etc. Because when it comes to Islamist radicalisation or violent extremism, the people behind the label or such movements are not necessarily affiliates nor actual members of an existing organisation; they sometimes simply claim the label of a movement without directly associatiating with it (Hasaneen, 2016; Paton and Figeac, 2015). It is simultaneously religious currents, theological doctrines, religious associations and politico-religious leaders who participate, deliberately or unconsciously, in the process of radicalisation in France (Gendron, 2017; Bonelli and Carrié, 2018). Therefore, it is difficult to properly map Islamist extremism. In this report, the expression 'Islamist extremism' will be employed to capture the variety of forms of new jihadism. In the same fashion as the approach adopted for the study of RWE, we intend to capture the variety of postures and question all forms of Islamist extremisms in France, without selecting one denomination or affiliation over another before entering the field.

Taking a broad approach to capture the right wing and Islamist extremisms is further justified by the amount of research carried out in recent years in these two fields. In the case of RWE, studies have focused on formal political organisations or traditional forms of citizen-based political participations, dependent on more or less stable forms of engagement. In the case of ISE, authors question affiliations in relation to specific denominations such as Jihadist Salafism (Torres, 2016), wrongly portrayed as at the centre of all terrorisms (Khosrokhavar, 2014, 2018) or in relationship to major political organisations, typically Al Qaeda (Rudner, 2017; White, 2016), ISIS or even the Al Shabaab group (Mair, 2017). As such, they rarely take a broader perspective that can capture the transnational, decentralised activities of new jihadism and the overlapping phenomenon of Islamist extremism.

We wish to offer a more-open ended perspective, channelling the horizontal, global, hyper-sociable, network-based forms of political participation that are nowadays dominating the field of practices as much as the field of theories of political participation (Castells, 2002; Della Porta, 2013). While research has captured classical forms of RWE or ISE, few studies have researched less formal, more spontaneous forms of political activism in the field of radicalism (Padis, 2015; Bouron and Drouard, 2014) from a bottom-up perspective. This report aims to do just that, by investigating how both types of radicalisation can be fuelled by online media practices.

This is an opportunity to identify whether radicals fit the mould of what has been described as self-radicalisation. By 'self-radicalisation' we mean a process by which a person shapes his/her social identity to match a given ideology by actively searching for radical information and networks without necessarily being a member of an established radical group (even if potentially influenced by a specific ideology and messages corresponding to an established organisation) (Sageman, 2008; Koehler, 2014). While we do not use this terminology ourselves, it is important to note that some of these processes of self-radicalisation have been referred to through the expression 'lone wolves' (Nesser 2012; Pantucci 2014). This term stresses the isolated nature of individuals, or people with weak ties to political organisations, who still manage to execute highly sophisticated political operations, such as terrorist attacks (Picart, 2015).

1.1.2 Zooming in on research carried out on the role of the Internet in France

Right-wing and Islamist radicalisation is often related to the content that circulates online, with the Internet viewed as a space for propaganda and the indoctrination of vulnerable young people who fall prey to the seduction techniques recruiters are free to circulate on the Internet (Rogan 2006; Smith 2013). It is easy to be critical of such consumer-oriented conceptions of the web, as they may underestimate participative culture (Deuze, 2006 ; Jenkins, 2006; Livingstone, 2013) and individual reflexivity (Beck, 1992; Beck et al., 1994). However, they need to be understood as indicative of a pressing social demand from the general public and authorities to formulate a response to the social and communication dynamics at play in contemporary radicalisation, given the fear of future terrorist

attacks. This study aims to address the questions posed through an online ethnography assisted by innovative methods usually applied in the field of big data analysis.

While it has now become clear that 2.0 devices are not solely responsible for the surge in radicalisation, social networking sites still play a role in this. The first examples of right wing extremism were the American Tea Party movement (Walsha et al., 2012; Stanford, 2014), the French ultra-conservative 'Manif pour tous' debate (Cervulle, Pailler 2014; Tartakowsky, 2014), and the German anti-Islam movement PEGIDA (Rehberg, 2016; Geiges, 2016). These displays of right wing extremism all resorted to social network sites to organise offline militant action, take part in digital arenas of public debates and broadcast propaganda-type content on the Internet. Zooming in on the French national right-wing extremist scene, the Internet has been a central tool to strengthen political organisations, notably the Rassemblement National (the former Front National), i.e. the RWE official political party (Albertini and Doucet, 2016). It allows underground identitarian groups to develop 're-information strategies' (Jammet and Guidi, 2017); broadcasting and promoting supposedly 'unpopular' opinions that traditional media do not wish to cover, supposedly providing 'alternative facts' to counter mainstream thinking. These types of media outlets, and the general conception supporting them, are based on conspirationist theories regarding the major French media outlets. Most importantly, such media practices represent opportunities to showcase reactionary ideologies and promote extremist conceptions of social reality (Bouron, 2014). On the Islamist extremist end of the spectrum, the Internet harbours thousands of overtly jihadist websites (Denning, 2010) and has been embraced by terrorists to expand their reach and influence (Aly et al., 2017; von Behr et al., 2013; Conway 2012; Pearson 2015; Klausen 2015; Alava, Frau-Meigs and Hassan 2017, Conway 2017; Al-Rawi 2017; Awan 2017; Meleagrou-Hitchens and Kaderbhai 2017). Political Islamist terrorist organisations have not been shy in boasting about their use of the media in general. As Zawahiri, the (then) deputy of Osama bin Laden stated back in 2005: 'We are in battle, and more than half of this battle is taking place in the battlefield of the media. (...) we are in a media battle in a race for the hearts and minds of our people' (Libermans, Collins, 2008: 23). The use of media and web 2.0 technologies is now widespread and goes beyond the latter implications of Al-Qaeda's second in command. Extensive research has been conducted to document how jihadists use the media (Ciovacco, 2009; Lakomy, 2017) and circulate their messages on the web (Ciovacco, 2009; Farwell 2014; Lesaca, 2015; Gratrud, 2016; Köhler and Ebner, 2019). From a general audience perspective, ISIS is probably the most infamous organisation of them all. The organisation is well-known for having successfully employed digital tools in general but specifically Twitter (Milton, 2016) to recruit foreign fighters with highly sophisticated social media campaigns (Talbot, 2015; Winter, 2016). In the French political landscape in particular, it is a well-known fact that social media websites such as Facebook and Twitter, and more recently, Telegram have played a key role in the surge of fighters and conversion to radical Islam, mainly Salafist Islamist ideologies (Thomas, 2008). As Olivier Roy points out, jihadist Salafists, well-known for carrying out the French terrorist attacks, rely on the Internet more than the other terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda, because they use the Internet to 'self-radicalise', searching for information to carry out acts of violence and/or connect to other like-minded individuals (2016: 27).

Much research has already been carried out on RWE and ISE at the international level. Yet less work has been conducted in the field of radicalisation and Internet studies in France, especially when considering both forms of radicalism side-by-side. A handful of research groups, such as the Observatoire of Violence in Paris or the Platform of radicalities in Toulouse, formed in the wake of the French 2015 terrorist attacks, to tackle the question of radicalisation and radicalism, but publications are still scarce. The investigation presented in this report therefore considers the role the Internet plays in encouraging or facilitating efforts to participate in campaigns such as those waged by local jihadist gurus, international terrorist organisations or , for example, the right wing extremist

Rassemblement National French political party. It does so by exploring the uses of the public sphere, namely the Twitter media arena.

1.2 Methodological choices

A three-month pilot study, conducted from September to December 2018, served to select a sample for France of 103 Twitter (TW) accounts and 10 Facebook (FB) pages for each stream of radicalisation studied. The primary object of this initial step was to help build a sample for the big data approach of the second phase of the investigation. However, the direct observation findings from this pilot study phase also proved valuable in themselves and are referred to in this report as the ethnographic or the direct observation phase.

Of the 113 accounts originally selected for the French investigation, only 84 Twitter accounts remained available by the end of the three-month scraping period; this attrition was due to suspension and deletion of accounts following the pilot study. Deletion or suspension of accounts only affected right-wing extremist accounts on Twitter. This could be explained by two factors: recent crackdowns on RW extremism (Conway 2019); or difference in online moderation for each ideology. Accounts promoting Islamist ideologies have already been heavily moderated over recent years while RWE ideologically-oriented accounts were barely moderated up until recent top-down governmental campaigns in certain European countries (Conway et al., 2019). The table below provides some insight into how censorship affected the French RWE sample.

Table 1 includes the Twitter and FB pages we collected during the pilot study, as well as the number of accounts from Twitter that were subsequently analysed. The type of pages selected on Twitter and on Facebook are different in nature (see the Introduction to the report for further discussion). In short, the Twitter accounts can be considered as 'personal' profiles whereas Facebook accounts are 'pages', that is to say, public accounts rarely developed as personal accounts, and if so, personal accounts of public figures. Since the focus of this study is on the mass of random citizens rather than political leaders or organisations, analysis was conducted on the basis of data and observations from Twitter alone.

	FRANCE							
	RWE				ISE			
	Personal (Twitter)		Forum (Facebook)	Total personal	Personal (Twitter)		Forum (Facebook)	Total personal
	W	M	N/A	W/M & non-identified	W	M	N/A	W/M & non-identified
Pilot study	28	26	10	70	23	27	10	60
Final sample	**23**	**19**	-	**44**	**20**	**16**	-	**40**

Table 1 A breakdown of the samples for the pilot study and final sample[2]

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[2] The above table is a breakdown of the samples for both the pilot study and final sample used for this report. Personal = Twitter profiles, Forum = Facebook Pages, F = female, M = Male, N/A = accounts not identifiable by gender.

The findings presented in this report, it follows, are based on Twitter accounts alone. For RWE, the gender balance of the accounts followed are 23 women and 19 men, with 2 gender non-identified accounts; for the Islamist extremist side, there are 20 women and 16 men, with 4 gender non-identified accounts.

Analyses conducted in this report employ a mixed-method approach. We rely on the findings from the ethnographic phase of the study as well as the results produced on the basis of quantitative and qualitative approaches exploiting the massive amounts of data retrieved from the big data approach during the second phase of the investigation. In each subsection of the report, we present the method employed and the data set on which the analysis was carried out.

1.3 Structure of the report

This report is dedicated to studying primary drivers of self-radicalisation at the Individual level in each of the seven countries studied. This report focuses specifically on the French case and is divided into 6 sections.

The first section introduces the case, describes it in its national context and explains how this context impacted the composition of the sample and the methodological choices of the study. The second section begins to explore digital participation in self-radicalisation by examining the key characteristics of the sample. The sample is subjected to critical interrogation with regard to whether it captures an online phenomenon of radicalisation. The levels and modalities of engagement in digital extremism are also presented. The third section furthers the study of self-radicalisation by establishing how the RWE and the ISE samples engage online through specific repertoires of action, and then considers internal and external labelling processes, contributing to the production of radical postures and identities. The fourth section questions what people are saying, which events are influencing what people are saying and who are the influencers. It considers the topics that justify resorting to radical ideologies, the events that trigger participation, and the people who fuel online communication. The fifth section explores how conversations are being conducted and who is engaging in these conversations. The final section summarises the results and reflects on whether the material on Twitter represents a threat to national security and whether there are 'elements' (statements, people, tools, etc.) found online that could incite, stimulate or engage people to commit violent crimes. This section also draws on the findings to suggest some of the implications of the research for the wider academic field to which it is directed. In so doing, this section discusses the theoretical implications of the research findings and sets out how the findings address the original research question.

2. Sample characteristics

This section provides an overall description of the sample used in the study to investigate digital radicalisation on Twitter in France. By analysing the characteristics of the RWE and ISE samples, we will have a better understanding of the quality of the data and the phenomenon being studied in the French case. In light of these remarks, we will start to question if each sample can be described as an online milieu and if users follow similar patterns of behaviour.

2.1. Distribution and representativeness of samples

As stated in the introduction, in France, the combined sample of both strands of radicalisation is composed of a total of 84 Twitter accounts.

2.1.1 Representativeness of gender

The overall distribution is gender balanced (see Figure 1). 51% of the overall sample is female, 42% male, and 7% unspecified. Gender balance for each form of radicalisation differs, however: for the

RWE side, there are 23 women and 19 men, and 2 non-identified accounts; for the Islamist extremist side, there are 20 women and 16 men, and 4 non-identified accounts.
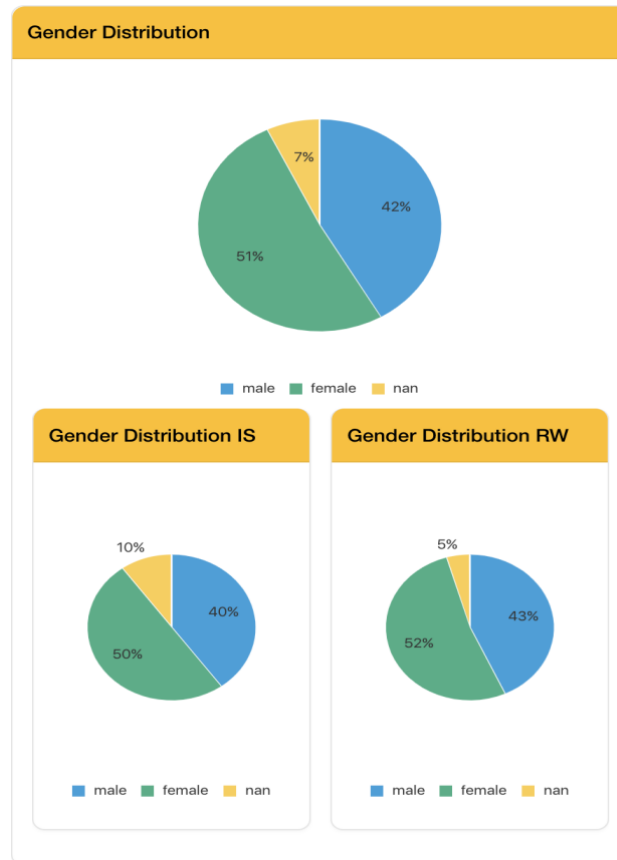
Figure 1 - Gender distribution of samples[3]

During the pilot study, it was not difficult to find the same amount of men and women to compose the right-wing sample. If we look at the percentages above, women are over-represented, however. This over-representation is due to the deletion and/or suppression of accounts during the data collection campaign that followed the pilot study phase and it holds no significance on its own.

If it was straightforward for French researchers to find as many women as men to construct the sample for the RWE case study; this was not the case for the ISE part of the investigation. Here again, for the ISE sample, gender is almost balanced. However, contrary to the right-wing sample, it was rather difficult to find any accounts matching our initial set of criteria, and even more problematic to identify accounts specifically held by women.

2.1.2 Representativeness of radical ideologies
Describing further the accounts collected, we must consider the ideology balance of samples[4]. As evident from Figure 2, both ideologies are equally represented. 52% of the sample covers right-wing extremist radicalisation (i.e. 44 accounts), 48% Islamist extremist radicalisation (i.e. 40 accounts).

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[3] The headlines 'Gender Distribution IS' and 'Gender Distribution RW' in Figure 1 are automatically generated by the platform researchers to extract datasets and access preliminary analysis. They were set up by the subcontractor in this manner and hold no bearing on our understanding of right wing and Islamist extremisms otherwise discussed throughout this report.

[4] The implications of this are explored in more detail in section 3.1.
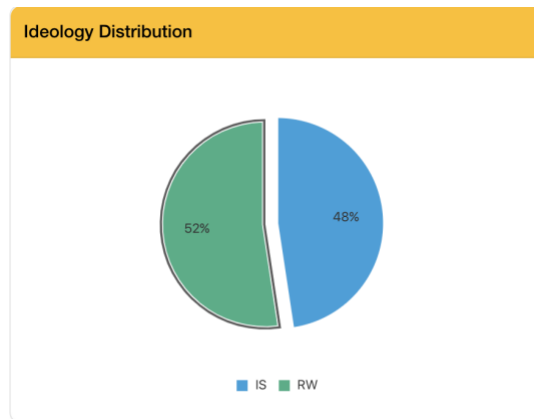
Figure 2 - Representativeness of each radical ideology for the full sample

2.1.3 Language distribution

The vast majority of the sample chose the French language as the default language of their account, directly reflecting the case at hand.
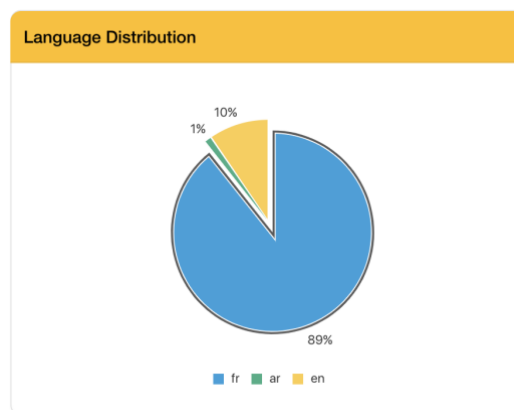
Figure 3 - Language distribution for the full sample

Within the French sample, 1% chose Arabic as a default language; this percentage is too low to bear any significance. Of the total sample, 10% chose English as their primary language, while the vast majority of users (89%) chose the French language. There is roughly the same percentage of people who chose English language from the ISE sample as the RWE sample, as Figure 3 and 4 illustrate.
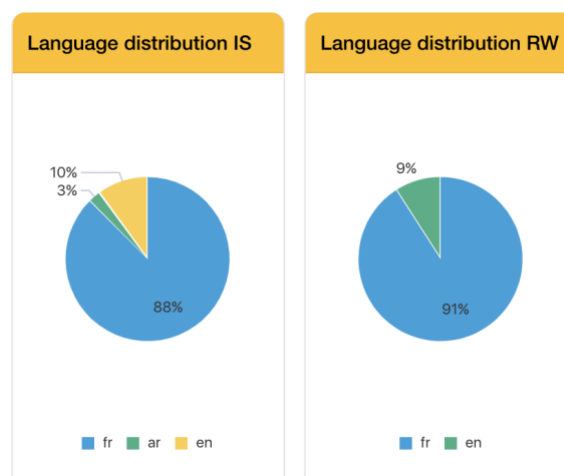
Figure 4 - Language distribution for each sample

Declaring one language over another affects the algorithm of the platform for the user. Therefore, choosing English over French may simply be an indication of what types of content a user prefers to see on their timeline.

2.2 Time periods of participation

The data collected from Twitter retrieved data from the beginning of any given account until the end of the data collection phase, which ended on 23 February, 2019. Given that Twitter was launched in 2006, and that theoretically accounts could have been scraped back to the mid 2000's, it is interesting to note that the first tweets within the French sample go back only to 2010 (28 March, 2010, to be exact[5]).

2.2.1 Longevity of participation

To start, we will examine both samples together and comment on the longevity of media participation of right-wing and Islamist extremists.

To have a better understanding of the time period of the general sample, we have placed two timelines below, above one another, that retrace users' activity (see Figures 5 and 6). 'Activity' in this context refers to tweets and retweets. The first timeline covers a shorter period of time, ranging from August 2017 to February 2019, than the second timeline which expands to include the whole range of tweets and retweets, going all the way back to 2012[6]. Within the first timeline, we can see a flatline of activity over several years, prior to 2017 and expanding the timeline confirms this.
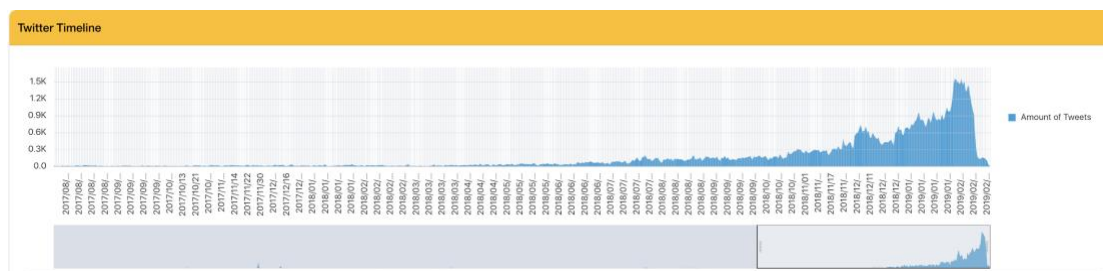
Figure 5 - Twitter Timeline of activity for the whole sample with a focus on the most recent years
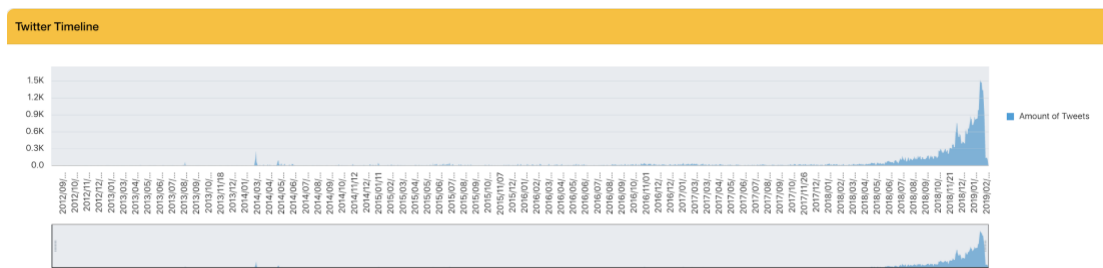
Figure 6 - The same Twitter Timeline of activity for the whole sample: zooming out to get a better picture of the full period of time the sample covers

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[5] It is important to note that the date of creation of accounts was not a criterion of selection for the French case. Researchers paid little, to no attention, to when the account was created and whether accounts had been recently active.

[6] In Figures 5 and 6, media activity starting in 2012 flatlines up until 2018. Prior to 2012, there was little to no media activity data to report. This is not represented in Figures 5 and 6 since the years 2010 to 2012 are missing. Based on the observation of a lack of media activity, the subcontractor took it upon himself to curate data from appearing in the generator of the Timeline figures. This case at hand notwithstanding, the dataset is otherwise intact and considered in full through analysis in this report.

2.2.2 Focus on present day phenomena

Now, let us look at both strands of radicalisation separately (see Figure 7, below).

We can see that the accounts from the ISE side are older than those from the RWE side. In the text above, we spoke of a first tweet in 2010; this tweet is from the ISE sample. The first tweet for the RWE sample is from 2014 (15 September), making the sample even more recent and the trends reported in this report that much more current.
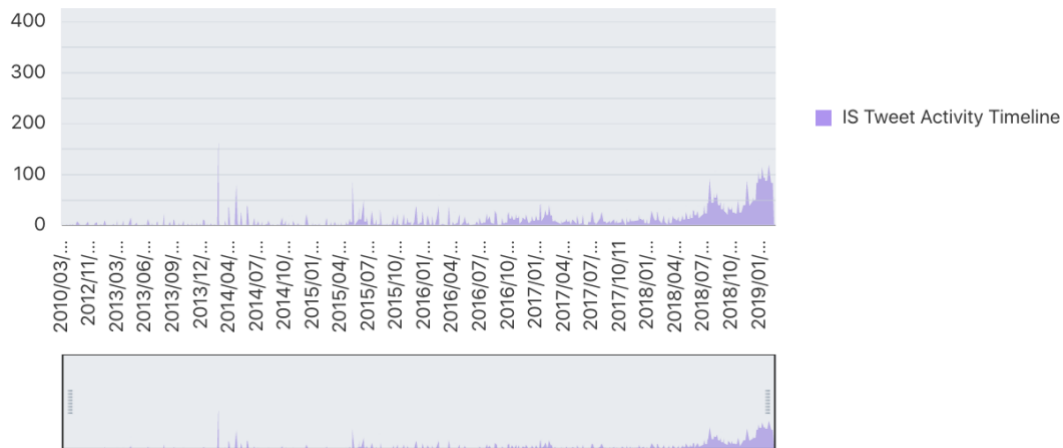
Figure 7 - Timeline of Islamist twitter activity from 2010 to 2019

The broad view of the activity timelines shown above illustrates the fact the Islamist extremist content we are discussing in this report covers publications ranging from 2010 to 2019, but that activity picks up in 2015 and spikes starting 2018.
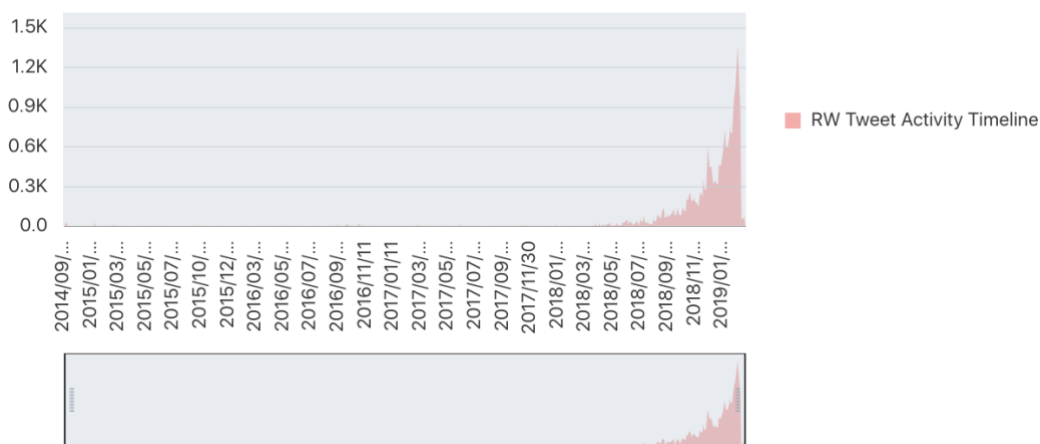
Figure 8 - Timeline of right-wing extremist twitter activity from 2014 to 2019

The timeline above (see Figure 8) shows activity is virtually non-existent for RWE until 2018, meaning one or two accounts in our sample give us this broad view of activity from 2014 to 2018, but that the vast majority of accounts only start publishing content and/or are created as of 2018.

With respect to these observations, we can question whether, in France, the use of digital public spaces like Twitter is an emerging and growing phenomenon for right-wing extremism supporters and Islamists extremists alike[7]. In a more general sense, taking both samples into account, we can conclude

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[7] It is impossible to investigate this hypothesis further because the size of the sample does not allow us to have a broad view of dates of creation of accounts, and we do not have any way to access previously existing accounts that have since been banned or deleted by users.

that users have, for the most part, only been active in recent years. This does not mean radicalisation did not take place online before this date; but if it did, the associated accounts were either deleted, suspended, never came within the scope of our radar, never even existed, or most likely a mix of all of the above. For example, we know with certainty that many extreme Islamist accounts were censored over the years on major platforms such as Twitter, as they were active recruiting tools, part of ISIS' digital political communication strategy. Such censorship measures are part of far broader counterterrorism strategies that also involve extensive military efforts and law enforcement (Conway et al., 2019). The banning of these accounts of course affects what we are now studying.

So, while the timelines may give the impression that extremist accounts are a new trend, there is nothing that allows us to positively confirm this. Instead, it is important to keep in mind that the phenomena we are investigating are the ones we can access today, and not the phenomena present on the platform before the start of the survey in September 2018. In this sense, this report updates knowledge accumulated in recent years and informs us of what is taking place online, from 2018 to early 2019.

2.3 Volume of activity and patterns of participation

To understand the accounts, we are using to conduct further analysis, we will consider the volume of activity of each sample and highlight levels of engagement as well as homogeneity of behaviours.

2.3.1 Volume of tweets/retweets and levels of engagement

The 84 Twitter accounts studied in this report together contain a total of 44,600[8] tweets and 84,415 retweets for both samples. Tweets can be understood as original messages originating from a user, while retweets correspond to tweets created by another and shared by a user.
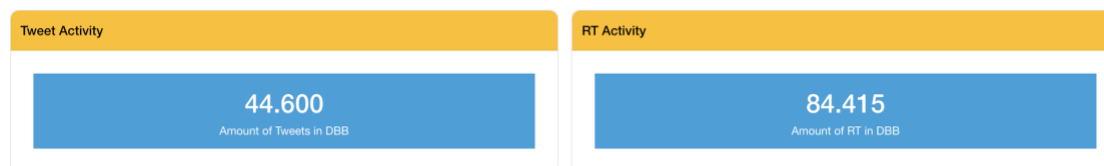
Figure 9 - Volume of tweets and retweets for the full sample

If we have a closer look at these numbers to identify the quantity of tweets and retweets for the ISE and the RWE accounts, the ISE sample represents 23,544 tweets and 21,056 retweets in our database, the RWE sample is composed of 19,949 tweets and 64,466 retweets.
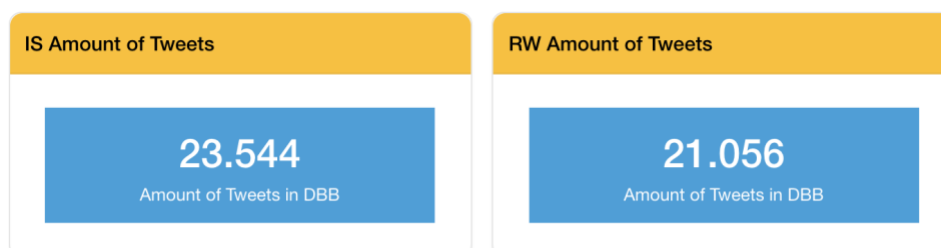
Figure 10 - Volume of tweets for each sample

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[8] Figures in this section are extracted from the platform created for researchers to access datasets and conduct analysis. While British English has been selected to standardise this report so commas are used in the text for numbers here and throughout the full report, Figures 9, 10 and 11 contain full stops rather than commas due to the formatting by the French subcontractor.

RT activity IS	RT activity RW
19.949 Amount of RT in DBB	**64.466** Amount of RT in DBB
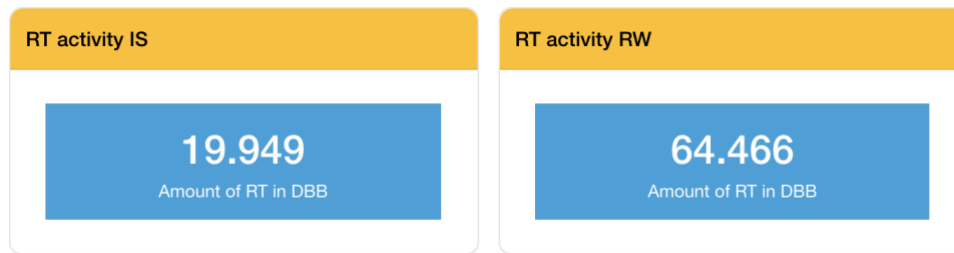
Figure 11 - Volume of retweets for each sample

Regarding the ISE sample, we can note that a smaller number of accounts publishes a greater number of original content. Users within this sample appear to have produced more content (ISE, 23,554 TW for 40 accounts; RWE, 21,056 TW for 44 accounts), possibly because people from this sample have been around longer, or maybe because the frequency in posting is more important for this sample. In the latter case - i.e. higher frequency in tweeting - the level of users' online engagement could be more important. Level of engagement is first estimated on the frequency of publication in original content, i.e. a tweet.

We can also note that the ISE sample contains almost as many tweets (23,544 TW) as retweets (19,949 RT) while the RWE sample contains three times more retweets than tweets (21,056 TW for 64,466 RT). To complete our previous comment on users' media engagement, engagement can also be based on producing content as opposed to sharing content, i.e. retweeting, the first activity suggesting a higher degree of implication and exposure (Park, 2013). The high volume of tweeting and overall activity could lead us to believe ISE users are more committed than RWE users to sharing in the Twitter public arena. However, if we take the ISE's higher level of posts for a smaller sample (ISE, n=23,554 TW for 40 accounts; RWE, 21,056 TW for 44 accounts) and set this in the context of the overall activity volume of RWE (i.e. tweets and retweets), which is twice as high (84,415) as the ISE volume of activity (44,600), it would seem that level of engagement is not the key explanation.

This appears to be confirmed by the fact that the level of retweets amongst the right-wing extremists is impressively high in comparison to the Islamic extremist users' retweeting activity (64,466 for RWE against 21,056 for ISE). Instead of a higher level of commitment, we can put forward the hypothesis that the users within the ISE sample are poorly connected to one another. What we could be looking at is individual patterns of behaviour instead of strong commitment to a group of some sort. This hypothesised lack of engagement to an online connected milieu - who share and spread a community's content - would not only help to explain the difference between the number of tweets and retweets but also the low number of retweets for the ISE sample.

2.3.2 Homogenous vs scattered patterns of behaviour

If we have a closer look at each form of radicalisation with respect to the proportionality of the number of accounts and user behaviours, the sample from the RWE is composed of users who tend to be active online, or at the very least, have produced a rather large number of tweets, with 50% of the total amount of tweets between 1,553 and 2,617 tweets (see Figure 12). In other words, 50% of the total number of tweets are made by those who tweet between 1,553 and 2,617 tweets. The same cannot be said of the ISE sample. We have a sample that, on average, participates less, with 50% of the total amount of tweets between 627 and 2,111 tweets (see Figure 12).

More importantly, the RWE sample contains users with homogeneous behaviour, even more so in comparison with the ISE sample. This becomes clear by examining the figure below (see Figure 12).

This figure, commonly known as a box-and-whisker plot[9], or a boxplot, represents the distribution and the dispersion of a full dataset.
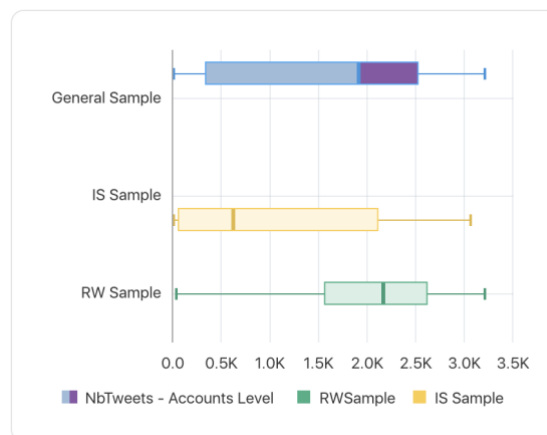
Figure 12 - Distribution and dispersion of (the) sample(s)

When examining the ISE boxplot side-by-side with the RWE boxplot, the RWE sample is clustered, while the IS sample is dispersed. It should be noted that the more the surface of the rectangle is spread out, the more the dispersion of values is important. In the case of ISE accounts, it appears that a few accounts publish tremendously, a fair part not as much. Also, the more the rectangle is left-skewed, the smaller the activity is and vice versa. In the case at hand, the ISE boxplot is clearly left-skewed, while the RWE boxplot is right-skewed.

In short, analysis conducted *via* the boxplot shows that, on the one hand, with the RWE sample, the dataset contains very similar types accounts, modalities of participation of the sample appear rather homogenous, connectivity seems high; on the other hand, the ways in which the ISE sample use their accounts are more diverse, heterogenous and therefore contributors are possibly weakly related to one another. Based on these findings and previous analysis above, it appears that the ISE sample cannot be understood as a clear-cut phenomenon related to Islamist radicalisation; users do not appear to be connected to an online milieu of any sort. However, considering that the study carried out was conducted after large banning campaigns took place on major social media sites, the absence of a clear-cut Islamist extremist phenomenon does not come as a surprise.

2.4 Modalities of participation and levels of integration

Drawing on what we have just established regarding patterns of behaviours, modalities of participation will now be explored to see how people are taking part in the online scene. To do this, how people are using Twitter must be examined: are they expressing original content (a tweet), sharing an idea (retweet), simply publicly approving of someone else's contribution (like) or spreading content (share)? Understanding how users contribute will also improve our understanding of the levels of engagement for each form of radicalisation and ultimately provides additional information on whether we are dealing with online milieus or individual patterns of behaviour.

2.4.1 Statistical distribution of tweets/retweets and levels of integration

We examined the difference in volume between tweets and retweets for both samples and saw that they contained a similar number of tweets with around 20,000 tweets each (ISE, 23,554 TW; RWE,

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[9] It provides information on how the overall sample is composed with regards to the lowest and the highest number of posts for a single account within the whole sample: what is the median level of posts; how disperse or homogenous the material is; whether accounts respond to a similar pattern or not.

21,056 TW), yet the retweet activity from the RWE was three times higher than the ISE, with an overall volume of activity twice as high.

Below, the boxplot clearly show the statistical distribution of tweets and retweets for each sample, with, on the left side, a picture of the tweet activity (boxplots on the left, F 13), and, on the right-hand side, a snapshot of the retweet activity (boxplots on the right, Figure 14).
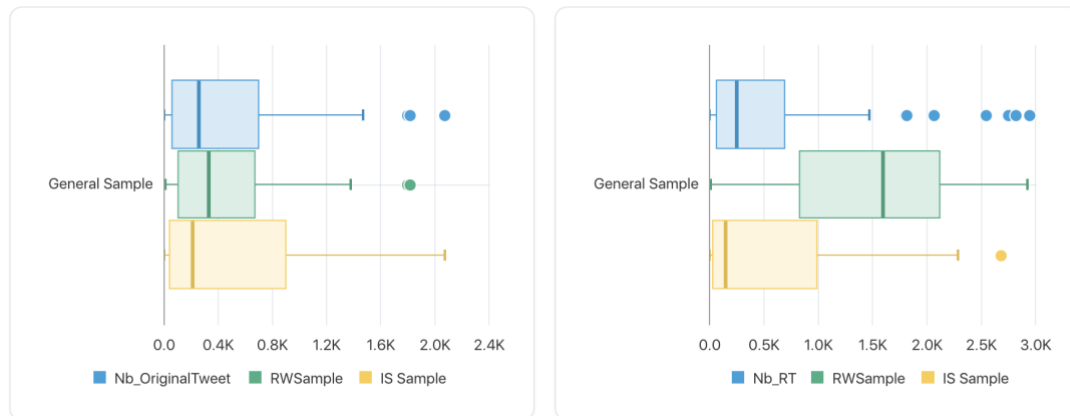
Figures 13 & 14 - Boxplots of the distribution of tweets (Figure 13) and retweets (Figure 14) for both samples (top fraction bar), the right-wing (middle fraction bar) and Islamist (bottom fraction bar) extremist samples

We mentioned that modalities of participation, in terms of tweeting or retweeting, are a way to gauge levels of engagement. By retweeting rather than tweeting, people are less exposed, more disengaged (Cha et al., 2010; Park and Kaye, 2018). In that respect, right wing extremists would seem less connected than Islamists extremists. However, if we put these results back into the context of typical Twitter use patterns, re-publishing content rather than generating original content, it is a normal pattern of behaviour for users on this platform (Park and Kaye, 2018). The fact right-wingers retweeted more than they tweet does not tell us much about levels of engagement. Given that retweeting is typical behaviour, it is more relevant to question the low number of retweets from the Islamist extremists. We suggest this could be related to a low level of integration into a digital milieu. Indeed, spreading other contributors' content would demonstrate an inflow just as much as an outflow of information, illustrating a manner to be connected to others online, and attentive to what is taking place within their networks. Instead, it would seem ISE users are not particularly receptive to their digital environment or strongly impacted by what others are expressing. While we still need to document this claim, we can note here yet another finding that tends to demonstrate the low level of integration of members of the ISE sample into a broad circle of online followers.

2.4.2 'Likes' and levels of integration
The overall volume of likes for samples illustrates another form of media participation. Liking content is even less engaging than retweeting but still shows a manner in which participants can actively contribute to the existence of digital milieus.

Figure 15 - Boxplot of the distribution of user's likes for the RWE sample
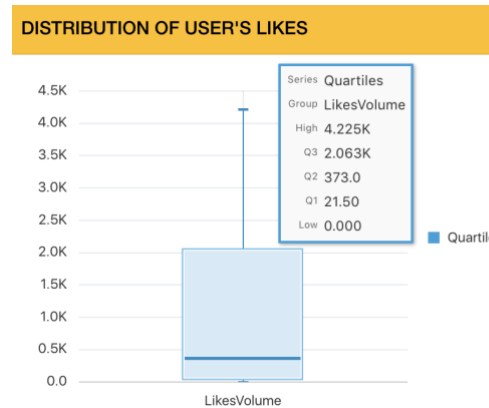
Figure 16 - Boxplot of the distribution of user's likes for the ISE sample

As the boxplots above demonstrate, likes are strongly disproportionate between ISE and RWE samples. On the left, the RWE sample shows that 50% of users like between 3,000 and 30,000 tweets, with a median value of 7,165 tweets liked. On the right-hand side, 50% of the range of likes of the IS sample is between 22 and 1,865 tweets liked, with a median value of 272 tweets liked. These figures confirm that ISE activity is mainly output - meaning Internet uses are directed at a general audience - rather than interactive - meaning exchanging or building reciprocal relationships with others. Overall the inflow of information is significantly low - even on its own without any comparison to the RWE milieu - to the extent where inflow of information seems non-existent for a number of accounts in the ISE sample. Within a median value of 373 tweets liked, users do not tend to like content published by other users.

2.4.3 Followers/followings and levels of integration

The last series of indicators we will look to highlight modalities of participation and evaluate online engagement by the number of followers and followings for each sample.
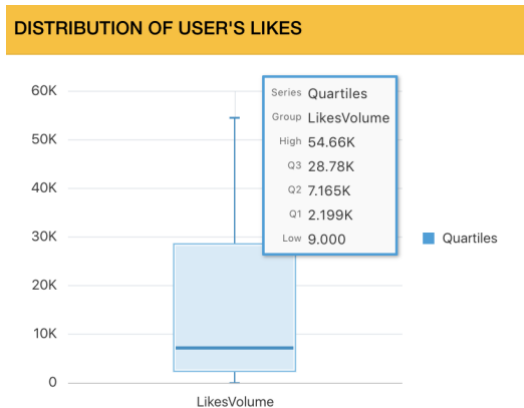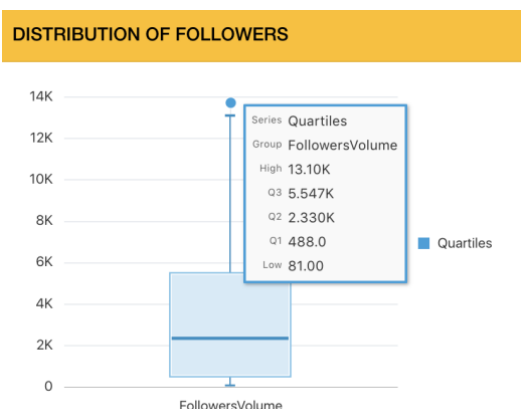

Figure 17 - Boxplot of the distribution of followers for the RWE sample
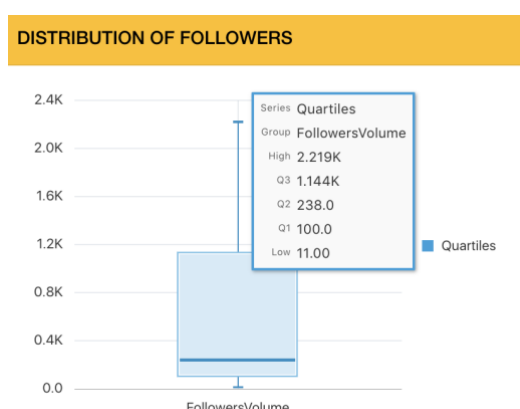
Figure 18 - Boxplot of the distribution of followers for the ISE sample
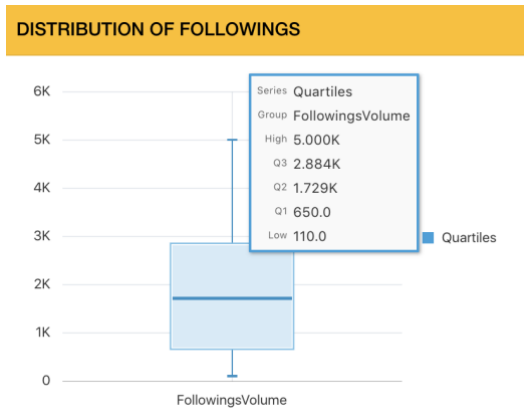
Figure 19 - Boxplot of the distribution of followings for the RWE sample
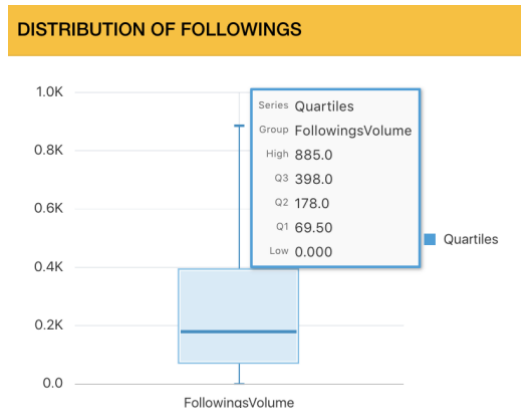
Figure 20 - Boxplot of the distribution of followings for the ISE sample

For the right-wing extremists, the median level is around 2,330 followers and 1,729 followings. For the Islamist extremists, median values are significantly lower with 238 followers and 178 followings. Followers and followings are good indicators to know if people have any echo when they post or if they are well-connected (Cha et al., 2010). They can also help pinpoint strategies of communication. For example, are users trying to get their message out there, or simply using Twitter to monitor domains of interest and therefore, not interested in the public debate potential of the platform? The ISE sample may demonstrate online engagement by posting original content and expressing themselves publicly, yet they lack any actual visibility with low levels of followers. As Boyd points out, publicity is not visibility (2010); publishing online does not mean that anyone is reading or seeing the material a user is sharing. The levels of followings and followers for the Islamists seem to indicate we are dealing with a sample of active contributors but without a strong echo. In comparison, the RWE sample presents a highly connected bunch of individuals with a strong level of participation, participation that may have an impact given that the level of visibility is higher.

2.4.4 Integrated vs disconnected contributors

Given the different findings within these last pages, we can describe the ISE sample as users who are disengaged from a larger online community, yet nonetheless active and engaged at an individual level of participation. This finding allows us to claim that Islamist contributors do not appear to support or engage in an online milieu shaped around radical ideologies; in other words, they may individually share radical content, but this form of participation is unrelated to an online milieu or carried out in relationship to a larger network. We will confirm this observation in the network analysis section of the report (see section 5.1).

Findings presented for the ISE sample do not apply to the RWE milieu. In this latter case, we can indeed sense the existence of an online milieu: strong activity related to 'liking' other contributors' tweets; following one another; and spreading content by retweeting. These are all signs that tend to indicate online engagement and connectivity, very possibly tied into an actual milieu.

Section Two: Key Findings

Notwithstanding the detailed analyses of samples presented above, five key findings emerge:

1. Analysis conducted shows that, on the one hand, with the RWE sample, the dataset contains a very similar type of accounts and modalities of participation appear rather homogenous. In contrast for the ISE sample, accounts seem more diverse and modalities of participation are heterogenous.

2. ISE activity is mainly output; Internet uses are directed at a general audience, rather than interactive. This observation of lack of interactivity is confirmed by the fact that contributors are possibly poorly related to one another. In these respects, media practices are at an individual level; there appears to be a low level of integration within the sample. This finding allows us to propose that Islamist contributors do not appear to support or engage in an online milieu shaped around radical ideologies; in other words, they may individually share radical content, but this form of participation is unrelated to an online milieu nor is it carried out in relationship to a larger network. Findings also imply that there is not a clear-cut phenomenon of digital sociability related to Islamist radicalisation. However, it may still offer a better understanding of self-radicalisation processes.

3. The lack of integration and high interaction does not lessen the fact that the ISE sample demonstrates online engagement by posting high levels of original content and expressing themselves publicly. In other words, the users are disengaged from a larger online community, yet are active and engaged at an individual level of participation. This high level of engagement may be an active form of self-radicalisation if we consider self-radicalisation as a process of continuous and ongoing self-convincing or the adoption of a lifestyle publicly self-promoted.

4. The lack of engagement in a community impacts the Islamists' influence. Publicity is not an equivalent of visibility. Given that the sample is actually poorly interconnected (within the sample and beyond), therefore we can consider they have little visibility within the public sphere.

5. In comparison, the RWE sample constitutes a highly connected bunch of individuals with a strong level of participation. Connectivity is high, and there would appear to be an online milieu. At this stage, while high visibility for the ISE sample was clearly absent, given the lack of interconnectivity and low level of followers, it was not possible to draw the same conclusion from the RWE sample.

3. Staging and framing identities

In section three, we study the fashion in which the groups stage their identity as radicals or extremists and/or are framed by others as such.

Drawing on labelling theories (Becker, 1963; Goffman, 1963), the purpose of this section is to situate the phenomenon of radicalisation on the stage of the public sphere (Habermas, 1962) as a co-produced phenomenon. By doing so, we consider radicalisation - both right wing or Islamist extremisms - as the by-product of conflicts of symbolic representations and relationships of power between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic social movements (Fraser, 2005; Macé, 2006). The semiotic and material boundaries of the notion of a French right wing or Islamist extremists scene are shaped by social actors – mainly institutions, e.g. politicians, journalists, scientists, representatives of

the civil society (Berger and Luckmann, 1966) – who take part in situated relationships, consisting of domination and power struggles.

From this perspective, the samples studied in this report can be pictured as radical because of the ways in which people react to the tweets they publish and they themselves perceive their contributions as radical. Participation in arenas of debate such as Twitter is only radical insofar as it is framed as such by the user himself/herself and bystanders (Becker, 1963). One's social identity as a radical is co-produced through external and internal labelling processes. This approach to radicalisation reminds us that radical ideologies are not a set of characteristics, but a process of interaction between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic movements, strongly dependent on the context and the situation of the symbolic productions.

Studying how users stage their identities on the Internet as well as how their media uses are framed by outsiders is important considering that the Internet has profoundly impacted the political landscape. The advent of 2.0 digital technologies, given their participative nature, where content is user-generated, has redefined the boundaries of the public sphere (Deuze, 2006; Jenkins, 2006; Livingstone, 2013). In this setting, creating an online profile carries both ideological and political implications (Castells, 2002). Access to political representation through media arenas, namely websites like Twitter, facilitates the legitimisation or modification of interpretative frameworks, which in turn endorse or transform this or that legislative and institutional arbitration. The rise of participatory media and the use of social media have reconfigured the recourse to the legitimacy that certain actors could claim, so much so that new forms of resistance or dissent are taking shape on the web. The Internet has magnified the availability of radical ideas (Dean et al., 2012; Shirazi, 2012; Torok, 2013) and now harbours counter-narratives promoting tolerance, support, acceptance, and mobilisation towards extremist ideology (Warschauer, 2003).

Understanding processes of radicalisation online therefore entails contemplating whether contributors participate on Twitter through specific repertoires of action and, if so, how are these uses framed. It presumes users stage their identities through general self-presentations to ensure their affiliation to a style recognisable by others as part of an extremist movement. It implies considering how far those stigmatised acknowledge the label they have been given and endorse it for themselves. Lastly, it supposes determining by what means and in what terms is labelling carried out by outsiders.

3.1 Expressing political and religious opinions

This section analyses the main forms of media participation encountered during the ethnographic phase of the study. Within the frame of social movement theories, a format of participation can be understood as a repertoire of contention (Tilly, 1993), a mode of action (Castells, 2015; Earl and Kimport, 2011) or a repertoire of action (Della Porta and Diani, 2006). Tilly defined repertoire of contention as an action carried out in common on the basis of shared interest (ibid.). To be heard on a certain issue or achieve visibility for a cause, activists have a set of various collective protest-related tools and actions that they perceive as legitimate to pursue in order to achieve their goals of visibility. Traditionally, these actions may include negotiations, petitions, poster collages, boycotts, demonstrations, sit-ins, riots, hostage-taking, sabotage, destruction, etc. Applied to the web, the notion of format of participation refers to the fashion in which one uses a social media account to engage in the public sphere to defend a cause by conforming to a collective style (Chadwick, 2007; Granjon and Cardon, 2010; Park, 2013; Theocharis et al., 2015; Figeac et al., 2020). Enquiring formats of participation thus prolongs studies that have shown how digital resources and social media websites have become modes of action (Castells, 2015; Earl and Kimport, 2011) allowing random citizens, social movements, activists or grassroot organisations to politically participate online, for example, by organising and coordinating protests more efficiently through social media tools (Bennett, 2003). Studies specifically designed for the Twitter ecosystem show that interactions on the platform become a political tool that can be used to several ends: taking part in political

communication, mobilising people to participate, and organising the actual actions of the social movement (Theocharis et al., 2015; Park, 2013).

Applied to extremism, it is a well-known fact that RWE and ISE organisations alike use platforms to rally their audiences, engage new recruitees and build a larger political movement, as we discussed in Section 1 of this report. More importantly, digital tools allow collective action rationales to emerge and individual citizens to take matters into their own hands by providing means to engage in political action (Norris, 2002). Yet, it is less clear how bottom-up movements take shape through individual actions and engage in politically collective action, taking a stand to defend radical ideologies through specific formats of participation, without particular incentive or direction from political organisations in a hierarchically descendant fashion. Here, we may contribute to this field of research by describing formats of participation retrieved for each sample. We will see that both samples engage in media activism, that is to say Internet activism aiming at triggering social, cultural or political change (Meikle, 2014; 2016). However, while the extreme right employs very classical forms of activism, the ISE sample uses Twitter in a less conventional manner, employing the platform for recognition and publicity purposes, to promote leaders and faith-based brands, rather than investing in the public arena and conversational features of the arena.

Considering participation formats in this section has the added value of bringing forward the reasons for selecting both samples. We will see that if each sample corresponds to a different repertoire of action, they can both be apprehended on a more general level as an expression of political opinions close to phenomena of radicalisation, without fitting the mould of radicalisation when that notion is equated with violent extremism.

By analysing the material retrieved through digital ethnography during the pilot phase of the study, and paying attention to topics of tweets, interactions between users, as well as the 'about' section of accounts, we can discern the format of participation used by each sample. We supplement this approach through quantitative analysis of the links contained in the tweets, using the datasets retrieved.

3.1.1 Right-wing extremism: classical forms of media activism

To identify what type of format of participation the RWE sample may be using to participate online, we focus on how they use their account and what justifications they provide to explain their participation. This shows that three main elements distinguish these accounts and allow us to think of them as a repertoire of action pertaining to media activism.

Engaging in activism to support anti-Islam and anti-immigration ideologies

The first element that allows us to distinguish a format of participation specific to the French far-right scene is the ideological orientations of topics of discussion amongst users within their tweets as well as stances people take to characterise and justify their online presence in the 'about' section of their page. These topics support the idea that accounts are set up to engage in political activism opposing immigration and/or Islamisation of French culture. Notwithstanding the fact that this characteristic is one that was included in the criteria for selection of the study, it nonetheless constitutes an objective marker that unites this group of users.

Indeed, all the accounts selected to compose the RWE sample are centred around political activism, also known as media activism when applied to the uses of ICT devices (Meikle, 2014, 2016). What the participants share is a specific way of using Twitter in relationship to a common focus, a political interest in anti-immigration and/or anti-Islam topics. Based on ethnographic observations of accounts, it is possible to demonstrate that users of the RWE sample are employing their accounts to communicate a desire to combat Islam and immigration in France.

They use Twitter to express their personal opinions against immigration and/or Muslims, claiming that France has been invaded by the Otherness of foreigners with their cultural and religious ways. This

symbolic category of 'others' is framed as foreigners who do not wish to adapt to the French ways but instead intend on pursuing their culturally foreign lifestyles. Great fear is expressed in the belief that they seek to impose their ways and beliefs on the French people. Below are three examples extracted from tweets expressing this sentiment and fear of invasion, typical of this format (see plates 1 to 3).

'Europe, 2050. Grandpa, why didn't you do anything?'

Plate 1

'#immigrationflooding

Lies and treachery

The horrible TRUTHS about African immigration that we HIDE from the French'

Plate 2

'According to Michèle Tribalat, it's a little over 5 million people and even at that some accuse her of exaggerating. Others claim we're closer to 20 million.'

Highlighted in the text: 'when I say 20 million Muslims in France, I'm probably still low compared to how many there really are'

Plate 3

As the description of one user's profile highlights, these claims of invasion are linked to lack of respect:

> When I'm in their country, I respect their traditions. In my country, they respect their traditions 😡! RESPECT MY FRANCE OR LEAVE! Speaking the truth gives freedom 🔯!

Based on what this user is saying, we could consider that the issue is not so much immigration as assimilation; the problem is immigrants' (or other figures of 'otherness') lack of willingness to erase any foreign cultural traits. Fighting immigration and Islam could then be perceived as a way to preserve a supposed 'pure French identity' from any alteration, as assimilation would guarantee that this imaginary identity is no longer threatened by any form of evolution or foreignness. Such discourses are typical of right-wing extremist ideologies where fear of change is intermixed with the production of an imaginary enemy. The definition of an enemy is fundamental to these ideologies; it reflects a logic of exclusion, if not dehumanisation, of the enemy. Furthermore, it lays the foundation for a battle line within a given socio-political and historical context (Dechezelles, 2005; Lebourg, 2010). No matter what the specifics of described otherness, the underpinning identitarian logic remains the same: alterity is subject to aggressive depreciation (Ferrie, 2014).

Nostalgia for the past and alienation in the present lead to fighting to #MakeFranceGreatAgain in the future

Another common trait of this format pertains to nostalgia for the past, sentiments of alienation in the present, and declarations regarding modern-day decadence. These sentiments are tinged with hopes for a better future, where past values would be restored.

When explaining the reasons for setting up accounts, contributors share the common perception that France is not the country it used to be. France has lost its way and its greatness. This sentiment is

similar to the one expressed at a national level in many Western countries worldwide in recent years, with the general spread of sayings like *#MakeFranceGreatAgain*, based on the American alternate 'Make America great again'. This particular expression is common in the 'about' section of profiles.

Such claims of decadence are often linked to expressions of alienation and nostalgia. Primarily, people are nostalgic for a past sense of strong national identity and unity. As one person explains, for example, her desires for France are to:

> *'Restore my beloved France, the France of my ancestors, and do not keep on watching all this barbarity and the degeneration of my country'*

Another person evokes France's lost culture, grace, traditions, etc.:

> *'So that my France keeps her identity, her elegance, her culture, her traditions, her values'*

This picture expresses the same idea in another manner:

This is what France is about! (top picture)

And definitely not that! (bottom picture)

Plate 5

These claims capture how accounts are used to act and publicly defend a cause - whether it is to recapture France's greatness or reverse an 'invasion' phenomenon - and thus, rectify something 'wrong'.

As one Internet user expresses:

> *'I will no longer shut up about how decadent my country is. I'm joining those who freely speak the truth to expose the real cancer of this country: Islam, immigrants, lefties and all those softies.'*

If the 'decadence' mentioned by users is due to immigration, according to the sample, participants also factor in other reasons - notably weak leaders, corrupt government officials and policies favouring cultural differences, as well as policies putting Others' and/or the elite's interests first - to explain their engagement on Twitter. Users express anti-communist, anti-leftist stances, accusing these political tendencies of leniency at best, but more often than not, of being the very source of the problem, having opened the doors to a flood of immigration and having crafted policies that favour mollycoddling, handouts and access to social welfare for the undeserving.

> *'We are patriots. Join-us in fighting against failing ideologies, that is to say, communism and socialism!'*

> *'Anti-socialist and proud of it. Islamist-incompatible. FR'*

What we can note at this stage is that accounts are used to combat the present-day political situation to 'make France great again'. We can also suggest that Twitter is being used for its communicative and expressive functions, in line with the main types of digital activism.

Participation as means for reclaiming a common cultural, religious and racial background

The third feature allowing us to consider accounts as part of the same genre is related to their 'heritage'. Whether the heritage they are referring to, pertains to sharing Christianity, a white skin colour and/or an identical historical background related to a given land, they claim to defend this socially constructed 'heritage'.

Many accounts boast about the fact that France has forever been Catholic - or at least Christian - simplifying the long history of the French territory. Likewise, many contributors state that the skin colour of the French is white, denying centuries of colonialism and past migration trends. Finally, references abound to remind one of the historical roots of the country, especially in relation to the Gauls, simplifying yet again the complexity of history. Simply put, France is portrayed as a non-Muslim faith-based country; people do not have darker skin tones and past colonialism does not constitute a part of France's history and/or provides no hold on present-day immigration. This general portrait of France's heritage promotes the idea that France's past greatness has been soiled by the changes brought forward by melding with other populations in recent years (e.g. citation below and plate 4).

'In this land of France, my roots are deep and my skin white like those of our queens'

'Races don't exist'

Plate 6

The insistence on the past can be a way to express feelings of being overwhelmed in the face of changes. As one Twitter user explains:

> *'When I was a child in the 50's, there were no Arabs or blacks in my town. When I go to Paris, that's all there is! They're everywhere! France has changed too much, too fast. I don't recognise my country anymore.'*

Studying links in tweets: sources chosen by users favour a bubble-effect experience

As part of this study we also statistically explored links inserted into tweets. These links are a direct reference to other websites (also known as 'domains' on the web). Exploring these links helps us understand the right-wing extremist ideological milieu and their relationship to other websites. Below, we consider the most referenced websites amongst tweets because the examination of the leading domains referenced can be indicative of manners in which the microblogging website is being used by participants.

If we look at which websites are the most referenced (see Table 2), the most popular source is *Français de souche*, a notorious right-wing extremist online magazine. This magazine is the most consulted political blog in France (Gimenez and Voirol, 2017). The second media outlet that figures below is *Adoxa.info*, an information website managed by former Rassemblement National departmental secretary, Gregory Roose. More mainstream but clearly identified as right-wing media sources, we find the names of journals or TV channels like *Le Figaro*, *Valeurs Actuelles*, *Le Parisien, BFMTV*. BFMTV is ambivalent because it is framed as an anti-populist, neo-liberal right-wing news outlet by some, so this domain appears amongst the top websites, either because it is a right-wing news source, or because users mention the news source to generate counter-narratives and oppositional stances.

Mixed in with these right-wing media outlets is one very famous French right-wing extremist journal, i.e. bvolatire - *Boulevard Voltaire* - a news website managed by Robert Ménard and Dominique Jamet. Also, amongst the most popular is the French version of *Sputniknews*, a news agency with a website platform and radio broadcast service established by the Russian government-owned news agency Rossiya Segodnya (*Russia Today*). This latter source is widely used across extreme right milieus as an alternative news source because it provides a critical view on Western governments. In France, these news domains are perceived as employing 're-information' strategies (Jammet and Guidi, 2017); that is to say, broadcasting and promoting supposedly 'unpopular' opinions that traditional media do not wish to cover or are too politically correct to share. It is important to understand that the idea behind re-information is that these news kinds of outlets provide 'alternative facts' to counter mainstream thinking. These types of media outlets, and the general ideas they support are based on conspiracy theories regarding mainstream media outlets. Such media practices, perceived as *avant-garde* strategies by their authors and their audiences, represent opportunities to showcase reactionary ideologies and promote extremist conceptions of social reality (Bouron, 2014).

Re-information strategies are a good example of the shift from offline propaganda and rumour-type communication strategies to the current online communication strategies with disinformation and fake news power struggles taking place within digital public arenas, opposing narratives and counter-narratives in a push-and-pull ideological tug of war, made technically possible by ICT opportunities.

Domain	NbLinks
twitter.com	25096
www.fdesouche.com	4297
youtu.be	1864
www.adoxa.info	1338
francais.rt.com	1315
www.lefigaro.fr	1179
www.valeursactuelles.com	949
www.leparisien.fr	708
www.bvoltaire.fr	706
www.bfmtv.com	679
actu17.fr	614
www.lemonde.fr	537
fr.sputniknews.com	512

Table 2 - The most shared domains within right-wing extremist tweets

Based on these observations, we can make two main assertions. First, spreading news is one of the dominant forms of communication amongst users. What is important to note here is that amongst the twenty main domains, a large majority are news outlets. This means that sources cited on Twitter – other than material produced on the platform for the platform - is information drawn from the news cycle and circulated by users. Secondly, and more importantly, sources chosen by users favour a bubble-effect experience on the web, also known as 'echo chambers' (Sustein, 2007), in which individuals are exposed to opinions concordant to their own, thereby reinforcing their initial convictions, further confirming a like-minded setting. The RWE sample mainly shares sources that pertain to right-wing extremist ideologies, thus following the overall user pattern online, according to which contributors share similar ideas, generate bubbles within which they operate and favour networks of like-minded people, preventing exposure to opposing ideologies (Stevens and Neumann, 2009). This particular aspect of Twitter has led researchers to claim that the platform encourages the

reinforcement of radical ideologies instead of exposing users to new ideas and streams of information (Silber and Bhatt, 2007; Stevens and Neumann, 2009; Torok, 2013).

If we look at what people share in their tweets, this echo chamber phenomenon could be reinforced by Twitter's algorithm. By prioritising the display of content shared by 'friends' closest to the users, algorithms favour similar opinions and promote like-minded political convictions, creating a 'filter bubble' (Pariser, 2011) meant to ensure a more positive user-experience of the website. Algorithms could also contribute to the spread of fake news (Tandoc, Lim and Ling, 2017), the reinforcing of the polarisation of opinions and the promotion of radical far-right ideas. While current research considers the power of platforms like Twitter to revitalise democracies and, at the same time, properly consider their fragility as well as their limitations in doing so (Tufekci, 2017), policy makers and platform administrators must also acknowledge the power of social media platforms in shaping opinions. Even more so, if we consider that those who primarily seek their news online are more prone to supporting extremist narratives of different sorts in comparison with those who only consult offline news (Piazza and Guler, 2019).

Examining domain names shared within tweets by those in our sample demonstrates that this repertoire of action functions in a closed environment; one favouring like-minded ideas, based on the promotion and spreading of right-wing extremist news content. This use of Twitter in a 're-information' strategy is a distinctive feature of the French RWE sample.

Transgressive postures aimed at spreading radical ideologies and promoting violent extremism
If the features of this format of media participation described in the last four sections emphasise its political nature, what differentiates these accounts from 'ordinary' anti-minority political stances is the degree of radicalism they display; a degree of radicalism that unites these accounts.

Since the object of this study was radicalisation, accounts that met a large number of criteria (cf. General Introduction) corresponding to what researchers defined as radical ideologies were targeted. One criterion of particular importance was the call for violence. In the case of the RWE sample, it was easy to find a large number of accounts that fit the criteria, or at the very least, shared explicitly violent content targeting minorities or immigrants. For example, while browsing through accounts, it was easy to spot the following type of imagery and texts that openly stigmatise migrants and/or expressed radical opinions in terms of how to treat Islamists and/or minorities (see plates 7 to 12).

Plate 7

The user states: '*May I present to you the future classmates of your kids.*' Underneath this claim, there is a video, excerpt from an ISIS propaganda video, with a toddler killing a man on his knees at bullet

Plate 8

'*We come in peace*'

Plate 9

point

Plate 10

Plate 11

Plate 12

Pictures and texts openly stigmatise minorities, especially Muslims and immigrants, occasionally expressing violent intent. Some illustrations defend the use of force against foreign aliens and/or portray Muslims, as barbarians, based on the justification that a growing Muslim population would supposedly lead to greater insecurity in France and wars worldwide. In tweets posted on line, Islam is also represented as a threat to national security and/or a disease that should be eradicated (see plates 13 to 15).

At the top of the tweet, the author states: 'This is a response to what a muslim said about Christianity [RT @xxxx[10] 'Christianity is a bloodthirsty and barbaric religion'] Below these words, we find the following pictures:

Plate 13

Right after the picture we can read: 'Blah,blah,blah… yet another immigrant, #LEAVE !!!

---

[10] Name has been intentionally altered to anonymise the original tweet that prompted the response used in the demonstration above.

Plate 14

The slogan in the sticker in the picture is '*Islam worse than Nazism. 270 million dead*'

Plate 15

The tweet above the picture states:

'In the Muslim world, female 'modesty' means the social incarceration and deadly and barbaric subordination of women' In the comment section of that tweet, we can note replies such as: '*Islam leave, fucking pigs. Long live le Pen, long live Trump. Immigrants leave!*'

In this one tweet, the contributor clearly targets only certain minorities:

> '*Have you ever heard of any British, Americans or Swedish who come to France as immigrants? And who have anti-white racist practices? The immigration from outside of Europe, from Africa, is the plague, a cancer in France. You are not welcome here.*'

In this way a narrative of French lineage as built on basic territorial limits and a series of particularities, such as Catholicism, white skin colour, etc. is maintained.

3.1.2 Islamist extremism: microblogging to serve a high power

As for the RWE sample, to identify what type of format of participation the ISE sample may be using to participate online, we will focus on how they are using their account and what justifications they provide to explain their participation. We will see that four main elements distinguish these accounts and allow us to conceptualise them as a repertoire of action pertaining to microblogging to serve a 'higher power'. The expression 'higher power' is employed in this context as a metaphor to underline the fact that users justify their online presence by pretending to use Twitter to serve Allah. Microblogging is thus a repertoire of action in itself, one meant to serve a greater purpose, carried out by servants of Allah. We will see that this format serves to publicise religious beliefs, without resorting to violent content, nor expressing political views in a fashion similar to the RWE sample. This does not fully eliminate the activist dimension of this repertoire of action, nor does it negate its extremist nature. To conclude this section, we will set these observations in the context of the earlier finding that the ISE sample engaged online without belonging to an online community or milieu (see Section 2.4).

Preaching, delivering faith-oriented lifestyle tips and broadcasting religious scriptures

If the RWE accounts openly contribute to political debates in order to promote their views and their agenda, the same cannot be said about the Islamist extremist accounts. Rather than getting involved in general politics, these accounts focus on preachings, religious lifestyle tips, scriptures and sermons pertaining to a Muslim belief system. The first element that allows us to distinguish a format of participation specific to the French Islamist extremist scene is the ideological orientations of topics of discussion amongst users within their tweets as well as stances people take to characterise and justify their online presence in the 'about' section of their page.

Accounts are not oriented towards spreading like-minded news or engaging in direct communication but instead are employed in an out-bound manner, to broadcast religious ideological material. The main feature of this type of media activity is indeed employing Twitter to promote a religious-based belief system. This format of participation is centred around praising Allah and sharing religious views.

When examining how people justify using Twitter, in particular in the 'about' section, explanations cluster around faith or a particular spiritual leader. As illustrated below, justifications take the form of a generic saying, an excerpt from the Quran or messages directed towards an audience.

> *'Islam according to the Quran'*

> *'Islam My Life My Religion My Faith: Hadiths, verses, surah'*

> *'Kadar[11] is often the source of public controversies. Take advantage of this direct line of communication to ask him all the questions you may have. You will receive a reply.*

> '*Allah will rise in those who have been believers and who will have received his wisdom*'

It is evident also that through this form of media participation, users offer different sorts of religious-based information, like scriptures or (original or leader-based) preachings. Accounts thus constitute guidance and educational resources, and as such, can be approached like a platform for lifestyle tips to support one's beliefs with practical advice.

> *'Through this account one will find only reminders [ndlr: of faith]'*

> '*This account aims at educating brothers and sisters in wedlock by accounting for rights and duties*'

Most accounts target men and women alike. However, some are set up in a more gender-oriented fashion. This is the first mention in our analysis of gender and for good reason. With the RWE sample, gender-oriented content is less ostentatious. In contrast among the ISE sample some accounts are specifically designed to fit the needs of a particular gender. For example, this account explicitly states in the 'about' section that it is designed to solicit women rather than men:

> *'Ritual dressings for women and (free) training based on the Quran and the Sunnah bi fehmi Salaf-us-salih'*

Beyond gender-oriented practices, this last example also denotes a dominant trait pertaining to the religious goal of publications: accounts serve to advertise an influencer or a denomination behind a lifestyle. In such instances, Twitter becomes a sort of marketing resource. The end result is not to share or exchange about a given topic; the expected end-result is to attract attention to an ideology and its related sub-products. Through such online participation, we can better comprehend why tweets are outbound, as we saw in section 2.1; promoting one's leadership style, denomination or specific empire of faith, does not call for a conversation.

This use of Twitter is quite different from how the RWE sample uses the platform because, as we saw, the right-wing extremist participants mainly employ the website as a communicative and expressive device in a media activist logic. In this respect, this repertoire of action strongly differs from the one described previously. The first one is interactive and communication based; the second one is outbound and serves as a promotion tool.

In sum, the primary way the ISE sample uses accounts is to offer spiritual guidance based on scriptures and preachings. Twitter is employed as a tool to help other believers align their lifestyle with their faith. At first glance, this form of media participation does not appear to have any political ground or stake. Microblogging would solely be carried out to serve a higher power and share the good news of

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[11] The leader of opinion's name in the text here has been changed to keep personal data anonymous.

Islam. That being said, we can already note that, as far as repertoires of action go, it does not call for any type of communication; it is a format of participation meant to promote religious-based ideologies.

General affiliation to Quietist Salafism

Over and above microblogging to promote one's faith, name or brand, another element that characterises this format is the affiliation to a specific denomination of faith, namely Salafism.

It was impossible to pinpoint a single ideological stream within the RWE sample; we are dealing rather with right-wing extremismS. The ISE sample, on the other hand, demonstrates heavy affiliation to a singular ideology, namely a specific denomination within the Muslim faith, i.e. Salafism. This can be identified by browsing through the accounts and paying attention to (screen/user) names, short descriptions in the 'about' section, header or profile pictures, as well as the content published and shared. This is illustrated in the following two examples:

> *'In the footsteps of authentic Islam, Quran according to the Sunnah, as well as the understandings of the Salafists'*

> *'Islam in accordance with the Quran and the Sunnah according to the methodology of the pious predecessors'.*

While Salafism comprises of three main branches: Quietist (also known as predictive or purist (Adraoui, 2015); Jihadist; and political (also known as traditional ethical activism (ibid.). Quietist Salafism is the dominant stream of Salafism in France (Amghar, 2006, 2011; Khosrokhavar, 2006, 2014, 2015; Boukhars, 2009). In opposition to the Jihadists, they are apolitical and nonviolent. Pockets of radicals, harbouring positive sentiments towards jihadism, are part of the French landscape, but the format of participation identified in this study appears to be in line with the French Muslim landscape, that is to say, in France, there are pockets of Jihadist Salafists but the dominant position of the Muslim is Quietist Salafism.

Indicators of this affiliation can be found in tweets, through mentions of well-known Salafist Quietist preachers, or by means of apolitical statements on matters of government, which are typical of a Quietest Salafist posture. Although there are many more examples of this, the three excerpts from tweets below exemplify this tendency.

In the first of the three examples, the tweet reads: 'We follow in the footsteps of the Sunnah of the Prophet, we do not revolt against those who govern! Now, if you're having a hard time with the Hadiths, that's another story (...)'. After that, the tweet shares a picture of a Hadith, knowing that the excerpt used is typical of a Quietist preaching. The hadith plus the way the tweet is framed are typical of Quietist beliefs, that is to say, followers should not meddle in political matters and leave that to those who govern, in such a way that taking part in politics goes against the Islam faith (plates 16-17).

Plate 16

The use of quotes from Muhammad Nasiruddin al-Albani, an Islamic Salafist scholar who promoted political quietism, underlines the religious leniency of the associated account

Plate 17

Quoting Ibn al Qayyim, an ancient Salafist scholar, can also be perceived as an indicator of Quietist Salafism

Exploring further, we checked the data for other ideological influences and cross-referenced tweets against a list of influential names and organisations, potentially indicative of radical material and ideologies. This generated a clear picture of which type of preachers or movements were cited, how extremists' movements were portrayed, and whether users supported or condoned radical ideologies. Ultimately, we were able to determine whether this material is jihadist by nature, leaning towards another branch of Salafism, supporting radical causes outside the perimeter of the radar of French Muslim tendencies, or, as noted above, participants belonged to Quietism.

The results confirm that this format of participation is characterised by support for Quietist Salafism, even if matters are not always as clear-cut as this suggests. This becomes evident below as we discuss the final feature introduced in this subsection to describe the ISE sample.

Absence of claims to violence for political means
The third feature of this repertoire relates to the fact that none of the Twitter accounts openly manifest violent claims, or share violent content of any sort, in the name of religious faith or ideologies. This does not mean that users do not aspire to Sharia-ruled states or that the messages in which they support their beliefs are not in breach of French laws. Simply, in contrast to the RWE sample, violent extremist type content is not employed to express political aspirations.

Contributors within the ISE sample are clear about their lack of support for radicalisation to the extent that they argue against terrorism or radical forms of political Islam. They denounce infamous political figures or organisations supporting any type of radical Islamism by, for example, providing links to anti-extremism leaflets or arguing against the reasoning behind terrorism, explaining how such activities are misguided and go against Islam. For example, a tweet links back to an article on how 'Khalid Yasin', a well-known controversial British Salafist preacher, is misguided. As stated in the tweet, his preachings go against an 'authentic' version of the Islamic faith:

> '*Several testimonies in this article serve to demonstrate the fallacious nature of Khalid Yasin, along with the fact that his preachings are dangerous*.'

Another tweet openly warns against Al-Qaeda and ISIS organisations by linking to an educational leaflet that explains why these groups must be avoided:

> *'Get your new leaflet now: Warnings against terrorist activities of ISIS & Al-Qaeda'*

In a final example, we can see in the 'about' section of a user's profile that the contributor adopts the extreme opposite position to one of violence, by portraying Islam as a religion of peace:

> '*Allah calls for the Home of Peace and guides whom he wishes to the righteous path*'

Of course, while clearly we were unable to track violent extremism of any sort, or calls for violence, we will see that the most radical Islamist ideologies are most likely expressed on other websites rather than on Twitter.

Studying links in tweets: from clouds, to chatrooms to crowdfunding sites
Looking at the domains used in tweets among the Islamist sample, we find a much greater diversity of sources than among the RWE sample, which was heavily reliant on news outlets in tweets (see Table 3). We can identify social media platforms and news outlets, just like in the RWE sample. However, we can also see crowdfunding sources, chat rooms and online clouds.

Domain	NbLinks
twitter.com	3043
www.youtube.com	467
youtu.be	379
www.3ilmchar3i.net	319
www.al-tawhed.net	262
app.box.com	202
kiw.im	183
fb.me	160
m.youtube.com	156
curiouscat.me	139
archive.org	115
www.islamsounnah.com	113
www.dahwaaboutique.fr	103
el-fitra.fr	88
www.cotizup.com	65
twishort.com	62
drive.google.com	59
salafislam.fr	57
www.facebook.com	53
t.me	52
www.dropbox.com	45
docdro.id	44
www.leetchi.com	43

Table 3: The most shared domains within Islamist extremist tweets

This major difference in types of website domains between the RWE sample and the ISE sample leads us to two main conclusions. First, this finding confirms that Twitter is by no means only used to share ideas or communicate. Once again, we see how Twitter is used in a very different way by the Islamist sample than by the RWE sample. The fact that chat rooms are amongst the top domains would tend to indicate that conversations are being held elsewhere. The mention of cloud spaces, such as google drive, also suggests that contributors are using Twitter to spread content. Another example is the links to crowdfunding websites – such as leetchi – which might lead us to suppose that Twitter is being used to collect money. This proposition is confirmed by the lexical analysis outlined below through which 'financial assistance' emerges as a theme (see Section 4.1.1).

Secondly, sources of information are secondary to other types of websites. Only a few websites are listed in Table 3, implying there are few information sources from which users pull up content for their publications; otherwise people share links to other social media platforms, amongst other things.

What this approach demonstrates is that Twitter is not a place to have conversations but rather a place to showcase content and find an audience; it is therefore a storefront of sorts that serves to publicise material and re-route followers. This seems to indicate the conversation is happening elsewhere, as has already been considered as a possibility in section 2.4.

While users may not use Twitter as a space to conduct conversations, Twitter is used by our sample as a platform to broadcast religious fundamentalism and as a stage for the promotion of Salafist ideologies. This constitutes the fourth feature of this repertoire of action.

Considering the apolitical nature of Quietist Salafism: from religious fundamentalism and political extremism to the adoption of an oppositional stance

Given these series of observations, why has this format of participation been considered within a study of radicalisation? Is it possible to characterise the participants in this sample as extremists? By answering these questions this report will describe the last feature of this format of participation, namely, the use of digital participation to showcase obedience to Quietist Salafism as a means of laying public claim to an oppositional posture.

We have seen that this format of participation is faith-based, centred around French Quietist Salafism. Through obedience, Quietists prevent their believers from meddling in political affairs, by setting moral, religious values and practices above man-made laws. However, as Adraoui explains, the belief system of Quietists is very much political (2016). The purist Salafist rhetoric is built around the idea that they do not engage in politics and refrain from interacting with political institutions, and yet, as they want to shape society to mirror their ideals, their actions fall within the realm of political practices through a process of public engagement (Boukhars, 2006). It is therefore impossible to consider Quietist Salafists' media participation as apolitical simply because they use Twitter to share their beliefs.

Moreover, if this format of participation cannot be considered as celebrating violent extremism, it nonetheless captures extremist stances. As we indicated above, users share messages in which they make statements that go against French laws. Either in a tweet or in the comment section of tweets, several participants below explain that, Islamist principles trump French laws. Here the examples centre around gender mixing, which in itself is an area of particular tension in the French political landscape with regular debates pertaining to how to respect both the Muslim faith and laicity principles (Parvez, 2011).

> At the beginning of the tweet, one can read: '*Laicity is considered as one of the main blasphemies a person can commit, sister, that is to say it actually prevents the person from being part of Islam altogether.*' Below are a few lines explaining some major blasphemies a believer can commit (see Plate 18, below):

Différentes formes de mécréance majeure qui excluent la personne de l'Islam

Saches que les juristes musulmans ont consacré dans leurs livres un chapitre spécial intitulé « Règles de l'apostasie ».

Ils y ont cité des dizaines d'actions, de paroles et de croyances qui excluent de l'Islam celui qui commet une seule d'entre elles...

Reviens donc à leurs explications pour vérifier l'authenticité de ton Islam et de ton monothéisme !!

Nous citerons quelques-unes unes des formes d'incroyance majeure :

- Appeler à la laïcité ou l'accepter, car elle constitue en fait le combat contre la religion, afin de l'écarter de la vie apparente et du système de l'état. De la même façon, s'affilier à une autre idéologie athée, comme le communisme ou le capitalisme.

Plate 18

In the comment section of a tweet, one participant explains to another that gender mixing is forbidden by Islam:

- '*In Islam, the man has much more legitimacy to be outside and 'work' while encouraging women to stay in their homes. The man has a duty to bring in money. Gender mixity is prohibited and shouldn't be permitted, that is why it is better to do the hijra or try to change matters here*.'

In this last example (plate 19), a user shares the sayings of an Imam through a tweet to support forbidding mixing in public spaces:

La mixité est la mère de tous les maux

« Et il n'y a pas de doute que l'établissement de la mixité des femmes avec les hommes : constitue la base de tout désastre et calamité, et fait partie des causes les plus ultimes de la descente des châtiments collectifs, tout comme cela fait partie des causes de la perversion des affaires générales et particulières. Et la mixité des hommes avec les femmes est la cause de l'augmentation des turpitudes et de la fornication. C'est la cause de la mort collective et des châtiments généralisés...»

Ibn l-Qayyim, Al Tourouq Al Houkmiyyâ (2/724)

'Mixity is the very source of all evil

'There is no doubt that the mixing of men and women lies at the root of all disasters and calamities, and is, in part, the ultimate causes of collective punishment as well as corruption, at the level of the general and the particular. (...) It is the cause of collective death and retribution for all…'

Plate 19

In addition to discussions about how French law is second to a system of belief, contributors engage in political conversations about their aspirations to live in a regime they support. One user, for example, expresses her hopes to one day be able to live under a Sharia-ruled regime to fully live in alignment with her beliefs:

- *According to Adi Ibn Hatim, the Prophet said: 'those who incurred anger are the Jews and the misguided ones are the Christians' (...)*

- *And so you would rather we whip your back in public for this or that reason due to the Sharia because Muhammad said that in the 7th century, instead of living freely in a Christian or Jewish country?*

- *Yes, of course, the Sharia before all else.*

- *In France and in Egypt, it's impossible to apply the Sharia.*

- *In Saudi Arabia, it is!*

By making such public assertions, this user engages in everyday politics and exemplifies how extremism is expressed in respect to French social norms. This repertoire of action can be understood, therefore, as operating within the scope of extremism in relation to religious fundamentalism. This constitutes the fifth feature of this repertoire.

Beyond political engagement, religious fundamentalism and political extremism, it is important to understand that Salafism represents an oppositional posture. According to Boukhars, the upsurge in affiliation to Salafism in France in recent years is rooted in a need for public recognition (2006); belonging and believing corresponds to a will to adopt a transgressive and oppositional posture in regard to the ways in which parts of the Muslim and second or third generation of immigrants perceive their place in French society. Sensing stigma in the eyes of the general public and the French population, these minorities take shelter in forcing the trait of 'otherness'. Boukhars explains that no matter which of the three tendencies within Salafism we have in mind, those who affiliate to Salafism in France seek to distinguish themselves by their 'defiance of a political order that is incapable of accommodating, or unwilling to accommodate, the concerns and grievances of French Muslims'

(2006: 307). For him, Salafism is the embodiment of an oppositional stance that has grown in recent years amidst the lack of proper political representation and recognition. In this sense, the rise of Salafism in France is a call for attention, a way to regain visibility in a public sphere that has overlooked the Muslim population and descendants from past decades of immigration; a fashion for minorities to ensure political representation within a national context. These observations translate to the Internet and allow us to conceptualise this format of participation as an oppositional posture, embodying a form of extremism.

3.2 Staging identities

Although the nature of this study precludes the collection of extensive personal data regarding people's age, level of education, or profession, information pertaining to social identity could still be recovered. By speaking of social identity, we make the claim that people, consciously or not, stage their identities to present themselves to their audience (Goffman, 1959). They display signs that enable others to situate them on the social scene, for example, through their dress choice or expression of some kind of cultural taste. Online interactions are coloured by these identity performances (Turkle, 1995; Markham, 1998; Sunden, 2003; Thomas, 2004), allowing us to capture these social markers to characterise the social identity of each sample.

To be more precise, we will examine how people perform their social identities. As Butler explains, identity is not just a social construct pertaining to external and internal labelling processes (see section 3.3). It is a kind of performance, a show we put on, a set of signs we wear, as if it were a costume or a disguise (Butler, 1990). This performance can be apprehended through the observation of general 'style' (Hebdige, cited in Glevarec, 2008) specific to each stream of radicalisation. "A style is meant to be *said*, it is a *saying* that is opaque, *a saying* that the researcher must decode, assuming actors are adopting a same posture" (Glevrac, 2008: 76). A style gives us an understanding of how people perceive themselves, as well as how they wish to be perceived by others as belonging to a group, and in this sense, It serves to express one's affiliation to a group of peers. Embracing an overall style successfully, with the relevant codes, is essential to convey resistance to dominant representations, and thus spread a counter-hegemonic narrative of sorts. In the case at hand, we could presume to find a narrative of political extremism as we have already established in the last subsection on repertoires of action. Such tendencies will be further detailed at the level of self-presentation indices.

Below, rather than considering Twitter as a place where people can mobilise specific repertoires of action to pursue political goals, this study has adopt an ethnographic approach to explore the social identities that are forged through individual accounts.

On Twitter, identities are expressed through emoticons, systematic vocabulary, expressions or hashtags in the 'about' section; they take on the appearance of profile pictures and profile banners on their page; they are related to the handle names and usernames. This data is drawn on here to study self-presentations and determine how users portray themselves on the public stage of Twitter, and if the way they stage their social identities reveals a common style pertaining to radicalisation. A particular interest in the use of common signifiers is noted, that is to say, the use of the same qualifiers – be they symbols, icons, verbal expressions or hashtags. These common signifiers show how people unite online and how they co-produce a collective identity. The findings also help demonstrate, where applicable, the existence of an online milieu.

3.2.1 Right-wing extremist self-presentations: Support for radical ideologies in profiles

To better understand exactly how individuals represent themselves, what they share with their audiences and to what extent their self-presentations support processes of radicalisation, findings have been summarised in Table 4.

RWE Twitter handles/ names[12]
1. **Reference to France**
[First Name] + some cf. to France ([First Name] De France or [First Name] underscore France ex: *Nathalie_FRANCE*
PerfectFrance
2. **French historical chieftains, kings, characters or famous personalities**
Vercingetorix, [i.e. leader of the Gallic tribes]
Joan of Arc
3. **Right-wing political Affiliation/ allegiance/ leaders**
Fascist Nationalist
Marine Le Pen
The People from the Right [LePeupleDeDroite]

RWE 'about' section
Location
Fachosphere
Emoticons

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[12] The terms Twitter handle, username and name are sometimes used interchangeably. The Twitter handle and username are the same thing; they appear in the URL bar and come after the '@' sign in the 'about' section of a user's profile. It is unique to the account and no two people can have the same one because a Twitter handle/username links your account to an online domain of sorts. On the other hand, the name of an account does not have to be unique and can be used by a wide range of users. More importantly, it can be changed throughout the lifespan of the account and therefore is not as committing and irreversible as handle/username. A lot of Twitter handles and/or names are made-up names to fit the intended uses of the account. If the accuracy and authenticity of names and usernames are dependent on the person behind the account and the way they intend on using their account, it is also highly related to the website itself. As Cardon explains, social media networks are exploited in different manners and there is a spectrum of authenticity, from the most made-up accounts to most authentic profiles, depending on websites (2010). LinkedIn, for example, at one end of the spectrum, is one place in which people provide accurate information about themselves. A place like Twitter is in the middle of this spectrum; people can very well decide to make up names and handle names without any ill intent, simply to reflect personal stances or areas of interest, for example. It is important to keep in mind that fake identities and made-up handle names take nothing away from the authenticity of the person' participation. Self-presentations - and this goes for every way people name themselves - are a reflection of how people wish to appear in society, and as such, are messages that should be taken seriously.

FRRUPLHUUSIL: French, Russian, Polish, Italian, American, Israeli flags

🟦 🏠 ✝️ : religious Christian icons

🐷🐷 : cf. to pork meat & eating halal

🍾🥖🗼 : symbols of French culture

Hashtags

1. **France's decline mirroring strong leaders/pro-right-wing extremism with an emphasis on the unity of RW everywhere**

   #MakeFranceGreatAgain #MAGA [Make America Great Again]

   #MarineLePen #RN #AvecMarine

   #strongringwingsunited #togetherwiththefarright #PVV [Partij voor de Vrijheid, a nationalist, right-wing populist political party in the Netherlands] *#TrumpSalviniOrbanBolsonaro #MatéoSalvini*

2. **Anti-Macron**

   #MacronDemission #MacronDestitution #NoLREM #AntiMacron

3. **Nationalism, historical heritage & identitarian**

   #nationalist #gaul #FrançaisDeSouche #identitarian

Expressions

1. **Patriotism, nationalism, pro-right, Gaullism**

   '*Blue White Red*' [i.e. colours of the French flag]

   '*Social nationalist. Identitarian*'

   '*For France, proud of her roots*'

   '*Gaul and nationalist*'

   '*So that my France keeps her identity, her elegance, her culture, her traditions, her values*'

   '*Proud to be French, proud to be far right*'

2. **Anti-establishment also understood as anti-politically correct**

   '*Political correctness is the language of those who are afraid of what would happen if they stopped lying*' (Pierre MANENT)

   '*Opposed to political correctness*'

   '*A state is called the coldest of all cold monsters. Coldly lieth it also; and this lie creepeth from its mouth: 'I, the state, am the people.'* NIETZSCHE

3. **Anti-left**

   '*Lefties, get on your way*'

'For a Europe that is rooted in its traditions, freed from left totalitarianism'

'Against leprosy #islamoleftie'

'Resolutely and wholly anti-left'

'leftie-phobic'

'Hate left-fascists'

4. Anti-Islam

'Islam the cancer of France'

'Islamophobe=fear of Islam!!'

'Islam-incompatible and therefore racist, fascist, other insults on the list'

'Is Islam soluble in democracy? Poor plucked turkeys! What do you need to understand (...)'
Maurice G. Dantec

5. Immatriculation/ Registration number/ Serial number

'immatriculation 2246'

'Personal serial number 7860'

RWE profile pictures and banners

1. Anti-Islam & Anti-Immigration

Plate 20

In reference to immigration, the picture could be translated as 'France is full', 'has no vacancies' or simply put 'France is no longer accepting immigrants'.

Plate 21

Headscarves forbidden.

Plate 22

Reference to the Jyllands-Posten Muhammad cartoons controversy[13].

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[13] In September 2015, a famous Danish newspaper published 12 editorial cartoons, some of which depicted Muhammad - the principal figure of the Islamic religion - as a terrorist, triggering a worldwide controversy, backlashes and uprising in Muslim communities around the world. Protestors saw the cartoon as disrespectful and an insult to their belief system. The drawings were re-published in several journals over the years, either in

2.   **Anti-establishment** (Anti-Macron & Anti-Europe sentiments)

Plate 23

Opposition to the European Union as a state and France's part in that political and economic state.
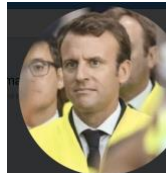
Plate 24

This image is a parody with the President Macron wearing a Yellow Jacket, knowing that he disapproved of the movement, or at the very least, was often portrayed in the movement, as being part of the problem.

Plate 25

'Macron dégage' meaning 'Macron buzz off' as opposition to the French elected President.

3.   **Patriotism & nationalism**

their original state or in new versions. Amongst these, the French newspaper Charlie Hebdo published several satires. These satires ultimately led to the 2015 terrorist attack on the newspaper's headquarters, killing a larger part of its staff, including the authors behind the satirical drawings.

Plate 26

Reference to French heritage or cultural origins with a picture of a Gaul village

Plate 27

Lorraine cross, reference to the French resistance in the 2nd WW, also used by ultra-RW to express resistance to the regime in place and ostracism

Plate 28

Patriotic visual material free of charge that can be found on the ultra-RW website jeune-nation.com representing a soldier, with a French flag in the background, defending a particular vision of France

Plate 29

Symbol of the French flag.

Plate 30

Symbol of Marianne, painted in the colours of the French flag. Mariane personifies France and is a reference to the French Republic since the French Revolution in 1789

4.   Christianity & Christian crusaders: historical references to national identity

Plate 31

Reference to the crusades that took place in the Middle Ages and were sanctioned by the Catholic church to take back the Holy Land from Muslim rule.

Plate 32

Another example of representations along the lines of the picture on the left of this one.

Plate 33

Reference to Christianity and France being a Christian faith based country.

5.   Yellow Vests social movement ('*Gilets jaunes*')

Plate 34

Reference to the Yellow Vest social movement and bluntly stated support to the social movement.

Plate 35

This particular image mixes anti-Islam sentiments (with a direct reference to pork, i.e. food that is forbidden by the Muslim faith) and support for the Yellow Vest social movement.

Table 4 - Summary of right-wing extremist self-presentation findings

We will start by briefly commenting on each of the separate areas of the Twitter accounts illustrated in Table 4.

● Regarding *contributors' names*, it is important to note that only a handful of people from the sample publish their real names. Instead, people use pseudonyms.

There are three main pseudonym tendencies:

i) Personifying their country, i.e. France;

ii) Resorting to historical popular French figures mainly chieftains, kings or religious celebrities, from the Roman era to the end of the Middle Ages to frame their identity;

ii) Using ultra RW movements or leaders to represent themselves.

The first tendency illustrates positive sentiments with people, using the name of their country to express their attachment and emphasise their patriotic inclinations. In the second case, here again, participants proudly showcase their national origins, yet insist more on the historical heritage and origins rather than opening the door to present-day narratives and contemporary manners to frame French identity. Also, the way they portray their historical heritage is not random; it is oriented, favouring traditional right-wing radical ideologies, leaning towards the Roman era and the leagues of this era. The third tendency amongst users is to endorse RW extremist political parties or their leaders and thus showcase their affiliation or allegiance to these given parties and leaders. In all three cases, political affiliation is straightforward and is unmistakably in line with a general right-wing extremist style.

On Twitter, people can specify a username and a handle name, giving them the liberty of choosing separate labels to name themselves. Yet the RWE references mostly figure in the screen name section of the page rather than the handle names of the account. This could be explained by the fact that a handle name cannot be changed without giving up the account altogether; handle names are linked to a domain of sorts. The screen name, on the other hand, can be changed as often as the user wants, without affecting the overall content of the account and past tweets published. The fact participants mention their political affiliations or

RW tendencies in their screen name instead of the Twitter handle could lessen the claim that users do not set up their accounts for political purposes or uses.

- Regarding the *'about' sections* of pages:
  - *Emoticons* are regularly used by contributors; roughly, one out of three pages uses them to frame their identity. These emoticons serve to support a series of institutions, in particular:

    i) Symbols representing the French culture;

    ii) Flags of their country (France) as well as countries aligned with their political inclinations, since these countries are presently ruled by right-wing extremist leaders, so mainly Brazil, the US, and Italy, but not only;

    iii) Allegiance to a Christian faith as well as opposition to Muslim faith;

    As we can see here, emoticons are used to generate self-presentations structured around national identity claims. They provide a means to an end, showing one's affiliation, allegiance and cultural background. Just like in other sections, participants pinpoint how they perceive France and what defines this.

  - *Expressions* on a user's page in the biography section are often famous sayings, a statement regarding how they intend to use their account or a few words on the position they adopt in society. Here are the four top ways people present themselves in this area of their accounts:

    i) Patriotism, nationalism, pro-right wing positions and national heritage with references to the Gauls;

    ii) Anti-establishment statements also framed as anti-political correctness;

    iii) Anti-left sentiments;

    iv) Anti-Islam sentiments.

    Theme i) and iv) align with the ones we previously presented in this section on self-presentations. They also match what was discussed in the part on repertoires of action (see section 3.1.1). However, there is a stronger emphasis on anti-left and anti-establishment positions, too.

    Anti-establishment positions go beyond simple distrust of elected politicians, discourses about double standards or disconnection between the People and the elite. Statements raise the issue of political correctness and praise frank, blunt and possibly rude public speakers, such as President Donald Trump.

    As for anti-left sentiments, there is a clear front opposing left-wing positions, mainly socialism and communism, but more generally any ideology related to the left end of the spectrum.

    The expressions, statements and overall postures are interesting for one last reason. Users tend to express their identity in the negative, meaning they insist more on what they are not, rather than what they stand for, or in other words, instead of positive sentiments to present oneself, contributors draw on anti-discourses to share their social identity. This was less the case in the other sections examined so far.

  - In the *hashtag* part of the page, there are three main topics:

i) France's decline in relationship to the lack of strong leaders/ the need for pro-right-wing extremism. Hashtags emphasise the coming together of RW extremist movements everywhere;

ii) Anti-Macron sentiments;

iii) Nationalism, historical heritage and identitarian labels.

Here again, we can note strong patriotic sentiments and identitarian discourses in line with those explored earlier (see Section 3.1.1). A new topic, not appearing hitherto, is anti-Macron sentiments. The fact Macron also appears here in self-presentation could very well be circumstantial and related to the Yellow vest social movement, especially since one of the slogans of this movement was '*Macron demission* (resign)'; we will explore this hypothesis in section 4.1. Whatever the reason, the RWE French sample is clearly opposed the present French President to the point of presenting themselves through this lens.

○ The last item to appear in the 'about' section is '*registration numbers'*.

In the 'about' section of profiles, we can observe a trend that is specific to the French digital milieu (but possibly extends to the French-speaking Belgian sample). A dozen accounts within the sample share a registration number by displaying the word registration (in French, i.e. '*matricule*' or '*fiché*') and then a number in their 'about' section. This self-presentation phenomenon became a trend in 2018. It is a backlash movement in response to research work carried out by the Belgian NGO Disinfolab[14] that focused on French right-wing Twitter users and specifically targeted the users that labelled themselves with the numbers they were attributed in the study. Therefore, users reclaim the fact they have been labelled as right-wing extremists (for further details on this user trend see section 3.1.1, internal labelling processes).

One of the most interesting findings within the material introduced in this section is the main themes that people use in order to create their digital identities. Although this result will be approached in a different fashion in the lexical analysis section of the report (Section 4.1), drawing on previous findings, it can be suggested that social identities presented by Twitter users in the sample, centre around three topics:

1. Patriotism and nationalism

2. French cultural and historical heritage (in close relationship to Christianity)

3. Anti-immigration and anti-Muslim sentiments

The first two of these themes shift away from the core themes discussed within the tweets themselves, and in this respect, repertoires of actions as well as self-presentations showcase accounts in a new light, as will be examined later in the report. The main threads of conversation taking place online will be presented in the section focusing on content analysis through computer-assisted methods. This will show that see that themes pertain to public affairs either on a national (state scandal and anti-Macron sentiments, European anti-immigration policies and pro-RW extremist leaders in Europe) or an international scale (pro-RW extremist leaders around the world), consumer buyer power, anti-Islam/anti-immigration discourses and the Yellow Jacket social movement. Some of these topics take a back seat or simply no longer appear here; at the very least, priorities shift with a central focus on patriotism, nationalism, and identitarian issues closely linked to cultural and historical heritage. From a statistical perspective, one of the most prominent topics within conversations was

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[14] http://disinfolab.eu/

the Yellow Vest social movement; this shows up here but is rather marginal. This is possibly because conversations are structured around events while profiles reveal ideological beliefs at their core.

Equally significant is the prevalence of the two themes highlighted above at the very core of RW extremist ideologies. In particular, contributors insist on the fact that the French are descendants of the Gauls and delve 2000 years into the past to paint the portrait of their historical references and past. Yet, the history of the French people is not limited to the Gauls, nor the Romans who followed; to relate French history, one could very well stress other historical time periods, such as France's royal legacy related to centuries of political domination by royalist regimes or even Imperialist contemporary dominations with Empires, such as the one founded by Napoleon on two occasions in the 19th century. Instead, in line with what the French historian Gwladys Bernard explains elsewhere, the French RW extremists systematically use Antiquity and especially focusing on the time of the Gauls, followed by the Roman era, to frame their heritage (2017: 151). As she explains, the quest for the origins of parts of the French people led the nationalists of the late 19th century to claim the legacy of the Roman power, as they are perceived to have civilized the ancient Gauls, pacified the Mediterranean, and made Christianity the religion of the Empire. Rome would therefore be the direct matrix of France. The historian also explains that the vision of an authoritarian, imperial, and Christian Rome has continuously inspired right-wing extremist leaders, contributing to the upholding of the myth of a Roman era from which France had emerged. The RWE sample of this study falls in line with this understanding. This allows the maintenance of a narrative that French lineage is built around basic territorial limits and a series of particularities, such as Catholicism, white skin colour, etc.

3.2.2 Islamist extremist self-presentations: support for religious fundamentalism

As established above, researchers were unable to clearly trace accounts on Twitter that openly supported radical ideologies related to Islam. Islamist accounts could possibly showcase religious fundamentalism, and as such could be categorised as political extremism. The ways in which participants within the Islamist extremist sample stage their identity are detailed below. The report then examines whether these presentations can be understood as a means for self-radicalisation and/or if they provide a sense of unicity, as in the case of right-wing extremists discussed above.

ISE pseudo/names
1. **Plays on the word salafi/ Islam** *islam islam islam* *IkramDienaresVnAllah*   2. **Gender specific names** *UmmAA* *Umm Muawiyah* 3. **Lifestyle blogging** 4. **Free, resistance**
ISE 'about' section
Mention Speaker accounts

Hashtags

⛔noMen⛔

⛔NoTerorism⛔

🕌🧭🕋: religious Islamist icons

📚🎓🎤: studying & preaching the Quran

PSSY: Palestine, Syria

Expressions are all directed at faith and often gender specific:

1. **Devotion in serving Allah and/or religious fundamentalism**

    '*Serving Allah*'

    "*servant*'

    '*pious*'

    '*fundamentalist*'

    '*Allah calls for peace and guides to a path of righteousness*'

    '*Thank you for allowing me to serve and dedicate my life to you*'

2. **Salafism movement and associated trends**

    '*Minhaj salafi*'

    '*Salaf Salih*'[15]

    '*The following of an Authentic Islam, i.e. the Quran according to the Sunnah*'

    '*Tawhid*' [*i.e. Tawheed, God is one and single*]

    '*On the path of the pious Predecessors*'

    '*In the steps of the Salafs Salih*' [*pious Predecessors*]

3. **Lifestyle/life goals (gender oriented)**

    '*Being a pious woman*' *être une femme pieuse*'

    '*ISLAM my life my religion my faith: sharing hadiths, verses and surahs*

    '*Tips to live an Authentic Islam based on the principles of the pious predecessors*'

    '*This account is meant to educate brothers and sisters in the skills of wedlock in line with duties and rights*'

ISE profile pictures and banners

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[15] A reiteration of what is stated in the previous footnote with more insistence on the 'pious predecessors' rather than the method to respect an authentic and true interpretation of the Quran (Meijer, 2014).

1. Religious references, preachings or sayings

Plate 36

Muslim traditional clothing

Plate 37

A picture of the Kaaba, a sacred Mosque and place for Muslim pilgrimage, in Mecca

Plate 38

A visual reference to Ed Ul Fitr, a three-day Muslim celebration, marking the end of Ramadan, the holy fast month.

Plate 39

A picture of a minaret at the Great Mosque of Mecca in Saudi Arabia.

Plate 40

Hypothetical flag of Andalusian Islamic Nationalism, i.e.

a medieval Muslim territory and cultural domain that in its early period included most of Iberia, today's Portugal and Spain, known as Al-Andalus

2. Femininity & Gender distinction
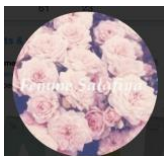
Plate 41

A picture of flowers

Plate 42

An illustration of womanhood rooted in faith with the use of a veil and colours pertaining to femininity

Plate 43

A picture of flowers with a quote on marriage superimposed

Plate 44

« LA MIXITÉ ENTRE LES HOMMES ET LES FEMMES, C'EST COMME MÉLANGER LE FEU ET LE BOIS. »
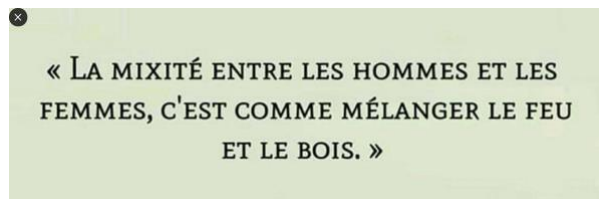
Plate 45

| Several illustrations of womanhood and gender norms rooted in faith | *'The mingling of men and women is like mixing fire with wood'* |

3. Saudi Arabian references

Plate 46

Illustration of the Saudi Arabian flag

4. Paradisiac landscapes & expressions

Plate 47

Plate 48

Plate 49
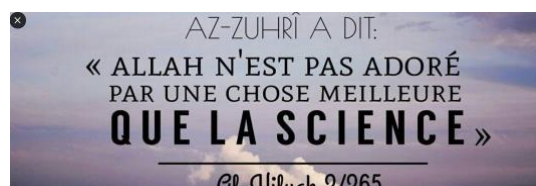
Plate 50

Beautiful landscapes or nature-related pictures with scriptures from central figures of the Muslim faith printed over the paradise-like place are used, as for example, the two last pictures here. One saying reads as follows: *'if people thought about the immensity of Allah, they would not disobey him.'* The second one reads: *'Nothing adores Allah more than science'*

Table 5 - Summary of Islamist self-presentation findings

ISE accounts offer common denominators relative to the type of participation format this sample exemplifies. We shall look into these below, by briefly commenting on each one of the separate areas of the Twitter accounts illustrated in Table 5.

- Regarding *contributors' names*, it is important to point out that no one within the ISE sample publishes his/her real name; this is taking privacy a step further than the RWE sample. Instead, people use pseudonyms. There are three main pseudonym tendencies:

  i) Reference to Salafism

  ii) Gender-oriented names

  iii) Preaching and lifestyle micro-blogging specifications

  The names employed by users are within a small range of references, all of which demonstrate allegiance to an Islamic faith, with a particular emphasis on Salafism.

  More often than not, names specify the gender of the person running the account. Contributors use it in order to highlight belonging. Recognising a gender is a way for the people within the sample to demonstrate they are actively practicing the faith they believe in and the principles this faith sets out. As such, it embodies alignment with the gender norms and principles of their faith (Adraoui, 2012). As emphasised above (see Section 3.2.1), gender is a variable that allows users to show affiliation to a lifestyle and more generally speaking, to an ideology.

- Regarding the *'about' sections* of pages:

  - *Location* is used in a symbolic manner. Rather than providing an actual location, this marker allows contributors to portray faith and obedience to a belief system, that of Salafism. People stage their identity by using the Twitter locator function, presenting themselves as living in Mecca - even though messages in the account clearly demonstrate the fact that the person resides in France. Beyond faith, just like any other social marker, this is also a way to portray their identity and situate themselves within society.

  - *Emoticons* are regularly used by contributors; roughly, one out of three pages uses them to illustrate who they are. These emoticons serve to support a series of institutions and key claims for believers:

    i) Social norms;

    ii) Islamic faith;

    iii) Social tensions surrounding conflict zones in which Muslims are implicated or targeted.

  Two of the three dominant trends refer back to faith. First, gender norms - recurrent throughout personal pages - illustrate allegiance and respect for social norms dictated by religious principles. This is displayed by distinct symbols of illicitness, *via* the emoticon 'forbidden' sign. Secondly, emoticons serve to highlight the fact that accounts are dedicated to faith and preaching. In both instances, users behind these accounts weave the fabric of a common social identity based on allegiance to the guidelines of their faith.

  The third type of emoticon is a bit different since it represents flags. We could have expected flags from countries such as Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria because of the ties between France, its former colonies and trends of immigration to France. Instead, flags refer to war zones, either in which Muslims are concerned, or where Muslims are killed and oppressed, or both. Palestinian and Syrian flags are the most common.

But as we can observe in the table listing the recurring emoticons, many other countries are referred to. The interpretation behind the support actually intended by the use of flags is not clear-cut. For example, with Syria, on the basis of only these signs, it is impossible to say if support is intended for ISIS, civilian rebels or Bashar Al Assad's regime and military. All we can assert is that flags show some kind of support and situate these participants within the realm of Muslim geopolitical claims. This confirms the point made earlier regarding the political activist dimension of the ISE sample.

○ In a dozen of the pages collected to be part of the sample, there is a direct *reference to another account on different social networking sites*, namely on Telegram and/or CuriousCat.

There is evidently a part of the conversations that takes place online, in less public and more remote arenas than on Twitter, however too much cannot be read into these indicators. This was also noted when observing website domains referenced in tweets (see Section 3.1.2).

○ *Expressions* on a user's page in the biography section are either a statement regarding how they intend to use their account or a few words on the posture they adopt in society and/or on Twitter. The three main ways people present themselves in this section of their accounts are:

i) Devotion in serving Allah and/or religious fundamentalism

ii) Salafism denomination and associated trends

iii) Lifestyle/ life goals (gender-oriented)

Theme i) and ii) overlap - sayings can be specific to Salafism or simply presentations relative to the Muslim faith, not specifically pertaining to Salafism.

The third type of presentation, named 'lifestyle/life goals' is of a different nature than the previous two. Participants explain why they are running their account and what purposes it serves. A dozen of the accounts in the ISE French sample express the fact that micro-blogging is meant for a wide audience of believers. These accounts serve to help shape lifestyles and attain personal development goals by successfully aligning their daily practices to their faith. These remarks match what was examined when studying formats of participation (see section 3.1.2).

As this last expression implies, what users present in this section is often gender-oriented in order to promote gender practices, based on the religious belief system behind the account.

○ In contrast to the RWE sample, the 'about' section of pages features very few to no *hashtags*. The only one that spotted was '*FreePalestine*'. That is not to say that this sample does not use hashtags in Tweets – there is evidence of this below. However, hashtags serve a particular purpose; they are rallying cries of sorts.

The lack of hashtags can also be perceived as the expression of weak engagement in political activism through this form of media participation. In other words, accounts do not seem to be set up to serve political goals, as is the case in the RW sample.

There are two findings that are framed in a new light as a result of the analysis of the semiotic material in participant profiles. These are:

i) Religious references in relationship to Salafism;

ii) Gender specific accounts.

In both cases, the ways that faith is currently practiced can be observed, that is to say, with the help of online tools and spaces.

Regarding i) analysis of semiotic material used to represent oneself in profiles showcases the centrality of 'purist' - also known as 'quietist' - Salafism. Salafism is a component of the religious and political field of Sunni Islamism. This branch of Salafism upholds its difference by proclaiming to lead a puritan lifestyle of high standards, based on what it claims to be the prophet Muhammad's and the pious predecessors' examples (Adraoui, 2015, 2017; Bonelli and Carrié, 2018; Sfeir, 2017).

As explained above, Salafism is typically divided into three branches: the first branch is 'revolutionary Salafism' - also known as jihadist Salafism. The French sample does not contain accounts that publicly engage in this area of faith, as previously noted. The second well-known branch of Salafism is what could be called 'ethical and classical activism'. Believers from this branch of Salafism engage in very typical forms of political engagement, such as, participating in political standardised events such as an election, lobbying for a candidate or creating a political party. This is not the predominant form of Salafism in France currently, at least from a quantitative point of view, nor does it seem to be what we are witnessing on Twitter. As well documented amongst French academics, the main way to practice Salafism nowadays pertains to a form of 'quietist, legitimist and anti-protest' Salafism, the third branch of Salafism presently dominant in France (Adraoui, 2006).

References throughout different sections of pages display ostentatious obedience to this particular denomination. For example:

- Reference to al-Hijra ('salutary migration'), i.e. the emigration towards lands of faith allowing the practice of one's beliefs to the fullest, far from both infidels and roadblocks instituted by non-Muslim majority countries like France;

- Al-Tawhid ('rightful and proper understanding of divine unicity') - an expression capturing the very purpose of Muslim revelation. Believers claim Salafism is the only way to carry out 'authentic' preaching as it is based on the necessary return to the religious sources of the Quran, the example of the Prophet (al-Sunnah) and the ways of the early Muslims (al -Athar);

- Mentions of Saudi Arabia where Sunni Islamism is practiced and preferred.

In direct relationship to Salafism but nonetheless a domain of its own, are gender-oriented practices. When analysing the material employed to create digital identities, the highly gendered ways of presenting oneself stand out. This is evident in several sections of the profiles and demonstrates one of the underlying manners in which Salafism is expressed and practiced in contemporary settings. As Marquardt and Heffelfinger explain, Quietist Salafism upholds principles of immunity; the only way to be physically and morally pure is to isolate oneself, in the image of the first Muslims whose physical and moral integrity had been endangered by Meccan dignitaries (Marquardt and Heffelfinger, 2008).

Gender practices are, again, a way to regain power over the private sphere often perceived as violated by an intrusive state, and therefore, a way to retreat into a moral community in response to this displacement (Parvez, 2011). Wearing a veil, refusing to speak to men, or letting them follow one's account are all ways to emphasise the spiritual posture of a person. Succeeding in setting up an account protected from negative influences helps achieve the overall goal of serenity, providing alignment with the supposed will of a higher power.

If gender practices are enforced by both genders in the French sample, women are particularly vocal in this area, contradicting the popular belief that segregated practice is solely enforced by men or that women are simply a victim of man's vision of womanhood. This conception of womanhood plays into a more general vision of purity, by emphasising the spiritual conditions necessary to achieve such a goal. In other words, we can conclude that gender practice is used to further advocate the proper way to practice religious beliefs. As we can understand here, segregation represents a stance against the immorality and impurity of the Western society just as much as it supplements a sense of belonging.

3.3 Co-production of content through framing

The next step in understanding how radicalisation is co-produced is to consider how radicalisation relies on internal and external labelling processes. Here, it will be examined whether people openly refer to themselves as radicals and whether they are also categorised as such by others. By conducting such analysis, we can account for the manner in which online material is produced as one outcome of framing processes.

Howard Becker (1963) demonstrated that labelling is a two-step process. First, to be able to be a part of a group or a category of people, one must acknowledge the label for oneself and by oneself. Secondly, others have to label the person in a similar manner. Being considered as a radical is the result of a two-fold process: an endogenous process consisting in self-labelling and an exogenous process consisting in labelling someone from the outside. Approaching radicalisation from this angle reminds us that radical ideologies are not a set of characteristics, but a process of interaction between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic movements, strongly dependent on the context and the situation of the symbolic productions.

3.3.1 Embracing the labelling of 'radical'

In the section on self-presentations, we saw that people adopted a style that helped identify them on the social scene of the Twitter media arena. Here we will consider material that supports the contention users acknowledge the fact they are portrayed as radicals. Self-recognition of otherness, self-labelling as a person with radical ideologies and the open adoption of an oppositional figure are all components that help construct the RWE milieu as a radical one. We will then see that the same can be said of the ISE sample. This analysis is based on direct observations carried out during the pilot study phase.

Right-wing extremism: from a transgressive posture to perverse effects of publicly acknowledging extremism

Embracing extremism by adopting a transgressive social position

We shall start by examining the external labelling processes for the RWE sample by means of the table below.

RWE self-definition as a radical
Self-recognition of Otherness/Framing as radical *'Blond, I love my France. I'm not on the side of the 'good people'! I don't not follow the flock.'* *'Registered by Macron establishment as a dangerous political opponent. This recalls 'the darkest hours' that the Macron establishment refers to so often!'* *'Islam-incompatible and therefore racist, fascist amongst other insults on the list'* '*Has leprosy* ' **Self-labelling as a fascist** **Location** *FascistSphere* **Remarks** *'Close to everything that is more or less far right, reactionary, and evil. In short, a fascist…'*

'If loving my country means I'm a fascist then I'm proud of being a fascist'

RWE 'us' versus 'them'/ Construction of an oppositional profile
'Against full-face veils except for the ugly ones'   *'Nationalist, Catholic, anti-immigration, anti-Europe, anti-euthanasia'*   *'Patriot. Actively trying to prevent terrorists, pro-ISIS, anti-white racists and those who insult or harm France'*   *'Man from the far right. On the very far right. Surviving in hostile territory. Alone against all'*

Embracing the label of radicalisation
Use of the mention 'registration number' in the 'about' section of profiles[16]   #2232   #8768

Table 6 - Summary of external labelling processes for the RWE sample

As can be seen here, the RWE sample frames itself as radical by creating a transgressive social position and embracing the manner in which outsiders label the group.

By saying this, we recognise the interactive nature behind the coproduction of any label. The use of the label 'right wing extremist', 'fascist', 'conservative', or any other label along that line featuring in the table above (Table 6), could therefore be indicative of our sample acknowledging others' perception of their social identity, rather than a label they actually believe in.

As Gimenez and Voirol state (2017: 13):

> *if certain parties or movements claim one of the above-mentioned categories, in particular nationalism or conservatism, the 'extreme right' category is seldom, if ever, mobilized by the actors to self-define themselves. These are exogenous categories whose uses are part of disputed spaces, so much so that they are often more rhetorical than actual ideological tools (Godin, 2012). The circulation, the assignment, the appropriation and the struggles related to these categorisations are not trivial, and they can reveal dynamics characteristic of the extended public sphere; but they also have a strong explanatory potential for the development of these groups and movements.*

In this respect, labelling has a performative action, further confirming what has been established in the literature (Paton and Figeac, 2015). By designating people as extremists through debates in the public sphere, one favours the development of movements of extremism, or at the very least provides a resource for opposition and transgression. Comments such as those listed in the table are examples of how RWE users acknowledge the labels they have received and employ them as means to resist or reclaim the categorisation. One user expresses this quite clearly:

> *'If loving my country means I'm a fascist then I'm proud of being a fascist'*

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[16] As we will see in section B. below, the fact users put a registration number on their account is a response to work carried out by the Belgian NGO Disinfolab# that targeted French extreme right Twitter users and accused them of spreading fake-news originating from Russian Twitter bots. The NGO gave numbers to users to "register" them in their database.

The undertone of this remark is that this user is well aware of how he/she is perceived and takes on the label to fully embody the stigma. Alternatively, this remark could also be a way to impact audiences through shock tactics and/or give the signifier a new significance. For instance, in this case 'fascist' is only reclaimed once it is redefined as someone who loves their country.

How labels can be flipped to support radicalisation

As mentioned in passing in the self-presentation section (see section 3.2.1), many of the right-wing extremist accounts publish a registration number. It is a backlash movement in response to work carried out by the Belgian NGO Disinfolab[17] that targeted French extreme right Twitter users and accused them of spreading fake-news that originated from Russian Twitter bots.

Disinfolab presents their work as research with campaigns tackling disinformation, targeting the EU, its institutions and core values. Back in July 2018, the NGO got involved in a possible fake news campaign supported by a number of French accounts under the influence of Russian intervention, surrounding a French state affair scandal, known as the Benalla Affair[18]. The Benalla Affair was triggered by an article in a French newspaper. In footage shared by the newspaper *Le Monde*, one of President Macron's security advisors, Benalla, was identified beating up a protester in Paris in May that year, while falsely impersonating a police officer. This affair supposedly generated an unusual amount of Twitter activity that questioned the actions of the NGO. To unravel who was behind the high levels of media participation, the NGO selected a sample of French citizens identified as RW extremists. At a later point they eventually published the list of people they had selected to be part of the sample of their study.

Soon after the study became public, people targeted by the investigation mocked the idea of their being undercover Russian spies and/or influencers pushing a Russian political agenda. Instead of questioning the possibility of actually serving foreign national interests and/or billionaires' political agendas, users targeted by the studied rapidly embraced the label of being radicals and posted the very fact they were studied without their knowledge, by publishing the number they were given in the study, calling it a 'matricule', that is to say a registration or a record number[19].

It is important to point out the expression 'matricule' or 'fiché' plays on the words used to refer to the public registers of Jewish people used by the Nazis. By using this common signifier, they simultaneously express a sentiment of victimisation all the while being empowered by flipping the label. In other words, displaying a 'registration' number is a way for the French RW emilieu to embrace the stigma of being a 'pro-Putin fascist' as one user states, or more generally speaking, a 'proud extremist' from the right-wing, thus flipping the narrative to their advantage. In this way, they reclaim the label which originally alienated them and, in doing so, empowering themselves while strengthening the movement and generating a sense of togetherness.

Islamist extremists: Controlled content?

Rejecting the 'radical' label

In contrast to the RWE sample, the ISE sample does not claim labels pertaining to violent extremism, even though they are aware of being labelled as extremists, if not terrorists. As one user puts it in the 'about' section of his profile 'Muslim but so-called radical'. Likewise, another contributor indicates at the top of her profile that ' 🚫*NoTerorism* 🚫' *will be tolerated, or in her words: terrorists are forbidden*. Indicating rejection of the label of radical is common within this sample. The need for justification is part of the manner of how this sample stages their social identity. This is illustrated by

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[17] http://disinfolab.eu/

[18] https://spark.adobe.com/page/Sa85zpU5Chi1a/

[19] http://195.154.215.204/matricule/ A website was created to allow everyone to easily identify whether they had been added to the 'blacklist of Russian supporters', by typing in a username on the Internet page.

this user's apparent feeling that he needs to justify his religious affiliation to a potential audience on Twitter by sharing this detail in his profile: 'Following the Hannibal School of law, but not a fanatic'[20].

These participants are aware of being labelled by others but do not condone the labels. On the contrary, they denounce them. Much of the content retrieved seems to indicate that the contributors in the ISE sample openly oppose any form of jihadism or extremism by, for example, denouncing Boko Haram's regime, ISIS or Kharijit supporters, and various forms of Al-Qaeda. Contributors can even offer teachings that explain why radical leaders and organisations must be considered as opponents of an authentic Islam. In one tweet, the author announces an upcoming series of blog posts on Sayyid Qutb, presenting him as the spiritual father of contemporary extremist groups, notably Daesh, Al Qaeda, and Boko Haram, to help educate believers and warn them about false versions of Islam. Another tweet links back to a podcast that is presented as follows:

> *'In the next episode, we speak about the challenges facing peaceful #SalafiCommunities living in France and how to combat the rise of radicalism from #isis #kharijite.'*

Tweets can aim at debunking confusions between Salafism and terrorism. In the following example, the participant explains the association between Salafism and terrorism is a misinterpretation introduced by the media. She says:

> *'The terrorists kharijite, daesch, wanted to be called #salafists, the French media in their ignorance decided that, yes, these terrorists were indeed Salafists. What a joke! #kharijite #isis'*

Another user claims it is people's general ignorance that upholds a confusion between religious beliefs and fear of terrorism. As he puts it:

> *'people know nothing about Islam except for the word itself; they are ignorant of the actual theology behind the word and therefore fear it.'*

So, while both streams of extremism equally acknowledge the existence of a label, the ISE sample rejects the label of 'radical'. Below, we will further explore the way in which the framing of Islamists as radicals emerges as a result of external rather than internal labelling processes.

Are digital strategies being employed to polish content and conform to social norms, thus preventing actual expression of personal opinions?

While users from the ISE sample reject being labelled radical, it is also clear that contributors practice self-censorship; this strategy of communication has some impact on what is shared on Twitter. Self-moderation actually plays a role in the content that can be found on Twitter for both samples as we later explain. But here, what we can already note is that users are aware of the fact their ideas may be interpreted negatively and clean up what they have to say. As one user from the ISE sample puts it: '*They [the moderators] might delete my tweet if I really say what I think*'. It would therefore seem that instead of risking an account suspension or deletion, participants filter their personal opinions to ensure their presence online.

Contributors share strategies of communication and know-how and techniques concerning what may and may not be published on social media websites. One of the videos pinned at the top of a user's account is entitled '*the use of social network sites'.* In the description section of this video, the producer specifies *'this is a video about the do's and don'ts for Islamists who want to use social networking sites carefree.'* Content, such as this, aims at sharing tips and advice on how to prevent the censorship of content.

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[20] The Hannibal School of Law is one of the most conservative Islamic schools of thought in the Sunni branch of the Muslim faith, yet it 'encourages the practices of independent reasoning' and 'rejects blind adherence to the opinions of other scholars'. http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e799

In addition to open expression about self-censorship and communication strategies on how to prevent passing for a radical on social media websites, a number of accounts publish links to other social network sites in the 'about' section of their profiles. In the self-presentation section of this report, we specified that the sample often shared links to Telegram and CuriousCat. In light of the strategies noted above, it is possible to picture these links towards other chat rooms as a way to offer others a safe space to carry out conversations elsewhere, on less public platforms. ISIS clearly suggests as much, as the UK report highlights in its introduction. The authors of this report state, "ISIS has encouraged its followers on Twitter and other social media sites to connect with ISIS coordinators and recruiters on Telegram to discuss sensitive matters such as travel to ISIS-held territory. ISIS also created public channels on Telegram to broadcast pro-ISIS news updates and disseminate other propaganda materials through its Amaq News Agency news outlet. In January 2015, an ISIS affiliated channel disseminated a guide of the 'safest' platforms to use:
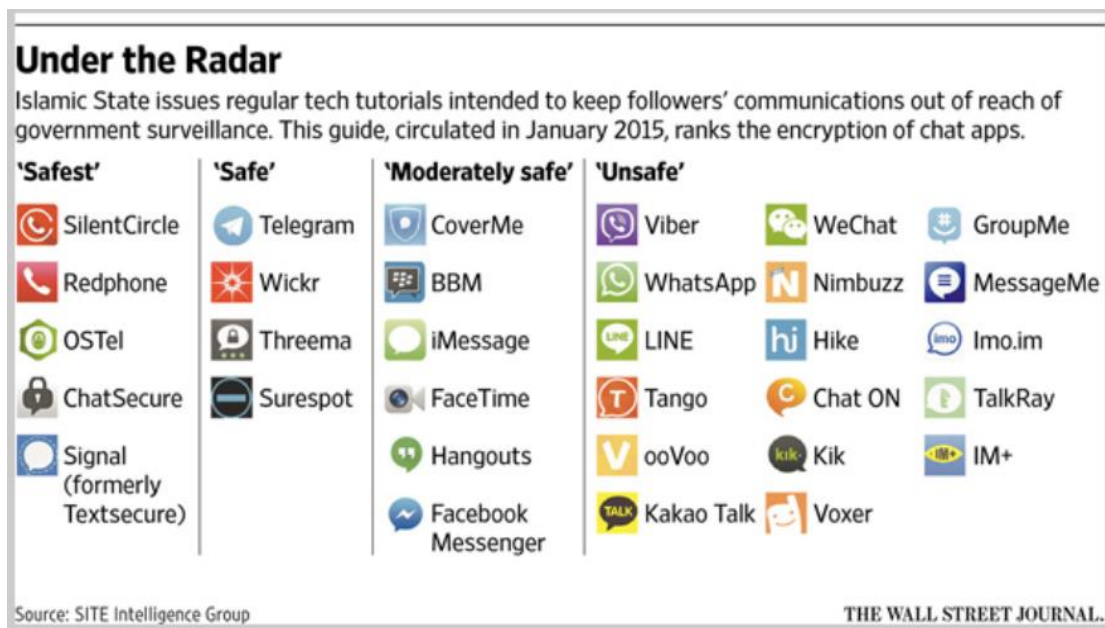
Figure 21. (Helm et al. 2020)

Based on these findings, we can conclude that users deploy some degree of knowledge or expertise that allows them to hone their media practices and prevent any bold statements being posted online. The fact users demonstrate such skills makes it difficult to determine the extent to which self-regulation and communication strategies shape what can be found on Twitter. We can question whether what we are studying in the Islamist sample is a by-product of moderation. We can also wonder whether Islamist radicalisation is still taking place online, and if so, if it is being carried out in remote and private space. As mentioned above, this appears to be confirmed by a recent ISIS publication on where it is safe to publish. It has also been expanded upon in the DARE UK report (Helm et al. 2020).

3.3.2 External framing processes

In this section we consider how external labelling processes might support the production of radicalisation. In contrast to earlier sections in this report, the ISE and RWE samples are considered together rather than separately, since the factors affecting how each group is co-produced as a group of radicals is the result of overlapping dynamics. Institutional accounts, moderation procedures and online interactions between anti-Islamist and Islamists are all contributing factors for both groups.

In the introduction, we note that the selection of Twitter for this investigation of radicalisation was supported by the way in which journalists, scientists and politicians framed the Internet (or specifically Twitter) as a means for facilitation of radicalisation (Weimann, 2004, 2006; Mantel, 2009). Scientific,

journalistic and political accounts have helped shape the idea that online spaces are 'at risk' places (Brown and Pearson, 2016; Calo and Hartley, 2019), with Twitter being one of the most discussed platforms (e.g. Ghajar-Khosravi et al., 2006; Bertram and Ellison, 2014; Baldauf et al., 2019; Crosset et al., 2019).

The reality behind such discourses is explored below and alongside how external labelling processes have produced right-wing and Islamist extremist audiences on Twitter through three approaches. First, it will be discussed how top-down moderation guidelines from authorities and service producers support the configuration of audiences as radicals by presenting recent governmental frameworks and moderation principles behind the scenes. It will then be examined how moderation affects the RWE sample in practice, by taking a closer look at the data collected in this study (in the knowledge that major censorship campaigns in recent years had already led to any sensitive content by Islamist extremists being taken down (Conway et al., 2017). Finally, the dynamics between anti-Islamists and Islamists on the Twitter platform are discussed, as are the ongoing vertical power struggle over narratives which affect users within the public arena.

General moderation principles operating online

One of the first factors that co-produces radicalisation on Twitter is moderation (Chen, 2014; Robert, 2019; Newton, 2019). Moderation can be vertical, typically on the basis of interventions from the website administrators and/or policy framework. Content moderation can also be horizontal, typically from user to user. In any case, by targeting specific types of profiles and accounts, moderation operations signify to the users their deviant behaviour. Labelling given users and accounts as out of bounds of the 'conditions of use' is not without side effects, as examined in the last subsection with the example of the Disinfo Lab (see section 3.2.1). Before delving further into the role of moderation on processes of radicalisation on the web, it is key to keep in mind general principals operating behind the moderation of social network sites, shaping what can be found online.

Most social media websites operate on the basis of 'publish first, moderate afterwards' (the opposite of how a newspaper functions, for example). An unbelievable amount of online content must thus be moderated (pornography, paedophilia, rapes, killings, etc.). These gigantic amounts of content in need of moderation affects what/how moderation is done. In addition to the structural effects of social media websites on digital content, policy framework impacts material circulating on the web too.

In recent years, websites such as Twitter have received immense pressure to moderate extremist and terrorist-type content – especially pro-jihadist publications - from government and associated actors, in particular:

- 'the (former) Obama Administration;
- the U.S. Congress in the form of legislative proposals (...);
- the European Union in the form of a 'code of conduct';
- Individual European countries such as the UK, France and Germany' (Cope et al., 2017) in different forms, notably fines.

Within the French context, a UK-French joint anti-terror campaign was announced back in January 2017 to place added pressure on a company like Twitter so that such online service providers better monitor terrorist-related activities (Toor, 2017). The campaign called for stricter regulation, working directly with tech companies to improve takedowns and suggested fining the companies that did not take down pro-terrorist content in the future.

In 2018, France also got involved in a new initiative within the scope of Europol's EU Internet Referral Unit (IRU), in partnership with two other European countries, i.e. the Netherlands and Belgium[21]. The

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[21] https://www.europol.europa.eu/newsroom/news/europol%E2%80%99s-eu-internet-referral-unit-partners-belgium-france-and-netherlands-to-tackle-online-terrorist-content

pilot project, aiming at improving the detection, analysis and referral of online terrorist content, directly as Europol's EU Internet Referral Unit (IRU) launched a pilot project with the Internet Referral Units of Belgium, France and the Netherlands. The project aims to improve the detection, analysis and referral of online terrorist content.

However, what ultimately stays on the web relies on applying policy AND interpreting policy. Interpretation of policy is done by Commercial Content Moderation workers, i.e. workers responsible for judging what is acceptable and thus what should be removed. These dozens of thousands of workers follow orders from private companies and more generally act upon:

- linguistic competency;

- laws governing the website's location of origin;

- experts in user guidelines and other platform level specifics concerning what is allowed

- cultural knowledge about the location of origin of the audience (Robert, 2019).

So while part of content/accounts should not be banned because they are fully within the realm of legality, the moderation system makes it impossible to accurately and always properly select what is potentially legal/illegal. Usually, what can be observed is major 'cleansing' in a whole ideological area. Cleansing trends have certainly targeted Islamist ideologues to the point where right-wing extremist supporters and Islamist extremists are affected by a double standard (Conway et al., 2017). As Bodo reports in an article from 2017, Twitter has suspended over 500,000 accounts since the middle of 2015 (2017). Suspensions notably affected ISIS and its sympathisers: a study measuring takedown of online terrorist material found that 'pro-IS accounts faced substantial and aggressive disruption, particularly those linking to official IS content hosted on a range of other platforms' (Conway et al., 2017: 5). However, over the past year or so, right-wingers have also started to be more heavily moderated, albeit not to the same degree (Bodo, 2017; Wahlstrom and Tornberg, 2019).

As an external process targeting individual actors, moderation is a strong factor shaping online communities and laying the groundwork for RWE milieus and possibly the lack of an ISE milieu on Twitter. In the next few pages, we will see how moderation - understood as external labelling processes that translate into material practices - supports participants' sentiment of belonging to a group of radicals on the right-wing side.

How moderation contributes to shaping the RWE milieus

Content moderation operations are evoked by the RWE sample in their profiles (e.g. '*account suspended on XX date*'). They also tweet about it (e.g. '*I'm obliged by Twitter to remove this tweet*') and create lists of censored accounts to showcase how moderation practices are targeting their inner circle (e.g. '*Chronicle of daily censorship on Twitter, @XX, @xy, @yy accounts have been suspended today. More on the next episode tomorrow!*').

One of the side effects of content moderation is that users then express sentiments of double standards and find refuge in the idea of being victims of the system. They then develop counter-hegemonic discourses to explain why they, and their inner circles, are targeted by moderation. Such interventions also throw light on the very thing the moderator meant to silence.

Censorship can be framed as part of a bigger plan opening the door to conspiracy theories and anti-establishment discourses - for example, the French President Macron is behind censoring operations on Twitter. In the following examples, users express outrage at the content that was censored and claim the level of tolerance is much higher in regard to Islamist content:

> '*How is your tweet shocking? I've seen a video in which an #Islamist was saying*: 'Men are bosses. Women are subordinates*. Videos of this kind, that explain without any shame that women are shit, there are tons of them on Twitter*'

> '*I'm good, I saw it, thank you Twitter censors, without your intervention I would've missed it, very efficient the Macron censor*'

In short, moderation, as an external labelling mechanism, may push contributors to become even more radical, moving from very public arenas like Twitter, to instead on more private or/and alternative spaces. At the same time, as Köhler and Ebner explain, it is important for moderation to be actively enforced. Indeed, while '*dissatisfaction grew in the extreme rightwing sphere, because, increasingly, low-threshold articles, pages and profiles were barred or removed according to community standards.* [And surely] *this resulted in an increasingly emotionalised and polarising discussion within this scene: freedom of speech was being curtailed, was in danger, or no longer existed. The accusation from extremist groups was often: "Because I can no longer publish racist contents or call for violence on an internet platform, this is censorship*" (2019: 12). Companies and policymakers nonetheless need to take action to set boundaries and make sure the law is enforced. Because while this reaction is possible, studies also show that uncensored content promotes the polarisation of societies and actively contributes to divide the People (e.g. Gurte, 2018).

How the anti-Islamists on Twitter contribute to co-producing Islamists as radicals

Twitter users from the extreme right-wing embraced the labels of radicals, by engaging in oppositional postures, relying on 'us' versus 'them' discourses. These discourses allow them to simultaneously generate two categories of people: ones they identify with, that is to say, people who share anti-Muslim, anti-Islam, anti-immigration ideologies. In opposition, they group together Muslims, Islamists and immigrants into a single category.

By focusing on the way, the RWE sample labels Otherness, we can see that the contributors in the French right-wing extremist sample, coproduce a category of people that they sometimes equate with 'dangerous terrorists', sometimes 'invaders', sometimes 'animals'. Through all these labelling strategies, they coproduce the idea that those who practice an Islamic faith are radicals, without further regard to the way in which they are simplifying social realities.

For example, there are publications such as the one below claiming: '*if it was not for those Islamist bastards, sweetie, you would be 35 years old today*' (see Plate 51). This popular video in the right-wing extremist French milieu shows Patrick Jardin in front of the Bataclan theatre, where the massacre of the same name took place in November 2015. By creating the video on the day of her birthday on this symbolic spot, he says that he it is his way of commemorating his daughter's death. During the video, he accuses all Islamists of being terrorists.

Nathalie, ma puce, sans ces ordures d'islamistes, tu aurais eu 35 ans ce jour...

Plate 51

To further illustrate how people on Twitter coproduce the association between Islamists and radicals, there follows three other original tweets clearly creating an equation of Muslims as a group of dangerous people (Plates 52 to 54).

Plate 52

Plate 53

Plate 54

Above the picture in the tweet, one can read: '*Lapidation: a common practice against women in Islamic territories… Barbaric ideology*'

Here is a photomontage of four pictures, all of which contain gruesome pictures, portrayed as aby-product of Islam as the text part of the tweet implies: '*ISLAM…*

This is what it looks like…

Fascist and barbarian ideology supported by UMPS, USI, PCF, FG…

Tomorrow at your front door'.

In this tweet, we can see a picture of a man in the process of being beheaded. The caption above says: '*With Islamisation, tomorrow at your door…*

Islam is a barbaric religion, filled with hatred for humanity'

It is important to note that these labels are not simply given through original publications posted by the RWE sample. There is a countless number of exchanges, between protagonists supporting anti-Islamist ideologies, and those supporting Islam; these publics and their counter-publics confront one another through comments on tweets. For example, this original tweet triggered strong reactions from those who claim to practice the Muslim faith and those who stand as anti-Islamists[22].

Plate 55

The original tweet, above the Plate 55 on the left of the page, reads: '*the #MuslimBrotherhood and the #Salafists have the same goal as #ISIS: to propagate an antisemitic, misogynistic, homophobic, violent, barbarian Islam that I call #islamism.*

The instauration of the #Shariah in Europe and in the world is the main goal of the MuslimBrotherhood…'

In the picture accompanying the tweet, there are several women in burqa, one of whom is carrying a sign with the exclamation: '*No Shariah = No peace*'. Implying that until the Shariah is instituted, they will not rest.

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[22] There are a whole spectrum of reactions and people in between these two polar postures, but for the purpose of focusing on the demonstration, they will not be considered here.

Below, the original tweet, the first comments read:

- *'That's completely ridiculous! This picture was taken in 2014, during a protest in favour of the Shariah in the Maldives. Which of course you neglect to mention. You also neglect to mention that in the Maldives, Islam is the state religion. Ridiculous…*

- *When 'the wise person shows the moon, the fool looks at the finger'. Who cares about where it is taking place, every time Islam dominates and applies a code as good as totalitarian 20th century ideologies, it's only death, misery and obscurantism'.*

As this controversy suggests, labelling Islamists as radical is also a process that takes place within the conversations on Twitter, and as such, the result of horizontal pressure amongst users.

Main Conclusions for Section 3

With respect to repertoires of action (Section 3.1), we noted that both streams of radicalisation employ Twitter for political purposes, but while the RWE sample uses it to converse, the ISE sample uses Twitter as a store-front to broadcast their ideological beliefs. This helps explain the dispersion of media practices identified in Section 2; ISE users are using this store-front in different fashions.

To be more specific, RWE users engaged in a classical form of media activism, consolidated around five main features:

i) Twitter is used for political ends to engage in a 'cause'; that of combating Islam and immigration, and to use the platform for its democratic conversational properties with direct access to an arena of public debate;

ii) Engagement is meant to restore France to a previous age in time, one of past greatness. A lost sense of purity and nostalgic feelings related to a past imaginary are a strong undertone to this repertoire of action. The flip side of this repertoire is change; France has undergone too much change too fast;

iii) Directly feeding off this sense of a lost greatness, the RWE sample claims to defend a socially constructed 'heritage', one of Christianity, people who are white of skin and share an identical historical background;

iv) This repertoire operates in a closed environment, one favouring like-minded ideas, based on the promotion and spread of right-wing extremist news content. Sharing news online is typical of a 're-information' strategy, spreading right-wing extremist opinion pieces and further delegitimising traditional media outlets;

v) The political nature of this format of participation is different from 'ordinary' political stances insofar as the level of radicalism is high; this repertoire openly stigmatises minorities (especially Muslims and immigrants) and occasionally is a vehicle for the expression of violent intent.

As for the ISE sample, contributors use a different repertoire of action, using Twitter to microblog and promote the belief in a higher power. This format of participation also has five main features:

i) Delivering information pertaining to faith in order to broadcast a certain lifestyle in line with religious beliefs, thus promoting ideological material (scriptures, hadiths, surahs) in the hope of reaching a potential audience of followers;

ii) The material shared online primarily adopts an approach associated with Quietist Salafism;

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iii) This sample is using Twitter as a storefront that re-routes users to other online platforms, such as chat rooms where conversations can take place, storage spaces where files can be retrieved, crowdfunding sites where money can be collected;

iv) Users do not condone violence, quite the contrary: they take public stands to denounce terrorism and acts of violence;

v) The last feature situates this repertoire of action within the range of political extremism and slightly contradicts the fourth feature. Signs of religious fundamentalism excludes the possibility of considering this format of participation as apolitical, and exempt from any sort of extremism or political consideration. In this respect, this repertoire can qualify as one of religious fundamentalisms dabbling in political extremism.

Beyond the recap of the features defining each repertoire of action for each sample, two main conclusions can be drawn from this section:

1. By adopting radical postures, these participants create digital identities around counter-hegemonic assertions, openly transgressive and oppositional to what they sometimes refer to as the 'mainstream' ideologies or the 'establishment'. Building transgressive identities allows the RWE and ISE samples alike to claim their differences and embrace their opinions freely. These contributors all share the common goal of using Twitter to express their political (and religious, in the case of ISE) beliefs. Through their media participation, participants act to reclaim power and engage in the change they wish to see, rather than accept sentiments of disrespect, fear, nostalgia, loss, mediocrity that they feel subjected to. Reflecting on the advantages of joining such a movement through digital media participation, we can identify collective and individual benefits. From a collective perspective, by sharing common cultural codes related to a certain number of topics, contributors weave a collective fabric, essential to forming and upholding a digital milieu. Digital sociability presents the added benefit of providing a sense of self. Indeed, from an individual user standpoint, employing material that is part of a collective fabric reinforces subjective autonomy. Participation in an online milieu provides means for empowerment. People may not find support within their local inner-circles or close to where they live. By turning to online participation, however, contributors can find like-minded people with similar areas of interest, reinforce their tastes, express their opinions and draw on a sense of togetherness that helps support their ideals, political aspirations and ultimately a sense of identity.

2. In relation to the DARE objective of interrogating the state of the media landscape to understand mechanisms of self-radicalisation, these accounts - forged around people's individual political identity – indicate that individuals can publicly engage in political extremism, and individually may undertake self-radicalisation without the support of a political organisation of any sort.

The study of Twitter self-presentations thus suggests three main conclusions:

1. The RWE and the ISE sample alike perform social identities that support the idea of a particular style related to specific ideological traits, illustrating samples of like-minded people, if not a 'milieu' in the case of the ISE.

2. Transnational considerations appear in both samples. Interestingly enough, in the case of the RWE sample, the material defends the need for a strong national identity, while establishing engagement beyond the borders of France. In a very different fashion, the ISE sample references international struggles by expressing solidarity with war zones where Muslims are active.

3. The main themes and core elements that appear in this section of the report are quite different from the themes identified in the lexical analysis section (Section 4). This underlines the difference between social identities and actual topics of conversations between people and the need to properly consider both interpersonal communication and the ways in which users perform their social identities to embody discourses and postures.

In the last section on external and internal framing processes, we noted that right-wing extremism was the by-product of internal and external labelling processes. It is important to emphasise that labelling has a performative action. For example, the role of DisinfoLab in reinforcing sentiments of unfair treatment but also strengthening sentiments of belonging were noted. In this instance, by designating people as radicals, the development of movements of radicalisation were either strengthened, or at the very least this provided a resource for opposition and transgression. If this example illustrates how it is possible to flip the label to reclaim power, it is important to note that it can also apply to the ISE sample. In the latter case, we saw that users do not endorse the 'radical label', however, they could not escape being framed as such by external framing processes. There is only one step to take before considering that Islamists can adapt the behaviour we saw with the right wing extremist sample, i.e. labelling generates the very phenomenon it was meant to denounce. As we saw with the DisInfoLab example, what initially started out as a study about radicalisation to identify the influence of Russian bots, with the end goal to de-radicalise populations, did the exact opposite. The DisInfoLab study ended up reinforcing the very process it was meant to denounce, as those targeted by the study reclaimed the label for themselves by posting their "registration number" onto their Twitter profiles. Users were not only empowered by the attention received through the DisInfoLab investigation but also through claiming the title of radical for themselves. The same processes can possibly take place on the ISE end of the spectrum.

4. Key themes and influencing factors

In this fourth section, we study key themes and influencing factors that might support claims that the Internet harbours self-radicalisation triggers. Simply put, this section tackles: what are people saying? What are the events that are influencing what people are saying? And who are the influencers? These questions are answered through a three-fold analysis of: 1) content 2) events 3) influencers. In each case, we will consider whether the Internet represents a significant threat for self-radicalisation, and if so, what kind of threat it poses. Since the methodology applied varies in relation to each question, it will be set out in each case in the introduction to the subsection.

4.1 Content

In order to analyse the main themes discussed amongst users in the French sample, we isolated the lexical material collected online, specifically the tweets and retweets. This data is analysed from three complementary perspectives: first, we describe the lexical corpus as a whole and examine the main conversations for each stream of radicalisation; then, we outline the structure of discussion to determine what topics are closely linked to one another and which discussions are possibly peripheral; finally, we consider the possible gender specifics of the themes presented to determine which topics are most discussed by men rather than women, and vice versa.

4.1.1 Themes

The first type of analysis conducted is a discourse analysis based on a descending hierarchical classification that can be described as a succession of bi-partitions, carried out by the means of a factorial analysis of correspondences. This analysis is undertaken following the Reinert method (Reinert, 1983; 1990) implemented through the free software IRaMuTeQ (Ratinaud, 2014; Ratinaud

and Marchand, 2012). This method makes it possible to determine the themes that compose a corpus. The software groups tweets that tend to contain the same words according to themes; here these themes are referred to as lexical clusters, classes of discourse or categories.

Right wing extremism: public affairs, social movements and anti-Islam, anti-immigration discourses
For the RWE sample, analysis was conducted on 84,415 tweets. That amounts to 75,208 texts representing 20,288,560 occurrences (68,549 distinct forms, 24,800 hapax[23], i.e. 49,316 active forms). The difference between the number of tweets and texts can be explained by two factors: first, all emoticons and ASCII used to convey sentiments were removed from the corpus; secondly, only distinct tweets were accounted for, in such a manner that analysis is conducted on a variety of topics rather than the volume of discussions. As for the high proportion of hapax and unrecognised words, this would suggest that there are a large number of typing errors. This is relatively common for corpora constructed on the basis of social media participation.

The results are presented below in a dendrogram that segments the online conversations into clusters, underlining the main lexical themes of the corpus. It also provides information on the size of each cluster (i.e. percentages and size of the boxes above the branches of words) and the overrepresented lexicon in each cluster (i.e. the more a word is situated at the top of a branch, the more it is overrepresented in a cluster).

For the French RWE corpus, we selected a classification of 14 themes - representing 93% of the classified segments - to generate the dendrogram that appears below (see Figure 22).
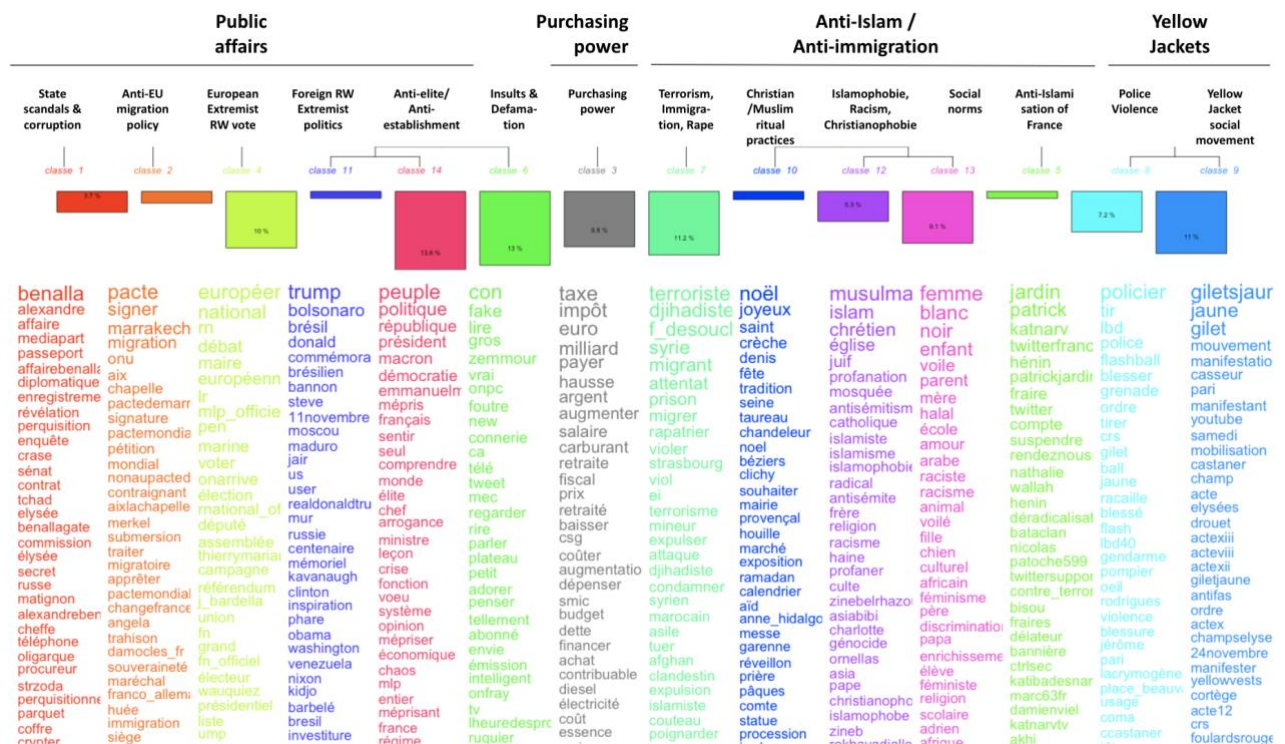
Figure 22 - Dendrogram for the RWE French sample

These fourteen clusters can be regrouped into four main themes:

- public affairs (classes 1, 2, 4, 11 & 14, n=29.4%),

- consumer buying power (class 3, n=9.8%),

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[23] A hapax is a word (or lexical form) that appears only once in the corpus.

- anti-Islam/anti-immigration discourses (classes 7, 10, 12, 13 & 5, n=29.6%)

- and the Yellow vests social movement (classes 8 & 9, n=18.2%).

A fifth category is prominent in the overall balance of classes, constituting 13% of the exchanges amongst the users of the sample. It is cluster number 6 and has been named 'insults and defamation'. The 'insults and defamation' category has been previously documented in the literature as a 'normal' and typical phenomenon for digital right-wing extremist groups (Smyrnaios and Ratinaud, 2017). This type of discourse bears witness to a certain relationship to politics; it tends to be the marker of predominantly negative sentiments and representations towards politics and politicians or the exercise of power. This cluster usually contains a lot of conversation-type talk, because it can gather live tweeting or basic back-and-forth conversations, which also explains why informal language is so prominent. Within the next few pages, we will put this theme aside because it tells us more about the nature of right-wing extremist conversations and possible symptoms of its expression, than the processes of self-radicalisation, unless it is to consider negative sentiments as characteristic of the process of engaging in radicalisation. In this case we need simply to keep in mind the negative sentiments and representations of users towards politics.

Below are the four main themes of the online RW extremist milieu and details of the classes that compose them.

1. Public affairs (classes 1, 2, 4, 11 & 14, n=29.4%)

The first five lexical clusters deal with public affairs, either on a national (1 & 14), European (2 & 4) or an international scale (11).

On the extreme right side of the dendrogram, the very first category is related to the time period of the study (1). It deals with a scandal of corruption at the highest level of state, that is to say, within the Presidential cabinet. The scandal is known as the Benalla Affair[24]. In footage shared by the newspaper *Le Monde*, President Macron's security officer and deputy chief of staff, Benalla, was identified beating up a protester in Paris earlier in May that year, while falsely impersonating a police officer. The category also denotes larger conspiracy theories and includes recent accusations of Russian meddling in national politics via digital strategies and operations.

From left to right, the next two categories are related to European matters (2 & 4). Both lexical clusters are openly anti-European, but one is circumstantial, related to the time-frame of the study, picking up on a debate surrounding the signing of the Marrakesh treaty, understood by online extreme right-wingers as facilitating immigration of refugees to the homeland. The second category celebrates right-wing extremist leaders and parties and, in the context of the approaching European elections of Spring 2019, calls for votes for the 'Rassemblement National', i.e. the French RW extremist party. Amongst the 14 themes studied here, this one accounts for 10% of the topics discussed, showing the importance of politics and anti-immigration policies; they represent topics of conversation that federate people online.

Then, we can observe a lexical cluster about foreign politics, in particular right-wing extremist politics, and their associated conversation topics (11). What we can identify in this category is the French RW milieu support for foreign leaders - such as Bolsonaro and Trump - recognised as populist 'strong leaders'. What we can also note in this cluster is the importance of the American political scene in general with several threads of discussions, such as Russian influence in the US elections, Hillary Clinton, and Trump's wall between the US border and Mexico. In this report, we will later see that the content most shared within the French RW sample is content produced by Trump and other foreign leaders, reminding us of the status of

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[24] https://spark.adobe.com/page/Sa85zpU5Chi1a/

RW leaders worldwide and the dominance of these leaders in certain media arenas. It also raises the question of bot-type influence on what content is spread on the Internet and appears in clusters of this study as well as the role of algorithms in pushing content onto the mainstage and thus, contributing to promoting certain influencers over others.

The last theme of the group is a mix of anti-elite, anti-system and anti-establishment discourses (14). It strongly focuses on the arrogance of the state, government officials in place - mainly the French President Macron - and criticises the elite in general. People in the sample share the fact they reject the contemporary 'system', described as a single ruling class. A mix of institutions and representatives are most often targeted to exemplify the idea of 'system' and/or establishment: the European parliament, mainstream media outlets, a liberalist economy, high-ranking officials, especially President Macron, and the intellectual elite. Politicians are portrayed as the puppets of the European Parliament. In general, much talk about the disconnection of politicians from the real world as well as between the ruling class and the People can be observed in this class. Furthermore, users discuss the fact that their distrust is fuelled by their perception of politicians' end goals. According to them, politicians are more worried about getting re-elected than actually telling the truth about situations or lack the toughness necessary to make the hard decisions that they consider to be the right ones. This means they fall in line with their political party and remain politically correct. The counterpart of such a position is the praising of strong leadership, at any cost. Constituting 13.8% of the discussions of the sample, this anti-elite/anti-establishment cluster is predominant within the RW extremist milieu and appears to constitute a uniting factor for extremist right-wing participants.

2. Level of consumer buying power (class 3, n=9.8%)

Consumer buying power - a cluster situated towards the middle of the dendrogram -, while loosely attached to many other classes, has its own autonomy (3). This class emphasises how important unjust taxation, social class divisions and low salaries of ordinary citizens are as uniting themes within the population. It is important to remember that the French Yellow Vests social movement originated from the creation of a new tax on gasoline in 2018. Early on, riots were framed as a social movement for more 'consumer buying power'. This topic is nourished by anti-European sentiments as contributors seem to associate the euro currency, and increase in prices, to one of the factors for the lack of consumer buying power of the French. Likewise, this theme brings forward high taxes and debt in respect to a low minimum wage as well as low retirement incomes. Finally, this cluster also highlights how conversations about income disparity – that some have little while others have billions - feed a sense of double standards and unfair treatment.

3. Anti-Islam/ anti-immigration (classes 7, 10, 12, 13 & 5, n=29.6%)

Moving towards the right, the next five classes, are variants of anti-immigration and anti-Islam topics (7). On the left-hand side of this group of classes, the first one deals with terrorist attacks and national security issues, notably in relationship to a terrorist attack attributed to Islamist extremists that took place on December 11, 2018, during a Christmas market in Strasbourg, France. This cluster discusses other news that made the headlines, in particular a series of rapes committed by immigrants in Germany. Overall, themes in this class convey negative representations of immigrants, portraying them as a threat to national security. This thread of discussion represents 11% of the conversations. Accounting for such a large chunk of the topics reveals how major terrorist events, and the underlying fear of them, fuel participation.

Next, we can distinguish a class concerning religious ritual practices (10). Discussions illustrate counter-narratives, opposing the way Christian rituals - Christmas in particular - versus Islamic rituals - specifically Ramadan - are treated in the media and by notorious leaders. Islamic

rituals are portrayed as being acclaimed and publicly acknowledged within the public sphere by institutional representatives, such as the state President, the Pope or main national media outlets, while the Christian rituals are described as frowned upon and not openly celebrated in the name of respecting the faith of the non-believers and Muslims. Typically, this class captures a sentiment of double standards and unjust treatment, as well as a sense of lost or misguided social identity.

The third category of the group - islamophobia, racism and christianophobia - is central to the right-wing type discourse (12). The narrative captures how the 'right-wing extremist' category is co-constructed through labelling processes: users endorse the labels, embrace racism and create counter-hegemonic narratives, for example stressing 'Christianophobia' rather than 'Islamophobia'. They also reverse the stigmata of exclusion by positioning themselves as victims. They portray themselves as a minority within the French society in lieu of Muslims, placing themselves as victims. In this class, and to different degrees in all the other classes of this segment, we can find an underlying central theme, specific to the RW extremist milieu, one that concerns the cultural heritage of Western European countries and proclaims the centrality of the Christian faith to it.

On the left-hand side of the latter category, we can note a new class, stressing the importance of social norms and tensions surrounding immigration (13). This cluster is particularly interesting as it regroups many of the social divisions and challenges brought forward in an ever-evolving contemporary society. It brings together the evolution in social norms in different areas of society. Typically, gender roles and family norms are discussed with a strand of tweets opposing same sex marriage legislation, denouncing feminism and left-wing leniency. Food norms are singled out as contributors strongly reject Islamist food-based practices such as Ramadan and halal products. This cluster also captures a normative perception of skin colour, that discriminates against people of colour and proclaims French people can only be white-skinned. A lot of the focus remains on gender-specific Muslim practices, especially items of clothing such as head scarves or full body bathing-suits. These tensions boil over into stigmatising figures of immigrants, often framed as 'violent', characterised by their 'otherness'. We can also note calls for 're-immigration', understood as the return of immigrants to their home country.

The last theme is one supporting the 'anti-Islamisation' discourses to guarantee that France will be "freed" from Islam one day. The expression behind such thoughts and the general movement guiding them being the "anti-Islamisation of France'. The expression used by French RW extremists is meant to characterise changes over the past decades, that, based on the tweets in the corpus, could be summarised as follows: a greater amount of racialised relationships, immigrants, and ostentatious Muslim practices (5). Through the expression 'anti-Islamisation of France' people are supporting the idea immigrants should drop their former practices to adopt the cultural and religious social norms of the French culture, in particular that France is perceived to be a Christian-faith based country. Here, in this cluster, centre stage is given to discussions about cultural heritage, revealing pressing social identity issues; participants stress the sentiment of invasion, decadency, laxity and political incompetence (3, 8, 9 and 2). Patrick Jardin, the father of a victim from the Bataclan Paris terrorist attack, is used as a symbol of this sentiment; his daughter dying at the hands of Islamist radicals lays the foundation for making her a martyr of the 'Islamisation' of France.

4. Yellow Vests social movement (classes 8 & 9, n=18.2%)

This theme is specific to the timeframe of the study. The last two categories of the dendrogram are related to the French Yellow Vests movement (known as the 'Gilets Jaunes' movement in the French language) that started in November 2018 and took centre stage in the French news cycle on a weekly basis, from there on until the end of the data collection

campaign. As a category representing 18.2% of the debates amongst identified clusters, the Yellow Vests social movement is one of the dominant topics of discussion amongst users in the sample. Closer examination of the conversations shows strong support for the movement.

The second to last theme focuses on police violence against protesters (8). Rioting supporting the Yellow Vests social movement took place every Saturday in the downtown area of the major cities of France during the winter of 2018-2019. The numerous acts of police violence repeatedly witnessed and denounced rapidly became a uniting factor amongst protesters, and as we can note here, within the RW extremist online milieu. The injuries and the deaths of rioters are discussed, documented and accounted for on Twitter within our sample. Unjust treatment, disconnection from political leaders and anti-establishment sentiments festered on the back of these conversations.

The final class, situated on the far right of the dendrogram, is central to the sample, with 11% of the texts analysed (9). It concerns the Yellow Vests social movement and the different episodes of striking in the streets called 'actes', i.e. acts in English, as if each Saturday was a new 'act' of a play or a theatre performance. Some of the defining moments of the movement, for example confrontations between the police and the public on the Champs Elysee and Arc de Triomphe, as well as how Castaner, the Minister of Home Affairs, frames the movement as violent and full of 'destructive rioters' are captured in this cluster. Online contributors also evoke the opposing social movement that emerged in the wake of the Yellow Vests movement but that was immensely less popular, that of the 'Red Scarf' movement.

Islamist Extremists: religion and faith, social and political matters

As above, a discourse analysis based on a descending hierarchical classification, using the Reinert method (Reinert, 1983, 1990) was used to identify the themes that compose the Islamist extremist corpus.

A first analysis was conducted on 43,493 tweets. That amounts to 34,711 texts representing 792,260 occurrences (41,114 forms, 23,260 hapax, i.e. 29,154 active forms). The results are presented below in a dendrogram that distinguishes and ranks the main lexical classes of the corpus; it reveals the size and the overrepresented lexicon in each cluster. We selected a classification of 19 categories - representing 93% of the classified segments - to generate the dendrogram (see figure 23).

Figure 23 - Dendrogram for the ISE French sample

The dendrogram is clearly divided into two parts following the classification branches (situated above the blocks of colour and the descending lexical clusters). From the right-hand side (class 1) to the middle category (class 18), the first part of the graph concerns social and political matters; the second segment from class 9 up until the last class of the dendrogram deals with religion and faith. There is also a language division that respects this general divide: on the left, the text is in French; on the right, the text is in Arabic for the most part.

If we have a closer look at the second section of the dendrogram, we can note the following topics: attraction to authentic Islam and spiritual accomplishment through devotion (10, 16), actual preachings and surahs related to Salafi tendencies (11, 3, 8, 9), normative behaviours and figures of power (19, 17). The second part of the dendrogram is likely to inform us on how the Muslim faith is experienced and narrated online. However, our focus is on the first part of the dendrogram to better understand the political and social issues behind media participation of the sample. At this stage, we can identify conversations about:

- Muslim faith related ritual practices (1),

- financial assistance and online solidarity (2),

- distrust towards politics and politicians, especially French RW personalities (6),

- two classes that can be tied to the later one, fuelling anti-establishment sentiments (14, 15),

- consumer buying power with a special focus on job security and high taxes (7),

- a class denouncing ordinary racism (4),

- another one discussing the status of marriage as a form of social success (12),

- social media talk and slang (13),

- and a final category dealing with conflict zones in which Muslims are involved (18).

By isolating the first section and analysing that part of the corpus anew, different themes of discussion emerge. That is what we can see in the dendrogram below (see figure 24). This operation is based on the selection of 12,240 texts. That amounts to 34,711 text segments representing 288,175 occurrences (27,104 forms, 9,063 hapax, i.e. 19,297 active forms). With this new analysis, we have selected a dendrogram with 14 categories.
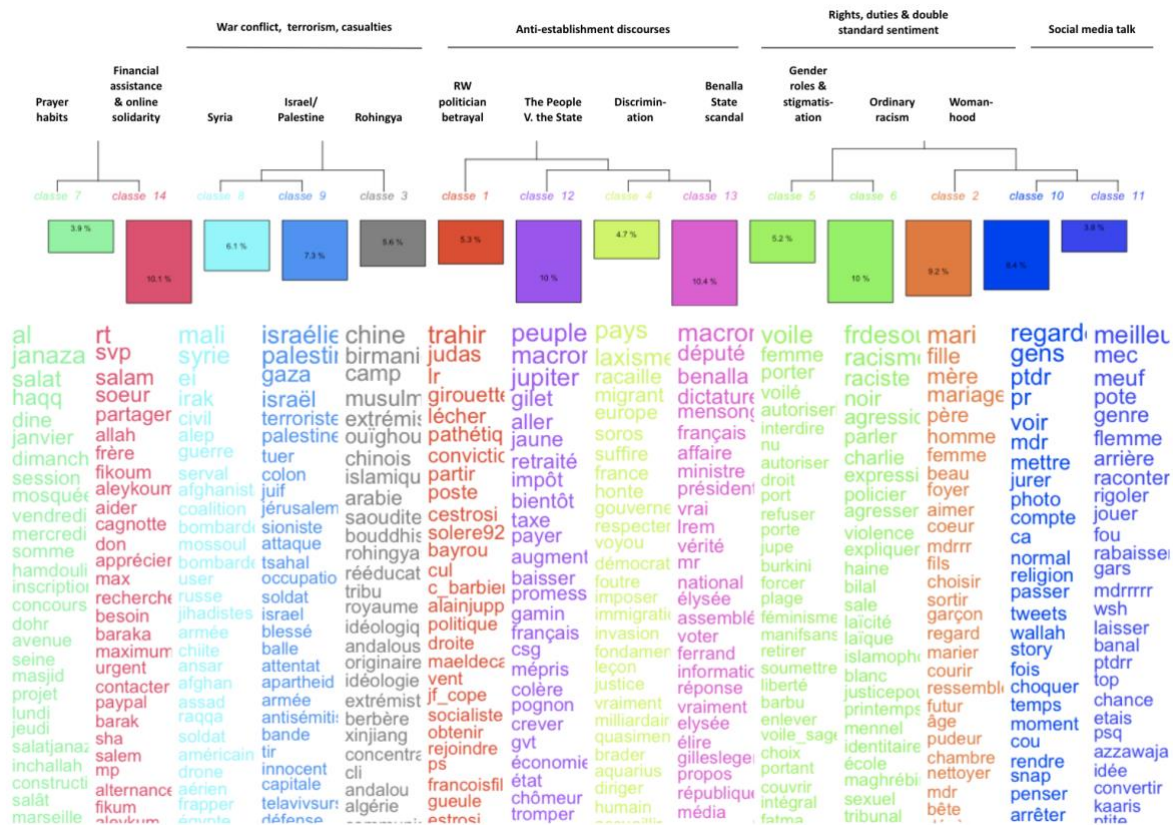
Figure 24 - Dendrogram for the ISE French sample focusing on social and political matters

The themes that compose this new analysis are categories related to: prayer (7), financial assistance and online solidarity (14), war, conflict, terrorism and casualties (8, 9, 3), anti-establishment discourses (1, 12, 4, 13), rights, duties and double standard sentiments (5, 6, 2) and finally, social media talk (10, 11). We will put aside the social media talk category as it brings nothing to the analysis at this stage; it includes basic conversation employing a lot of slang and social media expressions.

Let us explore the themes of the Islamist sample.

The first two lexical clusters function autonomously. This breakdown of the first two classes is due to the fact we put aside the part of the corpus dealing with faith. Thus, what is left of that section appears below (class 7) as an isolated category, although it is actually quite dominant in the scraped material. As we know, the ISE sample does not engage in direct conversations as much as it broadcasts and promotes material. The first dendrogram accentuated this phenomenon (see figure 23). This second dendrogram (see figure 24) puts aside these features, and allows us to focus more on what is being shared beyond prayers (class 7). This is what we explore after describing the first two isolated and autonomous clusters immediately below (class 7 and class 14) as they function with this new analysis as themes of their own.

1. Prayer (7, n=4%)

   On the far end of the left side of the dendrogram, the first theme is related to prayer type practices. Based on Muslim worship and faith, it includes names of prayers, places and days of worship, religious vocabulary (like sine or salat) or expressions. As we discussed in depth earlier in this report (see section 3.1.2), this topic is at the core of media participation in this sample. Results from the lexical analysis further demonstrate this if we consider the first dendrogram (Figure 23). Twitter serves as a means to exchange daily habits related to religious practices.

2. Financial assistance and online assistance (14, n=10%)

Moving to the right on the dendrogram, the next category reveals financial assistance and online solidarity. It is related to forms of crowdfunding for people in need with a great deal of vocabulary related to the request to share the call for financial contribution with larger networks online, but also contribute and financially support the causes named. The main cause evoked seems to be people, especially women, but also discriminated or persecuted Muslim minorities. The fact this cluster is related to the first cluster, as revealed in the classification tree, highlights how deeply interlinked this practice is to faith. As justified in tweets, solidarity is called upon in the name of religion. We could not be much further from a radicalisation process, unless to believe that the financial support serves to arm warriors; not only can we find no proof of support to such activities, nor does the material give us any reason to believe this. This is an extremely large lexical cluster representing over 10% of all the analysed tweets, showing us how Twitter serves other purposes than conversing with others. Therefore, this class deserves further investigation in future research to better comprehend what is at stake, and specifically what cause is being funded by the collection of funds. Is it simply a manner of gathering money for a personal brand, an Islamic school, or a larger cause and/or organisation?

3. War, conflict, terrorism and casualties (8, 9, 3, n=19%)

The following three categories are all related to an overall theme that can be understood as war, conflict, terrorism and casualties. The emergence of this theme sheds light on the importance of geopolitical issues for the sample.

Class 8 focuses on war zones such as Syria, Iraq, Mali, Afghanistan, with a particular interest in the Syrian conflict in which several social actors are involved. Amongst the main social actors of the latter conflict, there is mention here of civilians, Bashar al Assad, Russians, Americans, the jihadists, the military intervention against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) by foreign states. Most of the attention focuses on the conflict in Syria. The class serves to describe the war zone, remaining factual when detailing the battles in the field, like in Aleppo, and the related episodes of bombings.

Class 9 also deals with conflict but centres around the Palestine-Israeli conflict. Discussions between Twitter users show support for the Palestinians who are said to be 'innocent' and clearly side against Israel by describing their actions as terrorist and their settlements as colonisation. This cluster is the largest of the three categories in this theme capturing 7.3% of the attention in conversation, highlighting how crucial the Palestine-Israeli conflict is for the Islamists in France.

The last of the three classes of this theme, lexical cluster 3, is related to the Rohingya refugee crisis - also known as the Muslim Rohingya genocide - in Myanmar. Persecutions by the government and nationalist Buddhists have been notorious for decades, especially since the 1970s, when the Rohingya have been subject to 'apartheid', segregated from the other ethnic communities within Myanmar and deprived of freedom of movement. However, the crisis has intensified in the last few years, leading to mass migration in the wake of episodes of genocide. The unjust treatment and persecution of this minority are denounced by users.

These three categories amount to 14% of the conversations within this sample. They demonstrate a high level of attention to war zones in which Muslims are targeted and as such, the centrality of attention given by users to distant war zones. It would appear that persecuted Muslims become a symbol of martyrdom. These conflicts feeding the news on a daily basis seem to provide a sense of identity, purpose and togetherness.

4. Anti-establishment discourses (1, 12, 4, 13, n=30.4%)

The next four clusters in the middle of the dendrogram are strands of a general theme that can be perceived as anti-establishment discourses.

The first cluster of the four corresponds to distrust towards politics and politicians, especially French RW and centrist personalities (1). It denotes a certain despising of French politicians and a lack of respect for some of the main heads of political parties, who are accused of playing the political game without conviction, sincerity or honesty. The French political class is said to have betrayed the people and for this are characterised as 'Judas'. Disconnection between the People and their representatives is clear here.

Next, cluster 12 captures tensions between the State and the People with a particular focus on Emmanuel Macron, the French President. Macron is portrayed as 'Jupiter', literally the king of the gods, a pejorative expression often used in French public debates to emphasise the President's arrogance and disconnection from the people. This cluster also mixes the anger expressed *via* the Yellow Vests social movement and the financial burdens weighing on the people due to high taxes, increased prices and low retirement incomes. Unemployment appears in this cluster. These tweets represent 10% of the analysed texts, emphasising the importance of victimhood, and/or oppositional postures amongst the participants.

Cluster 4 is talk about discrimination. It tackles the ways in which Muslims are labelled (i.e. scum, literally 'racaille') as delinquents and also the way immigrants are unjustly and inhumanely treated in Europe. This class reveals a more conservative strands of thought, including claims for the need for a strong state and a strong leader in the face of ways in which Muslims are unfairly treated.

The last class in this group is class 13 (n=10.4%). It is based on conversations about the Benalla State Affair. As stated above, a scandal broke out in the summer of 2018 after the newspaper *Le Monde* leaked footage of Benalla, President Macron's security officer and deputy chief of staff, beating up a protester in Paris earlier in May, while falsely impersonating a police officer. The category also denotes larger conspiracy theories and includes recent accusations of Russian meddling in national politics through digital media activism. Interestingly enough, this cluster in addition to the one commented on before last, accounts for 20.4% of the texts, emphasising the significance of the news in online activity but also the importance of politics and anti-establishment sentiments for this sample.

5. Rights, duties and double standard sentiments (5, 6, 2, n=24.4%)

In the second part of the segment, clusters 5, 6 and 2 capture rights and duties related to religious beliefs of Muslims and the ways these conventions are unjustly dealt with by society, leading to a sense of double standards being employed.

In cluster 5, social tensions are debated with regard to Muslim women's clothing, particularly headscarves and full-body bathing suits. In France, both have been forbidden to different degrees in different areas of public space; headscarves are forbidden by law at the workplace or in schools, for example. Many public beaches have also banned the right to wear full-body bathing suits (in France) yet regulation relies on local authorities. Online conversations underline the fact that the State violates basic human rights of freedom of faith by outlawing Muslim dress codes. They also state the double standard under which the State operates by authorising nudist beaches, for example.

The following class centres around racism with reference to everyday acts of racism such as name calling or abusive police checks (2). There is an acknowledgement of episodes leading to the present situation with respect to the Charlie Hebdo terrorist attack in January 2015, for example, or support from organisations, like one of the main French RW extremist journals, i.e. *Français de Souche* (literally 'French-bred'), fuelling social tensions.

Lastly, class 2 is insider talk about Muslims' life goals in general, especially in respect to womanhood. Rather gender-oriented in its object, this cluster shows how marriage is framed as an achievement for a woman and how family is prized as an ultimate goal. Many positive

sentiments are shared amongst users in conversations about future love, weddings and the fact this step leads to having a household and a family. Normative gender and family roles are asserted with explicit reference to the role of a man, a woman, a son and a daughter. Representing 9.2% of the lexical material, this cluster illustrates how Twitter can be used to create a community of interests, in this case around common religious beliefs and the way to practice this faith.

4.1.2 Lexical proximity and relationship between themes

The analysis presented in this section maps the dendrograms presented in the section above and can be considered as a similarity analysis or a network of co-occurring words analysis. This is not a cloud of words, but a graphic representation of lexical clusters: words are not selected by the analyst according to what they mean nor selected at random; they are bound by their co-occurrence and their position in regards to one another. The size of the font is proportional to the importance of the words in the corpus. The colours represent communities identified automatically. This graph is made from the lexical clusters that form each of the categories presented in the dendrograms above, so it provides another reading, more focused on lexical proximity and relationships between topics. It constitutes another way of looking at the conversational material collected on Twitter, focusing on how themes are articulated to one another in relation to 'interpretative communities', that is, groups that share similar interpretations and understandings based on the fact they share similar positions and experiences (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Fish, 1980).

Structure of conversations for right-wing extremists: current events and national politics

The graph below extends the RWE dendrogram discussed above. It is generated by selecting the 700 words that appear the most in the corpus, keeping only nouns and verbs. The spatialisation layout used is called Fruchterman-Reingold; this algorithm helps emphasise clusters of discussions. The coloured areas of the graph were generated by means of the Louvain method, i.e. an algorithm specifically designed to detect interpretative communities and extract them from large networks (Fruchterman and Reingold, 1991).
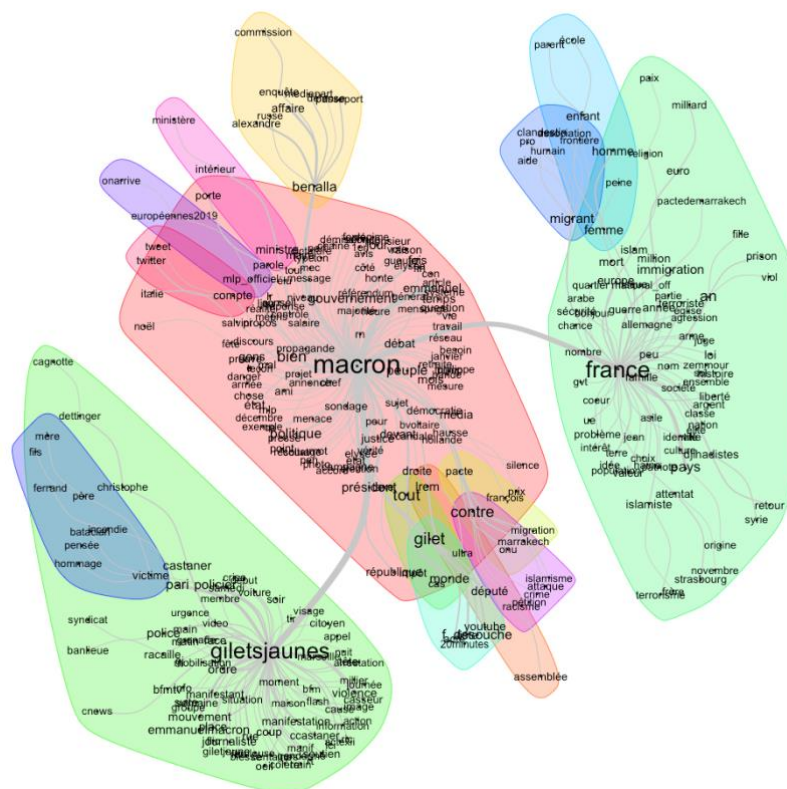
Figure 25 - Similarity analysis of the French RW extremist milieu: structure of debates

What we can see here is that three main topics shape right-wing extremist discussions on the web. The debates are structured around the French President Emmanuel Macron, the notion of France as a country and the Yellow Vests social movement (i.e. 'Gilets Jaunes') that took place in the winter of 2018-2019.

Macron, a self-proclaimed centrist, is at the crossway of all the conversations conducted within the RW extremist milieu on Twitter. In close proximity with conversations about the President, several clusters of discussion stand out, in particular: state corruption related to the Benalla affair; anti-immigration and anti-Europe sentiments related to the Marrakesh treaty; media outlets favourable to RW information or sources of information used by the sample of users; and the desire to make an impact on the Spring 2019 European Parliament elections. What appears even more clearly here is how users oppose Macron's leadership and presidency. These talks are embedded in current events and national politics; they all deal with topics that made the news in France during the timeframe of the study, underlining the importance of news cycles and their concomitant public debates for the replenishment of online discussion.

The second structuring theme that appears in the similarity analysis is France. France is associated with numerous threads of discussion pertaining to terrorism, the return of ISIS fighters, immigration, Europe, prison and Islam as a religion of peace. All of these threads link France to the Muslim faith and arising security matters. Beyond these small threads of conversation, two topics emerge. The first aligns with several of the conversation threads mentioned above, namely, tackling clandestine immigration, border protection and matters of humanitarian help. The issue of clandestine immigration can be placed within the context of notorious sites in France where immigrants cross the border illegally. In several of these sites, including places in the French Alps, (groups of) citizens help illegal aliens cross the border from Italy to France on a more or less daily basis in defiance of the law. Such topics show up in conversation threads making immigration in France, one of the main preoccupations of our sample. The second subtheme linked to France is related to social institutions, namely family, gender roles and school. On the back of discussions about France and immigration, this topic would appear to deal with what immigration threatens, that is, social identities related to the status of school, children, women, and family in general. These themes thus appear to act as forms of resistance to unwanted changes.

The last of the three larger themes is related to the Yellow Vests social movement. The theme is interlinked to countless threads of discussion, pertaining to hooligans, confrontation with law enforcement agencies, 'racaille' (literally scum from the ghettos), news coverage of the riots, etc. What appears here are conversations that took place week after week in relation to the coverage of the riots. In addition to these threads, a small cluster appears here; it captures discussion about Patrick Jardin, a man whose daughter died in the Bataclan Paris terrorist attack. Patrick Jardin was mentioned above, in the dendrogram section, due to the significant media attention he received in the wake of his daughter's death when he publicly declared he was embarking on a quest for justice against a state that he considered lenient with immigrants and led by those too 'soft' to oppose the invasion of Islamists in France. He and his deceased daughter represent martyrs of some kind for right-wing extremist parties and their audiences. As mentioned above, the social movement as well as the father's story can be associated with the news cycles that took place within the timeframe of the study, underlying the importance of events in fuelling online talk.

Islamist extremists: lack of clear dialogue

We shall now account for the fashion in which conversations are structured and topics related to one another for the ISE sample.

This similarity analysis is conducted on the basis of the third dendrogram presented above (Figure 24). It is composed of 15 interpretative communities. If the first lexical analysis led to the impression that the ISE sample was talking about a series of topics, this approach masked the fact that threads of

conversation were also poorly interwoven. Figure 26 demonstrates the presence of a great variety of topics and the overall dispersion of threads of discussion. In other words, the multiplicity of interpretative communities underlines the lack of global conversation and confirms earlier conclusions in this report that, unlike the RWE sample, the ISE sample is not using Twitter to engage in a public debate (see Section 3.1.2).

Amongst the 15 threads of discussion only a couple of words stand out as being of high significance for the interpretation of lexical communities.
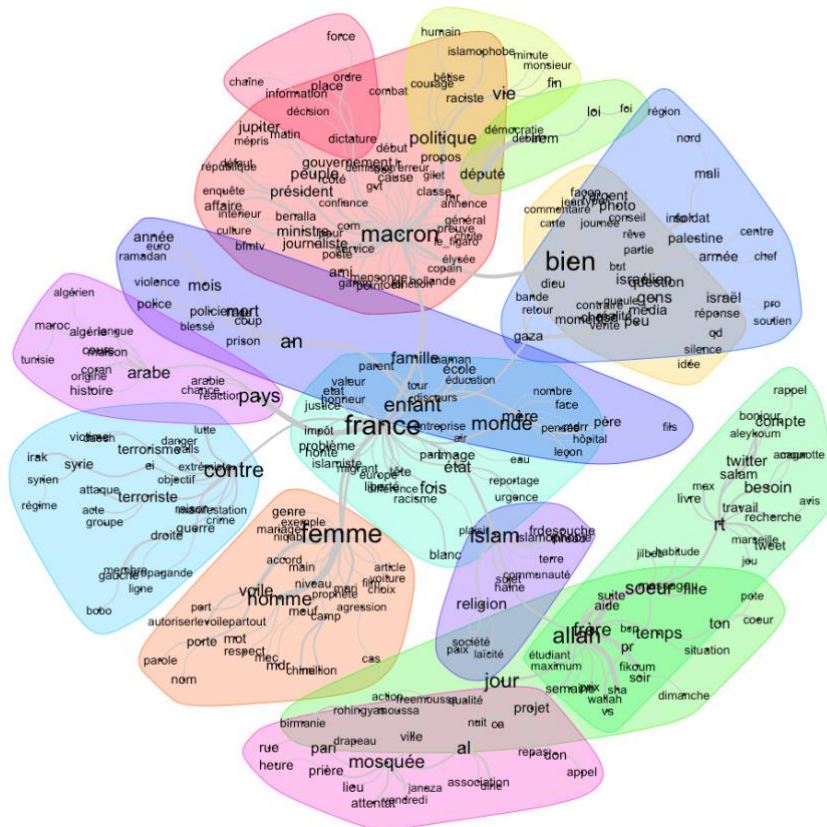

Figure 26 - Similarity analysis of the French ISE sample: structure of discussions

The similarity analysis reveals communities around the following terms:

- France
- Macron
- good
- country and Arab
- woman
- Islam
- Allah
- mosque
- against
- politics
- sister

At the very heart of all debates are two overlapping communities; both are articulated around the word 'France'. Firstly, France is questioned in relation to a number of social norms like justice, family, education, health, skin colour. Secondly, the State is brought up in respect to what can be considered as shortcomings, that is to say the expression of racism and islamophobia, the violation of core values like justice and the use of violence by police task forces. So, while France is the object of many discussions revealing the centrality of the nation as a uniting factor as well as a source of social tension and conflict, contrary to the RW sample, here victimhood is the main driver of digital exchanges.

Next, we can see that even though we excluded faith and preaching-related tweets for this analysis - as it is based on the second lexical corpus generated after the first dendrogram - an important part of the remaining themes that structure conversations is still centred around faith. Here, three communities of interpretation dominate: one cluster is tightly related to ritual practices and the place of worship (i.e. the cluster where the word 'mosque' is in larger font); one cluster is articulated around 'Allah', partly in reference to faith and life values, partly in association with casual talk where Allah is used as a common expression (like 'inshAllah'); one cluster places Islam at its core with two opposite views - on the one hand, there is talk about secular ways, peace, community, and on the other hand, talk about hatred, Islamophobia - clearly capturing the ways in which Islam is perceived and stigmatised in public debates and the French journal *Français de souche*. The centrality of these themes mirrors the format of participation of this sample.

There are a number of clusters that follow in the footsteps of the ones described above. Less religious oriented, these clusters are all Muslim community based. Arguably one of the most interesting is the interpretative community where the word 'against' ('contre') structures conversations. Here, it appears Twitter contributors are against terrorism and conflicts attributed to Islamists and/or in areas of the world where Muslim faith is predominant. This cluster goes against the very idea of online activity contributing to self-radicalisation if we were to consider calls for violent extremism alone as an indicator of the basis for self-radicalisation.

In line with the previous communities, there is a specific cluster dedicated to social identities with regard to origins and a given 'country'. Social identities are built around landmarks, specifically countries. The countries that appear in this cluster are former French colonies, underlining the significance of colonial heritage and history in the frame of the contemporary radicalisation matrix.

At the crossroads between faith-oriented talk and social norms, a lexical cluster is dedicated to womanhood ('femme'). It questions gender, men and women's respective places and status in society, zooming in on symbolic details like appropriate clothing, namely headscarves for women. The word 'respect' plays a central role in this cluster; it is used to underline the need for women of Muslim faith to respect themselves and their counterparts through appropriate attire.

If we move away from the religious-based interpretative communities, themes are politically oriented towards French debates. Just as in the RWE counterpart, Macron appears to be central to fuelling a rich conversation base and three more defined parallel conversations within this realm. Macron himself is the object of conversation about politics, the Benalla Affair, his arrogant and disconnected ways, the Yellow Vests social movement as well as certain media outlets' allegiance to his politics. Intertwined with this interpretative community is talk about three other topics: the use of violence and abuse of the police force to maintain social order; Macron's political party and the relationship between democracy and faith; racism and Islamophobic sentiments.

4.1.3 Gender-oriented discussions

To understand the structure of debates within a group, another interesting variable to consider is gender. Figure 27 shows which lexical clusters are more discussed by either: men (green bars) or women (red bars); the blue bars indicate unknown gender. To be specific, links are estimated through a chi2 reflecting the trend to find, in a given cluster, a statistical overrepresentation (a higher proportion) or a statistical underrepresentation (a lower proportion) of tweets produced at each date.

The bars going upwards signal an overrepresentation of tweets from one gender over another in the cluster; the bars going downwards show an underrepresentation; bars stacked in the middle signify that both genders are equally represented in that class.
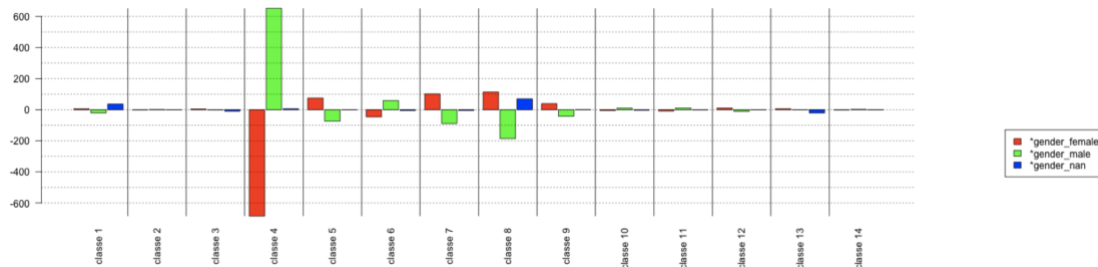
Right wing extremism

Figure 27 - Links between lexical clusters and gender in the French sample (Chi2)

européer	con
national	fake
rn	lire
débat	gros
maire	zemmour
européenn	vrai
lr	onpc
mlp_officie	foutre
pen	new
marine	connerie
voter	ca
onarrive	télé
élection	tweet
rnational_of	mec
député	regarder
assemblée	rire
thierrymariar	parler
campagne	plateau
référendum	petit
j_bardella	adorer
union	penser
fn	tellement
grand	abonné
fn_officiel	envie
électeur	émission
wauquiez	intelligent
présidentiel	onfray
liste	tv
ump	lheuredespro
	ruquier

Class 4   Class 6

Figure 28   *Figure 29*

The class that most divides users is class number 4, the one related to European politics. This theme was already over-represented in the dendrogram, representing 10% of the discussions on the web within the RWE milieu. Cluster 4, European politics and anti-immigration discourses, is a central topic here. Only one other cluster is overrepresented by men, even though it is not nearly as over-discussed as class 4, nor is it as prevalent amongst the general themes as we saw in the section on 'main themes'. This class is class 6; it is the insults and defamation clustering. We also noted that this class denotes negative sentiments towards politics in general. It is a class heavily constituted around a TV show and was most likely created by live tweeting during the show. In other words, men seem to voice their negative sentiments towards politics, often through vulgar language, in response to a particular TV show. However, the overrepresentation of men in this category remains less significant than in class 4 (European politics), suggesting men are the most invested in politics and, in particular, debates surrounding the Spring 2019 European elections and immigration laws.

If we look at what themes are most discussed by women, we can see that clusters 5, 7, 8 and 9 are the most discussed, 7 and 8 being slightly ahead of the other two clusters.

jardin	terroriste	policier	giletsjaur
patrick	djihadiste	tir	jaune
katnarv	f_desoucl	lbd	gilet
twitterfranc	syrie	police	mouvement
hénin	migrant	flashball	manifestatio
patrickjardir	attentat	blesser	casseur
fraire	prison	grenade	pari
twitter	migrer	ordre	manifestant
compte	rapatrier	tirer	youtube
suspendre	violer	crs	samedi
rendeznous	strasbourg	gilet	mobilisation
nathalie	viol	ball	castaner
wallah	ei	jaune	champ
henin	terrorisme	racaille	acte
déradicalisat	mineur	blessé	elysées
bataclan	expulser	flash	drouet
nicolas	attaque	lbd40	actexiii
patoche599	djihadiste	gendarme	acteviii
twittersuppor	condamner	pompier	actexii
contre_terror	syrien	oeil	giletjaune
bisou	marocain	rodrigues	antifas
fraires	asile	violence	ordre
délateur	tuer	blessure	actex
bannière	afghan	jérôme	champselyse
ctrlsec	clandestin	pari	24novembre
katibadesnar	expulsion	lacrymogène	manifester
marc63fr	islamiste	place_beauv:	yellowvests
damienviel	couteau	usage	cortège
katnarvtv	poignarder	coma	acte12
akhi		ccastaner	crs
			foulardsrouge

Class 5	Class 7	Class 8	Class 9
Figure 30	*Figure 31*	*Figure 32*	*Figure 33*

While class 5 appears here, it is important to note that these discussions weigh very little in the overall distribution of Twitter conversation, representing less than 2% of all analysed tweets (see figure 22). However, this class keeps appearing because it is discussed outside the limits of the milieu studied here. It would seem that Patrick Jardin received a great amount of support at the general level of Twitter, pushing this category to the top of all analysis conducted in this report. Here, we can see that women discuss Patrick Jardin and the underlying theme of anti-Islamism more than men. In a similar manner to class 5, class 9 is slightly more discussed by women than men. Class 9 deals with the Yellow Vests movement. In contrast to class 5, class 9 is amongst the most tweeted topics, representing 11% of discussions within the sample. The social movement seemingly received a bit more interest and support from the female segment of our sample. Lastly, class 7 is overrepresented. This cluster deals with terrorist attacks and national security issues. It highlights episodes of rape by immigrants. As we saw before, this thread is fuelled by fear and conveys negative representations of immigrants portraying them as a threat to national security.

Islamist extremism

Just as we did for the RWE, we will now consider which themes are more discussed by women or by men within the ISE sample. Figure 34 below reveals which lexical clusters are specific to either gender. The bars going upwards correspond to an overrepresentation of tweets from one gender over another in the cluster: the bars going downwards signify an underrepresentation. We will only consider the clusters in which male (green bars) or female (red bars) are overrepresented.
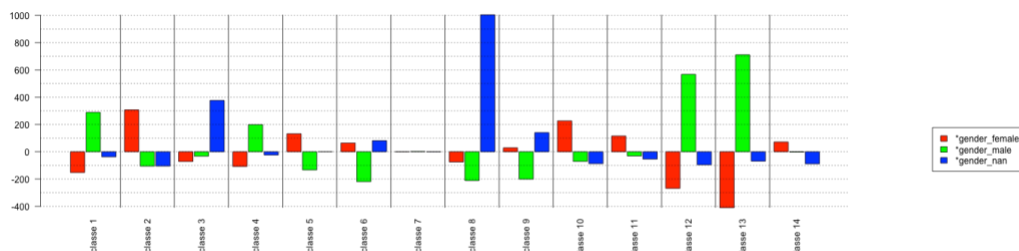

Figure 34 - Links between lexical clusters and gender in the French Islamist extremist sample (Chi2)

trahir peuple pays macror
judas macror laxisme député
lr jupiter racaille benalla
girouette gilet migrant dictature
lécher aller europe mensong
pathétiq jaune soros français
convictic retraité suffire affaire
partir impôt france ministre
poste bientôt honte président
cestrosi taxe gouverne vrai
solere92 payer respecter lrem
bayrou augment voyou vérité
cul baisser démocrat mr
c_barbiei promess foutre national
aĺainjupp gamin imposer élysée
politique français immigrati assemblé
droite csg invasion voter
maeldeca mépris fondamer ferrand
vent colère leçon informatic
jf_cope pognon justice réponse
socialiste crever vraiment vraiment
obtenir gvt vraiment élysée
rejoindre économie quasimen élire
ps brader milliardair gilleslege
francoisfil état aquarius propos
gueule chômeur diriger républiqu
estrosi tromper humain média

Figures 35 to 38

If we start by examining which clusters appear as most discussed by men, four classes stand out (1, 4, 12, 13). Interestingly enough, these clusters represent a single theme - anti-establishment discourses. The anti-establishment theme is composed of clusters about discrimination, distrust towards politics and politicians, tensions between the State and the People, political betrayal, lies and a sense of living in dictatorship rather than democracy. A mix of victimhood sentiments and feelings of anger prevail in all these exchanges. We could interpret the over-representation of this theme as an indication of how men are dealing with what they perceive as unfair treatment, double standards, lack of recognition and a dominant position in the French society. By rejecting political figures and denouncing discrimination men reclaim power, i.e. a status and a place in society that presently denies them equal opportunities. It would seem that men are now rejecting the very social classes and actors that they feel previously rejected them, and by so doing, they reclaim a status and a place in a society perceived as denying such opportunities. The importance of this category amongst men also calls for further exploration regarding how disenfranchisement affects masculinity.

For women, the four dominant clusters can be sorted into two themes: social talk (10, 11) and gender roles (2, 5). While we will not be considering social talk further for the same reasons as those noted earlier, it is important to recall the description of these two classes. This lexical cluster is typical of people who go online to converse and forge digital sociabilities around their common interests (Ito et al., 2011): they will comment 'live' a news event, for example, or political debates broadcast on television; they gossip through direct conversation in a synchronised manner to share their opinions. In this sense, the Internet serves to uphold individual religious beliefs through engagement in digital communities. It is essential to note that this class is the first sign we have found on the presence of digital sociability on the ISE side.

mari   voile
fille   femme
mère   porter
mariage   voilé
père   autoriser
homme   interdire
femme   nu
beau   autoriser
foyer   droit
aimer   port
coeur   refuser
mdrrr   porte
fils   jupe
choisir   burkini
sortir   forcer
garçon   plage
regard   féminisme
marier   manifsans
courir   retirer
ressembl   soumettre
futur   liberté
âge   barbu
pudeur   enlever
chambre   voile_sage
nettoyer   choix
mdr   portant
              couvrir

The other two categories that appear here have to do with womanhood. Cluster 2 concerns what it means to succeed as a woman in life and what conduct a woman should have. Cluster 5 deals with gender norms and social tensions generated by Islamist type dress codes, namely headscarves and full-body bathing suits. In France, social representations in public debates tend to portray women as victims of men's demands with respect to dress and

Cluster 2   Cluster 5
Figure 39   Figure 40

conformity to segregated gender norms. Here it appears that women call upon these norms as they provide a clear status and place in society, of the kind that men seem to lack based on the findings presented above. In this sense, religion becomes a means to an end; a way to have a sense of self, a clear status and a social identity, along the lines discussed above (see Section 3.1.2).

4.2 Events

Online participation and/or self-radicalisation do not take place in a social vacuum; social, political and economic developments and events have a direct impact on the online activity. Some offline incidents, such as a terrorist attack, an election or a social movement, can even provoke a massive wave of responses from bystanders, triggering media participation and fuelling radicalisation. In the case of school shootings for instance, online dormant networks of fans systematically 'celebrated' highly televised new school massacres; such tragic events provided a renewed sense of legitimacy for those who perceive school shootings as a sign of impending doom, rightfully executed to fight the injustices faced daily in school by those who are bullied. With the news coverage of each new school shooting, fans would suddenly actively take part in online shrines and express their transgressive views in such a way that it was possible to assert that news coverage and offline events fuelled radicalisation online

(Paton, 2015a, 2015b). Likewise, terrorist attacks can spark vivid online debates, and possible support or outrage, that can in turn nourish radical postures and ideologies. In France in the wake of the Charlie Hebdo attack in 2015 for example, the hashtag #jesuismohamed trended online. The hashtag was a sign of support for the motivations behind the attacks; the editors of the Charlie Hebdo journal had committed blasphemy by publishing caricature drawings of the Prophet Muhammed. #jesuismohamed therefore emerged in the public sphere as a counter-message to the hashtag #jesuisCharlie that had initially been widely adopted online by the French population to show their support to the victims of the attack. This terrorist attack triggered online debates involving mass interpersonal interaction, and led to the constitution of temporary networks of interpretative communities within which radical opinions resurfaced and hegemonic and counter-hegemonic movements opposed one another.

As these two examples illustrate, current events can trigger media participation and even fuel opposition, if not radicalisation. In this section, we expand on such findings by asking whether people mainly tweet to talk about daily news, and if so, whether we can consider that current events are a means for radicalisation. Based on these preliminary analyses, we will return to the theme analysis to consider whether the themes identified in section 4.1 are simply a reaction to what is going on in public debates rather than topics of conversations within a milieu. If so, can we consider theme analysis on a platform like Twitter as a way to better understand what unites radicals online? Or instead, should we privilege the material people employ to create digital social identities (cf. material presented in section 3.2) and the type of repertoire of action used to showcase the main ideologies behind their digital engagement (section 3.1). In turn, are repertoires of actions and self-presentations more informative about processes of radicalisation than themes of conversation? If the latter hypothesis was confirmed, it would imply that digital identities are where researchers should focus their attention to capture the rationales behind self-radicalisation instead of solely concentrating on themes of conversations; this should be investigated further when triangulating data with the cross-country report.

We will also question whether the daily news is a source of radicalisation and potentially triggers digital participation. To demonstrate a possible correlation, we question if users engage in high levels of activity concerning specific topics at a given time, and if so, whether they are related to particular events. In turn, we question whether these events represent a form of online stimulation for radicalisation.

4.2.1 Publications triggered by events
We start by considering the RW extremist sample.

Right wing extremist sample
In the theme analysis part of this report (see section 4.1), we detailed the content of the 14 classes that emerged from the lexical analysis. The heat map below is a chronological representation of these categories. Heat maps in general provide information on the over-representation of a class for a given variable. In the case at hand, the selected variable is the month and the year. This allows us to visualise what the topics most discussed within the timeframe of the study were (see Figure 41). The class numbers are listed in the column on the right. The months and the year are indicated on the bottom line under each column.
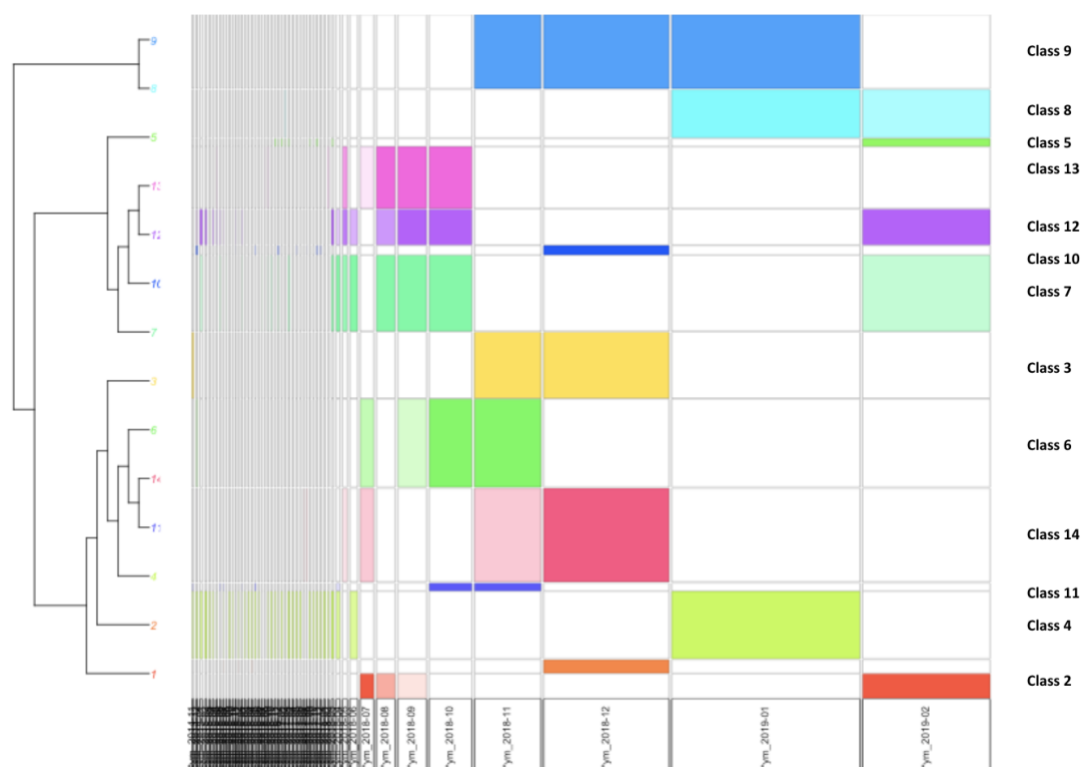
Figure 41 - RWE: Evolution of categories over time as per over-representativeness of classes per month

As we can see, the category that dominated the conversations online for over three months is the blue line at the very top, i.e. the Yellow Vests social movement theme. For three consecutive months, this cluster remained the most discussed topic. Based on this remark, we can consider that it is indeed a contextual event that feeds online participation.

If we consider all of the over-represented topics, i.e. classes 9, 8, 3, they all confirm this claim. While class 9 corresponds to the spontaneous event of the Yellow Vests social movement, class 8 is the Benalla scandal, and class 3 is Consumer buying power. Discussions about consumer buying power may seem far from the news cycle but, in reality, debates about consumer buying power are what triggered the Yellow Vests Social movement. Following an announcement from the government about a new tax on fuel to counterbalance global warming, the French population started weekly demonstrations to denounce this additional constraint on household budgets, as well as the overall lack of consumer buying power in the face of unemployment, taxes, low wages, etc. As for the Benalla scandal, as we explained in the 'main themes' section, this topic was fuelled by the revelation of Benalla's abuse of power and position in the government. It can also be defined as a news event. Therefore it seems events provoke a mirror effect of some sort.
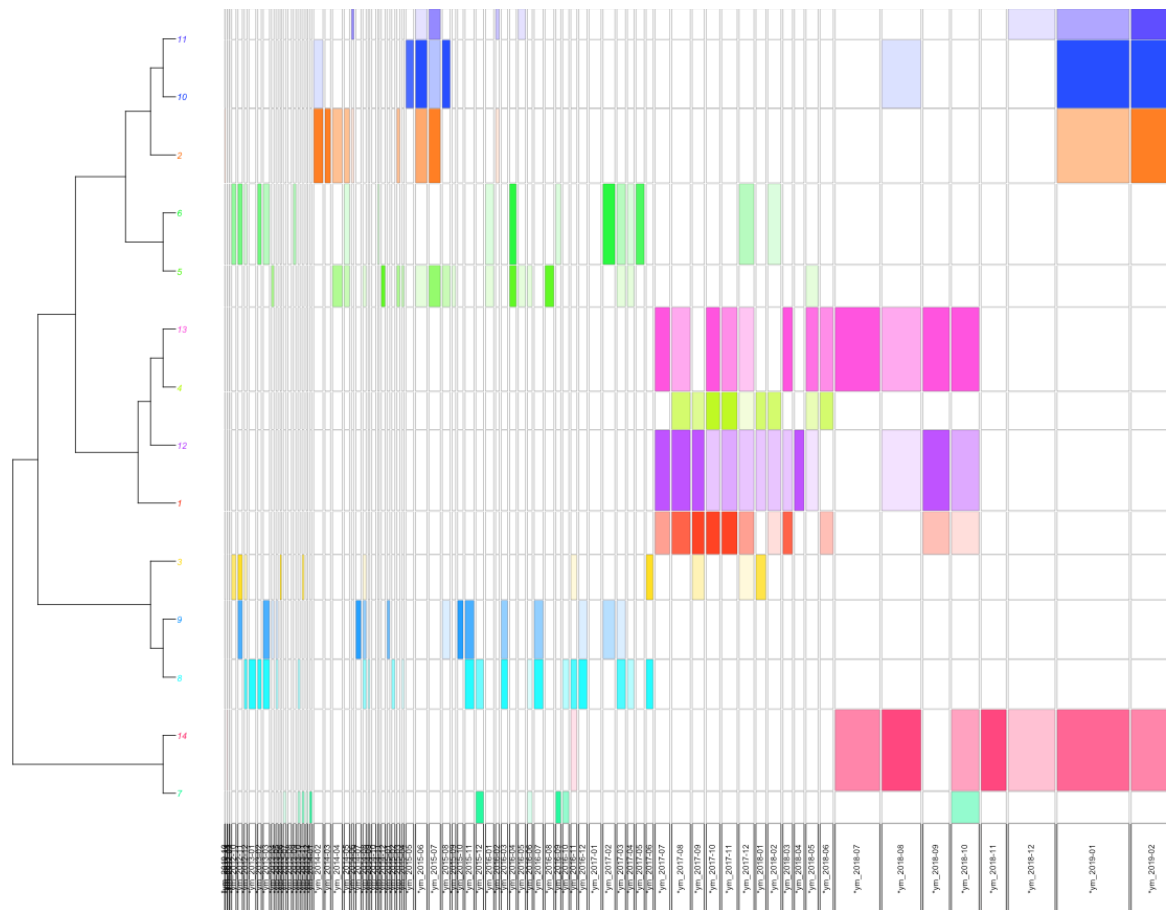
Islamist Extremists

Figure 42 - ISE: Evolution of categories over time as per over-representativeness of classes per month

In the case of the ISE sample, based on the analysis conducted via the second dendrogram (Figure 24), the findings appear similar, that is, all the themes are event-related and dated in time. Amongst the most shared topics of discussion are: the Benalla state scandal (class 13); migration policy talk (4) linked to the Marrakesh European treaty discussed in late 2018; the Yellow Vests social movement (class 12); and politicians' betrayal and corruption (1) closely interlinked with talk of the Benalla scandal. The topics discussed within the ISE sample would tend to support the claims made above about the stimulus character of news for online contributions.

Another element should be introduced into the discussion to further reflect on our findings here. The analysis we have just conducted is based upon the second dendrogram of the ISE sample (Figure 24) instead of the original dendrogram (Figure 23), from which faith and belief-oriented content of the narratives had been removed. As discussed above, to conduct the narrative analysis, we initially drew a full portrait of online discussions with 19 themes and saw that two main categories dominated: a category that was attached to social and political matters; and a category discussing faith. By doing so, we moved away from the tweets at the core of this repertoire of action, with the aim to better understand what was actually being discussed rather than showing interest in the semantics of religious texts. In other words, by favouring the social and political discussions to generate a second dendrogram (Figure 24) with only 14 categories, we focused on the dynamic elements of the texts, related to interactive communication within the twittersphere, rather than showing interest in the static consumption of content published to attract an audience and create a name for oneself. This choice to favour interactive communications between users instead of the core material of this repertoire of action may deroute analysis here. The over-representativeness of news-related topics presented above corresponds to this deeper level of analysis (i.e. the 14 category analysis), potentially leaving aside important indices that allow us to better grasp the importance of events as a stimulus fuelling online participation. Our hypothesis is that the first dendrogram was more routine-based as

it appeared to focus more on scriptures and religious texts. By routine-based, we mean that publications are disconnected from news coverage and current events; tweets published serve to microblog about Islam, to promote faith-related material, to showcase a possible lifestyle encapsulated in a belief system, and, in parallel, to sell associated brands of faith (i.e. this or that spirtual leader, this or that school of thought, and so on). The type of content published by ISE sample is in this sense mainly based on a day-to-day routine of promoting Allah's teachings. That is why it would be interesting to move away from this first heatmap and associated dendrogram, to take the initial dendrogram into account, i.e. Figure 23, to see whether a new analysis could possibly lead to different conclusions.

As a final note, we can also draw attention to the fact that there is one class that appears above that is not related to the news cycle nor that can be presented as solely 'event focused'. It is category 14; this class reflects discussions about crowdfunding, online solidarity and financial support within the community of Muslims. This topic is a constant (see section 4.1) and can actually be considered as an integral part of the repertoire of action (see section 3.1.2).

4.2.2 Events as a means for participation depending on the repertoire of action

Right wing extremists
As we saw with the RWE sample, events seem to provoke a mirror effect of some sort. Twitter users comment on what is going on in the news, reacting to political and journalistic information. That being said, as the Yellow Vests social movement highlights, events may be showcased in mainstream media outlets, the event in itself is not necessarily attached to any media outlet or media induced, or for that matter, the by-product of some political agendas. Events can very well be fuelled through top-down as well as bottom-up dynamics.

It is also important to stress that, while events may trigger online activity, there is nothing to suggest that it actually heightens radicalisation. The topics discussed are not right-wing 'by nature' as we will see by examining the narratives from the Islamist extremist sample.

Islamist extremists
In the ISE sample, the situation is quite different. While most of the topics of discussion seem to fit the findings for the RWE, the fact that events bear no weight in discussions of class 14 of the ISE sample has us questioning whether events are only relevant if and when Twitter is used in certain manners.

In section 3 of this report, 'Staging and framing identities', we saw that Twitter harbours different repertoires of action. RWE exploit Twitter to showcase their opinion and promote their political agendas; their uses are typical of media activism. ISE however employs Twitter to share beliefs and offer resources to practice faith. The lingering question is: do events also function as a means for participation when Twitter is not exploited to political ends?

As mentioned, the Islamist graph of representativeness of themes over time (Figure 42) only captures the second dendrogram presented in this report (Figure 24). That dendrogram was generated by selecting the lexical material favouring the study of political and societal matters and excluding religious discussion. But, would the most discussed classes be the same if we considered the whole lexical corpus, including the material pertaining to faith and religious scriptures? If we used this larger view of conversations on Twitter, would events still have the same influence on digital publications? To answer this, below we consider a second graph of topics discussed over time on the basis of the full lexical sample.
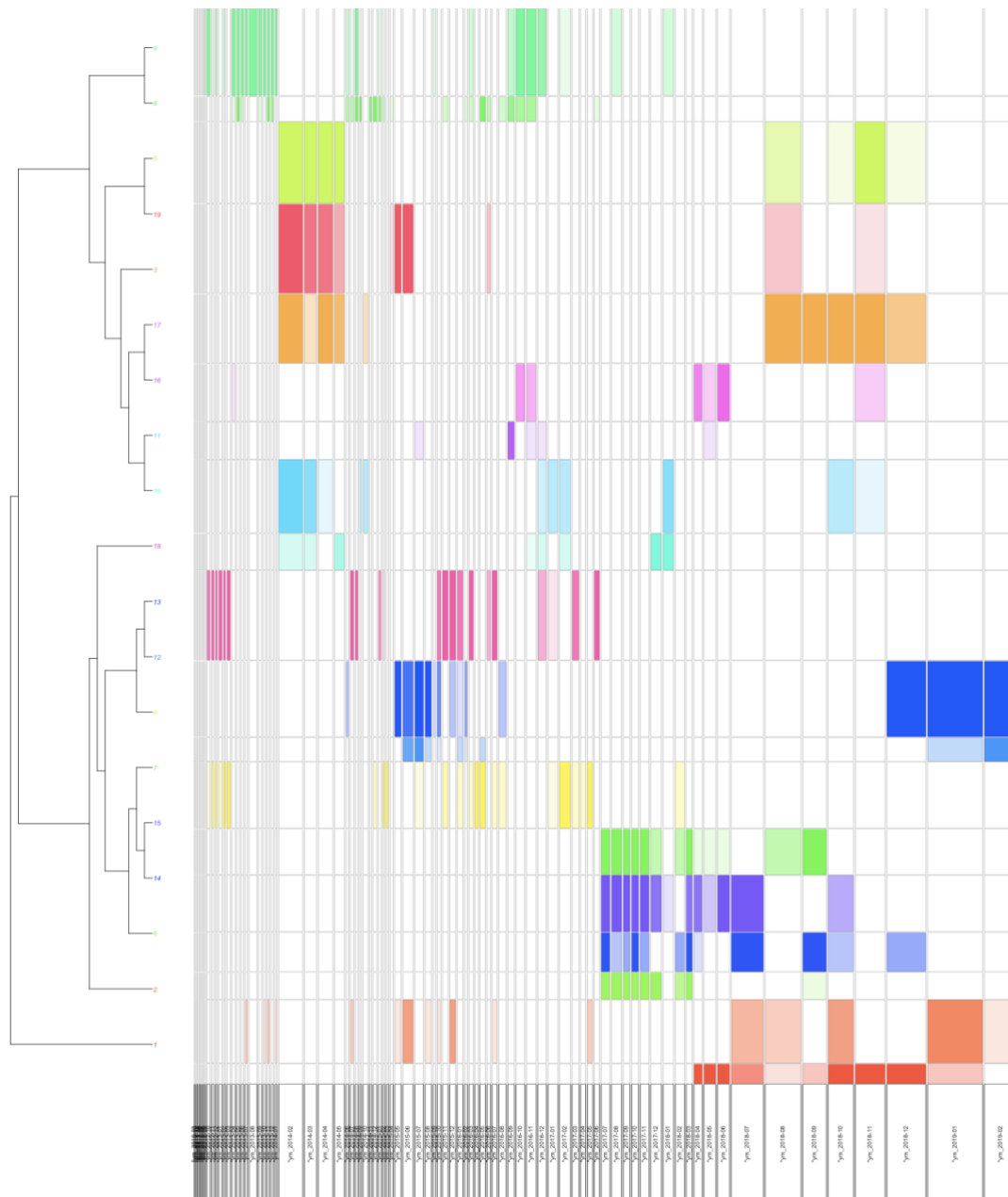
Figure 43 - ISE: Evolution of categories over time as per over-representativeness of classes per month

In this new graph, if we focus on the last eight months to stay within the same timeframe as the RWE study, we can see that the overrepresented discussions primarily pertain to clusters 1, 2, 14 and 3. These classes respectively correspond to politician betrayal (1), womanhood as an achievement (2), financial assistance and online solidarity (14) and the Rohingya crisis (3). Two of the clusters – namely 1 (politician betrayal) and 3 (the Rohingya crisis) - can be treated as relevant to the news cycle, and in this regard confirm our claim that events encourage media participation. However, arguably only the Rohingya crisis is clearly a reaction to recent news while 'Politician betrayal' does not seem to be tied to a specific episode in the news but rather echoes ongoing debate in France sparked by liberal right-wing framing of Muslims as part of a French national identity crisis. The other two clusters meanwhile - 2 ('womanhood') and 14 (financial assistance) - are among the most discussed topics in the last month but neither are tied to recent events. This suggests that not all media participation on Twitter is driven by events.

This also suggests that when it comes to understanding rationales behind self-radicalisation it is indispensable to move away from the dynamism of day-to-day conversations commenting on the news to also consider the more static material of self-presentations and social identities.

Earlier in this report, we saw that the French Islamist extremist sample did not correspond to an online phenomenon as much as it brought together a wide range of individual patterns of use, insofar as accounts were all promoting their own brand of faith-related material underpinned by an associated marketing style. Our findings further this conclusion by underlining the lack of a common interest in daily news that could have triggered event-oriented participation. This observation weakens yet more any claim to Islamisation-type radicalisation on the web.

4.3 Influencers

The role of influence has long been studied in the fields of sociology, communication, marketing, and political science (Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1955; Rogers, 1962). More specifically, influence seems to play a crucial role in how fashion spreads (Gladwell, 2007) and how people vote (Berry and Keller, 2003). Thus studying influence patterns can help better understand why certain trends or innovations are adopted faster than others and how this could help advertisers and marketers design more effective campaigns. There have been important theoretical studies on the diffusion of influence, albeit with radically different results. Traditional communication theory states that a minority of users, called 'influentials', excel in persuading others (Rogers, 1962). This theory predicts that by targeting these 'influentials' in the network, one may achieve a large-scale chain-reaction of influence driven by word-of-mouth, with a very small marketing cost (Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955). A more modern view, in contrast, de-emphasises the role of 'influentials'. Instead, it posits that the key factors determining influence are (i) the interpersonal relationship among ordinary users and (ii) the readiness of a society to adopt an innovation (Domingos and Richardson 2001; Watts and Dodds 2007). These new approaches to 'leaders of opinions' dissertate about how individuals and their social media accounts shape conversations and impact public debates through their involvement and their popularity in digital threads. These theories, however, are still just theories, because there has been a lack of empirical data that could be used to validate either of them. The recent advent of social networking sites and the data within such sites allow researchers to empirically validate these theories. Moving from theory into practice, it appears there are many unanswered questions about how influence diffuses and whether it varies across topics and time (Cha et al., 2010: 10).

While there is no perfect or reliable way to measure the level of users' influence on Twitter, we can gather multiple indicators to identify 'influential' users. Here, we will use the level of connectivity to measure influentiality as it can reveal the potential of a given message to spread widely. Connectivity can be considered on the basis of the ratio between in and out degree relationships - typically the number of followers and followings - of a given user (Cha et al., 2010:12). This approach to influentiality reveals the directions in which information flows and spreads and allows us to pinpoint those who have received the most exposure in relationship to the most replies to their tweets. By defining influencers in this manner, we are taking into account those who have the largest platforms and the highest levels of visibility. What we are doing here is, in addition to considering the level of connectivity of an account, factoring in the tweets that have received the most responses (commented upon) and have been the most shared (retweeted). Therefore, in short, influentiality becomes the measure of a ratio between followers/follow and responses to original content posted online.

Looking into users whose content spreads the most and reaches the highest scores in retweets in order to better understand the role of influencers must be done at the level of Twitter and not at the level of our sample. This is because our samples are in the region of 40 to 44 users, depending on which stream of radicalisation we are studying, which, in either case is insufficient to properly evaluate influencers at the level of the sample. Instead, to study agents of radicalisation, we will focus on the users who are retweeted in our sample and who have received the largest amount of replies at the

level of the Twitter platform as a whole. In such a manner, we will identify the users who can be perceived as influencers on a global scale.

4.3.1 Key influencers on Twitter

Right-wing extremists
Democratically elected representatives in the driver's seat of the RWE scene

For the RWE sample, the influencers who receive the most attention are major political right-wing and right-wing extremist leaders.

On the left-hand side of the graph below (Figure 44), we can detect the volume of replies received by a single tweet from a source whose tweet appears in our sample, i.e. tweets shared or commented on in our sample even when these tweets are not original tweets generated by our sample.
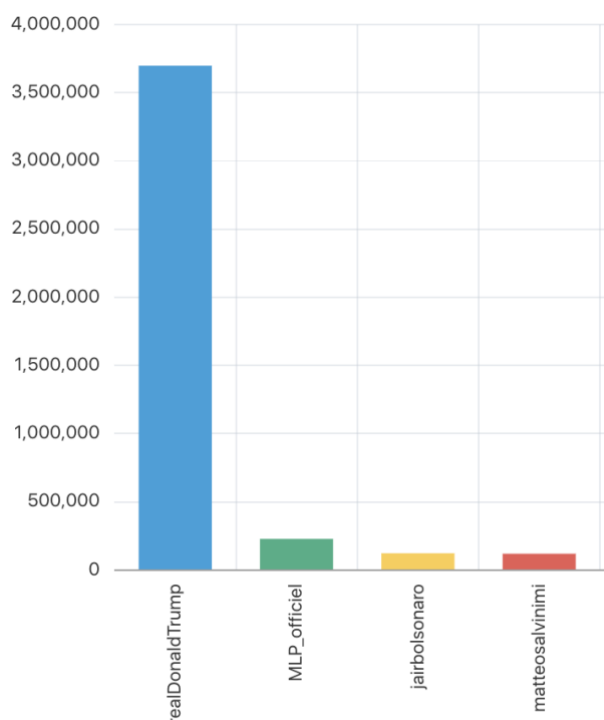

Figure 44 - Top 4 influencers for the RWE sample

The most influential of all is the American President Trump, ahead of the French right-wing extremist political party leader (i.e. the Rassemblement National party), Marine Le Pen. After these two political leaders, the two most influential Twitter users are the Brazilian President, Jair Bolsonaro, and the Federal Secretary of the RW extremist Italian party, the Northern League, also former Deputy Prime Minister of Italy and Minister of the Interior, Matteo Salvini.

It is important to note that the attention received by individual tweets of these four leaders can just as well be negative feedback as comments praising the tweets they are sharing. Influencers are not ranked according to their level of approval but considered on the basis of how much noise they generate. Another important element to state is that Donald Trump's tweet, as we can see on the graph above, reaches a level of visibility that significantly surpasses other political leaders. The tweet that figures on this graph has been retweeted close to three million seven hundred and fifty thousand times, whereas an official tweet from Marine Le Pen was only shared a little under two hundred and fifty thousand times. This result is not as surprising as it may first appear if we consider that Trump is the President of the United States and, as such, receives a great deal of attention.

Even so, all four of these influencers are elected politicians (see figure 44 above). These leaders are all well-known for their right-wing extremist views and strong claims leaning towards radical ideologies.

In other words, those who could be spotted as potentially contributing to online radicalisation are well-known world leaders, and not obscure organisations, underground influences or online gurus, as is sometimes portrayed in the media when discussing the negative effects of media participation and the Internet.

Is Twitter harbouring a RWE international milieu?

These findings also imply that the RW extremist scene is built at the level of global conversations and not restricted to national considerations.

If we go deeper into the list of primary influencers, many of the top retweeted accounts are French politicians or well-recognised leaders of opinions outside of the small Twitter arena. We cannot produce a new graph for these influencers because personal accounts would also show up amongst the most retweeted messages. Nonetheless, some of the well-known French accounts that appear are those of: Dupont-Aignan the leader of the party Debout la France who supported Marine Le Pen at the last Presidential election; Français de Souche, the main media outlet for right-wing extremist ideologies in France; and Gilbert Collard, Secretary of the Rassemblement National political party. In this respect, Twitter replicates or prolongs public debates held outside of this media arena, typically at the level of national public debates, which in France are carried out by the means of mainstream media outlets such as national newspapers like *Le Figaro* and *Le Monde*, or political arenas like the National Assembly. However, side-by-side with these names, amongst the list of top influencers, also figure foreign political leaders or well-known celebrities who openly support radical right-wing extremist ideologies. Therefore, while national context impacts media participation, what people are interested in following goes above and beyond internal state matters.

These findings lead to the general observation that the consolidation of nationalist and conservative positions are taking place today on a global scale. There appears to be some sense of unity that goes beyond national contexts, raising the question of the possibility of an online digital RW extremist milieu at the international level rather than merely at the French or national level. This finding also raises the question of how social media helps legitimise political leaders outside of traditional national political spheres in media spaces where past democratic rules and settings associated with gatekeepers and legitimate institutions do not pertain.

Islamist extremists

In contrast to the findings on RWE influences, who were all politicians, the top four influencers for the Islamist sample all come from quite different spheres.

Non-uniformity of ISE Influencers

The top influencer within the French sample is Mohamed Salah, an Egyptian football player who is presently playing for Liverpool and the Egyptian national team. Named as one of the 100 most influential people in the world by Times Magazine in 2019, this sports celebrity is well-known for his stance in favour of gender equality and women's rights. The second influencer is King Salman of Saudi Arabia, thus a Muslim, world-known political leader, at the head of one the most authoritarian regimes in the world, founded on Sharia Islamic law. The branch of faith practised by King Salman is Sunni, a branch of Islam upon which Salafism is founded. While at this stage it is not possible to assert a direct link between Salafism and retweeting messages from King Salman, this political leader can be considered a fundamentalist extremist. After these two public figures, the third most influential account is the Twitter official channel. Right behind the social media platform is Emmanuel Macron, the French President.

There is no distinct pattern nor perceptible characteristic that links these four accounts, and only one of the four top influencers can be potentially defined as radical. The three others cannot be construed as such.
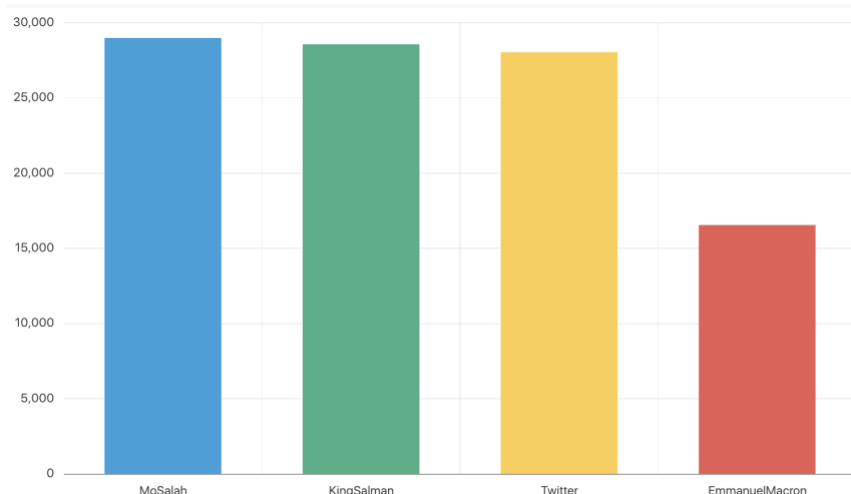
Figure 45 - Top 4 influencers for the ISE sample

While there is nothing particularly controversial with three of these sources, it is also important to note that the volume of replies to these influencers is considerably lower and in no way comparable to exposure received from the top influencers on the RWE side, in particular Donald Trump.

ISE influencers as different representative instances

While the top influencers for the RWE sample were extreme right political actors, this is not the case for the ISE sample. Here, the top influencers are quite diverse: a social media platform, a notorious political actor, a sports celebrity and a political actor, the French President. Influencers do not all actively contribute to the realm of politics, nor are they on the same political side even when they are political leaders. This finding already allows us to establish the fact that digital influencers on Twitter do not contribute to processes of radicalisation in our sample.

In addition, only one of the four actors can be labelled as extremist, undermining even more the idea that Twitter favours the development of digital Islamist extremism by means of online controversial leaders. Even in saying that, we know that retweet is not endorsement; people could very well be criticising Salman for his harsh regime, Salman being the only extremist leader who appears in the top influencers here in our analysis. Since we are unsure that our sample even supports Salman, it is impossible to say that the ISE sample shows any sign of support for radical ideologies.

4.3.2 Influencers as a means for participation?

In this section of our report, we have identified who may act as leading influencers in online radical networks. While we saw that there were no conclusive results for the ISE sample, world-renowned right-wing extremist leaders received an important amount of attention and are the heart of online conversations. If these social actors play a role in shaping conversations, how so? And is it possible to assert that these users trigger participation?

To properly consider how these influencers impact their audiences, it would be necessary to determine how these users are contributing online, what type of repertoire of action they employ and what they are expressing. Trump for example uses Twitter as an arena for authentic communication (Enli, 2017) providing an example of how public discourses have been changing with the development of social media (Ott, 2017) but also documenting how news and information nowadays bypasses official media outlets (Della Porta, 2015). In this sense, attraction for Trump as a prominent online Twitter figures tells us more about the breakdown of social institutions, the growing interest for alternative media and direct communication from social leaders, and the distrust in traditional media, or more generally speaking the establishment (Lewis, 2018), than it tells us something about what triggers participation online.

Findings invite us to extend research in this area to better understand how political influencers adopt the techniques of brand influencers to build their audiences and market far-right ideology.

Main Conclusions for Section 4

Section 4 considers the vectors for participation through the analysis of: conversations that could cement online communities (Section 4.1); events that could encourage more online conversations (Section 4.2); and influencers who could shape conversations or legitimise certain topics over others (Section 4.3). There were six main conclusions:

1. The Islamists primarily shared religion and faith material. This confirms the earlier conclusion (Section 3.1.2) that religion and faith are at the very core of media participation for this sample.

2. The themes shared in discussions among the right wing sample using content analysis techniques, however, differ from the ones identified in Sections 3.1.1 and 3.2.1. Anti-immigration and anti-Islam themes remain central to conversations, but become secondary to other threads of conversations. In particular, some themes that appeared central to forging right-wing extremist identity, e.g. national pride, disappear completely. While the core theme 'France' does remain central to the organisation of conversations (section 4.1.2), event analysis demonstrates that this is a reflection not of what unites the extreme right, but of current events. This confirms our earlier hypothesis that lexical analysis tells us what is going on in the news; tweets have more to do with current events than then they have to do with core themes of right-wing extremists.

3. The lexical proximity approach confirmed what we have consistently seen with the ISE sample (see sections 2.1.4 and 3.1.2), i.e. the lack of global conversation within this sample. Findings produced in Section 4 (notably) also provided additional proof of the absence of a digital milieu structured around Islamist extremism on Twitter.

4. In contrast, for the French right-wing extremist Twitter scene, we find communities of interpretation are gathered and engaged (supporting findings from Section 2 and 3) and demonstrate milieu qualities related to strong digital sociability properties.

5. By means of the influencer approach, we saw that conversations were global on the RWE end, leading us to believe that the consolidation of nationalist and conservative positions are forged on an international scale, even though future research must be carried out to thoroughly test this hypothesis. There is most likely some sense of unity that goes beyond national contexts, raising the possibility of an online digital RW extremist milieu at the international level rather than merely at the French national level. This also raises the question of how social media potentially encourages extremism by further legitimising political leaders outside of traditional national spheres and public spaces, in a new territory - that of digital spaces - that escape, for part, past democratic rules and settings, tied to gatekeepers and well-established institutions of information.

6. This section demonstrated that those we could potentially identify as actively contributing to right-wing extremist radicalisation online are world leaders, in particular the President of the United States, Donald Trump. Attraction for Trump as a prominent online Twitter figure tells us about how Twitter organises conversation in relationship to commercial and economic interests and technological intermediaries. It points to the fact that the rise of populism is related to a breakdown of social institutions. The growing interest for alternative media and direct communication with social leaders (aka influencers) is a testimony to the increasing distrust of traditional media, and more generally speaking, rejection of the establishment (Lewis, 2018), rather than an indication of what triggers

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participation online. This distribution of power on Twitter questions the role of robots (see General introduction on the role of robots in generating traffic online) and constitutes yet another area where research could be extended.

7. Finally, regarding the ISE sample, while none of the earlier sections has allowed us to identify strong digital sociability within this sample, the further examination of gender-oriented discussions found that women used Twitter to carry out 'social talk'. Statistically this thread of conversation is minor and therefore, this observation does not contradict previous results. Nonetheless, it is worth mentioning as it could be indicative of a way in which Twitter is being employed by a fringe of the sample, and therefore it could be relevant to isolate this lexical cluster to carry out additional explorations at a later date.

5. Networks: analysing how people engage

In this section we will consider whether digital milieus of radicalisation exist in the French context and/or in relation to French users from a network analysis perspective. By using network analysis, we pay attention to how connected people are online, who they are connected with and how conversations are being conducted on the web.

Some, like celebrities or famous politicians, for example, attract very large audiences of people with whom they share no ties. If their relationships are primarily one-directional and outbound, their messages can take centre stage and shape public debates. Others, with little to no platform prior to the web, can nonetheless develop strong ties with like-minded people around the same foci of interest and gain in notoriety online, to the point of becoming digital influencers who have the ability to give high visibility to a series of topics. However, most of the time on Twitter, people revolve within small circles, enjoy the social network site to microblog and talk about their daily activities, seek or share information, and most importantly, associate at a community level with users who share similar intentions (Java et al., 2007; Zhao et al., 2009).

In the context of this report, by studying people who openly support radical ideologies and enquiring whether radicalisation can be conducted through microblogging, we should come across users who tend to build profiles around particular areas of interest and engage in conversations with others who share the same opinions. Yet, many questions revolving around structures of communication and composition of social ties remain unclear at this stage. Knowing that relationships can be susceptible to peer pressure, able to sustain, uphold or fuel processes of radicalisation, in this section we will conduct network analysis to further our understanding of the role of digital sociabilities and online communication. These analyses will provide answers to questions such as: how connected are people to one another? If their interrelations tell of how conversations are conducted online? How polarized are people by national or international issues? What are the institutions and/or the leaders taking centre stage in these milieus?

Digital ties of the French samples will be analysed for both strands of radicalisation at three levels: i) the sample level, ii) the retweet level, and iii) the mention level. Analyses from these three perspectives are complementary as demonstrated below.

Before proceeding with our analysis however, it is important to make a methodological remark. Throughout our analysis, we will make a distinction between our 'sample(s)' and the 'full scale of the sample'. The first expression means we are solely examining the users that were hand-picked by the French researchers to compose the French sample(s); that is, 40 RWE accounts and 44 ISE accounts. The second expression - 'full scale of the sample' - implies we are considering the followers and followings of our country-level sample as well as the samples of the other countries within the DARE

study. In this manner, we are not only extending our focus beyond forty-some people of the French ISE and RWE samples; we are also considering the networks of all of the seven country samples with their respective followers and followings.

5.1 On the sample level

In this subsection, we deal with network analysis at the level of the French samples. Examining what is taking place within the French extremist Twitter scenes from a network analysis sample perspective helps capture how samples are structured, and therefore, how people are linked to one another. In this way, we are looking into who is connected to whom, who is following whom and who is being followed. This tells us more about who is well-connected and who is visible online.

In addition, this approach provides information on whether people constitute points of passage or hubs of some sorts, and therefore, if conversations are created around several clusters, if these clusters of conversations are connected to one another or if, on the contrary, there is a lack of clusters or a disconnection between clusters. In short, by understanding how conversations are structured, we can identify whether conversations intersect, are parallel to one another, or if conversations are mainly peripheral and isolated.

To see how connected people are, we have analysed, for each strand of radicalisation, the level of connectivity of the French sample at the full scale of the sample, meaning we took into account the followers and followings of our country-level sample as well as the samples of the other countries within the DARE study.

In the following two graphs, the size of the nodes is representative of indegree relationships, so the bigger the node is, the more that account is followed. Large nodes imply a person has a strong reputation and other people's attention.

Colours do not translate into the same indices for each sample. In the case of the RWE sample, interconnectivity was so strong that it was relevant to highlight communities of interpretation within the French sample. In this instance, colours represent interpretative communities. For the Islamist sample, interconnectivity was not as strong, so researchers decided instead to highlight countries. In this case, colours represent different countries.

In both cases, the spatialisation layout is a force directed algorithm (Force Atlas 2); it helps visualise the level of connectivity of our sample and the people who are central to the network. It is important to keep in mind that this algorithm heightens interrelationships and therefore helps us better determine whether the samples we are looking at have close bonds or not.

5.1.1 The network of the RWE sample

Below is the graph produced on the basis of a network analysis of the RWE French sample, allowing us to visualise the sample's structure at the level of the full sample of all seven countries.
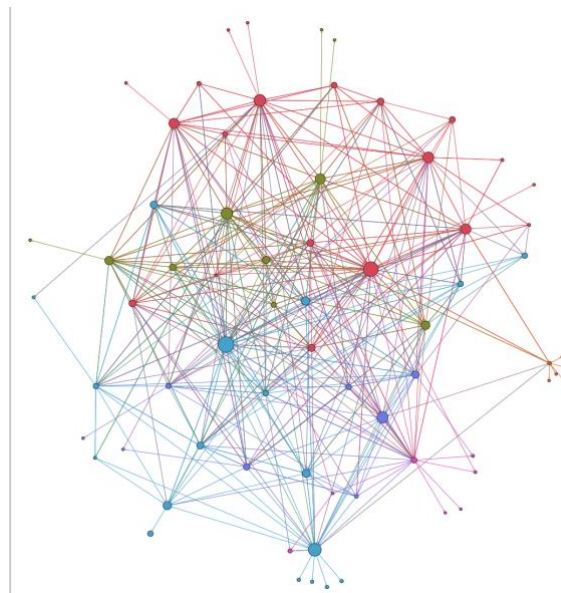
Figure 46 - Network of the tweets for the RWE sample with an emphasis on interpretative communities

Four main remarks can be made on the basis of Figure 46.

1. **'Small world' network phenomenon**

   This graph shows a 'small world' network (Watts, Strogatz, 1998), that is to say, the distance between any pair of nodes is relatively small while at the same time the level of transitivity (also known as clustering) is relatively high. In this sense, social ties amongst the French RWE sample are composed of an ensemble of networks that appear to be closely related to one another.

   If the existence of an ensemble of networks transpires through the number of clusters and the proximity between the nodes, another indication asserting strong integration here as well as the existence of a 'small world' network is the overlapping of the different communities. It is important to note that, in this graph, colours of edges and nodes represent interpretive communities. As we can see, towards the top of the graph, green and red are predominant, and at the bottom of the graph, blue and purple take over. Even so, the level of interconnectivity makes it hard to clearly determine where the interpretative communities lie, to the extent that we can assert that these are not parallel but intertwined conversations, feeding off one another.

2. **High level of interactivity and connectivity: demonstration of an online milieu**

   As we can see here, the graph is dense and collected. There are not a great number of intermediaries between two users; people are connected to one another directly or with very few intermediaries, showing strong interconnectivity. Likewise, people tend to gather around a number of users, making these users central to the larger network. In short, we can note the French sample offers a glimpse into a community of online actors who interact on a regular basis, and at the heart of these interactions are the most connected users around which clusters are formed.

   The high level of interactivity and connectivity amongst users demonstrates, in a new light, the fact we can consider the French sample as part of a larger RWE digital milieu.

3. **Clustering emphasises the centrality of a handful of users**

   Names of accounts do not appear on the graph for privacy reasons. However, we can still note that a few Twitter users are central to the network ensemble and play the role of leaders of

opinions given that they benefit from a high level of indegree connections. These people potentially have more influence than their peers as they are more connected and central to the overall Internet RW French milieu.

4. Prominent circulation of content

Lastly, the way people are connected also says something about the way conversations flow within a sample. At this stage, we could formulate the hypothesis that conversations generally flow between participants and are open-ended rather than the contrary. While we are not sure as to whether people retweet original messages or comment on them through this level of analysis, we do know that people are sufficiently interconnected and integrated to have easy access to what the other knows and shares, and the social network of RW extremists is dense and strong.

5.1.2 The network of the ISE sample

Below is the graph produced on the basis of a network analysis of the ISE French sample, allowing us to visualise the sample's structure at the level of the full sample of all seven countries.
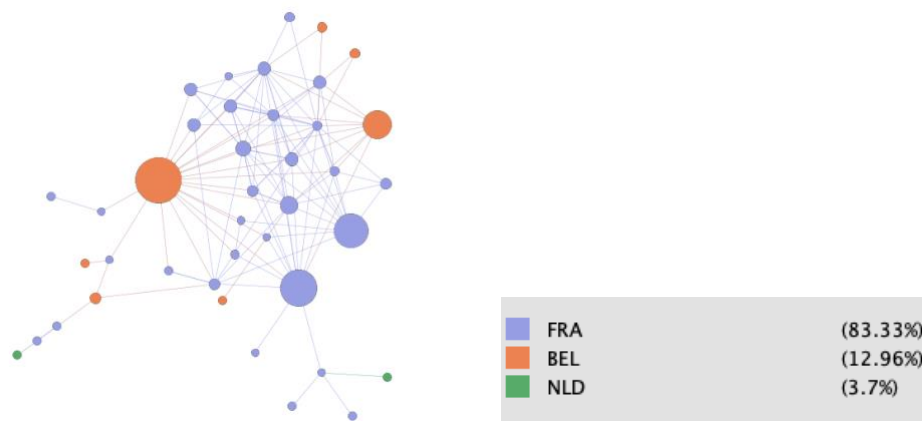

FRA	(83.33%)
BEL	(12.96%)
NLD	(3.7%)

Figure 47 - Network of retweets for the ISE French sample with an emphasis on the countries of residency of contributors

In the case of the Islamist sample (Figure 47), three main comments can be made:

1. Poor level of interconnectivity and outbound communications

As mentioned above, we used an algorithm that favours the visualisation of interpretative communities. Even so, more than half of the sample is disconnected, barely connected to one another or totally isolated.

Those who are isolated revolve around one account. The users, who are barely connected to others on Twitter, appear in the graph as having no more than one, two or three relationships. That is the case of the nodes situated on the outskirts of the graph above. As for those who are poorly connected, we are talking about the accounts that may appear more central and well-connected as they are situated closer to the centre of the network but are still poorly connected, lacking indegree relationships. These are the smaller nodes on the graph, meaning they are people with few followers. Above, these accounts are closer to the centre of the graph but not at the heart of the network.

If the better half of the sample is poorly connected, the other half, without having dense or strong ties, is still noticeably more interconnected. The density and level of interconnectivity is much lower than previously observed when examining the RWE sample, but a part of the sample is still aware of other users being interlinked by a dozen interconnected ties.

At the heart of this denser part of the network (placed at the very centre of the graph), we can observe a handful of people who serve as hubs, forming an epicentre for exchanges. Four accounts stand out in particular, seemingly at the heart of conversations. Yet, the followers of two of these four accounts show isolated conversations. Even here, talks are outbound rather than flowing from one account to the next, confirming further the overall observation related to a poor level of interconnectivity of the IS French sample.

2. **Transnationality with Belgium at the centre of the Islamist extremist accounts**

In the case of the ISE network, colours of nodes and edges highlight geographical location of users. We can note that the French ISE sample - identifiable by the purple nodes and edges - is connected to the Belgian one - marked by the orange colour - and very marginally to the Dutch sample - in green. With about 15% of the retweets from the database for the IS French sample originating from foreign countries - representing approximately 9,600 retweets within the 64,500 database sample - we can say that this network is not solely nationally based.

The reason Belgium and the Netherlands appear here rather than other countries could easily be explained by the use of French in those national contexts, but this remains to be proven.

More importantly, the fact that other countries appear here would imply transnational connectivity. Transnationality is even more prominent in the present situation given that foreign accounts play the role of conversation hubs. Two out of the four main clusters are Belgian, implying that what comes out of Belgium plays a role in the French sample.

Another point worth underlining is that the most connected users - or to be exact, the most followed accounts within the network of the ISE French sample - are actually Belgian accounts. As we have said above, the size of the node is dependent on the number of followers. Here we can clearly see that the two Belgian accounts around which people cluster are larger than the French nodes serving as conversation clusters. Although this should be confirmed by using other methods to better understand interconnectivity and transnationality of Islamist extremists, based on preliminary observations here, it would appear that Belgium plays a central role in the Muslim realm on Twitter, at least more so than France.

3. **Lack of strong ties**

More importantly, what is showcased by examining whether participants are following one another is the lack of strong ties between Twitter members. Lack of integration is illustrated by the outskirts of the graph where we can observe the poor connectivity, as said above. Also, there are very few conversations where several people are involved; the four clusters evoked earlier are outbound and disconnected from other hubs. As for the people who are connected - at the very centre of the graph - there is definitely some recognition of other users and interconnectivity as we can see that about half the people in the sample follow a handful of other accounts. However, this section of the network is not very dense and rather spread out, especially in comparison with the one observed on the RWE sample.

To conclude this part on network analysis of the French samples at the full level of samples, we can say that examining networks from a sample perspective illustrates the level of integration of the two French samples and further documents the existence of an online milieu. On the one hand, we saw that users carried out parallel conversations despite being strongly connected to one another. On the other hand, people were more spread out, and outside clusters formed around users who had no relationship to one another.

5.2 On the retweet level

In this subsection we present how conversations are articulated to one another and discuss their overall structure to highlight how communication is conducted. It is important to keep in mind that high levels of retweets - and this is the same for mentions - of a given account does not automatically

signal popularity of a message - or an account in the cases of mentions. Sharing a message can very well be a strategy to shed light on a contentious topic and therefore be used to trigger disruption and engage in controversy. As we have said above, looking into retweets is a way to map interactions and apprehend conversation patterns.

The two graphs below show us who retweets whom within the French sample. That being said, for users to be considered in the analysis of this subsection, two conditions were required: the person who is retweeting must be part of the country-level sample; the person who is retweeted must be part of the full sample of any of the seven countries.

The size of the nodes represents the indegree of the node, i.e. the more the account is retweeted, the bigger the node is. Colours represent countries and therefore highlight which countries are most central to the conversation.

The spatialisation layout is a force directed algorithm (Force Atlas 2); it helps visualise the level of connectivity of our sample and the people who constitute points of passage, possibly leading into the observed online milieu or connecting people outside of the milieu.

5.2.1 The RWE retweet network
Below, we can observe the retweet network of the French RWE sample.

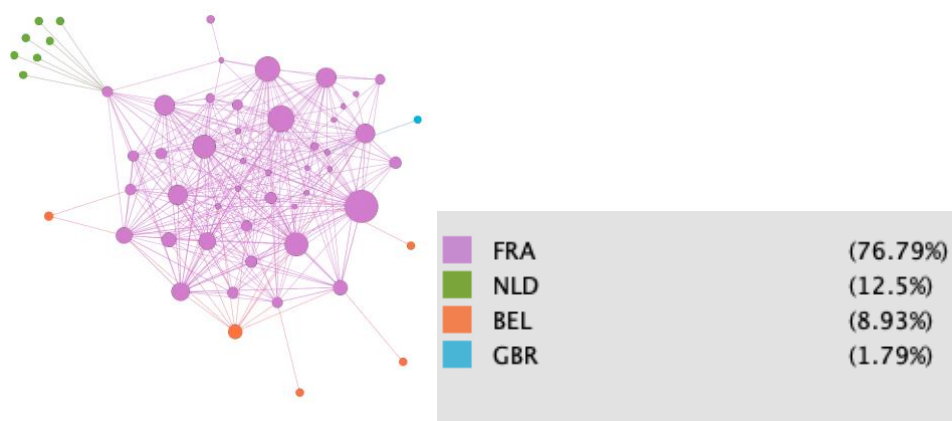|		
FRA	(76.79%)
NLD	(12.5%)
BEL	(8.93%)
GBR	(1.79%)

Figure 48 - Network of the retweet network for the RWE sample with an emphasis on the countries of residency of contributors

On the basis of Figure 48, we can make three comments:

1. **Transnationality of interactions**

   In the graph of retweets of the RWE sample, we can first notice that several countries are referenced; close to 25% of the retweets are messages originating from other countries. Amongst these countries, there is the Netherlands, representing 12.5% of what the French retweet. Then there is Belgium with almost 9% of the French retweets and Great Britain with barely 2%. Given that the total amount of retweets for the French sample is around 64,500 messages, even 2% of the messages originating from another country means a total of 1,600 messages shared on Twitter within the forty-some person sample alone emanate from abroad. In this respect, one of the main findings here is that the French national political scene is not hermetic to foreign influences. Interactions are transnational. We are not dealing with a French RWE extremist milieu; it would seem that we are observing a transnational network of extremists.

2. **A central role for the Netherlands in Europe?**

When considering which messages are shared, we can pinpoint the centrality of the Dutch. With 12.5% of the retweets, the French share messages from this nation. The presence of the Netherlands in the French sample, as well as Belgium, can possibly be explained by geographical proximity, even though it raises the question of the language shared. In any case, the importance of the Netherlands in the French sample leads us to question further whether the Dutch are also prominent actors in other countries or if this situation is specific to France. If this situation is actually cross-national, then how can we explain the influence of the Netherlands?

3. **High level of interactivity demonstrates the existence of an online French RWE milieu**

    If there are 25% of retweets from other EU countries, this also means that 75% of the retweeted material within the French RWE sample comes from French users. In this respect, conversations are mainly held amongst French citizens and topics are shared with fellow Twitter contributors in relation to the French interpretative communities.

    Likewise, even though foreign countries play a role in the French RWE scene, the structure of the conservations shows that the core of communications revolves around French users. This translates into a graph where we can mainly see French users. Even though the core of the network is dense and close-knit and especially exclusively composed of French nationals, a few foreign accounts appear on the outskirts of the graph. While there are not many foreign accounts, they produce a large number of tweets in comparison with the French.

    If we pursue our description, we can see that the network is composed of numerous larger nodes, meaning there are not just a few people spreading content on the web, but many people using retweeting to communicate information that they find relevant to share with a larger audience. This implies a high level of interactivity and strong interconnectivity.

    When specifically considering the French retweets and the overall structure of communications, we can reiterate the fact that the French sample demonstrates a well-integrated RWE milieu.

5.2.3 The ISE retweet network
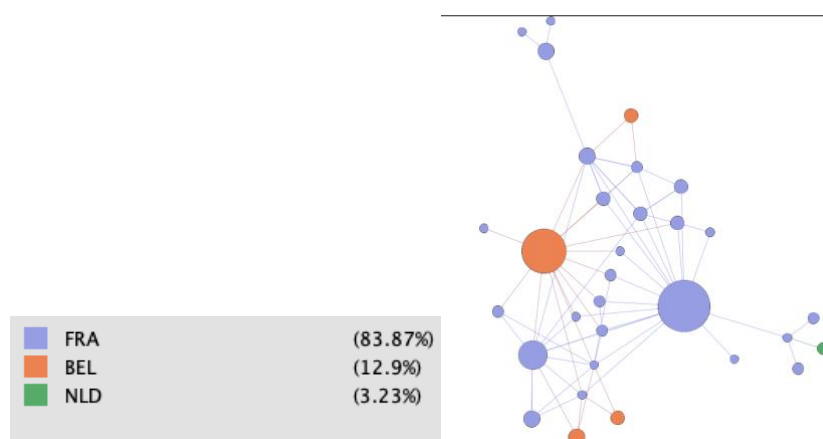
Figure 49 - Network of the retweet network for the ISE sample with an emphasis on the countries of residency of contributors

Two main remarks for the ISE retweet network analysis (Figure 49) can be made:

1. **It may be a network but it is not a milieu**

    When observing how people share messages online, we can see that the network is diminished by comparison to the RWE one. A fewer number of accounts are represented in the graph, even though the sample of retweets is larger meaning the network could

potentially be denser. The fact that almost half of the French sample are completely absent from the above graph indicates that there is little to no interaction between users, with the exception of three accounts in particular. These three accounts are different. One of these accounts - a large node situated on the left-hand side and orange in colour - is Belgian. The other two are French accounts. One of these two accounts, the larger node on the right-hand side of the graph, is central to the network we are observing. It provides information to a number of isolated users and connects to another small cluster. As such, it acts as a point of passage. The Belgian node, is less followed, but better integrated, connecting several clusters to one another. The third node mentioned above, the second French account, is situated towards the left-hand side at the bottom of the graph. It brings together a handful of people without constituting a strong connector.

All in all, there are little to no connections in the retweet network of the French IS sample. This conclusion adds to previous findings, allowing us to assert yet again the lack of community, and more importantly, the non-existence of an online milieu. On the back of this latest observation, we can say that the IS French online scene may be a network, but it is not a milieu favouring radical ideologies.

2. Outbound communication

The way people are connected through retweets also says something about the way conversations flow within this sample. As touched upon in previous sections, it would seem that people from the IS sample use Twitter less to converse and exchange ideas or information than they do to publicise content. In other words, Twitter is not a platform upholding a mutual process of influencing, supported by peer-to-peer interactions. To put things back into the context of our study, Twitter is not used as a tool for indoctrination fuelled by repeated exchanges and intense interactions. Twitter seems primarily - but not exclusively - to be used to publicise content with less regard to the formation of social ties. In other words, the retweet network analysis of the ISE French sample shows outbound communications.

5.3 On the mention level

To pursue our understanding of processes of radicalisation on Twitter, we will now examine the level of interconnectivity as well as the centrality and the reputation of accounts that are interlinked through mentions. This will help reveal the accounts that are part of the conservation of radicalisation.

A mention is signified with a special character like this @ and is immediately followed by the Twitter handle of an account. This sign can be employed for different purposes. By using the @ sign, someone can address another account and engage that account in an exchange with the purpose of jump starting or pursuing a conversation. Employing the at-sign can also be a way to tag someone. Then, the purpose is less to engage a conversation than to bring attention to something or someone, possibly to showcase a message, take a stand in favour of someone or something, or speak out against a person and/or a message. In this respect, mentions are not systemic engagement in a conversation; they can serve to endorse a message or, on the contrary, be used for conflictual ends to generate disruption.

Given that mentions can be conversation tools, endorsement signs, or conflict indices, or even none of the latter, and that, in the context of this study, we are dealing with huge amounts of data, it is impossible to know what the exact reasons behind the network of mentions are without providing additional analytical perspectives. For these reasons, we will be careful to not assume that the centrality in a mention network supposes positive or negative popularity unless context provides sufficient indicators as to whether we can lean one way or the other in our analysis.

We will consider all the mentions in the French sample, whether the account is part of the DARE full sample or not. The approach is a little different here than what we did in the last two subsections. Exploiting every single 'mention' - no longer restricting mentions to someone within the full DARE

sample, nor the French sample - allows us to see which accounts are targeted by our sample, and thus who they are trying to engage in conversations and who is targeted by discussions.

The layout below is the same as above, i.e. Yifan Hu. The node size represents the PageRank, i.e. an algorithm that outputs a probability distribution used to represent the likelihood that a person randomly mentioning one person will arrive to this particular person. The colour of nodes corresponds to the community of a given node. Interpretative communities are generated based on the Louvain algorithm (modularity calculation).

The PageRank algorithm outputs a probability distribution used to represent the likelihood that a person randomly clicking on the links will arrive at any particular page.

5.3.1 The RWE mention network - with all the mentions of the sample

Initially we had more than 5,700 mentions amongst the 84,415 tweets and retweets created by the French RWE sample. Given the huge number of nodes this would have created, we filtered the indegrees of each node, keeping only accounts that have been mentioned by at least 8 distinct accounts.

All the nodes that are mentioned less than 8 times at the level of the mentions within the full sample are deleted. That constitutes 96.13% of the mentions.
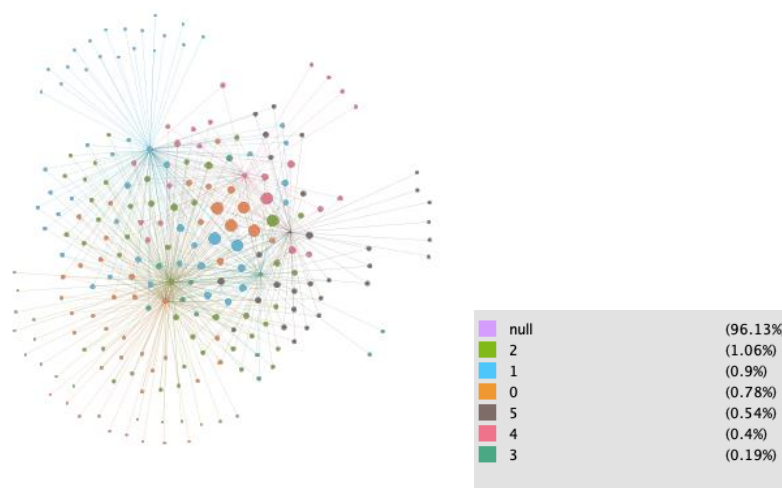

null		(96.13%)
2		(1.06%)
1		(0.9%)
0		(0.78%)
5		(0.54%)
4		(0.4%)
3		(0.19%)

Figure 50 - Network of the mention network for the RWE sample with an emphasis on the interpretative communities of contributors

In this graph (Figure 50), we can see a central dense cluster with, on the right side of the cluster, a few larger nodes. On the fringe of this central cluster, there are two outward hubs: one at the top in blue and one at the bottom in orange; both have spread-out connections to a wide number of accounts. These two hubs are actually people in our sample who apparently converse heavily online. Most discussions, though, revolve around the central cluster and the main nodes inside this cluster.

The larger nodes are institutions such as political parties, leaders of opinions, news outlets, celebrities. To be exact, we can find MLP (the official handle for Marine Le Pen), the news outlet *Français de souche*, the French Secretary of State in charge of equality between men and women and the fight against discrimination, Marlène Schiappa, and President Macron. Hence, they are leaders of opinion or professional journalists and, as such, legitimate sources of communication and/or information. This graph tends to exemplify the fact that online discussions, using mentions, are mainly public debates amongst recognised leaders of opinion, rather than discussions at the level of the people and random citizens. This result is not surprising if we can consider Twitter as a central media arena nowadays. What we can observe is ways in which Jurgen Habermas' traditional public sphere (Habermas, 1989)

has been transformed into 'a series of public sphericules' with 'micro-publics', 'none of which are mutually exclusive but which co-exist, intersecting and overlapping in multiple forms' (Bruns, Highfield, 2016[25]).

If mainstream media, political leaders and ideological extremist outlets of information are central here, we must not conclude that there are no discussions amongst users for two reasons. First, as we said before, discussions can take place in different ways, for example, through private messaging and, more importantly for this investigation, through comments. Secondly, a handful of private accounts are central to the graph introduced in this subsection. Simply, the size of the node does not allow us to assume centrality or popularity within the discussions.

User Mentioned	NbMention
F_Desouche	2141
EmmanuelMacron	1329
YouTube	1202
CCastaner	848
BFMTV	650
MLP_officiel	646
TwitterSafety	561
dupontaignan	545
TwitterSupport	489
Valeurs	420
AneSucre	419
PoliceNationale	400
TwitterFrance	369
RNational_off	347
LCI	283

Table 7 - Popular accounts within the RWE mention network

To complement the network analysis approach to mentions through a graph presentation, we have added above Table 7 summarising the number of times an account is mentioned at the level of the full scale of the sample, based on the French RWE sample. We can confirm what we have said above, that is, mentions mainly target institutions, like media outlets, government officials, and public authority figures. However, this table illustrates two new results:

1. Security and patrolling are central to conversations (ref. to Castaner who is the current Minister of Interior; the National Police force is brought up in many conversations, just like Twitter support, which is in a sense the equivalent of the Twitter police)

2. Talks revolve around right-wing extremist media outlets and officials more than we are led to believe by the network graph (with Français de souche online journal - a prominent RWE media source - and Marine Le Pen, at the top of the mentions)

3. The Yellow Vests movement represents a big chunk of the discussions in our database (ref. to the media outlets BFMTV, LCI, Macron amongst other mentions below).

5.3.1 The ISE mention network - with all the mentions of the sample

At first glance, we can see that the ISE mention network is dispersed, spread out and full of small clusters built around individual accounts. There are no large hubs of conversation and very few mentions altogether. Based on this graph, we can claim that people within our sample do not mention one another, nor do they share the same sources - clusters are not composed of interconnecting accounts but centred around a single account that mentions other accounts - with the exception of a few accounts situated in the centre of this graph.

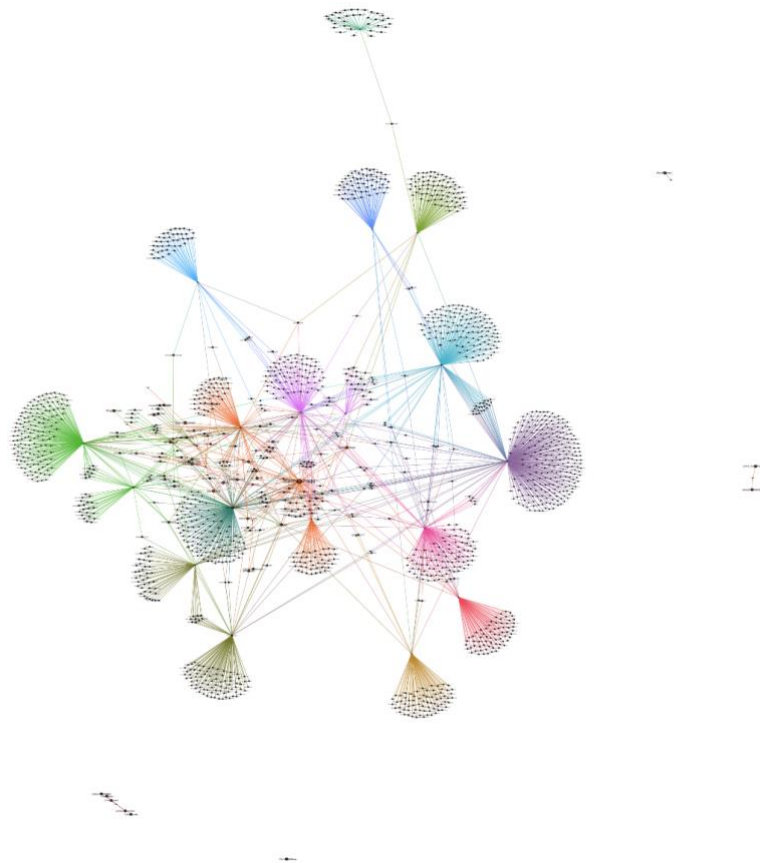[25] https://eprints.qut.edu.au/91810/

Figure 51 - Network of the retweet network for the ISE sample with an emphasis on the interpretative communities of contributors

The very centre of this graph is a little bit denser with overlapping colours of edges and nodes, and therefore intersecting interpretative communities. However, the density at the centre of the graph is still uncompressed. There seems to be little interaction within the overall network of accounts except for the outdegree interactions generated by the clusters and the interactions situated at the very centre where a few nodes are larger, suggesting more traffic.

Now let us have a closer look at all the clusters on the outskirts of the graph, the ones whose shapes are very close to a triangle. We can observe two dozen of them built around individual accounts. These clusters are systematically outdegree, meaning a given account mentions others in their tweets but the relation is not reciprocated. Those they mention do not respond. Not only do those mentioned not respond, but the people contacted in such a way do not interact amongst one another. Therefore, what we see here is people generating volumes of activity, tweeting but without any response or sense of reciprocal relations. In short, this shows us that there is a poor level of connectivity at a larger scale in the ISE French scene on Twitter.

That remark is notwithstanding the denser network at the heart of the graph, that constitutes a better-connected cluster of interrelated people who are communicating with one another. In this part of the graph, a few larger nodes stand out, signalling more traffic and communication with, and towards, these accounts.

To proceed as we did with the right-wing sample, let us look at the larger nodes to identify what types of accounts are amongst the most popular. Zooming in on the heart of the graph, a few accounts stand out, none of which are individual users, but instead governmental representatives (such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs), faith-based enterprises with accounts dedicated to faith and linked back to their blogs, foundations and humanitarian aid - either religiously oriented or not (like the *French Red Cross* but also the Saudi Arabian *Abdul Aziz Bin Saleh Al Rajhi foundation*) - as well as media outlets

(like *Saudi News*). At the centre of all this is a French blog dedicated to faith, i.e. manhajulhaqq.com. The larger part of these points of passage in the network stresses the importance of Salafism, as most of these larger nodes pinpoint Salafist tendencies or are related to Saudi Arabian sources preaching Salafist ways.
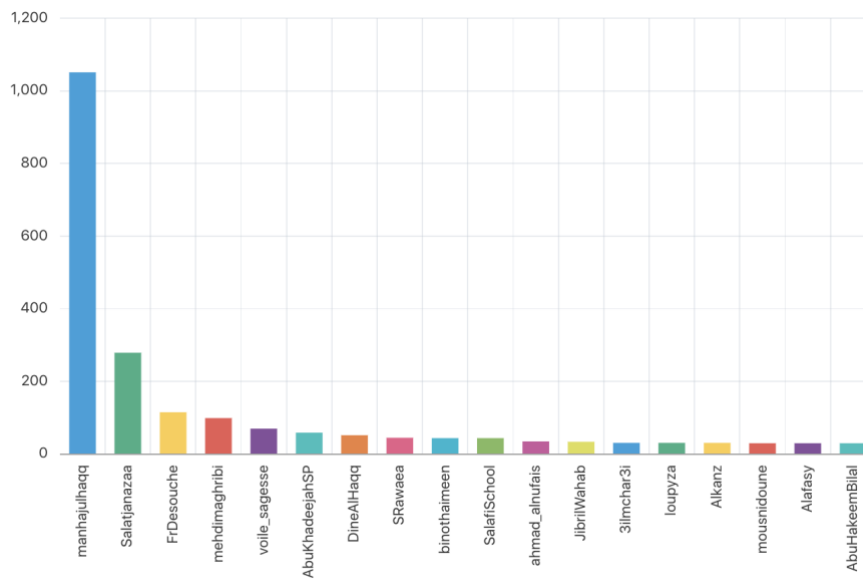

Figure 52 - Popular accounts within the ISE mention network

In the spirit of carrying out a similar type analysis on both ends of the spectrum, and thus complementing the network analysis approach of mentions through a graph presentation, as we did for the RWE sample, we have added below a table summarising the number of times an account is mentioned at the level of the full scale of the sample, based on the French ISE sample. By moving away from the structure of the conversation generated by mentioning people and examining the number of mentions, we can see that three of the top 5 accounts mentioned above are related to blogs dedicated to religious preaching. These blogs are not only meant to share and spread faith but also provide supplies and services that can be bought, and as such, are businesses built around faith-oriented goals.

This tends to indicate that the place to really pursue investigating religious fundamentalism is through blogs online. Also, it helps show what people are following and interested in within the tweetosphere, i.e. lifestyle tips and advice on how to best practice faith and pursue personal development. The tendencies behind these blogs show strong support for Salafism, either originating from France or crafted abroad, namely in Saudi Arabia and the United Kingdom.

The second element we can comment on regarding the top mentions in the table is the importance of *Français de souche*, which, as we said before, is a very well-known French right-wing extremist news media outlet. The over-representativeness of this journal could very well indicate people use Twitter within our sample to challenge the media outlet, and in this respect, use Twitter in a political media activist form. In any case, *Français de souche* plays a major role in the French political debate scene, generating controversy, but possibly also discord and dissension amongst citizens.

Main Conclusions for Section 5

To conclude, we saw that transnationality is an important dimension of the observed networks.

Given the level of retweets originating from other countries on the RWE sample - close to 25%, that is to say approximately 20,000 tweets of the total sample - it is possible to say that what we can

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observe is the expression and flow of radical ideologies on a transnational scale. The French political scene is not limited to national debates.

In previous sections of this report, we had already noted that our sample dipped into international politics. First, when exploring self-presentations, we saw that both samples took into consideration political matters abroad, whether it was to acclaim right-wing extremist Presidents elected in foreign countries, or to denounce conflict and war zones in which Muslims were involved and/or targeted. Then, from the lexical analysis, we saw that parts of the conversations among the RWE dealt with what was happening abroad. Political conversations on Twitter were not limited to what was happening in France. Finally, we revealed that some of the main influencers for both samples were notorious foreign political leaders labelled as extremists. These included leaders like Trump, Bolsonaro and Salvini for the RWE sample and King Salman for the ISE sample stood out as influencers. On the basis of these three observations, we were already able to assert that the international political scene had some kind of impact or leverage over the national French political debates, especially for the RWE side of the investigation. Now after examining the way conversations flow and are structured online via an analysis of the retweet networks of samples, we can further demonstrate the claim of transnationality of online networks, or at least an important degree of interactivity between political matters abroad and national considerations.

If we are potentially dealing with an international right-wing milieu, to fully implicate other countries in the processes of online radicalisation, it is necessary to compare our results with those of other countries to determine if findings align throughout Europe. Likewise, based on the results presented in this subsection, it would seem some countries may have more leverage than others within the right-wing extremist transnational milieu. In particular, we saw that the Netherlands played a predominant role.

The situation is slightly different for the ISE sample. As we observed, we are dealing with a network of people, not a milieu. People are nonetheless connected and a part of the material shared online in France seems to emanate from abroad. In this context, the Dutch also played a role, even though Belgians appear even more central. So, as we commented above, it is necessary to compare the French results with the ones retrieved in other European countries to determine whether the transnationality we have identified from the French perspective applies in other countries, and if so, which countries play a central role in conversations and the flow of information on the web.

In both cases, the results emphasise the importance of the Internet in contributing to the spread of ideologies.

6. Conclusion

What are the main conclusions that can be drawn from the above analysis with regard to the online French samples of right-wing and Islamist extremists? Summaries appear at the end of each section, so below, we will emphasise some of the main findings that could serve for policy considerations or fuel future research.

Early on, when we started completing ethnographic research on Twitter, we immediately spotted the differences in representativeness of each sample. On the one side, the right wing was ostentatious, 'loud and proud' as some would say; there was no shortage in the number of accounts and we encountered no difficulty in collecting a sample. The number of accounts inventoried was a surprise, as it presupposed the size of a rather large online community. Now that we have completed this report and analysed the selected accounts from different analytical perspectives, the material is even more surprising, given that violent intent is often expressed and hate speech is an integral part of the digital conversations. Just like in most extreme-right circles online where offensive discourses are common,

the right-wing extremist French tweetosphere is no exception (RAN 2019). Beyond these initial surprises, we could actually consider that the propagation of hate speech on Twitter is alarming, since the platform is a media arena and as such, a public sphere bound to similar laws as offline public spheres in which hate speech is severely policed and monitored. Yet, in this instance, it seems to appear that, either the sample flies under the radar of content moderators, or the French sample is subjected to the blurred boundaries of the permissible, at a time when policing hate speech on the right-wing extremist has grown more and more difficult given the support it receives on a daily basis with some of the main political figures and Presidential candidates openly expressing radical viewpoints (Berger, 2018)[26].

Is that to say that the extreme right material online promotes incentives to commit crimes? No empirical evidence was found that this platform has a causal impact on the outcomes of violent radicalisation within the sample, nor is there evidence to contradict it. In this sense, rather than being initiators or causes of violent behaviours, the Internet, and social media specifically, should be apprehended as facilitators of radicalisation (Paton, 2015a; Alava, Frau-Meigs and Hassan 2017). People on the extreme right simply offer a safe harbour for the legitimacy of radical opinions and behaviours. In this respect, we seem to be dealing with an overall acceptance of hate speech and a high level of tolerance for radical views and opinions that lays the groundwork for tolerance for extremism, but not causal vectors of behaviour.

By expressing political opinions in public debates in the Twitter media arena, support for radical right-wing ideologies are expressed through a classical form of 'media activism'. Users intend to support a cause, the cause being the defence of national identarian claims. This repertoire is typical of what can be observed elsewhere online (Chadwick, 2007; Granjon and Cardon, 2010; Park, 2013; Theocharis et al., 2015; Figeac et al., 2020); narratives in which national identity is threatened are common in digital right-wing extremist milieus (RAN 2019). Our observations allowed us to demonstrate that this type of media activism encourages a strong and vibrant national milieu of 'radical rights'. That is to say that, Twitter harbours a well-established community of French radicals from different political horizons (self-defined populists, nationalists, fascists, conservatives supporting royalism, etc.). It is supported by clear-cut markers of social identity related to anti-immigration/anti-Islam discourses, support for patriotism and nationalism ideologies, and defence of a 'supposed' French cultural and historical heritage. This milieu embraces the label of radicals and prides itself as being framed as such by outsiders.

When it comes to the Islamist extremist sample, this report could not identify a clear-cut phenomenon of digital sociability related to Islamist radicalisation. The sample does not constitute a milieu of any sort, nor does it demonstrate strong digital ties. The users populating the sample deny the radical label and denounce violent extremism. The label of radical imposed on Islamism and users from our sample is the by-product of external labelling and content moderation activities on social networking platforms such as Twitter. That being said, while this sample does not constitute an ideal-type for the study of Islamist radicalisation, it presents commonalities worth mentioning and showcases how Islamist extremists in France are using Twitter nowadays. Users are all related to Quietist Salafism and seem to use a similar format of participation - promoting ideological religious material in a very gender-oriented fashion, pertaining to a lifestyle and guidelines on how to embody this lifestyle, especially in the case of women and their role in society. Instead of using the platform to engage in public debate, they use the platform to promote their brand of sorts (as a mosque, a school of thought, etc.), a store-front to the public sphere. They mobilise social identities strongly marked by gender

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[26] It is important to add that we encountered the temporary suspension of a handful of accounts, along the lines with what has been reported in the literature (Bodo, 2017; Wahlstrom, Tornberg, 2019), but most accounts were simply temporarily suspended. For the accounts that did indeed go offline in early 2019, it is impossible to say if the user shut his/her account or if the platform suspended the account indefinitely. In any case, to this day, the moderation of French right-wing extremism content does not dramatically affect the digital milieu that is still very active at the beginning of the year 2020.

roles that embody (or epitomise) obedience to their faith. If the lack of representativeness of Islamist radicals on Twitter had been established shortly before our investigation began (Conway et al., 2017; Conway 2019), and the sample studied in this report primarily consists of religious fundamentalists without any open support for criminal acts or engagement in political matters, it is nonetheless important to note that some of the material collected online could be perceived as quite controversial in the French context. While no malevolent conversation appeared in the thematic analysis, when exploring in-depth conversations through direct observation, it is easy to find remarks that breach French laws. This observation opens the door to more in-depth analysis of French Islamist conversations, requiring the use of a different approach to lexical analysis. It also contradicts the idea that content moderation has silenced any type of extremist Islamist discourse on Twitter (Conway et al., 2019).

Another significant finding is the fact that digital social identities seem to tell us more about far-right extremism than the actual conversations that are taking place on the platform within the networks of users. We saw that threads of discussion are partly circumstantial, in the sense that topics are often news-related conversations, calibrated to the flow of current events. This observation led us to ask whether both samples were best understood through the manners in which they endorse a specific style, pertaining to self-presentation features and a repertoire of action, rather than through what they are talking in their tweets. This observation has important consequences for concluding how we might best capture rationales behind self-radicalisation.

In a similar manner, findings pertaining to influencers should not necessarily be used to shed light on rationales behind self-radicalisation. Analysis of dominant influencers for the RWE sample illustrates that those who could be spotted as potentially contributing to online radicalisation are well-known right-wing extremist political leaders, such as President Donald Trump or Jair Bolsonaro. Yet the fact these leaders appear amongst the most tweeted, even in our sample, tells us less about the rationales behind radicalisation and the identification with a foreign leader than they illustrate how the algorithm on the platform generates circles of influence, contributes to global right-wing extremist conversations and takes part in creating a dystopic vision of national proximities. That is not to say that the role of the influencers identified in this report should not be studied further as is, to understand the formation of right-wing extremist global milieus. Simply, when taking into consideration how much influencers contribute to rationales of self-radicalisation, it is important to properly consider the leverage influencers may actually have over individuals. This also points to the urgent need for research to properly understand how socio-technical means, typically bots and algorithms, have completely changed the way we should be thinking about social media websites (CO Schneble et al., 2018).

On the back of these findings, when considering processes of self-radicalisation, it becomes clear that the rationales people identify with for the extreme right pertain to benefits of social markers (belief in a simplistic conception of lineages, nationalist issues, etc). It is easy for the mere bystander to get involved online and find potential material to support further engagement in political matters and possibly join the bandwagon of extremism and political radicalism. If we think about the advantages for joining the right-wing extremist movement through digital media participation, we can note collective and individual benefits that further our understanding of how media participation in Twitter supports radicalisation. From a collective perspective, by sharing common cultural codes related to a certain number of topics, contributors weave a collective fabric, essential to fabricating and upholding a digital milieu. Digital sociability presents the added benefit of providing a sense of self. Indeed, from an individual user standpoint, employing material that is part of a collective fabric reinforces subjective autonomy. Participation in an online milieu provides means for empowerment. People may not find support within their local inner-circles or close to where they live. By turning to online participation, however, contributors can find like-minded people with similar areas of interest, reinforce their tastes, express their opinions and find a sense of togetherness that helps support their ideals, political aspirations and ultimately a sense of identity.

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