

Engaging with Online Extremist Material: Experimental Evidence



**NETWORK OF EXCELLENCE FOR
RESEARCH IN VIOLENT ONLINE
POLITICAL EXTREMISM**

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This project has received funding from the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme for research, technological development and demonstration under grant agreement no. 312827

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Overview

- Research Questions & Why its important
- Methodology
- Hypotheses & Findings
- Limitations
- Conclusions



Research Question



- How, and to what extent, do people engage with online extremist propaganda?



Why important?



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Research Question



- How, and to what extent, do people engage with online extremist propaganda?



Research Question

- How, and to what extent, do people engage with online extremist propaganda?
- Tweets, Facebook, YouTube Comments, Likes, Dislikes....
 - All work on the DV

Methodology

- Experimental Paradigm – Online study with Qualtrics
 - 70 UCL student participants
 - Webpage – Extremist Group (DV)
 - Mortality Salience Prime & other group-based measures (IV)

Fictional Extremist Material

1. Identity
2. Grievances
3. Innocent & unjustly penalised ingroup
4. Aggressive, dangerous but vague outgroup
5. Extremist group – self-styled defenders
6. Aggression and (implied) violence

Fictional Extremist Material



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The Webpage

- Themes and tone, images
- Interaction tools:
 - Like/dislike
 - Share/don't share
 - Follow/don't follow
 - Save/don't save





The Webpage

- Themes and tone, images
 - Download more info
 - Download stickers/posters
 - Visit websites
 - Watch videos
 - Join the group
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- Interaction tools:
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- **Explicit Support:**
 - Add material?
 - Add material if got in trouble?
 - Express support for group?

Variables

- Dependent

- Likes/Dislikes
- Online Engagement
- Explicit Support

- Independent

- Mortality Salience (MS)
- Social Dominance Orientation (SDO)
- Identity Fusion Scale (IDF)
- Outgroup Hostility – Trolley Dilemma (OGH)
- Activism & Radicalism Scale (ARIS)

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- Factors
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Hypothesis 1



Mortality Saliience = More Online Engagement &
Explicit Support than no Mortality Saliience



Hypothesis 2



Likes more than Dislikes associated with higher SDO,
IDF, OGH, ARIS



Hypothesis 3



Online Engagement associated with higher SDO, IDF,
OGH, ARIS



Hypothesis 4



Explicit Support predicted by Online Engagement,
higher SDO, IDF, OGH, and RIS (but not AIS)



Findings: Mortality Salience



Mortality Salience = More Online Engagement & Explicit Support than no Mortality Salience



Findings: Mortality Salience



Mortality Salience → Engagement &
Explicit Support for the EU → Mortality Salience



Findings: Mortality Salience

- Open Questions (Qual) – describe:
 - Institution students (Ingroup)
 - Non-institution students (Outgroup)
 - Extremist group

- Positive/Negative/Neutral

Findings: Mortality Salience

- Ingroup – positive
- Outgroup – positive
- Extremist group - negative

Findings: Mortality Salience

- Ingroup & Outgroup = Positive
 - Psychological distance from (UCL) ingroup
 - No MS effect

Findings: Mortality Salience

- Ingroup & Outgroup = Negative
 - Psychological distance from student ingroup
 - No MS effect

Findings: Mortality Salience



Online engagement & Explicit support, and IDF - higher in those who *did not describe the Extremist group in negative terms*



Findings: Mortality Salience



Online engagement & Explicit support, and IDF - higher in those who *did not describe the Extremist group in negative terms*

The things people don't say may still be important in relation to what they do....



Findings: Mortality Salience

- Mortality Salience has no effect:
 - Material promotes dis-identification from ingroup
 - Inconsistent/negative ingroup identity

Findings: Mortality Salience

- Terrorist/Extremist Propaganda can inhibit:
 - online engagement with extremist material
 - explicit support for extremist group
 - Via Disidentification

.... Depends on stage of radicalisation....?

Findings: Likes/Dislikes



Likes more than Dislikes associated with higher SDO,
IDF, OGH, ARIS



Findings: Likes/Dislikes



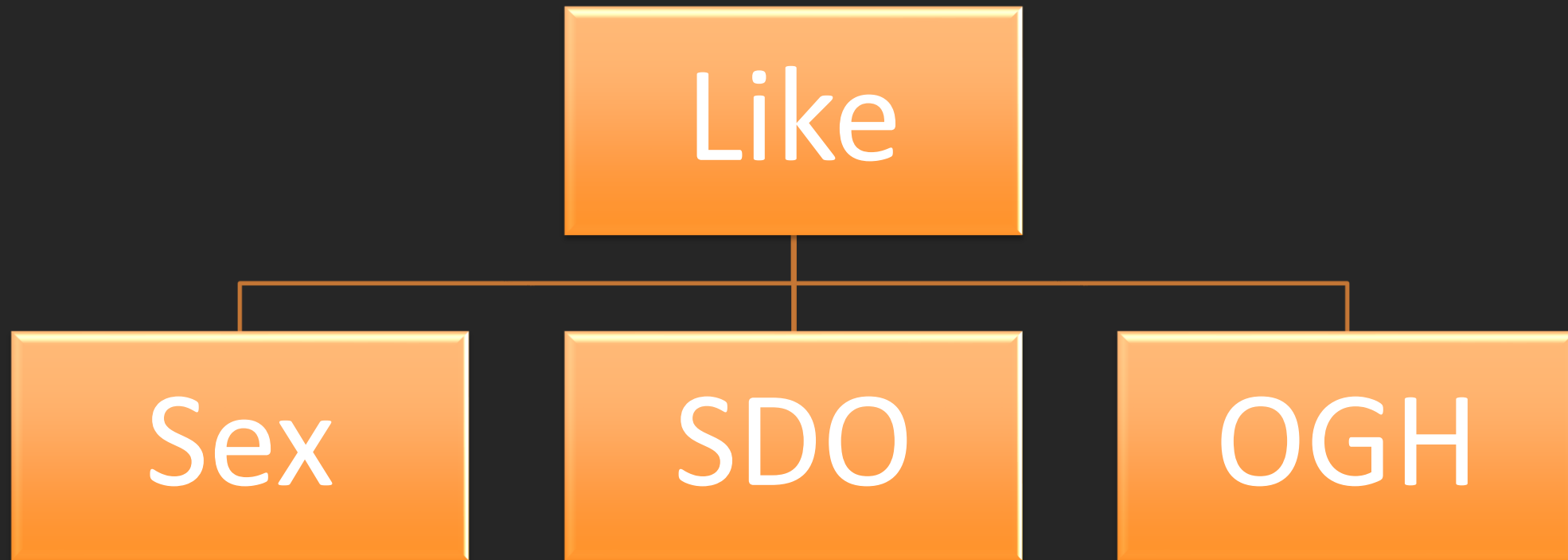
Likes more than Dislikes associated with higher SDO,
~~DE~~, OGH, ~~AX~~S



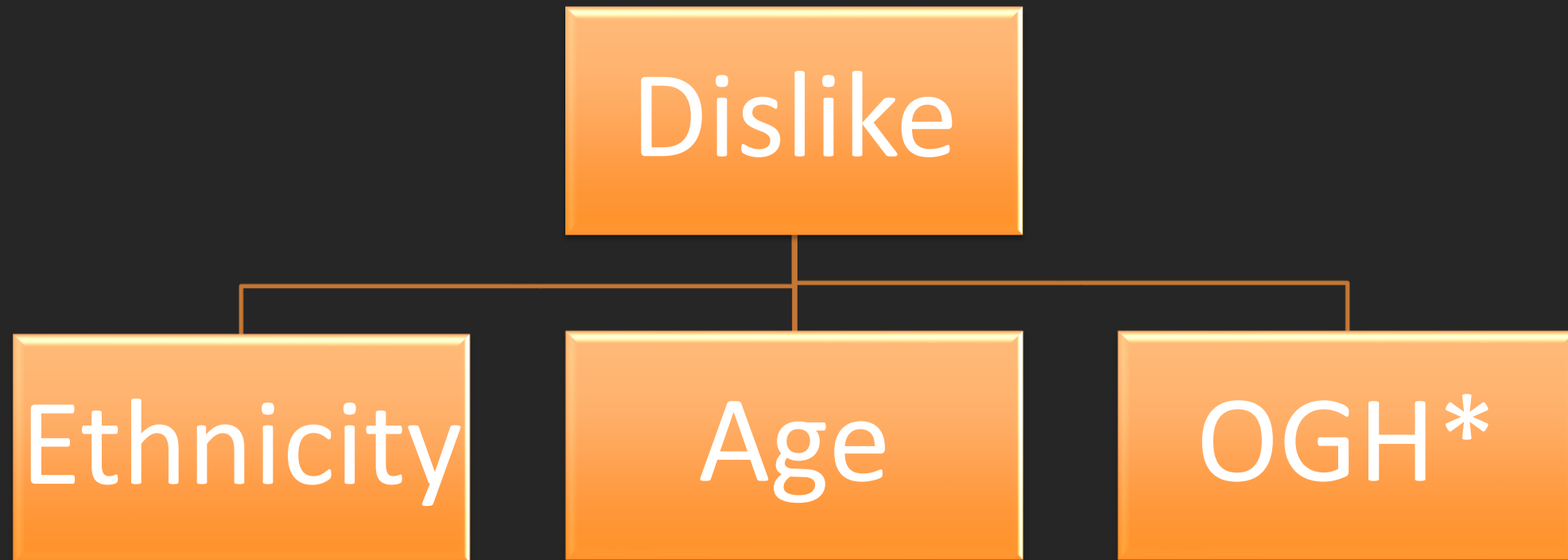
Findings: Likes/Dislikes

- 74.2% - no interaction
- 16% - Liked
- 53% - Disliked

Findings: Likes/Dislikes



Findings: Likes/Dislikes



Findings: Likes/Dislikes

- Likes/Dislikes – useful feature
- Most prefer not to interact at all
- Differences between those who Like & Dislike

Findings: Online Engagement



Online Engagement associated with higher SDO, IDF,
OGH, AIS, RIS



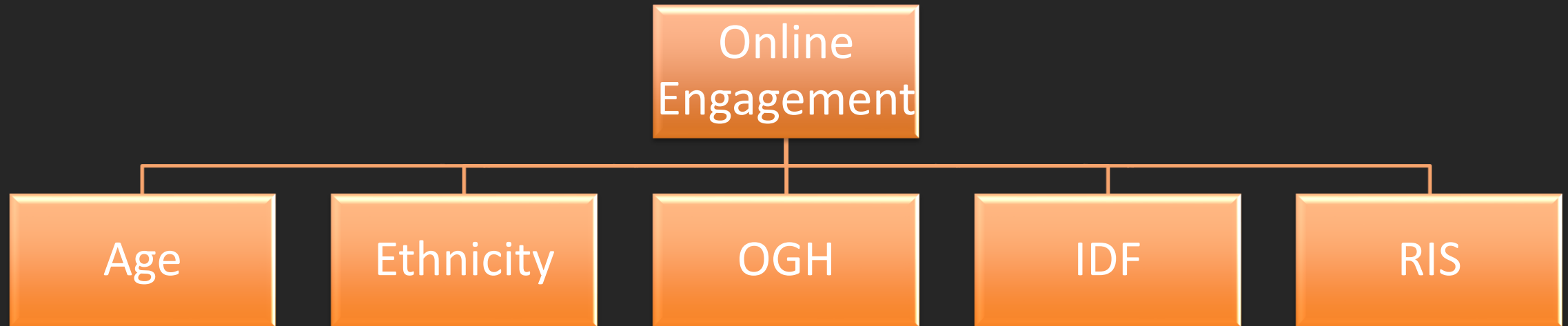
Findings: Online Engagement



Online Engagement associated with higher ~~SD~~, IDF,
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Findings: Online Engagement



Findings: Online Engagement

- OE tended to be low overall
- Certain features associated with OE
- Learn about features of those who don't engage

Findings: Explicit Support



Explicit Support predicted by Online Engagement,
higher SDO, IDF, OGH, and RIS (but not AIS)



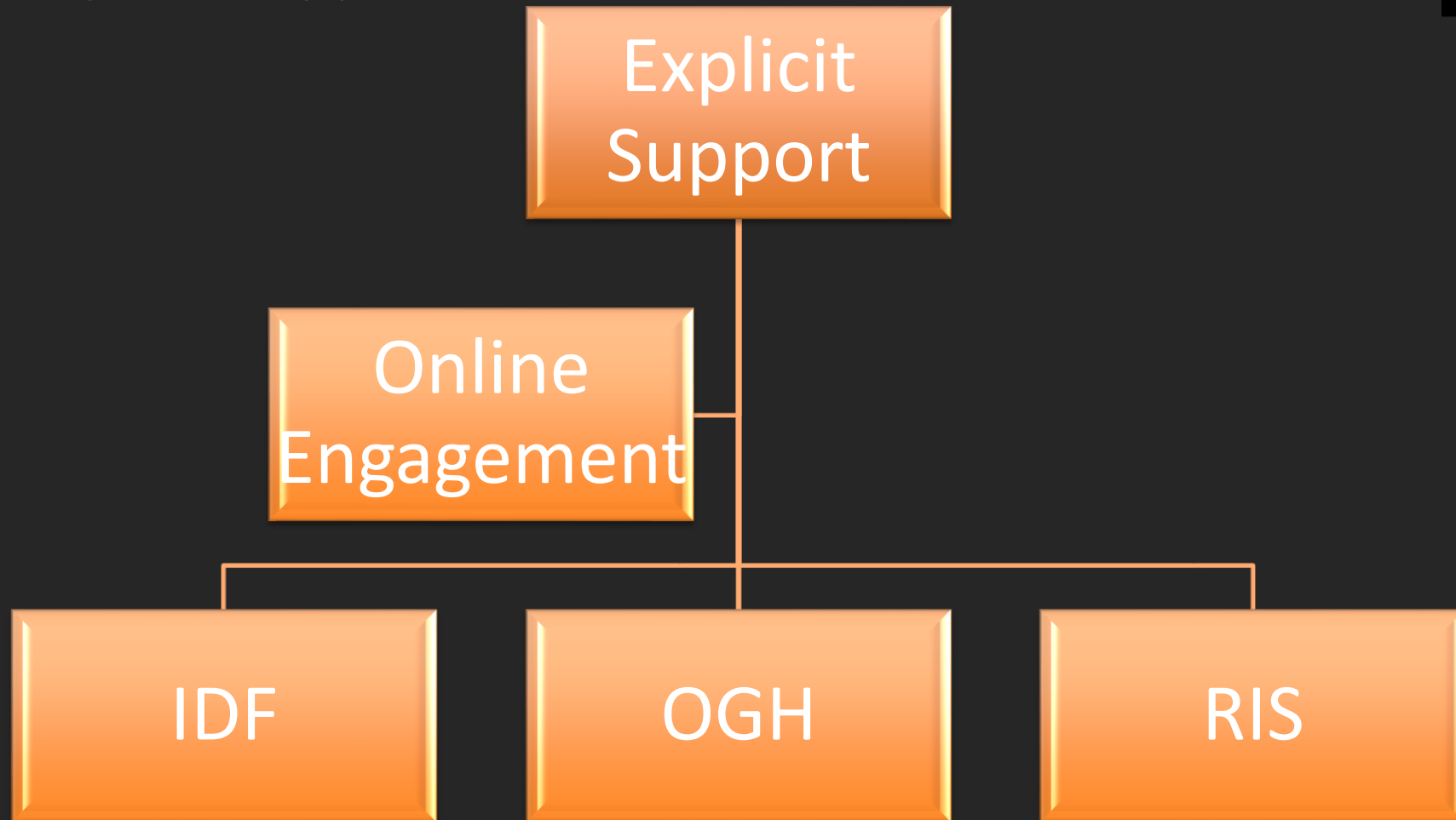
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Findings: Explicit Support



Findings: Explicit Support

Explicit Support = OE + IDF + OGH + RIS



41% Variance

Findings: Explicit Support



Useful factors for predicting who will (and will not) engage with online propaganda and/or explicitly support extremist groups online



Limitations



- Small & WEIRD sample
- Even smaller N engaging with material = caution
- Believability of material? (generally good)



Conclusion



- How, and to what extent, do people engage with online extremist propaganda?



Conclusion



- How, and to what extent, do people engage with online extremist propaganda?
- Engagement varies...



Conclusion

- Few actively positively or excessively engage
- Those who do:
 - Young and white
 - Identify with ingroup & prefer hierarchy and dominance
 - Positive view of extremist group
 - Hostility towards Outgroups
 - Radicalism intent

Conclusion

- Most don't engage at all
- Those who don't:
 - Older and non-white
 - Lack of identification with ingroup
 - Low Outgroup hostility
 - Lack of Radicalism intent

Conclusion

- Radicalisation can occur online, to some degree, providing certain criteria are met
- Terrorist/Extremist material may inhibit engagement via disidentification with ingroup
- Real world = engagement/support may lead to further exposure/attention of recruiters/mobilisers

UPD
L E S E T



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Thank you!

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