

## CDMM Research Notes No. 1 (June 2026)

### The French Alternative Influence Network:

Affective Mobilisation, Multimodal Strategies and Audience Engagement

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**Abstract:** In 2024, France's far-right party achieved historical election outcomes reshaping the country's political landscape. In this research note, we present an exploratory study of a French Alternative Influence Network (AIN) on YouTube which acts as an ecosystem of creators and audiences using humour, affect and collaboration to reshape political discourse. Based on the model of political influencer networks identified by Lewis (2018) in an Anglophone context, we employ Youtube Data Tools and Orange Data Mining to develop a triangulated mixed-method combining multimodal visual-verbal video analysis (Fazeli et al. 2023), sentiment analysis (Liu 2012) and video engagement metrics (Munger and Phillipps 2022) to capture the interplay between visual rhetoric, emotional tone and audience engagement within a sample of French far-right YouTube content. The analysis uses four prime data sources: transcripts of video content, qualitative coding of visual-verbal video elements, user comments on the videos and engagement metrics. The analysis develops in two phases: (1) Based on a purposive sample of ten videos, we develop a prototype and workflow for the analysis. (2) With the prototype we replicate the analysis for another 20 videos. Findings show that content creators in this network rely on multimodal strategies to reframe mainstream media content and emphasise a nationalistic frame to engage and mobilise their audiences even though they refrain from supporting particular parties or openly voice political ideologies.

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## Introduction

This research identifies a network of French content creators on Youtube who use affective, collaborative and multimodal strategies to foster engagement, competing with traditional media outlets and attracting significant viewer participation (Chadwick 2017; Reveilhac and Nchakga 2025). Their emotionally charged content circulates narratives that reject minorities and progressive social movements, reinforce in-group/out-group distinctions (Sari et al. 2025; George 2016), and propagate a sense of nationalistic 'French identity'. The study is based on Lewis' earlier framework (2018) from an Anglophone context, where an Alternative Influence Network refers to an "alternative media source for viewers to obtain news and political commentary, outside of legacy news outlets such as cable channels and print media" (Lewis 2018, p. 4). In our case, the French Alternative Influence Network (AIN) brings together content creators and audiences across the far-right spectrum and allows to analyse how content strategies and audience interactions affect sustained engagement with polarised political issues through co-produced meanings and community formation (Törnberg and Törnberg 2023; Hsiao and Hindman 2024, De Keulenaar et al. 2021).

Content creators on the far-right exert significant influence over circulating misinformation (Lewis 2019; Szakács and Bognár 2021; Stockemer and Bordeleau 2024) and the use of emotional discourses blurs the boundaries between what viewers *feel* and what they *perceive* as factual, deepening distrust in professional journalism (European Commission: 2025a; 2025b). Through humour, irony (Tuters, 2019) and other multimodal rhetorical devices, these creators normalise extreme ideas and frame them as rational, common-sense perspectives. In some cases, channels adopt conventional features of journalism (such as interviews, street reporting, or documentaries) to lend them legitimacy while positioning their creators as a "new generation" of online reporters or micro-celebrities (Lewis, 2019). Many of these videos maintain a calm and ostensibly rational tone, relying on emotional persuasion to normalise far-right beliefs as reasonable and legitimate. The French AIN is not an isolated phenomenon but part of broader transnational far-right dynamics (Rone and Fielitz 2025; Askanius et al. 2026) that adapt global digital strategies to national political cultures (Newman et al. 2025; Heft et al. 2021; Froio and Ganesh 2019).

With this pilot study we seek to develop a research instrument based on Youtube data to study content creator strategies and audience interactions around affective modalities of far-right content. We address in particular these **two research questions**:

- RQ 1: How do affective and multimodal strategies on YouTube shape the circulation of far-right narratives in France?
- RQ 2: What narrative strategies and affective dynamics are employed to circulate far-right content and mobilise audiences?

The study demonstrates how a mixed-methods design can capture content dimensions as well as audience affect and engagement simultaneously. Even with a small, purposive sample, triangulating multimodal qualitative analysis, sentiment analysis and

engagement metrics can reveal affective patterns within content creator networks that are also applicable in other contexts. This research note offers both a methodological tool and analytic approach for understanding affective communication dynamics in polarised political discourses.

## Methodology and Data Collection

In the first phase of the research, we focused on developing a data collection and analysis routine that relied on standardised data exports from Youtube and a data analysis workflow built in Orange Data Mining. The initial study of ten videos served to establish and test the instrument and prototype the method of analysis. The ten French-language political YouTube videos were purposively selected to represent far-right discourse themes yet allowing for a certain breadth in profile denominations and character. The videos were chosen in the context of French national and the European elections in 2024, where the French AIN was especially active (1 January 2024 to 31 December 2024). The videos were identified through:

1. Mainstream media coverage of controversial online content
2. Keyword search (“insécurité”, “immigration”, “identité nationale”)
3. Checking cross-channel references
4. Referral links from video descriptions and comment sections

All chosen videos were required to be longer than three minutes, excluding live streams and YouTube shorts, to have comparable lengths of videos. Up to 200 comments per video (the top level comments) were downloaded using the [YouTube Data Tools](#) by the Amsterdam Digital Methods Initiative and anonymised before analysis. In addition, a transcript of each video was produced by using the website [YouTube to Transcripts](#). Comments and transcripts were compiled as CSV files to allow for standardised processing in the following layers of analysis.

### Layer 1: Multimodal Analysis

The first analytical layer is based on Fazeli et al. 's (2023) visual-verbal analysis method, adapted to the context of this study using the video material itself. Their method, “identifies distinct analytical principles particular to video data that support an in-depth analysis of both verbal and visual content” (p.4). Applied in the context of the French far-right YouTube videos, the method aims to capture 1. general characteristics of the videos, 2. multimodal features such as type of speech, writing on the screen, soundtrack, 3. visual characteristics such as the video setting, objects actively used in the video, and 4. visible emotions expressed by creators. Fazeli et al.'s original six step method was adapted for larger samples to code essential elements in multiple videos within a reasonable timeframe and allowing for comparative analysis across the sample (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1:** Example of code categories for multimodal analysis of YouTube videos.

Video number	URL	Title	Channel	Likes	Views	Comments
V01						

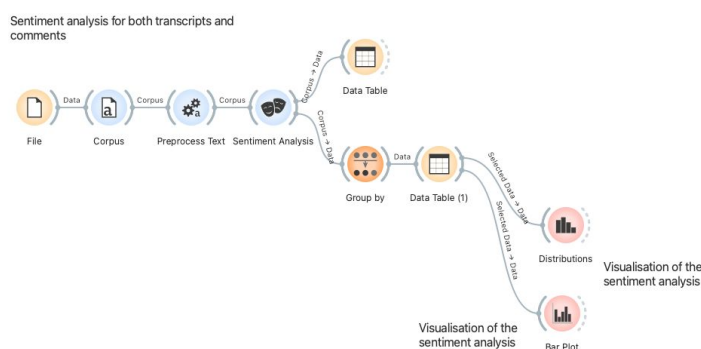
  

Writing on the screen	Type of speech	Soundtrack	Images	Background	Object	Gesture	Visible emotions
Quotes from a book	Informative	Calm music	Memes	Living room	Flag	Sitting down, moving hands	Anger

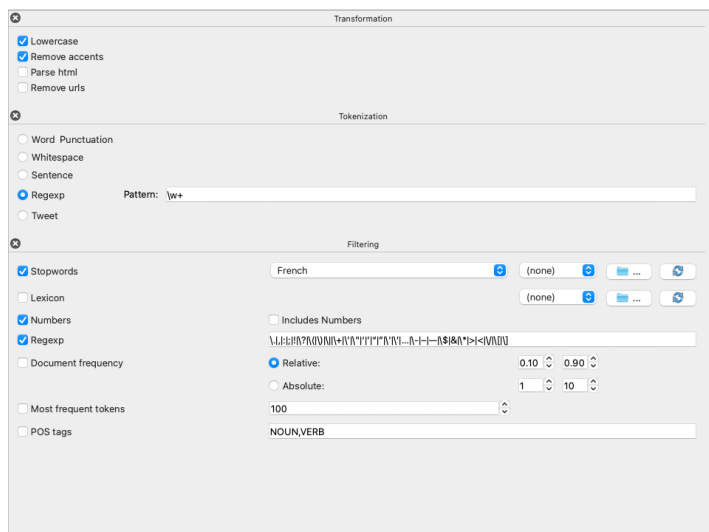
**Layer 2: Analysis of Sentiment and Discursive Themes**

On the second layer, we focus on the transmission of affect, drawing on Liu’s method of sentiment analysis (2012), which is broadly defined as “the field of study that analyses people’s opinions, sentiments, evaluations” by determining “whether each sentence expressed a positive, negative, or neutral opinion” (p.1; 4). Sentiments are calculated as positive (<1), negative (>1) or neutral (0) based on transcripts of the videos and audiences’ comments. The sentiment scores here are *indicative at best of broader trends* without reducing affect to bare algorithmic calculations. We used the “sentiment analysis” widget in Orange, uploading transcripts and comments to separate workflows, where they were converted into a corpus (see Figure 2). Data from both sources was pre-processed (in the respective widget) by applying lowercasing and accent removal, tokenising on word level, and removing French stopwords with NLTK’s pre-installed lists (see Figure 3), using the multilingual setting for processing French.

**Figure 2:** The sentiment analysis workflow in orange with *Corpus* and *Preprocess Text* widgets. The *Bar Plot* widget as an output format is useful for datasets under 700 instances. For larger datasets, the *Distributions* widget is better suited.

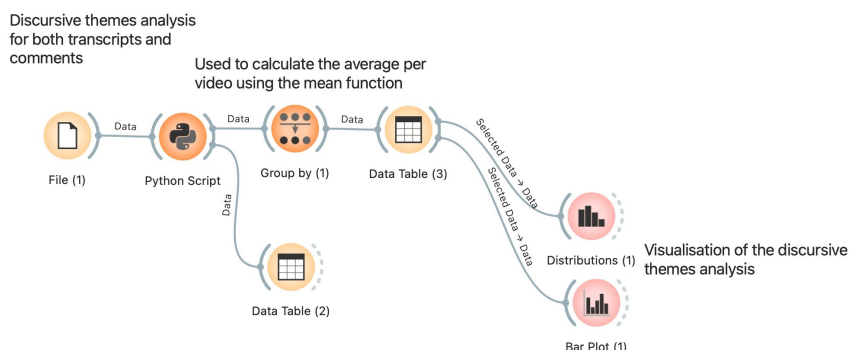


**Figure 3:** Settings of the *Preprocessing widget* on Orange to prepare the text for French multilingual sentiment analysis. Observe the order of preprocessing steps (transformation, tokenization, etc.), since each function removes or transforms textual content. These steps depend on each other.



In addition, discursive themes were identified using a custom-made dictionary with frequent terms (lexicon) often used in French political discourses on immigration, national identity, feminism, or media distrust (Boursier, 2024). We used the Python Script widget in Orange to embed the code in the workflow (see Figures 4 and 5). A separate Python script calculated both the absolute count of occurrences for keywords and co-presence patterns of keywords in transcripts and comments. Aggregated results were calculated for the average of the binary column (in percentages) and summed for the count values, producing frequency distributions of key themes per video.

**Figure 4:** The Orange workflow for analysing discursive themes based on a custom-made lexicon which is embedded through the *Python Script widget*.



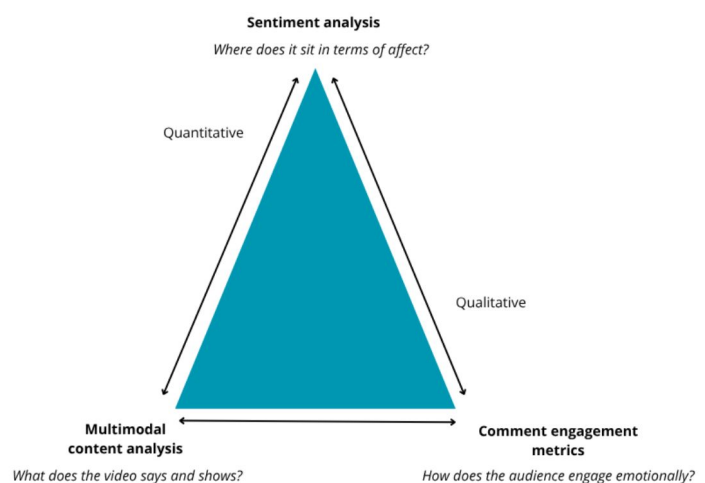
**Figure 5:** Lexicon of key terms in French identifying discursive themes known to be central in AIN content. The lexicon was uploaded to the *Python Script widget* to sort video transcripts according to the frequency of certain themes being mentioned by video creators.

```
# --- THEME WORD LISTS --- #
themes = {
  "Immigration": [
    "immigre", "immigration", "migrant", "clandestin", "sans papiers",
    "remigration", "expulsion", "asile", "refugie"
  ],
  "Islam_Muslims": [
    "islam", "islamique", "musulman", "allah", "mosquee", "charia",
    "halal", "arab", "islamiste", "djihad", "mahomet"
  ],
  "Anti_Feminism": [
    "feministe", "feminisme", "femmes", "metoo",
    "misandre", "woke", "sjw", "harpie", "hysterie", "soumise", "anti-feministe"
  ],
  "National_Identity": [
    "patrie", "france", "identite", "tradition", "nation", "occident",
    "valeurs", "culture", "chretien", "blanc", "racine"
  ],
  "Security_Crime": [
    "insecurite", "violence", "delinquance", "agression", "criminalite",
    "banlieue", "trafic", "viol", "meurtre", "voleur", "vol", "terrorisme"
  ],
  "Media_Distrust": [
    "media", "journaliste", "propagande", "mensonge", "fake news",
    "mainstream", "desinformation", "censure", "presse", "systeme", "manipulation"
  ],
}
```

### Layer 3: Qualifying Engagement Metrics

On the third analytical layer, we followed Munge's and Phillips's method (2020) to conceptualise engagement as the mutual interaction of content supply (content creators) and audience demand (viewers). In this study, engagement metrics served as *indicators* of affective engagement. We calculated ratios for comments per view, replies per view and average thread length based on standard Youtube metrics such as likes, replies, views for each video and comment. The results were then calculated as average per video to enable comparison between videos.

**Figure 6:** Schema of triangulation of methods (multimodal content analysis, sentiment analysis, and engagement metrics) and their purpose in the study.



After developing the initial workflow and approach for the analysis (see Figure 6), we conducted **a replication study** with an extended sample of another 20 videos to test the validity of the instrument. The sampling strategy, instruments and procedures were applied to ensure comparability with the pilot study. The larger sample included more videos featuring direct collaborations between content creators to better capture this central feature of the French AIN, which was not fully reflected in the pilot sample. The larger sample size introduced new practical challenges, particularly due to the volume of comments. Some transcripts covered several hours of airtime and needed to be divided into multiple documents per video for discursive analysis. The use of *Distributions widget* rather than *Bar Plots* proved to generate more readable visualisations for datasets containing more than 700 datapoints.

## Findings

This section presents the findings derived from the mixed-method approach outlined above including the multimodal analysis of video content, the sentiment analysis and discursive theme analysis of comments and video transcripts, as well as the qualification of engagement metrics for audience-creator relations. For each layer of analysis, we first present the findings of the initial pilot study (with ten videos) and point out important insights based on the extended sample (20 more videos).

### **Multimodal Strategies: From Format Diversity to Affective Authority**

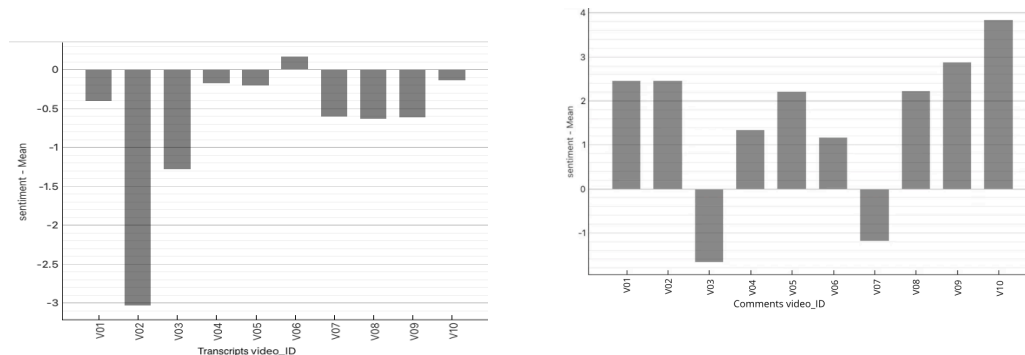
The multimodal analysis shows that far-right content creators are not tied to a single visual format. Their videos alternate between interviews, reaction videos, street reporting and informative videos. A closer examination of the most commented videos indicates that thematic content, rather than format, drives engagement. By fostering affective bonds (Hawkins and Saleem, 2023), creators rely on a sense of proximity and use their authenticity (Salojärvi et al., 2023), that contribute to the formation of a collective identity among users. Such practices align with Lewis's (2018) concept of "microcelebrity", in which creators appear authentic, relatable and accountable. This perceived authenticity enhances their credibility and positions them as a viable alternative to traditional news outlets. The multimodal analysis for the extended sample showed that 50% of the videos adopted a podcast style confirming a previous finding by Allchorn (2024). Podcast-style videos are characterised by lower visual provocation and higher discursive depth due to their long duration and largely being focused on a conversation between two or more people. This suggests that affective bonds are also constructed through discourse rather than visuals alone.

### **Emotional and Affective Mobilisation**

The sentiment analysis revealed that content creators within the sample systematically employ a negative emotional framing, dominated by anger, fear, hopelessness. While the videos were selected to ensure diversity in format and communicative approach, the initial keyword-based identification (e.g. insecurity, remigration, national identity) privileges politically and emotionally charged content in the sample. In the replication study, we broadened our sampling to include collaborative videos as well.

In relation to this negative sentiment in videos themselves, audience reactions tend to be more positive in over half of the cases. This suggests that negatively framed content (e.g., interviews at anti-migration demonstrations highlighting radical voices) serves as a mobilisation strategy in which emotional reaction drives political beliefs (Veri and Maier, 2025). Figures 7 and 8 indicate that *negative framing by the content creators elicits positive responses from audiences*. This pattern indicates a process of shared affect, where the emotional tone of videos prompts positive reinforcement and engagement from viewers. Emotional mobilisation, intensified through multimodal rhetoric and nationalist imagery, operates as a mechanism of radicalisation (Samaras, 2025). It strengthens the "us versus them" logic creating an "emotionally charged

narrative [that positions] the extreme-right as the only legitimate voice of the ‘true’ nation” (George, 2016: 6. cf. Seiger et al., 2025).



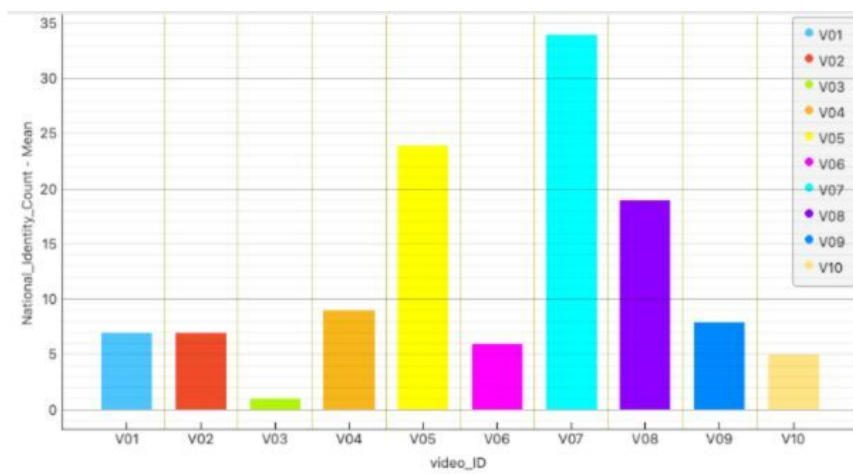
**Figure 7 and 8:** Visualisation of sentiment analysis for the transcripts (left) and the comments (right) of the ten videos in the pilot study. The two bar plots use different vertical scales to reflect the distinct sentiment distributions within each datasets. Transcript sentiment is predominantly negative (-3 to 0), while comment sentiment is mainly positive (1.8 to 4).

Sentiment analysis reveals consistent negative framing by creators, which is met with agreement, humour and encouragement from audiences. These sentiment scores indicate that overall, interactivity on such videos reinforcing affective mobilisation and normalises radical discourse positions. Compared to the pilot sample, the comments obtained for the larger sample in the replication study cluster in the lower range of positive-to-neutral range 0-5 in 40% of cases. This is also an effect of the analysis method as sentiment scores tend to level out in the neutral range with less polarised peaks when more diverse data is contained in the overall dataset.

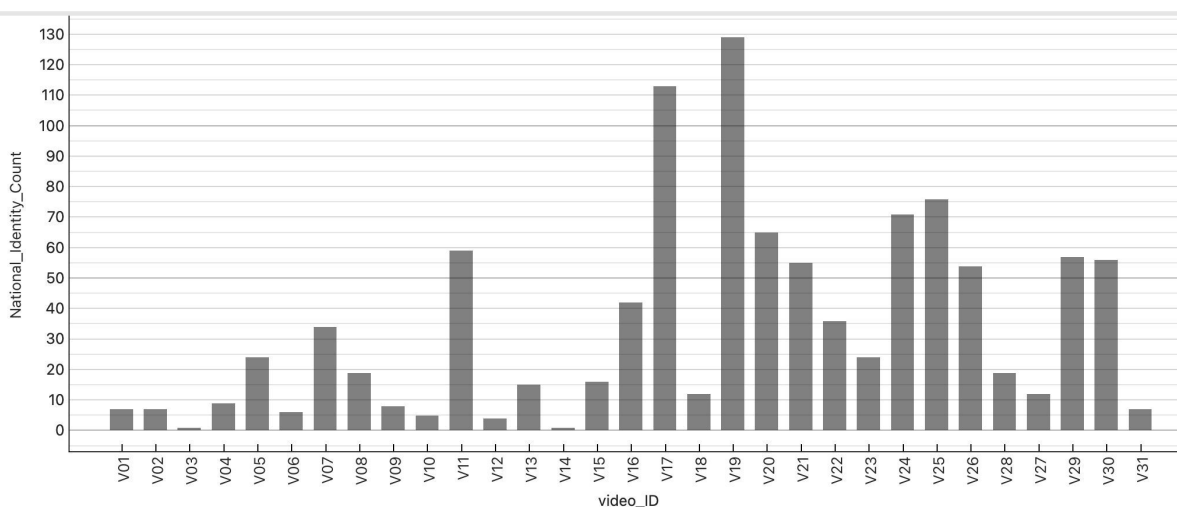
### National Identity as a Central Theme

The theme of national identity emerges as the core theme across the transcripts and the comments in the pilot study and the extended sample (see Figures 9 and 10). Other recurrent themes, e.g. immigration, insecurity, Islam, feminism, politics of the left, and media distrust, are often framed as a threat to national identity. The focus on national identity foregrounds the systematic “stereotyped portrayals of outgroups (e.g. Muslims, immigrants and feminists)” (Hawkins and Saleem, 2023, p.3311), identifying and reinforcing exclusionary nationalist ideologies. The strong resonance between video creators and their audiences reveals a reciprocal construction of belonging, where users echo and intensify these narratives and co-construct counter-narratives to a perceived threat that constitutes the foundation for a broader alternative influence network (Lewis, 2018). It also encompasses a sense of “transnationalism of the migration story” (Ethical Journalism, Network & International Centre for Migration Policy Development, 2017, p.25), stereotyping some minorities (migrants and/or Muslims) as a threat to a national culture and identity (Szakács and Bognár, 2021).

**Figure 9:** Relative frequency of the theme “national identity” per video and distribution across ten video transcripts in the pilot study (Visualisation in Orange *Distributions* widget).



The extended sample confirms the centrality of national identity, as the lexicon associated with this theme identifies key terms that are present in all the videos across the dataset. This consistency indicates that French far-right videos are systematically organised around the perception that French national identity is under threat which offers high potential of engagement with audiences.



**Figure 10:** Relative frequency per video and distribution across videos of the theme “national identity” for all thirty video transcripts (Visualisation in Orange *Distributions* widget). The videos V11-V30 in the replication study contain more podcast-style conversations over several hours, where the theme is mentioned frequently and consistently between conversation partners in AIN.

**Reframing News Media Coverage**

Most sampled videos engage in some form of reframing mainstream media content, sometimes using it as evidence or mockery, or as a reference to authority supporting a creator’s argument. This illustrates an ambivalent relationship between the far-right

content creators and mainstream media (Peucker and Fisher 2023). For instance, one video titled 'Trop de musulmans en Europe?' by Lapin du futur begins with an extract from a mainstream media interview of a far-right partisan, framing it as a proof of the "Muslim threat" to French and European identity. The selective use of such footage lends legitimacy to extremist narratives by integrating but also questioning journalistic authority (Reveillac and Nchakga 2025). The most commented videos frequently engage in media reframing, using screenshots of headlines, news segments, or statistics (often employing sources originally posted on X). This indicates a pathway of circulation between mainstream outlets, social media platforms and YouTube, where content creators appropriate journalistic credibility while simultaneously rejecting mainstream news as biased towards elites and as threats to national identity and security (Lewis 2019). Media reframing then becomes a form of instigating media distrust in general with 24 out of 30 videos explicitly mentioning media distrust yet often assuming rather than systematically demonstrating why distrust is warranted. For example, in an interview for the channel *Frontières*, journalist André Bercoff, recounts a 2016 conversation with Donald Trump, stating: "since the newspapers are against me, the press is against me, mainstream television is against me, I will use social media." The reported quote illustrates a broader narrative within the sampled channels: the perception of being censored, or being opposed by mainstream media, and therefore using social media as a 'free' space of expression.

### **Engagement Dynamics and Community Formation**

Videos with the highest engagement are those with provocative framings and extreme narratives, including white supremacist rhetoric, anti-migration demands, and hate speech targeting women. These videos attract high numbers of comment and reply chains, reflecting both intense user-to-user interaction as well as audience-creator engagement. The comment section functions as a community space, where users express shared beliefs and reinforce collective identity. This aligns with Sari et al.'s (2025) observation that such spaces contribute to the formation of "light communities [as] individuals with common interests who may not sustain any connections beyond the online realm" (p.85). Within these spaces, audience engagement acts as both a sense of belonging and a catalyst for radicalisation, consolidating the network identity of the French far-right online community through affective resonance (Lewis 2018; Ahmed 2013; Boursier 2024; Papacharissi 2015). From the creators' perspective, this far-right community, often referred to as the "fachosphere" (or "facist-sphere" in English) (Ethical Journalism, Network & International Centre for Migration Policy Development 2017, p. 23) shows a high level of solidarity and collaboration. These collaborations are sometimes used as a tool to counter bans and moderation by featuring emblematic figures who have been deplatformed such as Papacito, previously removed from Youtube for multiple violations of hate speech policies (Boursier 2024). In other cases, some videos by deplatformed creators are re-uploaded by followers as compilations. Such practices show how the network adapts to platform regulation, maintaining its visibility through cross-channel strategies. However, these

results have to be nuanced as it may also reflect disagreement, trolling and negative backlash. Engagement patterns differ slightly more in the extended sample. High volumes of comments signal visibility and algorithmic circulation, where very long comments elaborate controversial narratives often framed as debates.

Taken together, these findings point to the presence of a French AIN operating on YouTube with distinct patterns of framing discourses and engagement with audiences. Through a focus on negatively framed threats to national identity and security, creators motivate and mobilise audiences to engage with radical narratives. Overly positive reactions from users indicate that such content resonates and is expressing a shared sense of belonging presented as being under siege by mainstream media and politics. Extending Lewis's (2018) framework, the study reveals how such creator networks use traditional (mainstream) journalism as a core opponent, yet negatively appropriating its content to normalise far-right discourses through affective mobilisation, multimodal visual and verbal rhetoric and audience interactivity.

## Conclusion

This study analysed the French far-right AIN on YouTube by focusing on visual-verbal features, sentiment, discursive themes, media reframing strategies, and engagement patterns between creators and audiences. The narratives put forward by creators in the AIN remain stable, particularly on the issue of national identity and media distrust and are often framed negatively, resonating strongly (and overall positively) with audiences. Audiences approach certain types of polarised content as an affirmation of perceived needs or threats to national or cultural order. Their responses to creators' affective framing and rhetorical strategies on social media indicate active engagement with narratives and positions that seek to stand outside mainstream political discourses. Humour, irony and performative outrage disguise polarisation, which becomes visible only in the long-term redefinition of key discursive terms (Göpfert and N'Guessan 2025).

The methodological framework and analytic process in this research note and study includes a transparent documentation of the analysis process, methods and tools (cf. Van Es et al. 2021). The multi-modal approach can be applied beyond the study of far-right communities by offering a replicable method for examining how different content creators engage with political events over time, or how networks of creators position and support each other in specific political debates. The proposed triangulated method is geared towards easy adaptability. With a relatively small purposive sample the study is of course limited in its representativeness and generalisability yet offers an integrated approach that can be easily emulated by non-experts in the field of digital methods and Internet research. While the sentiment analysis widget in Orange is versatile, *automated results remain indicative of larger trends* rather than a substitute for in-depth qualitative analysis of culturally-sensitive discourses, nuanced expressions, irony, or community-specific codes (incl. the use of emojis).

## List of videos used in pilot study

- **V01 Daniel Conversano:** La Loi immigration a fait "Pschitt"! Tous POURRIS ? Daniel Conversano [The immigration law has gone "Pschitt" All ROTTEN? Daniel Conversano]
- **V02 Lapin du futur:** Trop de musulmans en Europe? [Too many muslims in Europe?]
- **V03 El Rayhan:** L'insécurité - EL RAYHAN [Insecurity - EL RAYHAN]
- **V04 Frontières:** Immersion dans les jungles de Calais: clandestins et associations pro-migrants [Diving into the jungles of Calais: illegal immigrants and pro-migrant organisations]
- **V05 Julien Rochedy:** Êtes-vous IDENTITAIRE ? | Rochedy [Are you IDENTITARIAN? | Rochedy]
- **V06 Bruno Le Salé:** LES PUBS AU JAPON VS WOKE AUX US [ADVERTISEMENTS IN JAPAN VS WOKE IN THE US]
- **V07 Vincent Lapierre:** FAITES ENTRER LES MIGRANTS : des Parisiens disent NON [LET THE MIGRANTS IN: Parisians say NO]
- **V08 VA Plus:** Le RN face à l'INSÉCURITÉ (avec Matthieu Valet) [The RN confronts INSECURITY (with Matthieu Valet)]
- **V09 BAPTISTENTX:** BAPTISTE DONNE SON AVIS SUR LES JO DE PARIS [BAPTISTE GIVES HIS OPINION ON THE PARIS OLYMPICS]
- **V10 Thaïs d'Escufon:** Pourquoi il faut arrêter avec la mixité [Why we must stop with gender diversity]

## Availability of research instrument

The Orange workflows (.ows file) for the above analyses are available under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) on the CDMM website alongside the publication of the Research Note. The workflow was created with Orange Data Mining (Version 3.40). CDMM instructions for installing Orange: <https://cc.au.dk/en/cdmm/tools-and-tutorials/data-analysis/orange-data-mining>

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