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D4.9 Social Media Extremist Textual Analysis Report

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Abstract	D4.9 presents two qualitative case studies of online communities discussing (1) immigration on Reddit's subreddit r/changemyview and (2) a QAnon-adjacent conspiracy theory among Danish Facebook users, respectively. The deliverable conducts close readings, or textual analysis, of these communities to investigate how users navigate the space between open, democratic debate and online harassment and symbolic violence. The first case study focusses on reasoning in online discussion forums, while the second case study analyses how in-groups and out-groups are the result of collaborative efforts in these spaces. Case study 1 investigates 150 comments on Reddit, while case study 2 investigates 370 comments from a Danish Facebook community. Brought together, these two case studies reveal how digital affordances and digital practices shape online discourse and how these dynamics may challenge democratic conversations. The deliverable captures the spectrum of online debates from democratic discourse to symbolic violence and threats of violence.
Key Words	Reddit, Facebook, immigration, conspiracy theories, reasoning, violence, online communities

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Executive Summary

D4.9 presents the work conducted in T4.5 and is the collaboration between UCPH and UCLanCY. It investigates two qualitative case studies of online communities discussing (1) immigration on reddit and (2) a QAnon-adjacent conspiracy theory on Facebook, respectively. The deliverable conducts close readings, or textual analysis, of these communities to investigate how users navigate the space between open, democratic debate and online harassment and symbolic violence. The first study is analyzed with a focus on reasoning, while the second study analyses how in-groups and out-groups are the result of collaborative efforts in these spaces. Study 1 investigates 150 comments on Reddit, while study 2 investigates 370 comments from a Danish Facebook community. Brought together, these two case studies reveal dynamics in what might shape online discourse and how these dynamics may challenge democratic conversations. The second part of the analysis shows how mundane social media practices known from non-extreme domains like online fandom, including memetic communication and forensic participation, are also characteristic of more extreme and conspiratorial communities such as the present case study.

1.0 Introduction

D4.9 is the final report on textual analysis of extremist content on social media building on the work in T4.5. D4.9 is the result of a collaboration between UCLanCY (lead of task 4.5) and UCPH (deliverable lead). It is the follow up report to the progress report D4.8 (M24), which presented the second case study on Facebook conspiracy theories, while this report includes two case studies to capture a broad spectrum of interaction and conversation in online communities. The aim of T4.5 is to develop a broader understanding of how misinformation and conspiracy beliefs and reasoning are tied with digital communities and participatory practices. In this report, we have focussed on (1) the attractiveness of conspiracy theories and misinformation for participants on social media, (2) reasoning in comment threads, and (3) how the playful practices characterising these communities may escalate into harassment and endorsement of violence. Specifically, we investigate a case study of 150 reddit comments on a thread in the subreddit r/changemyview. The thread poses a question about immigration in Europe, bringing in different perspectives to challenges and possibilities in this domain. Across both datasets, discussions were dominated by concerns about integration, crime, and broader ideological interpretations of immigration, but the emphasis differed between conversational levels (i.e., direct responses to the original post versus replies within the threaded discussion beneath the top comment). In the direct responses to the original post, users focused more on mixed views about crime and racism, practical barriers to integration, and structural explanations such as poverty or colonial history. In contrast,

the reply-thread dataset was more polarized and ideologically charged, with stronger emphasis on religion as a barrier, conspiratorial or extreme claims, and debates about whether current immigration differs from the past. Overall, while both datasets reflected contested and multifaceted views, the threaded replies showed deeper value conflicts and more radicalized narratives than the initial comment layer.

Second, we investigate Danish case of a QAnon-related conspiracy theory about a Danish Children's TV program, *Uncle Shrimp* (DR, 2013-) suggesting that the main actor and the Danish Broadcasting Company are intentionally using the program to groom Danish children so they will be susceptible to sexual abuse. The report is based on a content analysis of 6 posts made by two conspiracy influencers and 370 comments posted by their followers below (N=370) and a qualitative textual analysis of six types of comments from the sample, which were classified according to Berger's (2018) theory of group extremism: (1) comments which establish crisis narratives, (2) engage in in-group negotiations, (3) define out-group threats, (4) suggest solutions to the perceived crisis/threat, and (5) comments that disrupt coalescing narratives within the community.

The analysis shows that the majority of participants are women, and that affective socialization appears to be a key driver of engagement, as evidenced by expressions of both outrage, affection, and even humor, which are mixed together to form an environment of violent hostility. Finally, the analysis shows how mundane social media practices known from non-extreme domains like online fandom, including memetic communication and forensic participation, are also characteristic of more extreme and conspiratorial communities such as the present case study.

2.0 Case study 1: Immigration debates on r/changemyview, Reddit

2.1 Theory

The aim of T4.5, and D4.9 is to gain a better understanding of the types and dynamics of user-produced content on social media platforms that might promote misinformation and extremist narratives. The primary objective is to inform the development of counter-narratives and inoculation strategies as well as the MOOC under Work Package 6, with the broader goal of equipping citizens to resist extremist beliefs online.

Task 4.5 contributes to a theoretical framework that captures how social media users engage in practices ranging from less-harmful gossip and misunderstandings to conspiracy theories and extremist rhetoric. These practices can take place on a spectrum, from playful or nonsensical content to calls for violence or anti-democratic actions. The report seeks to examine the features that align with extremist discourse, and the reasoning strategies users employ to persuade others within online environments. To meet these objectives, the current report combines two analytical approaches: thematic analysis and reasoning coding, applied to the same datasets. The data were drawn from a single post on the r/ChangeMyView subreddit^[1], a platform explicitly designed for users to engage in civil argumentation and potentially revise their views. The analysis focused on two subsets of the discussion:

- a) 150 comments responding directly to the Original Post (OP), and
- b) the first 150 replies to the top-rated comment beneath the OP, in order to capture the branching, conversational dynamics typical of Reddit.

Social media brings abundant opportunities for society and decision-making; however, it also poses major challenges. As Baram-Tsabari and Schejter (2019) describe, social media acts as a double-edged sword which either boosts or minimizes knowledge among public users. Platforms such as X,^{[21](#)} Facebook, YouTube, and Reddit have been linked with the proliferation of misinformation and conspiratorial content, which can reinforce polarization among users (Cinelli et al., 2022). The link between social media use and belief in conspiracy theories has been established numerous times: The unregulated social media and lack of sufficient media literacy education (Iordanou & Antoniou, 2023) have as a result the dissemination of conspiracy beliefs in COVID-19 (Allington et al., 2020), with COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy and belief in conspiracies (Jennings et al., 2021), and belief in climate change conspiracies (Tam & Chan, 2023) to name a few examples. The lack of accountability on social media further exacerbates ethical concerns and violations of fundamental democratic principles and human rights (Christodoulou & Iordanou, 2021).

To combat the proliferation of extremist content online, counter narratives, embedded in personal and cultural worldviews, might reduce belief in conspiracy theories

and misinformation (Lazić & Žeželj, 2021). Therefore, it is imperative to understand what narratives are circulating online and where the difference between extremist and less harmful content lies. Reddit was chosen as the social media platform since it facilitates discussions among users in various threads. More specifically, the r/ChangeMyView (CMV) subreddit explicitly invites its users to engage in conversation with one another, making it a prime candidate for reasoning analysis.

The first case study is structured as follows: First, we will briefly discuss other relevant literature regarding online conspiracy discourse and reasoning. Second, we will provide the methodology of our analyses, including information about the post and comments, data collection process, and process of the analyses. The results of the report are split into two parts – the first focusing on the thematic analysis and the second on the reasoning analysis. Lastly, we will discuss the results of both parts.

2.1.1 Reasoning in Online Misinformation and Extremist Content

Social media has become an integral part of people's daily lives, influencing how individuals interpret and engage with social and political issues (Theocharis et al., 2023). Simultaneously, these platforms have facilitated the spread of negative language and polarizing rhetoric, which can contribute to the normalization of extremist discourse (Hiaeshutter-Rice & Hawkins, 2022). Among these platforms, Reddit has received growing attention as a platform in academic research (Medvedev et al., 2019). The social media platform, created in 2005, describes itself as a platform with various communities

to “discuss, learn, debate, support and connect with people who share your interests” (Reddit Rules, n.d.). Yet, partially due to historically relaxed content policies, Reddit has earned a reputation for toxic content and communities (Gaudette et al., 2021; Massanari, 2017). This highlights why it is important to consider what kind of and how extremist content users engage with on Reddit. Additionally, Reddit also provides unique opportunities to analyze individuals’ reasoning strategies while engaging with others on polarizing topics.

Öcal et al. (2021) examined how Reddit users structure their reasoning in r/ChangeMyView (CMV), a subreddit designed for civil debate. Using a manual coding scheme, they identified claims, rationales, and supporting statements (i.e., personal experience, external sources, or definitions), revealing that users often combine multiple forms of justification, blending personal experiences with references to external sources. While their analysis provides insight into how individuals construct and support their views in an explicitly deliberative context, it focuses solely on original posts (OPs), excluding responses or back-and-forth interactions. As such, the study overlooks the dynamic, dialogic nature of argumentation that unfolds through user engagement. Felton et al. (2024), on the other hand, used a mixed-methods approach to examine how discourse norms influence evidentiary practices and interaction patterns in Reddit discussions about COVID-19. They combined content analysis of subreddit rules with quantitative measures of user engagement, including dialogicity (i.e., the degree of back-and-forth in comment threads) and sourcing behaviors. Their results showed that subreddits with stricter community guidelines fostered more sustained and evidence-

based discussions. However, their analysis focused primarily on structural features of interaction and did not closely examine how users reason through or justify claims within discussions.

Similarly, Klein et al. (2019) combined computational textual analysis with social network mapping to investigate how Reddit users' linguistic patterns and social environments predicted future engagement with conspiracy forums. Using the Empath tool, they quantified users' language across psychological categories linked to conspiracy belief, and applied community detection algorithms to track subreddit engagement patterns. Their analysis revealed that distinct linguistic markers, such as heightened focus on power and distrust, appeared in users' comments even before their involvement in r/conspiracy, and that exposure to particular subreddit clusters (e.g., political and "toxic" communities) increased the likelihood of conspiracy engagement. By coding both language and social pathways, this study showed how conspiracy theory adoption is shaped by an interaction between linguistic style and community exposure, rather than inherent individual traits alone.

2.1.2 Existing Approaches to Online Discourse

Research on extremist content online has used a range of approaches to capture what kind of content presents itself and how users engage with it. Chen et al. (2023), for example, combined dictionary-based textual analysis with manual coding to investigate the diffusion of national identity language in COVID-19 conspiracy discussions on Weibo.^[3] By identifying patterns of in-group favoritism and out-group hostility, they demonstrated that early nationalistic language could trigger similar rhetoric downstream—a contagion effect. In contrast, De Wildt and Aupers (2024) adopted a mixed ethnographic and computational approach to Reddit’s r/conspiracy, combining six months of digital observation with iterative thematic coding and large-scale text analysis using the 4CAT toolkit. Their findings challenged assumptions that conspiracy spaces are ideologically uniform or solely radicalizing. Instead, they identified three epistemic positions—belief, doubt, and play—highlighting the ambivalence and heterogeneity of user engagement. While this study offers a rich account of epistemological orientations within conspiracy theory discourse, it does not provide a fine-grained analysis of how users justify specific claims within discussions.

The challenges and various approaches of existing literature highlight the role of mixed methods in understanding extremist content on social media.

The present report explores themes and reasoning strategies emerging from one post on Reddit on immigration to Europe. The analysis centers on a thread from the *r/ChangeMyView* subreddit titled *CMV: Immigration to Europe from Africa and the*

Middle East will completely ruin the safety of most European cities. The dataset includes a total of 300 Reddit comments; 150 direct replies to the original post and 150 replies to the first comment beneath that post. The report's objective was to identify the themes emerging from the comments and discussions under the Reddit post on safety issues related to immigration into Europe – exploring differences between less harmful themes and extremer ones.

2.2 Method

The current report examines a reddit post in the r/changemyview subreddit to investigate how users engage with claims about immigration. Two approaches examined the same datasets: a thematic analysis and a reasoning analysis. In total, 300 comments ($n = 150$ direct replies to the original post, $n = 150$ replies to the first comment beneath the post) were analyzed. This section outlines the sample selection, data collection procedures, and provides an overview of the analytic strategies.

2.2.1 Sample

Both analytic approaches are examining the same datasets. The sample laid out in this section applies to both of them. The post titled “*CMV: Immigration to Europe from Africa and the Middle East will completely ruin the safety of most European cities*” on the r/changemyview subreddit was discovered and examined for its content. It reads as follows:

Many European countries particularly ones in the EU are bringing in more migrants be it economic migrants or refugees from much African and Middle

Eastern countries. European countries such as Spain, Italy and others that are geographical entry points have difficulty securing their borders which only encourages more illegal immigration.

Unfortunately, these migrants oftentimes do not respect the local culture and commit crime at all much higher rate than their native European counterparts.

They also tend to come to Europe with little to no marketable skill so they stay relatively poor, form their own enclaves, displacing the native French, Spanish, Italian communities and replace them with dangerous ghettos. Since they are often stuck in these poor ghettos they do not assimilate to the local cultures even from one generation to the next meaning that all the problems the first generation brought will only be passed down to the second generation.

This only exacerbates the issue which even right now is a complete crisis. To be frank even just looking at the situation now, I have no idea how any natives of Spain, Italy, Germany etc could possibly be living decent and safe lives much less feel confident that their own children will be able to enjoy anything resembling safe urban/suburban life in the majority of European metros.

The post, which was originally posted on July 10th, 2024, contains a total of $N = 150$ replies to the original post (OP), and various sub-discussions. The comments of dataset 2 were first manually captured with screenshots on March 7th, 2025, while dataset 1 was manually exported into an excel file NCapture tool on April 7th. Dataset 2 is based on the

top comment (by *Glory2Hypnotoad*), which has the most upvotes^[4] and replies. It reads as follows:

So the obvious first question is, what's the difference this time compared to all the times in the past people made almost word for word the same argument about every immigrant group imaginable, like the Irish and the Italians?

Edit: I'm getting way too many responses to address individually, so I just want to point out that half are insistent that it's different this time because Muslims are uniquely incompatible while the other half are saying that the people fearmongering about the Irish and Italians were right.

2.2.1 Coding process

The researchers pursue two thematic analyses based on a discussion thread from the r/ChangeMyView subreddit

https://www.reddit.com/r/changemyview/comments/1e07xbp/cmv_immigration_to_europe_from_africa_and_the/.

The first thematic analysis focused on the 150 direct replies (standalone comments) to the original post. The second thematic analysis focused on the first 120 direct replies to the first comment under the original post. The second dataset was expected to have a more dialogic orientation, as it contained a higher occurrence of branching dialogue structures, with replies extending from previous replies in a tree-like fashion, compared to the

responses observed in the first dataset, reflecting more interactive and conversational dynamics.

For organizational purposes, the 150 direct replies were entered into a spreadsheet, referred to as Datasheet 1, while the first 120 replies to the first comment were entered into a separate spreadsheet, referred to as Dataset 2. Each comment was coded according to its point of reference, a variable included in the spreadsheets. For all comments in Dataset 1, the point of reference was labelled as “direct reply to original post,” whereas for all comments in Dataset 2, the point of reference was labelled as “reply to first comment.”

The reply structure of the comments was analyzed to explore dialogic interactions. To better understand which specific comments triggered branching dialogue, a separate Excel spreadsheet was created that summarized the structure of replies for each comment (see Appendix). In this table, each comment was assigned a thread identifier (e.g., D1, D2), indicating the discussion thread it belonged to. Reply depth was coded by levels (L1, L2, L3, etc.), with the number in brackets indicating the number of replies or sub-replies at that level.

For example, in the case of user Glory2Hypnotoad (D1), the branching dialogue structure extended across eight reply levels.

At level 1 (L1), the comment received 30 direct replies;
at level 2 (L2), 112 of these replies generated further responses;
at level 3 (L3), 64 of those responses triggered third-level replies;

at level 4 (L4), 29 additional responses were recorded;

at level 5 (L5), 16 further replies emerged;

at level 6 (L6), there were 8 replies;

at level 7 (L7), 3 replies;

and at level 8 (L8), 1 reply was recorded.

An additional column was included to calculate the overall number of replies generated by each initial comment by summing all direct and indirect replies across all levels.

In the case of Glory2Hypnotoad, the overall reply count was calculated as $30 + 112 + 64 + 29 + 16 + 8 + 3 + 1 = 263$.

The table below displays the top comments that elicited the most branching (i.e., high numbers of replies at single level, e.g., 173 replies at L2) and threading (i.e., long chains of nested replies such as L1 -> L2 -> L3...). These comments prompted extensive engagement either by triggering deep reply chains or by attracting a high volume of responses within fewer levels.

username	Comment	Number of levels elicited	Total reply count
Glory2Hypnotoad	"So the obvious first question is, what's the difference this time compared to all the times in the past people made almost word for word the same argument about every	8	263

	immigrant group imaginable, like the Irish and the Italians? Edit: I'm getting way too many responses to address individually, so I just want to point out that half are insistent that it's different this time because Muslims are uniquely incompatible while the other half are saying that the people fearmongering about the Irish and Italians were right."		
Top_Eggplant_6463	Probably shouldn't have destroyed Gaddafi's Lybia. What goes around comes around kid	6	12
OmniManDidNothngWrng	Maybe countries in Europe should stop declaring war on each and other countries for 5 minutes before they start blaming immigrants for violence.	6	8
videoninja	I'm curious as to what is your stake in this view? Like why do you want to believe this type of immigration is not bad to begin with?	11	35
MisterViic	As an european, I agree and know for a fact that this is a problem in certain places. This will create a lot of social tension for the foreseeable future. This is a self made issue, nonetheless. It's the cost we pay for not having 2 children per female. The production machine and economic growth must be fed with young and cheap people. The socialist services and pension system pyramid scheme must be supported by immigrants. "La dolce vita" mentality has a price and this is it.	5	5
LucidLeviathan	That's exactly what they said about those groups. Job postings in the US were rife with "NO IRISH!" all over them because the Irish	2	175

	were deemed too foreign to be allowed to assimilate in the US.		
nXtXhXn	While immigration may have some negative outcomes on Europe let's not forget why these people have to immigrate. Let's not forget who destroyed their countries. Most immigrants don't want to move but they have no choice because western powers destroyed their nations. If nations spend the time to address the root of the problem and try to rebuild society in the Middle East and Africa. In my opinion it's really just the consequences of their own actions. Also, a lot of the time the reasons why crime rate is higher among immigrants is because many immigrants especially those who arrive as refugees, live poor lower class lives, and obviously most crime happens within the lower classes. Many times when we see a statistic we forget that there can be many other external factors, influences and explanations. Just because one race has higher crime rates doesn't mean their race is more likely to commit crime than another it more likely means they are forced into conditions where they have to commit more crime. Addressing the issue of income inequality could probably reduce this. To address your point about how immigrants often don't respect the native cultural I would like you to explain more because having a different culture doesn't mean you're disrespecting the other culture it's just not yours. And in regard to the idea of immigrants "ruining" the future let's	2	65

	compare another event in history. Immigration to the is especially during the 1980s was a lot, people came from Italy, Germany, Ireland, China, India, Japan and so many other places. However the rise of immigration has only increased the economic benefits of the U.S.A. Today Asian American families are the number one earning family in the United States earning an average income of over 100,000 a year. Additionally many companies have seen huge boosts in Asian employees who are willing to do the work that most others don't want to do. It is a process that takes time but if done right, immigration can be a powerful tool for countries and economies. Additionally, The idea of middle eastern and African ideas and culture being so different from European culture dims in comparison to US immigration. So if Asian immigration to the USA went so well, why can't it go well in Europe? The Middle East and Africa are literally at the front door of Europe, they have shared and exchanged cultural information and views for thousands upon thousands of years, most Asians didn't even know the American land existed until the 1700s! Overall the idea that immigrants = unsafe isn't fair because it's more accurate to say income inequality = unsafe. Just eliminate the need to commit crime and everything will inevitably get better. Immigration contributes to income inequality but they are just an influencing factor if you really want to get to		
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	the root of safety issues it's better to target income inequality and poverty.		
Doub13D	No... Immigrants aren't the reason European cities are becoming less safe... Europe's lack of integration due to its backwards and outdated immigration/citizenship policies are to blame. People who move to France or Germany to find a better life for themselves and their family are not going to these countries to become criminals. When the society they move to refuses to integrate them whatsoever by denying any chance of citizenship, passing legislation that directly and explicitly targets their religion and culture (the burqa bans, circumcision bans), and refuses to acknowledge them as anything more than "foreigners living among us", then these people are left with no options. Crime is never the result of culture, religion, or race... it is the result of systemic inequalities, poverty, exploitation, and failed government policy.	2	174

Table 1: Top Comments With the Most Branching and Threaded Engagement

2.2.2 Thematic Analysis of Dataset 1: Comments to OP

The thematic analysis followed the six-phase procedure outlined by Braun and Clark (2006). Using a systematic and iterative approach, two experienced researchers collaboratively carried out the coding process, which was supported by both online and in-lab training sessions with two senior researchers. Throughout the process, coded comments were shared regularly among the researchers, providing regular opportunities for review, categorization, and assessment of inter-rater agreement.

Coders first familiarized themselves with the data, reading through the dataset multiple times without coding, in order to gain a deep understanding of the data. During this stage, initial ideas and observations about potential patterns or meanings in the data were noted. This was then followed by a joined coding session. The exact procedure and what constitutes a code or potential theme were discussed, and a couple of comments were coded together, with all the researchers involved.

During the second phase, the researchers jointly coded the first 30 comments. Segments of the text that contained meaningful and relevant content were systematically coded. Initial codes identified distinct features within the data that were meaningful and relevant to the aim of the study. The initial codes were very detailed and generated directly from the text. Next, each researcher independently coded a set of 30 additional comments. Afterward, they met to review their codes. Each coder selected 20 responses from their batch, which were discussed together to ensure agreement and consistency in

the coding process. At this point, the researchers began grouping related codes into preliminary subthemes, which were refined collaboratively based on the coded content of the initial 90 responses.

During the fourth phase, the coders resumed independent coding for the remaining ($n = 60$) responses, applying the refined set of subthemes and categories developed in the earlier phase, and ensuring that all responses were categorized consistently according to the agreed-upon framework. As more coded segments accumulated, related subthemes were organized into broader thematic categories, capturing higher-level patterns across datasets.

Finally, in the review and reliability phase, the researchers conducted an inter-rater agreement assessment. Each coder randomly selected and re-coded 60% of the other's previously coded responses to evaluate consistency and agreement in theme allocation. Inter-rater reliability was calculated and deemed satisfactory ($k = .841$). This final stage contributed to the robustness and trustworthiness of the thematic analysis.

2.2.3 Thematic Analysis of Dataset 2: Comments to first reply

The thematic analysis of Dataset 2 followed the procedure outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), using the same systemic, collaborative, and iterative approach as applied to Dataset 1. This dataset, composed of 150 replies to the most upvoted comment in the thread, contained a greater degree of dialogic and nested interaction, requiring particular attention to the evolving context of threaded discussions.

In the first phase, the researchers each individually code and categorize the initial 30 comments ($n = 60$ in total). During this stage, researchers flagged any content that did not align with the original categories developed in Dataset 1. In such cases, they communicated with each other to discuss the emergence of new content and to collaboratively update the coding framework to accommodate novel patterns specific to this more dialogic dataset.

In the second phase, each researcher independently coded an additional set of 30 comments ($n = 60$). The refined and expanded coding scheme – now inclusive of new categories suited to the threaded dialogue – was applied throughout to ensure consistency and comprehensiveness.

In the third phase, the coders conducted an inter-rater reliability check. Each coder reviewed and independently categorized the other's coded data to ensure consistency in the application of categories across the dataset. Any discrepancies were resolved through discussion. In the final phase, the researchers met to review and discuss the complete set of codes and collaboratively identify broader themes. Identical to the inter-rater reliability procedure from dataset 1, both researchers again coded 60% of the others' previously coded comments. Cohen's kappa calculations revealed a satisfactory agreement between both coders ($k = .856$). This phase involved consolidating individual codes into higher-order thematic categories and documenting how these themes reflected both the structure and the content of dialogue in threaded comment chains.

2.3 Findings

The thematic analysis of the two Reddit discussion datasets yielded a rich set of themes and subthemes reflecting a wide spectrum of public sentiment and discourse around immigration. In total, 9 themes were identified in Dataset 1 and 9 themes in Dataset 2. While some comments addressed surface-level concerns, many revealed deeper ideological divides, including conspiratorial thinking, historical comparisons, contested evidence, and emotional reasoning. Several themes emerged across both datasets, such as “Barriers to Integration,” “The Role of Crime, Blame, and Racism,” and “Comparisons and Similarities Between Europe and the US,” indicating recurring patterns of public concern. Other themes, such as “Perceived Double Standards in Law Enforcement based on Ideology,” “Multicultural Countries,” and “Conspiratorial or other Extreme Statements” appeared uniquely in one dataset, suggesting variations in focus depending on the specific conversational context.

Notably, thematic boundaries often blurred, with concerns about crime, cultural difference, and perceived societal threats frequently intersecting with religious or racialized perspectives. This overlap underscores the complex and often polarized nature of immigration discourse in online public forums.

2.3.1 Results from Dataset 1



Figure 1: Word Cloud Visualizing the most Frequent Words Stemming from the Codes of Dataset 1 (Comments to OP)

Theme	Subthemes	Total no. of Occurrences
Mixed Views on Crime and Racism in Immigration	Crime & Poverty ($n=68$) [Misperceptions of Crime Among Immigrants $n=23$; Crime is a Result of Income Inequality and Poverty $n=20$; Immigrants Commit Less Crime Than Locals $n=9$; Immigrants Commit More Violent Crime than Locals $n=7$; Crime is a Result of Poor Integration $n=6$; Crime is Intracommunal $n=3$] Racism, Xenophobia, Bigotry ($n=18$) [OP & Europeans are Racist $n=11$; Claims of Higher Immigrant Crime or Immigrants as Threats are Racist $n=7$]	86
Barriers to Integration	Benefits of Immigration ($n=14$) [Immigrants and their Children Contribute to Society $n=10$; Immigration Benefits	59

	Europe & the West $n=4$] European Host Countries Create Barriers to Integration ($n=9$) Immigration is not Beneficial for Europe ($n=9$) Religion as a Barrier ($n=7$) Examples and References of Successful Integration ($n=6$) Current Government Policies are not Addressing Integration Challenges Effectively ($n=5$) The Media's Negative Influence ($n=4$)	
Safety Issues in Europe	Safety in Europe will be or has Already Been Ruined by Immigrants ($n=13$) Historic Immigration into the US shows that it's safe, showing that Europe will be fine ($n=7$) Safety Hasn't Been Affected ($n=6$)	26
The Role of Colonialism & Europe Exploiting Others	Europe Deserves Current Issue due to Colonial Past ($n=15$) Europe & the West have Ruined and Exploited Africa & the Middle East ($n=8$)	23
Immigration as a Problem in the US & Europe	Immigration now in Europe is Similar to Past Immigration into the US by other Groups ($n=11$)	11
Suggested Solutions	Improving Integration Through Education and Programs ($n=5$) Improving Integration Through Policies ($n=4$)	9

Table 2: Themes and subthemes from Dataset 1

Table 1 displays the thematic structure of Dataset 1, illustrating nine themes and their associated subthemes, along with frequency counts. The most frequently referenced theme is *Mixed Views on Crime and Racism in Immigration* (86), capturing users' focus on the phenomenon of criminality and the moral reasoning of immigrants, including attributions of blame and racialized interpretations. Other high-frequency themes include *Barriers to Integration* (59) and *The Role of Colonialism & Europe Exploiting Others* (22), suggesting a strong undercurrent of discussion around systemic issues and historical accountability. Safety concerns also featured prominently under *Safety Issues in Europe* (19), indicating public anxiety around perceived threats posed by immigration. Collectively, the dataset shows a blend of practical, ideological, and historical reasoning within the immigration debate.

Mixed Views on Crime, Blame and racism in Immigration

In dataset 1, *Mixed Views on Crime, Blame and Racism in Immigration* emerged as the most frequent theme, encompassing diverse perspectives on the link between crime, immigration, and societal bias.

Crime & Poverty

Under the subtheme *Crime & Poverty*, many comments challenged the idea that immigrants are more criminal, instead regarding crime as a product of poverty, systemic inequality, and failed integration policies. As one user put it, “immigrants contribute to

income inequality but... it's better to target income inequality and poverty.” This interpretation redirects the focus away from cultural or ethnic explanations and toward broader socioeconomic structures.

A recurring point was that immigrants often commit less crime than native citizens, with some users asserting that “US citizens actually commit crimes at a higher rate than immigrants.” These perspectives sought to counter popular misperceptions and media-fueled fears. Nonetheless, some users maintained that immigrants, especially from Muslim-majority countries, do commit more violent crimes, citing murder and rape statistics, thus reinforcing the stereotype that links immigration to declining public safety.

A significant number of comments underscored the intracommunal nature of crime, arguing that people generally commit crimes within their own communities rather than targeting outsiders. In this view, the presence of immigrants does not necessarily increase threats to native populations. Others emphasized that crime rates among immigrants are often driven by poor integration and exclusion, such as being placed in impoverished neighborhoods with little opportunity, as one user noted: “You can’t just close people in a neighbourhood, let them stay poor and perspective-less, and expect them to not form a cultural enclave with high rates of crime.” The misperception of crime was also a key theme. Several users critiqued the inflated fear of immigrant criminality, comparing it to misplaced fears of car accidents or blaming crime on race rather than social factors. As one commenter said, “our perception of how bad crime is is based on how often we hear about it rather than statistical fact.” Another argued that if such fears were legitimate, “the US would have been wiped out by the Scots-Irish, Germans, Italians,

or Mexicans” decades ago. In summary, this subtheme reveals a polarized discourse. While some reinforce the perception that immigrants pose a violent threat, many others reject this view, grounding their arguments in data and structural explanations that tie crime to poverty, class exclusion, and unequal opportunity, rather than immigration itself.

Racism, Xenophobia, Bigotry

Under the subtheme *Racism, Xenophobia, Bigotry*, users challenged racialized perspectives, accusing both individuals and European societies of using crime-related arguments as a pretext to express or justify underlying racist attitudes. Several comments pushed back against comments they viewed as racially charged, particularly those that, according to them, falsely linked immigrants to crime. For example, one commenter accused the original poster of repeatedly posting “racist posts on here.” Many commenters criticized individuals for invoking safety concerns as a socially acceptable way to express xenophobia. One commenter dismissed this approach bluntly, urging people to “just say that you hate the chocos and be out with it.” Others accused European societies more broadly of masking racial biases behind debates about crime and integration, stating that “Europe has been horribly racist for hundreds of years.” Another user pointed out how migrants face ongoing rejection not due to crime but because they are “foreigners and you don’t want them.” These comments reflect a broader pattern of resistance to what users perceived as efforts to normalize bigotry through neutral or socially acceptable language.

Barriers to Integration

As illustrated by its subthemes, *Barriers to Integration* included a wide array of factors affecting different actors which might hinder assimilation and integration of immigrants. Some commenters pointed out the possibility and reality of successful integration, citing examples such as: “second generation integration is decent thanks to public education” and “Syrians did so quite well.” Others asserted that “culturally, migrants adapt to the European cultures and the European cultures adapt to migrants, as it has been happening for centuries,” portraying integration as a reciprocal and historical process. However, this optimism was tempered by contrasting viewpoints that stressed failures of integration. One user argued that “this should naturally lead to their ending up without much influence on the society that they are refusing to be part of,” while another pointed to “legislation that directly and explicitly targets their religion and culture (the burqa bans, circumcision bans)” as structural impediments to integration. These comments reveal that perceived integration outcomes are shaped both by immigrant behavior and societal or policy-level responses.

European Host Countries and Societies Create Barriers to Integration

Under the subtheme *European Host Countries and Societies Create Barriers to Integration*, comments highlighted how immigrants are often scapegoated for broader societal failures, arguing that public fears are misdirected and unjustified. This scapegoating reflects a broader pattern in which immigrants are positioned as focal points

for public anxiety, deflecting attention from underlying systemic issues that remain unaddressed due to political or economic expediency.

One commenter succinctly stated, “Immigrants are just an easy target to blame for society’s problems,” suggesting that immigrants are being unfairly blamed for issues that they did not cause and implying that society is seeking a simplistic explanation or scapegoat. By calling immigrants “an easy target,” the commenter highlights how they are a visible and politically vulnerable group, which renders them convenient to blame. This reflects how societal frustration is often redirected toward those with the least power to defend themselves, reinforcing hierarchical boundaries between socially included and excluded populations.

Another commenter emphasized the underlying motivations behind this misdirection, noting that, “the only reason these ‘discrepancies’ are even brought up is to be used as scapegoat for why people’s needs aren’t met, rather than to blame the wealth hoarders that control the narrative.” This comment reflects a critical awareness of how elites strategically shape public narratives to deflect responsibility for systemic failures. Immigrants, according to this perspective, are not the source of societal problems but serve as convenient targets for redirected frustration. Rather than addressing the structural inequalities perpetuated by political and economic elites, host societies encourage blame to be placed on immigrants, deepening the divide between socially dominant groups and those seeking to integrate. This dynamic not only obscures the real sources of inequality but also sustains social hierarchies that marginalize immigrant communities. Moreover, the human dimension of immigration was foregrounded by those challenging fear-based

rhetoric. One comment state “Many of those people just want a better life, not to appease your unjustified fear of potential dangers.” Here, the argument centers on empathy and rationality, countering xenophobic discourse by reminding audiences that immigrants are seeking safety, opportunity and stability, fundamental human needs that host societies often overlook in policy and discourse.

Together, these comments suggest that host societies not only misplace blame onto immigrants, but in doing so, also create and reinforce barriers to integration. Rather than promoting inclusion, this misdirection upholds systems of marginalization that serve political and economic interests at the expense of social cohesion. Notably, the commenters’ language reveals a deeper awareness of how fear is weaponized, how media and elites shape the dominant public discourse, and how this ultimately positions immigrants as enduring outsiders, a perception that is central to the persistence of policies that hinder inclusive integration.

Examples and References of Successful Immigration

Although many commenters underscored persistent structural and cultural barriers to integration, a subset of comments offered counterexamples to this narrative. These users invoked specific national or ethnic groups, such as “Asians and Indians in the UK” or “Syrians” to argue that integration is not uniformly unattainable but context dependent. References to second-generation success, as in the claim that “second generation integration is decent thanks to public education,” positioned institutions as key mediators of inclusion. These comments not only challenged portrayals of immigrant

failure but also introduced a more differentiated understanding of integration outcomes, contingent on both group characteristics and host society structures.

Current Government Policies are not Addressing Integration Challenges Effectively

The subtheme *Current Government Policies are not Addressing Integration Challenges Effectively* reflects how users construct policy as a core source of social and cultural tension. Rather than focusing solely on immigrant behavior, several commenters placed responsibility on governments for failing to implement coherent or sustainable frameworks for integration. One user emphasized the scale of migration, commenting, “*I in 30 people in the UK arrived within the last two years,*” suggesting that integration infrastructure cannot keep pace with demographic changes. Others criticized lenient enforcement and weak governance, arguing that “*it’s not the immigration itself that does damage. It’s the amount of immigration, and the absurd amount of leniency those immigrants get from law enforcement.*” These comments highlight a common perception of institutional failure, where ineffective policies are seen as exacerbating fragmentation, insecurity, and public mistrust.

Immigrants as freeloading

The subtheme *Immigrants as freeloading* captures a perception of perceived dependency and entitlement that, according to some users, undermines assimilation. Several

commenters argued that state-provided benefits disincentivize integration, asserting that “food and housing [are] provided by the state” and that immigrants receive “free education often in their native language,” raising the question, “Why integrate?” Others saw assimilation as historically linked to necessity, not choice, with one commenter noting that “what will stop assimilation this time... is the existence of extensive social services,” which once compelled immigrants to adopt local norms to survive. Echoing this view, another commenter claimed, “They’re also learning that a lot of these people aren’t interested in working or assimilating. Just the free shit.” Some distinguished between different types of immigrants, suggesting the problem arises “if they are immigrating just to take money and refusing to adjust their life to Europe.” Thematically, these comments reflect a belief that generous welfare systems, rather than supporting integration, give way to apathy and disengagement from host society norms.

Religion as a Barrier

Under the subtheme *Religion as a Barrier*, commenters repeatedly portrayed religious and cultural beliefs, particularly Islamic practices, as incompatible with Western liberal values, thus obstructing integration. One user claimed that mass migration had set societies back “10 steps” by bringing in “uber religious, uneducated people” who threaten the secular and rational ideas of modernity. These concerns often positioned Islam as not only a cultural mismatch but a regressive force, as when one comment described migrants as carrying “outdated, stale, and primitive ideology.” Another user argued that Muslim immigrants “create ghettos and end up as criminals more often,” reinforcing a narrative

that religious difference leads to isolation and deviance. This discourse draws a boundary between “us” and “them,” constructing religion not as a neutral identity marker, but as a structural obstacle to assimilation and civic belonging. In one comment, the perceived cultural gap is starkly racialized: “The Irish didn’t force their women to cover up and have terrible woman’s rights,” suggesting that certain religious expressions are irredeemably incompatible with Western gender norms.

The Media’s Negative Influence

Under the subtheme *The Media’s Negative Influence*, commenters emphasized the media’s outsized role in shaping public fears and skewing perceptions of crime and immigration. Users argued that media coverage distorts the reality of immigrant communities, disproportionately focusing on rare violent incidents while ignoring the positive contributions of immigrants. “We fear immigrants because the media influenced us to fear them,” one user stated, noting how immigrant-related crimes dominate the news cycle. Another highlighted that “criminals will always be a minority... yet they get all the media attention,” suggesting a sensationalist tendency to spotlight isolated cases while ignoring broader context. Some comments accused the media of political bias, particularly of favoring right-wing narratives, while others pointed out the lack of coverage of the “hardworking, productive and nice people” they personally knew from immigrant communities. Collectively, these comments reflect a broader concern that public opinion is being shaped by selective and ideologically charged portrayals rather than balanced or representative reporting.

Immigration is not Beneficial for Europe

Under the subtheme *Immigration is not Beneficial for Europe*, users conveyed a distinctly negative evaluation of African and Middle Eastern immigration. A recurring claim was that “the cons greatly outweigh the pros,” with users rejecting even commonly cited advantages like cheap labor. One comment dismissed such economic contributions as “nothing to be proud of”, adding that they “have been proven to be bad in the long term for economy.” Another user challenged the premise altogether: “Someone please update me when someone comes up with a valid argument for why African and Middle Eastern immigration into Europe will be a net benefit to Europeans.” The perception that immigrants “bring their problems with them” reinforced a broader view that migration places a burden on host societies without yielding proportional returns. Rather than offering isolated criticisms, these comments converge around a broader perception of imbalance, where the costs (social, economic, or cultural) are depicted as exceeding any potential gains for European societies.

Benefits of Immigration

Amid predominantly negative perceptions of immigration, some commenters presented a counter-perspective to the dominant view of immigration as a threat by highlighting both long-term and immediate socioeconomic contributions. Many users emphasized the economic utility of immigration, portraying immigrants as essential labor forces who are “extremely hardworking” and willing to take up jobs that “half the people in my own

country consider...beneath them.” Rather than viewing immigration as a burden, some commenters recast it as a necessary response to demographic and economic stagnation in Europe, arguing that “without the immigrants, Europe will die,” pointing to depopulated areas and the strain on welfare systems.

A forward-looking dimension also emerged in references to immigration as a long-term investment, with some noting that while it “is a process that takes time,” if managed properly it can be a powerful tool for countries and economies.” Others foregrounded intergenerational contributions, claiming that “the offspring of said immigrants...very often go on to become successful and productive members of society.” These comments introduced a longitudinal perspective on how benefits were conceptualized, not limited to short-term labor needs, but extending to future civic and economic participation across generations. Furthermore, systemic arguments surfaced around Europe’s role in addressing global inequality. One user pointed out that alleviating Africa’s economic depletion “would benefit Europe in the long run,” shifting the lens from immigration control to global justice and cooperation. Overall, this subtheme worked to reorient public discourse by articulating the potential of immigration as a structural asset rather than a social liability.

Ethnographic Considerations

Under the theme *Ethnographic Considerations*, two subthemes emerged that reflect how users position themselves within the debate in terms of personal identity or regional

experience. The first, *Identity Characteristics*, involved comments disclosing personal or national backgrounds, with some beginning with statements like “Italian native here,” or “As a Danish person living in Aarhus”, often to lend credibility or local insight to their views. These identity references served as personal justifications for their opinions, suggesting that their views should be taken seriously because they were based on first-hand experience.

The second subtheme, *Mentioning the Online Space*, addressed the nature of Reddit itself. Several commenters commented on the perceived degradation of discourse, criticizing the subreddit for harboring racism or adopting extremist tones (“This is just racist gibberish dressed up as a CMV,” “Just neonazi shit now all the time”). These remarks highlighted the influence of platform culture on the shape and tone of the discussion, situating the debate beyond the sociopolitical context and within a specific digital environment.

Identity Characteristics

In the discussion thread, users frequently referenced their own national or geographic identities, such as being an “Italian native,” “a Danish person living in Aarhus,” or “from the US,” to position themselves within the conversation. These self-disclosures acted as situational markers, signaling proximity or distance to the immigration contexts being debated. Rather than abstract opinion, these statements positioned their contributions as grounded in direct personal experience or regional familiarity. For example, one user

stated, “I don’t think the cities of my country are specifically dangerous, even when I walk in Ghetto and immigrant areas,” embedding a claim about safety within local knowledge. These identity cues served to validate opinions and assert a form of localized credibility in a broader transnational conversation.

Mentioning the Online Space

Within the subtheme *Mentioning the Online Space*, commenters engaged in meta-commentary about the very platform they were using, namely Reddit, and more specifically the CMV (Change my View) subreddit. A recurring theme was dissatisfaction with the subreddit’s current state, with users expressing frustration over what they saw as a rise in openly racist, xenophobic, and bigoted content. One user remarked, “Seems like every day I see some racist posts on here and it’s getting old,” while another observed that blatant bigotry is now “allowed on a mainstream subreddit.” These remarks were not isolated critiques but part of a broader concern that Reddit, especially CMV, was undergoing a transformation, with one user claiming it was “just solidifying the completion of Reddit’s 4channification.”

The use of terms like “racist gibberish dressed up as a cmv” reflected a perceived misuse of the subreddit’s intended purpose as a space for civil debate. Instead, users described the platform as devolving into an ideologically extreme space, mirroring 4chan in tone and content. One comment lamented, “This sub went straight back to its illiterate racist Steven Crowder roots,” underscoring a view that the subreddit has been overrun by

“uneducated and bigoted” posters. Even the phrase “oh cool. This racism meme again” reveals a cynical fatigue toward the repetition of offensive tropes, highlighting how Reddit’s affordances, such as voting, anonymity, and algorithmic visibility, may be reinforcing particular discursive patterns. These reactions reveal how the online environment itself became a topic of concern, shaping the content but also judgements about the legitimacy and civility of the conversation. The comments under both subthemes show how both identity and the digital environment inform how users construct and interpret discourse.

Immigration as a Problem in the US and Europe

The theme *Immigration as a Problem in the U.S. and Europe* revealed attempts by commenters to challenge the notion that immigration presents a uniquely European crisis. By referencing historical and contemporary cases in the U.S., users drew parallels and offered counterexamples to problem-saturated narratives about African and Middle Eastern migration to Europe.

One major line of reasoning focused on success stories of past and present immigrant communities in the United States. Asian American families were described as the “number one earning family in the United States,” with one user highlighting their economic contributions and willingness to take on jobs that “most others don’t want to do.” This was used to counter fears around cultural incompatibility by asking, “If Asian immigration to the USA went too well, why can’t it go well in Europe?”

African immigrants were similarly portrayed in a positive light, particularly those from Ghana and Nigeria. One comment noted that “every single one of them is either a doctor or getting a math PhD,” illustrating a strong record of academic and professional achievement among second-generation African immigrants in the U.S.

Historical immigration to the U.S. was invoked repeatedly to challenge recurring fear-based narratives. One user listed a satirical timeline showing how different groups (from the Irish and Poles to Italians and Mexicans) were each at one time accused of “ruining the safety of American cities.” These comparisons were used to point out the continuity of alarmist rhetoric and to highlight how such fears were later proven unfounded. A related comment noted that immigration during the 1980s was similarly high, with people arriving from Italy, Germany, Ireland, China, India, and Japan, again echoing today’s debates.

Several users extended these observations to the European context, arguing that while the discussion often focuses on Europe’s uniqueness, “there is a similar situation there as well.” Others suggested that the U.S. success story stems partly from its “blending of cultures,” which fosters innovation and growth. Therefore, the issue should not be seen as an inevitable failure of European immigration, but as a broader challenge shared across Western societies. These counterpoints reframed the debate by placing European concerns within a broader US–Europe context, suggesting that immigration, when viewed historically and cross-culturally, has the potential to enrich rather than destabilize.

The Role of Colonialism and Europe Exploiting Others

The third most frequently occurring theme in Dataset 1, *The Role of Colonialism and Europe Exploiting Others*, reflected strong historical awareness and moral critique. Many commenters invoked Europe's colonial past to challenge dominant claims that immigration from Africa and the Middle East poses a threat to European societies. Instead, they presented migration as a direct consequence of centuries of exploitation, war, and foreign interference. This theme was marked by both reflective historical analysis, and, at times, expressions of anger or retributive sentiment toward Europe's legacy of domination.

Europe and the West Have Ruined and Exploited Africa and the Middle East

A recurring argument portrayed Europe, and the broader West, as responsible for destabilizing the countries migrants now flee. One user remarked, "Most immigrants don't want to move but they have no choice because Western powers destroyed their nations." Another echoed this by stating that Europe "looted" and "exploited" Africa and the Middle East," creating the economic and political conditions that fuel migration today. Many comments highlighted ongoing Western interference (through war, economic manipulation, or political meddling), as perpetuating cycles of displacement and poverty. The argument was that blaming migrants ignores the structural role European powers played in creating the very crises these people flee.

Europe Deserves Current Issues Due to Colonial Past

A smaller but vocal set of comments took a more condemnatory stance, suggesting Europe was now facing the consequences of its imperial actions. Comments such as “You reap what you sow” and “Maybe don’t f**** up their countries and then run home and claim sanctuary” conveyed the view that European societies were merely experiencing a backlash for their colonial past. Others invoked irony, mocking the moral panic about migration given that European nations had once violently occupied and plundered foreign lands. A few comments explicitly expressed the belief that Europe “deserves” instability or crime as retribution for colonial crimes. While controversial, these views underscored the emotional weight of historical injustice in the migration debate.

Suggested Solutions

This theme captures proactive suggestions aimed at addressing concerns around immigration, with commenters proposing ways to improve outcomes both for migrants and host societies. The focus ranges from educational and economic support programs to policy-level interventions, including calls for more structured, humane and economically beneficial immigration systems.

Improving Integration Through Education and Programs

Several users advocated for targeted social investment to support integration. A common suggestion was to maintain or expand community-based initiatives such as language courses and education programs. One user commented, “What we need is to keep up what

little integration programs we have... Italian courses for foreigners that are solely needed to start the integration process.” Others emphasized the importance of placing immigrants in supportive environments: “It would be very different if immigrants and their families were put in apartments in already assimilated neighborhoods with community programs, stimulated to get better education, and properly helped economically.” Further recommendations included enrolling children in public education to facilitate early integration, as well as teaching language and job skills to adults. As one user noted, “You also get their children into the education system so that they integrate better into society as a whole and come out with marketable skills and language.”

Improving Integration Through Policies

Other commenters stressed the importance of systemic policy reform. Suggestions included implementing immigration models similar to Australia’s, which favor skilled migration. One user argued, “Ways to address is to implement a policy similar to what Australia has in terms of immigration where skilled laborers can immigrate while those without skills would struggle.” A more humanitarian solution was also proposed: “Provide a decent path to citizenship...Pair the legal path to citizenship with measures to help with assimilation and we will be so much closer to the actual solution.” Still, others pointed out the geopolitical stakes of failing to act: “The suggestion going forward is to quickly and directly address the issues and economic draining of the continent and try to forge a permanent amicable bond. Or lose out on a massive potential market and access to resources that will fuel the future.” These solutions reflect a recurring belief that

integration can be achieved if European nations take proactive, inclusive, and well-coordinated steps to support immigrants and address broader global inequalities.

Safety Issues in Europe

The theme of *Safety Issues in Europe* captures a central tension in public discourse around immigration, particularly from Africa and the Middle East. Commenters are divided between those who believe safety has deteriorated due to immigration, and those who argue that such fears are historically unfounded or statistically unsupported.

Historic Immigration into the U.S. Shows That It's Safe (So Europe Will Be Fine)

One group of commenters uses historical comparisons to immigration in the United States to argue that concerns about safety in Europe are not new and have proven false in the past. As one person comments, “What’s the difference this time compared to all the times in the past people made almost word for word the same argument about every immigrant group imaginable.” Similarly, another commenter critiques current claims of cultural incompatibility by contrasting them with successful Asian immigration to the U.S.: “The idea of Middle Eastern and African ideas and culture being so different from European culture dims in comparison to US immigration. So, if Asian immigration to the USA went so well, why can’t it go well in Europe?” These comparisons challenge the notion that current migration poses a unique or unprecedented safety threat.

Safety Hasn't Been Affected

Others go further to argue that safety has not been negatively affected at all. One commenter reassures that, “Safety hasn’t really changed (if anything big cities nowadays are safer than twenty years ago),” while another questions the premise of the OP’s claim altogether: “Do you know how many cities are in Europe and how many take in immigrants? Especially with the claim that they will ruin most European cities?” These responses construe fears as exaggerated or statistically unsupported.

Safety in Europe Will Be or Has Already Been Ruined by Immigrants

However, another set of commenters strongly affirms the idea that immigration has already caused a significant decline in public safety. Several short, emphatic replies, such as “*It already has*,” or “Yes. It already ruined it,” convey firm conviction. More detailed claims cite specific countries as evidence: “Sweden is a great example. What you don’t see reported is their mass bombings and mass sexual assaults.” Others emphasize scale or inevitability: “Huge waves of migrants are an issue, that’s true,” and “It already has. Been going on pretty much since the inception of the EU.” These comments align closely with the original post’s framing that immigration is already eroding the safety of European societies. Together, these perspectives illustrate how the theme of safety functions as a battleground in broader debates about immigration. Some attempt to defuse panic through historical perspective or data, while others reinforce the perception of a present-day crisis. This divergence highlights how “safety” becomes both a factual and symbolic point of contention in shaping public attitudes.

2.5.2 Results from Dataset 2

Barriers to Integration

In Dataset 2, *Barriers to Integration* was the most frequently occurring theme, encompassing cultural, religious, and systemic challenges, which fall under the following subthemes: *European Host countries' Lack of Integration Efforts*, *Immigrants not Adjusting to Norms and Values*, *Religion as a Barrier*, and *The Media's Negative Influence*.

European Host countries' Lack of Integration Efforts

Some comments reflect a sense that European societies either do not prioritize integration or have failed to create an environment that is conducive to it: “Exactly. They forget the centuries of wars. Heck..some were so bad at getting along - they even went away to form their own new countries.” This quote implies that even within Europe, there has been long-standing disunity, suggesting that expecting smooth integration from newcomers might be hypocritical or unrealistic if even host societies have struggled with unity historically.

Immigrants Not Adjusting to Norms and Values

A recurring barrier raised is the perceived unwillingness of migrants to adopt local values, and the importation of extreme ideologies: “Add to that, the shear (sic) volume of migrants coming into the country, their nationalism and religious zeal, often more extreme than in the countries they originally came from...” This suggests that the perceived extremity of migrants’ values compared to those in host countries becomes a point of tension, which fuels mistrust and obstructs integration.

Religion as a Barrier

Religion is repeatedly mentioned as both a perceived and actual barrier to integration, either through doctrinal difference, identity, or social behavior: “Even generic secularism is further from Islam than any two Christian denominations are from each other.” This implies a deep cultural and theological divide between Islamic migrants and secular or Christian-majority European societies, contributing to a sense that integration is inherently difficult. Similarly, the comment “Religion very rarely is the direct cause of a conflict, but it always exacerbates it,” suggests that while religion may not start conflicts, it intensifies them, again portraying it as a destabilizing factor in multicultural societies. Going beyond being a barrier, religion is also framed as a political tool, where identity becomes a line of division rather than unity: The idea of a Christian identity as common ground to bond over is a very modern one.

The Media’s Negative Influence

Several commenters point to the media's role in distorting public perceptions of immigration-related crime. One commenter state that "the crime rates are a far cry from a crisis," accusing "that particular media" of "blowing it way out of proportion." Another echoes this sentiment, arguing that sex crimes "aren't actually committed more by immigrants" and that the issue has been "sensationalized by media and events," despite statistics showing immigrants' crime rates align with their population share. A third comment criticizes media-driven "propaganda," describing it as intentionally misleading and reliant on superficial truths. This user suggests that fear of immigrants stems more from "a caricature created by the media" than from verified facts, highlighting a general failure to critically engage with information. Together, these comments construct a clear theme of media-driven exaggeration that fuels fear and misinformation about immigration.

Conspiratorial or Other Extreme Statements

Interestingly, conspiratorial or other extreme statements were only evident in the dialogic discourse (Dataset 2), capturing a range of content including suspicion of media manipulation, elite orchestration, and Islamophobic extremism. Users' comments collectively paint a picture of mistrust, where the state is seen as complicit or even orchestrating harmful outcomes under the guise of progress or tolerance.

Insincere governmental motives

The subtheme of *Insincere Governmental Motives* emerges strongly in comments suggesting that European governments are deliberately neglecting immigrant-related crimes for political gain. One user claimed that “European countries are unwilling to punish negative behavior from foreigners while arresting people praying next to abortion clinics,” insinuating that the state is selectively oppressive, while another user claimed that authorities in the UK allowed “the systematic abuse of ~1 400 girls at the hand of Pakistani grooming gangs just ‘happen’ because they didn’t want to “fan racial tensions,” implying a calculated refusal to act. Another comment argued that immigrants are “more relevant for the political and corporate class economic agenda,” and that holding them accountable could “create friction.” This view casts immigration policy not as a matter of social justice or humanitarian need, but as a tool for elite manipulation. Additional claims that the press and government attempted to suppress violent gang activity further support the belief that state actors are not acting in the public interest, but rather to protect a politically convenient narrative.

Others alleged that the media and authorities “suppress or erase immigrant-linked crimes,” citing supposed cover-ups like the UK riots involving “Pakistani gangs,” which “the press and government tried to memory hole.” More broadly, elites were accused of deliberately stoking division, with one user describing how “opportunistic greedy bastards in power” manipulate the public with a “fabricated ‘other.’” Several replies called out such discourse as propaganda, with sharp retorts like “Good Lord, you need to consume less far-right propaganda,” and critiques of users “parroting back statistics” they don’t understand.

Is there Genetic Incompatibility?

The subtheme “Is There Genetic Incompatibility?” reflects a controversial and conspiratorial discourse that attempts to biologize cultural integration. Some commenters assert that present-day immigrant groups from Africa and the Middle East are genetically too dissimilar to native European populations to integrate successfully. One user supports this claim by referencing fixation index (F_{st}) values to argue that Irish, English, and Italian populations are closely related, whereas Pakistani and Nigerian groups are genetically distant, with values such as “.15” and “.16” used to imply irreconcilable differences.

In stark contrast, other users strongly reject this line of argument, comparing it to phrenology, a discredited pseudoscience historically used to justify racism. One comment directly challenges the misuse of genetics, saying “Phrenology is a pseudoscience, as I am sure you are aware, so why would you call out a factually accurate post as pseudoscience, then pivot to, ‘well it's true but the only reason you'd bring it up is if you are racist’?” Others emphasized that citing genetic distance to argue that people “can’t integrate” constitutes a racist misuse of data and reflects an extreme ideology rather than a credible scientific or sociopolitical position.

This subtheme shows a clear conflict between users who argue that some immigrant groups are genetically too different to integrate into European societies (using

scientific terms to justify their views) and others who reject these arguments as racist and based on a pseudoscience like phrenology.

Depth of Conflict in the Data

The theme “Depth of Conflict in the Data” highlights the active contestation over evidence, credibility, and interpretation among commenters. Several users explicitly challenge the credibility of claims by demanding sources, with one requesting evidence “ideally from a non-rightwing publication,” emphasizing a need for impartiality. This reflects a broader concern about the trustworthiness of sources and efforts to ground arguments in empirical or official data, such as crime statistics from Germany.

Others challenge the interpretation of evidence, asking for clarification on which parts of a report support a claim and noting contradictions in how the data is being used: “The intro to it very clearly seems to discourage this line of thinking.” One user referenced official German crime statistics to rebut previous claims about immigrant violence, while another disagrees with prior statements based on personal historical knowledge, prompting debate about the framing of past immigration.

In addition, one commenter reluctantly cites a mainstream source, in this case, the History Channel, to provide a historical counterpoint about Irish immigration, saying “I don't really like citing History Channel, but it was the first result: <https://www.history.com/news/when-america-despised-the-irish-the-19th-century>-

[refugee-crisis](#)” This shows a tension between users’ mistrust of mainstream media and their recognition of its necessity when supporting claims.

Altogether, this theme reflects a high level of argumentative engagement, marked by evidence-seeking, critical evaluation, and mutual contestation of claims.

Past Immigration vs. Now

Users frequently referenced both differences and similarities between historical and contemporary immigration trends. This overarching theme comprises of three sub-themes: *Immigration is no Different Now then from the Past*, *Immigration Now is Different from the Past*, *Similarities or Differences on Irish Immigration to the US*. Under the first sub-theme, many users emphasized continuity across history. For instance, one user wrote:

‘Ah, the old "but this time it's different!" argument made by people who either don't know or are unwilling to understand human history.’ (deleted user)

As illustrated, users invoking this theme often drew on historical precedents to argue that immigration has always been a part of human experience. These references served to normalize present-day immigration and downplay perceived threats of immigrants, suggesting that current patterns are neither unprecedented, unique to Europe, nor a cause

for alarm. However, users invoking the second sub-theme *Immigration Now is Different from the Past* argued the opposite perspective. Under this sub-theme users claimed that current immigration trends cannot be compared to those of the past. One user wrote:

‘I frankly don't give a shit about US statistics from 100+ years ago. And I even doubt they would say what you want them to if there were actually any reliable stats available. The situations are not even remotely comparable so any imaginary lessons learned are not applicable.’ (Happy_Drake5361)

As highlighted by this user, references to historical immigration (particularly to countries like the United States) were frequently rejected as irrelevant. Users emphasized that the present context, including geopolitical, economic, and cultural conditions, differs too significantly for historical analogies to offer useful insights. The third sub-theme *Similarities or Differences on Irish Immigration to the US*, focused more specifically on past Irish migration. Within this sub-theme, users cited Irish immigration either to underscore historical continuity or to argue for stark differences. For example, one user stated:

The values and lifestyle of 1920's Ireland were almost identical to 1920's America.’ (please_trade_marner)

While another user replied to that comment with:

‘As an Irish person this is woefully not at all the case hahaha, genuinely not even close. You're comparing an industrialised, (then) highly developed and culturally+linguistically English society to an agrarian, economically

underdeveloped and still fairly culturally and linguistically Gaelic one. They're just completely different beasts.' (Fear_mor)

Together, these contrasting perspectives highlight how the Irish case was used rhetorically for both points of view. Users either used it as evidence of past similarity or as a basis to emphasize how current immigration differs fundamentally from earlier periods.

Mixed Views on Crime and Racism in Immigration

Crime & Poverty

Another prominent theme in Dataset 2 concerned users' mixed views on crime and racism in the context of immigration. This theme includes the sub-theme *Crime & Poverty*, in which users discussed the complex relationship between immigration and criminal behavior. Views were polarized, with some users arguing that immigrants commit more crime than native populations, while others asserted that crime rates are not of concern. Under the sub-sub-theme *Immigrants Pose safety and Crime-Related Threats*, 11 users expressed concern that immigration contributes to increased crime and public insecurity. For example, one user wrote:

‘In an ideal world, yeah, you would be right. Unless every single report and headline of rape, gang rape and gang violence (especially in Sweden) is fake, or

maybe it's not so simple. Maybe, just maybe, it's both intolerance and exclusion from the host country, and the immigrants are pieces of shit looking for easy life while still acting the same as in their home.' (CynicalNyhilist).

While acknowledging the complexity of the issue, this user attributes violent crime to immigrants, blending structural and individual-level explanations of crime with hostile language towards immigrants. In contrast, users invoking the *Misperceptions of Crime Among Immigrants* sub-sub-theme discussed how crime among immigrants is often misperceived. One user cited a report previously shared by another user, stating:

‘there is a substantial amount of crime being committed against immigrants by people espousing the sort of rhetoric that OP is promoting (p.6)’ (LucidLeviathan)

This perspective reframed the conversation, suggesting that immigrants are often the victims of crime rather than the perpetrators, and that the public discourse around it often misrepresents this reality. Another recurring theme under the *Crime & Poverty* theme was that crime is primarily the result of poverty and marginalization, not immigrant status. For example, one user wrote:

‘They commit more crime because they are marginalised, poorly integrated, and not given economic opportunities’ (Responsible-Pin8323)

This comment suggests that structural disadvantages, such as lack of proper integration and economic exclusion, may explain some criminal behavior among immigrants.

Meanwhile, some users explicitly rejected the notion that immigrants are more prone to crime, emphasizing the dangers of generalizations. One user stated:

However the vast majority are not, and end up being lumped in with the bad actors as part of an 'all immigrants are evil' narrative. (Smoothgriminal)

Nonetheless, other users continued to assert that certain immigrant groups are disproportionately overrepresented in crime statistics. For instance, one wrote:

It mentions that Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia and Georgia are overrepresented, while other African states are only slightly proportionally higher represented in crime stats.' (Appropriate_Elk_6113)

These exchanges reflect the polarizing perceptions of immigration and crime in public discourse. While some framed immigrants as threats to public safety, others emphasized structural factors, questioned the accuracy of crime statistics, or highlighted the prevalence of anti-immigrant narratives.

Racism, Xenophobia, Bigotry

Another sub-theme of the *Mixed Views on Crime and Racism in Immigration* is *Racism, Xenophobia, Bigotry*. In this theme users discussed how many claims that are circulating about immigrants in public discourse are racist, xenophobic, and marginalizing. Several users highlighted the danger of historical and ongoing fearmongering about minority groups. As one user wrote:

‘Ignorant bigots have always come up with reasons why these are unprecedented times, and as sure as the sun rises, people get over themselves and eventually learn to coexist when someone MORE foreign comes that they can be suspicious and fearful of together.’ (deleted user)

This comment highlights how fear-based narratives about immigration often repeat across history, shifting focus from one group to another but following similar patterns of exclusion and hostility.

Multicultural Societies or Countries Collapse

Another emerging theme in Dataset 2 is that of *Multicultural Countries*. This theme was shaped by a micro-discussion that unfolded in the comment threads where users debated whether multiculturalism leads to societal failure or success. Users invoking this sub-theme argued that historically, multicultural societies have been prone to collapse due to internal divisions along ethnic or cultural lines. In particular, one user insisted that this was the case, writing:

‘It hasn't failed everytime we can literally look at hundreds of examples of countries falling apart over ethnic lines because the populations couldn't assimilate to each others values. The real question is when did it ever fucking work do you have like 3 examples of any sucessful multicultural socities, because

as far as them failing that is so numerous I doubt you could list them all on a reddit comment.’ (Dangerous-Worry6454)

This comment exemplifies the view that ethnic cultural diversity is inherently destabilizing for countries.

Countries Collapse Because of Various Reasons

In response, some users contested the idea that multiculturalism was the primary cause of societal collapse. Instead, they pointed to a variety of political, economic, and historical factors. As one comment reads:

‘The Soviets collapsed as a result of the failures of communism and US intervention. Yugoslavia was one country that was broken up into multiple countries without regard to the people living there. There was no immigration aspect. The Ottomans lasted for 600 years and fell due to World War I. Austria is still around and doing just fine. The Romans lasted over a thousand years and fell due to the impossibility of managing such a massive empire in antiquity’
(LucidLeviathan)

This perspective illustrates that collapse cannot be solely attributed to ethnic diversity, which overlooks the broader geopolitical dynamics.

‘Success stories: The Roman Empire The Ottoman Empire The United States
Australia New Zealand’ (LucidLeviathan)

This comment reflects the view that diversity can coexist with national cohesion, and that multicultural societies can thrive.



Figure 2: Word Cloud Visualizing the most Frequent Words Stemming from the Codes of Dataset 2 (Replies to the First Comment)

Theme	Subthemes	Total no. of Occurrences
Barriers to Integration	Religion as a Barrier (n=80) [Issues are due to Politics, not Religion n=34; Islam acts as a Barrier for Successful Integration and can Undermine Europe's Progress n=20; Islam isn't a Barrier or Something to Fear n=13; Historical Christian Unity is a Myth n=13] Immigrants not Adjusting to Norms and Values n=8 European Host Countries & Societies Lack of Integration Efforts n=7 Media's Negative Influence n=3	98
Conspiratorial or other extreme statements	Is there Genetic Incompatibility n=49 Insincere Governmental Motives n=19	68
Past Immigration vs. Now	Immigration is no Different Now then from the Past (n=21)	47

	Immigration Now is Different from the Past (n=15) Similarities or Differences on Irish Immigration to the US (n=11)	
Mixed Views on Crime and Racism in Immigration	Crime & Poverty (n=32) [Immigrants Pose Safety and Crime-Related Threats n=11; Misperceptions of Crime Among Immigrants n=6; Immigrants Commit Less Crime n=5; Immigrants Commit more (Violent) Crime n=5; Crime is a Result of Income Inequality and Poverty n=5] Racism, Xenophobia, Bigotry (n=14)	46
Depth of conflict in the data		19
Multicultural Countries	Multicultural Societies or Countries Collapse (n=9) Countries Collapse Because of Various Reasons (n=3) Multicultural Countries can be Successful (n=2)	14

Table 3: Themes and subthemes from Dataset 2

3.0 Case study 2: Platformed harassment in HYPE communities on Facebook

Conspiracy theories co-produced and distributed by social media users play an increasingly central role in emerging forms of violent extremism online (Gartenstein-Ross et al., 2023). While some conspiracy theories are relatively harmless sources of entertainment to a diverse group of participants who try on identities and explore alternative explanations to various phenomena (de Wildt and Aupers, 2024), others turn violent through harassment campaigns and online vitriol (Wischerath et al., 2024).

For several months in 2023–2024, a community of Danish Facebook users engaged in a conspiracy theory-based harassment campaign against the title character of Danish children’s TV show *Uncle Shrimp* (orig. *Onkel Reje*, DR, 2013-) and the actor who plays him. The campaign was informed by a QAnon-adjacent conspiracy theory which accused Uncle Shrimp of being a satanic deviant representing an elitist cabal working to groom Danish children for sexual abuse. The case illustrates how online conspiracism may inform a trajectory toward hostile action and violence.

Studies indicate that individuals who endorse conspiracy theories are more inclined to justify political violence (Moskalenko et al., 2024). Conspiracy theories may appeal to social media users with a wide range of opinions and convictions due to their perpetually adaptable narratives. This points to the trend of hybridization, which describes how extremists are increasingly motivated by a wide range of ideology fragments, disparate conspiratorial beliefs, and personal grievances (Jones and Comerford, 2023). Hybridization, we suggest, not only applies to the content of

extremists' motivations, but also to the technological and aesthetic character of their communicative practices.

To better understand how social media-driven conspiracy theories enable threatening behavior, networked harassment (Marwick, 2021), and the legitimization of violence (Obaidi et al., 2022), we conduct a case study of the Uncle Shrimp harassment campaign and conspiracy theory. We depart from the following research question: How do online conspiracy theory communities devolve into different forms of platformed violence through collective worldbuilding and participatory practices?

The study is based on a digital ethnography of a Danish conspiratorial community on Facebook and quantitative and qualitative content analysis of 370 user comments and six posts made by two dominating voices in the community. Inspired by Berger's (2018) definition of extremism, we investigate how these users establish a *crisis*, negotiate the formation of the *in-group*, establish the threat of an *out-group*, and offer (violent) solutions as a response to their grievances.

3.1 The Uncle Shrimp conspiracy theory and harassment campaign

In the spring of 2023, the Danish children's TV show *Uncle Shrimp* became the center of attention and moral outrage in a community of conspiracy theorists on Facebook. A vocal group of users promoted a conspiracy theory that *Uncle Shrimp* was grooming its young audience (3–6-year-olds), suggesting that the actor playing Uncle Shrimp was a satanic pedophile, and that the management of the Danish Broadcasting Company (DR), who

produces the show, were themselves part of an elite cabal abusing children. The conspiracy theory quickly turned into a harassment campaign against DR and the actor playing Uncle Shrimp, who received several threats. Following weeks of intense campaigning by the conspiratorial Facebook community, the Uncle Shrimp actor went on sick leave due to stress caused by the constant pressure of threats, hate, and defamation online. During this time, the case became a much-debated news story in mainstream media.

Part of what turned the studied community against Uncle Shrimp is also the very appeal of the character. He is a grown man who swears and farts, he cross-dresses, wears bikinis and butterfly wings, and entertains an infantile fascination with transgression of traditional parental norms. The show is set in different fantasy worlds, from space ships to pirate ships and the speculations about Uncle Shrimp drew on the TV series narrative, but connected these to a wide catalog of globally distributed conspiratorial narratives familiar from PizzaGate, the subsequent QAnon conspiracy theory, and the anti-trans movement (Demuru, 2022; Reinhard, 2025).

Reviewing the history of conspiracy theories in Denmark, Rasmussen describes a general trend of Americanization, which both enables people to express ‘dissatisfaction with the condition of the world’ and provides them with ‘a roadmap for understanding it’ (Rasmussen, 2024: 63 our translation). In the case of the Uncle Shrimp conspiracy theory, many key talking points which appeared to emanate from a particular American conspiracy discourse, e.g., stories about a satanic, elitist cabal conspiring to groom and abuse children, was adapted to a context of public service broadcasting for children. The

case shows how conspiracy theories on social media travel across geographical regions and are adapted to fit new local contexts.

The campaign against Uncle Shrimp was led by two ‘conspiracy theory entrepreneurs’ (Harambam, 2020) operating as influencers with large followings on Facebook. Importantly, the conspiracy theory about Uncle Shrimp has not evolved into physical violence. However, other forms of platformed violence, including the threat of physical harm and harassment, are certainly present in the online community with severe consequences for the targeted actor beyond the virtual realm.

3.2 Theory

3.2.1 Violent socialization through extremist conspiracism

While not all conspiracy theorists are extremists, ‘extremists tend to be conspiracy theorists’ (Cassam, 2021: 110). As a psychological profiling component, conspiracy thinking constitutes a key aspect of the extremist mindset. However, participants of a conspiratorial-extremist community online need not have extremist mindsets at the level of the individual. Instead, they may have ‘a group extremist mindset in virtue of their joint commitment to imitate the behaviours of someone who has an individual extremist mindset’ (Malcolm, 2023: 5).

Moskalenko et al. (2024: 964) found in their study of the violent radicalization of QAnon followers that conspiratorial convictions ‘tend to correlate with a need to belong to a group’. In many cases of extremist conspiracism, socialization is just as important as

the content of the particular conspiracy theory, ideology, or set of norms to which the particular group subscribes. The notion of group dynamics, i.e., negotiations over who belongs to the in-group and who belongs to the out-group, is key to understanding the gradual transition from moral outrage and conspiracism to violent extremism. Although in-group formation is an important part of conspiracism, it is the specific conception among its members of how that in-group relates to the out-group that defines the proximity to violent extremism. In Berger's terms (2018: 44),

Extremism refers to the belief that an in-group's success or survival can never be separated from the need for hostile action against an out-group. The hostile action must be part of the in-group's definition of success. Hostile acts can range from verbal attacks and diminishment to discriminatory behaviour, violence and even genocide.

When an in-group perceives its survival to be contingent on damage done to an out-group, that in-group can be defined as extremist. The 'solution' to the perceived out-group threat against the in-group is typically some kind of violence (Berger, 2018: 46).

In the present case, the kind of violence employed to destroy the out-group may be termed 'online vitriol', which covers phenomena like public harassment campaigns, shitstorms, and various online speech acts that 'silence, threaten, or harm others' (Polak and Trottier, 2020: 14). This type of online violence may not only cause emotional distress and psychological damage to the victim because it is 'not just that the words cause harm on their own'; rather, 'harm is yielded in making those words so visibly linked to

the reputation of a targeted victim’ (Polak and Trottier, 2020: 15). Damage to a person’s reputation may bring ‘lasting and totalising consequences’ (Trottier et al., 2025: 13), especially in a digital environment where social media posts remain searchable for an indefinite period. Social media harassment campaigns put victims in a vulnerable position by placing them as potentially ‘legitimate’ targets of further harm. Once a public figure is linked to serious accusations such as grooming of children via claims made in a public space of discourse, anyone, including extremists or unstable individuals willing to engage in physical violence, becomes potential recipients of those claims. Although the most vocal online harassers may not necessarily attack their target beyond online vitriol, the mere incitement is a form of violence.

To be clear, not all conspiratorial communities lead to radicalization. The connection between participation in networked conspiracy theories and violent radicalization is a theoretical reduction, not a necessary linear causality (Wischerath et al., 2024). The point is, however, that conspiracy beliefs correlate with endorsements of violence: Conspiracy narratives can be an intervening factor, which may push individuals toward positive attitudes to using violence because these narratives ‘often provide an *outlet for hostility and aggression*’ (Vegetti and Littvay, 2022: 22, original emphasis).

In addition, the employment of violent strategies is also, in the eyes of the self-ascribed in-group, a morally legitimate or necessary response to perceived moral and legal offenses (Trottier, 2020). This is similar to what Marwick (2021) labels ‘morally motivated networked harassment’. This occurs when ‘a member of a social network accuses a target of violating the network’s norms’, triggering network members to ‘send

harassing messages to the target, reinforcing their adherence to the norm and signaling network membership' (Marwick, 2021: 4). Harassment and threats of violence, then, are not simply a question of pushing back against the perceived moral violations of an out-group, but also a response that positions the harasser firmly within the in-group. The aspect of conspiracy theories that frame a (perceived) violation of moral values in order to heighten the emotional tone of discourse is also discussed in Deliverable D4.1.

Although outrage and hate may be the main emotions around which an extremist-conspiracist community convenes, enjoyment, pleasure, and even love are also important emotional drivers (Olson, 2020). A recent study shows how far-right ecological settler movements take shape as 'spaces of love' (Beyer and Weisskircher, 2024: 2), which offer a sense of collective acceptance of violent expressions. Similarly, Rea et al. (2024: 169) demonstrate how media users 'form bonds' and reinforce conspiracy beliefs through 'hate parties' in the comments section on YouTube where they seem less concerned with the target of their hate and more concerned with writing 'for one another'.

This is not to say that group dynamics are detached from the content of the conspiracy theory at hand. For instance, when conspiracy beliefs revolve around the perceived abuse of children, which 'evidently carries a heavy emotional load' (Frejborg and Pettersson, 2024: 1048), the othering of perceived adversaries is likely amplified because group membership becomes a matter of purity and absolute moral. An in-group agenda of protecting children against perceived conspiracies is per definition superior to any construction of the opposite. The point is not that notions of moral purity or emotions of anger and resentment are problematic in and of themselves. The problem emerges

when such emotions are ‘exaggerated, irrational or based on false beliefs about reality’, which are key extremist characteristics (Cassam, 2021: 100). In this way, conspiracism may turn into violent extremism.

3.2.2 Participatory practices in HYPE communities

In conspiratorial communities centered around narratives of ‘protecting the children’, participants typically ‘blend personal testimonies with appeals to science, spirituality and the supernatural’ (Frejborg and Pettersson, 2024: 1048). These characteristics mirror the emerging trend of hybridization in online extremism where ideologies, conspiracy beliefs, and personal grievances are mixed together in new hybrid extremist narratives. Also labeled ‘salad bar extremism’ and ‘composite violent extremism’ (both in Gartenstein-Ross et al., 2023), the trend frequently shows up in the social media activities of lone-wolf mass shooters, indicating that they increasingly appear to be motivated by a mix of seemingly disparate beliefs (Bongar et al., 2019).

According to Jones and Comerford (2023), the hybridization trend ‘significantly lower[s] the barrier to participation for individuals into a potentially radicalizing environment’. The Danish Security and Intelligence Service emphasizes how hybridization is enabled by mainstream social media where ‘leading and agenda-setting individuals’ spread conspiracy theories and ‘threat-inducing narratives’ in a ‘loosely structured network’ with no clear ideological center (DSIS, 2024: 30). Similarly, the FBI predicts an increase in ‘conspiracy-driven extremism’ (Obaidi et al., 2022: 1687).

Elsewhere, we have coined the phrase *hybridized prefatory extremism*, or HYPE, (Petersen & Johansen, 2025), to conceptualize the complex relationship between ideological fragmentation, conspiracism, and violent extremism on social media. The notion of HYPE spaces aims to explain how social media technologies, platforms, practices, and aesthetics contribute to the hybridization trend. Via mainstream social media memetics, HYPE influencers and communities frequently dabble with extremist narratives, representing a possible first step on a radicalization trajectory, i.e., a prefatory stage. HYPE communities, such as the QAnon movement, are highly textually and aesthetically malleable; they combine a broad range of narratives, e.g., connecting COVID-19 misinformation and vaccine skepticism to conspiratorial notions of a deep state or a satanic global cabal led by Bill Gates (Demuru, 2022).

Importantly, when studying HYPE communities, it is useful to move beyond an isolated focus on extreme content and instead pay attention to their characteristics and types of practices. Although conspiracy theories about child abuse are serious in nature, the underlying logic of co-creating a conspiracy narrative is exploratory and sometimes even playful (de Wildt and Aupers, 2024).

Marwick and Partin (2024: 2536) have studied conspiratorial communities' self-labeled practice of 'baking' in which the 'bakers' utilize 'the participatory affordances of the social web to collectively construct knowledge that maintains the social and political cohesion of the conspiracy across time'. The baking practice points to a broader interpretive strategy in conspiracy theory communities where users take on the role of online sleuth. This practice is well-known in fan studies (e.g., Jones, 2023; Mittell, 2009).

Here, the term ‘forensic fandom’ describes how fans engage with complex television narratives through ‘research, collaboration, analysis, and interpretation’ (Mittell, 2009).

In the case of the Uncle Shrimp conspiracy, we perceive participants to engage in a form of *forensic play* (Petersen, 2025). Much participation in communities cultivating the conspiracy is centered around the interpretation of anything from social media posts to news stories and popular culture as potential ‘clues’ in a mystery that participants can collectively solve. Forensic play is fundamentally collaborative and based on a crowd-sourcing logic of producing ‘evidence’ to support and expand conspiracy theories (see Zeng and Schäfer, 2021).

Underlining the importance of socialization, the collaborative worldbuilding practices of conspiratorial communities illustrate how conspiracy theories may fulfill ‘an affective and ideological need for a shared sense of community’ (Topinka, 2024: 2). The way in which the sense of community is cultivated in HYPE communities is often through the expression of extremist emotions, particularly resentment and anger caused by conspiratorial convictions and a preoccupation with purity and victimhood. The most visible way in which such emotions turn violent is through calls to violent action, i.e., the solutions suggested to remedy the perceived threat of the out-group.

According to Berger (2018: 121–122), solutions constitute the final step in a four-step process which characterizes extremist groups: (1) Defining the in-group, (2) defining the out-group, (3) defining the existence of the out-group as a threat (crisis) for the in-group, and (4) defining hostile actions (solutions) that must be applied to the out-group.

The first two steps are concerned with the establishment of the right morals and values and an overarching narrative of supporters and adversaries. The third step concerns the positioning of the out-group not only as adversaries representing an oppositional set of values, but as fundamental transgressors, undermining – and therefore threatening – whatever set of values represented or upheld by the in-group. In this step, the existence of the out-group is typically defined as a crisis, which is commonly informed by conspiracy theories (Berger, 2018). Conspiracy theories are particularly useful in crisis narratives because they present an urgent need for action, or solution. The fourth and final step concerns calls to (hostile) action against the out-group.

Inspired by this process, our analysis is focused on the identification of *crisis narratives*, *in-group negotiations*, definitions of *out-group threats*, and, sometimes violent, *solutions* suggested in the Danish Facebook community engaged in the Uncle Shrimp conspiracy theory.

3.3 Method

3.3.1 Practice-based digital ethnography

Our data collection began in the days after the conspiracy theory on Facebook gained the attention of legacy media. In a practice-based approach, we observed what users *do* as participants in a conspiracy theory-based community and ‘how technologies and material infrastructures become players in social relations’ (Pink et al., 2016: 45).

We took an open digital ethnographic approach to identify patterns of practices, e.g., affective expression through likes, emojis and symbols, memetic practices, and the use of images, hyperlinks, and live streams by users to position themselves as belonging to the community. By searching for ‘uncle shrimp’ in the search bar on Facebook and moving through profiles and threads in a snowball fashion we familiarized ourselves with the community engaged in the conspiracy theory and were able to identify central actors and popular threads. In this way, we navigated through a loosely formed network of open-profile users liking, sharing, and commenting on each other’s posts. These ‘clusters’ of media practices ‘can have the effect of changing an existing social world’ in what Postill (2024: 49) labels ‘worlding effects.’

In the second phase, we collected posts and comments through screenshots over a period of several weeks in March–May 2023 and again in March–April 2024 when the conspiracy theory re-emerged in the same community. Reflecting the volatile nature of social media data, our data sample is essentially a snapshot as more comments have likely been added, and some deleted, after we collected data. We selected a total of six posts and their comment sections (three posts each by the two influencers).

3.4 Content analysis

Our content analysis is based on 370 comments posted in response to six individual Facebook posts by two influencers (hereafter Influencer 1 and 2), who were leading the campaign against Uncle Shrimp on social media. All data was anonymized both in order to avoid negative attention and limit potential harm against the commenting users but

also as a way of minimizing the chances that the two influencers use the present study to further position themselves within their communities.

In the first phase of coding, we counted the number of unique users per thread and noted their gender. An average of 40 users were active in each thread, roughly three quarters were women and the remaining quarter men, based on the feminine/masculine character of their names.¹

The code book used in the second phase of coding was based on the theoretical framework of violent extremism outlined above and informed by Berger's (2018) four steps of group extremism. The four main coding categories were (1) crisis narrative, (2) in-group negotiations, (3) out-group threats, and (4) solutions.

The data coded in the *crisis narrative* category covered the six original posts (also included in the 376 total) made by the two influencers. In the category of *in-group negotiations*, we coded for expressions of support between commenting users and the general cultivation of the community. Identifications of "the enemy," adjacent adversaries, negative callouts, gossip, and demonization of public figures and other users were coded as *out-group threats*. In the *solutions* category, we coded for direct calls to action and solutions suggested to solve the initial crisis. Calls to action were not necessarily violent but were generally focused on action to be taken beyond the comments sections on Facebook.

We added an additional fifth category of *disruptions* to capture comments which (likely intentionally) disrupted or derailed the coalescing narrative in the studied communities. Finally, *other* covers comments which did not fit in the remaining categories, for

example, nonsensical or imperfectly documented comments. All categories were mutually exclusive: when more than one category applied to a comment, for example, both negotiating the in-group and identifying out-group elements, we noted the dominant function of the comment. All comments were coded twice by both authors. An intercoder reliability test resulted in a score of 0.87.

In the following, we illustrate our findings by quoting several defamatory, discriminatory, and abusive comments. Due to the offensive nature of this content, reader discretion is advised. Although the identity of the Uncle Shrimp actor is well-known in the Danish public sphere, we refrain from mentioning his name in accordance with the ethical considerations of consistent data anonymization. Ethical approval has been granted by the University of Copenhagen's ethics committee.

3.5 Findings

The main claim of the Uncle Shrimp conspiracy theory is that the TV show and its title character are grooming Danish children. However, users consistently include other conspiracy theory narratives to support their evidence or to expand their worldbuilding beyond the local context. Thus, conspiracy theories about the New World Order, the Illuminati, Freemasons, and Pizzagate come up alongside mentions of COVID-19 vaccines, masks, and adrenochrome in the dataset. On the one hand, this indicates an ideological fragmentation in the community and, on the other hand, a narrative convergence underpinning a process of hybridization. In our analysis, we elaborate the

quantitative findings from our dataset through qualitative insights into the specific practices, formats, and aesthetics that enable a path toward “ambiguously motivated” harassment and violence (Gartenstein-Ross et al., 2023: 3).

Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of *crisis narratives*, *in-group negotiations*, *out-group threats*, *disruptions*, and *solutions*. Nearly half the comments are concerned with identifying the out-group and the related threat ($n = 175$). Yet the community was also significantly shaped by expressions of mutual support and affection in negotiating the

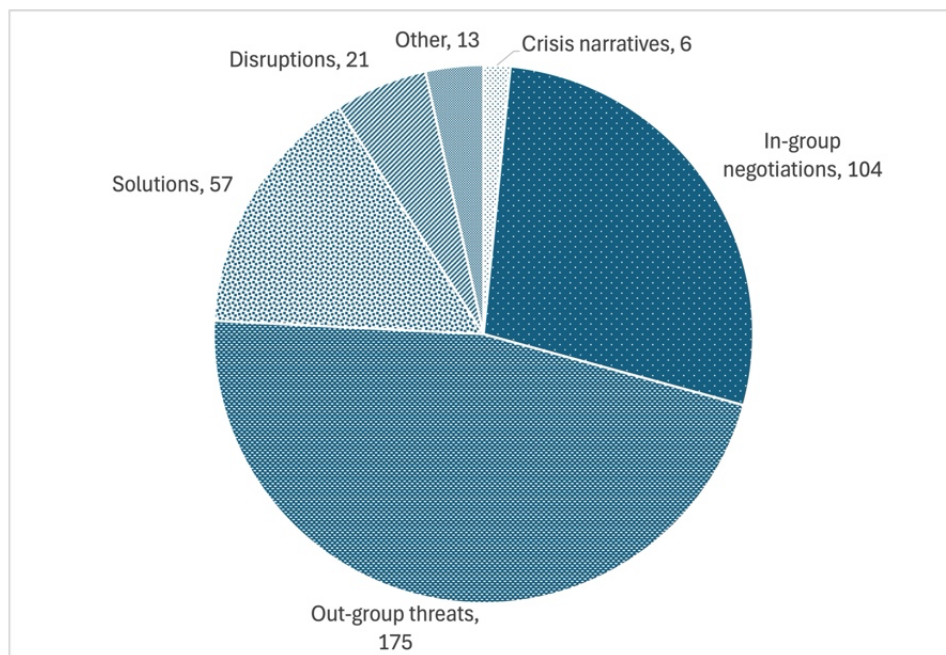


Figure 3: Distribution of comments across six categories.

boundaries of their community ($n = 104$). In addition, **57** comments were focused on offering a *solution* to the crisis, while **21** were *disruptions*, and **13** categorized as *other*.

3.5.1 Crisis narratives

Berger (2018: 122) describes how group radicalization occurs through the identification of a crisis: “The crisis cannot be temporary, conditional, or amenable to settlement. It must be perceived as inseparable from the existence of the out-group.” In this case, the crisis is entirely co-created by the community in question. Following a public performance in DR’s annual circus tour where the Uncle Shrimp character was playing with a “fart cannon,” some Danish Facebook users expressed outrage over such content being shown to young children. While some of the outrage resembled legitimate media criticism, a significant portion developed into a crisis narrative based on an emerging conspiracy theory.

In one post, Influencer 2 announces: “A SATANIC CULT IS BEING TAKEN DOWN RIGHT NOW ALL OVER THE WORLD” and continues: “a thing that is IMPORTANT to understand, is that Uncle Shrimp is part of the awakening.” Her post goes on to connect the Uncle Shrimp case to other local and global narratives, for example, the Jeffrey Epstein case. For Berger (2018: 99), the crisis is central in extremist movements because it calls for “an urgent response” in what he labels the “crisis-solution construct.” It is in the established crisis that the magnitude of the threat becomes poignant, so that a proportional (violent) solution may be legitimized (Berger, 2018: 99). The use of uppercase letters in her post underpins the urgency of this crisis, while also falling in line with “a broader trend of violent extremists with muddled beliefs” (Gartenstein-Ross et al., 2023: 4) by drawing on a repertoire of conspiracy theory narratives to “present their

case.” This content hybridity is most visible in Influencer 2, who demonstrates a deep engagement with conspiracism:

[With] my many disclosures and links to Skull & Bones, Freemasons, other “secret” orders, grooming for pedophilia, promotion of Satanism . . . “HIDDEN” CODES AND MESSAGES about dark and grim things such as Adrenochrome, dismembering little boys, children in cages . . . boiled children . . . kidnapped children . . . DRAGS and Uncle Shrimp in full BDSM outfit . . .

In other instances, posts are phrased as cliffhangers according to formulas such as: “if you’re shocked about Uncle Shrimp . . . you’ll get the shock of your life when you find out . . .” (Influencer 2) and “more on that tomorrow” (Influencer 1). The crisis in these online communities serve not only to establish a crisis narrative, they are also “governed by the economic and celebrity logics that drive social media: to produce regular content keeping up the outrage” (Finlayson, 2023, pp. 36–37), cultivating “an ongoing relationship with subscribers.” The apparent “amalgamation of prejudices, grievances, and subcultures” (Gartenstein-Ross et al., 2023: 7) may be understood in a similar vein; as a response to the internal logic of social media (Topinka, 2024) and an urgency to stay visible in the algorithmic infrastructure.

4.2 In-group negotiations and gendered participation

The in-group negotiations are central to the collective understanding of the potential threat that the crisis poses. Nearly three in four participants in the studied community are women. Although some studies show that women are less likely than men to endorse

conspiracy theories related to COVID-19 (Cassese et al., 2020), Frejborg and Pettersson’s (2024: 1037) study of female engagement in such conspiracy theories suggests that “feminine identities, and maternal identities in particular, play a key role in the mobilizing power of CTs.” The authors identify female subject positions anchored in motherhood, for example, the “roaring mother defending her children,” the mother “on a spiritual journey,” and mothers “as advocates for the abused” taking part in an awakening (Frejborg and Pettersson, 2024: 1041).

	Post	Comments	Unique users	Female	Male	Gender unknown
Influencer 1	1	39	25	17	8	0
	2	83	61	46	15	2
	3	71	56	40	16	0
Influencer 2	4	67	34	18	16	0
	5	69	40	28	12	0
	6	41	21	10	11	0
DR	7	61	-	-	-	-
Total		431		159	78	2

Table 4: Overview of comment distribution and the gender of the commenting users

Similarly, the in-group boundaries in the Uncle Shrimp conspiracy theory community are established through the repeated support for both the original poster and for others commenting in the thread, for example, “Super work with this post and in general, keep it coming ,” “You are so cool. It’s good that someone dares to speak up,” “AWESOME. Thank you ,” and posting pictures and gifs depicting anything from spiritual goddesses rising from earth to “Super Mom” stickers. Through these aesthetic practices of using images and symbols in the comments, community members emphasize the role of

motherhood and the personal awakening of the women speaking up about the perceived injustices against children, whom these mothers are uniquely positioned to protect. Positioning through motherhood is highly prevalent in our data as the community draws on “notions of empowerment, self-actualization, and sisterhood” (Frejborg and Pettersson, 2024: 1037) and emphasizes “the gendered authority of motherhood” (Reinhard, 2025: 46). It also offers insight into the hybridized characteristics of this Danish QAnon-adjacent community:

Amplified and exacerbated by the disruption of COVID-19 lockdowns, QAnon narratives moved through and across social media platforms to appeal not just to Republican supporters of Trump but also to *traditionally left-leaning women, yogis, vegans, natural childbirth enthusiasts, and “mom influencers.”* (Moskalenko et al., 2024: 965 our emphasis)

Spirituality is especially prevalent in the posts from Influencer 2, who frequently references awakenings or spiritual journeys, such as: “WE WILL RISE IN LIGHT, LOVE AND TOGETHERNESS. WE GOT THIS . LET LOVE RULE.” This resembles what Demuru (2022: 599–600) defines as “Pastel QAnon,” a QAnon subgroup characterized by “an aura of social empathy, love, and peacefulness,” which makes “[t]he fight against the deep state and the Satan-worshipping cabal lose[. . .] its violent tones,” turning it into “a demonstration of non-violent people concerned about the moral well-being of the world.”

These softer sentiments characterizing the in-group's dynamics as dominated by mutual respect and support emphasizes that a significant part of HYPE communities is not about (prefatory) violent expressions but about community building as a “crucial part” of the “affective practices that help explain the public appeal” of extremist cultures (Beyer and Weisskircher, 2024: 3). In-group negotiations and dynamics are thus central to understanding why these communities “are successful in mobilizing support” (Beyer and Weisskircher, 2024: 3), by offering its members continuous companionship and emotional resonance. Another potentially mobilizing practice that appears in the data as several users offer stories of their own experiences of sexual abuse and childhood grooming and links these experiences to watching clips from *Uncle Shrimp* as a retraumatizing event. Without wanting to minimize the lived experiences of the users sharing their personal stories, it is notable that this interpretive repertoire is, especially in the hands of other users, weaponized to offer legitimacy to the conspiracy theory narrative of a secret satanic pedophile elite.

3.5.2 Out-group threats

Nearly half of the comments in our sample are focused on identifying out-group elements. Comments in this category work to demarcate and describe the perceived enemy, while also engaging in conspiracy theory worldbuilding by placing the out-group as central in a mystery that the in-group can solve. It is a practice of othering, based on the attribution of various negative features to individuals and groups perceived to represent an adversarial moral framework: “the moral violations named in the accusation position the accused as deviant because their behavior violates group norms” (Marwick, 2021: 3).

Most comments are short expressions of emotional disgust, outrage, and name-calling directed at the individuals or institutions mentioned in the original influencer post or by other users. Other comments are elaborate contributions to the out-group construction and identification of adversarial narrative elements. For instance, in response to a suggested solution of “stopping DR,” one user commented, “[. . .] Still, there are many fans of that pedophile freak show, and one wonders why there are so many perverse and derailed individuals who defend this filth.” The *Uncle Shrimp* show and its fans are attributed features of moral decay, expressed through harsh language and extremely serious accusations. Another user concurs:

A great deal of the problem seems to be the DR Management, who wishes to spread sexual tendencies and pedophilia since they keep hiring this satanically deranged man whose only message is to [in]filtrate the kids’ innocence with twisted S&M sexuality and a pedophile, disturbed way of thinking.

In addition to the abstract construction of the out-group as the emblem of moral perversity and evil, several comments contribute to the crisis narrative by specifying members of the out-group. One user commented,

They want homo-children. In that way it becomes harder to reproduce. That is, fewer people on Earth. The ones who fall into the embrace of the satanists will forever be broken. Many of them with VENGEANCE and EVIL in mind. Some of them may not even survive. They are PRODUCING a generation of broken people. Ugh ugh ugh [. . .].

The user not only signals a homophobic sentiment, but adds to the crisis narrative a doomsday trope, suggesting that DR (or another vaguely defined elite entity, “they”) aims to depopulate Earth by spreading homosexuality. The catastrophizing, apocalyptic rhetoric is typical of extremist argumentation and a clear exhibition of an almost religious superconspiracy construction where a single TV show is ultimately linked to an evil scheme of depopulating the planet (see Barkun, 2013). Another comment claims that the goal of DR’s perceived grooming agenda is in fact to “prepare children for the pedophilia of Islam,” thereby adding Islam to the adversarial side of the narrative.

Thus, the constructed out-group threat is not only represented by Uncle Shrimp and DR. A vast collection, including the LGBTQ+ community, Islam, the political left, the World Health Organization, Klaus Schwab of the World Economic Forum, experts and the pharmaceutical industry, and a Danish radio host, who is attacked on the basis of his Jewish background, are also positioned as enemies. This identification of diverse outgroup threats reveals an ideological hybridization (Petersen and Johansen, 2025). This compilation of threats creates a sense of omnipresent danger which might push HYPE communities further toward violent solutions.

Beyond the clear conspiratorial and overt racism in the comments, the purging of possible in-group members, who are deemed unworthy or insufficiently dedicated to the cause, is also part of constructing the out-group. In several of the threads, users disrupting the conspiracy theory-building by challenging the arguments and “evidence” produced are quickly silenced and submitted to the same out-group as Uncle Shrimp, for example, “[...] I am glad that you, who used to ‘hide’, have now been lured out and commented

on my post, so I know who and what you are.” In this way, the in-group becomes immune to self-critique because any attempt to challenge the narrative submits users to the out-group.

Aside from the antagonistic outbursts, the identification of the out-group threat also takes place through forensic play. Here, seemingly any public piece of information serves as a potential clue waiting to be deciphered. In one thread, a user posts a screenshot from the actor playing Uncle Shrimp’s personal Instagram account from 2021 of a home baked Swiss roll alongside screenshots of an article on pedophile symbols. The implication is that the “spiral” at the end of the Swiss roll is signaling his affiliation with a pedophile ring. The same spiral is later identified on a picture with The Pope, a sheriff’s badge, a screenshot from a Disney movie, and brands of diapers and ice cream by other users suggesting the perceived extent of infiltration of the alleged ring. Similarly, other public images are zoomed in on and dissected to suss out evidence “hidden in plain sight.” Spirals, hand-gestures, clothes, colors, and subtle interior choices are pulled to the forefront of interpretation in this process of worldbuilding by “generating content collectively in a constant frenzy of editing, updating, and linking” (Mittell, 2009). One user links to a documentary about UK TV host and known sex offender Jimmy Savile, suggesting a perceived similarity to Uncle Shrimp. Other users link to videos from YouTube or Rumble on satanism and the satanic panic. While positive affective affirmations may establish in-group camaraderie, this type of forensic play may be a mobilizing force as “collective contributions can yield authoritative results” for others in the community (Mittell, 2009).

Intimating perhaps a hint of self-reflection, one user posted the widely used *Always Sunny in Philadelphia* conspiracy theory meme as a response to their collaborative efforts but also emphasizing that being engaged in a HYPE community is a fun source of self-produced entertainment. Similarly, another user posted an image of someone eating popcorn, emphasizing the amusement of a spectator watching as the conspiracy unravels. Humor, Phillips and Milner (2017: 92) suggest, can be “highly social for the members of the ingroup” while simultaneously alienating members of the out-group. Although presented in the typical jokey and ambiguous tone, image memes “establish ethical and ideological ways of being in the world,” ultimately shaping how people perceive it and respond to it (Phillips and Milner, 2021: 21). The solutions of the HYPE community rest on both intense expressions of disgust and hatred but also on the playful and humorous practices of solidifying an out-group threat.

3.5.2 Solutions: From prefatory to violent extremism

Among possible solutions that extremist in-groups typically suggest to resolve the crisis caused by an out-group are verbal attacks, harassment, and discrimination (Berger, 2018). In the context of online campaigns, also reputation-destroying slander, libel, and doxxing may be perceived as solution-oriented actions.

In the studied community, several calls to action appear as possible solutions across the sample of comments. Many comments in this category are abstract suggestions, for example, “When the hell will someone get off the couch and say ‘enough is enough’ [. . .]” or ambiguous, vague, and potentially suggestive, or subtly violent, for example, that

Uncle Shrimp, “Ought to be removed completely.” Several comments call for formalized types of action, including calls for petitions and open letters, calls for the filing of police charges against DR or Uncle Shrimp, and calls for lawsuits. One user comments in response to Influencer 1’s post: “SHAME ON DENMARK’S RADIO! Can we report them [to the police]? [. . .].” Influencer 1 replies “They’ve already been reported to the police. I did that last year. I started a campaign against DR back then. But the police are the henchmen of the state, so of course my report was dismissed.” Having taken the legal route in search for a solution in vain, the community is left to find “justice” through other means.

Several comments focus on solutions, which include the use of (violent) force, suggesting that the Uncle Shrimp actor “ought to be committed to a mental hospital for diagnostic investigation [. . .]” or that he “ought to be locked up.” Some of the comments suggest targeted harassment in the physical realm: In one post, which was not included in the dataset, Influencer 1 suggested demonstrating in front of the private home of DR’s director general. Another user writes: “can’t wait to tear out ALL CEOs of the news media and the 179 satans [members of the Danish Parliament] from wherever they’ve been trying to hide.”

Most of the solution-oriented comments are phrased as indirect threats, stating for instance that “it’s GAME OVER” for Uncle Shrimp or “I’m sure that [a known Danish criminal, name removed] and Uncle Shrimp are in competent hands. Just like Jeffrey Epstein is 🙏.” The passive rhetoric indicates a sense of faith and inevitability, based on the community’s perceived place on the right side at the day of judgment. Other

comments express similar beliefs in an inevitable judgment: “People don’t know what’s coming. DON’T LET THEM FOOL YOU!” and “Many of the people that have been part of an ugly and disturbing club and done terrible things have *no choice* now than to expose themselves” (emphasis added).

In addition to the more passive declarations of faith, several comments express extreme dedication to the cause. One user writes: “Whether or not I’m ruining the man’s life doesn’t matter. He is ruining many children’s minds and childish souls with that ‘show’ [...] HE HAS ALREADY RUINED HIS OWN LIFE”. Another writes: “I’m absolutely not joking, [name removed]... I’m willing to lose almost anything.” Not only do these comments indicate that the users are willing to take great risks; it potentially signals an all-or-nothing approach to solving the crisis, that is, by any means possible.

This, combined with vitriolic language, a general orientation toward mobilization, and several vague calls to action, such as “[...] all of us must do something. Please get things going. It’s so terrible to watch and needs to be stopped” and “It’s despicable. Someone needs to do something”, the community leaves space for individuals to “ask themselves whether their actions in support of the [. . .] in-group are an adequate response to the crisis” (Berger, 2018: 125–126). This marks the point in which lone-wolf attackers may escalate to hostile action or physical violence. While most users in the community will remain firmly in the prefatory stages, the initial stages analyzed here take on a character which makes space for the acceptance or necessity of extremist violence on an individual level, reminding us that “[v]iolence hangs around [. . .] it lurks, ready to pounce when conditions are favorable” (Zelizer, 2023: 1388). In HYPE communities, shaped by

ideological, platformed, practice-based, and aesthetic hybridity, such favorable conditions become manifest.

4.0 Conclusion

This report, D4.9, contributes with textual analysis of two very different, but both very typical, case studies of online communities from Reddit and Facebook, respectively.

The two case studies exemplify the conditions for democratic debate and the modes of participation in conspiracy theory-driven online narratives.

The findings of the Reddit study suggest that immigration discussions on the platform combine a mix of practical concerns about the topic of immigration, ideological reasoning, and more extreme narratives, with clear differences across conversational levels (i.e., direct replies to the original post versus deeper, threaded reply to chains). In the direct replies (standalone comments), users most frequently discussed mixed views on crime and racism in immigration, barriers to integration, safety issues in Europe, and the role of colonialism and Europe exploiting others, reflecting debates around crime and poverty, racism, benefits of immigration, and government policies. In the standalone comments, views were mixed including opposing immigration but also justifying or proposing non-extreme reasoning related to immigration. In contrast, the threaded replies were dominated by barriers to integration, especially emphasizing religion as a barrier, emphasising conspiratorial or other extreme statements, comparing past immigration versus current, and making strong

claims about multicultural countries collapsing, indicating more polarised and extreme discourse. This shift toward stronger ideological and conspiratorial themes in the threaded comments is consistent with the more dialogic structure of the second dataset, where branching conversations extended across multiple reply levels, creating spaces for intensified argumentation and conflict. This may reflect the emergence of more extremist echo chambers within the chatroom as the threads narrow and become more insular. In line with prior research showing that online environments can foster polarising rhetoric and extremist discourse (e.g., Hiaeshutter-Rice & Hawkins, 2022; Klein et al., 2019), the deeper reply chains appeared to amplify ideological divisions and conspiratorial reasoning.

The second case study in D4.9 mainly investigates the relationship between HYPE communities and platformed harassment and violent extremism. Since the emergence of the QAnon conspiracy theory from the imageboard 4Chan in 2017, and its subsequent mainstreaming in American and global politics, networked conspiracy theories have been part of the cultural zeitgeist on social media. The culmination of QAnon's influence at the insurrection on the US Congress on January 6 in 2021 highlights the significant threat of violence that online conspiracy theories pose to society by 'violating social norms and threatening democratic core values' (Isbister et al., 2018).

Our study of a Danish QAnon-adjacent community offers several insights. First, our study confirms similar findings from other recent studies (e.g. Marwick and Patin,

2024; de Wildt and Aupers, 2023), namely that networked conspiracy theory communities engage in collaborative wordbuilding through participatory practices and that these communities have ‘eroded the boundaries [...] between ideologies and entertainment, fan-culture, self-help and other genres of public communication)’ (Finlayson, 2021: 17). Online extremist communities draw on genres, formats, and modes of communication familiar from other cultural spheres resulting in an ideological hybridity, which we label *hybridized prefatory extremism*, or HYPE. In the present HYPE community, the ideological extremism is often subtle or unclear, as participants draw on a catalogue of global conspiracy theory narratives and hate ideologies and apply them to a communicative context of social media, but as Berger reminds us ‘such fused ideologies can be more complex and toxic than the sum of their parts’ (Berger, 2018: 30). Online spaces of hybridized extremism manifest through decentralized communities operating as a ‘flexible worldwide network’ (Bauer, 2014, p. 61), reconfiguring the landscape of violent extremism in the process. While the present conspiracy theory community has not risen above the level of harassment and threats of physical violence, it is an important reminder that even relatively “silly” and ephemeral conspiracy theories online may bring with them illegalities with negative impact on the lives of those targeted.

Second, while these worldwide networks emanate from American conspiracy narratives, their anchoring in deeply local contexts appears crucial for their potential to mobilize movements toward violence. The local context of a TV show in a small nation offers a proximity by which participants may feel action is more doable. Unlike Hillary

Clinton, who was targeted in the PizzaGate conspiracy theory, the actor playing Uncle Shrimp and DR are within reach both online and in their physical lives. Proximity may enhance a sense of urgency to solve an imminent crisis.

Third, part of the inherent hybridity of HYPE communities lies in how the crisis–solution construct (Berger, 2018) is communicated through playful forensic practices as participants take on the role of online sleuths identifying and deciphering clues. The use of playfulness and humor within communities of hate and harassment presents a specific challenge because it both offers a sense of communal levity to the serious topic of child grooming, which may in turn mobilize more participants into a space of disgust and outrage toward a targeted individual. While the prefatory character of HYPE spaces means that they sometimes deflate before taking on the expressions of (violent) extremism, we are reminded that it is ‘impossible to parse where the embodied ends and the digital begins’ (Philips and Milner, 2017: 66–67). The violence of online harassment campaigns and vitriolic callouts is in large part constituted by the afferent risk and enhancement of vulnerability of the targeted public figures.

5.0 Endnotes

^[1] Subreddits are communities on Reddit which have their own rules and guidelines

^[2] Formerly known as Twitter

^[3] A popular Chinese microblogging website

^[4] upvotes are the Reddit equivalent of “likes” on other platforms

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^[1] Two users (1%) used gender-neutral pseudonyms.

Revision Notes

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List of Acronyms/abbreviations

Abbreviation	Explanation
DR	Danmarks Radio, ie. Danish Broadcasting Company (public service network).
HYPE	Spaces of hybridized prefatory extremism.