Radicalization Narratives in Online-Videos: What Potential for De-Radicalization

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Introduction

Grown relevance of radicalization via social media

- **Social media & the visual**: greatly increased in media society
  - Problematic: quick distribution of content & easy spreading of false information
  - Images are powerful – speak to emotions

- **Videos**: linking of images, text, music, colours, etc.
  - Strategic use by extremist groups
  - Generate interest – subtly / directly over various topics
  - Recruiting, mobilizing

- **Youtube algorithms**:
  - Viewer behaviour rewards/punishes: algorithms shape what content is offered
  - Promotion of sensational content

Objectives and Proceeding

VIDEOSTAR – Video-based Strategies Against Radicalisation

Focus: radicalization narratives in youtube videos

- Islamism & right-wing extremism/populism

Q.: Which messages are conveyed through extremists' internet propaganda and their radical texts? And how are the interactions in extremists' online platforms?

Q.: How can video-based counter-narratives be designed to be de-radicalizing or at least to impede further radicalization?

Proceeding:

- Expert interviews
- Content and visual analysis: youtube videos, online text, platforms
- Field research
- Deconstruct extremist interpretations and messages – develop alternative perspectives in videos

First Results from Interviews and Videos

Right-wing extremist content:

- Danger from an outside other
- Danger of ethnic groups mixing – eg. ethnopluralism (New Right)

New Right:

- Refugee debate: 2015-2016 as chaotic, no order, threat
- Aim at mainstream – concerns shown in media
  - ‚Seid Ihr nicht auch besorgt, dass …' – „Aren't you worried too that …"
- Alleged solutions + open identity so that many can agree
- Re-interpretation: 'freedom', 'home', 'democracy'
- Call to participate – eg. spread crime statistics of migrants

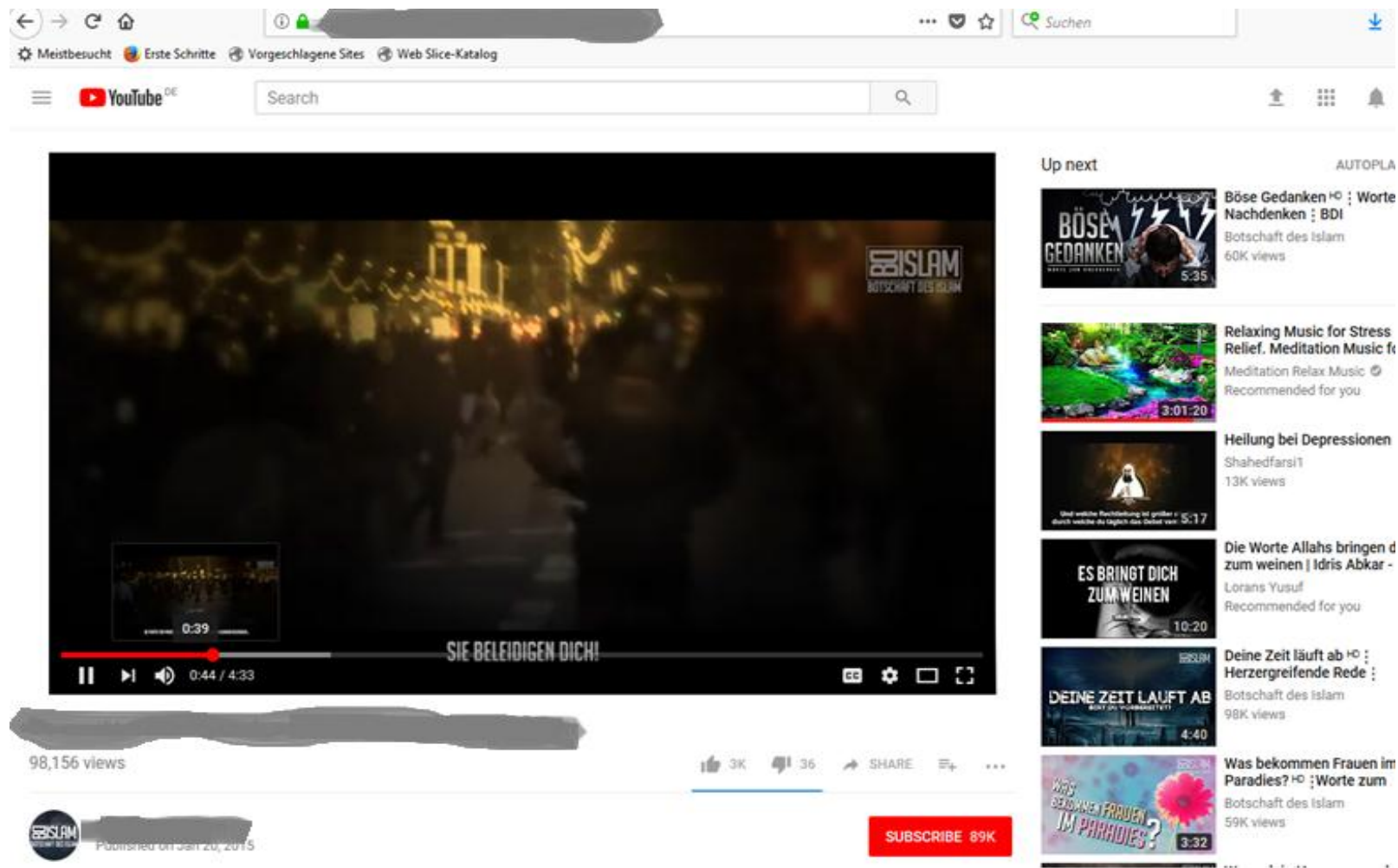**Right-wing:** "We fight for Germany" (transl.)

Islamist content:

- Messages: issues of long-term character + daily relevance
- 'The one true religion' – differentiation towards and devaluation from others

Both victim narratives and superiority narratives:

- "Muslims are not welcome in Europe" – will remain outsiders and be discriminated
- Re-interpret Western communication and action
- Call to Muslims to defend each other and Islam – obligation to act against disbelievers
- Speak to young people directly, offer identity, group belonging, meaning, a parallel world

Videos: often fast cuts, according to viewing habits of young people, some like ego-shooter games, special effects

Islamist: „They despise you. Run back to Allah" (transl.)

Challenges for De-Radicalization Narratives Online

- **Balance freedom of speech and opinion**, while pushing back ideas and actors creating antagonism in society and even calling for violence.

- **Different degrees of radicalization**, even in the early stages, likely need different approaches. Multiple types and formats of addressing audiences are needed, in order to address the multiple concerns taken up in radicalization narratives and to connect to the varied concerns of viewers.

- **Placing these videos** in particular channels and discussions, to ensure them being seen by the appropriate target group.

- **Keeping the creator of the videos (our institution) covert**, to not block possible viewing and content acceptance from the start.

How VIDEOSTAR Aims at De-Radicalization

- Earnestly debate existing conflicts on which extremist groups build their clout and followership.
- Some content may lend itself to be placed in a corrected context and reading, other content can be deconstructed by questioning contradictions and linkages.
- Move away from simplification of issues and problems – back to the complexity that most issues and problems come with.

Open Questions

- Use of examples of people having exited extremist scenes?
    - can be effective
    - but argue for a certain attraction of committed violence
        - talk of having committed violent acts seems attractive to some

- Who should speak? Who is seen as legitimate?
    - Authenticity is a crucial aspect of counter narratives!
        - speaker must be an expert (e.g. scholar in Islamic studies) in case of Islamism OR possibly be personally affected (e.g. migrant?)
    - Also charisma and popularity are key!
        - speaker could be popular in media (e.g. from sports, music, etc.).

Thank you!