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Gabrielle Blanquart

*Edith Cowan University, gblanqua@our.ecu.edu.au*

David M. Cook

*Edith Cowan University, d.cook@ecu.edu.au*

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# **TWITTER INFLUENCE AND CUMULATIVE PERCEPTIONS OF EXTREMIST SUPPORT: A CASE STUDY OF GEERT WILDERS**

Gabrielle Blanquart<sup>1</sup>, David M. Cook<sup>2</sup>  
School of Computer and Security Science<sup>1</sup>, Security Research Institute<sup>2</sup>  
Edith Cowan University, Perth, Australia  
gblanqua@our.ecu.edu.au, d.cook@ecu.edu.au

## **Abstract**

*The advent of Social media has changed the manner in which perceptions about power and information can be influenced. Twitter is used as a fast-paced vehicle to deliver short, succinct pieces of information, creating the perception of acceptance, popularity and authority. In the case of extremist groups, Twitter is one of several avenues to create the perception of endorsement of values that would otherwise gain less prominence through mainstream media. This study examines the use of Twitter in augmenting the status and reputation of anti-Islam and anti-immigration policy through the controlled release of social media information bursts. The paper demonstrates the use of new media by extremist groups using open source case study data from the associated Twitter traffic of Geert Wilders. The results indicate the pursuit of increased traction for controversial ideals that provoke and incite others towards extremism, violence, racism and Islamophobia.*

## **Keywords**

Twitter, Extremism, New Media, Geert Wilders, Radicalisation, Anti-immigration, Metadata, Homophily.

## **BACKGROUND**

### **The History and Influence of Twitter**

Created in 2006, Twitter is an online micro-blogging service that allows users to send and receive 140 character 'bursts' of information known as 'Tweets' (Lloyd, 2012). The Twitter organisation claims to have over 200 million users (Twitter, 2013), and there is widespread evidence that the number of users has grown rapidly (Parmelee&Bichard, 2013). Twitter is available in 58 countries in 37 languages (Twitter, 2013) and is the second most popular social media vehicle in the world (MIT, 2013).

Compared to social media mainstays LinkedIn and Facebook, Twitter is significantly under-moderated (Dean et al., 2012), whilst Twitter's message content has a greater rate of diffusion (Ausserhofer&Maireder, 2013;Rovner, 2013). Twitter sends short 'tweets' of information, the power of which is multiplied each time the original message is re-tweeted (Parmelee&Bichard, 2013). Thus an original tweet may be judged as influential based upon the number of followers who choose to re-tweet the original message to their network of connections (KLOUT, 2013; Twitter, 2013).

The Internet is a ubiquitous assembly of information networks (Chen, 2010; Keeves, 2012) and Twitter represents a substantial portion of those networks (Tapscott& Williams, 2008). The growth and direction of Twitter indicates that it now stands as an independently strong organisation that facilitates the dispersion of ideas more directly than competing new media (Parmelee&Bichard, 2013; Schneier, 2012). Twitter exhibits significant influence over political campaigns, issues and authority in both information and misinformation (Chamberlain, 2010; Schneier, 2012). New media such as Twitter now delivers measurable and recordable degrees of influence across a range of contestable issues (Park & Lee, 2009; Parmelee&Bichard, 2013). This paper will use a case study of the 12 month Twitter activity of Dutch political extremist Geert Wilders in order to illustrate the manner in which twitter messaging can directly facilitate incitement, provocation and violent reactions.

### **The Mechanics of Twitter**

Twitter is built upon an open source software platform (Twitter, 2013). It is an abbreviated form of messaging based on high-speed dissemination rather than multi-layered social integration (Parmelee&Bichard, 2013). The two key components of Twitter are the Direct Messages (DMs) and the Re-tweeted messages (RTs). The multiplier effect of RTs more clearly determine influence since they offer measurability of the sway, power and authority of information diffusion through technology (Romero, Wojciech, Asur, and Huberman, 2011). The difference between DMs and RTs is highlighted by the increased power of RTs. For example, if a politician with extremist views tweets a direct message (DM) to 5000 followers, then it gives an indication of his popularity within his political domain, However if the same message is subsequently re-tweeted (RT) to a further 15000 personas and then on to another 10000 personas, a more reliable indication of influence begins to emerge. Since retweeted messages deliver exponential growth in message diffusion, a message that is re-distributed signals an increase in the influence of the content of that message (Rogers, 2003). Thus the propagation of tweets determines influence far more clearly than the instigation of each tweet by its original author (Romero et al, 2011).

Social media advocates claim increased social inclusion using technology allows for a higher level of transparency and openness (Winn and Zakem 2009). Simultaneously, it also allows those with the digital understanding and technological means to harness the social inclusivity of the wider populace (Buck, Buck, & Mogil, 2003; Walker, 2009). In combination with Twitter's lack of moderation, the increased speed of diffusion makes Twitter a far more usable proposition for extremist groups who become aware of limitations in other forms of new media (Dean et al, 2012). Where Facebook and Youtube display narrative and counter-narrative, Twitter's short, sharp messages have a far more galvanising effect upon followers. It allows minority voices to shout considerably louder on their political landscapes, including the voices of fanatics, extremists and those seeking to incite discrimination and hatred toward others (Jackson, 2009).

### **Re-tweetability and Influence**

The key to the successful propagation of information diffusion through Twitter is the 're-tweetability' of each narrative. The key force-multipliers (factors that increase multiple re-tweets) that affect twitter are *keywords*, *@username*, *hashtags*, and *URLs* (Suh, Lichan, Pirolli, & Chi, 2010). Keywords that resonate with audiences that are already predisposed to certain messages allow extremist ideology and dogma to promulgate. The *@username* metadata is embedded in the standard re-tweet functionality, meaning RTs repeatedly promote the original author (Yang & Counts, 2010). The use of *URLs* and *hashtags* has greater multiplying effects. They form the principle markers that followers will look for when deciding to re-tweet a message (Yang et al, 2010). Hashtag metadata (such as *#Stop Islam*) gains popular usage among anti-immigration and anti-Islamic extremist groups, often being added to semi-related tweets to leverage analogous thinking. This tactic amongst like-minded followers is referred to as homophily (Kwak, Lee, Park, & Moon, 2010). Followers who see the hashtag will respond by re-tweeting the hashtag, often as a call to action (Suh et al, 2010; Kwak, et al, 2010). Similarly, *URLs* that point to related news or in many cases images are also suitable metadata tools that popularize and promote each message more powerfully than the narrative in its raw text-only form (Suh et al, 2010).

### **HOW TWITTER INFLUENCES EXTREMISM**

Web 2.0 technology now underpins most contemporary extremist operations, enabling finance, recruitment, and general support (Dean et al, 2012; Halverson & Way, 2012; Porter & Kebbell, 2011; Silber & Bhatt, 2007; Torok, 2013). Dean et al (2012) and Torok (2013) posit that this more increasingly involves social media sites such as Youtube, Twitter and Facebook. Extremist groups are more often deploying online social media proliferation as recruitment and training tools, as opposed to traditional face to face interactions (Bell et al, 2012; Shirazi, 2012; Torok, 2013). The increased use

of the internet by extremists through social media as a new mechanism for engagement has magnified the availability of radical ideas (Dean et al, 2012; Shirazi, 2012; Torok, 2013). The value of new media to extremists is that it can be harnessed at relatively low cost for the purposes of building a perception of a greatly exaggerated social capital (Conway, 2012). Such social capital can be converted into tolerance, support, acceptance, and mobilisation towards extremist ideology (Warschauer, 2003). The case of Arid Uka illustrates the trend of lone-wolf radicalization through the online environment with no affiliations (Torok, 2013).

### **Reinforcing Extremist Policies and Beliefs**

An alluring feature of Twitter is its *homophily*, where like-minded individuals join networks and normalise views and behaviours, often reinforcing extremist policy (Stevens & Neumann, 2009). As a person changes their views and becomes radicalized, the role of the internet changes from a source of information to a reinforcement tool (Silber & Bhatt, 2007). Online Web 2.0 participants seek other online users who have similar beliefs, and corroboration on beliefs can amplify the extremity of that belief (Stevens & Neumann, 2009; Torok, 2013). New media can reinforce extremist beliefs by spreading disinformation, hateful language or horrific images and encourage the creation of out-groups, reinforcing the categorical thinking that pushes an extremist to take action towards others (Conway 2007; Conway, 2012; Moghaddam, 2007). Both Holtmann, (2013), and Kundani (2012) acknowledge the danger of 'cumulative extremism' from vehicles such as Twitter through narrative exchanges that focus on fear and retaliation as common themes for discussion. Twitter can reinforce extremist policies as Tweets allow authors to send information without explanation and directly control perception, thus assisting extremists to transmit dogma without the accompanying reasoning (Conway 2007;2012). Gleason (2013) attributes the popularity of Twitter to this attractiveness of brevity.

### **Radicalization of followers**

There are many intermediary influences by which an individual or group may be radicalised (Aly &Streigher, 2012; Schmid, 2013; Silber & Bhatt, 2007). A growing practice for recruiting members relies on new media as an avenue for radicalising disenfranchised individuals (Bell et al, 2012; Shirazi, 2012). The way extremists use new media such as Twitter demonstrates the vulnerability for increased recruitment and extremism to proliferate (Helmus et al, 2013; Porter &Kebbell, 2011; Sutton & Wright, 2009). According to Silber & Bhatt's (2007) report, the internet acts as an accelerant to extremism and creates the ultimate path of radicalization. Homophily evolves as like-minded people share extremist thoughts, group polarization grows from compatible dialogue (Stevens & Neumann, 2009) Gleason (2013) posits that Twitter is utilized to fulfill cursory interest where it provides informal, constructivist learning regarding a topic and provides an informal space that facilitates opportunities to construct knowledge from multiple modalities including user-generated content. Recent scholarly interest in how Twitter can inform and mobilise people in times of social unrest suggests that Twitter provides a direct platform for social participation and can facilitate 'calls to action' through both encouraging displacement of aggression and through an ability to contact a group directly (Conway, 2012; Gleason, 2013; Lotan et al, 2010; Tufeki, 2012).

## **GEERT WILDERS: A CASE STUDY OF TWITTER BEHAVIOUR**

### **Right-Wing Extremist and the European Movement**

Dutch politician Geert Wilders advocates a far-right ideology based on anti-Islam, and anti-immigration platforms specifically directed at Europe. He has over 283,000 Twitter followers (Twitter, 2013). He uses Twitter regularly, and posts inflammatory, anti-Islamic content on Twitter as a method to arouse support. Wilders' aims to create international alliances against immigration and Sharia law in the western world (Conway, 2012; Switzer, 2010). Wilders is portrayed as an anti-Islam figurehead for national populist groups with a network of supporters internationally and throughout the EU (Vossen, 2011; Van der Zwan, 2011). Right wing political figures such as Wilders focus on Islam as extremist and undesirable, and going against traditional western liberal values (Acuto, 2010;

Bartlett et al, 2011). He has been taken to court for hateful language towards Muslim people (Bartlett et al, 2011) and was refused entry into the United Kingdom in 2009 (Independent, 2009).

Geert Wilders' twitter accounts align with other far-right wing movements that are emerging through Europe. His twitter-fed ideology appears overtly discriminatory and draws from current political and social problems as well as official security narratives and jihadist narratives (Kundani, 2012; Ramalingam et al, 2012; Stevens & Neumann, 2009). The active support (via re-tweets) for Wilders' extremist messages, over 10,000 re-tweets (between 2012 and 2013), gives rise to concern in terms of right wing radical support in Europe. The number of followers who retain direct connectivity to Wilders' twitter messages is a stark indicator of influence and support. Encouraged mobilisation and calls to action include street based activism, participation in parliament to possible violence. Euphemistic narratives such as #stop Islam are open to interpretation. Whilst right-wing extremism is underestimated next to the global Islamist threat which has characterised most counter terrorism efforts (Kundani, 2012; Richards, 2013; Tepfenhart, 2011), Wilders' tweets resonate strongly with other right-wing groups. An analysis of Geert Wilders' Twitter practices substantiates the challenges driven by extremism and new media.

### The Language of Twitter: Using Hateful Commentary to stir reaction

For two decades a wave of far right extremism has evolved through Europe, based on the opposition to cultural pluralism stemming from mass immigration (Bartlett et al, 2011; Tepfenhart, 2011). Far-right discourses include the protectionism of national identity, anti-immigration, and concerns over multiculturalism and Islamic extremism (Bartlett et al, 2011; Richards, 2013). Specialised and understated language, as identified by Bandura (2004), is an important tactic for extremists, and Wilders' content on Twitter uses terms that draw on popular themes and areas of dissatisfaction and disenfranchisement (Kundani, 2012). Such language gains support and inspires others towards his ideology (Bartlett et al, 2011; Kundani, 2012). Table 1 provides examples of the characteristic language used by Wilders on Twitter.

Element	Tweet Examples
Propagation of scare stories about Islam	"View the number of terrorist acts and the number of casualties since the begging of Ramadan. Brutality in the name of Allah" August 6, 2013 "More and more Christians in Islamic countries persecuted and killed". September 12, 2012 "Iran celebrates 34 years of Islamic barbarism led by dangerous Lunatics like Khomeini, Khamenei and Ahmadinejad." February 10, 2013
Criticise Islam in a hateful way	"Logically, Muhammad also liked much more hatred and violence" February 8, 2013 "I will tell it but follow Fitna - is mainly about the barbaric life of the sick mind Muhammad and should be ready in 2012 !". April 1, 2011
Generalisations against Islam, but extremists as example	"Islam is peace ? Al- Shabaab threat : attack on Dutch parliament due delete ban blasphemy . # stop Islam" Dec 3, 2012 "Muslims stabbing Buddhist temples on fire in Bangladesh . Madness . Islam is peace ? Islam is pure hatred and violence ". September 30, 2012 "Al Qaeda terror in the name of an insane warlord/pedo." August 11, 2013
Anti-immigration message	"How wonderful it would be a NL without Islam. Without mosques , burqas , female circumcision , street terror" July 31, 2013 "Total idiocy : Muslim halal homes in Amsterdam . Anyone who wants to be better off to Saudi Arabia . # Stop Islamization" November 24, 2012
Against Establishment / Unification Europe	"5 billion gives EU Egyptian Muslim brother Morsi . Van Rompuy collaborates with Islamic fascists". January 4, 2013 "Krankzinning intention : Islamic prayer in Walibi Holland . No Islamisation of our parks ! December 24, 2012
Calling for Action (eg "Stop Islam")	"Visit Australia in Feb is finally on. Looking forward to it . Fight against Islamization is an international assignment". January 2, 2013. "Islam is war . Islam is violence . Islam Sharia . Islam is jihad . Why do we import it? # stop Islam" May 22, 2013

Table 1. Samples of Geert Wilders Tweets @geertwilderspvv

### The Twitter Commentary of Geert Wilders, a focus on inciting hatred in Muslims

An analysis of Geert Wilders' two main twitter accounts (@geertwilderspvv and @geertwilders\_mp) from January 2012 to September 2013 examined 459 tweets. The sample was collected from open source content, available by following the accounts through Twitter.com. An examination of the Twitter accounts between January 2012 and September 2013 indicates that Wilders' most circulated subject-matter frequently critiqued the European Union (EU), and the current political

establishment. National political content consisted of 43% and international political content 23% as shown in Figure 1 and 2. Beyond these anti-establishment jibes and taunts, the remaining Wilders' tweets proffer anti-Islamic sentiment. Of the 459 tweets, 87 were anti-Islamic (19% of all tweets). Wilders' extremist narratives are mixed into the political commentary, they frequently transmit scare stories, and inflammatory rhetoric depicting all Muslims as violent and that Islam equates to War (see Table 1.).

Wilders' narratives draw parallels with current new right extremists (Kundani, 2012) such as the EDL. Wilders uses twitter to promote anti-Islam ideology throughout Europe by aligning and promoting the fear of terrorist threats from Muslims throughout Europe. Anti-immigration rhetoric is blurred with anti-Islam rhetoric, and cross multiplied through thousands of retweets and their associated narrative progeny.

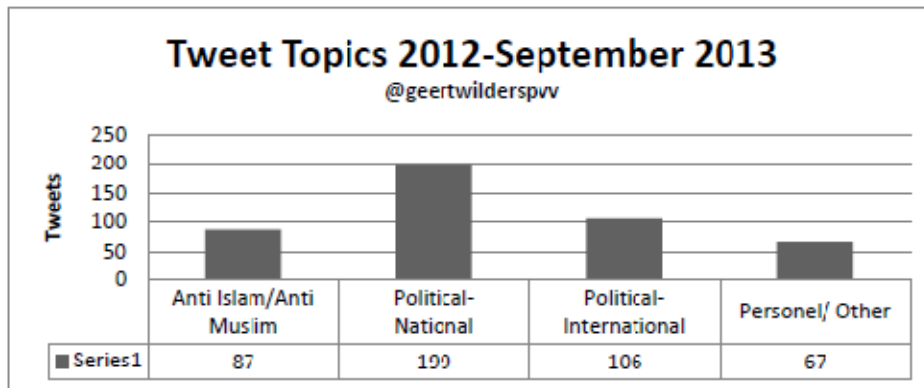


Figure 1. Analysis of Tweet Topics 2012 to September 2013 disseminated by @geertwilderspvv

The categorisation of the key narratives depicted in Figure 1 (and further segmented in Table 2) shows that Wilders tweeted many mainstream political messages in addition to his extremist messages. The mixture of political commentary and extremist commentary appears to lend populist credibility to his contentious narratives. This in turn translates to a higher than expected number of retweets of his extremist words. Twitter followers of Geert Wilders demonstrate acceptance and support for a variety of topics even though nearly 20% of these messages cover extremist subject matter.

Segmentation of Narrative Content @geertwilderspvv	No of Tweets
Personal Tweets	67
Hateful Discourse	5
Anti-Immigration/ Anti-Multicultural Tweets	36
Anti-Establishment / EU Unification tweets	17
Calls for Actions (eg Stop Islam)	7
Islamic / Terrorist Generalisations	55
Dutch / European Political Tweets	268

Table2. Segmentation of Tweet Topics 2012 to September 2013 disseminated by @geertwilderspvv

The narrative segmentation (in Table 2) shows the number of tweets that were of a general political nature and the number of tweets that are extremist. At first glance Geert Wilders twitter accounts display sufficient personal content to humanise his narratives within normal social boundaries. If the narratives of hateful, anti-immigration, anti-multicultural, anti-establishment, anti-Islam and Islamic terror generalisations are summed up it can be seen that a three way segmentation of Personal narratives (14.7%), Extremist narratives (26.4%), and 58.9% Political narratives (Table 2a) are

created. Thus, the Twitter chronicles of Geert Wilder display the normal interactions of an active public figure, but with the added characteristic that more than one quarter of all narratives stimulates extremist discourse.

Segmentation of Narrative Content @geertwilderspv	No of Tweets
Personal Tweets	67
Extremist Narratives	120
Dutch / European Political Narratives	268

Table2a. Segmentation of Tweet Topics 2012 to September 2013 disseminated by @geertwilderspv

The data in Table 3 gives an understanding of the influence of Geert Wilders' extremist tweets, and what types of narratives resonate with others. The table shows the number of retweets each of Geert Wilders' original tweets attracts. Wilders' May 22<sup>nd</sup> 2013 post attracted 776 retweets. Retweeted circulation delivered increased homophily (common pairings between like-minded twitter users) between followers and non-followers. The May 22<sup>nd</sup> tweet re-enforces Wilders' persistent themes:

*"Islam is war. Islam is violence. Islam Sharia. Islam is jihad. Why do we import it? # stop Islam"*

The tweet coincided with the news that London soldier Lee Rigby had been hacked to death by two individuals in an Islamic extremist attack (BBC, 2013). The attack received worldwide media attention and resulted in far right groups such as the English Defence League (EDL) mobilizing (Vinograd, 2013).

Original tweet	Narrative Content	Discrete Retweets
11 <sup>th</sup> August 2013	"25 Al Qaeda terror in the name of an insane wailord / pedo. But civilization from barbarism always wins"	128
7 <sup>th</sup> August 2013	"Unfortunately end of Ramadan.. Islam no end"	229
6 <sup>th</sup> August 2013	"View the number of terrorist acts and the number of casualties since the beginning of Ramadan. Brutality in the name of Allah."	96
2 <sup>nd</sup> August 2013	"The so called Prophet did the same thing with a young girl"	109
1 <sup>st</sup> August 2013	"Whipping and jailing a journalist in Saudi Arabia for insulting Islam. Meanwhile in the Netherlands we continue cowardly cultural relativism."	273
29 <sup>th</sup> July 2013	"Let them roar. Recruiters for jihad should be locked up and sentenced. All of them The more the better!"	231
8 <sup>th</sup> July 2013	"Why should we include those Dutch who follow Allah... Ramadan is just one big holiday"	284
24 <sup>th</sup> June 2013	"Hate that the Book of Qur'an remains in Lower House plenary hall. Incredible!"	121
1 <sup>st</sup> June 2013	"Stop building mosques!"	296
1 <sup>st</sup> June 2013	"Netherlands has had enough of Islam! Read the Islam-examination of Gallup on behalf of the PVV."	266
28 <sup>th</sup> May 2013	"Nice, so on June 9 in LA there are speeches on national sovereignty versus European Union and the growing danger Islam"	58
23 <sup>rd</sup> May 2013	"Islam is war. Islam is violence. Islam Sharia. Islam is jihad. Why do we import it?"	776
22 <sup>nd</sup> May 2013	"And they cried 'Allahu Akbar'"	261
21 <sup>st</sup> May 2013	"Visited Schilderswijk. Exactly one native-EN is encountered. Seems Saudi Arabia does. Stop Islam, Sharia stop!"	515
18 <sup>th</sup> May 2013	"What NL needs: sharia ban and firm anti Islam offensive. Gentle healers make stinking wounds"	272
17 <sup>th</sup> May 2013	"Sharia in Hague painter district. Islamofascism is advancing in the Netherlands. Totally unacceptable. Quick parliamentary debate!"	298
20 <sup>th</sup> April 2013	"It is so quiet in the NL- the media about the background of the perpetrators Boston? Were they Buddhists? Oh no ....."	258
8 <sup>th</sup> March 2013	"Now hear. Imperialist screeching daily in Deventer islamising further. Stop it!"	285
7 <sup>th</sup> March 2013	"New Muslim party in NL? Christians Serve Allah? Can Ella Vogelaar and Mohammed become honorary members of the CDA (Christian Democrat Party)?"	121
8 <sup>th</sup> Feb 2013	"Logically, Muhammad also liked much more hatred and violence"	536
24 <sup>th</sup> Dec 2012	"Krankzinning intention : Islamic prayer in Walibi Holland . No Islamisation of our parks !"	1298
24 <sup>th</sup> Nov 2012	"Total idiocy : Muslim halal homes in Amsterdam . Anyone who wants to be better off to Saudi Arabia . # Stop Islamization"	736
31 <sup>st</sup> July 2012	"How wonderful it would be a NL without Islam. Without mosques , burqas , female circumcision , street terror"	994

Table 3. Geert Wilders Anti-Islam tweets that were re-tweeted from July 2012 to August 2013

The language of the tweets in Table 3 make generalisations about the Muslim faith using extremist examples, propagating scare stories and promoting an anti-immigration message. The May 22<sup>nd</sup> tweet provides a homophile connection to similar tweets from other extremist groups and individuals in the UK, most notably from the EDL.

#### Use of metadata

Wilders' May 22<sup>nd</sup> tweet contains a call to action (stop Islam) in combination with the increased impact provided by the hashtag. Thus the influence and authority of the message "hashtag #stopislam" is greater than other messages about preventing Islam. The Tell MAMA (Measuring Anti-Muslim Attacks) group commented on the impact of these combined tweets against Muslims, citing that that in the immediate aftermath of Lee Rigby's death there were 212 incidents of extremist retaliation towards UK Muslims within a period of one week (Elgot, 2013). Geert Wilders is one of several high profile people who generated significant twitter reaction through his related metadata and euphemistic narrative. His May 22<sup>nd</sup> tweet represents one his most popular messages using twitter. Significant postings by Wilders use metadata in the form of hashtags and URLs to magnify the propagation and diffusion of anti-Islamic and anti-immigration sentiment. The inclusion of a call to action *#stop Islam* that has been embedded into a hashtag generates greater influence than had Wilders posted without the hashtag. The use of these combined features strengthens the extremist impact.

The tweets of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> of May use *URLs* to augment the re-tweetability of the narrative content. The 17<sup>th</sup> May tweet contains URL <http://nos.nl/artikel/508118-in-deel-schilderswijk-is-sharia-wet.html> to a Dutch news feed, while 18<sup>th</sup> May tweet has the URL to newspaper De Telegraaf <http://www.telegraaf.nl/binnenland/21576797/WildersnaarSharia-driehoek.html>. Of Wilders' extremist narratives, 26% use hashtags, whilst 77% use URLs. A further 5% use some form of 'call to action' with anti-immigration and anti-Islamic directives. Geert Wilders also uses URL links to pictures to entice extended tweet propagation via the [pic.twitter.com](http://pic.twitter.com) functionality of twitter [pic.twitter.com/yMqgo0GoTa](http://pic.twitter.com/yMqgo0GoTa). Twitter pictures feature in more than 4% of his extremist tweets. Geert Wilders uses extensive metatagging through the use of hashtags, URL links and twitter pictures as a means of extending extremist narrative to an extended new media audience.

#### CONCLUSION

Twitter provides extremist groups with increased opportunities to magnify and heighten the influence of their message. Twitter provides unrestrained access to information, reduced communication costs, and enables the dissemination of automated homophily. It provides like-minded extremists with a lowered threshold for engaging in behaviour outside of the social norm (Dean et al, 2012; Neumann, 2009). Twitter is under-moderated, yet disseminates information with lightning fast speed. New media influences extremism by reinforcing extremist policy, providing easy access to extremist beliefs and mobilising followers with calls to action. Metadata is more obvious and more fertile in tweets than in other forms of media, thus the accumulative effect of multiple retweets, further re-enforced through hashtags, pictures and URLs, adds to the acceptance, influence and authority of each message.

Twitter is an ideal vehicle for issuing a 'call to action'. Many of Wilders' tweets combine these calls to action with *hashtags* and *URLs* to magnify their perceived significance. Extremist groups can relay combinational phrases such as *#stop Islam* repeatedly with a lower expectancy of any message dilution by means of counter-narrative. Online political 'chat rooms' and Facebook forums allow for narrative and counter-narrative to debate and dilute the power of a single message. In contrast, counter-narrative dissenters rarely re-tweet an original narrative for fear of drawing attention to the original messenger.



One unexplained metric remains with those followers who do not re-tweet, yet retain sufficient interest to remain as a nominated follower of a given persona. In the case of Geert Wilders there are more than a quarter of a million followers who remain openly interested in his tweets. With this in mind the power of the retweet is often underestimated. The ability to count retweets gives a partial indication of the popularity and support that a narrative captures. That support is considerably increased by overt metadata such as *hashtags* and *URLs*. Followers of right-wing extremist dogma through Twitter are exposed to amplified narrative and augmented perceptions of influence.

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