

# How Far-Right Movements Make Money Online

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## Executive summary

CCC COVID Briefing Papers are an ongoing series of short-form, open access reports aimed at academics, policymakers, and practitioners, which aim to provide an accessible summary of our ongoing research into the effects which the coronavirus pandemic (and government responses) are having on cybercrime.

In this report, we discuss observed methods of monetisation employed by, and available to, far-right communities and platforms. We see a mixture of traditional methods, such as income from merchandise, with newer methods such as monetisation via content creation.

## Method 1: Sale of merchandise

Far-right communities' attempts to make money by selling merchandise are well documented by existing research, noting the use of the Internet to advertise and market a music genre known as "hate rock" to generate income [5]. In one instance, links to a previously identified far-right forum now direct users to a record company of the same name. This website contains catalogues of various items, including: a) t-shirts with slogans and pictures (e.g. the swastika and Iron Cross), b) various types of movement-related stickers (including one with the tagline of "Dreaming of a White Christmas" featuring a group of individuals in Ku Klux Klan robes), and c) CDs for movement-related music. This merchandise plays a role beyond the financial, being a key way in which the values and aesthetics of these subcultures are communicated, shared, and displayed.

## Method 2: Online video-hosting platforms

With recent efforts to combat misinformation and disinformation, mainstream video-hosting platforms such as YouTube have imposed stricter processes and standards on monetisation. To make money from a YouTube video, the content creator must become a member of the "YouTube Partner Programme". Specific requirements include adhering to YouTube's guidelines and policies; having 1 000 subscribers and 4 000 valid public watch hours; and owning an AdSense account. A human reviewer assesses all aspects of the channel to determine if the application should be accepted [9]. Once accepted, there are multiple methods of monetisation: 1) advertising revenue, 2) membership of channel, 3) merchandising, 4) "Super Chat" & "Super Stickers", and 5) a portion of YouTube Premium subscription (if a subscriber views the content) [8].

The policy changes by the mainstream platforms have created a demand for platforms with lax community guidelines and policies, and alternative platforms are addressing this demand. An example is BitChute, a YouTube-like platform launched in 2017 which only bans content produced by or promoting terrorist organisations. The monetisation process here is straightforward and does not involve a review process; the video creator simply turns on the feature in the account settings [4]. There is an icon on the channel and video page to show if the content creator has enabled the feature.

There are other platforms with equally lax requirements for content which use blockchain technology and cryptocurrencies [1, 7]. One example is 3Speak where its core policy is "Freedom of Speech". Registered users can upload any content except the incitement of violence, excessive gore and/or pornography [2]. To earn rewards, the content creator needs a Hive blockchain account. Users receive Hive tokens with the

earnings determining users' privileges and governance of the platform. Users are also allowed to create their own tokens and marketplaces [1]. Again, this serves both a financial and a subcultural function, much like the sale of merchandise.

### Method 3: Direct financial support of platforms and communities

Direct financial support comes in two forms: donations and membership subscriptions. Two common narratives for seeking money in this way are *the survival or continued operation of the platform* and *access to exclusive features*. In the first instance, the platform shares the reality of the issues it faces with its users. A typical example is from the owner of a website dedicated to the QAnon movement:

*I offer my labour for free to the MAGA movement, but that doesn't help me much when I get to the supermarket checkout. [6]*

The aforementioned BitChute encourages content creators and users to donate or sign up for membership by showing a progress bar with the percentage of already-raised funds and highlighting the importance of such support for the continued operation of the platform [3]. Stormfront's donation page speaks of the scariness of bills at the end of each month.

With the second narrative, financial support means access. For example, those who have provided financial support to Stormfront have a dedicated private sub-forum. Other websites have exclusive content that is hosted behind a paywall. These platforms accept various forms of payment including but not limited to Bitcoin, money orders, cheques, PayPal, and cash.

### Conclusions

This preliminary exploration shows how people have been able to continue to be involved with and support the far-right movement during the pandemic. The increasing numbers of content-hosting platforms may encourage content creators to produce more effective and influential content, or competition may get in the way of fund-raising. Far-right communities are learning how to repurpose the digital platforms they use for spreading their political and cultural messages for direct fundraising. Future work needs to examine the (changing) prevalence of the various monetisation methods available to extremist groups.

[1] 3Speak. *About 3Speak*. 2020. URL: [https://3speak.online/intl/about\\_us](https://3speak.online/intl/about_us).

[2] 3Speak. *Frequently Asked Questions*. 2020. URL: <https://3speak.online/intl/faq>.

[3] BitChute. *Help Us Grow*. 2020. URL: <https://www.bitchute.com/help-us-grow/>.

[4] BitChute. *Receive tips on your channel*. 2020. URL: <https://support.bitchute.com/monetization/receive-tips-on-your-channel>.

[5] Robert Futrell, Pete Simi, and Simon Gottschalk. "Understanding music in movements: The white power music scene". In: *The Sociological Quarterly* 47.2 (2006), pp. 275–304.

[6] Martin Geddes. *QAnon*. 2020. URL: <https://qanon.martingeddes.com>.

[7] Steemit. *Steemit FAQ*. 2020. URL: <https://steemit.com/faq.html>.

[8] YouTube. *How to earn money on YouTube*. 2020. URL: <https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/72857>.

[9] YouTube. *YouTube Partner Programme overview and eligibility*. 2020. URL: <https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/72851>.

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*At the Cambridge Cybercrime Centre we make our research data available to other academics, sometimes before we have looked at it ourselves! Researchers can be provided access to our 'CrimeBB' dataset of (26 and counting) underground cybercrime forums, our extensive collections of chat channel data, and our new collections of forums relating to online right-wing extremism and radicalisation. We can also share email spam and sensor data related to DDoS and IoT malware. All these collections are regularly updated and can be rapidly provided under licence – for full details see: <https://cambridgecybercrime.uk>*

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