

This book deals with the psychological effects of extremist propaganda videos. It particularly asks the question how young adults in Germany respond to right-wing as well as Islamic extremist videos which can be found on the Internet today. This is not a book about terrorism, but about the potential conditions which might facilitate a climate of receptivity for radical messages in a young mass audience with diverging cultural and educational background and different attitudes and values.

The so called web 2.0, with its mostly unfiltered, user-created content provides unprecedented opportunities for extremists to present themselves and uncensored ideas to a mass audience. This internet propaganda is created in order to increase attention and interest for extremist ideas and group memberships. It also aims to indoctrinate the recipients and, as a last consequence, to foster radicalization. The radicalizing potential has been feared by international security agencies and mass media. Nevertheless, not even the early stage effects of extremist propaganda in terms of raising attention and interest have yet been analyzed empirically. They are however necessary preconditions in order for propaganda to envelope a radicalizing effect.

The current studies close this gap by focusing on this early stage effects. We analyzed how a non-radicalized audience responds to extremist internet videos. For the first time, based on a content analysis of actual right-wing and Islamic extremist Internet videos, our study used state-of-the-art methods from experimental media psychology for tracking the emotional and cognitive responses of a broad sample of 450 young male adults. As expected, we mostly found rejection and never strong acceptance for the extremist videos. Still, specific production styles and audience characteristics were able to cause at least neutral attitudes underpinning the strategic potential of internet propaganda. In the end, our studies might result in more questions than answers. However, we are confident that the conceptual as well as the methodological way chosen is most promising as to approach a deeper understanding of the first effects of extremist Internet propaganda.