The Invisible Sisters

Actors on *TikTok* and *Instagram* in the spectrum of extremism, Salafism, Islamism and activism

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Issue 11

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Violence Prevention Network

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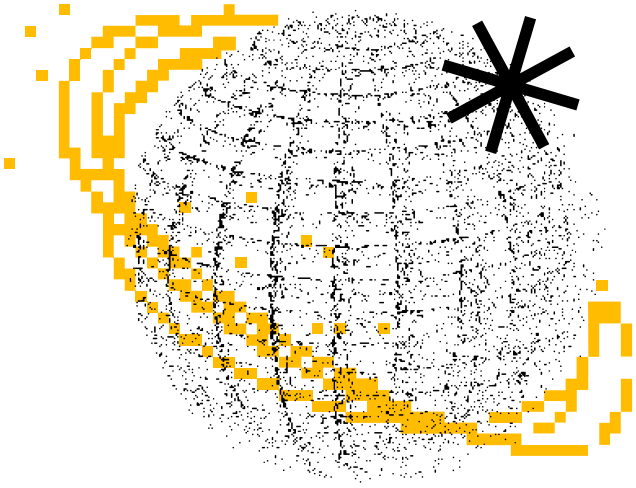
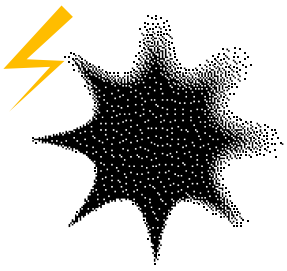


Conclusion

The great importance of social media for Salafist-Islamist-extremist ecosystems is well known. The extent to which women are involved in the ecosystem and in what form they participate in online activities is less researched. Issue 11 of this publication is therefore devoted to social media posts by women on *Instagram* and *Tiktok*. The first part of the publication deals with the difficulty of classifying accounts run by women as extremist, Islamist, Salafist, activist - or none of the above. This part discusses possible criteria that can help with classification, using examples of existing projects and publications. In the second part, the contents classified as Salafism, Islamism or activism in the broadest sense are analysed in terms of their "formats". Based on the formats, it will be examined how/if an ecosystem-specific online behaviour of women and girls can be concluded.



1. Context and current state of research

The importance of social media for the dissemination of extremist[1] content is well known. Algorithms, anonymity and the constant availability of an infinite number of posts are just some of the factors that make social media fertile ground for extremist actors. The highly dynamic nature of the platforms not only means that the online behaviour of users is constantly changing, but it also makes it difficult for actors in the prevention landscape, educators and researchers to follow all developments. Figures from the *Institute for Strategic Dialogue* (ISD) show that the number of German-language Salafist social media posts increased by 77% between 2019 and 2021[2]. Figures like these indicate an urgent need for action.

Studies on the online behaviour of Islamist[3] actors still focus mostly on male protagonists. They maintain wide-reaching, professionalised accounts on which they regularly share content that is intended to help followers live a life that is - in their eyes - pleasing to God. Structured online monitoring[4] shows that girls and women also run accounts, post exhortations to wear *niqabs*[5] and *jilbabs*[6], condemn disbelief, and share videos of male actors. However, systematic surveys on the online activities and behaviour of these actors and their accounts are still lacking.

Existing studies on Islamist activities on social media also show convincingly that categorisations as Islamist, Salafist or extremist are predominantly inaccurate or simply insufficient (Comerford, Guhl & Ayad 2021, 8; Guhl 2021; Hartwig & Hänig 2021, 5ff.).

Tiktok has been available on the German market since September 2016, but only gained popularity within the last few years after the Chinese parent company *ByteDance* took over the former social media platform *Musical.ly* at the end of 2017 and merged it with *TikTok*. *Tiktok* has its global headquarters in Los Angeles and Singapore (cf. TikTok 2018, ByteDance 2023). The *TikTok* feed in which the videos are displayed to users is divided into two different tabs with different modes. While the "For You" feed is a personalised feed with videos based on user interests and user interaction, the "Following" feed shows videos from subscribed creators (cf. TikTok 2020). In order to be active on *TikTok* and to be able to see the videos published there in their entirety, users, who must be at least 13 years old, must register on the website or in the app with their email address or mobile phone number (cf. TikTok 2023). In addition to the main function, the app offers, for example, the possibility to create Stories, i.e. 15-second videos that disappear 24 hours after publication, and to share them with other users. Users can also "go live", i.e. share their video with the community in real time and interact with viewers, e.g. by answering questions posed in the chat. Some of these functions, including live streaming, are only accessible to older users (cf. TikTok 2023).

1 Within the debate dominated by security policy, extremism is defined as the counterpart to the democratic state (Salzborn 2011, 13f.). The *Federal Ministry of the Interior and Home Affairs* (BMI), like the *Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution,* defines extremism as "activities that oppose our democratic constitutional state and its fundamental values, norms and rules" (BMI 2023, BfV 2023) and aim to abolish the free democratic basic order, for example through the use of violence (ibid.) With regard to a static concept of extremism, Salzborn complains about the resulting neglect of "der Wahrnehmung von antidemokratischen und antiaufklärerischen Tendenzen, die ihren sozialen Ursprung in der Mitte der Gesellschaft haben" [the perception of anti-democratic and anti-enlightenment tendencies that have their social origins in the centre of society] (2011, 13). Neumann sees extremism as a "schwammigen Begriff, der keine unabhängige oder universelle Bedeutung hat" [woolly term that has no independent or universal meaning] (2016, 29), but is always oriented towards the respective social order and its opposite.

2 Between October 2019 and July 2021, an increase of 112% was recorded among Arabic-language Salafist posts, 110% among English-language posts and 77% among German-language posts (Comerford et al. 2021, 6).

3 According to Seidenstricker, a "generally accepted definition" (2016, 9) of the term Islamism does not yet exist. In order to understand the diverse activities and motivations of the actors, he proposes the definition "Bestrebungen zur Umgestaltung von Gesellschaft, Kultur, Staat oder Politik anhand von Werten und Normen, die als islamisch angesehen werden" [efforts to transform society, culture, state or politics on the basis of values and norms that are considered Islamic] (Seidenstricker 2016, 9). According to Pfahl-Traughber, Islamism often serves as a collective term for "alle politischen Auffassungen und Handlungen, die im Namen des Islam die Errichtung einer allein religiös legitimierten Gesellschafts- und Staatsordnung anstreben" [all political views and actions that strive in the name of Islam to establish a social and state order that is legitimised solely by religion] (2011). In distinction to Salafism, Islamism is not limited to a Sunni understanding of faith with recourse to an early religious practice, but can be understood as an all-encompassing political ideology adapted to modernity (El-Wereny 2020, 37f.). The German security authorities divide Islamist groups into legalist, Islamic-terrorist and jihadist currents on the basis of their different ideological backgrounds, methods and willingness to use violence (BMI 2021). What all currents have in common is that they want to "invoke Islam [...] to wholly or partly abolish the free democratic basic order of the Federal Republic of Germany" (ibid.). For the sake of simplicity, the term Islamism will serve as an umbrella term for the broad variety of phenomena in this publication. The problematic nature of the terms is addressed in chapter two.

4 See the informational services *KN:IX plus* (https://kn-ix.de/knixplus/), an offer from the Competence Network 'Islamist Extremism' (KN:IX).

5 The *Niqab* is a face veil that leaves only the eye area of the woman free. The *Niqab* is usually worn as an additional garment over a scarf covering the head and is knotted at the back of the head.

6 The *Jilbab* (or: *jilbaab*) is a garment, usually consisting of only one piece of fabric, designed to cover the female body from head to toe.

Even a first unstructured look at the content that *actors* post shows that their activities are even harder to locate on the basis of these existing terms. A critical questioning of these rough categories and a more differentiated description beyond seemingly predetermined subdivisions is urgently needed in order to be able to do justice to the growing amounts of data and the heterogeneous, hybrid content.

The video platform *TikTok* is becoming increasingly popular, especially among target groups of Islamist actors, such as adolescents. Although *TikTok* is only the third[7] most popular social media platform in Germany, users spend the most time there[8]. The user-friendly interface, the simplicity of the platform and the possibility of "going viral" through likes and followers also invite people to become active on *TikTok* themselves.

Instagram has advanced from a purely photos platform to a photo and video platform, especially with the introduction of *Instagram* Reels[9] in August 2020[10]. According to the *JIM Study 2022,* the app remains in second place in the category "Most important app" for young people between 12 and 19 years of age[11]. While *YouTube* is more important for boys, *Instagram*, *TikTok* and *Snapchat* are the most important for girls[12]. As young people grow older, *Instagram* tends to become more significant; *TikTok,* on the other hand, loses importance with increasing age[13]. Islamist actors also use both *Instagram* and *TikTok* as a venue for extremist indoctrination, radicalisation and recruitment. Precise algorithms in particular ensure that users remain in so-called filter bubbles and hardly come into contact with alternative content.

The app ***Instagram*** has been available in the App Store since 2010 and allows users to share photos and videos. According to the *ZDF/ARD Onlinestudie 2022 [ZDF/ARD Online Study 2022]*, more than half of the people between the ages of 14 and 29 use the app daily. This makes the platform the most used social network of this age group (Koch 2022, 473). Since 2012, the platform has been a subsidiary of *Facebook Ireland Limited* and *Meta Platforms Ireland Limited* (Instagram 2023a). In order to fully access the content on *Instagram* and publish posts yourself, it is necessary to create an account. This is possible from the age of 13 (Instagram 2023a). Although people without accounts can also temporarily access individual contents, after some time the app refers to registration in order to continue to stay on the platform (Böhl 2022).

This issue

This issue of the publication series is dedicated to online activities of girls and women who partly refer to Islamist discourses and known male actors in their social media posts, but also link them to non-Islamist elements. The analysis refers exclusively to accounts that predominantly use German as their language of communication. Before analysing formats and specifics in the online behaviour of female actors, this article first focuses on the difficulties of categorising the accounts of female actors. The aim of this first part is to describe the conflict that arises from the need for a comprehensible classification as an "Islamist actor" (and thus justification of the academic study of it) on the one hand, and the lack of differentiated terms for content that cannot be clearly classified as Islamist, Salafist, extremist or jihadist on the other. This part of the issue aims to address the problematic nature of existing terminology and to highlight the need for new concepts. In addition, the first challenges that arise in relation to the classification and analysis of accounts specifically of *women actors* are described.

In a further step, this publication attempts to examine formats of online activities - based on the contributions of selected accounts. Finally, it will be determined to what extent the analysed contributions indicate specific online behaviour of girls and women. The study focuses on social media accounts on *Instagram* and *TikTok*. For a first round of analysis, 30 accounts each on *Instagram* and *TikTok* were chosen, which were reduced to 18 and 20 respectively in a second step. The 18 *Instagram* and 20 *TikTok* accounts were used for further analysis.

7 According to the *Digital Report* 2022, *Whatsapp* and *Facebook* are the most used social media platforms in Germany. *TikTok* is used by 22% of the population and thus ranks third (Digital 2022 Report). The figures from the *JIM Study 2022* show that even among young people aged 12 to 19, *TikTok* (24%) - about the same as *YouTube* (23%) - is in third place among the subjectively most used apps. *Instagram* (31%) is in second place (JIM-Studie 2022, 26).

8 According to the *Digital Report 2022*, *Whatsapp* is used in Germany for an average of 11.4 hours per month and *Facebook* for 11.0 hours per month; *TikTok,* on the other hand, is used for 23.6 hours per month (Digital 2022 Report).

9 *Instagram* Reels, like *TikTok* videos, can be created on the platform itself since mid-2020, edited with the tools provided by *Instagram* and be published (cf. Instagram 2020). There is also the option of uploading videos from an external medium. The maximum length of the video is 90 seconds. Reels are visible in the *Instagram* feed as well as in a separate Reels tab on profiles, depending on the user's settings (Instagram 2023).

10 cf. Instagram. 2023. "Introducing Instagram Reels".

11 According to the *JIM Study 2022, Instagram* is the second most important app among young people aged 12-19 (31%). (JIM-Studie 2022, 26).

12 JIM-Studie 2022, 26 and 28.

13 *TikTok* is the most important app for 31% of 12 - 13-year-olds, but for only 18% of 18 - 19-year-olds . *Instagram* is the most important app for 19% of 12 - 13 year olds and for 44% of 18 - 19 year olds (JIM Study 2022, 27).

Since *Instagram* Stories[14] are a central element with which the analysed channels communicate, their evaluation is central to this work. *Instagram* Stories of the selected actors were archived via screenshots in the period from 8.5.2023 and 12.5.2023. *Instagram* posts (photos/graphics and *Instagram* Reels posted in the feed) and *TikTok*videos of the selected accounts were considered in the period from 1/1/2023 to 31/3/2023. A total of 181 *Instagram* Stories, 296 *Instagram* posts and 607 *TikTok* videos were evaluated.

The following questions guide the investigation in this issue:

1. According to which characteristics do existing studies classify or select Islamist online actors? What terms do they use for this? What criteria do existing definitions offer that are useful at this point?
2. How can existing definitions, categorisations and criteria be applied to accounts of women and girls? Which characteristics help in the classification?
3. Related to the selected accounts on *TikTok* and *Instagram* and the formats used there: What trends can be identified with regard to online behaviour specific to women and girls?

On the one hand, the publication is aimed at practitioners of prevention work who want to find out about online activities of Islamist actors and gain insights into the content to which young people are potentially exposed; on the other hand, the booklet is aimed at academics and contributes to the systematic research of activities in extremist online spaces and the possibilities and challenges of online monitoring and analysis.

Terms

The use of terms such as "Islamist" repeatedly leads to debates about their flawed definition and their frivolous use. This issue is addressed in this publication from page 9 onwards. Comprehensive explanations of the definitions are not provided here.

Where terms such as user or actor are used in the singular form, the publication is referring to persons coded as male or female, or to persons who describe themselves as women or men. This is shown by the use of male or female preceding the noun. The question of how far an account can be used to determine whether it is actually operated by a woman is discussed on pages 14 and 15 .

The term "actors" refers to people who operate accounts on social media and create and publish content there themselves with a certain regularity. The term "user" generally refers to people who use social media. These can be actors who post content themselves as well as people who only consume the content of others. The transition between consumers and producers is fluid.

14 *Instagram* Stories are photos or videos that are shared in a separate story function on the platform and are visible to other users for 24 hours. Since 2016, both self-created content and posts by other users can be published or reposted in Stories (cf. Instagram 2016). Viewers can react to the Stories with various emojis, like them or contact the creator directly via the message function. Visibility can also be extended indefinitely after 24 hours by creating a "highlight" folder on the profile. (Instagram 2023).

Current observations | Online

Recent studies on extremism on platforms like *TikTok* show that the amount of polarising content circulating there is increasing. Anti-Semitism (Weinmann & Masri 2021), hatred towards the LGBTQI+ community among others, misogyny, anti-Asian and anti-Black hate (O'Connor 2021) exist alongside Islamist and far-right content. O'Connor describes that *content moderation* on *TikTok* is particularly effective in relation to English language content, but is significantly less well implemented for other languages (2021, 46).

The social media accounts of male extremist actors in German-speaking countries have received increasing attention in recent years through monitoring projects, documentation and publications in academia and practical counselling work (Comerford et al. 2021; Baaken et al. 2019; Klevesath et al. 2021). Klevesath et al. (2021) examine the perception of videos of actors designated as "radical Islamic" on *YouTube*. They note: "Der im politischen Diskurs häufig postulierte Gegensatz zwischen Islam und Islamismus spiegelt sich in der untersuchten Rezeption der Videos nicht wider." [The opposition between Islam and Islamism often postulated in political discourse is not reflected in the reception of the videos studied. "Radical Islamic" ideas do not exist in a vacuum] (2021, 223) The authors point to the great heterogeneity of the content and come to the conclusion that some of the contributions are also applicable to people who can by no means be assigned to "radical Islamic" currents (2021, 223). Comerford et al. describe the emergence of an online ecosystem they call "Islamogram":

> "At the sharp end of digital Salafism, an online community with over 160,000 members borrows heavily from the culture of the alt-right, with increasing ideological convergence around the alleged moral decline of the West and the need to return to an idealised 'pure' society." (2021, 7)

The authors identify online, among other things, an "'alt-rightification' of Gen-Z[15] Salafi spaces" that is becoming a "new battleground for Muslim identity" (Comerford et al. 2021, 7). In this context, the authors also speak of an "akh-right subculture", in reference to the Arabic word *akhi* meaning brother and alt-right. They describe parallels between narratives, formats and online behaviour of Salafism and those of the alt-*right* and point to necessary counter-strategies to these developments (2021, 10).

A key aspect that both Comerford et al. (2021) and Baaken et al. (2019) observe is that the content shared consists of set pieces of various directions and expressions. Comerford et al. describe:

> "We are seeing a broad digital community of young Salafis emerging that is not ideologically cohesive, but nonetheless contains digital extremist subcultures, associated with a generation that came of age in the wake of 9/11, and was shaped by the rise of social and political movements that challenged both mainstream and fringe establishments." (2021, 9).

The sometimes outspoken rejection of the so-called *Islamic State* ("IS") is also observed among actors whose content was included in the above-mentioned studies (Comerford et al. 2021, 9).

modus|zad - Centre for Applied Research on Deradicalisation also investigates online activities of extremist actors - predominantly German-language *YouTube* channels, which are summarised under the working concept of the "periphery of religious-based extremism" (PrE).[16] Baaken et al. noted "the preliminary 'first impression screening' (FIS) led to a hybrid group in terms of content, with more moderate statements of Islamic faith and ideals of piety existing alongside radical and in some cases also extremist positions" (2019, 26); they then categorise them as Islamist, Salafi and hybrid channels (2019, 55). In the annual report of 2021 (Hänig & Hartwig), the authors describe further differentiations[17] based on the three categories.

Current observations | Extremist Women

Existing research on women's behaviour in extremist circles focuses on women in offline worlds and shows that they are central links of Islamist groups (Hoyle et al. 2015, Saltman & Smith 2015, Koller 2021, among others). Hoyle et al. note an open legitimisation and glorification of the organisation's violent acts in the communication of women who have migrated to the former territory of "IS" (2015, 29). While women who joined "IS" performed classic gendered roles there as wives and mothers, they also involved as propagandists and recruiters, especially online (Saltman & Smith 2015, 72). Koller also refers to the active participation of women in struggles, but their deeds are difficult to prove (2021, 6).

15 *Gen Z* means the demographic group of persons born predominantly between the years 1997 and 2012. They are considered to be the first generation to have grown up with digital media from the beginning and are described as particularly diverse as well as technology- and social media-savvy in terms of their life plans. (cf. Pew Research Center 2019).

16 See, among others, the project *ABAT* (https://modus-zad.de/en/themen/monitorings-und-trendanalysen/abat-online-salafismus/) and *KorRex* (https://modus-zad.de/en/themen/monitorings-und-trendanalysen/korrex2020/).

17 Hänig & Hartwig, for example, divide the channels described as Salafist into, among others, channels of the core area and channels they describe as "erweitertes Umfeld" [extended environment] (2021, 8ff).

Although a few publications also look at women's online worlds, they usually focus on jihadist online scenes and female actors who have joined or feel affiliated with the so-called "Islamic State" (Jacobsen 2016, Nilsen 2020, Veilleux-Lepage et al. 2023, Bloom & Lokmanoglu 2023). Among other things, reference is made to the negotiation processes on the role of women in armed struggle (Jacobsen 2016). In addition to classical, passive roles as mother or wife of a male fighter, Salafi jihadist actors in Denmark, for example, also discussed the active role of women on the battlefield (Jacobsen 2016, 179). In her study of the *Facebook* profiles of "IS" sympathisers, Nilsen highlights the importance of feelings of alienation and the desire for belonging in the radicalisation dynamic (2020, 13). Engaging in online activities can connect like-minded people with these sentiments (ibid.). The online activities of extremist women also contribute to the negotiation of their position within the organisation or movement, while at the same time perceiving themselves as an active part of a group (Veilleux-Lepage et al. 2023, 238). The boundary between the role ideologically assigned to women in private and the male-dominated (online) public sphere is thus becoming increasingly blurred (ibid.). Bloom & Lokmanoglu (2023) address the changes in the roles of women in extremist/ jihadist groups. The authors identify patriarchal stereotypes, which generally attribute passive roles to women, as one reason for distorted perceptions of women in extremist contexts (2023, 2).

A publication by *Jugendschutz.net* (2017) illustrates how jihadist online postings for women skilfully disguise the inhumane ideology of jihadism with "rose-tinted" texts geared towards romanticisation and "sisterhood". Scheuble & Oezmen (2022) emphasise that young girls turn to online worlds especially when they are restricted in their freedom regarding work and education or social contacts by social expectations and family pressure. The authors note: "Online extremism appears to be highly gendered in the sense that content, messages and language are characterised by gender stereotypes and/or promote strict gender segregation" (2022, 9). They also point to tendencies for women to be promised a "safe space" in online worlds and for invitations to offline meetings to be disseminated in online content, again creating a restricted, private setting for women's activities. Herrschinger (2022) makes clear that gender-sensitive approaches are needed to systematically shed light on the many factors that contribute to the radicalisation of girls and women and to find out what significance gender generally has in radicalisation scenarios. The author concludes that - both in right-wing extremist and Islamist circles - "[...] die Konstruktionen von Männlichkeit und Weiblichkeit sowie die zugeschriebenen Rollen nicht statisch, sondern von Widersprüchen und Dynamiken geprägt" [the constructions of masculinity and femininity as well as the ascribed roles are not static, but are characterised by contradictions and dynamics] (2022, 165).

The brief overview of existing publications points to the highly dynamic nature of extremist online activities and sheds light on key aspects that are central in researching women's activities in Islamist circles. It is also clear from the overview that a breakdown of the spectrum of female actors who cannot be clearly assigned to jihadism (or another clearly definable current) is not yet taking place to a sufficient degree and that the increasing differentiation and hybridisation of content - which is currently being noted above all in studies of men's accounts - must be followed up. These aspects are taken up in this issue.

2. The invisible sisters - Female actors and their accounts on *TikTok* and *Instagram*

The publication is divided into two parts. The first section of the main part focuses on the explanation of the platform and data selection and describes the implementation of the survey. Reflections on the selection of accounts and the challenges regarding categorisation as Islamist, Salafist, extremist, activist - or none of these classifications - form a central part of this first chapter. In the second section of the main part, the collected data is evaluated and interpreted. On the one hand, the focus is on the formats that are used online to publish content; on the other hand, the aim is to find out whether specific patterns of the online behaviour of female actors can be derived from the data collected.

Choice of social media platforms

This issue of the series looks at contributions shared by women actors on *TikTok* and *Instagram*. Both platforms are publicly accessible and no membership of private groups is required to view content on the platforms. While *TikTok* at least partly restricts the viewing of videos for people who do not have their own account on the platform, this is generally not possible with *Instagram*. Thus, for this survey, an anonymised research account was created on *Instagram,* which was used to view and collect the data. On *TikTok,* the data was accessed without creating such an account. In contrast to *YouTube,* for example, *TikTok* and *Instagram* users can be identified on the basis of the likes and comments they have left on the pages of known Islamist actors. While *Facebook* continues to be used by Islamist actors, the enforcement of policies and community standards in recent years has shifted relevant content out of the

public domain and into private groups and profiles. The same applies to the messenger *Telegram* (Frischlich et al. 2022). An identification and classification of the actors there is hardly possible due to the mostly anonymised profiles of the channel owners, which generally do not contain any personal data, which would be necessary for this study. Due to the combination of self-created posts (text, photo, graphic and video) and shared posts from other actors, *Instagram* and *TikTok* are well suited for comparative analyses compared to *YouTube*, *Telegram* and *Facebook*. As described at the beginning, *TikTok* and *Instagram* are also particularly popular with young girls and women, which is why these platforms were ultimately chosen for this analysis.

Preliminary considerations on data selection

An initial, unstructured look at possible accounts on *TikTok* and *Instagram* that are relevant to the study revealed that making an appropriate selection presents challenges. In addition to uncertainties regarding the question of whether accounts are actually operated by women, there were also difficulties in principle due to the frequent deletion of accounts, which made the initial search more difficult (see page 15). The central problem was that accounts cannot easily be classified as "relevant to the study". Within the framework of existing monitoring projects in which the authors of this issue are involved and which focus predominantly on male actors, these actors are mostly selected on the basis of their relevant (police) notoriety, large followership and certain statements on religious, political and social issues (e.g. legal issues, questions of religious practice, politics and political participation, as well as dealing with non-believers) and thus roughly categorised in the field of Islamist extremism (the next chapter shows, however, that even their classification is not always clear-cut). It was determined at the beginning of the data selection that these criteria predominantly do not apply to accounts run by women. The women's channels, which were initially considered unsystematically, seem to tend to avoid political topics; they do not show any obvious references to jihadist content or groups (e.g. through the use of relevant logos, glorification or calls for certain (violent) acts) and rarely make statements that could be clearly interpreted as a rejection of the free democratic basic order. Instead, their accounts mainly share content exhorting other women to follow different rules, such as wearing a *Hijab* or a *Niqab*. Occasionally, some of the channels also share videos of well-known Salafist preachers or quotations from scholars such as Ibn Taymiyya[18]. Often, however, it seems to be merely a matter of individual elements of Salafist beliefs. Assignment to a specific spectrum is made difficult because this content exists alongside purely religious content that does not reveal any references to Islamist narratives. There are usually no secondary sources (e.g. academic publications, reports on

18 Ibn Taymiyya was a scholar of the 13th and 14th centuries whose works circulate today in jihadist and also Salafist scenes. He is often referred to in relevant circles by the epithet "Sheikh ul-Islam", an honorary title for scholars.

the protection of the constitution) for accounts that are run by women (based on the names/references given in the account biographies). Moreover, in many cases, background research is not possible because neither the face of the actor nor her real name is given on the accounts.

Before starting the data collection and interpretation on page 16, it is necessary to address these challenges in terms of possible or not possible categorisations with a systematised approach. To this end, the criteria and terminology used by other studies with similar research objectives are first described. With reference to existing definitions of Salafism, Islamism and other sub-definitions and umbrella terms, these are examined for their applicability to accounts of women and girls. It will be evaluated which criteria can be used for this study in order to do justice to the hybrid content on accounts maintained by women and girls.

Challenges in the categorisation of accounts

The authors of the *modus|zad*[19] monitoring project mentioned above summarise the channels of male actors considered for their project under the term "periphery of religious-based extremism"[20] (PrE). The channels considered for the monitoring project were sorted into three categories, which together represent the "Fringes of religious extremism" (Baaken et al. 2019, 8): 1) "Channels broadcasting content that is unquestionably Salafi-inspired, and hosting individuals known to be active within Germany's Salafi community"; 2) "channels associated with the *Hizb-ut-Tahrir* movement that are clearly Islamist-inspired"; and 3) "channels broadcasting content that contains at least some components of Islamist or Salafi beliefs." For this last category, the terms "hybrid mission channels" or "hybrid channels" are also used. The Annual Report 2021 also describes a "gewisse ideologische Offenheit" [certain ideological openness] that would entail thematic overlaps between the categories (Hänig & Hartwig 2021, 5).

19 The 2019 project continued in the following years with different focuses of analysis and also different social media platforms. All project reports are available on the website (only in German): https://modus-zad.de/schwerpunkte/monitorings-trendanalysen/basis-monitoring-2021-22/.

20 Against the background of the difficulties arising from the categorisations of the channels, it seems useful to look at definitions of extremism, e.g. on the websites of the *Landeszentrale für politische Bildung Baden-Württemberg [The State Agency for Civic Education Baden-Württemberg]* and the *The Federal Agency for Civic Education*; see also *Democracy Centre of Lower Saxony* (2022).

In addition to the explanation given above, definitions of Salafism, Islamism and the hybrid channels are explained on the project website. In their definition of Salafism, the authors refer to Rüdiger Lohlker (2017, 12ff), among others. They state the following as central characteristics of Salafism (Hänig & Hartwig 2021, 6):

- claiming exclusivity as the sole representatives of an assumed 'true Islam'
- a self-perception as the only saved group
- the strict concept of monotheism
- a selective orientation towards the Quran and the traditions of the Prophet
- a rigorous orientation towards commandments based on a selective interpretation of Islamic sources
- and adherence to the doctrine of loyalty and disavowal

The authors see the focus on politics and society as a central characteristic of Islamism, which often also applies to the *Hizb-ut-Tahrir* or channels close to the Muslim Brotherhood. According to the authors, recurring themes are the struggle or conspiracy of the German majority society against Islam; incompatibility of democracy, constitutional state and Islam; rejection of integration or "assimilation", as this would entail apostasy from Islam; and rejection of reforms in Islam, as this would be an "intrigue" of the West against Islam (*modus|zad*2023, FAQ: "Was charakterisiert islamistische Kanäle im Projektverständnis des bpb-Basismonitoring?" [What characterises Islamist channels in the project understanding of the bpb-Basismonitoring?]

The "hybrid channels" are defined by the fact that they have characteristics of Salafist and Islamist channels, but at the same time cannot be clearly assigned to either category (Baaken et al. 2019, 36). In the annual report of 2021, the authors describe, among other things, the following characteristics that unite these channels: "Mission zum Islam, strenge Moralvorstellungen und die Betonung von Apokalypse, Hölle und Paradies sowie ein dichotomes Welt- und Gesellschaftsbild mit der polarisierenden Aufteilung in Muslim*innen und Nicht-Muslim*innen" [mission to Islam, strict moral concepts and the emphasis on apocalypse, hell and paradise, as well as a dichotomous view of the world and society with the polarising division into Muslims and non-Muslims] (Hänig & Hartwig 2021, 11). The channels in this category tend to comment more frequently on socio-political issues than Salafist channels. Hänig and Hartwig also describe that the channels in this category are hardly interconnected (2021, 11).

In their report for the 4th quarter of 2022, the researchers also point out that all channels of the "PrE" want to influence their recipients' understanding and practice of religion (Hänig et al. 2022, 4). To this end, they work with the creation of fear, among other things, in order to suggest pressure on their audience to act (ibid). In this context, formats that present supposedly unambiguous judgements on what is permitted (Arab. *halal*) and forbidden (Arab. *haram*) in Islam are also relevant and belong to one of the core contents of the "PrE" (Hänig & Hartwig 2022, 9).

The qualitative study by Klevesath et al. (2021) on the reception of *YouTube* propaganda, which was mentioned at the beginning of this publication, uses the term "radical Islam". According to the authors, the term "radical Islam" is not to be equated with extremism or jihadism, but rather, according to their definition, a collective term for currents that exhibit one of the following characteristics: 1) the advocacy of "grundlegende(r) Kritik an etablierten religiösen Institutionen des islamischen Mainstream" [fundamental critique(s) of established religious institutions of the Islamic mainstream]; 2) questioning the "Legitimität der religiösen Praxis der Mehrheit der Muslim*innen" [legitimacy of the religious practice of the majority of Muslims]; 3) striving for (or already realising) a "grundlegenden Bruch(s) mit der bestehenden politischen Ordnung in mehrheitlich muslimischen Staaten oder weltweit" [fundamental break with the existing political order in Muslim-majority states or worldwide]. In the authors' definition, the term "radical Islam" does not automatically imply, for example, that there is a rejection of democracy or that violence is advocated (2021, 7). Klevesath et al. emphasise that their definition of the term encompasses a number of very heterogeneous currents, some of which are in opposition to each other.

Comerford et al. (2021) use the term Salafism for their consideration of the *TikTok* landscape. Without drawing on known derivations of the term, the publication speaks of Salafism as a movement with "conservative associations" that "has constantly adapted to the media of its times, to appeal to new generations and new constituencies." The authors describe the ecosystem as "A broad ecosystem of Salafi-inspired groups – from apolitical scholars to online activists and violent extremists" (2021, 4). Numerous sub-groups are subsumed here under the term Salafism. In line with Baaken et al. they state that "Our current categorisations are not fit for purpose to describe this ideologically elastic online community" (2021, 9) and recommend moving away from existing classifications of Salafism: "Reflecting the give and take between traditional classifications of Salafism and internet subcultures,

as well as the intersections of extremist, fringe and mainstream political ideologies, this Gen-Z cohort of Salafis will continue to evolve" (2021, 9).

The authors point to a dynamically developing online ecosystem that is not subject to any "ideological coherence" (2021, 9), and which cannot be adequately captured by criteria that is derived purely from disrespect for the free democratic basic order (2021, 11). Comerford et al. welcome a move away from the exclusive use of the term extremism and favour the move of the Salafist ecosystem into the globally growing online landscape of *Hate Speech*, disinformation, conspiracy theory and polarisation (2021, 11).

A publication by the *Democracy Centre of Lower Saxony* (2022) emphasises - as do the previous contributions discussed here - the need to analyse content and actors beyond existing definitions and terminology, which often follow a classification by the security authorities. In this context, the authors refer to the phenomena and concepts of "islamistisch-konnotierten Populismus" [Islamist-connotated populism] and "islamistisch-konnotierten Aktivismus" [Islamist-connotated activism] (2022, 10). The actors attributed to the phenomena use populist-activist forms of action and argumentation; the religious worldview tends to remain hidden. The *ummah* is propagated as an imagined community whose cohesion must be preserved at all costs. As part of the definition, the authors also see the strong reference to an Islamic identity that would be common to all Muslims: "So wird die Adressatin, d. h. die Gemeinschaft der deutschsprachigen Muslim*innen, zunächst selbst als 'Fremde' im Vergleich zur nicht-muslimischen Mehrheitsgesellschaft definiert und dieser Fremdheitsstatus in Abgrenzung zu einer nicht-islamischen, ‚fehlgeleiteten' Gesellschaft positiv umgedeutet" [Thus the addressee, i.e. the community of German-speaking Muslims, is initially defined as a 'foreigner' in comparison to the non-Muslim majority society and this foreign status is positively reinterpreted in distinction to a non-Islamic, 'misguided' society] (2022, 11). In this definition, Islamist-connotated activism has mainly young people as its target group; Islamist-connotated populism appeals to the broad masses. Both forms have in common that the "pluralitätsfeindliche Stoßrichtung" [anti-plurality orientation] only becomes recognisable with a precise analysis of the contents (2022, 11).

This overview of the attempts at definition and categorisation presented shows impressively that there is no agreement on the use of existing terms. There is only agreement on the recognition that existing categories are not sufficient or not optimal to represent the dynamics of the ecosystem. While the authors of the publication of the *Democracy Centre of Lower Saxony* and Baaken et al. have opted for the development of smaller definitions, Klevesath et al. and, with restrictions, also Comerford et al. use collective terms that summarise different currents on the basis of a few common features. What the studies described in this section have in common is that the vast majority of them look at accounts run by men. The next section will explore what conclusions can be drawn from the above discussion of definitional approaches for the analysis of women's and girls' accounts which is the aim of this issue.

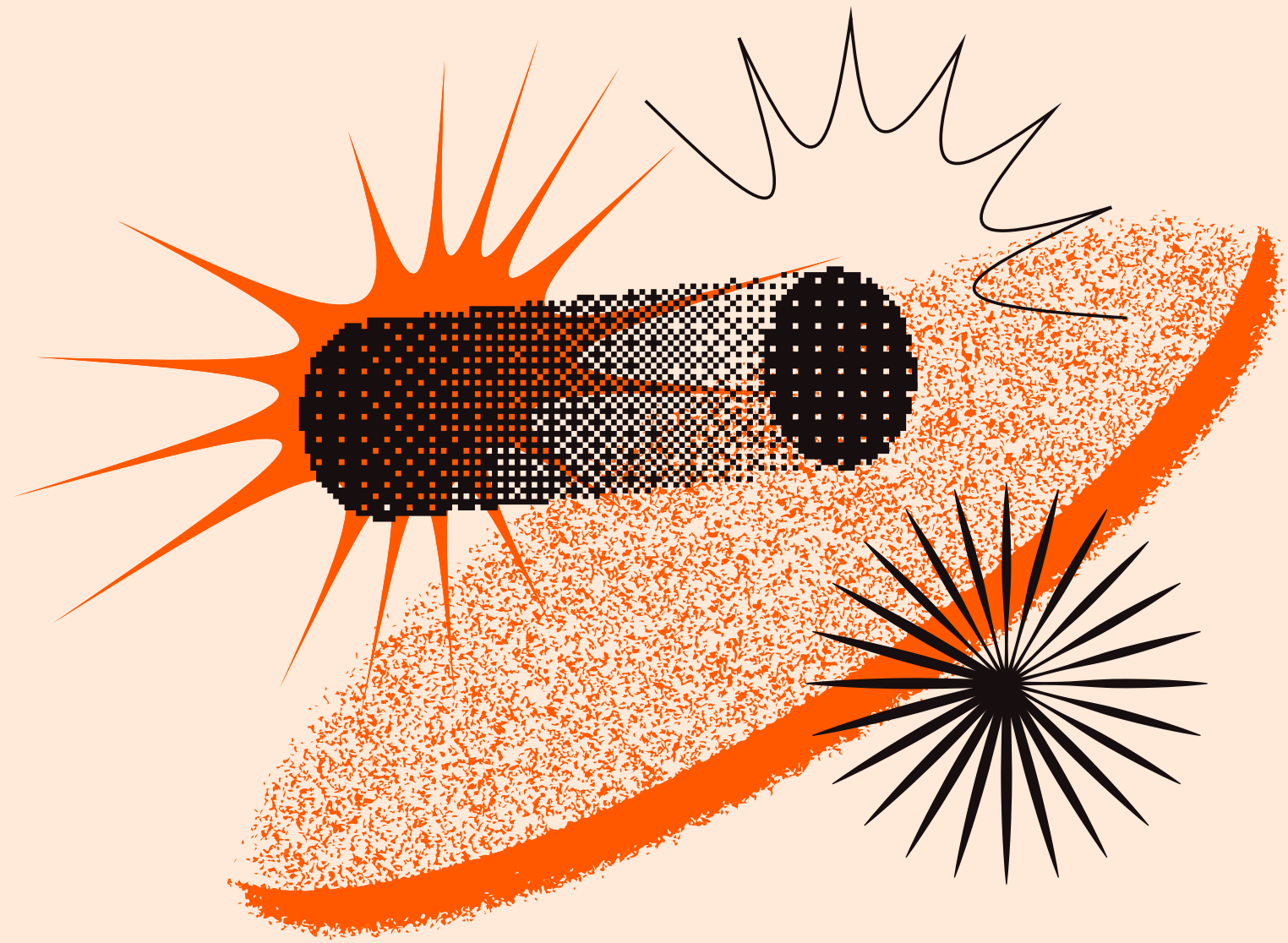
Preselection of accounts

Based on ongoing monitoring projects in which the authors of this issue are involved, the first accounts on *TikTok* and *Instagram* were identified through an initially unstructured search. Based on the comments left under posts by well-known male actors, accounts of women and girls were gradually identified using a snowball system. Based on these, further accounts were identified in a second step: This was done on the one hand through suggestions offered by the *Instagram* and *TikTok* platforms based on their algorithms. On the other hand, accounts were selected and, where appropriate, included in the primary consideration that followed the first accounts identified on social media. In total, 30 accounts on *TikTok* and 30 accounts on *Instagram* were identified through this method. Each account selected at this time had to meet the following criteria:

- The accounts are public, i.e. they are not private accounts to which only a certain group of people has access.
- Content (text, audio) is predominantly in German; Arabic, English, Russian, Czech or Turkish texts - where applicable - exist in parallel with German translations.
- At the time of the first channel selection (17.03.2023), (1) the last video/post was not older than two months OR (2) one or more *Instagram* Stories posts were published within the last week. Due to deletions of accounts, additional accounts had to be selected several times.
- With regard to the classification as a women's account, at least one of the following criteria applies to all selected accounts: (1) It is clear from the username[21], display name[22]

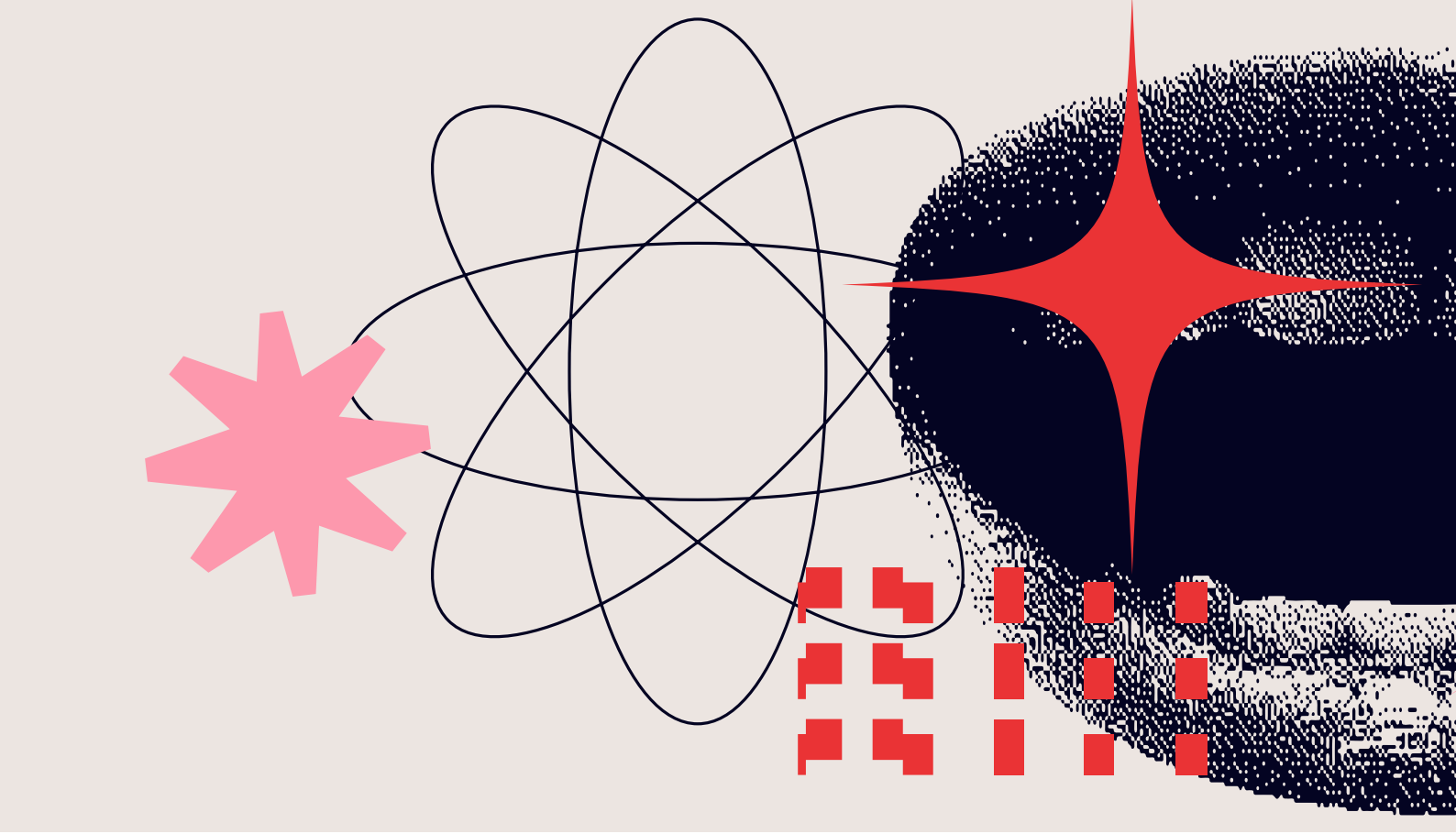
21 The username is the name that actors give themselves when they create an account and is represented by an @ sign in front of the name. The username can be chosen freely. The username is indicated next to comments, posted contributions or also in the URL that leads to the respective account.

22 Users can also freely choose their display name. This is only visible in the account view of each actor. Some users use their real name for this name. Some of the selected accounts use the additions *"ghariba"* (Arab. for stranger) or *"ukht"* (Arab. for sister) instead of their own name or in combination with a first name. These additions are also interpreted in this study as an indication that the account is assigned to a woman.



or profile photo that the account is assigned to a woman OR (2) it is mentioned in the profile that no messages from men are welcome ("no messages from *Ikhwan*" (Arab. for brothers)) OR (3) it is mentioned in the profile that the account is only accessible to women (often described as a "sisters' meeting" or as a community "only for *Akhwat*" (Arab. for sisters)) OR (4) individual posts/videos or Instagram Stories indicate that the channel is exclusively aimed at women.

- Islam, Islamic everyday and religious practices as well as Islamic traditions are a central part of the account and are regularly explicitly addressed as central themes. For this study, only accounts in which at least eight of the last ten posts/videos (calculated from the day of account selection) contained references to Islam were selected, on the day of channel selection. These references can be either in the form of quotations from Muslim scholars, Quranic texts, book titles, statements about Islamic traditions and religious practices, statements about one's own faith or relevant symbolism in the form of pictures or videos (for example, women wearing *niqabs*, mosques, etc.).

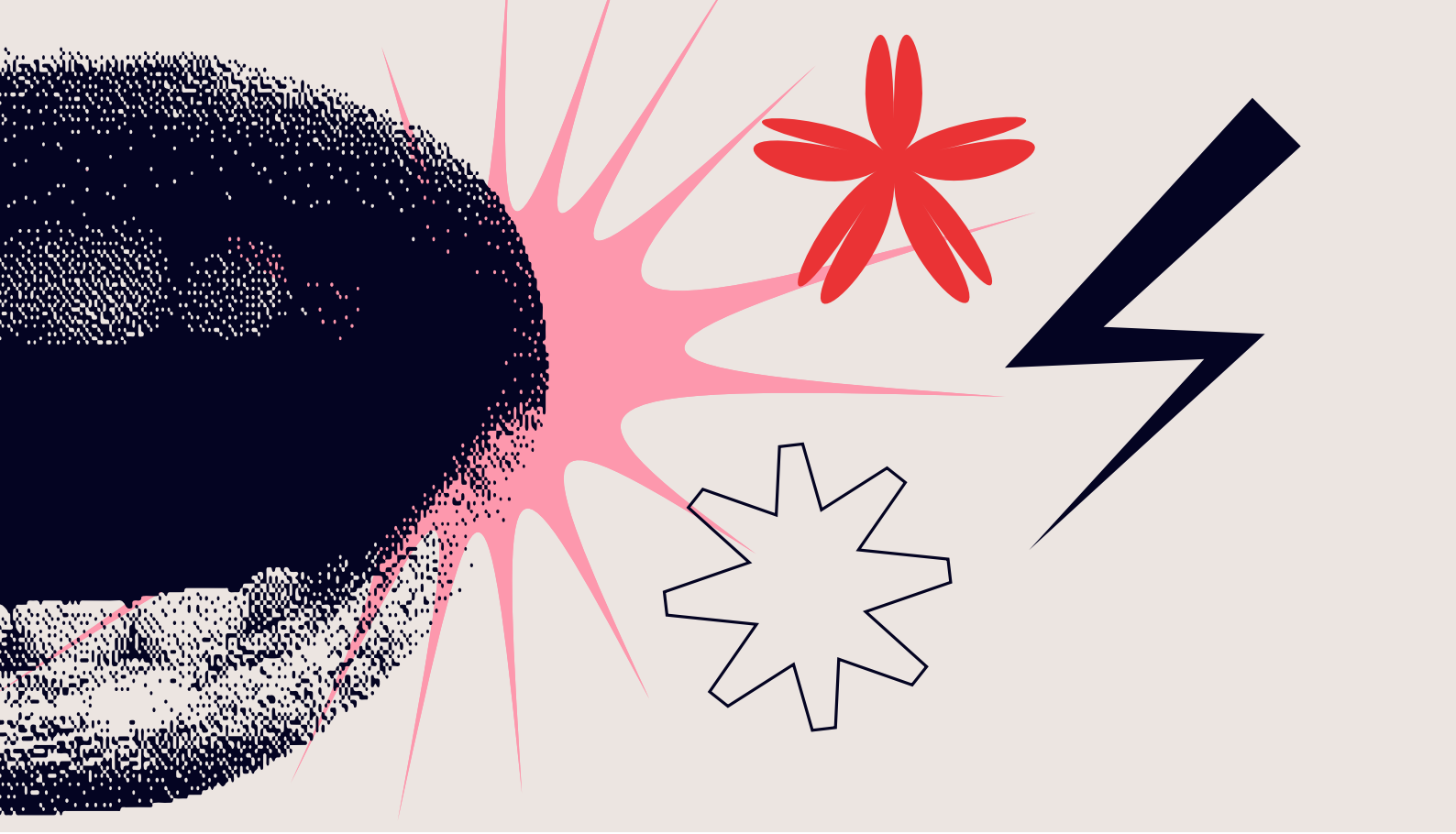


As far as can be determined, the 60 *Instagram* and *TikTok* accounts are each different actors; there is no overlap of accounts existing on both platforms. The following limitations arose with regard to data collection: on the one hand, it is not possible to clearly determine through online monitoring whether an account is actually run by a woman. The survey is thus based only on the assumption that this is the case and recognises this uncertainty as a limitation of the research. In addition, the data collection showed that some of the accounts that were initially classified as active did not publish any posts during the survey periods. Numerous accounts were still online at the time of data selection, but no longer existed or were switched to private during the course of data collection. Deletions of individual posts or entire accounts can be initiated by the actors themselves, but also by the platforms due to violations of the respective guidelines. This meant that new accounts had to be selected several times in order to view the same amount of accounts. In terms of the survey of *Instagram* Stories, however, this meant that in some cases between the first and second survey, different accounts were included. In addition, a large part of the planned survey period fell during the fasting month of Ramadan, which in our experience shifts the topics and contributions significantly and leads to an increased focus on fasting and the religious practices of Ramadan. This must also be mentioned as a limitation.

Due to ethical considerations, the authors of this booklet have decided to apply the following guidelines in order to ensure responsible handling of the collected data[23]: The authors of the publication (1) only collect data from social media profiles that are publicly accessible[24] and (2) store it in a location that is inaccessible to third parties. Data storage means that observations described in the booklet can also be traced retrospectively by looking at the data. In the text itself, however, (3) neither usernames nor photos, videos or screenshots will be published. If direct quotations from the posts are included in the text, this is done without mentioning the user's name, but only by mentioning the number assigned to the screenshot, in order to enable the authors to trace it back. Statements and results from the data analysis are therefore not linked to personal data at any point for the readers and no conclusions can be drawn about the identity of the users.

23 The following articles provide further food for thought on the use of social media data in scientific research: Baumgartner/Angler 2018; Ranger 2022.

24 Users can open a private account on social media (e.g. on *Instagram*) and thus regulate that only people they have accepted as followers can see their posts. Data from such accounts is not included in this study.



Classification of accounts

The 60 identified accounts will now be analysed and classified with regard to the categorisation attempts described above. On the one hand, this first classification is intended to determine which accounts, on the basis of their categorisation, can be assigned to the field of Islamism in the broadest sense of the word. Among other things, it will illustrate which of the categorisations can in principle be applied to accounts of female actors, and which categorisations do not or do not completely cover the content found. Furthermore, the authors hope that the comparative examination of contents and statements will lead to additional insights regarding categorisations and delimitations. This classification is based on an initial, rather superficial classification that needs to be systematised in further studies.

The classification is done through a qualitative assessment of the totality of the accounts. Within the framework of this publication, it was only possible to view a select number of contributions, at least the ten most recent (*Instagram* post, *Instagram* story, *TikTok* video). The profile description is included in the evaluation in rare cases. For the classification, a table was created per platform. The definitional approaches set out on pages 11 to 13 are used below as seven categories of analysis: Under the heading of the "periphery of religious-based extremism" there are the three categories **(1) Salafism, (2) Islamism, (3) Hybrid Channels**. What all three have in common is that seemingly clear-cut evaluations of *halal* and *haram* are made, among other things, fear is used as a means of exerting pressure by assigning blame, and statements are mostly made within the framework of freedom of opinion and religion. The other categories are: **(4) "radical Islam"; (5) Salafism as a fluid online ecosystem; (6) Islamist connotated populism/activism**. Accounts that cannot be allocated to any of the others are assigned to category **(7) Other.** While categories (1), (2) and (3) each describe distinct phenomena, there are overlaps between categories (1) to (6), which is why accounts can also be assigned to more than one category. Since the aim here is not to clearly assign accounts to a category, but rather to check which of the categorisation attempts most closely capture the online content, these overlaps are not a hindrance, but rather a compulsory part of the investigation.

Out of a total of 60 accounts, 18 *Instagram* accounts and 20 *TikTok* accounts were assigned to categories (1) to (6). Two *Instagram* accounts and five *TikTok* accounts were assigned to two (or three) categories at the same time, as a clear assignment to a single category was not possible. 15 of the 18 *Instagram* accounts were classified as Salafist accounts (category 1), following the definition of *modus|zad*. On *TikTok,* 18 accounts were assigned to category (1) (Salafism). In at least seven of these accounts (*TikTok* and *Instagram* added together), however, only very isolated quotations or "warnings" to the Muslim community can be found, which potentially point to set pieces of Salafist characteristics, but do not allow for a well-founded attribution. One *TikTok* account was assigned to category (2) (Islamism). No account could be assigned to category (3) (hybrid

Category	*Instagram* accounts	*TikTok* accounts	Total
(1) Salafism	15	18	33
Of which: Isolated elements of Salafist features	Of which ~ 3	Of which ~ 4	Of which ~ 7
(2) Islamism	/	1	1
(3) Hybrid channels	/	/	0
(4) "Radical Islam"	/	/	0
(5) Salafism as a fluid online ecosystem	1	5	6
Of which: Loose assignment to (5)		Of which 1	Of which 1
(6) Islamist connotated activism	4	2	6
(7) Other	12	10	22

Table 1.

channels) or (4) ("radical Islam"). Five *TikTok* accounts and one *Instagram* account were attributed to category (5) (Salafism as a fluid online ecosystem); of these, one *TikTok* account is only loosely attributed to category (5). A total of six accounts were assigned to category (6) (Islamist connotated activism).

Already the first attempt at categorisation showed that the described characteristics of categories (4), (5) and (6) are not detailed enough to be able to make clear allocations. At numerous points it also became clear that a classification would have to be made on the basis of considerably more data material, which means that the findings described here should only be evaluated as tendencies with the aim of having an approximate evaluation of the content found in mind. The following paragraphs describe by way of example which statements, contents and references were used to make categorisations.

The following were primarily used as criteria for allocation to category (1) (Salafism): Sharing videos of well-known Salafist preachers; spreading quotations from, among others, Ibn Taymiyya (screenshot 8), Ibn al-Qayyim[25]; issuing "exhortations" on the proper dress of women, correct behaviour in marriage, adherence to other religious practices, etc. These exhortations are often backed up with statements intended to frighten or unsettle. One actor wrote: "You will only stop sinning when you stop loving it and start loathing it" (Screenshot 9). The obligation to repent and to obey the supposed rules of Islam under all circumstances is made clear in statements such as "Wer garantiert dir den nächsten Tag?" [Who guarantees you the next day?], which are meant to point out to followers the transience and urgency of action. The combination of shared preacher videos, quotations from scholars and frequent "exhortations" can be assessed as meeting the criteria of 1) "a selective orientation towards the Quran and the traditions of the Prophet" and 2) "rigorous orientation towards commandments based on a selective interpretation of Islamic sources"[26].

25 Ibn al-Qayyim, or with full name Shams al-Dīn Abū 'Abd Allāh Muhammad ibn Abī Bakr ibn Ayyūb al-Zur'ī l-Dimashqī l-Hanbalī, was a theological and legal scholar who lived in Damascus in the 13th and 14th centuries. He is considered the most important student of Ibn Taymiyya and, like his teacher, is nowadays received in Salafist circles. In his numerous works, Ibn al-Qayyim dealt with Christianity and Judaism, among others, and expressed views that were sometimes derogatory towards them. In other writings in which he dealt with the suffering of body and mind, inspirations from Sufism are evident (Hoover 2010).

26 Hänig & Hartwig 2021, 6 and page 12 of this publication.

There are hints of the practice of strict monotheism (Arab. *tauhid*) in places, partly in the form of photos with the index finger stretched upwards, partly in the form of statements such as "Tawheed is to know that ONLY Islam brings salvation" (screenshot 10). In isolated contributions, there is derogatory talk of unbelief/the unbelievers (Arab. *kuffar*). By using the term, a division is made clear from all those who do not follow the understanding of faith exclusively known to the *in-group*. A total of five accounts use references to the word *gharib*[27] (Arabic for "foreign"; often used in the feminine form *ghariba* or in the plural form *ghuraba*) or *strangers* in their usernames, probably to refer to feeling foreign in the Western world. One post describes: "The more you adhere to Quran and Sunnah, the more of a stranger you become to people" (Screenshot 11). In Salafist circles, being a stranger is reinterpreted as a positive value and often replaced with the feeling of being "saved" or chosen - which is another Salafist characteristic from the *modus|zad* study. An Instagram post by a female actor describes: "They are worried because I have become religious. However, they don't know how lost I was without this religion" (screenshot 1), making clear the central importance that Islam plays for the actor. The turning away from the life of this world (Arabic *dunya*) and the joy of the eternal realm beyond (Arabic *akhira*) is illustrated by the frequent use of the hashtag *#deenoverdunya* (Engl. faith (comes) before this temporary world). Only on one of the *TikTok* accounts was the hashtag *#dschihad [jihad]* found on a post[28] (screenshot 3). The video is underpinned with a German, jihadist nasheed (a cappella song) in which, among other things, the jihad moving into "your country" is praised and the *kuffar* are promised hell. The fact that Muslims are seen as a chosen group is also made clear by statements such as "Islam will win!" (sometimes also used as a hashtag) (screenshot 7). The covering of women is a central theme in the accounts - usually accompanied by criticism of the clothing of others and warnings of what would happen to the *ummah* if women did not cover themselves. The mere fact that female actors appear with *niqab* or other forms of covering was not used as a criterion for classification.

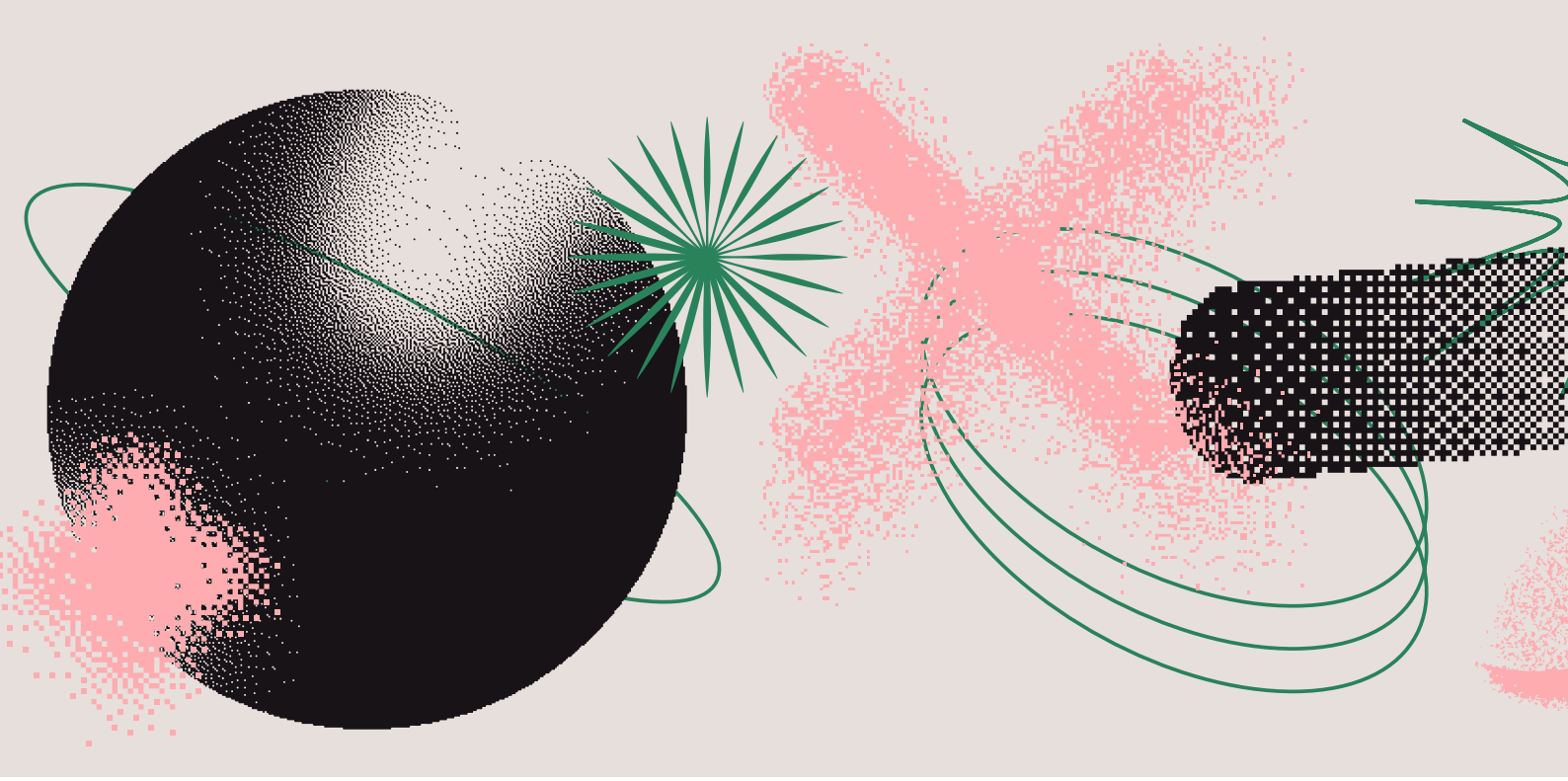
The assignment to the term "radical Islam" (category (4)), as used by Klevesath et al. (2021) in their publication, and also the classification as an "Islamist channel" (category (2)), as defined by *modus|zad*, was difficult due to the fact that only very isolated statements on politics (mostly in an endorsement of the liberation of Palestine and criticism of the state of Israel) were found. Only the second aspect of the definition by Klevesath et al. (questioning the "Legitimität der religiösen Praxis der Mehrheit der Muslim*innen" [legitimacy of the religious practice of the majority of Muslims], see page 12) can be found in statements. This concerns, for example, posts criticising women's clothing or pointing out the urgency to turn away from "western sins". Only one account explicitly mentions the *Furkan* movement, where the actor seems to be active.

As hybrid channels (category (3)), *modus|zad* describes the combination of Salafist and Islamist characteristics, whereby the channels cannot be clearly assigned to either category. Central to these channels is the focus on faith practice, piety, apocalypse, jinn, devils and angels as Quranic beings (modus|zad 2023, FAQ: "Was charakterisiert hybride Kanäle im Projektverständnis des bpb-Basismonitoring?" [What characterises hybrid channels in the project understanding of the bpb baseline monitoring?]). (Only in German) Fear of the *Shaytan* or the jinn is addressed in numerous posts. Statements like "Favourite words of the Shaytan: "Just once, as an exception" (screenshot 12) and "If we relax the hijab, we serve the Shaytan, and the kuffar, nobody else. Not even ourselves" (screenshot 13) point to the perceived truthful danger posed by the Quranic devil. However, these accounts also show characteristics of Salafist accounts (according to the *modus|zad definition*), so that classification is again difficult.

Category (5), the broad, fluid Salafism definition by Comerford et al. (2021), also proved to be rather ambiguous, as the cited definition contained few clearly delineated characteristics. Nevertheless, important insights can be derived from the work of Comerford et al. that are particularly central in relation to the problem described in this publication. The "expansion" of the definition of Salafism, which the authors undertake, has already led to the realisation that current online content makes use of a broader repertoire than classical definitions of Salafism. Comerford et al. speak of decreasing "ideological coherence" and an increasing hybridisation of content. This can be illustrated, at least to some extent, with an example from the data material. An actor whose content is primarily concerned with a God-fearing life and the strict observance of commandments derived from selected Islamic sources, and who would have tended to be assigned to Salafism, posts a video in which a voice says: "They don't call us Shia, they call us Rawafid, what an honour it is to be called a Rafid. My rejection remains rejection till today. And you know who I reject." (Screenshot 14). The term *rawafid* (sometimes also: *rafida*; singular: *rafid*) is used today by Sunni scholars on the Arabian Peninsula as a derogatory term for Shiites; Salafist currents are associated with Sunni Islam. The mixing of this content on the channel is therefore surprising. On other

27 A media outlet called "Al-Ghuraba Media" once existed around the Austrian jihadist Mohamed Mahmoud, cf. Profil. 15.08.2015. "Exklusiv: Mohamed Mahmoud – Das Buch des Gotteskriegers" [Exclusive: Mohamed Mahmoud - The Book of the Holy Warrior] see also Steinberg 2012.

28 While the post was still online at the time of writing, it had already been deleted from the platform on 23.05.2023.



accounts, it can be observed that instructions on how to wear the *niqab* or simple rules of conduct in everyday life are disseminated without even a passing reference to Islamic sources or personal statements (screenshots 15 and 16). Examples can also be found of accounts that publish rigidly dogmatic, religious rules right next to irrelevant cat videos (screenshot 17). Women actors write their own texts, which coexist on the account alongside quotations from scholars such as Ibn Taymiyya. In these texts, religious commandments are paired with the modern desire for *digital detox*, as the following post shows: "Freedom sometimes means going offline. To focus on oneself. To do good for yourself. To exercise. To go out into nature. To observe the creation of Allah. To offer one's prayers sincerely and punctually. To eat healthily and have enough water to drink. To laugh from the heart and also to cry. To keep your boundaries and principles and not think about what others might say about them." (Screenshot 18).

Category (6) opens up new perspectives with its focus on Islamist-connotated populism or activism. Central to this definition is that political worldviews tend not to be communicated, but rather the focus is primarily on the commitment to the *ummah* and the preservation of Muslim identity. The authors of this definition also see the element of foreignness described on page 17 as a component of this category, which again leads to an overlap with the category of Salafism (1). Accounts that organise offline events for converts or "crown" hijab-wearing women, as well as accounts with advertisements for Islamic marriage brokering, could thus be assigned to the category of activism rather than the other categories described above - even though there is certainly a need for discussion here. While at first it seems that this definition only applies to a few accounts, a closer look reveals that the category of Islamist connotated populism or activism frequently encompasses recurring content. Above all, the accounts of women actors who turn to the supply of *ummah* in the form of offline meetings without making decidedly political statements can be represented by this category. In view of the specific, young target group, the term activism rather than populism applies to the channels studied.

Twelve out of 30 *Instagram* accounts and ten out of 30 *TikTok* accounts were assigned to category (7) (Other). In part, it was not possible to make a classification based on the characteristics of categories (1) to (6) due to the small number of contributions available. Other accounts showed insufficient/ no content overlap with the characteristics - even though they may belong to the ecosystem in the broadest sense. Some of the accounts are focused on hadiths, Quranic quotations, purely practical questions of faith, rules for a life pleasing to God, self-empowerment as a Muslim woman or as a Muslim mother. A total of three of these accounts focus on the sale or presentation of garments for women that are described as Islamic. However, since no statements are made on religious issues or socio-political topics, these accounts cannot be categorised either. One account promotes Islamic connotated art, one Islamic children's books; another discusses the idea and implementation of *hijrah* in a Muslim country; all three accounts were also assigned to category (7) and are thus not considered in the further analysis.

Data collection for further analysis

The accounts that were assigned to categories (1) to (6) in the procedure described above will be examined in more detail in the next two sections - once with regard to the formats, once with regard to an inferred online behaviour of their actors. For this part, 18 *Instagram* accounts and 20 *TikTok* accounts are included in the analysis. All *Instagram* posts and *TikTok* videos published on these accounts in January, February and March 2023 were archived by screenshot. Videos and slideshows (posts with more than one photo) cannot be fully captured via screenshot, which is why the authors viewed these posts several times on the original platforms. For the categorisation described below, however, only the still image or the first photo of a slideshow was evaluated in each case. *Instagram* Reels were not produced by the actors. Since female actors in particular use *Instagram* Stories a lot, they were also included in the study. *Instagram* Stories are only accessible for 24 hours, which is why the analysis of these must take place within a set period of time. For five consecutive days (8.5.2023 to 12.5.2023), the Stories of 16[29] channels on *Instagram* were thus archived via screenshot at the same time each day.

The *Instagram* accounts examined in this study have an average of 1086 followers, where the account with the most followers had 3039, and the one with the fewest had 69. The *TikTok* accounts examined in this study have an average of 4942 followers, where the account with the most followers had 40,700, and the one with the fewest had 89. (As of: 23.5.2023). A total of 181 *Instagram* Stories, 296 *Instagram* posts and 607 *TikTok* videos were evaluated.

Through an initially unsystematic analysis, rough categories were created to sort the content in terms of formal criteria. These criteria were reviewed and adjusted during a trial allocation. Ultimately, all contributions were analysed with regard to three different aspects; the results are illustrated in Tables 2-4.

Table 2 shows that female actors on *TikTok* were significantly more active than those on *Instagram*. In the same period, about twice as many videos were posted on *TikTok* as posts were published on *Instagram* (607 versus 296). In line with the respective orientations of the platforms, significantly more posts consisting purely of text were published on *Instagram* (103 out of 296). On *TikTok,* posts with photo/video and text clearly dominate (525 out of 607).

With regard to Table 3, it should be noted that a distinction was only made here between the producers of social media posts i.e. whether it was self-created or shared content. However, this distinction does not refer to the authors of the published texts: i.e. a Quranic quotation that can be seen in a post created by the selected account is counted as a "self-created post" - despite the fact that the Quranic quotation was of course not written by the actor. Thus, only the appearance of one's own or another username under a post was considered for the categorisation.

It is clear that the actors actively produce their own content; *Instagram* posts that appear in the followers' feed are mostly created by the actors themselves, as this function of the app is not suitable for sharing other posts. This aspect is also reflected in the figures collected here.

Table 4 breaks down the posts as follows: a) content with a known male actor from social media (for example, shared videos or screenshots from videos or posts); b) Hadith quotations/ Quotations from the Quran (Surahs) with clear identification by stating sura/verse, or textual reference ("The Hadith says"); c) Texts of unknown origin/self- authored posts/text whose author is not clearly identified; d) Quotations from scholars, i.e. text that is identified as a quotation by quoting the author's name; e) Mixture of quotation (from scholars or Islamic sources) and text of unknown origin; f) Invitation to offline events (events, sisters' meetings); g) Invitation to online events (webinars, readings); h) Other.

Difficulties arose partly with regard to the distinction between c) text of unknown origin and h) other. Some of the contributions contained only a few words, which could not be considered as a text with a clear theme or statement. These contributions were thus assigned to category h). Contributions with texts that comprised more than one sentence were assigned to category c) if the author was not identifiable there. Category h) is also numerous, as the following contents, among others, have been allocated to it: Well wishes for religious holidays, invitations to online events, infographics on prayer or fasting, clips from film and television, photos of mosques, *anasheed* (a cappella singing) with video, photos of women with coverings, marriage advertisements, food and unrecognisable images. The following two sections interpret the data collected.

29 Two channels were added subsequently due to inactivity of two accounts selected at the beginning. There are no *Instagram* Stories for these new accounts.

Online formats

The concept of format is central to this section: According to Lünenborg, "format" is a "[...] Bezeichnung für die unveränderlichen Elemente serieller Fernsehproduktion" [designation for the unchanging elements of serial television production] (2013, 94). According to this definition, "auch Aussagen über das Erscheinungsbild, die optische und akustische Kennzeichnung (Logos) sowie die Vermarktung des Produktes durch Festlegung von Sendezeit und Zielpublikum" [this also includes statements about the appearance, the visual and acoustic identification (logos) as well as the marketing of the product by determining the broadcasting time and target audience] (2013, 94). The existence of formats suggests that media products are highly standardised and thus have recognition value. Based on this definition, formats are understood here in simplified terms as more or less fixed, recurring types of contributions. For this purpose, categories were created that reflect the relatively heterogeneous contributions of the women actors (Table 3).

Analysis of these shows that the vast majority of contributions (740 out of 1084; the sum of a), b), c), d) and e)) consisted of texts. Quotations from scholars, from the Quran or hadiths make up a part of this; the majority of these are shared as direct quotations and without personal comments. However, self-authored texts outweigh these. These mostly focus on meaning/motivational sayings to encourage others, or admonitions to point out perceived mistakes to others. On *TikTok,* a video recommended: "If you are not doing well, then turn to Allah swt[30]. Talk only to Allah swt about everything. Allah is the only one who listens to you & can make your wishes come true. But do not only turn to Allah when you are not well, but also thank Him in good times & pray regularly" (Screenshot 27). Another actor wrote: "Fitna instigators. Don't be blinded by women whose hearts have already died one way or another. 'Oh, it's no big deal'. 'Leaving that open at the neck looks much nicer'. Blah blah. No, no *ukhti*... Allah does not want that. Allah wants you to be ashamed. Not for you, not for the people, not for your husband. For Allah" (Screenshot 26).

Only 48 out of 1084 posts show content with known male actors in any way. These actors include Pierre Vogel, Abul Baraa, Abdelhamid (screenshot 19) and Abu Abdullah, who each maintain their own social media profiles. Despite the relatively low number of posts (29 out of 1084), invitations to offline events are recurring formats among the accounts; in addition to so-called "sister meetings", readings or online courses are also advertised (screenshot 21).

Especially on *Instagram,* it can be observed that female actors pay attention to a uniformly designed profile, keep posts in similar colours and often only change within one or two of the formats mentioned above. Some of the accounts post only texts they have written themselves, others post mainly excerpts from hadiths, which they incorporate into slideshows sorted by topic. *Instagram* accounts can often be assigned to either the pink-beige or the black colour scheme. On *TikTok,* shots of dark windows, the night sky or mosques dominate, combined with texts of the above categories.

Online behaviour

This final section explores some observed behaviours. Online behaviour is understood here as characteristics that refer to the use of certain features of the platforms, the interaction with other users or the self-presentation of the actors. For this purpose, observations from the survey above as well as specifics of the actors' social media profiles will be included.

On the one hand, it was observed that accounts of women have significantly fewer elements of *personal branding* in the form of logos than accounts of male actors. Actors only mention parts of their real names, if at all, or act under pseudonyms. Many of the profiles contain references to concepts that can be attributed to Salafism, among others. On the one hand, this concerns references to *gharib* (see page 17); for example, the profile of an actor refers to the *manhaj as-salafiyyah* (engl. methodology of Salafism). On the other hand, there are references to *dawah* (i.e. call to Islam, missionary work) or *tawhid* (i.e. unity of God/monotheism) or the person who follows *tawhid* (Arabic: *muwahid* or *muwahida*).

In the survey, it emerged as a problem that accounts of women and girls were often deleted completely, were offline for some time or were set to private. Compared to accounts of men observed in other monitoring projects, it can be noted that the online activities of women are significantly less consistent and constant. In some cases, statements can also be found in which women admonish each other not to share anything on social media (screenshot 2). Deletions on the part of the platform operators could be an additional reason for the frequent disappearance of accounts - which, however, would also affect men. In the period from 1/1/2023 to 31/3/2023 (90 days), a total of 903 posts (*Instagram* posts and *TikTok* videos) were published. Thus, only about 0.3 posts were posted per actor per day - that is, only one post every third day. Some well-known male actors, on the other hand, post daily.

30 "swt" is an abbreviation for *subhanahu wa ta'ala* - an expression often used to praise Allah (i.e. praised and exalted is he).

	Text only	Photo/video only	Text and photo/ video	TOTAL
TikTok videos	47	35	525	607
Instagram Stories	34	26	121	181
Instagram posts	103	25	168	296
TOTAL	184	86	814	1084

Table 2.

	Self-authored post	Post created by another actor
TikTok videos	514	93
Instagram Stories	117	64
Instagram posts	296	0
TOTAL	927	157

Table 3.

	TikTok videos	*Instagram* Stories	*Instagram* posts	TOTAL
a) Content with male actors	28	3	17	48
b) Hadith and Quran quotations	78	4	74	156
c) Text of unknown origin	262	58	95	415
d) Quotations from scholars	50	14	60	124
e) Mixture of quotations and text of unknown origin	18	17	10	45
f) Invitation to offline events	7	6	5	18
g) Invitation to online events	2	9	0	11
h) Other	162	70	35	267

Table 4.

On the basis of numerous posts, it becomes clear that women mainly address other women; men do not seem to be part of the target group. One actor wrote: "Hijab – Khimar – Niqab. Our pride! Not a fashion accessory! You claim to love Allah? Then please stop playing with HIS commandments and mixing them with forbidden things. Is it something between you and Allah? Then don't do it publicly and don't tempt others to commit this sin too" (Screenshot 22). The strict gender separation is made clear by references in the profiles that no messages from men are accepted (screenshots 28 and 29).

The appearance of women actors themselves in videos or other contributions was not recorded by the quantitative survey. The actors hardly show themselves. Women occasionally appear in photos or videos, but they usually wear a face veil so that only their eyes are visible. Due to the high degree of anonymisation, it is also not clear whether the actors themselves are really involved. Only one of the actors speaks directly to the audience in individual videos. On the one hand, the concealment could be part of their online strategy, in which personal appearance is usually used strategically for popularity and identification. On the other hand, it enables anonymity and privacy in what is actually a public space.

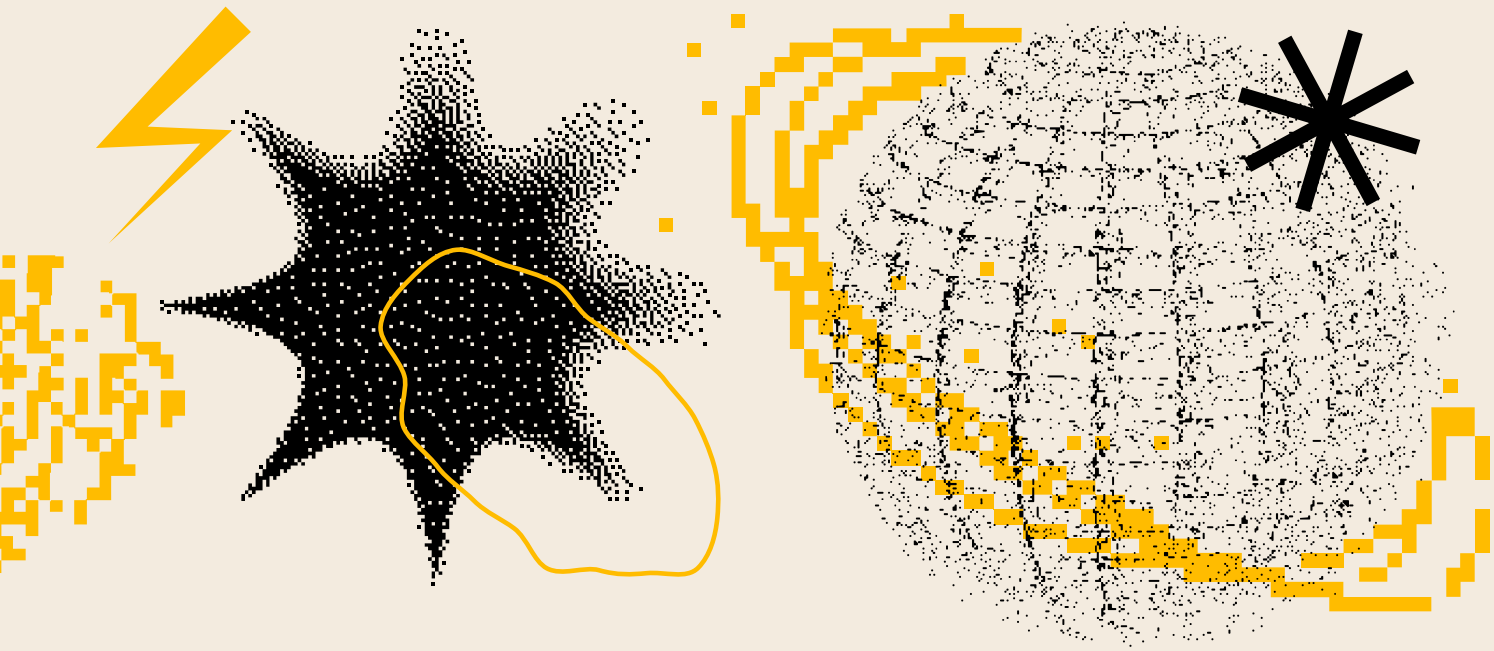
3. Concluding remarks and outlook

The aim of this publication was to take a closer look at the online content of female actors on *Instagram* and *TikTok*. Existing monitoring projects often focus on male actors who maintain high-reach accounts and operate online with a certain continuity and often in organised networks. What both male and female actors have in common, however, is that content and statements are becoming increasingly hybrid. The summary of existing definitional approaches brought the realisation that the (further) development of these is urgently needed in order to grasp the current online content. While the majority of the analysed content tended to show Salafist elements, numerous accounts (or even individual contributions) could not be classified as Salafist. The variety of definitions, some of which have very different focal points, made it possible to include online activities that do not correspond to classic definitions of, for example, Salafism. This included, for example, activist elements such as organising offline events. Locating Salafism-related content in the large echo chamber of online hate, increasing polarisation of online discourses, disinformation and conspiracy narratives enables the analysis of dynamics and mechanisms that unite all these phenomena.

Even though it seems necessary to make categorisations for the analysis of content, this publication does not necessarily want to draw such a conclusion. The central concern of this publication was rather to take a closer look at the diversity of contributions that move within the broad field of the Salafist ecosystem. For this, definitional approaches were used that emphasised specific elements and thus deepened the analysis.

The analysis of online formats and online behaviour revealed some trends that need to be looked at in further research. The low continuity of accounts and formats, anonymisation and the "making invisible" of women actors are central elements that describe the online activities studied.

By analysing women's accounts on *TikTok* and *Instagram,* this issue contributes to the systematic research of women's online activities. Firstly, a procedure was outlined for locating accounts and social media posts by women in the field of extremism, Salafism, Islamism and activism. Secondly, trends were recorded in terms of which formats women actors use online to disseminate their content. The analysis also provided initial insights regarding an online behaviour that characterises women's social media presence on *TikTok* and *Instagram.* Themes, narratives, discourses, contradictions in discourses and the roles of women actors online are central aspects that should be considered in the context of further publications. Examining the different understandings of Islam, marriage or motherhood seems to be profitable in this context.



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