

Beyond the Screen: Unmasking the Consequences of Online Extremism

An investigation into free speech's propulsion of extremist ideologies
in the modern era and the danger it has posed to democracy

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Introduction

"Goebbels was in favour of freedom of speech for views he liked. So was Stalin. If you're in favour of freedom of speech, that means you're in favour of freedom of speech precisely for views you despise." - Noam Chomsky

Freedom of speech stands as a fundamental right in the modern era, it allows us to be able to speak, hold opinions and speak on them without interference (as outlined in the UN's ICCPR article 19)¹. In the age of information this right has never been more important for the public to wield but as social media algorithms continue to push fringe views that have placed oppressed groups and general public safety in harm's way. Although technology has shifted the location of the public forum, in person demonstrations of protest have still held their weight in conversation and forces upon the world a tough question, that being, as technology and life continue to merge should free speech be redefined in light of a rise in extremist/hateful views that are pushed as socially acceptable narratives to everyday people (especially younger people who are more socially malleable)²?

The advent of technology has accelerated dangerous ideology to the front page of society, this dramatic change holds major consequences for the future of all democracies that if not adapted to correctly, could serve as a turning point in the outcome of history.

The primary research methods used allow the coverage of three aspects, public opinion through a focus group, raw statistics on hate in a statistical analysis and the personal consciousness within my personal reflection.

Growing up online and being witness first hand to hateful content pipelines and how it shifts people to hateful world views was a major influence in the construction of my thesis statement, that being: An investigation into free speech's propulsion of extremist ideologies in the modern era and the danger it has posed to democracy. Throughout the course of my investigation I wish to be able to clarify the danger created through extremist views spread in the online sphere, how violence as a political motivator has changed with the advent of

¹General Assembly resolution 2200A (XXI), International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 16 December 1966

²M. Spring, 'Young Britons exposed to online radicalisation following Hamas attack', BBC (6 Jan 2024), <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-67884785>, accessed Feb 26

modern communication and finally the overall impact seen on democracy and how we as a society can effectively use this fundamental right to create positive social change.

Log

During 2020 I found myself captured by the tumultuous landscape of United States politics, trying to stay as up to date on any polls or new information as I possibly could. It was 2020, a year defined by online content in the wake of covid and the upheaval of societal beliefs, that had sparked my personal interest into politics. It was also during this time that I began to recognise a worrying wave of harmful online content that threatened the safety of marginalised groups and human rights.

When starting my PIP I was aware that I wanted to cover extremism in the online space but I was also aware of my own inability to answer any question surrounding it at that current moment. This made secondary research difficult for me as I had to confront my own personal biases related to politics in focus of a bigger picture but when I read Susie Alegre's "freedom to think" I felt empowered to talk about the subject matter from a unique perspective.

To further combat my fear of personal bias having me close minded from the beginning I decided upon a focus group for one of my primary research methods which allowed me to analyse public opinion and the thought process behind conclusions surrounding censorship, responsibility and violence. As I began to expand my grasp upon my hypothesis I started to analyse data surrounding hate speech, I collated this into a statistical analysis which provided insights that supported and contradicted some of my beliefs. Statistics were a great tool in dismantling personal biases. For my third primary research method I had originally planned to do an interview but as the search for an interviewee that could provide something new or insightful to the discussion proved tireless I reassessed what I would be using the research for. In the end I decided that to best triangulate my research I would do a personal reflection that would cover for ground not covered in my two other research methods.

When structuring my chapters I had originally planned for 3, the digital space, the physical space, and institutional response. As I wrote the first two chapters it became evident that my concept for chapter 3 was integrated all throughout my writing therefore rendering that third chapter redundant.

My cross cultural comparison, progressive vs conservative, was something that I had kept in mind since the beginning. Although I recognise that there are clear age demographics that fall

into either side of the aisle I felt that to be as clear as possible my cross cultural would have to be based on ideological standpoints.

Chapter 1: The terms of service: how technology amplifies hate

As the online space has expanded to become the leading source of information in many people's lives, a worrying rise in extremism has taken hold of the social media platforms we use in our everyday lives. It has become clear that a conversation around the rules of censorship must take place to ensure a future in the digital age that remains safe without infringing on the fundamental right that is freedom of expression. The internet is a global phenomenon and its protection and utilisation apply to all, including those who do not or may never be able to access it.

This rise in extremism is not an invisible enemy colluded to serve existing agenda but a real and worrying pattern of behaviour that has real-world consequences as was seen during the Covid-19 pandemic where misinformation spread online about vaccines and associated health risks sparked hesitancy around the acceptance of the Covid-19 vaccine³. In the statistical analysis that was conducted, correlations between medical misinformation and ideology were consistently showing up as most accounts that pushed these narratives had been a part of right-wing extremist factions² and the ADL(anti-defamation League) found that Covid 19 misinformation saw a massive spike after the Twitter buyout by Elon Musk, an event told to be a victory for free speech by more conservative speakers⁴. This was reinforced by an Australian study that found *"more than half a million conspiratorial and misleading English language tweets about Covid, using terms such as "deep state," "hoax" and "bioweapon.""*⁵. Hate Speech has also been a constant in social media, serving to push hateful narratives for real-world agendas and ideologies and has become an attractive tool for extremist groups as a driver for engagement.

³P. Joi, 'Misinformation on social media is linked to vaccine hesitancy, says study', VaccinesWork (5 May 2022), <https://www.gavi.org/vaccineswork/misinformation-social-media-linked-vaccine-hesitancy-says-study>, accessed March 14

⁴ Primary research, Statistical analysis ; 'Elon Musks acquisition of twitter may be a victory for free speech but its no panacea', Mercator (n.d) ,<https://www.mercatornet.com/elon-musks-acquisition-of-twitter-may-be-a-victory-for-free-speech%20but-its-no-panacea>, accessed March 14

⁵ Primary research, Statistical analysis

Social media organisations are run as for profit and have algorithms designed to keep their users engaged with the material given to them as long as possible. This interest conflicts with the perceived moral obligation for these platforms to push for verifiable information and unhateful content as algorithms designate those topics as highly engaging for users. The phenomenon known as algorithm radicalisation, most referred to in the context of conservative radicalisation as the “alt-right pipeline”, is the concept of recommender algorithms, the algorithms used by social media platforms and search engines, delivering more and more extremist/radical content to a user over time in turn radicalising the person to the designated ideology directed by the algorithm. **Figure 1**⁶, illustrates how this process can alienate and polarise the consumer by eliminating different points of view in the algorithm which inadvertently promotes extremism without opposition.

⁶R. Lewis, ‘Alternative Influence: Broadcasting the Reactionary Right on YouTube’, Data Society (2018), https://datasociety.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/DS_Alternative_Influence.pdf, accessed April 1

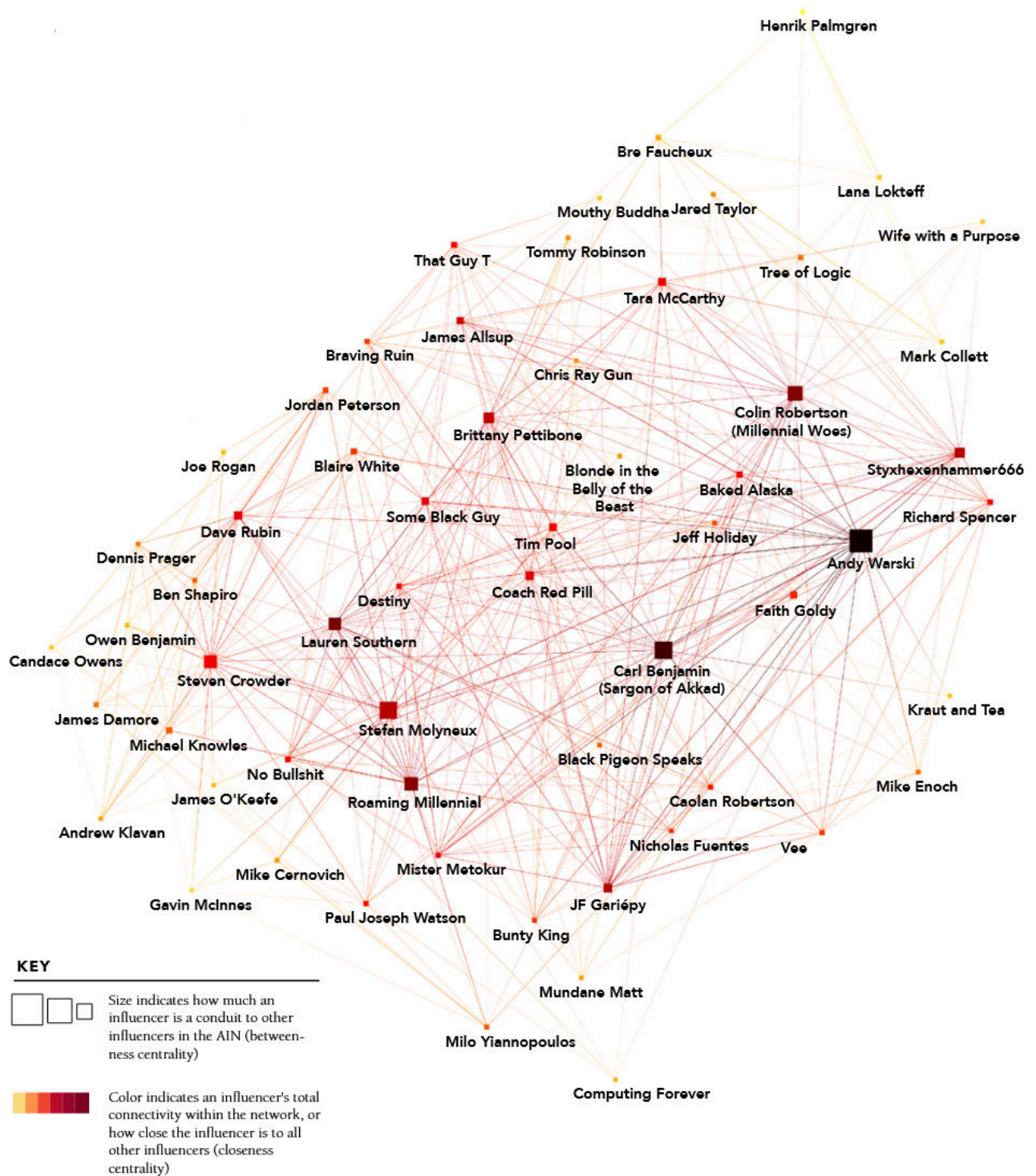


Fig 1: *Alternative Influence: Broadcasting the Reactionary Right on YouTube* (Rebecca Lewis)

Hate holds a unique power within this context. Hate is an extreme emotion and because of that it is one that gets an audience to react with the content they are delivered and as the audience becomes captured by hate the mask of reality dissolves to a point where

propaganda and misinformation go unquestioned. Susie Alegra analyses this notion in reference to the Nazis, stating that “for the nazis, propaganda transcended personal opinion and transformed their views into unquestionable fact. When messages and ideas infiltrate every part of your life and your future chances, they can feel inescapable and true, even if they are neither”⁷. Hate forces us to put our own morality on the line, if we are wrong in our hate then we have proved ourselves capable of a fallibility most would not dare admit⁸.

While conservative right-wing ideology has been and will be a major focus point it is important to understand why. Conservatism, as a general movement, relies on the basis that there are values, traditions and institutions that, for the public, should be conserved as they are or be subject to change in a slow and measurable approach. This resistance to change is inherently reactionary and thus remains in constant relevancy, attracting algorithmic attention. In opposition progressive politics follow a similar path calling for

A focus group conducted had primarily decided that the onus of responsibility for hateful content online was shared in the public's choice to ignore the posts to prevent further engagement with the material as well as on the corporation that oversees management and moderation policies that can take down said posts⁹. This did not go without reasonable push back on whether it may be “impossible” for the largest social media platforms to appropriately moderate all content on such a large scale. Now, while aware that a change must happen at the micro levels of society for true progress in anti-discriminatory efforts it has become clear that macro institutions, specifically social media, must use their power over the online space to cultivate healthier and more productive communities and it seems that content moderation is the primary tool for this job.

Content moderation has gathered a bad reputation that it may well deserve and being a tool of censorship marks it with a high rate of misuse. Even when those who sit closer to progressive ideologies may be more comfortable with its use as a tool to shut down specific dangerous thoughts than conservative ideologies. In current western ideologies it should be viewed in a historical context, censoring what is considered dangerous or out of bounds in the eyes of the zeitgeist. All this considered content moderation is still an effective tool for keeping the world safer and as we have shifted into a technology-based society it has helped in the reduction of misinformation and hate speech as seen in a study performed by faculty in

⁷S. Alegra, Freedom to think: protecting a fundamental human right in the digital age (2023), page 95

⁸ Primary research, Personal reflection

⁹ Primary research, focus group

Montclair State University that found that “Platforms with lax or no moderation are frequently spaces filled with racism, homophobia, transphobia, and antisemitism.”¹⁰.

If content moderation is avoided and an efficient recommender algorithm is in function, an acceleration of radicalisation occurs. This event is not one of complete speculation as X (formerly known as Twitter) laid off staff on global moderation following its purchase¹¹. A move reinforced by perceived failures of moderation that indicate a significant lack of funding such as the Centre for countering digital hates report that claimed “Researchers find that X continued to host 98% of 200 posts reported to them by researchers which

promoted antisemitism, Islamophobia, anti-Palestinian hate, or other hate speech” and the ADL’s findings that confirmed other social media sites like Facebook were not experiencing anything close to a similar increase in hateful content (**See figure 2**)¹². This lack of content moderation then interacts with an algorithm designed to push engaging content and as a post analysis by The Washington Post found “after an account created by The Post followed dozens of others labelled as extremist, Twitter inserted a quote and a portrait of Adolf Hitler — from a user the account did not follow — into its timeline”.

¹⁰‘Study Finds Hate Speech Increases on Twitter After Elon Musk Acquisition’, Montclair State University (oct 29 2022), <https://www.montclair.edu/school-of-communication-and-media/2022/10/29/study-finds-hate%20speech-increases-on-twitter-after-elon-musk-acquisition/>, accessed April 4

¹¹‘Elon musk cuts more twitter staff overseeing content moderation’, Bloomberg (n.d),<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-01-07/elon-musk-cuts-more-twitter-staff-overseeing-content-moderation>, accessed April 2

¹²‘Israel gaza crisis x fails to remove 98 of posts reported by the ccdh for hate and extremism’, Counter Hate (n.d), <https://counterhate.com/blog/israel-gaza-crisis-x-fails-to-remove-98-of-posts-reported-by-the-ccd%20for-hate-and-extremism/>, accessed May 23

Findings: Surging Antisemitism on X, Small Upticks on Facebook

Antisemitic Posts Spiked after the Oct 7th Attack, Particularly on X

Antisemitic post frequency vs. platform baseline, Sep 30 – Oct 13

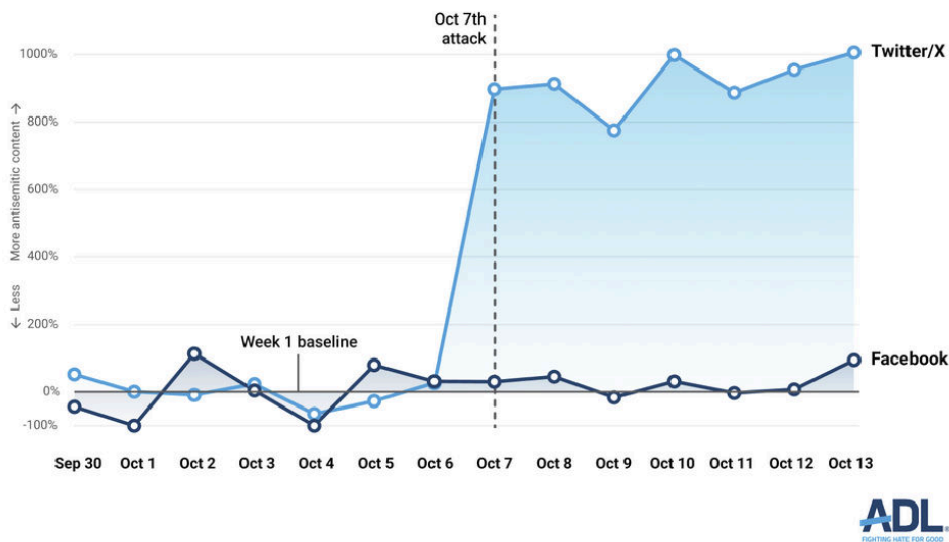


Figure 2: Increase in antisemitism on X in comparison to Facebook. (ADL)

And thus, the perfect storm; extremism, little moderation, and an algorithm designed to keep us engaged. Technology has advanced global communication to an extreme point of connection and interactivity, a desired place for the activists of old, but the profit motivated moral skew of media institutions is enabling hateful content designed to inflame and discriminate against the masses. As people begin to fear the global stage, democratic institutions shatter. To throw away what we have access to now would be a great disservice to future generations.

Chapter 2: Rage and Revolution: The role of violence in shaping discourse

Where do we go from the internet? The real world it seems. As extremism in the online space has escalated we need only look at the tangible consequences in the form of violence. In the micro sphere of perception violence is almost an absolute moral wrong, and for good reason too, but looking at violence from a macro perspective we see a shift into a grey area where justifications for global atrocities begin to creep in. Is violence a form of free speech or is it its suppressor?

Violence in the modern day is often viewed as an absolute immorality, but on further investigation the ethical complexity of its use case became layered¹³. To answer this an understanding of the general consensus of the term “violence” must be understood. The question “What would you define as “violent” action?” was posed to a focus group and a few key patterns emerged. Focus group participants found themselves divided on the concepts surrounding physical violence and mental violence which became sticking points as the discussion of “motivation” and “intention” prevented the discussion from making any stance on the subject¹⁴. This confusion was relieved after a question posed over unintentional violence brought together a unanimous agreement, concluded due to the emotional stakes of the proposal, that although intention can be considered into the equation of fault, violence is defined in the impact not the distributor. A participant of the focus group stated they would “stand up for others immediately”, this claim brought up the key defence of violence, to prevent further suffering. This brings some indication as to why violence and ideology go hand in hand. During the “unite the right” rally in Charlottesville USA white nationalists campaigned against the removal of a Confederate statue and were faced by counter protesters, as seen in **Figure 1**, violence erupted and a car at one stage ploughed through a crowd, leaving one dead and many more injured¹⁵. This event demonstrates not only the power of online media within that moment of time but the lengths people will go to when moved by a cause that feels greater than themselves. This “greater purpose” proves to be a dangerous

¹³ Primary research, personal reflection

¹⁴ Primary research, Focus Group

¹⁵ A. Katz, ‘Clashes over a show of white nationalism in charlottesville turn deadly’, Time (n.d), <https://time.com/charlottesville-white-nationalist-rally-clashes/>, accessed June 11

force as in an interview with prominent alt right figure, Richard Spencer, a man directly connected to the rally claimed that “I absolutely regret that I will always be connected with an event that led to the death of an innocent person, among other things,”. The horrible and discriminatory violence seen at Charlottesville is a reminder of the staying power of violence, as a local member of Charlottesville and co-founder of the local Black Lives Matter (BLM) organisation put it “It's not what you can remember. It's what you're still trying to forget,...All the hatefulness and the evilness that transpired here.”¹⁶. When violent conflict emerges from a desire for the opposition to conform to ideological ideals the space for freedom of speech becomes constricted, an unavoidable consequence derived from a fear to stand up for what one believes in. This is what allows violence to leave a lasting imprint on society but this imprint may not always be an unpleasant one.



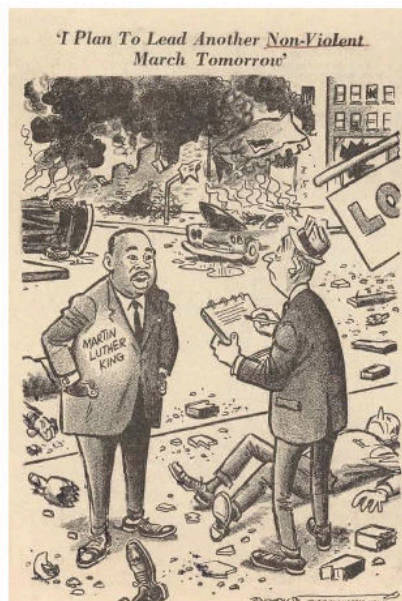
Figure 1 *White nationalists encircle counter-protestors at the base of a statue of Thomas Jefferson after marching through the University of Virginia campus with torches on Aug. 11.*
Zach D Roberts—NurPhoto/Getty Images

¹⁶D. Elliot, ‘The Charlottesville rally 5 years later: ‘It’s what you’re still trying to forget’’, NPR (12 Aug 2022), <https://www.npr.org/2022/08/12/1116942725/the-charlottesville-rally-5-years-later-its-what-youre-still-trying-to-forget>, accessed June 11

Systemic oppression has resurfaced as an issue recognised within western societies primarily from the perspective of leftist politics, reinforced by the social outcry that took place during the BLM protests that were focused in more than just the United States¹⁷. Violent action, although detestable, is a clear promoter of social change and falls in line with Marx's conflict theory that suggests societies are in a constant battle between an oppressed and oppressor which is in a moment of constant change. The movement to end apartheid within South Africa was built with planned non violent protest but as the Apartheid Museum describes "They did become violent from time to time, usually as a result of brutal police actions"¹⁸. The perception of protest from a politically centred perspective takes place in two stages, during the event where there is usually either a view of disgust or avoidance, and after the social change has been enacted where the protest is viewed in a wholly positive light. **Figure 2** provides a visual indicator of this change, using the American civil rights protest as an example. This change in general consensus indicates that on the topic of political violence, even for righteous cause, it is practically impossible for a macro institution such as the government to treat political violence as a form of free speech due to subjectivity surrounding its use. It is in cases like these where a clear line of privilege is identified in the ability to non violently demonstrate. If violence can be understood as a necessary response in extenuating circumstances then the power and responsibility lies within the populus to respond accordingly as is the case with all functioning democracies.

¹⁷ Primary research, personal reflection

¹⁸ 'Resistance to apartheid', Apartheid museum (n.d), <https://www.apartheidmuseum.org/uploads/files/Resources/learners-Book/Learners-book-Chapter4.pdf>, accessed June 14



Anti MLK political
cartoon (1967)

*Charles Brooks,
Birmingham News*



Pro MLK meme (2020)

Figure 2 (Public perception of MLK during and after social change)

Seeing that conflict is an unavoidable reality within society whether the arm of democracy is functioning or not, it is often ignored that the end goal of political violence is to unify a point or argument to have it become a dominant concept in the overton window¹⁹. This end goal, however noble, can often lead to a complete opposite effect if not achieved, creating more polarisation in the long term. In the micro space, which in democracy is where the power should theoretically lie, we see a dangerous response as the outcomes divide and inflame existing extremisms or polarising beliefs. The failed assassination attempt on former US president Donald J Trump, 13th of July Pennsylvania, served as an example of growing polarisation in the political climate of the United States of America and forced confrontation with the fact that to continue a functioning society extremism must be countered to ensure stability in tumultuous times. Current US president Joe Biden addressed this concern directly

¹⁹ Primary research, personal reflection

in an address given the day following, “Unity is the most elusive goal of all, but nothing is more important than that right now.”²⁰.

Although macro forces are put into positions where they must direct discourse surrounding major world events such as the one discussed, the stance taken collectively by governments and media organisations around the world reveals a modern example of conflict theory. Macro institutions exist as the guiding power structure that are trying to preserve a constant in society that conflicts with a populace divided among two sides²¹. Macro forces intend to preserve the current status quo as change is often detrimental to certain power structures that are beneficial to those in positions of authority, the outcome then is split in two; a progressive outcome, focused on social and economic injustices open to new and untried systems but open to instability; and a conservative outcome, focused on the upheaval of current systems in an attempt to revert to a more stable era of capitalism with a cultural focus on the past. The question then arises, how will the heightened climate of the modern day be alleviated in the face of necessary large-scale change that proves incongruent with current institutions? And to this there may be no set solution, it is up to a populace to decide the outcome of our future. Either way it is explicit that technology has not so much shifted violence away from the physical space but amplified its reach.

²⁰M. Sainato, ‘Biden says he spoke with Trump after rally shooting: ‘No place in America for this kind of violence’’, The Guardian (15 Jul 2024), <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/article/2024/jul/14/biden-trump-rally-shooting-speech>, accessed July 16

²¹ Primary research, personal reflection

Conclusion

We must seek to protect freedom of speech as well as seeking to prevent dangerous ideology from spreading. To allow online systems to be abused for the spread of hate speech and eventual violence is to allow freedom of speech and therefore democracy to suffer under a continuous oppression..

This PIP has revealed that the systems that facilitate the ability to express oneself can and have inadvertently led to a rise in extremist behaviours becoming normalised within society. I understand that while it may seem contradictory to be an advocate for free speech and an advocate for rules in place that prevent the spread of hate speech, it is a necessary path in preventing a catastrophic polarisation that will continue to divide as people are forced to take sides in a dangerous political landscape. I am also aware that violence has been a tool instrumental in positive social change but that it has also been a tool for the oppression of free thought but it is my understanding that violence is almost impossible to categorise in a contemporary setting and must be viewed from a historical perspective that allows us to contemplate its nature and effects.

My belief that free speech, although necessary, was possibly dangerous in the hands of unmanned algorithms and a populace often captured by hate was reinforced by my research, both primary and secondary. Chapter 1 delved into the dangers of technology that pushed extremist content with the statistical analysis revealing that it was a specific combination of extremism, a distinct lack of moderation and algorithms designed to keep us engaged that were contributing to a divisive political landscape in the modern era. In chapter 2 the effect of the online space onto the physical space was explored with the personal reflection allowing me to assess that violence has been an important tool throughout history while also evaluating that because of its nature it can only be properly assessed in hindsight. Chapter 2 came up with mixed conclusions on the effects to democracy as in some ways violent rebellion against the macro governance is the most democratic action a society can make.

The topic for my PIP is growing ever relevant as it pertains to the rising influence of ideology over all persons within society and how media systems can exclude and include a person at

will to adopt dangerous thought. As social media becomes ever integrated into daily life it is imperative that we as a society can understand the power it holds over our own thought processes so we don't commit ourselves to endangering the democracy that exists to serve us.

The research conducted proves that there must be a significant change to social media systems and the way society reacts in the face of growing polarisation in order for us to make use of the capabilities that such technologies allow for free discussion. To throw away what we have access to now would be a great disservice to future generations.

Annotated bibliography

Primary research annotations

Statistical analysis

I found the statistical analysis to be extremely useful in the creation of the first chapter of my pip. I focused on collecting statistics focused on the use of certain words on social media platforms which allowed me to quantify hate speech to a certain extent, effectively allowing me to prove that extremism was on the rise on certain platforms, leading to the unfortunate conclusion I made in my hypothesis. Although I was happy with the ability to collate information I found trouble with the research method when it came to looking at qualitative moments which is what most of my PIP was focused on, this created problems when I was trying to look at the more psychological consequences of being in constant exposure to extremism in the online space. Despite this I was able to come up with meaningful answers to my pips' most hard questions.

Focus group

I found the focus group to provide meaningful insight throughout the entirety of my pip. My focus group focused on definitions and responsibility allowing me to grasp a greater concept of violence, the focus of chapter two. The focus group was also hard to integrate considering the amount of bias I recognise in the results. The geographical location, the age, and the school that all participants went to are cause for caution when trying to provide information in a pip that won't prove fallible under someone else's eye although I did attempt to remove gender bias from the focus group by ensuring I had an even split male and female. Overall the focus group allowed me to make the final steps in the conclusion making process, specifically when considering the implications of extremism on the online space affecting actions in the real world and who is to take the responsibility in such cases. In finality my pip was instrumental in crafting both chapters of my PIP.

Personal reflection

My personal reflection was an extremely important tool for chapter 2 of my PIP as it allowed me to reflect on my own experiences with extremism and to provide personal insight to a macro issue from a micro perspective. Not only did the personal reflection allow me to view how the wave of extremism had impacted the micro world but I also was able to reflect upon how my research had impacted myself. Consolidating the development of my thoughts into a reflection also helped me pinpoint certain moments where I had experienced issues with a more openly violent political space in the online environments. I struggled with the personal reflection in terms of bias and how to implement it into the final pip in the beginning stages of writing but I soon recognised that the reflection allowed me to access the micro world in the discussion of macro issues which provided layers too and fleshed

out my pip.

Secondary research annotations

Jana Bazeed, 'Freedom of speech in the Digital age - more complicated than you'd think', Roar News, Roar News, January 2023.

Jane Bazeed works as Science and research correspondent and is a Physics and Philosophy Student at King's College London. The article discusses how the censorship of speech is a tough road to follow as it can easily be co opted by forces that seek to suppress useful information for the public but is also a necessary evil to combat hate speech. Everyday people who may be uninformed about a recognised human right is who the article is attempting to reach. Some research methods identified in the piece are Statistical analysis and Secondary research. The author comes to the conclusion that. The future for the fundamental human right is unclear and harmful media needs to be defined. The text is published by an independent student body of King's College in London so it has the capability to be free from institutional bias. The article uses up to date information so is accurate for application to contemporary. The highlighting of multiple perspectives makes this useful as it is a good reminder to stay as unbiased as possible when conducting my research. The text relates to misinformation in the digital space and the conversation on the regulation of free speech. I think it's a very good introduction into the topic but I would have liked it to make a bold stance on one side or the other.

Margaret Sullivan, 'Elon Musk's hypocrisy about free speech hits a new low | Margaret Sullivan', Guardian News and Media, The Guardian, September 2023.

"Margaret Sullivan is a Guardian US columnist writing on media, politics and culture". The article argues that Elon Musk's lack of moderation on the platform X has shown clear consequences for minority groups and is a clear demonstration on why moderation is important in the public forum. It is intended for people who already have an understanding of free speech and the clear trade offs it holds. It uses secondary research. The final conclusion of the piece states that moderation is required for this social media platform to survive long term. The text is an opinion piece so it is not trying to provide a massively balanced view but the use of quotes does inform the reader to a certain degree. Technology, moderation and free speech are all touched upon and will be included in my PIP. I thought it was a

useful look into what can happen without the safety net that moderated platforms provide and the acceleration of hate in online spaces.

Susie Alegre, Freedom to think: Protecting a fundamental human right in the Digital age, (Atlantic Books: London, 2023).

Susie Alegre is a human rights lawyer. “Alegre argues that only by recasting our human rights for the digital age can we safeguard the future”. The main audience is people looking for an informed perspective on complicated human rights surrounding technology. The book makes extensive use of case studies. The conclusion of chapter 9 was that hate as an emotional force is extremely destructive and is more than ever prevalent over the internet. It is only made worse by widespread misinformation that causes unnecessary behaviour towards groups of people, most notably marginalised. The text has won multiple awards from reputable sources and the author is an expert in the field which makes this book extremely reliable for research purposes. The text will be useful for helping me decide on good examples for what I aim to discuss. Technology, freedom of speech and misinformation are the main topics of discussion here and will also be in my PIP. It's written in a way that makes it easy to process while still remaining extremely informative.

Rebecca Boone, ‘Experts say attacks on free speech are rising across the U.S.’, Public Broadcasting Service, PBS, March 2023.

Rebecca Boone is an Investigative reporter for the Associated press. The main argument is that the banning of books and legal attacks on queer artforms is indicative of free speech being suppressed within America. The article is United States focused and thus the intended audience are people from the US. The article has statistical analysis and secondary research within it. The conclusion that is come to is that hate speech is protected by the first amendment of free speech and people should remain careful in online spaces. PBS is a public media organisation and the article is mainly composed of statements and data not the authors own perspective which helps with the removal of authorial bias but it is still important to consider that quotes and data can be easily handpicked to support almost any argument. The article relates to free speech which is what I am researching. I think its a good look into current events in a politically charged environment but I would have liked some synthesis.

‘X’s free speech and rights of people | X help’, X, *Twitter*.

This is the Statement on X(formerly known as twitter). A platform controlled by billionaire Elon Musk who is notable for his roles in Tesla, Paypal, SpaceX and Neuralink. The text discusses X’s policy toward privacy and free speech claiming it’s values as a “global commitment” grounded in the United States Bill of rights. The intended audience are those who are looking to see what the platform stands for. The text being published by a for profit company calls into question the validity of their claims especially considering recent events surrounding the funding of the platform and those who seek to abuse it. This is useful for the case study I will perform as I have been considering doing it on “x” as they have been in the news multiple times in the last 12 months for their lack of proper content moderation. The text relates to freedom of speech and technology. My opinion on this is that it is probably a flimsy defence for the lack of care that has gone into preventing rampant hate speech on the platform.

‘Freedom of information, opinion and expression’, The Australian Human Rights Commission, *The Australian Human Rights Commission*.

The Australian Human Rights Commission is Australia's institute of human rights and it operates independently from the government. It was established in 1986. The text outlines what freedom of speech/expression is and how it should operate in a democratic society. The text contains information from many global sources such as the United Nations and the European convention. The text is assessed to be reliable as it is from an independent body outside of Government influence and it’s job is to not only hold the nation accountable but also to inform those who do not understand their rights. There is no evidence to suggest that they have some hidden bias. This text will be extremely helpful for me as Free speech is so integral to my PIP that I will need a reliable and complex definition if I want to do my research ethically and effectively. My view on this text is that it is critically important to understand for everyone as it is the basis of a fundamental human right.

Cancel Culture: Fear of the Mob | Tom Nicholas , (YouTube, YouTube, February 2021).

Tom Nicholas is a youtuber who makes videos discussing politics and history, he has a PHD in theatre from his thesis on “ class and regionality in contemporary UK playwriting”.

The video essay points out the flaws in the concept of “the mob” claiming it as a term that has historically been used to give less credence to lower class groups in society who have recognised the misfortune they have been dealt. The audience is clearly towards people who would already have the mind to agree with his claims as although he does make a good argument it is not designed for people who would disagree. Secondary research is used for much of his historical analysis regarding pre 2000s but he does use statistical analysis when discussing census data between 1801 to 1851. Those online who claim to be against “the mob” are just as a part of it as anyone else is and it is almost stupid to criticise its place in society as it is integral to any form of public debate, even if it is ugly on the outside. The video is opinion heavy but it is all backed up by sources so I would definitely consider it valid. This video is extremely helpful for my understanding of free speech as a historical item that has only been gained within the last 200-300 years.

Jeffrey W Howard, Annual Review of Political Science, Vol. 22:93-109, (Annual Reviews: Palo Alto, Calif).

Jeffrey Howard works in the department of political science at the university college london.

The text argues the logistics of censorship on hate speech and the dangers of the abuse of enforcing agencies and whether we as humans have a moral obligation to refrain from hate speech. The intended audience for this is obviously people who are well versed in political theory. Ordinary people are permitted to take part in combating hate speech but state powers should remain unaffiliated with its suppression. This text has a disclosure statement which claims that “The author is not aware of any affiliations, memberships, funding, or financial holdings that might be perceived as affecting the objectivity of this review.” this may not be true but considering the source is from a public university I believe it to be true. This text brings up a very important concept, that being the government's role in the suppression of speech they deem inappropriate, this is useful to me because when I discuss the impacts on democracy I want to explore posed solutions, government action being one of them, and pose counter arguments to each.

Julian Borger, “‘an atmosphere of fear’: Free speech under threat in Israel, activists say’, Guardian News and Media, The Guardian, October 2023.

Julian Borger works as a world affairs editor for the Guardian. He is an ex-correspondent in the United States, the Middle East and Eastern Europe. The article is an investigation into the political environment in Israel that is persecuting those for even the thought that they might hold a pro-Hamas sentiment. The article is not an opinion piece and doesn't look to make any conclusions on its subject matter. The article is focused on events happening to people who or are perceived as supporting Hamas but the absence of opinion and or conclusions suggests that the way this story is being told is mostly free from bias although nothing can be ruled out. This text is an example of the abuse of state power which undermines meaningful democracy in any institution. The article talks about democracy and free speech, two things that are mentioned in the current title of my PIP and are integral to its production. This text provided a great example that I can apply to the modern era on state violence and will no doubt be a handy resource when I am writing that chapter.

Roger Dooley, ‘X/twitter hides legitimate news while misinformation flourishes’, Forbes Magazine, Forbes, October 2023.

Roger Dooley writes on science based business strategies, he has written multiple books on behavioural science and its practical effects in business. X as a platform is pushing away accurate and reliable news while bringing in extremist sources instead. This is seen in the comparison of search results in competitor platforms to X. The intended audience for this article is people who are interested more so in business news than political news. The author concludes that the situation will either need to be resolved almost immediately or international action from EU regulators will push hard against the platform. Forbes as a publisher is not seen as the most reliable new source as it is profit driven and they have a past of promoting people who were later exposed as perpetrators of white collar crime (Elizabeth Holmes and Sam Bankman Fried) but this article is less focused on promotion and is thus more reliable and accurate. This article will be helpful for me and my case study on X and the environment it has created in regards to political extremism and misinformation. The article relates to my concepts of misinformation, media and freedom of speech. I appreciate the article's use of examples and would find a follow up article very useful for exploring the consequences that take place for X.