



IMSISS
International Master
Security, Intelligence
& Strategic Studies



**Erasmus
Mundus**

Assessing the Degree of Extremism of the Incel Community Online: A Comparative Analysis of Social Media Platforms

August 2023

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**Presented in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the Degree of**

**International Master in Security, Intelligence and
Strategic Studies**

Word count: 23.873

Supervisor: Dr. James Fitzgerald

Date of submission: 02/08/2023



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ABSTRACT

The term "incel" is an abbreviation for "involuntary celibate" and is used to describe a man who desires a romantic or sexual relationship with women but is unable to obtain one. They blame women for their inability, claiming females reject them solely on the basis of their appearance. This belief led many of them to develop misogynistic views, which they express in hateful and degrading speeches or, in the most extreme cases, by glorifying violence against women and sexually active men.

The majority of the Incel community exists online. The majority of users report having little to no social life in the real world, which is why they seek out online communities where they can interact with people experiencing similar challenges.

The purpose of this study is to investigate and compare the extremism levels of the incel community on two social media platforms. The first one is the most popular forum in the community, Incels.is, while the second one is the relatively new Twitter community "Incel Talk".

For the purpose of the analysis, the author will perform content analysis and critical discourse analysis of the posts shared by users on both social media platforms between October 5 and December 31. She collects more than 640 tweets for Twitter and more than 13,000 for Incels.is.

The findings indicate that Twitter conversations revolve around the social order, the nature of women, and the hierarchy of men in society. Incels also discuss the same topics in greater detail on their forum, Incels.is. In addition, the forum contains other narratives, such as hateful speeches about women, violence glorification, racism, and homophobia.

The degree of extremism of social media platforms is evaluated using the Holbrook's Extremist Media Index, which establishes the criteria for classifying media content as moderate, fringe, or extreme. Using the Extremist Media Index, the researcher quantifies the general level of extremism among incels on social media. Overall, Incels.is shows a higher level of extremism than Twitter.

This research makes a significant contribution to the existing literature on incels by introducing two new perspectives on the subject. First, this is the first study that attempts to quantify the actual level of extremism and danger among incels by analysing their online posts. Second, it expands our understanding of the community through an analysis of its Twitter community, something that has never been done before.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. James Fitzgerald, for his guidance.

Moreover, I express my appreciation to Johnathan Collins, for listening to me at the first stages of this research and for helping me to find the best way to conduct this study.

Lastly, my deepest gratitude goes to my parents, Marco and Margherita, my grandparents, Edda, Roberto, Ernestina and Angelo, my siblings, Giovanni and Cecilia and my boyfriend Andrea, who have supported me along this path, giving me strength and constant encouragement.

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INTRODUCTION

The Internet gave people the unprecedented opportunity to connect globally with individuals from all over the world. This enabled the flow of information, the exchange of personal experiences and grievances, and the development of online communities where people with similar interests could converse. Nonetheless, the Internet brought with it a number of negative aspects, such as the creation of a fertile environment for the growth of radicalised movements and the facilitation of communication between individuals who might embrace extreme ideologies.

The incel community is illustrative of both these sides.

Incel is an abbreviation for "involuntary celibate," which refers to men who desire romantic or sexual relationships but are unable to obtain them (Preston et al., 2021). The term was coined in 1997 by a Canadian woman, known as Alana, who created a supporting forum where lonely people struggling to get a relationship could become part of a community of similar individuals. However, it quickly evolved into a space for heterosexual men only, filled with misogynistic and hateful ideas (Kelly et al., 2021).

The expansion of the incel community from one side of the Internet to the other is attributable to the emergence of the manosphere, a collection of websites and forums characterised by misogynistic and anti-feminist views. The manosphere consists of five subgroups, with involuntary celibates being the most extreme (Ribeiro et al., 2020, p.2).

In the course of time, incels have developed a set of complex values and beliefs known as blackpill, which has become so pervasive that some scholars classify it as a subculture. Subcultures operate in opposition of the mainstream culture (Helm et al., 2021).

They believe in the gynocentrism and misandry of society, which means that society is ruled by women and men are the true victims of the system. In

addition, they argue that life is biologically determined, meaning that unattractive men with poor genetics will have a difficult and low-quality life.

The primary factor which makes life difficult for ugly men is considered to be sexual deprivation, which is the element which makes men self-label as incels (Ging, 2019). They attribute sexual deprivation to women. In fact, they believe that women are hypergamous by nature, meaning that they only seek out extremely attractive or wealthy partners, rejecting those who do not meet their standards.

The fact that incels blame women for their incelhood is the primary cause of their misogynistic views. They characterise women as inherently evil, hypergamous, stupid, and promiscuous. They frequently use dehumanising, offensive, and degrading terms, such as "foid", "femoid" (both of which imply that women are not human, but rather similar to robots or androids), "slut", and "whore". In certain instances, incels express the desire to harm or kill women and sex-active men in order to take revenge.

In a few instances, these threats of violence made by the community were actually carried out, making earn incels their current infamous reputation. In fact, since 2014, more than 26 incel-related mass attacks have occurred, resulting in the deaths of tens and injuries to hundreds. In addition, as time passed, the community gained popularity on the Internet, and thousands of young men joined the community's online spaces. Incels.is, Reddit, 4Chan, and 8Kun continue to be the most popular places for incels to engage in online discussion, since they all have low moderation (Farhadi Berthelsen, 2021). In an effort to clean up their reputation following the incel-related attacks, they also became active on more "mainstream" social media platforms, such as Twitter, where the Incels.is Twitter profile created the community "Incel Talk," which is possibly open to everyone.

Aims and research questions

This dissertation seeks to examine the incel community in both traditional and new online spaces. In fact, the researcher investigated the most popular incel forum, Incels.is, as well as the newest incel Twitter community, Incel Talk. The purpose of this analysis is to quantify the level of extremism of the Involuntary Celibate community on these social media platforms in order to answer the following research question (Q1): “To what extent does the level of extremism of the Involuntary Celibate community online change across different social media platforms?”. To provide a comprehensive response to this question, the researcher will conduct a qualitative analysis of social media posts from October 5 to December 31, 2022.

The first step for the researcher to answer Q1 is to divide it into two sub-research questions (Q2 and Q3). The first sub-question (Q2) is “What are the most common narratives of the incel community on Twitter and Incels.is?”. The researcher intends to respond to Q2 by conducting a qualitative analysis of the posts on both platforms. She will first perform content analysis through inductive coding and then critical discourse analysis on the collected posts in order to identify the most prevalent discussion topics of incels on the platforms. This step is essential for gaining a thorough understanding of the community on the various social media platforms.

The second sub-question (Q3) is: “What is the level of extremism of the posts published by the members of the incel community on Twitter and Incels.is?”. To answer Q3, the researcher employs Donald Holbrook's Extremist Media Index designed in 2015, which establishes the criteria for determining whether a post is moderate, fringe, or extreme. In addition, Holbrook identifies three different levels of extremeness. Following Holbrook's definitions, the researcher will assign a score between 0 and 4 to each post analysed, with 0 representing moderate, 1 representing fringe, 2 representing extreme (level 1), 3 representing extreme (level 2), and 4 representing extreme (level 3).

Then, she will calculate the mean of the grades given to each post shared on the two social media analysed to determine their general level of extremism, therefore answering the primary research question Q1. Lastly, she will briefly compare the results obtained.

This research contributes to the existing body of knowledge on incels because it analyses the community from a new perspective. In fact, it aims to quantify objectively the degree of extremism within a community, which provides crucial information for determining the degree of danger the community poses. In addition, it investigates community behaviour on popular platforms like Twitter, which, to the researcher's knowledge, has never been studied. In contrast, the majority of research focuses on investigating the community in its most prominent online environments, such as Reddit and Incels.is. Thus, the analysis of Incel Talk contributes to a greater understanding of how communities behave on platforms other than their "traditional" ones.

Research structure

The research is structured as follows. **Chapter I** presents the current literature on the topic. **Chapter II** explains the methodology used for this study and the rationale behind the choices of analysis. In **Chapter III** and **Chapter IV**, the author presents the primary topics discussed by the incel community on Twitter and Incels.is, respectively. Therefore, the author responds to Q2 in this chapters. In **Chapter V**, the researcher assesses the level of extremism in every post shared by users by assigning a score between 0 and 4 to every post analysed. Thus, she responds to Q3. In the same chapter, she calculates the mean of these values, thereby assessing the overall extremism of the platforms and answering the primary research question Q1. Lastly, in the Conclusion, she summarises and reflects on the research findings. In addition, she offers suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER I - LITERATURE REVIEW

In the last few years, the involuntary celibate phenomenon online has been of increasing interest for academics and scholars. Involuntary celibates are an online-based community, part of the greater manosphere, which is a term used to identify a set of websites, blogs and social media platforms online characterized by anti-feminist attitudes. In particular, the involuntary celibates' community is the largest within the manosphere, gathering tens of thousands of men.

This chapter represents the first step to answer to the research question at the center of this thesis, meaning to what extent does the degree of extremism of the involuntary celibate community online change on different social media platforms.

The first section of this chapter underlines the etymology and development of the term "incel" (short for involuntary celibate) and highlights how this research intends to contribute to the existent literature. The following section focuses on the historical development of the incel community itself, starting from its origin in 1997 until now. Then, the third section explains the evolution of the incel ideology and outlines its main traits. The fourth part of the chapter highlights the most common demographic traits of incels identified from two research conducted by Speckhard et al. in 2021 and the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) in 2020. To conclude, the last section underlines the main topics of interest of the incel community identified by the 2020 research of O'Malley et al. The study distinguished five main narratives: the sexual market, women as inherently evil, the legitimization of masculinity, male oppression, and the legitimization of violence and vengeance.

Origin and evolution of the term “incel”

Incel is a portmanteau of the term "involuntary celibates", which refers to men who desire romantic or sexual relationships with women but are unable to engage in them (O'Malley et al., 2022).

Henry Flint was the first to describe the phenomenon of involuntary celibacy in his 1975 book "Blueprint for Higher Civilization" (Incels.Wiki, 2021). In Chapter 17, "Creep", Flint recounts his personal experience with female rejection and believes that his involuntary celibacy is a result of being viewed as a "creep" by the society. Flint explains that "every society has an image of the ideal young adult", and involuntary celibates do not fit this standard. He portrays himself and others like him as timid and submissive, lacking self-confidence, unstylish and awkward, weak and inferior, incapable and maintaining their self-respect, and viewed by the ideal adults with amusement or pity, which are characteristics opposite to the "ideal" ones. This is why they are called "creeps," rejected by women, and avoided by society (Flint, 1975: p. 182). Flint also asserts that the situation is unalterable and attributes it to the influence of pornography and social expectations.

They corrupted Indeed, he argues that women only value physical attractiveness and no longer consider a person's personality, even though "creeps" have more enriched and superior personalities than “normal” people.

Flint concludes that personalities and values of women are mostly superficial and naturally incompatible with those of involuntary celibates (Flint, 1975).

The term “invcel”, later incel, was first used in 1997 by Alana, a Canadian bisexual girl who described herself as a "late bloomer" in romantic relationships. She created a blog called Alana's Involuntary Celibates Project (AICP) as a space for individuals who struggled with their romantic lives to feel understood and heard (Bloom, 2022). However, due to growing negativity on the website, Alana decided to shut it down in 2003 (Ibidem).

Following the shutdown of Alana's blog, several incel-related forums emerged and the incel movement divided into two factions. The first faction continued to promote the positivity of the original blog, while the second faction became more aggressive and engaged in hateful and misogynistic speeches. This second group began blaming women for their lack of romantic and sexual relationships and expressed a desire for revenge against them. Over time, the positive portion of the movement diminished and only the negative fraction remained active online, marking the end of the original incel community (Bloom, 2022).

Academic recognition of the term "incel" came in 2001 with the publication of the article "Involuntary Celibacy: Life Course Analysis" by Donnelly et al. In the article, the authors analyzed the development and maintenance of incel status through an electronic questionnaire filled out by 82 individuals (Donnelly et al., 2001). Until 2014, the topic of incels remained largely unexplored, but the incel-motivated attack by Elliot Rodger brought increased attention from social and political scientists, as well as from intelligence analysts, seeking to better understand the phenomenon and address it (CCDH, 2022; FBI, 2022). In particular, intelligence agencies such as Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the Military Intelligence, Section 5 (MI5) and the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) are keeping an eye on the community, since they consider it a security national threat and eventually a terrorist threat. Moreover, academics are conducting both qualitative and quantitative research on the community, trying to identify to what extent and to whom incels pose a threat, as well as the elements which compose their ideology, their demographic profile and the psychological and sociological processes which lead part of them to extremism.

This research aims to contribute and enrich the current literature by analyzing the incel phenomenon through a cross-platform analysis. Specifically, the researcher will conduct in-depth research on the community by considering two

online social platforms used by them: Twitter and Incels.is. The final scope of the analysis is to determine the level of extremism of the community in these social environments. According to the researcher's own knowledge, this is the first study on the topic which aims to assess the degree of extremism of the community. Therefore, this research can be useful to gain a deeper understanding of this phenomenon and to design more effective counter-extremism programs.

The development of the community

The incel community has its roots in online forums and communities. It started with Alana's Involuntary Celibates Project (AICP) in 1997, which aimed to provide a supportive space for individuals struggling with relationships. It was Alana's intention to create a platform for individuals who were disillusioned with their relationship status where they could express their emotions of loneliness and exchange personal experiences with others who were in similar situations (Preston et al., 2021). The website allowed for open communication among its users and did not discriminate based on gender, age, sexual orientation, or nationality.

In 2000, Alana was content with her relationship situation and as the community of AICP had grown and solidified, she chose to step away from actively contributing to the blog and allowed it to be run by the community.

However, in 2003, Alana discovered that the content of the website had become extreme and violent, leading her to shut it down. Following this, the movement split into two separate forums, IncelSupport and LoveShy.net (Zavislak, 2021). IncelSupport remained faithful to Alana's original vision but was shut down in 2013. LoveShy.net, which is still active, took a much more degenerate turn and became a hub for misogynistic content. Since its creation in 2003, it started being exclusively frequented by men, who began holding women responsible for their inability to form relationships. Administrators did not restrict the

publication of misogynistic content, but instead encouraged it (Beauchamp, 2019).

The incel community later migrated also to other popular social media platforms, in particular Reddit, but was eventually banned due to the violent content being shared. The community then moved to other forums, solely dedicated to the incel community.

LoveShy and Incels.is are the two most prominent incels websites at present. From 2003 to 2020, LoveShy.com remained the largest online incelspherian community. In 2020, it moved to the new domain LoveShy.net, which is now managed by a new administrator (IncelsWiki.com). It has 660 members in total. Incels.is was established on November 7, 2017. It is now the largest online community, counting 21.618 members, 454.662 threads and 10.319.133 posts on the 2nd of July 2023.

As time progressed, these incel blogs and message boards shifted towards a more and more violent and hateful nature, as a few members began expressing a desire for retribution against women for leaving them in a state of loneliness. While not all members condone violence, those who advocate for it call for the beating, humiliation, and degradation of women. Some members also openly support the legalization of rape and promote pedophilia (Kelly et al., 2021). When some members of the community express their violent and hateful desires, they are often supported and encouraged by others to carry out such acts.

These feelings led some incels to perform violence on people. Since 2014, at least 26 incel-related attacks have occurred only in the United States and the United Kingdom, resulting in over 50 deaths and hundreds of injuries (ADL,

2020; Beckett, 2021). Notable attackers include Elliot Rodger, Chris Harper-Mercer, and Alek Minassian.

This violent turn taken by part of the community intensified the radicalization and inclination towards violence among those involved in these online communities. Indeed, some incels described themselves as "proud" of the actions of the attackers.

For example, Rodger, the first incel-motivated attacker, became a symbol of extreme martyrdom within the community, and he is referred to as "Saint Elliot" and "The Supreme Gentlemen" (Kelly et al., 2021).

Apparently, the violent trend within the incel community continue to escalate with time. Some members have reported that participating in online forums exacerbates their anger and desire for revenge (Speckhard et al., 2021). The constant exposure to violent and hateful content creates a sort of echo-chamber, where the individual's pre-existing beliefs and ideologies are repeatedly reconfirmed.

A study conducted by the Center for Countering Digital Hate (CCDH) found that the amount of violent content shared on incel forums and blogs increased by 59% between 2021 and 2022 (CCDH, 2022). This rise in actual violence or support for it within the community has attracted the attention of intelligence agencies such as the FBI and MI5, as well as academics (Ibidem; FBI, 2022).

Understanding incels' subculture: from the redpill to the blackpill

The change in attitude within the incel movement can be traced back to the rise of the manosphere, which is a set of websites, forums, and blogs that promote toxic masculinity and suppress feminist voices (Glance et al., 2021). The manosphere is composed of four main groups: Men's Right Activists (MRA), who advocate for political changes to benefit the male population; Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW), a group of men who choose to avoid women

altogether; Pick Up Artists (PUA), who teach men how to attract women through seduction techniques; and incels (Aiston, 2021).

All groups within the manosphere embrace the redpill ideology. This concept is a metaphor taken from the 1999 movie *The Matrix*, in which the main character discovers the truth about the world by swallowing the redpill.

Individuals who adopt the redpill ideology believe that society is controlled and dominated by women, and that men are the real victims of the system (Marche, 2016; Ging, 2017). This belief is referred to as gynocentrism, meaning that society prioritizes women's needs and perspectives over men's (ISD, 2022). Redpilled individuals believe to see the world as it actually exists, while those who refuse to accept this view are said to be "taking the bluepill".

The incel community adopted the "blackpill" which is a more extreme form of the redpill. Indeed, in addition to the redpill beliefs, the blackpill involves accepting one's incelhood as a permanent and hopeless condition, linked to the current societal system. Moreover, the blackpill ideology entails suicide as the only means of achieving liberation from incelhood (Bloom et al., 2022).

The blackpill notion was not born with the Alana's forum, but it is the result of the development of the incel community and its interaction with other anti-feminist online groups. Today, the blackpill is categorised by scholars as a subculture. Subcultures normally form around common beliefs and common values and operate in opposition of the mainstream culture (Helm et al., 2021).

Incels' beliefs are rooted in the concept of involuntary celibacy as described by Henry Flint. Similar to Flint, incels believe that their physical appearance and societal marginalization are the reason for their lack of romantic and sexual relationships. Also, like Flint, while incels believe to be physically inferior to

other men, they believe to be superior to other them in terms of personality and intelligence.

Incels differ from Flint in their views on the cause of their celibacy. While Flint simply concludes that his condition is due to a natural incompatibility, many Incels believe it is a result of women's narcissistic personalities and a gynocentric society that prioritizes women's needs and perspectives. This belief has led to a strong anti-feminist perspective, which made become misogyny the defining characteristic of the incel subculture.

Incels embrace misogynistic beliefs both as a form of hostility towards and control on women (Cottee, 2020). The root of misogyny in the incel community lies in resentment (Ibidem). Many of them blame women for their loneliness, accusing females of rejecting them due to their unattractiveness. Incels believe that women are stupid, superficial, self-serving, and untrustworthy for choosing others over them. Indeed, they believe to be superior in every way to other men, making women's rejection extremely insulting and in extreme cases it is perceived as a "declaration of war" (Ibidem). As a consequence, numerous incels arrive to dehumanize women by denying them human qualities. Indeed, they refer to them as "foids", "feminoids" and "femoids" which imply that they are cyborgs, androids, and not humans. Moreover, incels compare females to inanimate objects or animals, assessing, for instance, that "women are beneath insects" (Pražmo, 2020). Finally, some of them arrived to affirm that women do not deserve civil rights (Rodger, 2014). The use of violent and hateful semantic is widespread among those incels who justify violence against women, mainly as an attempt to increase the distance between them and women.

Incels view the evolution of society over the past several decades as the cause of their perceived unfair situation. This belief highlights the second essential aspect of their subculture: a sense of victimhood.

Incels believe that the 1960s sexual revolution was a turning point in the imbalance of power between men and women (Zimmerman, 2022). They argue that females' newfound economic independence and access to birth control caused women to become far more powerful than men within the society.

According to some of them, economic independence brought women empowerment, allowing females to choose with whom have sexual relations.

Indeed, they believe that prior to their independence, women needed to find a husband for their own survival since they could not provide for themselves. This implied also accepting to get married with someone who did not fully respect their personal preferences. However, incels believe that economic independence gave women the power to choose their partners and that now they only aspire to the best men in terms of appearance, wealth, and social status, ignoring other qualities such as personality and denying relationships to the men who do not conform to their standards (O'Donnell & Shor, 2022).

Incels also blame the development of modern technologies and dating apps for giving women even more power. They argue that these apps have exaggerated the importance of appearance, since users must decide in less than 10 seconds if they find someone attractive based solely on a few pictures (Preston et al., 2021).

Incels believe that dating apps have left men at a disadvantage, since the proportion of female and male users on them is 1:3 (Sparks and Zidenberg, 2022b). Hence, women have more power because they can choose the best partner in term of look from among a large pool of men. Instead, men must be happy with what they get since they do not have a big choice. Due to this mechanism, incels feel excluded in principle from the society and victims of an unjust system that has left them with no chance in engage in relationships.

Misogyny and victimhood are the two elements which justify violent behavior against women in the incel community. Indeed, they see violence as the mean to overthrow what they perceive as their oppressors (Zimmerman, 2022).

Fatalism is another critical aspect of the incel subculture. Incels believe that one's destiny is determined by biology and genetics, and that those with good genetics will have an easy path to success, including women, fame, and wealth. Because of this idea, incels talk about “lookism”, which is the theory according to which look is so important that it determines someone’s life. Therefore, incels believe that their fate is set for failure due to their biological limitations (Cottee, 2020).

The acceptance of this belief leads to the adoption of the "blackpill" ideology, which involves completely disengaging from interactions with women (Cottee, 2020). This is seen as a form of "reaction-formation" in subculture theory, as incels reject relationships to avoid being rejected (Ibidem).

Taking the blackpill brings a sense of liberation to incels, since they give up hope for improvement in their situation. However, it also fuels their anger and resentment towards women, who left them with no alternative to take the blackpill and accept their loneliness. According to the founder of one of the largest incel forums “The drive to join the community is rooted in loneliness.” (Hullander, 2021). The founder further clarifies that “loneliness” must not be indented only as lack of sexual intercourses, but mainly as a lack of any type of social contact, since most incels have the tendency to self-isolate from the entire society (Ibidem.). Indeed, incels believe that their loneliness is an extension of the looks-based hierarchy on which they believe the society operates (Sparks et al., 2023). In other words, similarly to Flint, incels believe that their unattractiveness is the source of their failure to have women, friends and to get along with their family.

The perceived permanent state of loneliness of the members of the community causes a strong psychological distress, most times characterized by serious and chronical depression, self-harming behaviors, and strong social anxiety, which ultimately push them to self-isolation. As an attempt to find a sense of belonging

and understanding, many incels join forums and the social community online. Once they become part of the community by embracing the blackpill subculture, most of them start believing that the only place where they are treated fairly is inside of the community (Moghaddam, 2005). This feeling creates a distance between the in-group members (incels) and the out-group's ones, who are considered their primary source of suffering. The division between the in-group and the out-group is further strengthened by the creation of a highly complex and difficult-to-understand vocabulary, which does not allow those who are not part of the community to understand the topics of discussion.

Demographics of incels

Some studies, such as the one conducted by the administrators of the most popular incel forum (Incels.is), have attempted to define a profile of incels. The majority of incels are young white men in their early 20s. The survey included 665 respondents. Approximately 55% of respondents identified as White or Caucasian, while 45% identified as Black or African American, Middle Eastern, Hispanic, Asian, Indian, or as belonging to another ethnicity. Approximately 81% of respondents reside in Western Europe or the United States.

Regarding their age, 8% were younger than 17, 36% were between 18 and 21 years old, 27.9% were between 22 and 25, 18.9% were between 25 and 30, and 10% were older than 30 (ADL, 2020).

Approximately every incel identifies as heterosexual. According to a similar study conducted by Speckhard et al. (2021), which surveyed 272 self-identified incels, 93.8% of them identified as heterosexual, 4.8% as bisexual, 1 as homosexual, and 3 as "other" besides heterosexual, homosexual, and bisexual. 84% of the incels who responded to the Incel.co survey (ADL, 2020) said they did not ever have a sexual relationship, while 16% said they did. Regarding incels' relationships, the romantic perspective is more significant than the sexual perspective. In fact, the majority of them frequently visit sex workers.

Many incels belong to the category of NEETs, or individuals who are Not in Education, Employment, or Training (European Commission). This lifestyle, characterized by spending most days at home, exacerbates their already limited social interactions. The lack of engagement in either education or employment makes it challenging to provide them with the mental health support they need. In fact, the majority of incels have poor mental health. Specifically, 67.5% of respondents to the Incel.co survey said they suffer from long-term depression, more than 74% said they constantly experience anxiety, stress, or emotional "distress," and more than 67% said they had considered suicide to escape their situation (ADL, 2020).

Incels' recurrent narratives

One of the most complete studies about the main narratives of incels on the online social environment they use is "An Exploration of the Involuntary Celibate (Incel) Subculture Online", published in 2020 by O'Malley et al. This research analyzed 8,324 posts made by 703 unique users on two active incel forums. The purpose of the study was to identify the most prevalent topics of conversation among community members. The findings revealed the existence of five major themes: the sexual market, women as inherently evil, the legitimization of masculinity, male oppression, and the legitimization of violence and vengeance.

Sexual Marketplace

Incels believe that Western societies are structured around a hierarchical system based on physical appearance, with women at the top and men at the bottom (Sparks & Zidenberg, 2022). They see these societies as gynocentric, meaning dominated by women, and view men as victims of this system (Farhadi Berthelsen, 2021). Incels perceive this hierarchy as a reflection of power dynamics within the sexual marketplace. This social and sexual hierarchy is

believed to be determined by individuals' sexual market value (SMV), which is largely based on physical appearance but also includes factors such as wealth and social status (Preston et al., 2021).

Incels believe that women hold the most power within the social hierarchy since they can decide with whom they can engage in sexual relationships. They believe that their power comes from natural differences between females and males (Lindsay, 2022). In fact, they claim that while men are predominantly sex-driven (they need sex), women are self-serving (they use sex for a certain purpose). Thus, women can use sex as a means to "trade up" and obtain benefits by exploiting these natural differences. Indeed, incels believe that women are hypergamous by nature, meaning that they seek out mates who are superior to them in terms of looks, money and status. As a result, women only consider men with the highest SMV, leading to a rejection of those with lower or equal status.

This alleged hierarchy is organised as follows.

At the top of the scale are highly attractive women referred to as "Stacy(s)", hyperfeminine and sexually attractive women desired by everyone (Sparks et al., 2022a).

Then come "Becky(s)" who are still attractive women but not as much as Stacy(s). They are described as needy, attention-seeking, and having poor attitudes (Ibidem).

Then, there are "Chad(s)", who are hypermasculine and genetically superior men, desired by women (Zimmerman, 2022). Incels claim that Chads won the lottery of the genetic, social, and sexual lottery (Lindner, 2023). Despite their envy of Chads' perceived ability to easily access any desired woman, incels also hold resentment towards them for monopolizing all available women.

At the fourth level of the hierarchy are the "Betamales" or "Normies," who are considered average males. They possess enough appeal to be able to form relationships. Unlike those who have taken the "redpill" and understand the

perceived reality of the gynocentric system, these individuals remain blind to it. As a result, they unknowingly reinforce the power and influence of women within society.

Incels are the lowest level of the scale. Their perceived lack of physical attractiveness has led to continuous rejection and isolation. They do not have any sexual market value. However, they have realized the gynocentric truth and come to terms with their involuntary celibacy. As a result, they have stopped trying to engage in the sexual market and enlarging women's egos and power over men (Ibidem).

Women as naturally evil

Incels consider women inherently evil. This belief is often fueled by past experiences of rejection or mistreatment by women and strengthened through interactions within online communities that serves as "eco-chambers". Eco-chambers are environments that reinforce a person's beliefs, ideologies, and opinions through continuous interaction with like-minded individuals and sources (Cinelli et al., 2021). Many times, incels do not have inherently hateful views against women. Instead, these attitudes evolve as a result of exposure to online environments. In fact, most incels start spending time on the community's online spaces after being rejected or mistreated by women. Once on these websites, they become conscious that many men share similar experiences of bullying or humiliation with females. In light of the fact that women are a major source of widespread trauma for men, they draw the conclusion that females must be intrinsically evil (Lindsay, 2022).

This is the starting point of incels' idea of biological determinism, according to which women are naturally manipulative, self-serving, dishonest, narcissistic, superficial and untrustworthy (O'Malley et al., 2020). They believe that a further proof of women's evilness is their natural hypergamy, which induces them to mate with someone only if they can gain something in return. This belief is

rooted in the idea that women are less evolved than men and must rely on exploiting relationships with superior men to survive (Ibidem). Through this belief, they assess women as emotionless and lacking empathy.

In addition to biological determinism, incels' use of semantic perpetuates gender stereotypes and reinforces harmful ideas about women (Lindsay, 2022). As mentioned, many incels refer to females as "foids", "feminoids", "femoids" (Female Humanoid Organism) and as entities inferior to animals and inanimate objects (Prazmo, 2020). The use of this type of semantic is an important mean for incels to justify violence. Indeed, while not all incels support violence against women, those who promote it encourage the beating, humiliation, insulting and, in the most extreme instances, the killing of women. Through dehumanizing semantic, incels create a distance between themselves (the perpetrators of violence) and the targets, arriving to perceive violence not only as acceptable, but also as desirable. Indeed, those who support violence refer to these actions as "lifefuel".

It is relevant to underline that, even though women are the first target of those incels who support violence, they also deprive men of their individual characteristics, by calling them "Chads", "betas" and "normies".

Hybrid masculinity

Through the use of language incels aim to promote their belief in traditional gender roles and want to create an oppressive environment in which women are subject to discrimination and violence. They want to assert male's dominance over females, by denying women humanity and treating them as inferior beings. By degrading them incels find a justification to police, punish and subjugate women (Will, 2020).

Incels declare themselves nostalgic of past societies, based on the traditional natural values of males and females. They openly wish to reset the classic Victorian-gender roles to force women to a submissive role. To achieve their

goals, incels propose greater control on females by men. Some of them propose to get inspired by radical Islam and force women to fully cover their body to stop the current "moral decay" of values, caused by modern technologies. They blame social media for the degeneration of societies, because these tools boost women's egos and feed their natural tendency to be attention-seekers (Ibidem). Furthermore, incels believe that since women show their bodies on social media, men are entitled to sexualize and objectify them. As a result, most of them support rape and sexual violence on women (Glance et al.,2021). They believe that for men having sex is a natural right and a physiological need, then forced sexual relationships should be legalised to guarantee the respect of this right to everyone (CCDH, 2022).

Moreover, a few incels support pedophilia. This is because they affirm that women after their 20s are disrespectful of traditional values and untrustworthy. Indeed, they use "scientific" studies to demonstrate that the more sexual partners a woman had the more likely she will cheat. As a result of this conviction, they claim the age of consent is an unreasonable social construction and that men, to have a loyal partner, should look at girls no older than 14 years old (Laskovtsov, 2020).

A study conducted by Ging in 2021 emphasised that incels do not support hegemonic masculinity, but instead perform hybrid masculinity.

Indeed, they wish to eliminate the traditional privileges of the masculine "Chad" while simultaneously reaffirming his position in society. In fact, they aspire to resemble Chads and are envious of their appearance. To achieve this, many Incels aspire to "look max", that is, to maximise their attractiveness and become the ideal "man" as depicted by traditional values. However, they simultaneously despise and mock Chads for stealing all the available women, and therefore they aspire to destroy the traditional societal standards.

Thus, on the one hand, they distance themselves from the traditional form of masculinity, arguing that the ideal attractive and powerful "man" is merely a

social construction that must be overcome. On the other hand, reflecting that social construction is their individual goal.

In addition, even though they claim to want to destroy traditional values, they still intend to subjugate women and maintain traditional gender roles on the matter, which is a classic narrative of hegemonic masculinity.

Male oppression

As incels assert that modern societies are gynocentric, they believe that men as a whole are oppressed. They affirm that societies are always biased in favor of women's rights.

They point to examples such as divorce court decisions that often award custody to mothers and a woman's sole decision-making power regarding abortion, disregarding the man's opinion.

Moreover, they argue that society has a prescribed standard of masculinity set by women, causing men who do not conform to these standards to feel excluded and ostracized. They believe that in order to be minimally accepted, they must resort to plastic surgery. They also contend that due to societal expectations, men are raised with an inherent inability to express themselves authentically (O'Malley et al., 2020).

Legitimation of violence and revenge

These four narratives - the sexual market, the portrayal of women as inherently evil, the validation of masculinity, and male oppression - create the foundation for the fifth one: the justification of violence and revenge, in particular against women.

However, not all incels support the use of physical violence against women. Indeed, as highlighted by researchers like Moghaddam (2005), not everyone who is radicalized becomes violent. Nevertheless, studies have shown that the more incels participate in forums, the more likely they are to support violence

against women, as their views are validated (Speckhard et al., 2021). Additionally, many incels advocate for indirect and non-physical violence against women, such as catfishing women, sharing females' personal pictures without their consent and non-intervening when seeing them in danger (*Ibidem.*). Some incels also support violence against Chads and sexually active men, because they are receiving female attention.

Moreover, the incel community also celebrates and venerates individuals who have carried out violent attacks against women, such as Rodger, Minassian, and Harper-Mercer. They use the term "lifefuel" to describe the violence they inflict upon women. Those who carried out violent attacks are often seen as heroes and their actions are viewed as necessary for the so-called "incel rebellion" (Minassian, 2018). Some members use term "going ER" -ER stands for Elliot Rodger- to describe their desire to emulate Rodger's violent acts.

The legitimisation of violence within the incel community comes directly from the blackpill subculture, which can be identified as a terrorism-justifying ideology as defined by Kruglanski et al. (2014). Kruglanski et al. affirm that an ideology to justify violence needs three elements, namely a grievance, a culprit, and a morally warranted and effective method of removing the injustice.

In the case of incels, the grievance is the result of their rejection by women and isolation from society.

The primary culprits of their situation are women, who deny them love and affection, as well as the society as a whole, which does not accept them because they do not conform to its standards.

Lastly, the morally warranted and effective method for eliminating injustice consists of two factors, namely the moral warrants and the effectiveness of the method. The moral warrants are accomplished through semantics and rhetoric. They use semantic to dehumanize women, with terms such as "foids" and "feminoids" and to take distance from the object of their violence.

Dehumanization is needed to portray the targets of violence as “disgusting inhuman creatures that do not merit the consideration extended to people” (Kruglanski et al., 2014). This creates a distinction between the members of in-group and those of the out-group (mainly all women, but also Chads and normies), who are considered as the natural obstacle to incels’ happiness, which must be eliminated to reach a satisfying life. In short, the dehumanization of the targets of violence, makes perceive this both necessary and desirable. Rhetoric, such as the glorification of Rodger and others, is used instead to justify violence and to promote it. Indeed, when he committed the mass murder in 2014, other incels referred to him as "Saint Elliot" and "Supreme Gentleman" (Ibidem). In this way, violence is perceived as very effective, since those who perpetrate violent acts are viewed as making an exceptional contribution to the group. Therefore, also the effectiveness of the method is proved.

CHAPTER II - METHODOLOGY

The current study aims to evaluate the Involuntary Celibate community's level of extremism on two online social environments by applying the Extremist Media Index developed by Holbrook in 2015. The study specifically responds to the following question:

Q1: To what extent does the level of extremism of the Involuntary Celibate community online change across different social media platforms?

The Index of interest was designed and tested by Donald Holbrook, an Associate Fellow at the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, to analyse the level of extremism of content online. Holbrook wanted to develop a “systematic, testable and repeatable tool of measurement” of the level of extremism of media content (Holbrook, 2015). The author designed the Index to assess the degree of extremism of religious and political extremist groups on medias (Holbrook, 2015, p. 59). However, it results general enough to be applied in the involuntary celibates’ instance.

Similar to other relevant academics such as Moghaddam (2005), Holbrook asserts that only a small number of participants in large-scale movements of discontent embrace extreme ideologies, and even fewer decide to commit a violent act. Moghaddam argues that the path to a terrorist act resembles a staircase with six levels.

The majority of people are at the ground level. They may feel partially deprived of something, but they do not react to this perceived deprivation.

On the first floor of the staircase, only those who actively seek remedies for what they perceive to be unjust treatment proceed.

Moving forwards, the individuals who displace aggression or hostility towards the “out-group” climb at the second floor.

Individuals who are morally engaged, i.e., they justify the use of any mean to achieve the ideal society, proceed at the third floor. The achievement of the “ideal society” becomes a moral duty for these individuals.

People who ascend to the fourth floor are indoctrinated and become members of the terrorist organisation, with which they share values, goals, and interests. Lastly, on the top level (fifth floor), there are those willing to commit a terrorist act, specifically an act of violence against civilians intended to spread terror (Moghaddam, 2005).

The staircase model can be applied to incels as well. Indeed, it is relevant to underline that not every incel is violent nor they all approve violence. Contrarily, only a relatively small portion of the users advocate for violence or support it. As it will emerge from the analysis of Incels.is in the fourth chapter, most of them keep using the forum only to have social contacts and to talk with people who can relate with the situation and not to express hostility.

Holbrook designed the Index by coding according to a set of definitions some texts of his interest on Islamic terrorism. The definitions used are intended to describe notionally “moderate”, “fringe” or “extreme” content (Figure 1).

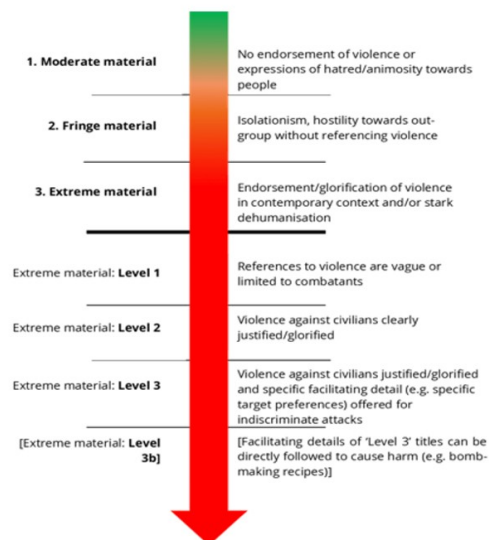


Figure 1 – Definitions of the levels of extremism of the Extremist Media Index

As shown in Figure 1, Holbrook classifies content as moderate when it does not glorify violence or express hostility in any way. It is considered fringe when it expresses isolationism or hostility towards the out-group without referencing violence. Lastly, extreme posts include those that dehumanise people, glorify or endorse violence against targets. Additionally, the index evaluates three levels of extremeness. At level one, the Index comprehends references to violence on a very general level or against combatants. Extreme – level two is assigned to media content that justifies or glorifies violence against specific targets. Level three is assigned when there are the requirements of level two and specific facilitating details, such as a location or a method of attack, are provided.

The modality through which the Extremist Media Index will be applied to this specific research are explained later in this paragraph, since this step will be the last one of three.

To answer Q1, the researcher will analyse the content shared by incels on two different online social platforms, which differ for their degree of popularity. Specifically, the first platform considered is Twitter, which is a highly mainstream social media with around 450 million users monthly (Ruby, 2023). Twitter allows users to post “tweets” long up to 280 characters, possibly accompanied by visual content.

The second platform analysed is Incels.is, an online forum intended only for men who self-recognise as involuntary celibates, namely who “struggle with or are unable to get into romantic relationships with women despite trying” as stated on the biography of the website (Incels.is, 2017a). As for the 19th of April 2023, it counts slightly less more 21.000 members. For both the popularity of the forum and the nature of the content shared (generally highly misogynistic),

Incels.is is classified as a dark social platform. Incels.is allows its users to share posts with no length limit. The posts on the forum are composed by title, which summarises the content of the body text, the body text itself and eventually visual content. Many posts have a pre-title which gives an idea of the topic of the post.

The research is accomplished through a qualitative analysis of the posts shared by incels on the social media mentioned in a specific period of time, from the 5th of October 2022 to the 31st of December 2022. For what concerns Twitter, the posts are collected on the community “Incel Talk”. The community feature was introduced by Twitter during September 2021 and its scope is to create a space on the platform where users who share similar passions can group together and talk freely about the common interest. Specifically, Incel Talk was created by the Twitter account of the forum Incels.is, and the bibliography states it is a “place where incels and those that can relate to the situation can talk freely”.

Hence, those who post on this Twitter community are self-recognized incels or consider themselves in a very similar situation. The community was created on the 5th of October 2022 and on the 19th of April 2023, it counts 332 members. For what regards the forum Incels.is, it was created on the 7th of November 2017. On the forum are allowed only self-identified incels, and the creation of an account is strictly forbidden to non-incels, women, members of the LGBTQ+ community and people under 18 years old. The posts analyzed are collected from the largest sub-forum on the website, called “Inceldom Discussion”, which on the 19th of April 2023 counts almost 5 and a half million posts.

The analysis of the posts consists of a three-step process.

Data collection

The first step is the collection of the data to be analysed. On both platforms, the researcher manually collects all the posts shared during the period of interest, meaning from the 5th of October 2022 to the 31st of December 2022. This

decision is taken mainly to guarantee users anonymity with the purpose of not collecting any personal information traceable to specific persons. Indeed, for what concerns Twitter, the researcher takes trace only of the text of the post, the type of post (e.g., tweet, quote, retweet) and, if it is the case, the text of the tweet quoted or retweeted. Similarly, for what regards Incels.is the researcher will save both the pre-title, title, body text and number of replies of the posts.

In total, the author collects 644 tweets for Incel Talk. For what regards Incels.is, the number of posts saved in the database is equal to 13.312.

The researcher, mainly because of time constrains, must narrow down the number of posts collected on Incels.is.

Since the author is mainly interested in analyzing the most discussed topics in the Forum, she considers only the posts with the highest grade of engagement in terms of replies. On Incels.is the number of replies is the only element that allows to quantify the popularity of the posts published.

In order to select the most relevant posts in the forum, the researcher sorts in ascending order the number of replies that each post got. After this, she calculates the median (M) of replies, which is equal to 12 ($M=12$). As a first step to narrow down the database, the researcher considers only the posts with the number of replies higher than the median. Calling the number of replies of the posts R_n , the researcher considers only the posts with $R_n > M$, i.e., $R_n > 12$. Through this step, the database has been almost halved, restricting the number of posts to 6.291.

At this point, the researcher further narrows down the database by using a sampling procedure. The sampling method selected is the Simple Random Sampling (SRS), which is defined as the “simplest and most common method of selecting a sample, in which the sample is selected unit by unit, with equal probability of selection for each unit at each draw” (Singh, 2003, p. 71). Random sampling is accurate for social media content analysis because it gives to every element of the population the same probability of being chosen. This

method is chosen in light of the article “Evaluating Sampling Methods for Content Analysis of Twitter Data” (2018) written by Kim et al. In the article, the authors test different sampling methods on social media data to determine which is the most accurate one for creating a sample. They argue that literature focuses only on sampling methods in traditional media content, while there is a great under-exploration of the effectiveness of sampling techniques in modern media platforms. The results of their testing show SRS as the most accurate sampling procedure for social media platforms.

In order to obtain a reliable sample (i.e., with the correct number of cases) from the 6.291 posts collected, the researcher refers to both the table proposed by Krejcie and Morgan (1970) and the Taro Yamane sample technique (1967). Even if the tables proposed are up to date, they are still considered by many academics as a relevant method to find a big-enough sample to study a population.

Krejcie and Morgan developed the following formula to determine the size of the sample:

$$n = \frac{\chi^2 NP(1 - P)}{e^2 (N - 1) + \chi^2 P(1 - P)}$$

Where χ^2 is the chi-squared value depending on the level of the confidence interval, N is the population size, P is the population proportion and e the margin of error. The researcher considered a confidence interval of 95%, to which corresponds $\chi^2 = 5.024$ and $e = 2.5\%$. N is the size of the population, meaning 6.291 and P is generally assumed to be equal to 0.5 since this value provides the maximum sample size (. With these terms, the sample considered should be equal to:

$$n = \frac{5.024 * 6.291 * 0.5(1 - 0.5)}{(0.025)^2 * (6.291 - 1) + 5.024 * 0.5(1 - 0.5)} \approx 1.523,25$$

The first formula indicated that 1523 posts is the number of cases a sample should contain to be representative with 95% confidence.

To double check the result, the researcher uses the Yamane method as well.

Yamane indicated that a simple, yet accurate, formula to get the correct dimension of a sample is:

$$n = \frac{N}{(1 + Ne^2)}$$

Where N is the size of the population (6.291) and e the margin of error. By maintaining the same confidence interval considered for the above used formula, the researcher gets the following result:

$$n = \frac{6.291}{(1 + 6.291 * 0.025^2)} = \frac{6.291}{4,93} \approx 1.275,58$$

Yamane's method indicates that the sample should contain 1276 cases.

Given the different result of these two methods, the researcher calculates the mean between the two valued, obtaining the following result:

$$n = \frac{1276 + 1523}{2} = \frac{2799}{2} = 1.399,5$$

Therefore, the sample of reference contained 1.400 elements, which corresponds to 22,25% of 6.291.

The sample of 1.400 posts is created proportionally to the elements of the population. Indeed, all the posts published on the forum are classified according to 23 different pre titles, which give an idea of what the post will talk about.

Other posts which do not have any pre title are categorised as "No Pre Title" by

the researcher. Then, the author calculates the frequency and the proportion of every pre title in the 6.291 posts (Appendix 1).

Afterwards, the researcher creates the sample of 1.400 elements respecting the same proportions of the pre titles mentioned above (Appendix 2), in order to maintain the same frequency of topics of the original database.

The elements in each of these categories are selected randomly using a random number generator in accordance with the requirements of the SRS method. With these steps, the author has a high confidence of covering most of the topics discussed by incels on the community.

Data analysis

The second two steps of the research concern the analysis of the data gathered. In order to answer Q1, the author divided the analysis into two smaller research questions, Q2 and Q3.

The first one (Q2) intends to detect the main topics of discussion of the incel community on the online social platforms analysed and it can be expressed as follows:

Q2: What are the most common narratives of the incel community on Twitter and Incels.is?

Q2 is approached according to two different research methods. First, the researcher will perform content analysis, and more specifically conceptual analysis, to get familiar with the data collected. As a first step of this section, the researcher will read the two databases of posts created, and she will manually code them taking into account recurrent words and themes. The coding step will be done inductively, in order to make arise the themes directly from the data collected (Medelyan, n.d.). The inductive coding results to be the most accurate for this study, since the author intends to detect all the narratives discussed on the forum without relying on pre-existing codebooks. The conceptual analysis is of particular importance in this study and provides a solid

starting point to develop the subsequent in-depth research. Indeed, as Myburgh and Tamaro (2011) underline, the study of concepts allows to understand the meaning and the role of a term in the broader scenario and how it is linked to other concepts. Myburgh and Tamaro argue that concepts represent ideas and ideologies. Therefore, the study of concepts makes understand the beliefs and ideologies behind the concepts themselves, allowing to understand the concepts as intended by the users (Myburgh and Tamaro, 2011, p. 18).

The second step performed by the researcher to answer Q2 consists in analysing the posts by using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), theorised by Norman Fairclough (1995). According to Fairclough's theory, discourses (meaning texts, speeches, and in general every form of use of language) are social practices that must be analysed according to three dimensions: the object of the analysis (the type of discourse analysed), the mean by which the discourse is produced and received (such as text, speech) and the socio-historical conditions existing while the discourse is produced (Janks, 1997). Through the analysis of each of these elements, the researcher can 1) understand the deep meaning of the texts analysed, 2) emotions the text aimed to transmit and 3) the thinking process of the author behind specific terms, keeping in mind the socio-historical condition when the discourse was produced (Janks, 1997). Moreover, Wodak (2001), another exponent of CDA, similarly to Fairclough, considers discourses as a social practice, but he puts more emphasis on the historical approach to analyse discursive practices. He argues that discourses are socially constitutive and socially constituted, meaning that discourses reflect and shape what society is. This means that discourses are not neutral, but they depend on some ideologies which can be understood only through an analysis of the discursive acts while considering the social and historical context (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997; Jahedi et al., 2014).

Given the nature of the incel community, understanding the feelings behind users' statements is essential to assess their extremist level. Moreover, given

that their thoughts are strictly and openly linked to the current historic conditions (e.g., they consider women empowerment and the arise of dating apps as two of the main causes of their incelness), Critical Discourse Analysis is a consistent methodology to employ for this study. Therefore, CDA is performed on the posts of Twitter and Incels.is to understand their deep meaning in light of the socio-historical context.

After having really understood the posts of the users, the researcher moves to the second step of the analysis, which aims to assess the degree of extremism of the posts analysed. This step answers the following question:

Q3: What is the level of extremism of the posts published by the members of the incel community on Twitter and Incels.is?

To answer Q3, the researcher uses the Holbrook's Extremist Media Index (2015) introduced above. As mentioned, the Index is structured in order to classify the posts analysed according to five different levels of extremism: moderate, fringe, extreme –level 1, extreme –level 2 and extreme –level 3.

The researcher will assess the degree of extremism of each post analysed, scoring them from 0 to 4. 0 corresponds to a moderate post, 1 to a fringe one, 2 identifies a post which is extreme – level 1, 3 identifies the second level of extremeness and 4 the third one. Once every post is graded, the researcher is able to assess the general degree of extremism of the incel community on the online social platforms considered, therefore she will answer the primary research question Q1. To calculate the general degree of extremism of the social networks she calculates the weighted average (m) of the scores given to each post for both platforms. The operation is like the following one:

$$m = \frac{n * 0 + n_1 * 1 + n_2 * 2 + n_3 * 3 + n_4 * 4}{N}$$

Being n the number of moderate posts, multiplied by their weight 0, n_1 the quantity of fringe posts, multiplied by their weight 1, n_2 the number of extreme – level 1 posts, multiplied by their score 2, n_3 the amount of extreme – level 2 posts, multiplied by 3 and, n_4 the quantity of extreme – level 3 posts, multiplied

by their value 4. This sum is divided by the total number of posts analysed, 644 for Twitter and 1.400 for Incels.is.

The result of this operation is the m , which varies from 0 to 4 ($0 \leq m \leq 4$). The closer m is to 0, the more moderate the social media platform is. Contrarily, the closer m is to 4, the higher the general level of extremism of the platform.

Limitations

The main limitation of the present research is that it may be under representative of the incel community on Twitter and Incels.is, possibly resulting in lack of accuracy when assessing the degree of extremism of incels on the considered platforms.

For what concerns Twitter, it is very likely that not all incels who use Twitter interact on the platform's community considered, because it is new or because they would be more exposed than on platforms with low moderation. This means that many incels' posts on Twitter will not be analysed. This is an important element to consider when looking at the results of the research, since the overall level of extremism of incels on Twitter could overestimate or underestimate the real degree of extremism of the community on the platform. With regards to Incels.is instead, the research could result under representative because it will analyse the posts published on a limited time span, considering that the forum was founded in 2017. Nevertheless, for Incels.is the limitedness of the time is substantially overcome when considering the purpose of this study itself, which is to identify the current degree of extremism of the incel community on the platform. Hence, historical data lose their importance in this specific situation.

On a similar note, the use of a sample of posts instead of the entire corpus of posts for the analysis of Incels.is may generate results which do not perfectly reflect the real situation of the forum.

Timewise, the time span analysed does not represent a limitation for Twitter, given that Incel Talk was founded in October 2022. However, the problem with Twitter is that its most extreme posts are normally deleted from the platform quite quickly. Indeed, as the policy on "Hateful conducts", updated in April 2023, states "You may not directly attack other people based on their race, ethnicity, national origin, caste, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, religious affiliation, age, disability, or serious illness" (Twitter.com "Hateful Content" page, 2023). However, since Elon Musk's takeover of Twitter, its contents have been less moderated in the name of the "freedom of speech" (Malik, 2022). Moreover, Elon Musk openly embraces the redpill philosophy, encouraging others to do the same (Winkie, 2022). Therefore, it is likely that most posts on Incel Talk have not been removed, if not strongly extreme.

Another limitation related to the current study is that the researcher could be personally biased while analysing the posts collected. The fact that the posts are mainly analysed qualitatively increases the risk of personal bias. Indeed, qualitative research is "often criticised in terms of validity, reliability and generalizability" (Chowdhury, 2014). To try to avoid this criticism and as an attempt to make this research reliable and generalisable, the researcher decided to use the Holbrook's Extremist Index. With this, the analysis can be, at least partially, converted from qualitative to quantitative. The combination of qualitative and quantitative methods is recommended by many academics to research in the social realm because it helps making the study more reliable, acceptable and with a lower risk of being personally biased (Silverman, 2004). To conclude, the last relevant limitation of the present study concerns the wellness of the researcher. Indeed, she must deal with misogynistic, violent, and explicit material which might offend her sensitivity. As Conway (2021) highlights, the mental distress caused by online research must be seriously taken into account, since the amount of extreme content online has grown up both in quantity and goriness.

Moreover, there are also risks concerning her digital and physical safety by dealing with incels. However, the researcher will mitigate these risks by non-interfering in anyway with the members of the community. Additionally, she developed with her supervisor an emergency plan to be implemented in case she feels distressed by the material of the research. Part of the plan includes a maximum number of hours that the researcher may spend daily collecting and analysing posts or consuming visual material. Finally, in case of severe distress, the researcher is instructed to contact the emergency service of the University to get the support she might need. She furtherly developed this topic in the ethics procedure for this dissertation, which have been fully approved.

CHAPTER III – INCEL TALK ANALYSIS

The Twitter community Incel Talk was established on October 5, 2022, by the Twitter profile associated with the forum Incels.is. The purpose of the community is to provide a “place where Incels or those who can relate to the situation can talk freely”, as stated in the biography of the community.

Incel Talk enforces six rules that have been established by the community administrators:

1. “Be kind and respectful: this isn’t a place to insult, demean or make fun of others.
2. Keep tweets on topic: any off-topic tweets may be removed.
3. Limit political discussions: politics can be unavoidable, but we do ask that you keep it out of the community if it's not related to incels, as political discussions are polarizing.
4. Don’t incite to violence or make any threats of any kind, even jokingly.
5. No debating: this isn’t a place to debate incels, but a place for discussion of incels and incel related issues.
6. No illegal activity: don’t discuss any illegal activity of any kind. Members that post this content will have their posts removed and will be banned from the community.”

The collected tweets have been published between the 5th of October and the 31st of December 2022. In total, 644 posts are collected, which corresponds to an average of 7.4 tweets per day.

The author read the tweets published twice. The purpose of the first reading is to understand the most used terms. The database containing the results of this step is called Appendix 3 and it is available in the Appendix section.

This first analysis serves solely as a preliminary investigation to identify common words and themes. Afterwards, the researcher conducts an in-

deep analysis of the posts to identify all the major narratives discussed within the community. The analysis uncovers three prominent narratives: discussions about society, discussions about females and discussions about men. The next three paragraphs will elaborate on the content of each major narrative detected, presenting the subcategories of these topics as well.

Society

The analysis of the shared tweets reveals the perception of society held by some incels.

Social discriminations

Most of them view society as fundamentally unfair because they observe discrimination against certain people and privileges granted to others, primarily based on gender and appearance. Indeed, many incels believe that societies treat men and women differently, as well as attractive and unattractive men.

Regarding the differences between men and women, incels believe that the different social treatment is due to the gynocentrism of Western societies. They claim that in Western countries women have power over everything, while men are the victims of the systems. As a result, many of them believe that women enjoy privileges in every social aspect, whereas men must work harder to be valued in societies and to meet higher social standards. They provide numerous examples to support their claim of a double standard, such as the different social treatment women and men receive when coping with failure and relationships, and the disparity in freedom of expression.

Regarding the first topic, users assert that men who experience failure are viewed as failures themselves, whereas women are always excused. The following tweet summarizes the thoughts of the users who agree with this view: “Isn’t it crazy how whenever women are statistically less favoured in any category (e.g., wealth gap) it’s “patriarchy” and “privilege” and “women are

oppressed” but whenever men are less favoured (e.g., college acceptance) it’s “their own fault” and “men need to work on themselves”?”.

In terms of romantic relationships, incels argue that men are held to higher social standards than women. They assert that any woman, regardless of her physical appearance, wealth, or status in society, can easily find a partner. In contrast, men have an unfairly higher LMS (look, money, and status) requirements in order to find a partner. In fact, they claim that most women only desire to mate, sexually or romantically, with men with much higher LMS values than them. This results in women trying to mate only with the best 10-20% of the male population. The remaining 80-90% of men are destined to incelhood or financial exploitation by their partners. To avoid the incels' fate, a few users assert that some men will undergo plastic surgery to try to enter the top 10-20% of the male population, while others will convert to homosexuality or become trans women. Regarding the disparity in freedom of expression, the majority of incels believe that the difference between men and women becomes evident when discussing emotions and physical appearance.

For the first element, they assert that women are free to express their emotions without societal judgment. In contrast, they argue that men who attempt to express their emotions, especially negative ones, are often mocked, viewed as weak, or labelled as creeps.

Regarding aesthetics, many users believe that women are free to express their opinions on male bodies, whether they be compliments or criticisms. When men behave similarly, they are accused of being sexist, superficial, or objectifying women.

As a result of all these privileges, many users on Twitter claim that women live life on easy mode, meaning that they do not have to put any effort to get things in life because the society keeps favouring them on every occasion.

They believe that feminists are the primary culprits of this double standard. They assert that feminists created and bolstered social favouritism toward

women, while deteriorating the position of men in society by spreading misandry and portraying them as evil and dangerous. Indeed, some incels in the community agreed with the tweets ““Men are trash” = feminism “Women are trash” = misogyny” and “women who manipulate men = feminism; contrariety = misogynism” to demonstrate that feminism is responsible for men's poor social conditions.

The second social difference concerns men's attractiveness, confirming the existence of an ingrained "attractiveness privilege" Incels affirm that attractive and unattractive men receive different social treatments. This idea can be summed up by the term “lookism”, which is largely used in the community and is used to define look-based discrimination and the bad treatment reserved for ugly people (Pelzer et al., 2021). They support this claim by pointing out instances in the justice system, where attractive men received lighter sentences compared to unattractive males who committed the same crime.

In addition, they assert that the attractiveness advantage is evident in daily life, specifically in how women interact with men. Many of them believe that women will behave well with attractive men based solely on their appearance, disregarding any negative behavioural or personality traits he may have. They share tweets such as “Never forget that when a man is a Chad, white nationalist women don't care if he's black, Palestinian women don't care if he's an IDF soldier, ANTIFA women don't care if he's a neonazi, black women don't care if he's a member of the KKK, etc.” to support their argument. In addition, they assert that women compete with one another and accept to share the same man if he is attractive. In contrast, the majority of incels believe that women mistreat, ignore, and hate ugly men only because of their appearance, even if they are gentle and smart.

According to some users, the current existence of the attractiveness privilege is largely attributable to the rise of social media and dating apps, which have destroyed the dating lives of unattractive men. They contend that in the modern

dating landscape, where initial interactions are frequently conducted online, unattractive men are quickly rejected, ignored, or blocked by women after a brief evaluation based on their physical appearance. This prevents them from getting to know women better, as they are automatically rejected based on their appearance and cannot demonstrate their intelligence or express their personality to potential partners. Moreover, the majority of incels on Twitter believe that social media contributed to raise daily women's standards and expectations for men to unattainable heights, leaving ugly men with no other choice but forced incelhood.

The sexual marketplace

Another prominent topic discussed within the incel community regarding the mechanism in the current society is the concept of the sexual marketplace, which will be furtherly analysed in the males' section. Most incels perceive the dating market as a marketplace, where individuals are seen as "products" with a different "sexual market value" (SMV), primarily determined by their physical appearance, but also by wealth and social status. Even if it is not very discussed on Twitter, it is necessary to explain how incels assess the SMV of individuals to understand the dating dynamics they believe exist in society.

Incels use a decile scale ranging from 1 to 10 to assess the attractiveness of individuals and accordingly rank their SMV. The greater a person's attractiveness ranking, the higher his or her sexual market value. According to the matching hypothesis of the incelosphere, people would naturally prefer to mate with their looksmatches, meaning with other individuals with similar decile rankings (Incels.wiki, 2023). This is not the case for women, who, according to the incelosphere, have more power in the sexual marketplace due to their gender. In fact, they argue that women are generally more selective than men because they are naturally less interested in sex, whereas men are mostly sex-driven. Therefore, women have more power in the sexual marketplace

because they can exchange sex for what they want, which varies depending on the situation. For instance, when seeking sexual relationships, women prioritize physical attributes, whereas when seeking a long-term relationship, they prioritize the material resources their partner can provide. Men, on the other hand, are less selective and will engage in sexual relations with less attractive or poorer women as long as they can get sex.

Dating

Incels on Twitter talk a lot about the dating market. They claim that nowadays dating is very hard for men, since ugly and poor men do not have chance to have a relationship. They state that this situation is the result of the growth of the standards required by men to merely be considered as a potential partner by women. As said, some of them see feminists, social and technological development as the main culprits of this unfavoured situation. Incels believe that women are willing to go out only with the top 10-20% men, condemning the others to incelism and to a life of loneliness.

Many incels also complain on how other males do not realise the struggle in dating. They affirm that most of them just try to give them advice such as to improve their appearance by going to the gym or improving their personality. Nevertheless, incels share that they tried with no positive results to improve themselves before embracing the blackpill subculture and accepting their unchangeable state of incelism, often concluding that this lack of understanding is a source of frustration.

According to many users, the main factors which determines whether a man is desirable or not are look and money.

For what regards look there are two main ways of thinking in the community. According to the first portion of the community, height is the most important physical trait for a man. They believe that being tall makes it very easy for a man to find partners, both sexually and romantically. Others believe that the

main element of attractiveness is a good-looking face. Regardless this disagreement, the entire community affirms that being attractive is the most important factor to get sexual relationships.

Contrarily, when women decide to have a long-term commitment with a man, wealth and status become the most relevant elements.

Females

Women's natural characteristics

For what concerns females, one of the most discussed topics is women nature. The majority of incels believe that women are incapable of love, hypergamous, self-centred, and manipulative. In addition, they assert that their nature is universal and that all women are identical.

Regarding the first characteristic, many incels argue that women cannot love unconditionally and that their love is contingent on the wealth and status of men. In fact, when it comes to long-term relationships, the majority of incels argue that women only fall in love, or pretend to do so, with the best provider they can find, and end up loving the partner's ability to provide for them rather than the partner himself. They are perceived as being uninterested in romantic relationships and only keen on long-term commitments when they can obtain financial gain.

This conception of female nature is strictly based on the notion that women are hypergamous and self-centred. In fact, many users assert that women only seek and maintain relationships with men who can provide for them in order to improve their status in society. However, as soon as women perceive that their relationship no longer financially benefits them, they will end it and seek a partner who can provide them with more in order to enhance their status even more. Nevertheless, some incels believe that even when women have no genuine interest in a man, they will intentionally give him false hope by faking interest and maintaining his emotional investment. Women would do this to feel

desired and boost their egos, without worrying about hurting a man's feelings, but rather because they take pleasure in seeing men suffer for them.

The manipulative trait that incels see in women emerges particularly when discussing the equilibrium of relationships. Indeed, they affirm that within relationship women constantly manipulate and gaslight their partners to get what they want. In particular, women would do this by playing the victims to win arguments and to make men feel guilty on many occasions. By this way, men would do everything to please their women, making them gifts, providing for them, and becoming subjugated to them.

Another characteristic incels attribute to women on Twitter is being inherently evil. To support this, one of their arguments on Twitter is what has been said above, namely that women enjoy men's suffering and are pleased through manipulation and gaslighting. In addition, they assert that women are naturally liars. Indeed, they share that women lie to men about anything and everything without remorse in order to get what they want. Moreover, many of them believe that women hate men, specifically ugly men. Incels assert that women view them as worthless, subhuman, and "socially undesirable" and to reinforce their thoughts they share tweets of female users stating concepts such as "nobody cares about what an ugly man has to say". They assert that this is feeling is unfairly evil, because no one has control over their physical appearances. Due to their perception of females' nature, from many incels emerges the idea of an ongoing conflict between themselves and women. Some incels end up viewing women as natural enemies, who mistreat and disregard them. This thinking process results in the development of a us vs. them mentality.

Feminists as the worst category of women

Finally, special attention must be paid to incel narratives against feminists. As stated in the previous paragraph, they blame feminists for the unequal treatment of men and women in society. In addition, users assert that feminists are

partially responsible for the unfair social standards that men must face in society, which ultimately forces ugly men into incelldom. Indeed, they believe that feminists created an unfair social standard for men, which is met only by the top 10-20% of males, those with the highest sexual market values. Those who do not meet the fixed standards, are isolated by the society, and excluded a priori from the dating market. Lastly, some users affirm that some feminists' personal goal is to keep worsening incels' lives by spreading incelphobia, misinformation and social panic around the community.

Males

Male hierarchy

The analysis of the posts reveals that incels believe men can be classified into three distinct categories: Chads, normies or betamales, and incels. Depending on his level of attractiveness, his ideology, and his race, a man would fall into one of three categories. In this specific narrative, the fatalistic component of the blackpill subculture becomes particularly evident. In this particular narrative, the fatalistic aspect of the blackpill subculture is highlighted. They assert that genetics is everything and that the day one is born determines the quality of his life. Being born attractive, meaning having "good genes", makes men's life much easier. Contrarily, being born ugly, or having "bad genes" makes life "brutal" and "hopeless" and, most importantly within the incel subculture, "unchangeable".

Chads

Chads are at the most attractive men, who possess specific physical characteristics, including height, muscles, a square face, and "hunter" eyes (Incels.wiki, n.d.). They have the highest sexual market values among men. Twitter users describe them as extremely privileged, both in society and in their

relationships with women. Indeed, in society they are advantaged in everything thanks to the attractiveness privilege.

Similarly, due to their look, they have an easy life also in relationships. They are desired by most women, who will do anything to engage in sexual relationships with them. Users claim that females are willing to share the same Chad with other women or accept to be used by him only for sexual relationships. Some users claim that Chad's power is limitless, and they can persuade any normal-looking man's partner to cheat on him.

Lastly, users state that women will overlook a Chad's negative characteristics and behaviours based solely on his appearance.

Normies

After Chads, the second category of men are normies or betamales. They are normal to slightly ugly looking men. Incels claim their sexual market value is sufficient to be able to get a relationship.

Users on Twitter are very critical in their regards, mainly because they do not understand how the dating market works and they are partially responsible for reinforcing women power in the society. Most users claim that betamales are very idealistic, believing that it is sufficient to go to the gym, improve their social status and ask girls out to get an active dating life. However, this is just an illusion that normies do not understand, preferring to work hard to be part of the dating market, to be, ultimately, used. Indeed, incels claim that if a man is not exceptionally good looking, women will just use him as much as they can as financial providers. Normies accept this fate for them just to not be alone.

Lastly, incels complain about normies because they often declare to be feminists and fake to support the feminist cause just to have easier access to women, ultimately reinforcing the power of women within the society and the differences between men and women.

Only one member expressed the desire to kill normies “in SIMS 4”, a popular videogame. Videogames are used by the members of the community to express the intention of being violent without the risk of censorship or posting something illegal.

Incels

At the bottom of the attractiveness hierarchy there are incels. Most of them define themselves as "subhumans" in terms of sexual desirability and they rank themselves as a 1 or 2 in the decile scale. They have no sexual market value.

Users frequently discuss the personal characteristics that contribute to their lack of success in relationships. Most users believe the main cause of incelism is height, others that it is the face and others again that it is due to the dimensions of the penis. To summarise why they are incels, users include the suffix -cel after the primary reason for their incelism. For instance, if a user believes he is an incel because he is short, he will indicate it with shortcel.

On Twitter, incels discuss the negative effects of being ugly in contemporary society. They affirm that they are frequently viewed as weirdos, socially undesirable, and not human due to their appearance, making it impossible for them to form any social bond, be it romantic, sexual, or friendly. As a concrete example, some users shared their experience of being mistaken for dangerous individuals, primarily rapists and pedophiles, while walking down the street, claiming that people began to feel threatened after seeing their face.

In addition, they assert that the situation has worsened in recent years due to the public's perception of incels. The majority concur that incelism is now considered a disease and that incels are viewed as a social, or in the worst-case scenario, a terrorist threat. As a result, they assert that ugly men are even more socially isolated now than in the past. According to numerous users, the current perception of incels and ugly men in general has increased their sense of isolation.

In accordance with this, users discussed the psychological issues resulting from their social situation. It is evident from their posts that some of them are afraid to leave their homes due to the constant feeling of being judged or because they feel saddened by the comparison between their lives and those of others. For example, a user shared that “My health is in genuine jeopardy because I can't just go out for a walk every day without feeling a sense of dread and terror, not to mention being constantly reminded at what people have and what I don't have”. For some of them, the consequences of these feelings lead to serious mental and physical illnesses. They defend this claim by sharing scientific articles reporting that the lack of physical affection and sexual interaction increases the probability of developing mental illnesses and physical diseases, such as prostate cancer. Among the most mentioned mental disorders caused by incelism, there are depression, eating disorders and suicidal tendencies. For what concerns suicide, they frequently share tweets like “it's over”, “I give up”, “I wish I was never born” or “rope”, which is used to imply the desire to hang themselves.

The role of race

Another discussed topic when talking about males' hierarchy are races. Incels claim that a man's sexual market value depends also on the colour of his skin. More in detail, they claim that while the general hierarchy is still based only on the physical appearance, in the macro categories (Chads, normies and incels) there are sub-categories which depend on the race of the person. Until last year, the sub-categories were classified as follows: white, black, Hispanic and Asians. However, according to many users there have been a change lately. Indeed, Asians are gaining more attention in the dating market due to the recent global diffusion of K-Pop and the popularity gained by Korean celebrities. Lastly, it is worthy to mention that on Twitter it emerges a sort of crack in the incel community when discussing races. Many non-white incels are now

affirming that white incels are fake incels (fakecels). They argue that every white man can easily have a relationship just because of his race, summing up this concept with the term JBW, which means Just Be White. They claim that if white men do not have a partner, it is just because they did not try enough with women of other ethnicities, since every black, Hispanic, or Asian woman would choose a white man over any other.

White members of the community disagree with this view and claim that they have the same struggles of any other incel, regardless their ethnicity.

Other discussions

On a last note, members of Incel Talk share a lot of social media links to blackpilled content. They use this material to confirm their ideology and thoughts about society, women, and men. For example, they share videos which confirm the hypergamous nature of women. In other instances, they share social experiments or real-life happenings which highlights the different social treatment reserved to men and women, as well as those which show the attractiveness privilege.

CHAPTER IV - INCELS.IS CONTENT ANALYSIS

Incels.is is a forum created for incels in November 2017. According to the forum's bio, «We welcome men from all walks of life, and all cultural and racial backgrounds, as long as you are an incel». The Rules and FAQ of Incels.is expressly not allow in the forum women, members of the LGBTQIA+ community, non-incels, and boys under the age of 18.

The forum defines incels as «a male who has never had a romantic, voluntary, unpaid sexual relationship with a human female ever in his entire life and no romance whatsoever in his entire life with a human female, so this means to join up here and not be banned you must never of had a girlfriend or wife nor even a fling or one night stand, as that too can be based in a type of fleeting romantic love or passion.» (Incels.is, 2017).

The forum's rules are established by its administrators and, in some instances, by a vote of the forum's members. Four macro groups comprise the primary rules:

1. **Experiences:** which limits the type of experiences one can talk about in the posts (e.g., do not talk about previous romantic or sexual experiences).
2. **Behaviour:** which limits the type of behaviours one can have in the forum (e.g., do not harass, persecute, or attack others, do not post spam or platitudes or mass tag users on posts older than one month).
3. **Accounts:** which limits the number of accounts to one per person.
4. **Content:** which establishes the type of content which can and cannot be posted (e.g., users are not allowed to post low effort content or spam, as well as illegal content or pro-LGBTQIA+ material).

To analyse the discussions on Incels.is, the researcher gathers 13.312 posts from the largest thread of the forum, Inceldom Discussions.

On average, 153 posts have been published daily in the period considered, meaning more than one every 10 minutes.

Subsequently, the large corpus of posts is reduced to 1.400 by first selecting only the most popular posts (i.e., those with the highest number of replies) and then by Simple Random Sampling (SRS) them.

Every post on Incels.is consists of a title and an unlimited-length body. In addition, some of them have a pre-title, which allows the user to classify the posts into a particular category. There are 23 pre-titles for the user to select from, covering a variety of topics discussed by incels on the forum.

The researcher has read the resulting corpus of 1.400 posts twice.

The first time she has coded the entire database, saving recurrent concepts and words. The result of this first reading is another database containing the terms of interest, as well as their frequency of occurrence. This database (Appendix 4) can be consulted in the Appendixes.

During the second reading, the author has delved deeper into the analysis, detecting the most discussed topics.

As a result of these two phases of analysis, the researcher identifies six primary narratives discussed on the forum, which are: Incels and their personal experiences, women, normies, racism and homophobia, glorification of violence against incels' perceived enemies and opinions about Incels.is itself.

Several of these narratives were also discussed in the preceding chapter.

Even if the content may be similar on the two social platforms, these categories are generally discussed in greater depth on Incels.is, both in terms of the number of posts and the level of detail devoted to them. The recurring themes on Incels.is that were explained in the Twitter analysis (Chapter III) include the social favouritisms received by women and attractive men, the structure and dynamics of the sexual marketplace, some features of women's nature, and the power of Chads in society and relationships. While the already explained topics

are not presented another time in great detail, all the other narratives discussed on Incels.is are introduced in the following paragraphs.

Incels

The analysis of the posts reveals the existence of two distinct types of forum users.

On the one side, some of them write about their personal experiences and romantic desires. Men in this category express that they only seek affection and love. The analysis reveals that this type of user frequently experiences feelings of isolation and hopelessness. These feelings are reportedly amplified when they see couples, since they represent something they believe they will never have.

On the other hand, other incels frequently express a desire for sexual relationships rather than romantic ones. This type of user is frequently openly envious of others' sexual lives and primarily expresses anger and frustration. These members often accuse women of being selfish for not giving them a chance and share beliefs of entitlement to women's bodies.

Moreover, nearly all incels on the forum appear to believe in biological determinism, which holds that a man's life is determined by his genetics.

Indeed, they discuss "good" and "bad" genetics. They contend that the first one determines a life lived in the "easy mode", meaning that one can easily get a job, friendships, and relationships.

On the contrary, according to incels, "bad" genetics condemn men to a challenging life. They argue that being physically unattractive results in isolation from society and being labelled as creeps. Users claim that modern society offers no place for individuals deemed unattractive, leading to a life of failure, loneliness, and isolation. For those who believe they have bad genetics, they perceive life as being irreversibly over, with little hope for improvement.

Moreover, users emphasize that determinism applies only to men and not to women. They believe that women are favoured in society and can effortlessly obtain what they want. Therefore, they conclude that women can achieve success simply by virtue of their gender.

This topic and its interconnections with other aspects of users' lives are further elaborated in the following subparagraph "Traumatic experiences".

Traumatic experiences

Many incels share their personal experiences on the forum, which cover a vast array of topics.

One of the most frequently discussed is their experiences in school or the workplace. Numerous users self-identify as NEETs, which stands for Not in Employment, Education, or Training.

Regarding education, a few of them admit that they have abandoned higher education studies, primarily because college was an awful experience. Users in this situation share similar experiences of isolation from the academic community and their course mates, which they believe is a result of their socially undesirable appearance. These incels describe how they became disillusioned with the college experience, where they believed they could have socialised and built relationships. However, everything turned out differently and they had to spend all the time alone. Others report that, as a result of their traumatic experiences with bullying in high school, they did not even try to enrol in college, but instead quitted their studies.

Regarding employment, the majority of them claim that their ugliness makes it difficult for them to obtain employment. They assert that their face is so unattractive that they cannot convince employers to give them a chance, despite their professional qualifications. In addition, they concur that job interviews are terrible experiences that induce extreme social anxiety.

Some incels attribute their condition of NEET to their parents. Specifically, since they argue that genetics is everything and that everything is determined on the day of their birth, their parents are to blame if they have inherited bad genes and have turned out unattractive.

On a deeper psychological level, a few view their fathers as those responsible for most of their failures. They assert that their fathers physically and psychologically abused them, constantly calling them losers and pushing them down. This affected their development by causing them to feel like failures and worthless. They affirm that the personalities they developed living with abusive fathers caused them to be bullied in school, resulting in insecurities and mental disorders. Depression, anxiety, stress, and suicidal tendencies are the most mentioned ones. On a smaller extent, some users tell similar stories involving mothers.

In addition, some of them have share traumatic experiences involving women. They claim to have experienced traumatic rejection from one or multiple girls. They recall being rejected by a female counterpart without sensitivity (e.g., women were laughing at them or making fun of them). As a result of these traumatic experiences, they frequently compare their lives to those of women who rejected them. Parallelisms such as "I rot at home" and "they are happy and living their best lives" are frequent and accompanied by anger or annoyance.

Suicidal tendencies

Suicidal tendencies are the most frequently reported mental health problem on Incels.is. They believe that their life cannot improve and that they are doomed to a life of isolation, loneliness, and failure due to biological determinism.

Similar to Twitter, many users share their intentions to end their lives by posting "It's over" or "rope"-related content. In addition, they conduct countdowns to their death. Specifically, they claim that if they are unable to improve their life within a predetermined amount of time, they vow to commit suicide.

In addition, many users encourage other members to commit suicide because “there is no point in continuing to live in such conditions”.

Members post messages like "Why haven't you killed yourselves yet?", to underline the meaninglessness of each other's lives. Contrarily, some members try to prevent self-harmful behaviours, inciting other members to go to therapy to overcome difficulties and find happiness despite their incelism.

Women

There is some overlap between what is discussed on the forum and what has been presented in the Twitter analysis.

Many users on Incels.is specifically discuss the hypergamous, egocentric, and manipulative nature of women. While the narratives regarding these topics on Twitter and Incels.is are extremely similar, the researcher poses greater emphasis on the narratives of relevance discussed on Incels.is and not covered on Twitter, such as other natural features of females and hateful speeches used by incels when talking about women.

Women nature

One of the most shared narratives about women on Incels.is is that they exist solely to humiliate unattractive men. Numerous incels share similar stories of being publicly denigrated by women due to their appearance, with some claiming that women look at their faces with disgust, fear, or mockery. In addition, some incels testified that women recorded them to make fun of their unattractiveness or subjected them to verbal harassment based on their look. These experiences have led some incels to develop antagonistic ideas towards females, viewing them as natural enemies.

Moreover, some of them perceive women as extremely toxic, particularly due to their tendency to humiliate other people. Incels also emphasise that this social bad treatment is directed only towards their specific category of men. In fact,

they claim that women would not be rude with attractive men, but rather they would serve them and compete for their attention. Many of them believe that women are only attracted to hypermasculine men, paying no attention to other qualities, such as intelligence or personality.

In this regard, users of Incels.is discuss women's hypergamy, employing the same arguments that were analysed for Twitter. They assert that women would only date men with a higher sexual market value (SMV) than them. In addition, they specify that the weights of the SMV elements vary based on the type of relationship. When incels address long-term relationships, they assert that women look for men who can provide for them and a potential future family. However, when considering a sexual partner, appearance becomes the most important factor for women. Consequently, users claim that ugly and not-wealthy men will never have any opportunity with any female.

Some incels also claim that women are liars. In their opinion, females would fake to be innocent and pure, while they are the opposite. Indeed, as said above women are considered evil and self-centred. However, users' view about women's lack of pureness becomes stronger when referring to females' number of sexual intercours. They believe females have sex with everyone who is attractive, while they play the role of pure people only when ugly men approach them, ultimately rejecting them. The discussion of this topic often triggers outrage among incels, leading to the use of sexist and offensive terms to talk about females.

Hateful content about women

The type of hateful content regarding women includes both the use of dehumanising language and the mention of threats of violence.

Regarding hateful speeches, users use derogatory and humiliating terms such as “foid”, “femoid”, “toilet”, “hoe”, “whore”, “bitch”, “slut”, “noodlewhore”, “roastie”, “dumb”, “stupid”, “cunt” and “landwhales”.

Both “foid” and “femoids” are formed by combining the terms female and android. With these words, incels imply that women are not fully human because they lack positive emotions and feelings. In contrast, it is implied that women are cold and evil, incapable of love, and power-seekers. Therefore, they are compared to machines.

With “toilet”, some users of incels.is assume that women are just objects to be used for sexual purposes, since the toilet is the place where men ejaculate. In a few instances, some users argue that "a foid who rejects sexual intercourse from a man has no use in this society".

“Hoe”, “whore”, “bitch”, and “slut” are used to dehumanise women, implying that they are merely objects of pleasure meant to satisfy the desires and needs of men. Moreover, as Tranchese and Sugiura (2021) note, these terms are also the most prevalent in contemporary pornography. According to Tranchese and Sugiura, this fact would prove a link between some incels' vocabulary and the addition to pornography that some members of the community claim to have. “Noodlewhore” is intended to have the same meaning as the other terms just mentioned, but it is only applied to Asian women. In this case, Asian women are referred with a term classifiable both as misogynist and racist.

In accordance with the view of women as sex objects, incels also use a different narrative to describe them. They define women as "used" if they have had numerous sexual partners throughout their lives. Some incels argue that the more sexual partners a woman has, the more morally corrupted she becomes and the more likely she is to cheat on her partner. They claim that no unattractive or average-looking man can get an uncorrupted woman, but they will only have Chads' discards.

Regarding this, some incels characterise women as disgusting and dirty. Many of them describe vaginas as a repulsive, filthy, odorous, and rotten part of women's bodies. A few of them emphasise that they are grossed out by vaginas. To further emphasise their feelings, they are now employing the term fesikh,

which refers to a traditional Egyptian dish made from fermented fish. It is used to compare the dish's pungent odour to that of a woman's genital organ.

Since they have this idea about women's vaginas, users call females "roasties", which is used to emphasize that the labia of their sexual organs are loose and similar to roast beef slices as a result of the high number of sexual partners they had.

Furthermore, women are also referred to as "Dumb", "Stupid" and "Cunt". These terms are used to emphasise that women are morally and intellectually inferior to men. This narrative is frequently reinforced by the notion that women are incapable and inefficient at work. In some posts, this notion was pushed even further, with users arguing that women should not participate in the workforce and suggesting that they should instead perform domestic duties and serve their husbands at home.

Lastly, incels use the term "landwhales" to talk about obese women.

The glorification of violence on women will be presented in the paragraph Violence against incels' enemies.

Normies

On Incels.is, users largely discuss normies, also known as betamales or betas. They are men of average appearance who cannot be identified as either Chads or incels. They are referred to as "bluepilled" by users, which describes the condition opposite of "redpill". Bluepilling is the lack of awareness that the world is gynocentric, meaning that women control everything, and men are the victims of this system. In addition, to be bluepilled is to be unaware of the true nature of women, i.e., their inherent evil, hypergamy, and manipulative nature. Normies are one of the primary topics of discussion among incels. The analysis reveals that incels experience a range of emotions towards them, with frustration and anger being the most prominent. Incels' aversion for normies depends in different factors.

First, users report to dislike normies because they are not aware of their real role women's' lives. Indeed, incels believe that normies can only obtain relationships with women due to their role as providers, and not because of genuine love. However, according to users, betas do not realise this.

Incels assert that women are not sexually attracted to them, since they are solely attracted to Chads, but are instead attracted to their resources. In fact, they argue that although women will engage in sexual relationships with Chads, they will settle for normies for economic gain.

Since incels believe that women exploit betas financially, they label them "betabuxx", which is the result of the combination of "beta" and "bucks". This term highlights the fact that they are "beta" males (i.e., inferior to Chads in the social hierarchy) who serve only as providers of "bucks", meaning money, for women.

In addition, some users assert that because women desire Chads for sexual satisfaction, they will cheat on their normie-partners with attractive men, while betas will continue to invest time and money in their female partners to keep them close. Because of this, users refer to normies as "simps" or "cuckolders". Simp is defined as "a male who is perceived to be investing too much into a woman without receiving any reward" (Incels.Wiki), while cuckold refers to a man who let his wife having sex with other males. Incels assert that by continuing to invest in women, normies bolster the egos and social relevance of women, taking part in the disempowerment and deterioration of men's position.

A second reason incels despise normies is that they do not comprehend the struggle of unattractive men in the modern dating market.

Users assert that normies only encourage them to be themselves or improve their physical appearance and personality, arguing that improvement is sufficient for finding a partner. However, the majority of incels express openly that they cannot tolerate these "bluepilled ideas" that do not apply to the current dating

market. Therefore, their anger towards normies only increases because of lack of understanding.

The community's tolerance of this type of content is so little that in the rules section of the website moderators forbid "every type of bluepill content", claiming that «Just be yourself bro», "Man up bro", "Just hit the gym and learn to lift bro", "Work hard, get a job and eventually a woman will come to you bro", are all examples of blue pill thinking that don't belong here, as while some of this advice may have worked in the long ago past eras of the 1980's, 1970's, 1960's, 1950's and earlier, it is a vastly different world now.».

Lastly, some incels do not tolerate normies because they believe they easily get everything in life. In such situations, hatred turns into envy. In fact, some of them argue that normies are fortunate because they can effortlessly obtain a job, a partner, and happiness in life. While some incels affirm that they wish to be as fortunate as normies, others assert that they would never trade their incel condition for a normie condition due to the lack of dignity and self-awareness exhibited by normies.

Racism and homophobia

Racism

There is a degree of racial intolerance on the forum.

As Pelzer et al. (2021) note, the relatively high level of racism on the forum is curious, given that it is comprised of a diverse group of individuals of various nationalities. The racist component is a result of their perception of the most desirable race on the dating market, which they also perceive to have superior genes. Incels.is members identify the following hierarchy: white, black, and Asian.

The racism exposed on the forum differs from the mainstream type of racist content, as the hierarchy is generally accepted by all users. This means that

many of them speak negatively about their own races, confirming their theorised inferiority.

Specifically, when discussing Asian incels, users use terms such as currycel to refer to South Asian men, ricecel for Southeast Asian men, and soycel for East Asian men. These labels reiterate stereotypes on such nationalities and emphasise the higher "ethnic tax" that Asian men must pay in order to participate in the dating market (Kelly et al., 2021a). In fact, these ethnicities are considered to possess all the physical traits that women find unattractive, namely, they are not typically very tall, they do not have a masculine physique, and they have an unattractive face morphology. In addition, many Asian forum users claim to have a significantly higher IQ than the average man. Nevertheless, they claim that this trait is not viewed favourably by women, since they are often labelled as "nerd". According to forum users, Asian men have the lowest sexual engagement among Asian women as well, who prefer to have relationships with white men. This way of thinking about Asian incels is so ingrained in the majority of incels that some Asian users of Incels.is define themselves as "inferior". In addition, Asian women are sometimes referred to as "noodlewhores," which is a racist and sexist insult.

Black men are classified between white and Asian men in the hierarchy. Some forum users assert that tall black men will never be incels because they are viewed as hypermasculine and therefore desirable. According to those who discuss this topic, only short blackcels (i.e., black incels) are authentic incels. Sometimes, derogatory, and racist terms such as "Nigger", "Nigga" and "Negro" are used to refer to black males.

White men are considered to be at the pinnacle of the hierarchy. They are reportedly the most desired by women. Ethnic users claim that every ethnic woman would prefer to mate with a white man. Since they can easily find ethnic women, many ethnic users believe that no whitecel (i.e. white incel) is a truecel (i.e., real incel).

On a last note, for what concerns racism, some incels express strong antisemitic sentiments.

Jews are described “greedy”, “backstabbing”, “disgusting” and viewed as degenerates. A few users also mention conspiracies regarding the control of propaganda and global governments by Jews. A minority of them who hold these views believe Jews deserve violence and should be eliminated.

Homophobia

Numerous Incels openly oppose homosexual men. Some users assert that homosexual men are disgusting and corrupted.

The homophobic nature of the community is reflected in the Rules and FAQ of Incels.is, which forbids to publish «gay or LGBT content, unless you're criticising it». In a separate rule, homosexuality is described as "disgusting and degenerate" and as "fostering degrading filth and cultural subversion". Furthermore, administrators of Incels.is are so concerned with keeping gay men out of the forum that they require members of incels.is to sign up with «an alt username [...] that gives off the vibe that a masculine heterosexual man created the names, otherwise the account will be rejected effectively banning you from the website.». From this request, it is clear that some incels desire to be perceived as masculine real men. This is the reason why they want to create distance between themselves and gay men, who are seen as extremely effeminate and lacking in masculine characteristics.

To underline the distance between themselves and the LGBTQIA+ community males' members, some incels use denigratory terms to talk about homosexual, namely "faggots" and "bottoms".

Moreover, some incels believe that homosexuality is against nature and gays are men who were not able to have sex with women and "converted to homosexuality" just to have sexual relationships.

A portion of this hatred is fueled by the fact that many users have been asked if they are homosexual by family members and acquaintances because they are always single. They perceive this question as very offensive because it makes obvious their personal situation.

Violence against incels' enemies

The recurrent hateful narratives against some categories of people, namely women, normies, LGBTQI+ community members and some specific races promote a strong us vs them view of society. This idea sometimes is spread to a larger spectrum of people, such as attractive men, but it is generally strongly directed towards the above-mentioned categories.

Incels often express feelings of hostility towards those who are generally considered part of the out-group. Specifically, users highlight the metaphorical distance between them and other people, using formulas such as “us incels” to talk about themselves and generalising with terms like “normies” and “Chads” for the others. Moreover, they express hostility towards individuals by labelling them with the misogynist, racist and homophobic words presented above.

In some instances, the hostility expressed towards specific terms turns into justification of violence or desire to do violent actions.

The proportion of incels who openly express violent sentiments on the forum is modest. Nevertheless, there are some members who glorifies violent acts or express the desire to commit violence.

The forum moderators have established general rules for discussing violence, which stipulate that it must be done in a legal manner. Specifically, the rule states that it is permissible to «celebrate someone on the news having “gone ER”, meaning gone on a mass shooting against our perceived or actual group enemies», while it is illegal «saying you will go ER against our actual or perceived enemies and or advocating or telling someone else to do so. » (Incels.is, 2017b).

"Going ER" is the most common phrase used to describe mass shootings or mass murders. ER refers to Elliot Rodger, the first incel-related mass shooter who killed 6 people and injured 14 in 2014 in Isla Vista, California. People who support violence against the out-group often glorify Elliot Rodger and are inspired by his actions.

Even though discussing the intent to commit violence in direct terms (e.g., announcing the intention to go ER) is illegal and not permitted on the forum, users found other ways to discuss their intentions. They describe the scenario of the violence they wish to commit, putting the name of a videogame in brackets to imply that it would occur in a virtual world. To clarify, one user, referring to a woman, posted: "I wanna stone her (in minecraft)".

Violence expressed by users is directed at various groups of individuals.

In some instances, it is expressed against a generality of people. For example, one user suggested a mass shooting at his workplace after being humiliated by co-workers. Another proposed it as a means of revenge against "all the Stacys and Chads" who ruined his life.

In other cases, users express hatred towards people with an active sexual life, also known as sex-havers. For example, one user claims "DEATH TO ALL SEX HAVERS".

In any case, women are the most common target of violence on the forum. As noted in the Women paragraph, they are the primary target of hateful speeches, which can evolve into threats of physical violence.

Users express different violent scenarios regarding women. In some instances, they wish to subjugate women to the traditional female role. This reduces women to domestic servants whose sole purpose in life is to serve and please their husbands. In a few instances, users promote domestic violence in order to force women in that condition.

Some incels fantasise about raping or abusing women in order to "put them in place".

In both these cases, incels imply through their words the necessity of feel their manliness by proving their force and the superiority of males over females. This need is linked to the idea of overturning the current gynocentric system, recognised as the first source of their incelhood, to re-find the social balance on patriarchy.

Other users create violent scenarios in which they murder women as a form of punishment. One user, for instance, expresses his desire to "execute any whore who has an abortion or commits adultery".

Lastly, other members of the forum simply wish to commit violent actions on women out of hatred. For instance, one of them asserts: "I HATE THEM (women) SO MUCH. If I could, I would kidnap and kill every single one of them in Far Cry 3".

Opinions about Incels.is

There are two distinct and recurring opinions on the forum about the forum itself. A portion of users express satisfaction with the forum, considering it a good way to meet people with similar interests and reduce loneliness. In this instance, they describe the forum as a community where they feel understood and can find their place in society. Others, however, are unhappy with the forum's recent evolution. In particular, the majority of incels in this category assert that Incels.is is now overrun with fakecels. There are numerous types of incels who are categorised as such on this forum, including white, tall, ethnic, and wealthy incels. Moreover, members who can socialise, for instance by making friends or conversing with women, are also considered fakecels.

Some incels believe that the forum deviated from its original purpose during time. Some claim that the word incel has lost its original meaning due to overuse. Consequently, some of them wish to leave the forum and express their disapproval. Another portion of users who criticise the website assert that it has become extremely toxic. They believe that instead of being a supportive

community, it has become a place where users put each other down by making fun of them or encouraging them to self-harm.

Some members who deleted their accounts and returned after a period of time reported that their mental health had significantly improved. However, because of loneliness, they returned to Incels.is.

CHAPTER V - ASSESSMENT OF THE LEVELS OF EXTREMISMS OF INCEL TALK AND INCLES.IS

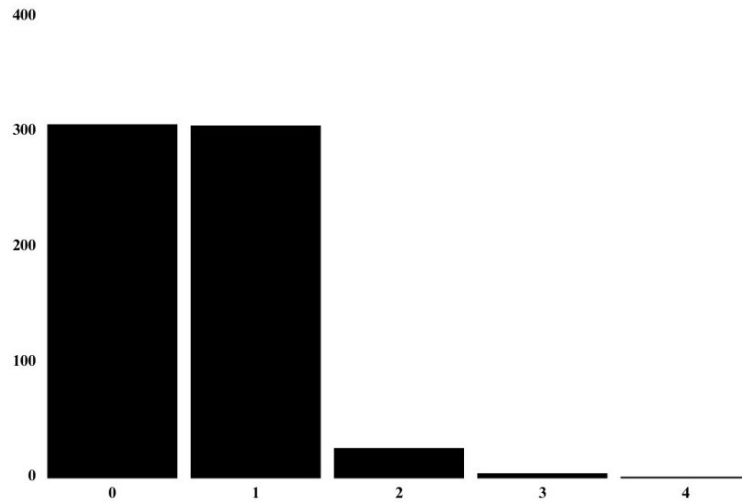
After having qualitatively analysed the posts published on both social media platforms, it is time to answer the last research question (Q3):

Q3: What is the level of extremism of the posts published by the members of the incel community on Twitter and Incels.is?

To do so, as described in the Methodology, the researcher assigns a number between 0 and 4 to each post analysed, which determines the degree of extremism of the post itself. The grade of 0 is given to moderate posts, 1 to fringe ones, 2, 3 and 4 to extreme ones. After completing this initial step, the researcher can finally answer the main research question of this dissertation (Q1: To what extent does the level of extremism of the Involuntary Celibate community online change across different social media platforms?) by determining the average level of extremism of the platforms under consideration. To do so, the researcher calculates the mean of the values assigned to the posts. The obtained value (m) falls between 0 (completely moderate) and 4 (completely extreme): $0 \leq m \leq 4$.

Assessing the level of extremism of the “Incel Talk” community on Twitter

The degree of extremism on Incel Talk is evaluated by grading all 644 collected posts. Graph 1 shows the distribution of the given grades.



Graph 1: the Graph illustrates the distribution of the degree of extremism of each tweet collected in the community Incels Talk. Most tweets were classified as moderate (0), or fringe (1). A minority of the corpus collected resulted extreme (2, 3, 4).

The results reveal a near parity between the number of posts graded as "moderate", corresponding to the number 0, and those graded as "fringe", corresponding to the number 1.

To provide additional context, 307 tweets, or 47.67% of the total corpus, is categorised as moderate. In these posts, community members discuss a variety of topics. In many of them, incels talk about what physical characteristics of men's bodies are more attractive to women. These discussions primarily centres on whether height is more important than face or vice versa. Other moderate posts include those in which users share YouTube videos confirming certain aspects of the blackpill, such as the social privileges that women and attractive men receive. However, this visual content is not in any way hostile to any group. Lastly, other moderate posts concern life-improving recommendations.

306 tweets, or 47.52% of the total number of tweets collected, are classified as fringe. In the majority of these posts, users utilise a vocabulary which implies the existence of an in-group/out-group dynamic. Those who are part of the in-group are the incels and all the other people, the individuals of the out-group, are perceived with hostility or rejection.

As Kelly et al. (2021b) underline, the use of terms like “Stacy”, “Chad”, and “normie” underlines the existence of an in-group/out-group view. Everyone who is not incel is viewed as an outsider in the community, unable to relate to the difficulties of being unattractive in the modern era. Given the importance of distinguishing members of the incel community from those who are not incels, “fakecels”-related posts were also classified as fringe. In fact, according to truecels (i.e., the terms used to refer to “real” incels), fakecels cannot be considered authentic incels because they cannot really comprehend their problems. Fakecels are seen as intruders and strongly disliked by the community members. Other fringe-classified posts occasionally address the social or economic isolationism experienced by many users.

The remaining 31 posts, meaning 4.82% of the entire corpus of tweets, are classified as extreme. Of those, 26 (4.04%) are extreme - level 1 and graded with 2. These posts are categorised as extreme because they contain dehumanising terms for women, such as “foid” and “roastie”. However, since these terms are used very rarely (i.e., “foid” twice and “roastie” three times) and do not constitute a recurring narrative, they have not been included in the “Twitter Analysis” chapter. In other tweets, users refer to women as “thots” or compare them to animals or diseases. One user, for instance, writes: “Woman are the next worst thing in the world, worst then cancer!!!!”.

A few additional tweets contain references to violence in general terms. For instance, some users justify violence against society based on its current condition. However, these expressions of violence are not directed towards specific targets, but they remain expressed only in general terms.

4 posts, or 0.62% of the data collected, have a score of 3 and are classified as extreme – level 2. In these posts, incels explicitly defend violence directed towards specific groups of people. In 3 out of 4 tweets, women are the targets of violence, with incels justifying sexual assault and rape. Moreover, in

one of their posts, one user glorifies the murder of normies, who "should be stoned."

In a single tweet (0.16%), a user openly supports violence against those who humiliated him, stating that he should commit mass murder ("going ER"). Given the greater detail of this post, this tweet is classified as extreme - level 3 and received the grade of 4.

To determine the overall level of extremism in Incel Talk, the researcher calculate the value of m . m is calculated as the average of each post's grade:

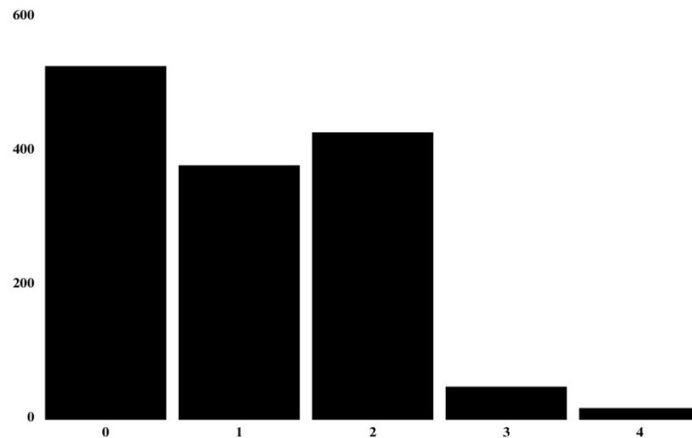
$$m = \frac{307 * 0 + 306 * 1 + 26 * 2 + 4 * 3 + 1 * 4}{644} = \frac{374}{644} = 0.58$$

The value of m demonstrates that Incel Talk is a forum that can be classified between moderate and fringe. In fact, the number of moderate posts (307) is nearly equal to the number of extremist posts (306). This proves that the Twitter community is partially hostile to those who do not identify as in-group members. However, as indicated by the limited number of extreme posts, the level of hostility is generally mild.

Assessing the level of extremism of Incels.is

The assessment of the degree of extremism for the Incels' forum Incels.is is made on the sample of 1.400 used to perform the content analysis on the website.

The results of the analysis can be seen in Graph 2.



Graph 2: the Graph illustrates the distribution of the degree of extremism of each post collected in the forum Incels.is. Many tweets were graded as moderate (0) and extreme – level 1 (2). Another large number of posts was classified as fringe (1), while a minority resulted to be extreme – levels 2 and 3 (3, 4).

513 posts, corresponding to 36.64% of the total, are categorised as moderate and assigned a score of 0. In these posts, users share content which does not express any type of hostility, justification, or desire for violence towards other individuals. This collection of posts covers a variety of subjects. Similar to Twitter, in many of them users discuss the primary causes of incelism, with the majority asserting that height or face play the most critical role. In some other posts graded 0, they discuss what women seek in men and relationships. In these texts, they do not make any hostile reference to women or their personal preferences. In other examples, incels using the forum share personal experiences or personal problems, as well as daily occurrences. They generally do so to compare their experiences or simply to talk with someone who can relate with their personal problems. When discussing their struggles in moderate posts, they may ask for or offer advice on how to deal with their issues. Lastly, many of the discussions pertaining to the forum Incels.is itself are categorised as moderate.

390 posts, representing 27.86% of all collected posts, are categorised as "fringe," meaning they have received a score of 1. The posts about isolationism and hostility towards others that do not involve stark dehumanisation are part

of this category. The majority of them emphasise the us versus them narrative described in the preceding chapter. Similar to Twitter, posts that refer to individuals as "Stacy", "Chad", and "normie" are considered to be fringe because they imply hostility towards those who are not members of the in-group (Kelly et al., 2021b).

Additionally, posts in which individuals are identified as "fakecels" by other users receive a grade of 1. This is for the same reason given for Twitter, namely that it highlights the hostility towards an alleged outgroup that cannot relate to "truecels" struggles but tries to become part of it. In short, Incels.is users view fakecels and forum "intruders" (i.e., women and LGBTQI+ members) as hostile enemies.

Moreover, all posts regarding voluntary or involuntary social isolation are categorised as fringe. Isolationism is one of the elements presented by Holbrook (2015) as an element which defines a post as fringe. Indeed, discrimination and social and/or economic isolation are motivating factors for extreme behaviour (Pfundmair et al., 2022; Alcalá et al., 2017). The amount of posts indicating the socioeconomic isolationism of members of the forum is relevant for the analysis.

Lastly, posts which labelled ethnic people with offensive terms are graded 1. This specifically occur when users refer to Asians as "curry", "soy", or "rice" or to black people as "nigga" or "nigger" but "without the assumption that these people are somehow "subhuman" and legitimate targets of violence" (Holbrook, 2015).

The remaining 497 posts, i.e., 37.5% of the entire database, are "extreme".

Of these, 430, i.e., 30.71%, are categorised as extreme – level 1. These posts contain dehumanising language or vague references to violence.

Regarding the first component, posts containing the terms "foid(s)", "femoids(s)", "toilet(s)", "bitch(es)", "whore(s)" and "slut(s)" are assigned a score of 2. Moreover, all posts where homosexuals are referred to as "faggots"

or “bottoms” receive the same grade. As described in the preceding chapter, these terms are meant to emphasise the "non-human" or "sub-human" nature of a person. Rhetoric plays an important role in the radicalization to violent extremism process because it creates a distance between in-group and out-group members. In some instances, rhetoric establishes the necessity of violence against the targets or, under certain conditions, its acceptability (Kruglanski et al., 2014). In this instance, when women, members of the LGBTQ+ community, normies or other individuals are described as repulsive, degenerate or disgusting, the posts seems to establish the necessity of violence to clean up society. Therefore, they are categorised as extreme on the first level.

In addition, when users openly glorify incel-motivated attackers, for example referring to Elliot Rodger as "Saint Elliot", they were given a grade of 2.

49 posts, corresponding to 3.5% of the entire database, are categorised as extreme – level 2 and given a score of 3. These posts glorify or justify violence against particular groups. For instance, they wish death upon women, normies, and other groups deem to be enemies. For example, a user writes: "Normies I wish you get run over by a fucking truck".

Others promote violence against women for revenge or to make them submissive. For instance, some promote domestic violence to subjugate women.

On a similar note, a user, talking about the protests in Iran which lead to the death of hundreds of women, claims that: “Better a million Iranian foids die than one gets turned into a degenerate”.

Lastly, 18 posts, or 1.29 percent of the total number of collected posts, are graded a 4 and classified as extreme – level 3. In these instances, users not only express a desire for violence, but also provide specific details about how they would carry it out. Regarding this, one user described how they would plan an attack to kill the greatest number of people, writing:

«An ER can only kill a few people, but an attack on an electricity generating station has the potential to kill hundreds or thousands of people, completely cripple the lifestyles of normies, chads and stacies, and even force the economy to a stand still. [...] Most electrical stations have 0 security and aren't attack-proof in any way and it would be far too expensive for the government to fortify most of them».

Another user shares that: «I HATE THEM (i.e., women) SO MUCH. IF I COULD I WOULD KIDNAP EVERY SINGLE ONE OF THEM AND SKIN THEM ALIVE (in far cry 3) ».

The general degree of extremism of Incels.is depends on the value of m :

$$m = \frac{513 * 0 + 390 * 1 + 430 * 2 + 49 * 3 + 18 * 4}{1.400} = \frac{1.469}{1.400} = 1.05$$

Incels.is is a forum with an average level of extremism that corresponds to the term "fringe". This indicates that the forum tends to be hostile towards individuals who are not members of the community. Nonetheless, the most frequently published posts on Incels.is were either moderate or extreme - level 1. This means that users on Incels.is tend to express hostility towards out-group individuals through dehumanising terms (such as "foids" and "roasties") or through a slight justification of violence against those who are perceived as enemies, rather than using more "neutral" terms (such as "Chad", "normie"). Therefore, when considering only the expression of hostility towards out-group individuals, the forum appears to be extreme. However, the large number of moderate posts published decreases the forum's average level of extremism.

Comparison of the social media

Incels.is displays a higher overall level of extremism than Incel Talk. In fact, whereas the Twitter community's general level of extremism is classified between moderate and fringe ($m=0.58$), Incels.is' one is classified as fringe ($m=1.05$).

Even if m differs, there are numerous analogies between the content shared on both social media platforms. Indeed, all conversations detected on Incel Talk are also present on Incels.is, demonstrating a high degree of coherence between the two social media platforms. Specifically, the three main categories identified in the Twitter Analysis section of the third chapter, namely society, women, and men, as well as their respective subcategories, are also prominent narratives on Incels.is.

Moreover, both social media platforms outline a strong in-group/out-group perspective of society. Indeed, the majority of topics discussed on both platforms demonstrate a high level of hostility towards non-incels. On Twitter, hostility is predominantly expressed using fringe language. On the other hand, there is a preponderance of extreme expressions of hostility on Incels.is, specifically words that dehumanise the perceived outsiders. Moreover, there is a generally low level of glorification of violence against others on Twitter, whereas the justification of violent actions is more frequent, albeit still limited, on Incels.is. Nevertheless, on both social media platforms, the level of extremism is not very high as a consequence of the high number of moderate contents.

Different levels of extremism may depend on various factors, some of which the author has identified. The nature of social media, as expressed in their bios, is the first factor. According to the Twitter community's bio, Intel Talk is «a place where incels and those that can relate to the situation can talk freely. All are welcome.».

In contrast, Incels.is's bio states that the forum is exclusively for "male involuntary celibates, single men who have difficulty finding a partner". This statement is immediately followed by a categorical exclusion of women, LGBTQI+ individuals, non-incels, and minors. The higher the level of exclusivity of the forum, the higher the level of identification with the in-group, and the higher the level of hostility towards the out-group (Kessler and Hollbach, 2005).

Moreover, the varying degrees of extremism between platforms may depend on how social media platforms regulate this content. The updated to April 2023 policy on "Hateful conducts" of Twitter states, «You may not directly attack other people based on their race, ethnicity, national origin, caste, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, religious affiliation, age, disability, or serious illness». This type of policy restricts hateful and violence-justifying posts, which are removed if they violate the presented rules. Even if this rule was created afterwards the period considered for the analysis, it precedes the period of data collection, which might have been affected retroactively the content on the Twitter's community.

In contrast, the rules of Incels.is state that only certain types of posts are prohibited, including low-effort and spam posts, as well as illegal and pro-LGBTQ+ material. In the rules, it is specified that with illegal content, glorification or expression of violence is also intended. However, the same rules allow for the celebration of violent acts and the use of expedients to express a desire to be violent (e.g., saying you want to kill someone in a video game). This difference in the moderation of the platforms makes Incels.is naturally more susceptible to violent expressions and glorification.

Another determining factor could be the level of detail permitted for each post on each platform. During the period analysed, Twitter still imposed a character limit of 280 per tweet, making it impossible for users to delve deeply into the topics discussed on the social media. Incels.is, on the other hand, has no word

or character limit and allows the user to write as much as he desires. Specifically, in the thread under consideration, Inceldom Discussion, the rules state: "Low effort is not permitted here. Please post quality threads and responses only", hence encouraging the users to be exhaustively detailed in their contents.

A further difference between Twitter and Incels.is relates to the popularity of the incel community on each platform. Twitter was selected as a mainstream social network, but its community is significantly smaller than the one of Incels.is. Indeed, Incels.is has registered 332 members on the 19th of April 2023, while Incels.is has slightly more than 21.000 members on the same day. This significant difference is attributable to the fact that the Incel Talk community on Twitter was only established in October 2022, while Incels.is was established in November 2017. However, the different number of users on the platforms causes a significant difference in the publication frequency of posts. During the period under consideration, the Incel Talk community averages between 7 and 8 daily posts, while Incels.is' average is 153. Additionally, the number of interactions in the shared posts differs between the two platforms. Most Twitter posts receive no more than a few likes and replies. On Incels.is, some posts remain with a limited number of interactions, whereas the majority of posts receive a substantial number of replies and views.

Therefore, all these elements may have contributed to the higher degree of extremism of Incels.is. The lower level of tolerance of Incels.is, as well as its lower censorship and the much more numerous and active community are elements which surely influence the content on the platform.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to determine the extremism levels of the incel community on two social media platforms. Its specific objective was to address the following research question:

Q1 - To what extent does the level of extremism of the Involuntary Celibate community online change across different social media platforms?

To answer Q1, the researcher performed qualitative analysis on the posts published by the users of incels' spaces on Twitter and Incels.is. She gathered all the posts published on both platforms between October 5 and December 31, 2022. She collected a total of 644 tweets and 13.312 posts on Incels.is. Later, using proportional Simple Random Sampling (SRS), the researcher reduced the Incels.is database to 1,400 posts for analysis.

To answer Q1, the author divided the main research question (Q1) into two sub-questions (Q2 and Q3).

The first smaller research question, Q2, was the following:

Q2: What are the most common narratives of the incel community on Twitter and Incels.is?

To identify the dominant narratives on both social media platforms, the researcher conducted a qualitative analysis in two steps. First, she performed a content analysis using inductive coding to determine the most frequently used words and most prevalent topics. This step was essential for gaining a basic understanding of the discussions on the platforms. Then, utilising critical discourse analysis, she re-examined the posts to determine the true significance of the words used and their relationship to the personal experiences of social network users.

At this point, the researcher observed a substantial overlap between the common narratives on both social media platforms. Specifically, Twitter users frequently

discussed the privileges that women and attractive men have in society, the sexual marketplace, the nature of women, the hierarchy of men when it comes to dating, and the personal issues caused by users' incelism. All of these Twitter narratives were also discussed on Incels.is. Moreover, during the analysis, additional relevant narratives emerged on Incels.is, such as hateful speeches about women, users' past traumatic experiences, racism, homophobia, and glorification of violence against individuals who are not incels (i.e., the out-group).

The second smaller research question (Q3) was:

Q3: What is the level of extremism of the posts published by the members of the incel community on Twitter and Incels.is?

The Extremist Media Index developed by Donald Holbrook was used to evaluate the level of extremism in each post. The Index establishes the criteria for determining whether media content is moderate, fringe or extreme. In addition, it identifies three levels of extremeness based on the level of violence expressed in the texts analysed. The researcher assigned a value between 0 and 4 to each post, with 0 representing moderate, 1 representing fringe, 2 representing extreme – level 1, 3 representing extreme – level 2, and 4 representing extreme – level 3.

After assigning a score between 0 and 4 to each post, the researcher was able to answer question 1 by calculating the values of m , which represented the mean of the scores assigned to each post. The value of m for each social media platform indicated the overall level of extremism on each platform.

m equalled 0.58 for Incel Talk and 1.05 for Incels.is, indicating that incels on Twitter were overall more moderate than those on the forum.

On both platforms, however, significant hostility was expressed towards those who are not incels, demonstrating the existence of an in-group/out-group viewpoint. Women, normies, and fakecels were singled out as the primary

targets of the hostility. On Twitter, however, hostility was less pronounced than on Incels.is, where many posts contained dehumanising language (such as "foid" and "femoid"). In addition, the number of posts glorifying or justifying violence on Incels.is was much higher than the one on Incel Talk.

Given their inherent differences, the researcher expected a similar result in terms of the difference in the extremist level (m) between the two platforms.

On the one hand, Twitter is the most popular social network in the world, with over 450 million monthly users. While users on this platform discuss an extensive variety of different topics, its policies prohibit its users from sharing extremist or hateful content. When done otherwise, the content is removed from the platform. Based on the number of users and the content of the posts shared on social media, Twitter is categorised as a mainstream platform.

Incels.is, on the other hand, is a forum used exclusively by incels. On the 19th of April in 2023, the site had slightly more than 21.000 members. The forum's rules regulate the permitted types of content. They prohibit certain types of content, such as low-quality, pro-LGBTQIA+, and "bluepill" discussions. In addition, the forum permits users to share extremist and hateful content as long as it is not illegal. Based on these characteristics, Incels.is is classified as a "dark" social media.

Therefore, given the more exclusive and less controlled nature of Incels.is, the author expected this platform to be more extreme.

However, in spite of the fact that Twitter met expectations for its level of extremism, the researcher believed that the nature of Incels.is would have been more extreme. She believes that her different expectations were due to the over-reporting of the misogynistic and violent aspects of incels by certain media outlets and authors, who frequently failed to accurately mention the community's moderate nature.

Consequently, the author believed that the objective assessment of the real degree of extremism of the platforms using a "systematic, testable, and repeatable tool of measurement" (Holbrook, 2015) might be the most significant contribution to the existing literature on incels.

On the one hand, to the researcher's knowledge, this was the first time a study attempted to objectively quantify the actual level of extremism in incels' online spaces. The findings indicated that in some instances, the current literature and the media overestimated the potential for danger and violence within the community. Indeed, the author wanted to underline that the actual percentage of incels engaging in this behaviour appears to be much lower than what the media and scholars, who might overgeneralize on the subject, sometimes portrayed. The use of the Extremist Media Index -or other comparable tools- not only would enable scholars to demonstrate the reliability of their findings, but also would encourage them to be as objective and unbiased as possible during the research process.

On the other hand, this research aimed to objectively comprehend the group's general level of extremism from an original viewpoint compared to previous studies. Therefore, it enabled to increase the knowledge on the community under a perspective which had not been previously considered. The understanding of the actual dangerousness of a group and its potential for violence might be helpful to design tailored programs to counter violent extremism. Indeed, as mentioned in the Methodology (Chapter II), Holbrook's Index assumes that only a small portion of a group is willing to embrace violence for a cause. Moreover, this willingness is built through a process of growing radicalisation (Moghaddam, 2005). Therefore, in order to design effective programmes to counter the threat, it is crucial to comprehend the stage of the process at which individuals are and this research provides at least a starting point to do so.

Overall, this new approach to studying the community provided a better understanding of the community itself and the threat it might pose.

Additionally, this research offered another fresh perspective on the study of incels. In fact, as far as the author is aware, this was the first study to analyse the Twitter community Incel Talk. There was not any prior research analysing the content of this Twitter community and assessing its extremism level. This feature could be significant because it revealed the habits of incels on a mainstream social platform, whereas for long time scholars had primarily studied the incel community on "dark" social platforms (such as Incels.is) or on fringe ones (such as Reddit). Researching this community from a perspective other than those traditionally employed yielded new insights and comprehension of the community itself.

Given that this analysis revealed that many incels frequently express hostility towards people who are considered to be part of the out-group, additional research might be conducted to delve deeper into this topic. It could be crucial to understand whether incels limit their hostility to their specific online spaces or if they also target online specific individuals, such as women, normies, or attractive men, in order to express their disappointment and take revenge on them. Understanding the relationship between cyberbullying or online harassment and the incel community may reveal new faces of the phenomenon and provide new tools for counter extremism and violence online.

Additionally, it is necessary to investigate in greater detail the factors that drive young men towards incel ideologies. Since these ideologies and subcultures are infused with misogyny and hostility, it is important to comprehend the processes and motivations that lead individuals to engage with these ideologies. These would make it easier to identify individuals who are more likely to adopt extremist views and provide them with assistance to distance themselves from them. Moreover, this would help to decrease the level of misogyny online.

Lastly, as presented in the analysis, the psychological repercussions of blackpill use are potentially devastating for the mental health of young men. Further research on the psychological effects of "swallowing the blackpill" is essential for combating the spread of extremist ideologies and enhancing the mental health of those who identify as incels.

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APPENDIXESAppendix 1 – Count of posts in the total database by pre-title

Pre title	Count	Frequency (%)
[Whitepill]	12	0,19
Based	121	1,92
Blackpill	483	7,68
Brutal	167	2,65
Cope	66	1,05
Discussion	325	5,17
Experiment	205	3,26
Hypocrisy	35	0,56
It's Over	243	3,86
JFL	558	8,87
LDAR	36	0,57
LifeFuel	207	3,29
News	89	1,41
No Pre Title	2027	32,22
NSFW	37	0,59
RageFuel	298	4,74
Serious	592	9,41
Soy	57	0,91
Story	42	0,67
SuicideFuel	285	4,53
TeeHee	107	1,70
Theory	75	1,19

Toxic Femininity	49	0,78
Venting	175	2,78
SUM	6.291	100,00

Appendix 2 – Count of posts in the sample per pre-title

Pre title	COUNT IN THE SAMPLE	Frequency (%)
[Whitepill]	3	0,19
Based	27	1,92
Blackpill	107	7,68
Brutal	37	2,65
Cope	15	1,05
Discussion	72	5,17
Experiment	46	3,26
Hypocrisy	8	0,56
It's Over	54	3,86
JFL	124	8,87
LDAR	8	0,57
LifeFuel	46	3,29
News	20	1,41
No Pre Title	451	32,22
NSFW	8	0,59
RageFuel	66	4,74
Serious	132	9,41
Soy	13	0,91
Story	9	0,67
SuicideFuel	63	4,53
TeeHee	24	1,70
Theory	17	1,19
Toxic Femininity	11	0,78
Venting	39	2,78

SUM	1.400	100,00

Appendix 3 – Word frequency on Incel Talk

Topic of discussion	Words	Count
Women	Women	132
	Woman	34
	Female(s)	16
	Girls	11
	Girl	10
	Stacy	7
	Feminists	7
	Feminist	4
	Tot	221
Men	Normies	19
	Normie	2
	Men	59
	Man	22
	Males	3
	Male	7
	Incels	51
	Incel	32
	Guys	24
	Guy	18
	Chads	15
	Chad	21
	Beta	3
	Tot	276

	Sexual Market Value (SMV)	5
	Dating	26
Dating and relationship	Date	20
	Dates	4
	Relationship	15
	Girlfriend	11
	Boyfriend	3
	Love	13
	Sex	28
	Sexual	18
	Laid	7
	Tot	150
	Ugly	51
	Fat	11
Physical appearance	Height	13
	High	10
	Tall	7
	Short	9
	Face	19
	Attractive	17
	Handsome	5
	Tot	142
	Rich	7
	Wealth	2
Status and wealth	Money	8
	Status	15
	Provider/ing	3

	Tot	35
Race	Race	8
	Ethnic	6
	Curry	5
	Soy	2
	Asian	10
	Chang Do	4
	White	24
	Black	11
	Tot	70
Blackpill	Blackpill	55
	Brutal	35
	Tot	90
Suicide tendencies and mental health problems	It's over	15
	Rope	3
Suicide tendencies and mental health problems	Depression	6
	Lonely/loneliness	7
	Schizophrenia	3
	Tot	34

Appendix 4 – Word frequency on Incels.is

Topic of discussion	Words	Count
Racism	Race	60
	Curry	48
	Soy	38
	Rice	41
	Asian	42
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