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TASM
JUNE 2026

THE RADICAL RIGHT AS INFLUENCERS

ONLINE LEGITIMACY & THE NORMALISATION OF EXTREMISM



Introduction

Social media is used by extremist groups to “create a **brand image**, **market themselves**, **recruit followers**, raise capital, identify partners and suppliers, **provide training materials**, and even manage operations” (Lachow & Richardson, 2007: 100, emphasis added).

For followers, social media can **communicate the skills, behaviours** and **ideologies** espoused by the group in **real-time** (Koehler, 2014).

It also enables members to **commodify** and **display** their **in-group identity status** through the use of **symbols** and **iconography** (Koehler, 2014).



Research Questions

1. What behaviours do radical right groups enact in order to behave like influencers?
2. How are these behaviours constructed through language and images?
3. How do these practices help legitimise the groups and their underlying ideology to their followers?

Data



EDL

7 months
3,094 tweets
49,558 words
681 images

Siege Culture

7 months
343 tweets
4,437 words
6 images

Generation Identity UK (GI-UK)

13 months
1,249 tweets
24,476 words
87 images

Total

4,686 tweets
78,471 words
774 images

Approach

SM-CDS

SM-CDS interprets social media data “within **a wider socio-political context of a given society**” (KhosraviNik, 2017: 586, emphasis added) in order to identify the “**social and cultural power asymmetries**” embedded within them” (KhosraviNik, 2017: 588, emphasis added).

SM-CDS, therefore, **interrogates social media data** within the **socio-political and institutional contexts** in which such data is produced.

Identity

Identity is the **social positioning** of **self and other** (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005: 598).

Identity is “a **discursive construct** that **emerges in interaction**“ (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005: 586, emphasis added).

Digital spaces, particularly social media, serve as **both mirrors and amplifiers** of **broader societal debates** about **national identity, belonging and threat**.

The continuous deployment of these discursive performances produce **a sense of coherence and inevitability**, exemplifying what **the naturalisation of discourse**: the process by which **ideology** is transformed into **common sense** (Fairclough, 2003).

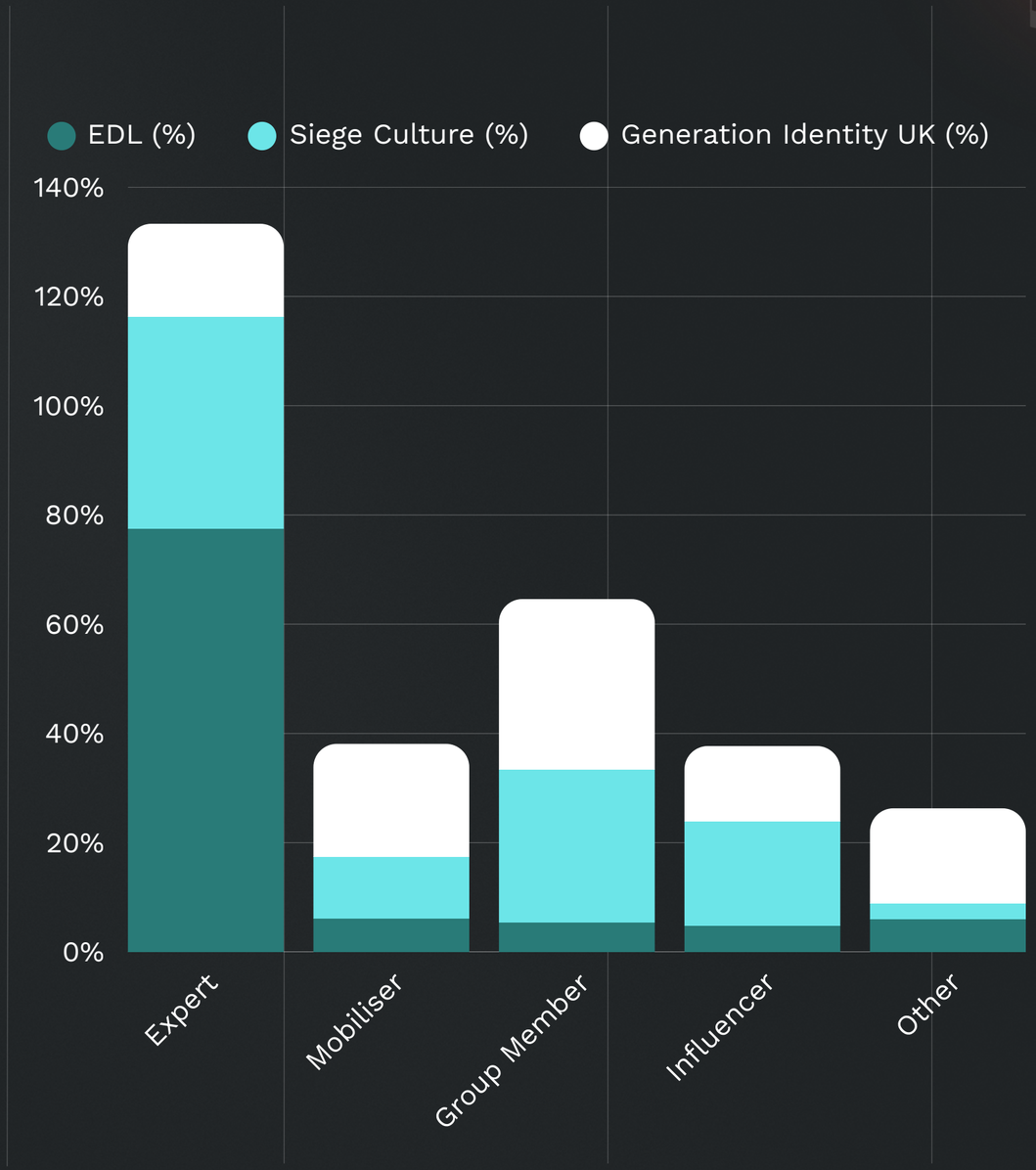
The political identities of the RR

Expert: Knowledgeable either about some aspect of **political decision-making, ideology or event.**

Mobiliser: Activate audiences and **legitimate the organisation** politically in public spaces.

Group member: Ordinary members of the organisation (i.e., n**ot leadership**) who functioned as **representatives of the in-group**.

Influencer: Attempts to **shape audience opinions** about **an issue, event and/or social actor**.



The influencer role

Behaviours

Promoting own content

The sharing of content produced **within the organisation** (e.g., blog posts, website updates, other social media sites, etc.).

Leveraging external media content

The sharing of content produced **outside of the organisation** (e.g., news stories, podcast appearances, media images, etc.).

Outcomes

Brought together discourse practices that sought to **shape audience beliefs and behaviours** through the **careful management of representation**.

Sought to influence **audience perspectives** and **encourage investment** in a certain product, i.e., the organisation.

Combined elements of the **online lifestyle influencer** with that of the **political commentator**, resulting in the construction of **a distinctly political social media influencer** (see, e.g., Rothut, 2025).

Conclusion



The three groups **curate content**, **frame reality** for their followers, **signal what matters**, and **direct attention, emotion and action**.

Their **affective alignment** with their audiences strengthen **parasocial bonds** between them, allowing their narratives to be experienced as **emotionally authentic** and **socially meaningful**.

Visibility becomes **evidence of relevance**: to be **mentioned, criticised or platforms** is **proof that the group matters**.

Thank You

Keep in touch!

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