

**Faculty of Business, Law and Social Sciences**

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| **Proposed Title:** Twitter and online extremism: A Corpus Linguistics based approach to identifying risk factors and toxic online communities |
| **School:**  Psychology & Criminology(in collaboration with ADM) |
| **Proposed Supervisory Team:**  Dr Pelham Carter, Dr Imran Awan, Dr Mark McGlashan, Matt Gee, Dr Robert Lawson |
| **Abstract:**  With the increase in internet and social media usage there has been an associated rise in the proliferation of online extremism (Awan, 2017). Online communities and social media platforms, many accessible even by smart phone have provided extremists with a means of reaching international audiences and recruiting members (Gerstenfeld, Grant, & Chiang, 2003). It is suggested that twitter is an easier way for users to propagate extremism online compared to the many other social networks and social media platforms (Kotenko, 2013),. Whilst there is experimental evidence of how anonymity and length of group membership can have on aggressive or dis-inhibited behaviour generally (Spears & Lea, 1994; Postmes et al, 1998; Lea et al, 2001) this is largely limited to small scale experiments or short observations (Zimmerman & Ybarra, 2014), and is not within the context of social media. One approach to analysing social media use and online behaviour is corpus linguistics, which involves the quantitative comparison of large bodies of text (corpora) which each other to determine differences in language frequency, use, common context and associated sentiment (Crawford & Csomay, 2016). This can be applied to online data using a range of software. The proposed PhD aims to investigate factors relating to online extremism and membership of extremist online communities, largely within social media platforms such as Twitter. The proposed PhD would combine approaches and theory used in Psychology and Criminology around potential influencing factors (such as level of user anonymity/identifiability, length of membership of online groups, postage/tweeting frequency, number and type of followers) with corpus based methods of online data collection and analysis. |
| **Research Environment:**  The successful applicant will be based within the postgraduate room in the new Curzon Building extension. There is an active and growing PhD and postgraduate community within BLSS. The PhD student on this project will benefit from close interactions with another 10 PhD students in Psychology. The Department of Psychology holds regular seminars and research cluster meetings that the PhD student can participate and benefit from interaction of research ideas.  As the applicant will be part of Psychology, Criminology and ADM they will have access to the software, equipment and research support/facilities available across the three areas. The majority of data collection will take place online, and alongside general research training as part of a PGCert, the applicant will be given further training in how to collect and analyse online data. |
| **Applicant Requirements:**  **Essential:**  Demonstrate the potential to carry out independent research, through at least an upper second class honours degree in psychology, criminology, or linguistics/socio-linguistics, or a master’s degree in a cognate discipline.  Students will be expected to obtain the PG Cert Research Practice as part of their development and progress in the PhD programme. They will be encouraged to obtain the PGCert in L&T also. |
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