

**Impacts of radical right groups' movements across social media platforms – a case study of changes to Britain First's visual strategy in its removal from Facebook to Gab**

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## **Abstract**

This article examines the visual strategy of the UK radical right group *Britain First* as they were removed from the world's largest social media platform Facebook and migrated to a less regulated-platform - Gab. Data was collected from each platform over two four month periods in 2017 and 2018, resulting in two corpora comprising 731 Facebook images and 264 Gab images posted through the group's official accounts. Using methods from discourse analysis, the study identifies noticeable visual changes in terms of content, including a shift on Gab towards promoting the group's inner core members (instead of British citizens) and expanding 'othering' practices to Islam broadly (instead of just Islamic extremism). Changes in visual style were also identified, notably from the routine posting of aesthetically polished images on Facebook to a reliance on unedited images on Gab. These findings are interpreted as resulting, in part at least, from the group setting up digital home in a less regulated space. The article concludes with policy recommendations for governments and tech companies regarding the removal of visual radical right online content.

## 1. Introduction

For a number of years governments and law enforcement have been concerned about radical right<sup>1</sup> groups' use of the Internet in general and social media in particular. In the United Kingdom, for example, a 2016 report by the Home Affairs Select Committee, titled *Hate and Abuse on Social Media*, unambiguously stated that “[n]etworks like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube are the vehicle of choice in spreading propaganda and they have become the recruiting platforms for terrorism”.<sup>2</sup> And following US President Donald Trump's retweeting of posts from the radical right group *Britain First* in November 2017, the then UK Prime Minister Theresa May was quick to point out that he had been “wrong” to do so.<sup>3</sup>

Academic interest in radical right groups' usage of social media is also substantial, ranging from research into the type of content that these groups post through to the impact that such content may have upon the groups' ability to increase their supporter base.<sup>4</sup> Recently, scholars have turned their attention to the approaches required from different actors, primarily government and technology companies, to limit these groups' social media presences and influence.<sup>5</sup> This is an important research area given some recent regulatory frameworks and government responses to online extremist content, which have deployed fast and proactive automatic content removal with little consideration for alternative strategies. Examples include Germany's introduction of the Network Enforcement Act (NetzDG) on 1 October 2017 to counter hate speech and fake news on social networks<sup>6</sup> and the European Commission's 2018 Directive<sup>7</sup> on measures to effectively tackle illegal content online.<sup>8</sup>

Against the above backdrop, this article examines the visual content posted by *Britain First* on two very different social media platforms, Facebook and Gab, in periods during 2017 and 2018. In doing so, our work addresses three areas that are comparatively under-researched within the

field of Terrorism Studies, namely: visual (as opposed to textual) content posted by extremist groups, cross-platform content, and extremist groups' engagement in emergent social media platforms. Each of these is separately an under-researched area and almost never addressed in unison as herein. The study of visual – rather than textual (language) – content online by radical right groups is important given both the known influence of images in our (digital) lives and the savvy deployment of visual media by extremist groups' and their supporters, on and off-line.<sup>9</sup> Cross-platform analyses of extremist groups' social media content (visual and textual) can help to reveal how they adapt their communications to contextual factors, as well as perceived target audiences.<sup>10</sup> This may in turn inform empirically derived recommendations regarding different approaches to limiting these groups' content online. And a focus on fringe social media platforms – in our case Gab – is crucial in order to understand how they fit into the online ecosystem of platforms that are used by radical right groups, and additionally, the consequences of pushing these groups off the major platforms and onto these fringe platforms.

As for our focus on *Britain First*, this is justified by its considerable digital influence and its social media trajectory. The group was formed in 2011 by Jim Dowson, a former member of the *British National Party*, as a product of the decline of the *English Defence League*.<sup>11</sup> *Britain First* describes itself as a “patriotic political party and street movement that opposes and fights the many injustices that are routinely inflicted on the British people”.<sup>12</sup> The group's leaders, Paul Golding and Jayda Fransen, state that they are not a racist party, claiming that many of their supporters come from ethnic minority groups. Yet, they also claim that their goals are to protect British and Christian morality, and to preserve the ancestral ethnic and cultural heritage of the UK while supporting the indigenous British people as the demographic majority. On their now defunct Facebook page, *Britain First*'s leaders claimed not to be against individual Muslims – rather, and specifically, against the ideological doctrine and religion of Islam itself.

Following the conviction in March 2018 for hate crimes,<sup>13</sup> the group was banned from Facebook. This is particularly noteworthy given the Facebook influence that *Britain First* had reached at the time: 1.8 million followers and over two million likes, making it the second most liked Facebook page within the politics and society category in the UK, after the royal family.<sup>14</sup> As the old adage claims, however, as soon as something is removed from the Internet, it pops up somewhere else. In the case of *Britain First*, by May 2018 – that is, just under two months after their Facebook ban – the group had created an official page on a social media site that is known for its lack of censorship and which has attracted a large right-wing user-base<sup>15</sup>: Gab. By June 2020, *Britain First's* official Gab page had attracted around 11,100 followers. The personal Gab accounts of the group's two leaders, which were set up in December 2017, have since then attained around 14-15 thousand followers each. This is only a fraction of the reach the group had on Facebook.

Gab was founded in August 2016. According to their own report, by August 2019 Gab had approximately 850,000 users<sup>16</sup> and reached 1.8 million unique visitors in the 30-days preceding the report's publication.<sup>17</sup> With the strap-line "The Free Speech Social Network", Gab describes itself on its homepage as "[a] social network that champions free speech, individual liberty and the free flow of information online. All are welcome."<sup>18</sup> It is not surprising, therefore, that Gab is particularly favoured by public figures associated with the radical right, including Stephen Yaxley-Lennon ('Tommy Robinson'), Milo Yiannopoulos and Paul Joseph Watson.<sup>19</sup> Gab previously (but no longer) stated on its homepage that it is anti-censorship, arguing that "[c]ensorship and closed systems are ultimately about two things: destruction and control." The platform further characterised the goal of censorship as being "to silence the storytellers, the truth seekers, the contrarians, the artists, those who question the status quo." Moreover, Gab has argued that the Internet belongs to "The People", that Gab is for "The People", and that it is powered by "The People".<sup>20</sup>

The aim of this article is to offer new insights into changes and continuities in the visual content used by an influential radical right group – *Britain First* – as it moved from a major (Facebook) to an (at that point in time) emerging (Gab) social media platform. The article is structured as follows. Section 2 offers a review of the literature regarding the use of social media by the radical right and the importance of researching images, particularly on social media. Section 3 provides an overview of the current regulatory framework regarding online extremist content, the relevant policies of both Facebook and Gab, and a discussion of the trade-offs of takedown strategies. Sections 4 and 5 outline the methodology and results respectively. The conclusion offers a series of policy recommendations.

## **2. Context: Use of Social Media by the Radical Right**

Radical right groups have grown a considerable online presence over the last few years across major online platforms, including Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, and alternative, fringe platforms like 8Chan, Voat and Gab.<sup>21</sup> These groups are known to make use of these digital spaces in order to fulfil a number of objectives. For example, online ethnographic research into different radical right online campaigns undertaken by Ebner and Davey<sup>22</sup> identified the following goals: to collaborate, to discuss their worldviews, to try to influence elections, to exploit common grievances, to build bridges both geographically and ideologically and thus penetrate new audiences, and to portray their ideologies in a more mainstream manner and therefore shift the Overton Window. Research has also identified a number of recurrent strategies used by radical right groups to achieve their goals. In the context of Twitter, for instance, Graham<sup>23</sup> found hashtag hijacking to be a salient strategy when trying to reach a wider, more mainstream user-base. A number of sub-strategies were further identified, including “piggybacking” (adding an extremist hashtag to a tweet containing trending hashtags to try to infiltrate trending topics) and “narrating” (using a hashtag that is normally positive to

fit a group's own extremist agenda). Research by Brindle and MacMillan<sup>24</sup> on *Britain First's* use of Facebook found that the group used the strategy of high frequency posting – up to 50 posts per day – to maintain a large online presence. Although most of this content sought to create a fear of 'the other', content about themes unrelated to *Britain First's* radical right ideology was also posted. This may have been aimed at increasing engagement with their content by appearing more 'mainstream'.

The above studies are complemented by a prolific literature into the online discourse of radical right groups in, primarily, Europe,<sup>25</sup> but also Australia and the USA.<sup>26</sup> A seminal work within this literature is Wodak's study of the rise of radical right discourse in Europe since the 1990s.<sup>27</sup> Her analysis pinpoints fear of out-groups as the chief concept around which radical right discourse centres. A number of case studies of radical right groups further nuance our understanding of the argumentative and stylistic features that characterise their discourse of fear. For example, Brindle finds that both elites within and supporters of the radical right *English Defence League* construct their identity as victims of the UK political establishment, ethnic minorities (Muslims) and police authorities.<sup>28</sup> And Nouri and Lorenzo-Dus' comparative analysis of the nature of content posted to Twitter and Facebook by *Britain First* and *Reclaim Australia* identifies more similarities than differences between these two groups. Chief amongst the similarities is the construction of *sui generis* imagined political communities that are bound together through othering of immigrants and Muslims.<sup>29</sup>

## **2.1. The Use of Online Visuals by the Radical Right**

Not unlike other Internet users, the content posted by extremist groups, including radical right groups, is distinctively visual.<sup>30</sup> This is unsurprising given that images, as Hariman and Lucaites argue, are crucial to our ability to communicate social knowledge.<sup>31</sup> Images can have



many interpretations and can remind us of barely conscious, half-forgotten knowledge.<sup>32</sup> In some instances, images can reduce language barriers as there are visual symbols and expressions that are universal.<sup>33</sup> In other cases, visual symbols and expressions are cultural or only meaningful to specific groups in society; being (un)able to recognise and use these can therefore index in-group/out-group membership. Research by Sternberg reveals that people tend to have a better memory for images than text.<sup>34</sup> Wanta and Roark, for instance, found that news-consumers could recall news articles that contained images better than those that did not.<sup>35</sup> Another study found that news-consumers, when given the option to read articles about relevant social issues, would choose to read articles that featured images over those that did not, with images depicting victimization being read for the longest periods of time.<sup>36</sup> Images have also been found to be both cognitively easier to process and more likely to be interpreted as true than text,<sup>37</sup> along with being shown to produce powerful and lasting emotional responses.<sup>38</sup>

The Internet has increased the presence of visuals in our everyday lives, particularly their increasing and widespread circulation on social media.<sup>39</sup> Drainville argues that images and their associated text on social media platforms enable a deeper understanding about their authors' motivations for posting certain content. Images on social media can also provide helpful metadata, which makes them a rich source for empirical analysis.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, it is important to note that nowadays images can be – and are regularly – edited in many ways. Many social media images are carefully edited to match exactly how those posting them wish them to be perceived. Additionally, images on social media are frequently not produced by those posting them, but have been sourced from elsewhere on the Internet, oftentimes re-posted out of context and at different time and places from when they claim to have been taken. All these technical affordances enhance the potential of images to fulfil a number of strategic goals,

something that, as this article will show, radical right groups are rather adept at exploiting through their social media communications.

Despite the salience and strategic importance of images in radical right groups' messaging, which dates back to long before the creation of the Internet,<sup>41</sup> research into their visual content online is comparatively under-developed but with some exceptions.<sup>42</sup> Doerr applied a multi-modal analysis to online cartoon posters of three European radical right groups that were posted to webpages and blogs.<sup>43</sup> The study found that these cartoons included familiar racist symbols, despite insisting that there were no racist intentions. The study also found that the cartoons were able to communicate the groups' messages visually in a way that they would not be able to do with politically correct language. Karl collected and compared the Facebook posts of various far right groups in Hungary.<sup>44</sup> The posts included text, videos, pictures and graphics. A greater number of likes and shares tended to be amassed by groups with a more sophisticated visual posting style, ensuring that their posts were easy to understand, and tending to be both self-referential and tailored towards a young, tech-savvy audience. Forchtner and Kølvrå collected images posted on Facebook in 2015 by radical right activist groups in Germany.<sup>45</sup> This research revealed that the groups' use of images was multi-faceted and complex. The posts included both authoritarian (focusing on ideology) and intimate (focusing on relationships – both with leader figures and the opposite sex) images. Prisk undertook a study of memes posted to the image board 4Chan.<sup>46</sup> The findings revealed that the memes had a high level of “hyperreality”, that is to say, their content was completely divorced from, and in denial of, reality. Additionally, the memes were so steeped in irony that it was often difficult to know what they actually meant. Finally, Zannettou *et al* also studied memes.<sup>47</sup> Theirs was a large-scale cross-platform study across Twitter, Reddit, 4Chan and Gab that involved the analysis of 160M images using a novel image processing pipeline. The findings revealed that the meme ecosystem under analysis was complex with distinct differences in the memes posted across

the different platforms. For example, the memes on Twitter and Reddit tended to be “fun” memes, whilst Gab and 4Chan contained racist or political memes. Zannettou *et al*'s finding that images differ greatly across platforms highlights the need for further studies in this area. This is particularly important on newer, smaller platforms that are exploited by extremists yet lack the expertise and resources to know how to respond. A greater focus is thus needed on how the findings of these studies can be used to guide and shape future and existing policies across platforms, to which our work contributes.

### **3. Social Media Regulation of Extremist Content**

Social media platforms are exempt from legal liability for the content that their users post on their platforms, in Europe by the e-Commerce Directive 2000/31/EC and in the United States by Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act. However, there is an expectation that social media platforms should proactively take responsibility for use of their services by extremist groups. In the UK, for instance, the last few years have seen social media platforms come under pressure from government to “do more” to tackle extremists on their platforms, to do it “faster” and “automatically”.<sup>48</sup> The European Commission has been on a similar trajectory over the last four to five years regarding extremist content, encouraging platforms to take proactive measures that are proportionate to the level of risk, to implement automated detection tools, and to remove content within very short time windows of notification of the content's availability on their services.<sup>49</sup>

Social media platforms started to more obviously react to these pressures in 2016. Although the companies already had “rules”, “community standards” or “community guidelines” in place, they began to put greater efforts and resources into implementing more stringent policies around hateful and extremist-related content. In 2016, the major social media companies

(Facebook, Microsoft, Twitter and YouTube) and a few others (such as Instagram and Snapchat) signed the EU Commission Code of Conduct on Hate Speech, which is a voluntary instrument that aims to ensure the companies put in place a clear and effective process to review and respond to notifications of illegal hate speech on their platforms. If users fail to comply with a platform's rules, then action will be taken against that user, group or content. This can be done in the form of adding warnings to content, demonetizing content, removing the ability to comment on that content, removing the content from being recommended, removing the content completely or suspending the page or account. However, there is a significant lack of consistency across social media platforms when it comes to stakeholder, including regulatory body, definitions of extremist content as well as policies and technology for removing such content.

In the case of Facebook, for instance, the company has “community standards” with a “Dangerous individuals and organisations” section in which they state that they do not host organisations or individuals that engage in “terrorist activity” or “organised hate”, and that any content that expresses support or praise for either will result in removal.<sup>50</sup> They define a hate organisation as “any association of three or more people that is organised under a name, sign or symbol and that has an ideology, statements or physical actions that attack individuals based on characteristics, including race, religious affiliation, nationality, ethnicity, gender, sex, sexual orientation, serious disease or disability.” Facebook uses a combination of artificial intelligence technology and human moderators for this work, and has banned several groups and individuals for violating this policy, including the *British National Party* and *English Defence League* in April 2019.<sup>51</sup>

Gab also have regulatory policies in place.<sup>52</sup> The “Prohibited Uses” section of its terms of service has a broad statement that users should not use the platform “in any way that would violate any applicable federal, state, or local law of the United States of America...and is not

protected by the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution...”. Further, the website states that users may not “engage in any other conduct which, as determined by us, may result in the physical harm or offline harassment of the Company, individual users of the Website or any other person (e.g., “doxing”), or expose them to liability.” Examples provided in the site’s terms of service include that users cannot “unlawfully threaten” or “incite imminent lawless action”.<sup>53</sup> However, Gab’s website also states that, unlike most of the major platforms, they “do not review material before it is posted on the Website and cannot ensure prompt removal of unlawful material after it has been posted.”<sup>54</sup> Gab’s policies have been under close scrutiny since the hosting provider, GoDaddy, refused to continue providing its services to the platform after it was revealed that the 2018 Pittsburgh Tree of Life Synagogue attacker had an account on Gab and had posted anti-Semitic content prior to the attack.<sup>55</sup>

Extremist groups often use multiple platforms, albeit not homogeneously.<sup>56</sup> Consequently, it has been recommended that regulatory interventions be targeted at platforms based on how they are being exploited specifically (e.g., to host content, to signpost content elsewhere online, etc.), as opposed to applying a one-size-fits-all approach. It should be noted, however, that much of this research has focused on jihadist content. There is a need, therefore, for extending this research to radical right groups’ online content. Moreover, despite pressure from governments’ and the introduction of regulatory interventions, research highlights that extremist content removal can come with trade-offs that policymakers should not be quick to dismiss.<sup>57</sup> Clifford and Powell argue that removing groups from a platform can reduce the group’s ability and opportunity to get their message out to a mass audience and recruit. However, it can also push the group and their supporters to “obscure and opaque platforms”, where it is more difficult for law enforcement to monitor their activity.<sup>58</sup> Alexander and Braniff argue that removals are reactive and feasible only for the best-resourced platforms.<sup>59</sup> They also argue that poorly timed takedowns can prevent law enforcement and intelligence services from

identifying behaviours that could lead to arrests and prosecutions. They argue furthermore that content removal stands in the way of efforts to target potential extremists with counter-speech and supportive programmes and interventions. Alexander and Braniff thus suggest that a marginalization strategy may be more suited to some platforms than content removal, whereby instead of removing content, strategies are introduced to mitigate the effects of content and reduce the connectivity between extremist networks and the general public. The authors give an example based on their research on so-called Islamic State, of “thwarting hashtag-hijacking campaigns or blocking known extremists from entering new networks” and “de-prioritising extremist rhetoric relative to content absent of those narratives”.

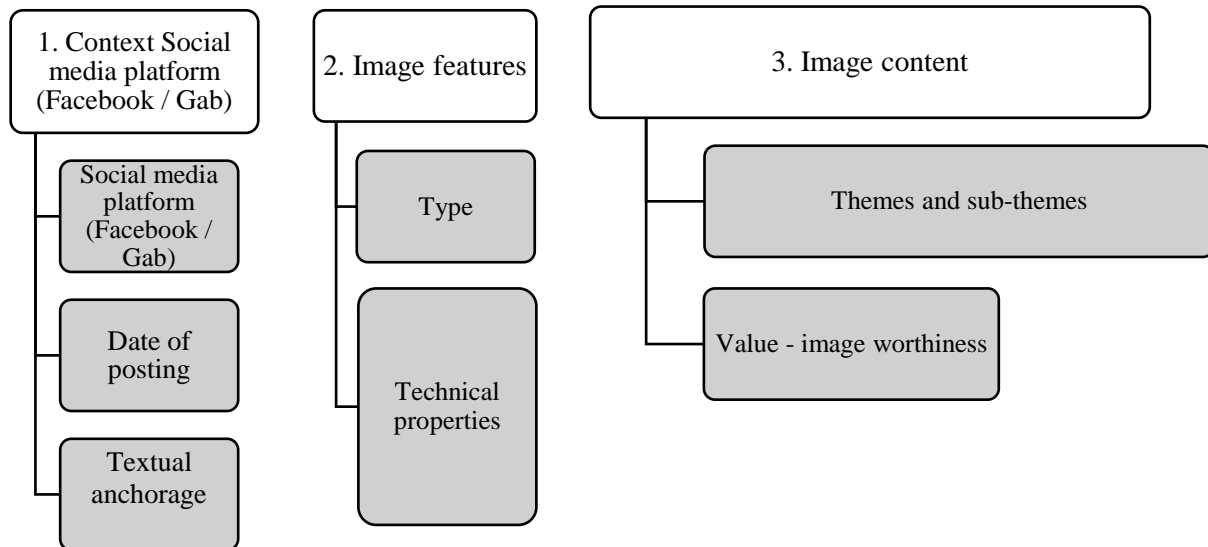
Finally, it is important to note that many of the policies that social media companies have in place to remove content and accounts are centred around “violent”, “dangerous” or “inciting” content. A study researching jihadist content found that the so-called Islamic State had and for some time avoided removal on the major platforms by posting non-violent, non-violating news items that supported their stance, and URLs signposting users to large quantities of content (that would have violated the policies) hosted on less regulated platforms.<sup>60</sup> Similarly, a report by the EU Internet Referral Unit revealed that non-violent material is important to propaganda efforts, can be just as persuasive as violent content, and is often more resilient to removal because it is less graphic.<sup>61</sup> Further, because non-violent content is often allowed to remain, it can often be considered to be true. This is also a problem with the radical right since much of the content that they post, particularly hate speech, is described as increasingly subtle, rhetoric using coded forms of racism and sophisticated rhetorical strategies, such as metaphors, irony and sarcasm.<sup>62</sup> It is often neither overly graphic/gory nor does it directly incite violence. This means that such content can sometimes end up having a more mainstream appeal<sup>63</sup> and potentially remain online for long periods of time. Further research is therefore needed to understand the strategies and elements of non-violent (radical-right) content online, in order to

make recommendations to social media companies on how this type of content, which could still be persuasive, should be addressed in their policies. In the remainder of this article we discuss our empirically-driven contribution to this research agenda.

#### **4. Methodology**

Our dataset comprises 995 images collected from the official *Britain First* pages on two social media platforms: Facebook (n= 731) and Gab (n= 264) during two, four-month periods, January to April 2017 and May to August 2018. A four-month duration for data collection was selected in order to generate sufficient data for manual, qualitative analysis (see below). As for the two data collection points, period 1 coincided with the start of a broader research project into radical right groups' use of social media; period 2 was selected because it enabled comparative analysis once *Britain First* was banned from Facebook in March 2018 and subsequently moved to Gab. The dataset only includes images that were posted *by* the group on their own official pages. It does not include any images posted *to* the group's pages by other users or followers. This dataset was coded in three stages, as detailed in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Coding Procedure and Scheme



Stage 1 entailed noting contextual features, namely the social media platform on which it was posted, the date of posting, and whether or not the image had any accompanying textual anchorage – either in the form of in-image text and/or super-imposed caption. Stage 2 entailed noting image type, for example painting, drawing, photograph, and so forth; and technical properties, such as use of camera angle (i.e., high-, low-, eye-level) and distance (i.e., long-range, mid-range, close-up), use of colour, and other photographic techniques (e.g. lenses aperture), as deemed relevant to the visual communication of meaning. Stage 3 consisted of coding the content of each image, specifically its element(s) in focus, for instance social actors (e.g., group leaders or children) or inanimate objects (e.g., flags or buildings). In the case of social actors, we also coded the kind of activities in which they appeared engaged (e.g., talking, crying, etc.), their facial expressions and body language. This provided the basis for inductively deriving a set of themes, and sub-themes, as described in the results section, and analysing the public circulation (posting) value of each of these themes. This final analytic stage, which we



applied to a random sample of 50 images for each of the four main themes derived from the image content analysis, was conducted by adapting an established framework for identifying the visual and linguistic properties that deem a text suitable for and worthy of mass public distribution.

The framework was originally devised by Bednarek and Caple<sup>64</sup> for the analysis of news (print and online), and hence for identifying and interpreting news values / newsworthiness.<sup>65</sup> It has also been successfully applied to the analysis of text and images deemed worthy of inclusion in online propaganda by extremist groups.<sup>66</sup> Bednarek and Caple’s framework is thus used in our work because it provides a tested toolkit of visual (content / technical) properties that construe a particular multimodal message (image and, if relevant, accompanying text) in a particular evaluative light (e.g., as negative, as impactful, as coming from authority (elite) sources, etc.) and therefore as promoting certain value-laden viewpoints and contributing to the construction of particular ideologies.<sup>67</sup> The coding scheme for our image worthiness analysis is shown in Table 1.<sup>68</sup> All of the images were independently coded by this article’s authors with differences in interpretation regarding the value/s realised via specific photographic devices resolved through discussion.

Table 1: Photographic devices for the construction of worthiness (values), adapted from Bednarek and Caple<sup>69</sup> and Caple.<sup>70</sup>

<b>Photographic device</b>	<b>Values</b>	<b>Photographic techniques used to realise value</b>
Evaluation	Prominence	Showing elements like microphones / cameras, media scrum, being flanked by entourage;

	(indicate high status of individuals/organisations/nations)	Images depicting easily recognisable key figures, people in uniform or with other regalia of officialdom; low camera angle indicating status of participant in image
	Negativity (the negative aspects of an event)	Images of negative events and their effects (e.g., disaster, accident, injured, arrests, etc.) High camera angle, putting viewer in dominant position
	Positivity (the positive aspects of an event)	Images referring to positive emotions, attitudes and behaviours (e.g., joy, celebration)
	Proximity (the geographical and / or cultural nearness of an event)	Images of landmarks, natural features or cultural symbols
	Timeliness (the relevance of a story in terms of time)	Indicated through season/cultural artefacts/signage
Intensification	Superlativeness (the maximised or intensified aspects of an event)	Repetition of key elements (e.g., many boats, protest signs, police shields) Extreme emotions in participants Placement of elements of different sizes together
	Superlativeness/ Negativity / Impact	Camera movement and blurring, combined with camera-people moving around, running, etc.

Comparison	Superlativeness / Novelty	Placement of elements of different sizes next to each other; use of specific lens and angle settings to exaggerate or condense differences
Emotion	Impact (the effects or consequences of an event)	Images showing the after-effects (often negative) of events (e.g., scenes of destruction)  Emotions caused by an event
	Novelty (the unexpected)	Depictions of people being shocked/surprised  Juxtaposition of elements in the frame that create a stark contrast
	Personalisation (the personal or 'human interest' aspects of an event)	Images of individuals, especially when using close-up and showing an emotional response, when not acting in a professional role
Consonance (the stereotypical aspect of an event)		Stereotypical imagery of event/person/country
Aesthetics		Well-composed/aesthetically pleasing images; use of variations in shutter speed, aperture, colour, contrast, lighting effects, time of the day

Three clarifications are in order. Firstly, there is no one-to-one relationship between photographic techniques and the values that they construe. Rather, certain photographic techniques can construe more than one value simultaneously, which may explain why they feature frequently in a given context. Close-up shots of facial emotions such as anger or

sadness, for example, contribute significantly to values of negativity and impact. Secondly, the value of “aesthetics” refers to images that are “well balanced in their compositional configurations”,<sup>71</sup> regardless of the content being either positive (e.g. celebratory) or negative (e.g. disturbing). Thirdly, image content significantly influences the range of values that may be construed, and *vice versa*. For instance, images of street riots and values of superlativeness (they contain many individuals), negativity (rioting entails violence) and impact (rioting leads to disturbance) tend to go hand in hand. Similarly, images of political leaders tend to align to the value of prominence, except when these images depict leaders ‘off-duty’. In these cases, the images tend to construe the value of personalisation. In our study, images linked to sub-themes such as ‘Anti-Islam’ and ‘British nationalism’, for example, drew primarily upon values of negativity and proximity, respectively.

## 5. Results

### 5.1 Image type and features (themes and sub-themes)

One of the main findings of our analysis of image type across the two platforms was a clear preference for seemingly un-edited photographs with textual anchorage when *Britain First* were forced from a mainstream (Facebook) to a fringe (Gab) social media platform. Evidence of this is displayed in Tables 2 and 3, which show the decrease of photoshop techniques and the increase of textual anchorage in Gab when compared to Facebook.

Table 2: Image type across social media platform

Image Type	Facebook	Gab
Photograph	574 (74.8%)	244 (92.4%)
Photoshopped	97 (13.3%)	12 (4.5%)

Painting	18 (2.5%)	0 (0%)
Graphic	35 (4.8%)	5 (1.9%)
Text	6 (0.8%)	0 (0%)
Drawing	1 (0.1%)	1 (0.4%)
Cartoon	0 (0%)	2 (0.8%)

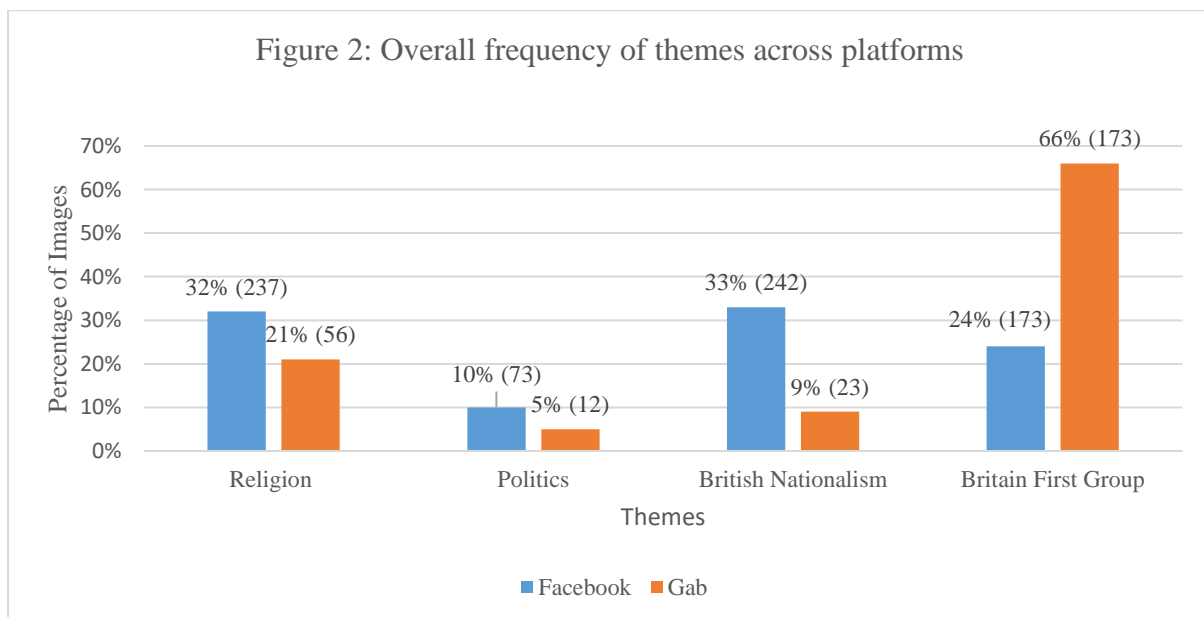
Table 3 – Use of textual anchorage across social media platform

	In-image text	Caption Text
Facebook	556 (76%)	647 (89%)
Gab	145 (55%)	263 (99.6%)

The increase in images that contained in-image or caption text in Gab, when compared to Facebook, may be related to the simultaneous decrease in the use of photoshopping and other forms of image editing. Many of the images on Gab depicted *Britain First*'s members and leaders flyering in the street, without use of any obvious aesthetics features, such as colour filters. The photography appeared to have been taken, spontaneously, by group members themselves. Use of captions and in-image text would have aesthetically clashed with the images' 'natural' look, which may explain why textual anchorage was less frequently used overall in the Gab dataset. In contrast, many of the images in the Facebook dataset appeared not to have been produced by them, but sourced from elsewhere on the Internet to fit the group's agenda. These images tended to be aesthetically sophisticated, for instance use of block, bold red colour background in an image of two foregrounded females wearing a burka. They also often included impactful messaging (e.g. "ban the burka") via in-text or captions.

As for the themes covered through the images, our analysis revealed that the same four themes were used across the two social media platforms, namely: religion, politics, British nationalism, and *Britain First* (group). Religion refers to images that included any kind of faith-related artefacts or symbols, such as the Christian cross, the Muslim crescent and star, and so forth. Politics refers to images that had a political focus, ranging from political figures and to political events / issues. British nationalism covers images that depicted positively a wide range of British features, from British people and landscapes to culture, traditions (e.g. ‘national’ dishes) and institutions. *Britain First* (group) refers to images depicting the behaviours and membership of the radical right group itself, as well as the advertising for the group’s merchandise. The overall frequency of use (in percentage and raw numbers) of these four main themes was however different across the two platforms, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2 Overall frequency of themes across platforms



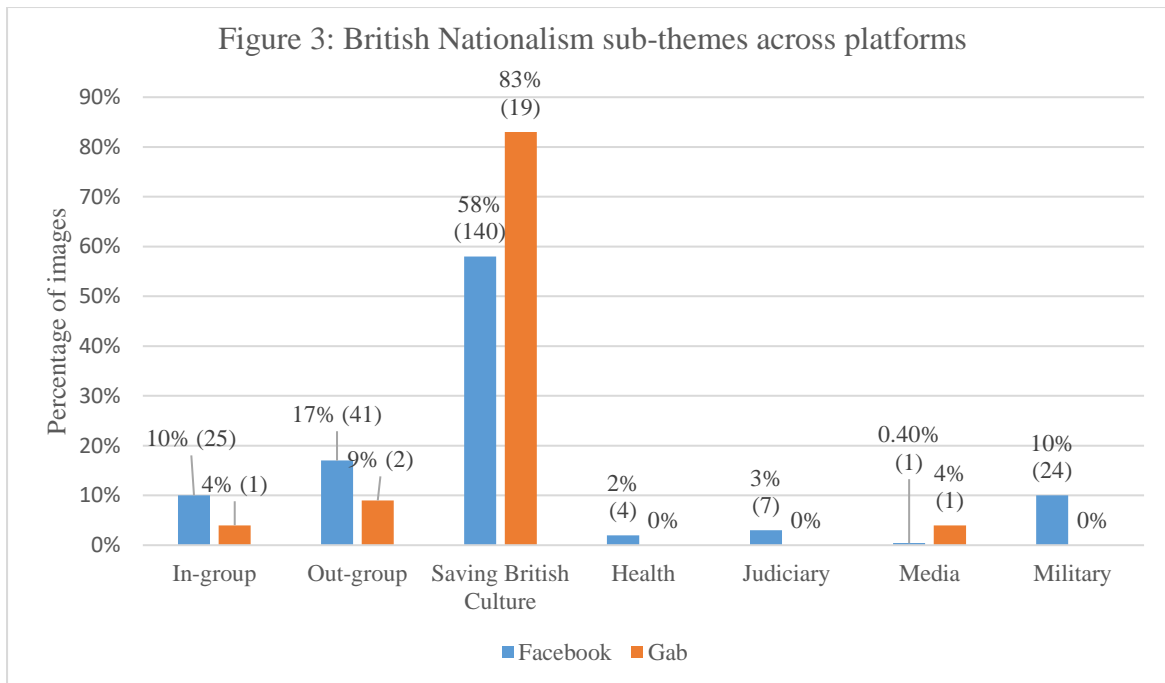
As Figure 2 shows, the theme with the lowest proportion of images across both platforms was politics (Facebook 10%; Gab 5%). As for the theme with the highest proportion of images, this

was markedly different for each platform: in the Facebook dataset it was British nationalism (33%), whereas in the Gab dataset it was *Britain First* (group) (66%). In both cases, these themes were concerned with the construction of the in-group (see Section 5.1.1). Religion remained the second most frequent theme across both platforms (Facebook: 32%; Gab: 21%). The higher percentage of religion-themed images on Facebook than Gab needs to be considered alongside the surge in *Britain First* (group) on Gab. As the group sought to establish themselves on a new platform, they visually focused on themselves, that is, on in-group identity construction and branding. This was likely a strategic means to attract their supporters to their new Gab page and thus supported a recruitment goal. Religion-themed images primarily focused on the out-group (see Section 5.1.2). These images became less important to *Britain First* at the time the group moved to a smaller and emergent social media platform.

#### 5.1.1 *Constructing the in-group: From British nationalism to Britain First as a group*

While operating on a large, mainstream social media platform, i.e. Facebook, *Britain First* constructed its own identity as a (potential / actual) in-group broadly, that is, in terms of British nationalism. As Figure 2 shows, this theme covered a wide range of sub-themes, which included many different groups of individuals and symbols. ‘Health’ images were concerned with the NHS, ‘Judiciary’ images with the police and capital punishment, ‘Monarchy’ with the British Royal Family, and ‘Media’ with the BBC. The ‘In-group’ images portrayed vulnerable British people such as the elderly or homeless ex-veterans, whereas the ‘Out-group’ images portrayed immigrants, refugees or foreign aid receivers. ‘Saving British culture’ images contained images of British food, traditions and landscapes, often accompanied with the text “like and share if you love British...”. These images not only portrayed Britishness positively, but also as something that required protecting from the out-group: in-group members were visually represented as vulnerable and ‘losing out’ to out-group members, for example, in terms of access to British welfare resources.

Figure 3 British Nationalism sub-themes across platforms



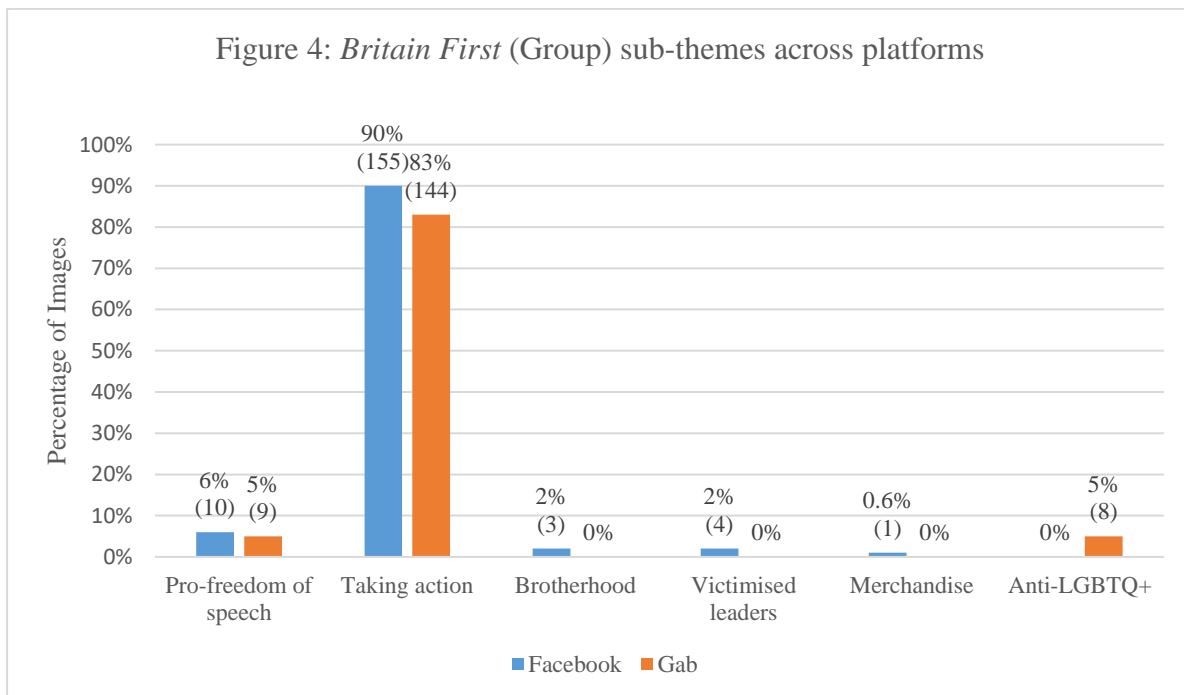
For comparative purposes, Figure 3 also shows the frequency of use of images within the British Nationalism sub-themes across both platforms. However, the theme was overall more popular on Facebook than it was on Gab, where it was only the ‘Saving British Culture’ sub-theme that had more than a couple of images (n=19). The largest sub-theme for British Nationalism in the Facebook dataset was also ‘Saving British Culture’. The overall visual construction of the in-group therefore was that of a broad and positive, but victimised (by the out-group), entity.

Visual construction of the in-group changed markedly on *Britain First*’s move to Gab. Rather than focus on Britishness as a general and varied concept, visual attention moved to an inner core of individuals (i.e., group leaders and members), who were actively involved in supporting the group. Six sub-themes contributed to this narrower focus, as shown in Figure 4. They were: ‘Pro-freedom of speech’ (i.e., images were explicit in their anti-censorship messages); ‘Taking action’ (i.e., images included both leaders and members of Britain First flyering or protesting for the group); ‘Brotherhood’ (i.e., images showed the bond that existed within the group



members); ‘Victimised leader’ (i.e., images portrayed the leaders of the group as victims of the system:the police, the criminal justice system, and so forth); ‘Merchandise’ (images showed merchandise for sale); and ‘anti-LGBTQ+’ (i.e., images displayed opposition to the LGBTQ+ community).

Figure 4 Britain First (Group) sub-themes across platforms

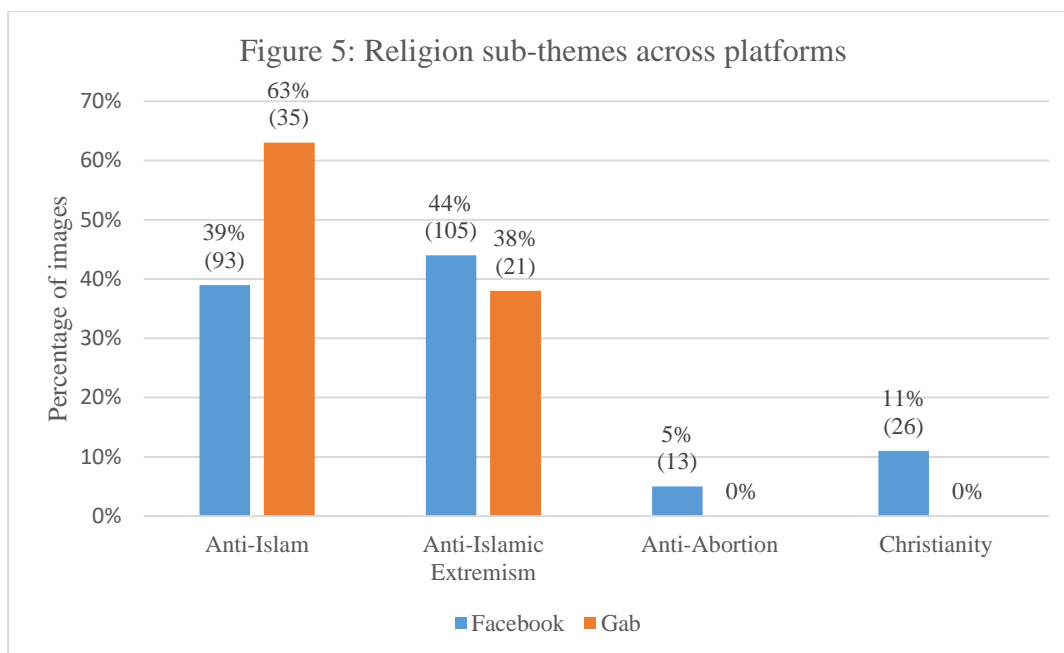


As in Figure 3, for comparative purposes Figure 4 shows the frequency of use of each sub-theme across the two social media platforms. The results are proportionally very similar. However, as the overall number of images is different, the *Britain First* (group) figures for the Facebook dataset are significantly less representative of general trends for the whole dataset (see Figure 2). The largest *Britain First* (group) sub-theme on both platforms was ‘Taking action’. These images consistently depicted group members and leaders engaged in flyering and demonstrating on the streets in order to progress their cause. In visual terms, the activities were therefore depicted as supporting the group’s most important mission.

### 5.1.2 Constructing the out-group: Othering Islam

We have seen in Section 5.1.1 that, in terms of in-group visual construction, the move from Facebook to Gab meant that *Britain First* focused on its own inner-core membership, thus reducing the visual salience of British citizens – and other British features and practices – in their images. Our analysis also reveals a marked shift in visual focus when *Britain First* moved from Facebook to Gab as regards construction of the out-group, specifically Islam / Muslims. Although, as noted earlier (see Figure 2), the religion theme remained fairly constant in terms of overall frequency of use across the two platforms, there were important differences in how the theme was visually rendered.

Figure 5 shows the frequency of use of the different sub-themes linked to religion across the two social media platforms. There were four sub-themes in the Facebook dataset: ‘Anti-Islam’, ‘Anti-Islamic Extremism’, ‘Anti-Abortion’ and ‘Christianity’. The latter two, which did not feature in Gab, respectively comprised biblical paintings accompanied by biblical quotes, and photoshopped and graphics images with in-text / captions that explicitly positioned anti-abortion views. The two other sub-themes, ‘Anti-Islam’ and ‘Anti-Islamic Extremism’, were used across the two social media platforms. ‘Anti-Islam’ images concerned a wide range of Islamic practices, and included images supporting the banning of mosques, burkas, and halal products. ‘Anti-Islamic Extremism’ images specifically targeted the practices of Islamist extremist groups, particularly the so-called Islamic State.



Whereas the frequency of the two main religion sub-themes was relatively balanced in the Facebook dataset (‘Anti-Islamic’: 39%; ‘Anti-Islamic Extremism’: 44%), there were many more ‘Anti-Islamic’ (63%) than ‘Anti-Islamic Extremism’ (38%) images in the Gab dataset. This creates an interesting contrast in terms of in/out group visual identity construction on *Britain First’s* move from Facebook to Gab: a focus on the inner-core as far as the in-group was concerned (Figure 2 and Figure 4) and, simultaneously, a broadening of the out-group, from ‘Anti-Islamic extremists’ to ‘Anti-Islam’ (Figure 5). As both sub-themes clearly constructed ‘anti’ –othering – identities for Islam, this change also marks a shift towards hate discourse as an acceptable position for the group. In other words, it was not ‘just’ those engaged in extreme religious practices (e.g., so-called Islamic State), but anyone involved in a different (here Islam) religious practice that became visually the focus of othering as *Britain First* moved from a mainstream (Facebook) to a fringe (Gab) platform. This may be to some extent expected given Gab’s take on the concept of censorship, as discussed in Section 3. Gab will allow any content to remain on its site unless the content is prohibited under the US First Amendment. This allows groups such as *Britain First* to push boundaries that they could not push on the major platforms without fear of removal. Our results thus provide empirical evidence that,

where regulation is known to be missing, the spread of othering practices targeting non-violent others (e.g., followers of the Islamic faith) will easily and quickly develop.

## 5.2 Image Worthiness / Values

In order to further our image content analysis, we examined the values that the images constructed, focusing on 50 randomly selected images for the two most frequent themes per platform. The total number of images examined in this analytic stage was therefore 200; the results are shown in Table 4.

Table 4 – Values attached to visual themes deployed by *Britain First* on Facebook and Gab

Value	Theme – Social Media Platform			
	British Nationalism - Facebook	Religion – Facebook	<i>Britain First</i> (Group) - Gab	Religion – Gab
Aesthetics	42% (n=21)	82% (n=41)	2% (n=1)	18% (n=9)
Consonance	54% (n=27)	64% (n=32)	2% (n=1)	26% (n=13)
Eliteness	42% (n=21)	58% (n=29)	66% (n=33)	56% (n=28)
Impact	30% (n=15)	54% (n=27)	16% (n=8)	42% (n=21)
Negativity	34% (n=17)	74% (n=37)	14% (n=7)	94% (n=47)
Positivity	50% (n=25)	52% (n=26)	66% (n=33)	22% (n=11)
Personalisation	28% (n=14)	40% (n=20)	74% (n=37)	32% (n=16)
Proximity	84% (n=42)	70% (n=35)	90% (n=45)	94% (n=47)
Superlativeness	38% (n=19)	16% (n=8)	8% (n=4)	2% (n=1)
Timeliness	14% (n=7)	0% (n=0)	14% (n=7)	0% (n=0)

Two main trends emerge from the figures in Table 4. The first one concerns the type of values that *Britain First* (de)-prioritised when visually constructing in- and out- groups on social media. Across all the four themes selected, the frequency of use of certain values decreased on Gab in comparison to Facebook, namely aesthetics, consonance, impact and superlativeness. In contrast, the frequency of use of the proximity value increased on Gab, when compared to Facebook, across all four themes. The remaining three values – negativity, positivity and personalisation – increased or decreased in their frequency of use on Gab, in comparison to Facebook, depending on the actual theme.

The change of social media platform thus resulted in a change in visual style, from aesthetically polished images on Facebook to unedited images on Gab. The latter created a ‘natural’ visual style, especially as it was combined with an increase in the use of the value of proximity, which included images of familiar scenes, often British streets with *Britain First* members flying. This combination on Gab of low aesthetics and high proximity strengthened the impression of *Britain First* being a group that is close to and familiar with its target audience. A strategic focus on naturalness / un-polished visuals is associated with attempts at constructing authenticity and truth about the author of the images, as it transmits an ‘unsophisticated’ look that seems to resonate with cultural constructions of ordinariness or laity.<sup>72</sup> In our Gab data, this look also entailed de-emphasising values such as impact and superlativeness. On Facebook, these values were often constructed via editing images and adding captions and / or in-text that purposefully constructed – rather than simply depicted - the huge scale of a given issue, for example, grooming gangs, the building of mosques or the wearing of the burka. The decrease in the use of the consonance value on Gab, when compared with Facebook, owed to the high presence on Facebook of stereotypes, either linked to the in-group (e.g., British landscape, the Queen and British castles) or the out-group (e.g. Muslim females wearing burkas).

The second trend emerging from the values analysis relates to the visual realisation of specific themes. Regarding the religion theme, which was broadly similar in terms of frequency of use across the two platforms, the move to Gab resulted in a marked decrease in the use of aesthetics (from 82% to 18%) and consonance (from 64% to 26%). It also led to a noticeable decrease in the use of superlativeness (from 16% to 2%) and impact (54% to 42%), as well as an increase in proximity (from 70% to 94%). Actual percentage figures apart, these changes were similarly experienced by the other themes as they were used on Facebook and then Gab. Specific to the religion theme were changes to the values of negativity (from 74% to 94%), positivity (52% to 22%) and personalisation (from 40% to 32%). Negativity was used in depiction of the out-group, that is, Islam / Muslims; positivity was deployed when portraying the in-group in religious terms, that is, Christianity / Christian British citizens. These changes all concern values linked to the emotional realm (unlike, for example, superlativeness, which has to do with 'objective' or rational concepts linked to size / numbers). As such, the changes targeted internal processes that are known to be particularly effective at persuasion.<sup>73</sup>

As for themes linked to the in-group, as we have seen, the move to Gab brought about a shift in focus away from Britishness (British nationalism theme) and towards in-groupness (*Britain First* - group). In terms of the actual values that were aligned to this shift, these showed a marked emphasis on constructing an 'ideal' identity. Three values increased their frequency of use: eliteness (from 42% to 66%), positivity (from 50% to 66%) and, especially, personalisation (from 28% to 74%). There was also a concomitant decrease in negativity – which in relation to British nationalism (Facebook) concerned victimisation of the in-group (British nation) and in relation to *Britain First* - group (Gab) depicted Islam as a whole. Visually, therefore, the shift to Gab resulted in both exaltation of the inner core of the group and an increase in hate messaging towards the out-group (Islam), even though no explicitly violent content was shared. Although negativity – and hence othering of Muslims / Islam –

increased on Gab, the content of the images remained non-violent. In fact, none of the images in our dataset were explicitly violent and / or directly called for violence.

## **6. Conclusion and recommendations**

Several notable findings emerged from this study. The first is that the removal of *Britain First* from Facebook and their migration to Gab resulted in noticeable visual changes in terms of content and style. Content-related changes concerned two themes: British nationalism and religion. British nationalism was the most frequent theme of the images in the Facebook dataset. These images focused on everything that was perceived to be great about being British and also reminded *Britain First*'s followers of the threat the out-group posed to this ideal concept of Britishness. As such, and as per research findings concerning textual content by radical right groups online<sup>74</sup>, this online visual content contributed to create polarised, imagined political communities bounded together through fear and exclusion. The most popular theme changed to *Britain First* (group) on Gab. Although this theme also portrayed the in-group positively, rather than focus on Britishness as a general concept, the visual attention moved to the inner core of the group: the group leaders and members that were actively involved in supporting *Britain First* and progressing the cause of removing the threat of the out-group.

As for the religion theme, on Facebook, this focused both on portraying the in-group positively (i.e. 'Christianity', 'Anti-abortion') and the out-group negatively (i.e. 'Anti-Islam' 'Anti-Islamic extremism'). On Gab, the focus was solely on the out-group with the main emphasis on the 'Anti-Islam' sub-theme. This marks a shift towards hate discourse as an acceptable position as it relies on expanding othering' practices from Islamic extremism to Islam as a whole. This may not be surprising when considering the stance of their new platform, Gab,

holds on free speech. This finding therefore offers empirical evidence that absence of regulation does help to spread othering practices that target non-violent others. It also highlights the problem with regulatory frameworks, such as Germany's NetzDG, that focus on major platforms.

Regarding changes in visual style, our analysis revealed a change from aesthetically polished images on Facebook to unedited images on Gab. This more 'natural' visual style on Gab, primarily created via a combination of low aesthetics and high proximity values, strengthened the impression of *Britain First* being a group that is close and familiar to its target recruitment audience and may aim to resonate with cultural notions of laity. This focus on 'ordinary people' recruitment on Gab, which was evident from the change in themes and values, makes sense given the huge hit that the group took when they were removed from Facebook (and Twitter) and their follower count went, within two months, from millions on Facebook to only thousands on Gab.

The above findings need to be considered in light of study limitations, one of them being not knowing who, within the *Britain First* account, had responsibility for posting on the group's official social media pages after the migration from Facebook to Gab. Given that *Britain First* leaders Paul Golding and Jayda Fransen were arrested shortly before the period of time where data was collected on Gab,<sup>75</sup> a change in posting authorship is likely to have taken place. It is therefore possible that some of the changes identified in our analysis may be linked to individual preferences, rather than group ideology (even if individuals' posting was still undertaken on behalf of the group).

The change in the number of followers from Facebook to Gab provides empirical evidence that removal of content posted by extremist groups, in our case the radical right group *Britain First*, is effective in one sense. Despite the risk of groups migrating to less censored spaces, the loss



of millions of followers suggests that major companies should continue to seek to remove groups that violate their policies. This prevents the groups from using the major platforms as gateways to signpost their followers elsewhere and reduces the pool of potential recruits. Major platforms should also continue to share best practices regarding removal and monitoring of extreme content and resources with newer, smaller platforms. A challenge in this respect is that not all platforms – Gab being a case in point – want to participate in the sharing of best practices regarding the removal and monitoring of such groups. This is a problem in light of some of our research findings, which show a shift towards hate discourse developing, and becoming seemingly more acceptable, in these new, less regulated spaces. Scholars have yet to answer the question of whether it is more dangerous to have millions of users (of which the level of loyalty and commitment most likely varies greatly) exposed to extreme content or to have a significantly smaller number of super loyal followers exposed to extreme content. Until this question is given more empirical attention, this paper recommends that

- 1) Major companies continue to remove extremist groups who violate their policies;
- 2) More governmental effort be put in to incentivise platforms that are ‘unwilling’ to address extremist content to do so. In this regard, it is vital that future regulatory frameworks are not limited to the major platforms or platforms with a specific number of users which allow platforms like Gab to slip through the regulatory cracks (such as NetzDG). Smaller, newer, alternative, and fringe platforms need to be held to the same level of responsibility as the major platforms as they are just as useful to these groups’ overarching ecosystem.
- 3) Careful consideration be given within policy-making to the type of content posted online by the radical right, since this content is often non-violent.
- 4) Any policies or regulations be thoroughly informed by how groups used different platforms, for as this study shows, the strategies of the radical right are not necessarily

homogenous across platforms. Blanket content removal for all platforms may therefore be inappropriate. There are a number of situations in which marginalization may be better suited. The first is specifically in cases where platforms do not immediately have the resources to hire the hundreds of human moderators that are required for the appeal processes (that are necessary) when AI is used for blanket removals of violating content (e.g., JustPaste.it). Marginalisation includes a range of strategies that Tech Against Terrorism and GIFT could assist these types of platforms with (discussed in Alexander and Braniff<sup>76</sup>). Marginalization may also be useful in cases where takedowns result in a loss of intelligence for intelligence services. When content is blocked at the upload stage or removed very quickly it may not allow human moderators, intelligence services or law enforcement any opportunity to be alerted or respond to it. This is only ideal however for platforms that are less likely to have innocent users easily stumbling upon the content. Further to this, marginalization could be useful in cases of borderline content or non-violent content that does not clearly violate platforms' policies but is potentially harmful and therefore requires some response. This is particularly so to try to avoid the potential displacement effect of groups migrating to less regulated spaces (as was the case in this research) that resulted in the circulated content becoming more extreme. Finally, marginalization may be useful as a starting point for platforms that are wary of gaining a reputation for being 'anti-free-speech' and are not willing to readily implement more interventionist approaches.

- 5) On-going digital literacy programmes be created and regularly reviewed that explain how alternative, fringe platforms differ from mainstream platforms, and their associated risks.

- 6) A wider array of punitive measures be developed for extreme cases whereby platforms fail to comply with regulatory frameworks, for example, cases where companies refuse to remove dangerous and inciting content.

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<sup>1</sup> As per other scholarship (see e.g. Lorraine Bowman-Grieve, “Exploring “Stormfront”: A virtual community of the radical right,” *Studies in conflict & terrorism*, 32(11), (2009): 989-1007; Ryan Scrivens, Garth Davies, and Richard Frank. "Measuring the evolution of radical right-wing posting behaviors online." *Deviant Behavior* (2018): 1-17., ‘radical right’ is used in this article as an umbrella term for extreme and far right groups. In our paper, we draw upon Mudde’s definition of populist radical right groups as those that “share a core ideology that combines (at least) three features: nativism, authoritarianism, and populism” (Cas Mudde, "Populist radical right parties in Europe today." *Transformations of Populism in Europe and the Americas: History and Recent Trends*. London: Bloomsbury (2015): 295-307. We also draw upon Berger’s definition of extremism as “the belief that an in-group’s success or survival can never be separated from the need for hostile action against an out-group” (J.M. Berger, *Extremism*. MIT Press, 2018, p.44).

<sup>2</sup> House of Commons Home Affairs Committee, ‘Radicalisation: The Counter-Narrative and Identifying the Tipping Point’, HC 135, p. 4, < <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmhaff/135/135.pdf> > accessed 21 November 2019

<sup>3</sup> BBC News, ‘Donald Trump Prepared to Apologise for Britain First Retweets’, *BBC* < <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-42829555> >, accessed 21 November 2019

<sup>4</sup> Maura Conway, Ryan Scrivens, and Logan McNair. "Right-wing extremists’ persistent online presence: history and contemporary trends." ICCT Policy Brief (2019): 1-24; Ryan Scrivens

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and Maura Conway. "The roles of "old" and "new" media tools and technologies in the facilitation of violent extremism and terrorism." (2020): 286-309; Jacob Davey, and Julia Ebner. "The fringe insurgency. Connectivity, convergence and mainstreaming of the extreme right." *Institute for Strategic Dialogue* (<http://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/The-Fringe-Insurgency-221017.pdf>) (2017).

<sup>5</sup> Bharath Ganesh and Bright, Jonathan, Extreme Digital Speech: Contexts, Responses and Solutions. *VOX-Pol Report*, (2020)

<sup>6</sup><[https://www.bmjv.de/SharedDocs/Gesetzgebungsverfahren/Dokumente/NetzDG\\_engl.pdf?\\_\\_blob=publicationFile&v=2](https://www.bmjv.de/SharedDocs/Gesetzgebungsverfahren/Dokumente/NetzDG_engl.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=2) >, accessed 15 December 2019.

<sup>7</sup><<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H0334&from=FR> >, accessed 15 December 2019.

<sup>8</sup> Broadly similar, too, are Australia's Abhorrent Violent Material Bill accessed via [https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Bills\\_Legislation/Bills\\_Search\\_Results/Result?bId=s1201](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Bills_Legislation/Bills_Search_Results/Result?bId=s1201); France's Law Proposition to fight against the hatred on the internet accessed via [http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dyn/15/textes/115b1785\\_proposition-loi](http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dyn/15/textes/115b1785_proposition-loi); and Films, Videos and Publications Classification (Urgent Interim Classification of Publications and Prevention of Online Harm) Amendment Bill in New Zealand accessed via <http://legislation.govt.nz/bill/government/2020/0268/3.0/LMS294551.html>

<sup>9</sup> Maura Conway, "We need a 'visual turn' in violent online extremism research", *VOX-Pol Blog*. (2019) (< <https://www.voxpol.eu/we-need-a-visual-turn-in-violent-online-extremism-research/> >, accessed 15 December 2019.

<sup>10</sup> Maura Conway, Determining the role of the internet in violent extremism and terrorism: Six suggestions for progressing research. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, (2017). 40(1), 77-98.

<sup>11</sup> Matthew Collins, "The truth about Britain First – The one-man band with a knack for Facebook," *The Guardian*. (2015) < <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/feb/25/truth-britain-first-facebook-far-right-bnp> >, accessed 15 December 2019

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<sup>12</sup> Britain First's Mission Statement was available at < <https://www.britainfirst.org/mission-statement> > but has now been removed.

<sup>13</sup> Alex Hern and Kevin Rawlinson, 'Facebook Bans Britain First and its Leaders', *The Guardian*, (2018) < <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/mar/14/facebook-bans-britain-first-and-its-leaders> >, accessed 21 November 2019

<sup>14</sup> Patrick Hermansson, 'Online Hate: The Year In Numbers', *Hope Not Hate*, undated, < <https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/research/state-of-hate-2018/> >, accessed 21 November 2019

<sup>15</sup> Savvas Zannettou, Barry Bradlyn, Emiliano De Cristofaro, Haewoon Kwak, Michael Sirivianos, Gianluca Stringini, and Jeremy Blackburn. "What is gab: A bastion of free speech or an alt-right echo chamber." In *Companion Proceedings of the The Web Conference 2018*, pp. 1007-1014. 2018.; Lucas Lima, Julio CS Reis, Philipe Melo, Fabricio Murai, Leandro Araujo, Pantelis Vikatos, and Fabricio Benevenuto. "Inside the right-leaning echo chambers: Characterizing gab, an unmoderated social system." In *2018 IEEE/ACM International Conference on Advances in Social Networks Analysis and Mining (ASONAM)*, pp. 515-522. IEEE, 2018.; David Gilbert, Here's how big far right social network Gab has actually become. *Vice*. (2019) Accessed 26 June 2020 via [https://www.vice.com/en\\_uk/article/pa7dwg/heres-how-big-far-right-social-network-gab-has-actually-become](https://www.vice.com/en_uk/article/pa7dwg/heres-how-big-far-right-social-network-gab-has-actually-become); Jane Coaston, Gab, the social media platform favoured by the alleged Pittsburgh shooter, explained. *Vox*. (2018) Accessed 26 June 2020 via <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2018/10/29/18033006/gab-social-media-anti-semitism-neo-nazis-twitter-facebook>

<sup>16</sup> Kelly Weill, "Gab in full meltdown, and founder Andrew Torba blames the 'Deep State'". *The Daily Beast*. (2019) < <https://www.thedailybeast.com/gab-is-in-full-meltdown-and-founder-andrew-torba-blames-the-deep-state> > accessed 23 October 2019

<sup>17</sup> David Gilbert, "Here's how big far right social network Gab has actually become," *Vice*. (2019) < [https://www.vice.com/en\\_uk/article/pa7dwg/heres-how-big-far-right-social-network-gab-has-actually-become](https://www.vice.com/en_uk/article/pa7dwg/heres-how-big-far-right-social-network-gab-has-actually-become) > accessed 22 October 2019

<sup>18</sup> Gab Homepage < [gab.com](http://gab.com) >, accessed 15 December 2019.

<sup>19</sup> Tom Bennett, "Gab is the alt-right social network racists are moving to". *Vice*. (2018) < [https://www.vice.com/en\\_uk/article/ywxb95/gab-is-the-alt-right-social-network-racists-are-moving-to](https://www.vice.com/en_uk/article/ywxb95/gab-is-the-alt-right-social-network-racists-are-moving-to) >, accessed 15 December 2019

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<sup>20</sup> Andrew Torba, 'Building a People First Community, a Response to Mark Zuckerberg', *Medium*, (2017). This article is no longer available as Medium has since removed all of Gab's articles from their site.

<sup>21</sup> Ryan Scrivens, and Maura Conway. "The roles of 'old' and 'new' media tools and technologies in the facilitation of violent extremism and terrorism." In *The Human Factor of Cybercrime*. Taylor & Francis, 2019.

<sup>22</sup> Jacob Davey and Julia Ebner. "The fringe insurgency. Connectivity, convergence and mainstreaming of the extreme right." *Institute for Strategic Dialogue* (<http://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/The-Fringe-Insurgency-221017.pdf>) (2017).

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