Right-wing extremism and the Role of YouTube

A study of the role of YouTube in tendencies towards right-wing extremism among Dutch millennials

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Abstract

In the Netherlands, the political spectrum is shifting more and more to the right and we are increasingly confronted with expressions of right-wing extremism on the internet, including on YouTube. Many studies have been conducted into the influences of social media on the tendency towards right-wing extremism, but the role of YouTube in particular in this process is still very difficult to explain. Therefore, the aim of this study is to map out the relationship between right-wing extremist ideology among millennials and YouTube. To this end, interviews and a literature study were used. The results show that the use of YouTube is mainly related to the experienced marginalization of one's own political preferences. This study shows that what is unique about YouTube when it comes to right-wing extremism is that the results of this study show that YouTube is a tool which can facilitate tendencies towards right-wing extremism. On the one hand it can be a tool used to generate attention from millennials and on the other hand it can be used by millennials for entertainment, as a source of information, to connect with others and as a place to express your emotions. In both cases it appears that YouTube has a reinforcing effect on someone's emotions, making it a powerful tool that can unconsciously direct someone towards taking over right-wing extremists views. Based on this study, it can be concluded that YouTube can reinforce tendencies towards right-wing extremism and with that this research contributes to the general discussion on the relationship between social media and right-wing extremist ideology. The implications of the present study and recommendations for follow-up research are discussed.

Key words: Right-wing extremism, ideology, YouTube, millennials, tendencies, extremism

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1. Introduction

We live in a digital era and the exposure to messages online involving hatred and extreme violent ideologies is large and continuously growing. The literature suggests that especially millennials tend to be more receptive to these messages, which carry out populistic and right-wing extremist perspectives (Denkmayr, 2018 & Rensmann, 2017). This is because 'relatively' young people are still bio/psychological continuously exploring their identity and are active users of the internet. Therefore, they are more susceptible to the unconscious effect that these messages may carry (Alava et al, 2020). According to Kruglanksi (2020), the effect of unconsciously incorporating a more extreme perspective is a general process in which motivational, cognitive and social influences intersect into a field of forces that may push or pull individuals into the arms of extremist groups. Certain ideas are in turn continuously fed due to an intertwining construct of the operation of algorithms, social media, social context and implicit biological and psychological processes of the individual. This makes the tendency to slowly adopt a more right-wing extremist ideology greater (Kruglanski & Webber, 2017; Proulx & Major, 2013). The involvement of millennials in right-wing extremism attracts a lot of attention and is an escalating global concern, also in the Netherlands (Chazan, 2019; Guterres, 2018; Jones, 2018) (Alava et al, 2017). Apparently, the unstable political developments in the past couple of years have ensured that millennials increasingly disregard democratic structures and show lower trust in democratic institutions than the previous generation did (Checkel & Katzenstein 2009, Foa & Mounk 2016, Montgomery 2009, Rensmann 2017, Russel et al. 2002, Voeten 2016). Various groups of people in the Netherlands are said to be polarized and radicalized, particularly through international fora such as 9gag, 4chan, hiddenlol and 8chan (Arthur, 2019; Europol, 2019). Additionally, research has shown that besides various chat rooms, Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and multiple videogames are used by violent extremist groups. These platforms are used for recruitment, the sale of products, merchandise or music and propaganda (Roks, van der Schoot, 2019). Individuals can come across radicalizing narratives, expressed or glorified right-wing extremist ideas, stereotyping, glorification of the use of violence or the expression of hatred towards a collective based on race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, national origin, religion or other group characteristics (Costello et al, 2016). The danger is that these messages alternate with other messages about themes that have a broad social condemnation such as, animal abuse or famine. The power of video content on people should not be underestimated, especially when those people already experience heavy emotions or adhere to a set of ideals

(Ledwich, 2019). When people start framing communication as a story, it can build an emotional connection or induce a certain feeling. In turn, this can reinforce someone's political ideals. Without people being aware of the social charge of these messages, they keep on reading and gradually shut themselves off from other ideas (Ledwich, 2019). There is a growing body of literature that recognizes the importance of studying the relationship between social media and extremism. This study specifically focuses on one social media platform, in order to contribute concretely. In addition, one group of people is chosen to study; the group that on the one hand grew up in the digital age and on the other hand is labelled as a group that increasingly loses trust in democratic institutions and appears to be more prone to radical political ideologies (Denkmayr, 2018). This study, therefore, focuses on the tendencies towards right-wing extremism among Dutch millennials and the role of YouTube. The following research question is central to this study: *What factors influence tendencies towards right-wing extremism among Dutch millennials and what is the role of YouTube within this process?* This research will contribute to a better understanding of the role of YouTube in the current context of Dutch millennials who tend to adhere to a more right-wing extremist ideology. The research is structured in 6 chapters; the theoretical framework, the research, the results, the discussion and the limitations.

1.1 Methodology

This study contributes to the Extreme Beliefs project. This is a research project at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam that aims to research the Epistemology and Ethics of Fundamentalism. Extreme Beliefs contributes to the in-depth understanding of fundamentalism in our society and the phenomena that are associated with these fundamentalist movements. This study aims to provide a deeper understanding of the multi-layered dynamics of right-wing extremism among millennials and the role of YouTube. This study relies on qualitative empirical methods. In this section, the data collection techniques and storage, the ethical issues, the operationalization of the sub-questions and the chosen subjects will be discussed.

Data collection techniques

According to Ravndal & Bjørgo (2018), right-wing extremism has been mostly studied through the use of qualitative data. Qualitative data is an essential source of information for contemporary research on right-wing extremism, because it gains insights into the online way of thinking and organizing of these groups and individuals. Moreover, qualitative data reveals their influential narratives or ideological currents (Ravndal & Bjørgo, 2018). The data for this

study was obtained by a literature study, in which books, scholars, journals and newspaper articles provided insight into the perspectives and dynamics of right-wing extremist groups. The literature used for this study is carefully selected due to desk research and reviewed upon the academic quality and its relevance. In addition, this study contains 10 qualitative interviews from men and women in The Netherlands. Some of them were approached at a variety of demonstrations in Amsterdam, I was connected to them via friends and family or through social media and e-mail. The goal is to understand the world from the interviewees' point of view, to unfold the meaning of their ideas and experiences on the phenomenon of right-wing extremism and their perspective on the role of YouTube. It is an exploration of their perspectives, the aim of this study is not to be representative of the whole population. Qualitative interviewing provides a deeper understanding of social phenomena that would not be obtained from purely quantitative methods, such as questionnaires (Viktor, 2010). Therefore, I have chosen to use in-depth, semi-structured or loosely structured forms of interviewing and selective sampling to select a maximum variation of respondents (Pertijs, 2020 & Viktor, 2010). I wanted to at least discuss five necessary conditions for right-wing extremism and their personal or professional experiences with YouTube. Furthermore, I specifically paid attention to the reliability and validity of the interview questions. During the interviews, the terms right-wing extremism or extremism were not explicitly mentioned to maintain an objective conversation. In addition, I took into account that there is a chance that respondents will present themselves according to the social norm and do not answer from their point of view. This social desirability forms a real threat to the internal validity of the research and should therefore be avoided as much as possible (Pertijs, 2020 & King & Bruner, 2000).

To ensure the validity of this study, I used characterizations of the Right-Wing Authoritarianism Scale (Saunders & Ngo, 2017). The Right-Wing Authoritarianism Scale measures the degree to which people defer to established authorities, show aggression toward out-groups when authorities sanction that aggression and support traditional values endorsed by authorities (Saunders & Ngo, 2017). The characterizations are a guide to recognize right-wing extremism and were therefore essential in order to validate the answers to the sub-questions.

Data storage and ethical issues

To guarantee the verifiability of the research, firstly, the research set-up, the choice of method and references are accurately documented. The quality of data collection, data input, data storage and processing are guarded closely as well. Furthermore, all the steps and notes are properly reported and monitored within a journal, notebook or progress report. Personal matters like interviews or conversations will not be shared with others.

Secondly, when conducting any research that contains interviewing or ethnographic fieldwork, it is important to be aware of the ethical issues that may arise. Therefore, I have handed out informed consent to the participants and made them aware of the purpose, risks and confidentiality of the research. All interviews are anonymized to obtain confidentiality. Furthermore, the data obtained from the internet could raise several ethical concerns, which I have taken into account when analysing contemporary actors. As we live in a digital era with fake news and sources that are not verified relating to contemporary issues like right-wing extremism, I continuously checked the sources and academic relevance of the articles used for this study.

1.2 Operationalization sub-questions

The terms 'Extremism' and 'Radicalization' are difficult to define and used in different ways in scholars, traditional media, social media or policy reports (Alava et al, 2017). Therefore, to create sub-questions that contribute to the answer of the research question, it is needed to first reflect upon the use of these terms.

In this study, the term right-wing extremism is understood as a specific ideology characterized by 'anti-democratic opposition towards equality' (Jupkås & Leidig, 2020). It is associated with antisemitism, racism, xenophobia, exclusionary nationalism, authoritarianism, and conspiracy theories (Jupkås & Leidig, 2020). This study speaks of right-wing extremism when a respondent produced a set of "enemies", which are seen as a threat against the survival of the nation, the culture or the race (Jupkås & Leidig, 2020). Immigrants, ethnic and religious minorities, anti-racists/fascists and left-wing politicians are the most common enemies. Secondly, there must be a belief that one's group is disadvantaged or that one's own culture is threatened by outsiders (Kruglanski et al., 2014; Jupkås & Leidig, 2020). This results in the manifestation of a black-white worldview mentality, that is generated by the desire for clarity, order, purity and structure to solve the problem of perceived disadvantage. Finally, there must be a belief that the only way to solve this problem is through undemocratic solutions (Van den

Bos, 2020). How and why, someone takes on these beliefs is very personal and depends on many things. It is therefore difficult to provide an unequivocal answer. However, the more research that is done about possible indicators of right-wing extremism, the better we will understand the process. Identifying factors that can reinforce or change the attitudes of the individual is essential to understand tendencies towards right-wing extremism among Dutch millennials. This is examined by means of the first sub-question: 'What factors can push an individual towards right-wing extremism?'

To answer this sub-question, interviews were conducted with men and women who vote for or are politically involved in a right-wing extremist party. In addition, multiple articles were examined. The following questions were assessed: what factors are mentioned most? Can the patterns of right-wing extremist ideology be identified? Or are things said that stand out or are different than expected? What emotions, ideas and narratives are fundamental to the ideals of these individuals? Identifying these indicators that can push individuals towards becoming interested in right-wing extremism, is essential to answer the research question of this study.

Secondly, it is important to research the factors which can make right-wing extremism attractive for Dutch millennials and pull them towards this particular ideology. This is done by means of the second sub-question: 'What factors can pull individuals towards right-wing extremism? Here two interviews were used to answer questions such as; How do right-wing extremist parties make themselves heard or recruit followers? How do they make use of social media? Additionally, the literature explains the connection between tendencies towards right-wing extremism and consumption of extremist propaganda and group dynamics, which are seen as factors that can pull someone towards a right-wing extremist group.

Both sub-questions examine how YouTube relates to the relevant factors. Through the interview questions about the experience of right-wing extremists with YouTube, an even more specific analysis can be made of the role YouTube plays within tendencies towards right-wing extremism.

1.3 Subjects

The subjects chosen for this research are Dutch males and females who were born between 1980 and 2000 in the Netherlands. This group is chosen because scholars argue that younger generations tend to be more receptive to populists and right-wing extremist perspectives. This is because their political development has been shaped by digitalization and their political and cultural context (Denkmayr, 2018 & Rensmann, 2017). Dutch millennials grew up with the great financial crash in 2008, the huge refugee streams into Europe, Brexit and the rise of

populism. Denkmayr (2018) argues that populism is rooted in the ongoing identity crisis of voters in Western countries due to these chaotic societal issues. The unstable political developments have ensured that millennials increasingly disregard democratic structures and show lower trust in democratic institutions than the previous generation did (Checkel & Katzenstein 2009, Foa & Mounk 2016, Montgomery 2009, Rensmann 2017, Russel et al. 2002, Voeten 2016).

Moreover, millennials are used to communicating freely with the rest of the world as they grew up parallel to the rise of the internet, technology and social media. Millennials are referred to as the 'Internet Generation' (Naim, 2014). Nowadays, the internet and social media are indispensable to society and used to connect, communicate, consume and broadcast information (Edwards, 2015). This digitalization boom has had vast and global implications for communication patterns (Denkmayr, 2018). Not only do they consume media differently, millennials are also exposed to far less qualified opinions on social media than the generation before them. According to Montgomery (2009) and Pasek et al (2006), the internet therefore truly affects political ideals and voting behaviour. Additionally, scholars claim that when millennials show high levels of political apathy, they are more prone to radical political ideologies and are not that supportive of freedom of speech (Denkmayr, 2018).

1. Theoretical framework

This chapter presents an overview of the discerned patterns of right-wing ideology on social media. First, the online presence of right-wing extremism is further explained by elaborating on the overall presence of right-wing extremism in the Netherlands and the reason why millennials are most susceptible to this movement. Secondly, the main social media groups used by right-wing extremists are set out as well as the symbols and the language used on these platforms. (Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid, 2021). Finally, a conclusion is given in which the sub-question of this chapter are answered.

National-populism has taken over the ideological hegemony in Europe, so too in the Netherlands (Mudde, 2019). After the elections in March 2021, The Netherlands moved up to third place of radical right voters in Europe, with over 18 per cent of the votes for the radical right. "Meanwhile, the political left has less and less support almost everywhere" (Hubert Smeets, 2021, Trouw). This development is the consequence of the normalization of the radical right, which has grown since the turn of the century (Mudde, 2019). But, what explains the rise of "the far right"? According to Greenberg & Jonas (2003) people only adopt certain ways of thinking, cognitive styles and dispositions, because they satisfy psychological needs and motives such as the need for closure, order, structure, and the avoidance of uncertainty or ambiguity. Therefore, a possible argument for this shift is that the needs and motives within the Dutch social context have changed in such a way that more individuals became motivated towards adhering to a more right-wing extremist ideology (Greenberg & Jonas, 2003). The rise of the radical right in the Netherlands was historically characterized by neo-Nazi, fascist and anti-Semitic ideology. These characteristics are still present, however it seems that nowadays the anti-migrant, anti-authoritarian and anti-Islam ideology prevails (State of hate report, 202; Wagenaar, 2018). As the desired political and social course differs among Dutch right-wing radicals, it is necessary to make use of a clear terminology and to make a distinction between the "far-right" (radical right) and the extreme right (AIVD, 2018; Mudde, 2019). In contrary to right-wing extremist groups (such as neo-Nazis), the radical right does not reject democracy, although the wish of the majority must prevail over minorities and certain elements of the constitutional state. The radical right does not promote the use of violence, whereas right-wing extremists, in some cases, legitimize the use of violence to pursue its political aims (Jupskås

en Segers, 2020). Although the concept of right-wing extremism has many definitions, this research focuses mainly on the definition of Jupskås and Segers (2020). Jupskås en Segers (2020), define right-wing extremism as a specific ideology characterized by 'anti-democratic opposition towards equality'. Additionally, right-wing extremism is often associated with antisemitism, racism, xenophobia, exclusionary nationalism, authoritarianism, and conspiracy theories. These features produce a set of "enemies", which are seen as a threat against the survival of the nation, the culture or the race (Jupkås & Leidig, 2020). Immigrants, ethnic and religious minorities, anti-racists/fascists and left-wing politicians are seen as the most common enemies. The concept concerns behavioural characteristics that apply to parties, movements, forums, activists and other individuals (Jupkås & Leidig, 2020). These characteristics are mainly an increased desire for obedience to authority, order, purity, familiarity, structure and a black-white worldview mentality (Jupkås & Leidig, 2020). Individuals that endorse a right-wing extremists ideology, adhere a worldview that is based on authoritarianism and hierarchy between social groups, which is reflected in the desire for group-based dominance and social inequality and traditionalism (Alizadeh, M., Weber, I., Cioffi-Revilla, C., Fortunato, S., & Macy, M, 2019). Mudde (2019) continues and describes that right-wing extremists are devoted to these groups for different reasons and though they agree on a lot of terms, right-wing extremists hardly ever strive for uniformity, making them a more difficult group to analyse. As the adherence of an ideology is an individual matter, generalization must be avoided, as will be thoroughly discussed in chapter 2. Although the movement of right-wing extremism is not uniform, it is possible to distinguish eight factors within the broad concept of right-wing extremism that contribute to a higher likelihood of the tendency towards right-wing extremism among millennials. These factors can be divided into push and pull factors. The push factors include social context and perceived marginalization of political identity. Pull factors include group dynamics and consuming right-wing extremist propaganda. According to Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid (2021), these Right-wing movements also take place in the online landscape, with YouTube playing a potential role in facilitating the growth in tendencies towards right-wing extremism.

2.1 Millennials

As explained in the methodology, millennials tend to be more receptive to populists and right-wing extremist perspectives (Denkmayr, 2018 & Rensmann, 2017). Research has shown that millennials live in a period of "storm and stress," in which they search for identity, have an urge for romanticism, seek adventure, want to take risks and pursue social heroism (Davydov, 2015). They strive to be actively involved, can rush headlong into things and in general have a pronounced urge to seek a variety of new sensations (Davydov, 2015). Millenials have a big quest for norms and values that differ substantially from their parent's generation, which often manifests as a protest against authority and upbringing (Davydov, 2015). In addition, social changes, uncertainty and unstable political developments have ensured that millennials increasingly disregard democratic structures and show lower trust in democratic institutions than the previous generation (Checkel & Katzenstein 2009, Foa & Mounk 2016, Montgomery 2009, Rensmann 2017, Russel et al. 2002, Voeten 2016). A lower trust in democratic or governmental institutions, makes a millennial more prone to radical political ideologies as these ideas are all reflected in the political agenda of right-wing extremist ideologies (Denkmayr, 2018).

2.2 Online presence

The online landscape with its infinite possibilities has become an indispensable part of our society, that millennials witnessed from the very beginning (Denkmayr, 2018). The internet has made it possible to communicate globally, create platforms for cultural exchange and information sharing. Although this has a lot of positive side effects, the internet also functions as an entrance for people who have different user intentions (Winter, 2019). According to Meleagrou-Hitchens and Kaderbhai (2017), extremists are in many ways seen as first-time users of the internet. As the internet has long been linked with extremism, the use for purposes such as recruitment, incitement and finding sponsorships for activities improved and continues to grow. It is most likely that the mainstream social media and file-sharing platforms existing today are to some extent touched by extremist activism (Winter, 2019). Nowadays, the internet is no longer just one part of the spectrum of extremist activism. It is an operational environment, in which political ideologies are continuously shared and realized, activities are planned, and social movements are made (Winter, 2019). In relation to right-wing extremism, the online presence is often referred to as online or virtual extremism, online hate and cyberhate (van der

Schoot & Roks, 2019). According to a factsheet written by the Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid (2021), the online landscape has multiple functions for right-wing extremists. Online, a message can be sent due to different reasons. Right-wing extremists can recruit others, generate worldwide attention, mobilize, spread their ideology, find like-minded people, undermine the government and use trolling or doxing. Trolling is defined as creating discord on the internet by inciting hatred or upsetting people by posing inflammatory or off-topic messages in an online community (Polak, 2020). Doxing is when personal information of a person – for example, an address or phone number – is made public online (Richards, 2020). Furthermore, social media is also used by right-wing extremist movements to make themselves appear bigger than they are (van der Schoot & Roks, 2019). Using social media platforms smartly, can make a relatively large group of people pay attention, who in principle do not adhere to radical and right-wing extremist ideas (Ravndal & Bjørgo, 2018; van der Schoot & Roks, 2019). For example, many platforms and channels are not solely aimed at ideological formation but show a mix of politically charged messages. These messages alternate with other messages about themes that have a broad social condemnation such as, animal abuse or famine (van der Schoot & Roks, 2019). Without people being aware of the social charge of these messages, they keep on reading and gradually shut themselves off from other ideas. As a tunnel vision is created, they become more vulnerable to the more extremist expressions shared within these groups (van der Schoot & Roks, 2019). As the exposure to these themes keeps on growing, the inadvertent spread of radical and right-wing extremist expressions grows as well. This process contributes to the fact that the discourse slowly shifts to more adherence to explicitly extreme right-wing content (Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid, 2021).

2.3 YouTube

As mentioned before, right-wing extremists have the greatest reach through Facebook groups, YouTube channels, Twitter and Instagram. The terms of these platforms limit the amount of extreme content. Therefore, users are often redirected elsewhere. Alternative platforms including Gab, Telegram and 4chan are known as channels where more extreme content is shared (Arthur, 2019). It is of great importance to investigate the influences of the overall media landscape on the tendency towards right-wing extremism, but to frame this research, the focus is on YouTube. Human beings are designed to communicate audio-visually, and YouTube, more than virtually any major social networking site, uses audio-visual communication (Munger & Phillips, 2020). When the communication grows, and the viewership of the content

becomes higher, the content has more potential for political influence. YouTube, as mentioned before, is a platform structurally used by right-wing extremists. According to Lewis (2018), YouTube consists of a loosely connected network of reactionary YouTube users, ranging from mainstream conservatives and libertarians to white supremacists and neo-Nazis whom all broadcast their political ideas to young audiences (Lewis, 2018). It is a platform without any hierarchy or tightly controlled groups. Right-wing extremists can take up arms against what they see as the stifling virtue of feminists, cultural Marxists, gender ideologues and other so-called social justice warriors (Bahara; Kranenberg; Tokmetzis, 2019). The platform has about 400 hours of content uploaded each minute, with about 200 Dutch individuals who are documented as having a right-wing extremist ideology. As they keep on posting angry comments under antisemitic content about Islam, immigration, feminism and "social justice warriors," the inadvertent spread of radical and right-wing extremist expressions grows by every minute new content is uploaded (Lewis, 2018; Tokmetzis, 2019). In the Netherlands racist content and hateful messages are shared bottom-up by individual users, including Dutch Celebrities such as the rapper Lange Frans. Until recently, he owned a YouTube channel on which he repeatedly shared his perspective on current governmental, political and Covid-19 related issues. Since he was inciting hatred, misinformation and was charged guilty of sedition, his accounts were removed. While YouTube attempts to stay apolitical through changes in their moderation algorithm, policies and content priorities, there still seems to be a disconnect between the actions they take against extreme content and the user experience (Bahara; Kranenberg; Tokmetzis, 2019). According to Lewis (2018), this disconnection relates to the denial of the underlying issues. One of the issues involves a hermeneutical problem, concerning the ignorance of the way of defining and interpreting hate speech, extremism or harassing content and the upholding values that accompany these definitions. A second issue is an algorithm, which can nudge viewers into accessing extremist content through recommended videos (Lewis, 2018). Tokmetzis (2019) continues and describes this recommendation-algorithm as something that is not a simple recipe that can be reverse engineered: It is a very complex system, a deep neural network that takes many variables into account to deliver an experience that is unique for each user. According to Tufekcy (2018) we live in a society where fiction is outperforming reality, because of the thumbnail video recommendations. These thumbnails contribute to the process of dismantling someone's worldview, after which they embrace alternative frameworks for understanding the world (Tufekcy, 2018). The Correspondent, a Dutch news forum, wrote about Margot, a woman whose worldview got dismantled through watching YouTube content. After she started commenting on videos about

the refugee crisis and looking at alt-right video channels, her behaviour became more extreme (Tokmetzis, 2019). As she started to express herself differently and she became more aggressive towards foreigners, feminists and "social justice warriors", the videos she watched became more extreme as well. Partly due to her use of YouTube she had slowly shifted towards a more far-right ideology, and she eventually got interested in nationalist and antisemitic videos as well. Tokmetzis (2019) describes that Margot declared online that white culture was being undermined by dissenters and Jews are to blame for many societal issues (Tokmetzis, 2019). This example illustrates that YouTube can reinforce contradictions in thinking about groups. It can stir up fear, increase polarization and the risk of radicalisation. Because of YouTube's interactive nature, it can reinforce conceptions, certain feelings and reinforce stereotypes (Ledwich, 2019). Finally, YouTube can bring children and young people into contact with harmful content (images, conceptions), undesirable persons and coloured information (Ledwich, 2019; Van den Berg & van Suylen, 2019). According to Ledwich (2019), the power of video content on people should not be underestimated, especially when those people already experience heavy emotions or adhere to a set of ideals. When people start framing communication as a story, it can build an emotional connection or induce a certain feeling, which in turn can only reinforce their thinking (Ledwich, 2019). An example of how story framing is used by right-wing extremists, is through the concept of the red pill. Right-wing extremists compare the confrontational experience of having the idea that to finally realise the unsettling truth of a situation or issue, to a scene in the movie The Matrix (Munn, 2019). In this scene a comparable allusion is portrayed, where someone takes "the red pill" and sees the truth about the world that has previously been hidden from him or her. A moment that is experienced as a revelation (Munn, 2019). The concept of "the red pill" is often mentioned in responses to right-wing extremist content, which makes it symbolistic language that is important to take into account when researching right-wing extremism as being difficult to define (Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid, 2021). The "red pill" is not the only example of the symbolic language used on YouTube by right-wing extremists. Although the language and symbols that are frequently related to right-wing extremist movements change rapidly, it is possible to highlight a few that are still regularly used (Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid, 2021). According to a factsheet written by the Ministerie van Sociale zaken en Werkgelegenheid (2021), the following symbols and words can be linked to the online movement of right-wing extremism in the Netherlands.

Prince's flag. The use of the Prince's Flag dates back to the Eighty Years' War and became strained in the 1930s because the NSB saw the Prince's Flag as the only true Dutch flag. In the 1930s, it became an issue because the NSB considered the Prince's Flag to be the only true Dutch flag. After the Second World War, the flag was embraced by radical and extreme right-wing groups (Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid, 2021).

VOC. The VOC logo is also popular among Dutch extreme right-wing activists. Sometimes it is used in combination with the Prince's flag, in other cases, it may be a combination with an image depicting the Golden Age (Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid, 2021).

This sign is often used to communicate non equality. Right-wing extremists do not believe in racial equality or equality between men and women (Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid, 2021).

Wegkijkers: The word 'wegkijkers' is usually used for dissidents who do not see the problems that the radical and extreme right see for themselves. The term implies that left-wing voters in particular have a blind spot or even deliberately look away when they encounter issues that do not correspond to their political convictions (Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid, 2021).

Deuger / Gutmensch: The words "Deuger" or "Gutmensch" are used to describe people who would like to carry out a supposed left-wing agenda at all costs. In doing so, they would mainly want to flaunt how progressive and broad-minded they are, with little regard for the problems of the "hard-working Dutchman"(Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid, 2021).

Meten met 2 maten: The expression "measuring with double standards" is used to comment on the news that is supposed to show that Dutch people with a migration background are favoured over Dutch people without a migration background (Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid, 2021).

Cultuurverrijkers: The word 'culture enrichers' is used sarcastically to refer to asylum seekers and refugees. It suggests that left-wing opponents see them as enriching our culture, whereas right-wing extremists say they are not (Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid, 2021).

MSM: MSM' stands for mainstream media that deliberately conceal unwelcome matters. This includes, among others, the NOS and major daily newspapers. Often the term is used in combination: 'You won't hear the MSM talking about this. Or: 'The MSM remains silent! Incidentally, it is not uncommon for these to refer to reports that have been reported (Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid, 2021).

Kike: The word 'kike' is used as a derogatory term for people with a Jewish background. This term of abuse has been around for some time but is mainly used by the online alt-right scene (Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid, 2021).

VOC-mentaliteit: The term 'VOC mentality was once used by then Prime Minister Jan-Peter Balkenende, but subsequently became part of the discussion as to whether the colonial slavery past of the Netherlands is something to be proud of. The radical and extreme right-wing harks back to the Dutch East India Company (VOC) and the 'VOC mentality because they see it as a golden age in which the Netherlands was a player on the world stage, ruled over other nations and was less concerned about the rights and feelings of minorities (Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid, 2021).

Rode pil: The "red pill" comes from the movie The Matrix, in which the main character has to choose between a red and a blue pill. If he chooses the blue pill, he chooses that nothing will change. If he chooses the red pill, he will see the world as it is: as a construct. The metaphor of swallowing the red pill is used to interpret a process of right-wing consciousness and identity formation (Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid, 2021).

To conclude, these symbols and words are rather an indication than a fact, though by seeing these words on YouTube you could identify certain indicators of right-wing extremism. According to the Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid (2021), this indication is important, because the prevalence of right-wing extremism is hard to define and even harder to counter, especially online. Right-wing extremists are devoted to their groups for different reasons and hardly ever strive for uniformity, though their messages reach infinitely far. With their reactions under antisemitic consent about Islam, immigration, feminism and "social justice warriors," the inadvertent spread of radical and right-wing extremist expressions grows by every minute new content is uploaded (Lewis, 2018; Tokmetzis, 2019). Additionally, Ham

et al (2016) show that social media can make an important contribution to polarization, as disinformation and coloured information can reinforce emotion, ideals and 'us and them' thinking in small, closed groups of friends. In this way, one could state that the impact YouTube has as either a tool or deployment, creates ways to incite hatred, recruit people for activities, mobilize groups, spread ideology and undermine the government. In how the platform is constructed and used, it likely contributes to the tendency to take over a right-wing extremist ideology (Norris, 2020; Munger& Phillips, 2020).

2. Factors of influence

As discussed in the previous chapter YouTube functions as an important agent regarding the push, pull and personal factors that influence tendencies towards the extreme right among millennials (Alvares & Dahlgren, 2016; Kruglanski, 2018) YouTube seems to function as a tool or deployment, which on the one hand, creates ways for individuals to inform or to educate themselves, to connect with like-minded people or incite discussions. This platform can make an important contribution to polarization, as these conversations with like-minded people, heated discussions and coloured information can reinforce 'us and them' thinking in small, closed groups of friends (Ham et al, 2016). On the other hand, YouTube can be deployed by right-wing extremists to establish themselves as being a trustworthy source of information, mobilize groups, spread their ideology and undermine the governmental institutions or media channels. Both sides are interrelated and influence each other in a reinforcing way. To get a clearer idea of the interrelation of these factors with YouTube and right-wing extremism, 10 individuals including right-wing extremists were interviewed and asked about their political- and cultural beliefs and their experiences with YouTube. The interviews are semi-structured and unstructured, as it has also happened that an interview took a completely different turn or could be conducted on the spot. The subjects for the interviews were selected on the fact that all of the respondents are millennials and/or belong to an extreme right-wing political party. Furthermore, the interviews are confidential, therefore the subjects are numbered. This chapter elaborates on what emerged in the interviews and is structured in three sections. Section 2.1 provides an overview of the push factors regarding the tendency towards right-wing extremism and the role of YouTube, which includes the social context and the marginalisation of political identity. Push factors largely focus on structural, political and sociological explanations of features that contribute to a set of "enemies", which are seen as a threat to the survival of the nation, the culture or the race (Vergani, 2018). Subsequently, in section 2.2, the results of the pull factors regarding the tendency towards right-wing extremism and the role of YouTube are presented. Pull factors tend to focus on social context, group dynamics (Vergani, 2018). Third, the personal factors are identified and discussed in section 2.3. Personal factors are concerned primarily with individual psychological and biographical explanations for tendencies towards right-wing extremism, such as depression for example (Vergani, 2018). These are factors that make a person fundamentally more susceptible to push and pull factors than others. Also, the human need to belong or have meaning are factors that can motivate an individual. Millennials are still constantly exploring their identity, search for adventure and are active users of the

Internet (Vergani, 2018). As mentioned before, they are more susceptible to push and pull factors, such as social context, consuming extremist propaganda, group dynamics. These factors will be further defined below. It is important to note that in reality, these factors are all closely interrelated. This intertwinement will be ultimately set out in the conclusion of this chapter. Since corona is now highly influencing the current social context of the Dutch millennial, it is not possible to dissociate it from this research. This is because factors such as the consumption of online content or propaganda, narratives or political dissatisfaction do not operate by themselves but rather have an effect within a specific social context (Kowalewski, 2019). As a result, Covid is included in this research to a certain extent, but it is limited. In the next paragraphs, societal examples and interview quotes are used to substantiate the desired understanding.

3.1 Push factors

Push factors act largely on structural, political and sociological levels. On these levels, factors are contributing to the emergence of tendencies towards right-wing extremism. The most relevant factors regarding the possible relationship with YouTube are the social context, marginalization of political identity and search for meaning and belonging (Broekhuizen, Hermens, Van Kapel & Van Wonderen, 2016; Doosje et al., 2016; Wagenaar & Van der Valk, 2010). In the statements of the respondents, it was reflected that YouTube functions as a platform on which these push factors are reinforced.

3.1.1 The social context

Social context is a push factor for tendencies towards right-wing extremism. Social context can make an individual vulnerable for the tendency to adhere to a more extreme ideology and can be framed in terms of the feeling of disadvantage, inequality and loss of legitimacy in governmental institutions or media channels (Doosje, 2009). The respondents reflect on the consequences of their use, as they speak out about the way the platform connects them to others. Most of the respondents describe that they see YouTube mainly as a way to find others who share the same opinions, to spill their thoughts and to share ideas with others.

"YouTube makes it easier to find like-minded people, to make our voices heard"(Respondent 3)

"The impact of YouTube is big so to say. Almost everyone around me uses it for fun, inspiration, to share your own ideas with followers or to look up informative clips" (Respondent 4)

A. Frustration, disadvantage

The feeling that one's own group is disadvantaged or victimized in the contemporary social context is evident in the interviews. Most of the respondents feel that there are high levels of inequality and they feel disadvantaged, especially financially speaking. Casino capitalism and plutocracy are terms that are mentioned several times and refer to the fact that the Netherlands owns a loose free-market economy, in which everyone is striving for individual gain.

"As you can see, there is so much discontent in society, Rutte is just a kind of Pinocchio, he does not dare to choose anything and really does not care about the Dutch people, who are also in need of support. He sees it all as a kind of political game, it seems. Those rules around Covid really don't make sense, he just does something. Us young people are restricted in our free movement and will have to take on current financial debts in a few years." (Respondent 5)

The respondents struggle with unemployment and financial debts, which in turn confirm or increase their feeling of being disadvantaged. The interviews also revealed that because of their social context including the corona restrictions, they have more free time. One of the respondents emphasises that the free time she has actually resulted in more practical availability to either delve more deeply into contemporary issues or to become more vulnerable to the influences of right-wing propaganda:

"Well, as I am not allowed to go to the office, I have been working from home for a year now. I notice that I lose my focus quite fast and that I spend a lot more time online. I read far more news articles than before, and I indeed watch more videos as well. I also look at my social media a lot more, as there was not a thing to do in the last couple of months. (Respondent 6)

b. Loss of legitimacy

The feeling of loss of legitimacy in the government is clearly evident in the statements of the respondents, when discussing their tendency towards right-wing extremism. Respondents 3 and 4 give clear examples of this and the other respondents hint at it in their answers.

"Sometimes I think it makes no sense at all, because we are being cheated on. Rutte, that Pinocchio, they cheat and rob us all! And that shit about black lives matter and making excuses about slavery. I am not going to say sorry for what happened so long ago, am I? Anyway, there have been more white slaves by the Arabs than black slaves. All they want is money. reparation payments, well then, I want reparation payments too. It's just because this mass immigration

is eating away at our identity. Rutte is just a weakling and should just stand up for something and not let himself be dragged along like a piece of elastic." (Respondent 5)

"No, 1000% not!!! No, I am clear about that. We cannot trust any form of media. Each media party gets money to publish or not to publish things and I have had enough of it. It is a big media cartel, system media we call it, it is simply worrying. All those journalists are for sale and filter their news reports based on what is asked of them." (Respondent 4)

Furthermore, the search for norms and values that differ substantially from those of their parents or those that are socially accepted might also play a role here. However, no specific statements have been made in this regard.

c. Education and black and white worldviews.

The respondents clearly show an aversion towards the "foreign", by which they make a distinction between the ingroup and outgroup. One example illustrated a combination of the distinction made and a black and white worldview, both understood as a characterization of right-wing extremist ideology:

"You can't tell me that people flee through 6 or 7 countries, in order to find a safe environment. Does he wear a pedometer or something? They are just fortune seekers and do not care about learning Dutch or taking over our values. They live off our taxes, which means that less money is spend on somewhat poorer Dutch people. Anyway, I'll give you an example of a boy on my son's football team. There was an Eritrean boy in my son's football team who didn't speak a word of Dutch and he asked me why we didn't play against other clubs. As it turned out, he had no idea what Corona was and that this is the reason we did not play other clubs. So back home they live in a bubble. They don't speak a word of Dutch at home. They only receive satellite TV with Eritrean channels and have no idea what is going on here in the Netherlands. Well, that is not normal. As long as I see people walking around at the food bank here in the Netherlands who don't do a damn thing about their poverty or don't speak Dutch, I want them to go back to their own country." (Respondent 5)

3.1.2 Marginalisation of political identity

Feeling that one's own group is disadvantaged compared to other groups in society is reflected in the answers of 8 out 10 respondents. The respondents experience a marginalisation of their political identity, which, according to them, is reflected in the "cancel culture" that exists in The Netherlands. In theory, cancel culture is an (online) boycott campaign to silence someone with a wrong opinion, and to make sure that they get nowhere. As if their opinion does not count. The respondents describe that in comparison with the past, people are nowadays not being allowed to express a more extreme or conservative right-wing political ideology. Because when they do, they are immediately "cancelled", deleted from the internet or restrained from work-related contracts and other.

"The media is a big point that has changed the narrative of right-wing thinking and contributes to a growing support for the far right. I think you have fewer objective media now. You actually see a lot of newspapers or public broadcasting going very hard left. There is also a cancel culture. If you say something that is in the right corner, there is an immediate chance that you will be cancelled, and this feeds my thought of unreliable media. This is often discussed between my friends – who do not all vote for FVD – and a topic on which we all agree."
(Respondent 7)

"In the mainstream media, cross-thinkers are very quickly ridiculed, framed or silenced. These are extremely worrying tendencies! Independent thinking and truth-telling are not always desirable. We must not allow ourselves to be silenced. If we can no longer freely share our opinions and information, then we no longer live in a democracy." *(Respondent 4)*

By making the comparison with the past, you could say that the respondents experience a societal change as well. Societal change could stoke resentment and the feeling of disadvantage, as mentioned earlier this can lead to tendencies towards right-wing extremism. Additionally, this restriction of freedom of expression frustrates the respondents even more and for them this underpins the thought about unreliable media and marginalization of their political identity, which are also described as indicators that can push individuals towards extremist ideologies.

"You can see it with one of those Moccro Maffia rappers - a boy who does something stupid on the internet and is then removed by literally all media platforms - and nobody wants him. The other day, there was also that cabaret artist who spoke out about Thierry Baudet. I didn't

agree with him, of course, but when people criticize what he said, the tv programme immediately distances itself from him and says that it doesn't want to have anything to do with him and distances itself from his statements" (Respondent 3)

2.1.3 Search for belonging and have meaning

An individual's search for belonging and have meaning are personal factors and are described as a motivator of tendencies towards right-wing extremism, especially among millennials. When discussing the current social context respondents describe their mental state of mind-influencing their thoughts about societal issues. They aren't allowed to see a lot of friends, so they feel like their needs for connection are not met.

"I yearn to be able to go outside and not be stuck in this corona prison anymore. I am so done with it, we are really being kept inside with all of those rules. This policy doesn't make any sense. As you can see, people are getting destroyed, both financially and mentally. (respondent 6) "

As illustrated in the answers, 6 respondents feel the need to surround themselves with like-minded people, because it is comfortable. Moreover, sharing the same perspectives and experiences creates a bond as well, describes another respondent:

"I live in England now and I joined a conservative debate club. It gives me energy to meet with them and discuss our perspectives on certain matters. It's not that I don't like talking with people who have a different political opinion, but it sometimes is very relaxing when you talk with others and agree on things. It creates a bond, especially when you live abroad." *(Respondent 7)*

This also applies to the sharing of a feeling or emotion, whether it concerns online or offline groups. As I attended the large protests in Amsterdam, Eindhoven and The Hague, it became clear how the sharing of emotions can connect people. At these demonstrations, right-wing extremists mingled with the anti-government activists and with all the other people that might share some of the same opinions. On YouTube right-wing extremists also mingle with the anti-government activists and people that might share some of the same opinions. A number of the respondents indicated that they were very active in the comment area of YouTube. According to them, these comments and interactions provide a useful indicator for community building.

"When people comment on videos, it is both to communicate with the creator of that content and to communicate with other viewers. People mostly react to each other, which can reinforce certain thoughts. When I see people having whole conversations they are mostly about "red pilling, anti-feminism or conspiracy theories and more or less hold by the same people" Often I see people posting links towards other clips of which they think will substantiate their point or they refer to other websites where people can find more information about the issue." (Respondent 6)

Both examples illustrate that frustrations or feelings of injustice that are collectively shared can trigger someone's motivational drive to adopt more extreme thoughts in order to fulfil their need to belong, even though the reason for this emotion differs among group members

3.2 Pull factors

Pull factors are external factors that can influence an individual in such a way that a person wants to adhere to a right-wing extremist ideology. According to Vergani et al (2018), right-wing extremism becomes appealing to some people when an individual consumes certain extremist propaganda (online or offline) or is attracted to the perceived dynamics and morality of a group. These factors are difficult to avoid because they lay claim to your own human desires or can direct your thoughts in a certain way. It is, therefore, to be expected that YouTube also has a certain correlation with pull factors and the tendency towards right-wing extremism. YouTube can be used by right-wing extremists as a way to spread their ideology, create more followers and attract others towards their group.

3.2.1 Group dynamics of right-wing extremists

Certain dynamics in a group can be seen as appealing for young people, making these dynamics function as factors that could gently pull you towards right-wing extremism. Right-wing extremist groups convey the image of strong bonds, something that particular seems to attract respondent 1.

"But you do create a bond. I do have other people in my group of friends. It occurs quite often that when we talk about politics, my friends are interested in my political preferences. Sometimes they say they used to vote for the PVV and are now thinking of voting for an even more conservative party. Only they don't want to mention it out loud. It's like they haven't expressed their political convictions yet, and that's how you grow closer to each other." (Respondent 7)

3.2.2 Consumption of extremist propaganda

Multiple respondents explained that various chat rooms, Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and multiple videogames are used by violent extremist groups, through which millennials can come across radicalizing narratives, expressed and glorified right-wing extremist ideas and identities.

"Sometimes I see things like the Glorification of Nazi Germany pass by on my timeline. I don't mind, but there are a lot of children who can see this. I understand that they can be triggered to watch, as I clicked on it as well." (Respondent 7)

The respondents mention that right-wing extremists link their ideas to the anti-government sentiments and respond to people's uncertainties and emotions. As the attention paid to this subject is continuously growing, so is my doubt as well, says one of the respondents.

What emerges in the interview is that deploying online video content on YouTube on issues regarding the loss of legitimacy from governmental institutions or the scientific substantiation of Covid, are quite common now.

"You can feel on all sides that the role of the media is wobbling, and logically so. Because it is a big scam. We are going against this and trying to convince people to inform themselves in another way. I see and notice that more and more young people do not watch ordinary television anymore. People are choosing to watch all kinds of things online, so I make use of that. We started to advertise and share news-related content on YouTube, Facebook and Twitter because your reach is much bigger and therefore the impact is bigger as well. As a political party, we have to move with the times and respond to trends." (Respondent 5)

A. Consuming video content

Apart from YouTube, video content in itself appears to play a huge role in the relationship between YouTube and right-wing extremism as the impact is large. Many of the respondents see YouTube as a content host and as a great tool to reach millennials.

"We in the NVU (Nederlandse Volksunie) mainly use Facebook and YouTube, which have the largest reach. People nowadays choose to look at all kinds of things on the computer, the impact is large. Every now and then we make video content in which we report on demonstrations or meetings and in which I discuss important news items with my followers. How I see it, is that YouTube is more like a content host. It seems that the demand for right-

wing content is growing and therefore I assume the supply of right-wing video content will grow too. YouTube facilitates this, in my opinion. (Respondent 5)

"YouTube is a fantastic tool. We have just started a forum with a talk show. And that works enormously. So yes, I like it. You also reach the younger generation, because they hardly ever read the newspaper." (respondent 8)

b. YouTube's content barrier.

The content barrier seems to play a role in the relationship between YouTube and tendencies towards right-*wing* extremism. In several interviews it was mentioned that calling content educational, is on the one hand used to attract people who are in search of information and on the other hand a way used by right-wing extremists to permeate YouTube's strict policy on placing far-right content.

"I do see a lot of organisations trying to get around YouTube's algorithm by, for example, stating that it is "purely educational" or including a disclaimer. They refer to other websites or make use of particular symbolic language to still communicate the preferred message. When people are looking online for more information on certain subjects and when a video is marked as educational, people would most likely think it is reliable." (Respondent 7)

3.3 Other findings

Important to note is the upcoming influence of TikTok as a video content host. In the interviews TikTok was mentioned multiple times, because it functions the same way as YouTube, only relatively faster. Although the user base of TikTok is very different, and people too young to vote are heavily over-represented, scholars should pay attention to this trend in the coming years (Lorenz, 2020).

"I use Parler. For events I use Facebook. Tik Tok is also widely used by right-wing platforms and young people are involved. I watch a lot of that. Because yes, a lot of people are "cancelled" on YouTube, so they set up their own websites or go to other platforms." (Respondent 7)

3. Results

This chapter presents the results of the research. Section 3.1 focuses on the results of the push factors: social context, marginalization of political identity and search for meaning and belonging. 3.2 focuses on the results of the pull factors: group dynamics and consumption of extremist propaganda. Finally, this chapter ends with a summary that shows how the results together answer the research question.

4.1 Results push factors

First, the results of the interviews indicate that social context is influencing tendencies towards right-wing extremism. Respondents often refer to the social context of today in which an overall loss of legitimacy in governmental institutions and traditional media is experienced. The many contradictory statements that have been made by the government in the last couple of months, the political mistakes made prior to the elections and the untrustworthiness of media channels are mentioned as being the reason for reinforcement of their political opinions and of their overall feeling of frustration. This is because the respondents see their perceptions and ideas confirmed in the political agenda of right-wing extremist parties. According to the results, YouTube plays a facilitating and mobilizing role in tendencies towards right-wing extremism, as it can fuel the discontent and function as a source of information in a social context where there is a loss of legitimacy in governmental institutions and traditional media. During the interviews, the level of education did not appear to be specifically applicable. Though, lower levels of education are often associated with less sophisticated and more black-and-white worldviews. Having black and white worldviews is common among right-wing extremists, which came out strongly for one of the respondents. Secondly, the interview results show that there is a feeling of political marginalization underlying the political preferences of the respondents. They feel like they cannot express their political ideals on social media since anyone who shares too extreme opinions on YouTube will be removed from the platform. This has reinforced their critical view of the media and their feeling of perceived disadvantage even more. Finally, the human needs for meaning and belonging are in the results identified as motivators for group formation among right-wing extremists. The respondents all appoint to the formation of strong bonds as a motivation to join an online or offline community with like-minded people. The results show that when the respondents were surrounded with other like-minded people, they felt comfortable and heard. This also applies to the groups that are formed and the conversations that are held in the comment area of YouTube. Therefore, YouTube

seems to have a facilitating role in the search for belonging and connection, which in turn act as motivators in tendencies towards a right-wing extremist ideology.

4.2 Results pull factors

First of all, the results of the interviews show that group dynamics are appealing because they contain strong friendships or interconnectivity. Among the respondents, mostly the FVD members seem to present themselves as a strongly formed group. They often refer to their loyal followers and they emphasize the fact that they are a close-knit group that stands together for the same values. Additionally, their ideology often contains norms and values that differ substantially from the ones that are socially accepted. Apparently, this creates an even stronger band. Second, the results show that consuming extremist propaganda can make someone become more interested in right-wing extremist views. The respondents mention that the amount of video content grows by the minute and that the current video content shared by right-extremist parties reflects their political agenda. The content arouses interest because of the volume with which it appears and because of the fact that this content appeals to societies common shared feeling of doubt about public authorities and media. It makes it difficult to not get drawn towards it and right-wing extremists know this. They explain that if they are willing to spread their word, expand their reach and recruit others they can assert the common feeling of dissatisfaction or frustration and use it to their benefit. According to the interviews, YouTube can function as a way to achieve this benefit as consuming right-wing extremist content can stir up certain feelings and ideas in people, motivating them to adopt a more right-wing extremist political viewpoint. The respondents mention that YouTube creates the possibility for anyone (who can produce enough video content) to establish themselves as a major source of media for a fanbase of any size, but they have generally taken a strict stance against extremist's ideas posted on their platforms, which resulted in them having to call their content educational. According to them calling content educational is helping in circumventing barriers, which in turn can makes YouTube a tool for anyone to broadcast their ideas. YouTube has therefore been included as a possible explanatory factor for the tendencies towards right extremism among young people.

The aim of this research was to map out what factors influence tendencies towards right-wing extremism and what the relationship is with YouTube. In summary, the findings of the research give rise to the assumption that social context, political marginalization, need for connection and consumption of extremist propaganda can motivate a millennial into adhering to right-wing

extremism. The reason for this may be that first of all millennials more than other ages desire to belong and meaning in their lives. It makes them vulnerable to factors like social context, political marginalization, need for connection and consumption of extremist propaganda. The interviews reveal that these factors can reinforce feelings of frustration, marginalization, distrust in the government agencies and media channels. Moreover, these factors can prompt a desire for clarity. These are emotions, desires and feelings that, according to this research, are often reflected in the political agenda of more extreme right-wing parties. Therefore, with some caution, it can be argued that these factors can strengthen a person's motivation to adopt a more right-wing extremist ideology.

As for the role of YouTube in relation to these above-mentioned factors, this research indicates that the loss of legitimacy in traditional media makes the respondents want to move away from mainstream media. The respondents look elsewhere for information, for the answers to their questions or to find like-minded people with whom they can connect with. The findings suggest that in general YouTube, in particular, is appealing because of its video content and broad reach. These observations are not such a surprising result, as these are probably true for all social media and all fundamentalistic ideologies. Though, what is unique about YouTube when it comes to right-wing extremism is that the results of this study show that YouTube is a tool that can facilitate tendencies towards right-wing extremism. On the one hand, it can be a tool used to generate attention from millennials and on the other hand, it can be used by millennials for entertainment, as a source of information, connect with others and as a place to express your emotions. In both cases it appears that YouTube has a reinforcing effect on someone's emotions, making it a powerful tool that can unconsciously direct someone towards taking over right-wing extremists views.

"Making use of YouTube will only be beneficial for us at NVU. We either attract more people towards the far right or substantiate the position and perspectives of our party. (Respondent 5)"
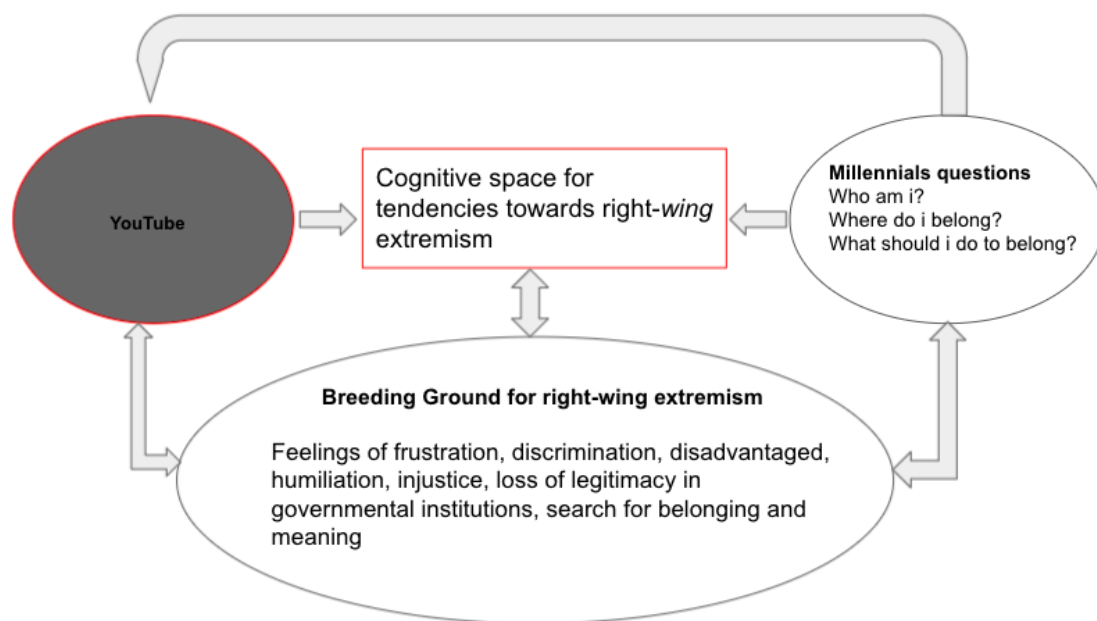
Figure 1. The tendency towards right-wing extremism begins when individuals try to find answers to their unanswered questions in extremist ideologies and make these ideologies their own. These characteristics create a breeding ground and make individuals more susceptible to right-wing extremism. In turn, this can be reinforced by YouTube and extremist propaganda. The arrows indicate the interaction between the factors included in the process of tendencies towards right-wing extremism. YouTube functions as an agent in a vicious circle, where it has the capability to reinforce emotions which in turn function as a breeding ground for right-wing extremism.

<center>**4. Discussion**</center>

The results of the research have contributed to a possible answer to the research question. The aim of this chapter is to relate these results to the previously described literature and to see whether there are similarities or differences. For the sake of overview of the different factors, the discussion is elaborated by sub-paragraphs.

5.1 Social context

The current findings emphasize the influence of social context and related factors. Previous studies have shown the importance of social context in relation to tendencies towards right-wing extremism as well. The literature states that legitimacy in governmental institutions contributes to compliant behaviour, thus to the acceptance of norms and rules. When there is no perceived legitimacy, people naturally will turn against these institutions (Pauwels & Waele, 2014). As right-wing extremists' groups propagate these thoughts and perspectives, people likely see their ideas confirmed in the political agenda of right-wing extremist parties. The results of the research show that this is indeed the case.

Subsequently, frustrations, perceived disadvantages, unreliability and uncertainty can prompt a desire for clarity and straightforward assumptions, as this can make a world more comprehensible (Kruglanski, Pierro, Mannetti, & De Grada, 2006). In terms of social context, the results of the study and the literature are thus similar, confirming the influence of social context on tendencies towards right-wing extremism (AIVD, 2018).

5.2 Marginalization of political identity

The results indicate a perceived marginalization of political identity, only this is explained in terms of "the cancel culture". Compared to the literature, the cancel culture was not mentioned there. Tough the use of this term can be substantiated since this movement can be seen as an explanation for the experienced political marginalization among right-wing extremists (Norris, 2020). The respondents see the cancel culture as the political weapon of the left, which is driving people from their jobs, shaming dissenters, and demanding total submission from anyone who disagrees. According to the respondents, this movement has only contributed to a greater increase of right-wing extremist followers. Norris (2020) describes that nowadays expressions of deeply unpopular and contrarian opinions are silenced in many cultural spaces and social media. This has resulted in limiting freedom of speech, increasing social pressures for ideological conformity, reinforcing group-think bubbles, 'us-them segregation, academic

intolerance and self-censorship (Norris, 2020). The role that YouTube has within this debate concerns the fact that respondents regard YouTube as another culprit when it comes to cancel culture. The platform expands opportunities for collective expression, with the politics of outrage constantly reinforced by filter bubbles and echo chambers (Norris, 2020). YouTube is thought to have amplified the reach, and accelerated the pace, of the cancel culture spreading in our contemporary society (Norris, 2020).

5.3 Search for meaning and belonging

The literature suggests that young people are vulnerable to tendencies towards right-wing extremism, because they have a strong need for recognition and belonging (Pels & De Ruyter, 2012; Wagenaar & Van der Valk, 2010). With some caution, then, it was expected that the results of the study would show that the motivation to join a right-wing extremist movement would be related to the need for recognition and belonging. Our study/interviews confirm this. When you surround yourself with groups that also include right-wing extremists, you become more vulnerable and can gradually adopt more extreme political thoughts (Melzer, 2013). This accounts for online communities too, as the results indicated that comments on YouTube also provide a useful indicator for community building (Munger & Phillips, 2020).

5.4 Group dynamics

Certain online and offline dynamics in a group can be seen as appealing for people when they convey the image of strong bonds. As the study has shown and as confirmed by the literature this connection is often based on the perceived injustice, the culprits who caused this injustice and ideas about how this injustice should be combated (Kruglanski et al., 2014; Simon & Klandermans, 2001). Something that does emerge from the literature, but less from the research is the attractiveness of norms and values that differ substantially from the ones that are socially accepted. The literature suggests that the perspective of right-wing extremists' manifests as a protest against authority and upbringing, which can be appealing to a lot of young people as well (Davydov, 2015). These dynamics are attractive and can influence someone in such a way that he or she becomes vulnerable to the tendency to join extremist groups or take over a more extremist ideology (Kruglanski, 2018). The respondents describe their norms and values, which include resistance against authority as being inherent to their political ideals. Though, the reason that such a group is attractive because they oppose "the normal" was not explicitly stated.

5.5 Consumption of extremist propaganda

The research shows that YouTube and video content in particular is very appealing to right-wing extremists. Videos are incredibly efficient to create and creators can invest significant time into pre-recorded content or simply create content from the comfort of their homes. This is equivalent to what is described in the literature. Right-wing extremists increasingly spend their time online creating websites, promotional videos and podcasts, which is an overall hallmark of fundamentalism (AIVD, 2018) (Lewis, 2018; Tokmetzis, 2019). Additionally, the cost of content creation on YouTube is much lower compared to traditional broadcast television (Munger & Phillips, 2020). According to Ledwich (2019), we should not underestimate the power of video content, which immediately highlights the possible influence of YouTube on individuals who tend to consider YouTube as their source of information or as a go-to-place for like-minded people. The research shows that right-wing extremists prefer to use video content as a medium. A possible explanation for this can be found in the literature. Munger & Phillips (2020) describe that when people start framing communication as a story it can build an emotional connection or induce a certain feeling, which makes it likely that people will keep on consuming this kind of content. Demonstrated by the results and confirmed by the literature, this preference has to do with the fact that right-wing extremists are more sensitive to emotional stimuli. Apparently, they are characterized as individuals who are driven by emotional, relational, and situational dynamics rather than by deep ideological convictions or strategic calculation (Munger & Phillips, 2020). This is also reflected in the results as many answers indicate the presence of high emotions. This immediately describes the role of YouTube as a convenient tool to quickly generate an emotional response and attention and therefore to spread propaganda. Besides the fact that YouTube plays on emotions, the range and the algorithm also play their own role. As described in the results and the literature, one of the most important activities of the right-wing extremist scene in the Netherlands is the spreading of its ideology. YouTube is the most effective way of doing this, because of its recommendation algorithm. This algorithm is responsible for more than 70 per cent of all time spent on the site and therefore contributes to the reinforcement of ideals because you are constantly fed the same kind of content (Munger & Phillips, 2020). Populist parties and far-right leaders make use of this, trying to stir up resentment and energise their followers through video content (Norris, 2020). As YouTube and other social media platforms have generally taken a strict stance against most inflammatory material on their platform, right-wing extremist have tried to find ways to permeate the content barrier. Calling content educational is one of those ways, according to the results of the research (Ledwich & Zeitsev, 2020)

Conclusion

Millennials have an urge for constant exploration of their identity or the search for adventure. They are active users of the Internet, as they use it to make contacts, communicate, consume and broadcast information (Edwards, 2015). This results in the fact that they are inevitably more susceptible to the influence of social context, perceived disadvantage, the supply of extremist propaganda, group dynamics and the need to belong to a group or have meaning that can push or pull someone towards certain political ideologies (Alava et al, 2020; Kruglanski & Webber, 2017; Proulx & Major, 2013). These are push and pull factors that can function as a breeding ground for right-wing extremism, as individuals base their political stance on them and see their political ideals confirmed in the political agenda of right-wing extremists. The role of YouTube in this process is that it acts as a tool that can constantly reinforce the aforementioned factors. YouTube creates ways to be informed, stir up discussions, mobilise groups, spread an ideology and undermine government institutions or media outlets (Ham et al, 2016). In addition, anyone on YouTube can portray themselves as a reliable source of information. In a context where there is a perceived loss of legitimacy in traditional media, this too can steer individuals towards a particular political preference. It is through this intertwined construct of the operation of algorithms, social context, human needs and powerful video propaganda that the possibility for someone to become interested in adhering to a right-wing extremist ideology is enhanced (Kruglanski et al, 2020; Lewis, 2018; Tokmetzis, 2019).

5. Limitations & Future research

6.1 Limitations

I approached the respondents for this study during demonstrations, through social media or e-mail. Since it was difficult during the demonstrations to label people as right-wing extremists, one can question whether everyone actually is a right-wing extremist. This is not necessarily problematic as the results indicate a large presence of right-wing extremist characteristics that could be used in order to answer the research question. There are also some other comments that can be made on this research. One limitation is that the small number of interviews restricts generalisability. To address this to some extent, it was decided to conduct in-depth interviews without really wanting to generalise. Another risk for the generalisability of the results is that the interviews were conducted with more men than women. Due to a time limit on the research, the possibility of putting together a diverse research group was complicated. Though, what emerged in the literature is that within right-wing extremism there are more men than women anyway (Pertijs, 2020). In general, men attach more value to strict maintenance of public order and women tend to look for a more harmonious solution. This is in line with the right-wing extremist ideology (Pertijs, 2020, Gidengil, Hennigar, Blais, & Nevitte, 2005). For follow-up research, it is therefore recommended that the study be extended to include more women.

6.2 Theoretical implications

The most important theoretical implication of this study is that due to the functionality of YouTube the tendency towards right-wing extremism can be reinforced. This study contributes to the existing knowledge of factors that play a role in the process of tendencies towards right-wing extremism in The Netherlands. Since this process involves many different factors within a certain social context, new research will have to be carried out continuously when analysing right-wing extremism. In addition, this information can be used to map out the process of tendencies to adhere to a right-wing extremist ideology. Secondly, the concept of right-wing extremism seems somewhat controversial, as explained by Jupskås en Segers (2020). This is because it concerns a hermeneutical issue, as the prevalence of right-wing extremism depends on whether it is defined in terms of an ideology or in terms of (politically motivated) violent behaviour (Jupskås en Segers, 2020).

6.3 practical implications

The practical implications that arise from the insights of this study concern what can be done concretely to prevent tendencies towards right-wing extremism among young people. It goes without saying that in today's society it is of great importance to intervene in radicalization processes that occur in various forms, both right-wing and left-wing extremism. But this is not easy, because it requires interventions to influence thoughts and behaviour, preventive measures and processes of deradicalization. As right-wing extremists are devoted to their groups for different reasons and agree on a lot of terms, they hardly ever strive for uniformity (Mudde, 2019). This makes it difficult to create the right tools that are applicable to many, so that radicalization can be prevented. Especially in the current digital era where a large amount of content is uploaded every minute and it is almost impossible to work against this mass. Though, the information gathered in this study can be used to develop targeted interventions on understanding the process of radicalizing towards right-wing extremism and in what ways YouTube can play a role in these processes.

Second, activists or politicians do right-wing extremism as terminology and to describe their own perspective, as it is often associated with attitudes and actions that are violent, illegal or stigmatized. Therefore, some questions were asked in a more nuanced way. This might have influenced the research in a way that the results weren't all explicit or straight to the point, which emphasizes the need for objective interpretation. The study has provided an outline for the importance of research on YouTube concerning the political agenda of right-wing extremist parties in The Netherlands. If the role of YouTube within the process of right-wing extremism is not seen as a serious issue, it is possible that it will continue to play a facilitating role for right-wing extremism.

6.4 Avenues of future research

Based on the methodological limitations of this study, three recommendations are made for follow-up research. Because of the limited sample of 10 respondents, it is advisable to increase the number of respondents. In addition, it is recommended to expand the data collection for YouTube analysis in future research. Secondly, as the internet is here to stay and right-wing extremists will keep on posting comments under antisemitic consent about Islam, immigration, feminism and "social justice warriors," the inadvertent spread of radical and right-wing extremist expressions grows by every minute more content is uploaded (Lewis, 2018; Tokmetzis, 2019). Therefore, for further research, it is of great importance to dive even deeper into the interpretation of texts, words and symbols used on platforms like YouTube. In this

way, it will become easier to recognize patterns of right-wing extremism in the digital landscape. In addition to the recommendations discussed above, the results of the current research also raise several new questions that follow-up research could focus on. This study shows, for example, that TikTok is a platform on which right-wing extremists' content is uploaded and visible for especially younger individuals. For follow-up research, it is therefore interesting to research the role of TikTok concerning tendencies towards right-wing extremism among millennials or the younger generation. In addition, the existing literature states that the presence of personal factors can be seen as catalysts for tendencies towards right-wing extremism. The results showed some influence, but not in a way that you can say anything about it. It is therefore recommended that follow-up research examines the influence of personal factors on tendencies towards right-*wing* extremism more profoundly.

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