

# SPOTLIGHT

JUN 2023

GAMES,  
GAMING  
AND  
GAMIFICATION

RANI   
Practitioners



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**EDITORIAL**

**Online gaming represents one of the biggest and fastest growing industries globally with over 900 million gamers. Its growth is not only attributed to the development of online games and communities, but also to the game hosting and adjacent communications platforms that have been specifically designed for gamers and gaming, including Steam, Stadia, Twitch, Discord, and DLive.**

Much research has been done to determine the impact of games on those who play them. While games have a positive impact on many lives – not only providing entertainment but also opportunities to connect – there is some evidence to suggest that games can increase social isolation and access to harmful content. Meanwhile, there is also evidence to suggest that games can change how (young) people behave online – both in terms of how they engage and interact with others, and what information or content they find appealing, more likely to be drawn to gamified language, content and experiences.

Violent extremists increasingly use gaming elements in their radicalisation and recruitment efforts. Over the past year or two there have been a string of terrorist attacks with gamified elements. The livestreamed terrorist attack in Christchurch, New Zealand, and various subsequent attacks which have followed a similar modus operandi in Pittsburgh, El Paso, Halle and Buffalo, demonstrate the increasing use and popularity of gaming and gamified techniques – ‘gamification’ – by violent extremists to radicalise, recruit and draw attention to their actions – such as the use of helmet cameras, combat gear and weapons in the style of first-person shooter games.

This edition of the RAN Practitioners Spotlight magazine therefore takes a look at the nature and scale of the radicalisation challenge on gaming and gaming-adjacent platforms, the use of gamified techniques, digital grooming tactics, and the opportunity to use games to tackle a range of social harms. The publication features a number of original articles by experts on the topic, papers produced by RAN Practitioners, and case studies of projects being delivered.

As always, we want to hear from you. If you would like to contribute to future editions of Spotlight, or if you have ideas for a topic, article, interview or feature, please get in touch with the RAN Practitioners communications team at [ran@radaradvies.nl](mailto:ran@radaradvies.nl)

**RAN Practitioners Staff**

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ARTICLE

# The radicalisation challenge on gaming and gaming-adjacent platforms

Petra REGENI

As one of the fastest growing entertainment sectors in the world, online video gaming has garnered far more attention of late – both positive and negative. In light of the exploitation of gaming and gaming-adjacent platforms by (violent) extremist actors and the gamification of violent extremism, there continues to be increasing concerns over threats of radicalisation via video gaming, especially the targeting of young gamers. Across the European Union, albeit globally as well, policymakers have grappled with a new set of counter-terrorism and extremism challenges gaming presents.

**During the COVID-19 pandemic, online gaming surged globally – as people isolated and spent more time at home, lacking socialisation opportunities, they turned to the online space to fill the void. Online gaming and gaming-adjacent platforms (e.g., Twitch, Discord, Steam, DLive, etc., designed to complement games/gaming platforms) became a lifeline for many. Due to their interactive nature, for instance the ability to chat with other gamers while playing, it rapidly evolved as an important vehicle for socialising. And in a community of over 3 billion gamers worldwide, it should come as no surprise that extremist actors and ideologies appear in gaming spaces and seek to exploit its popularity and attractiveness.**

#### **Attacks with Links to Gaming**

If you look around the world at recent violent right-wing extremist attacks, nearly all of them have, to various degrees, a link to online gaming. In many cases, they exemplify a new category of violent right-wing extremist. Individuals falling under this category are often young self-radicalised men who envelop themselves in violent right wing extremist YouTube videos, conspiracy narratives, and violent video games, among other things. The attacks of Christchurch (New Zealand), Halle (Germany), Bærum (Norway), and those of El Paso, Poway, and Buffalo (USA) highlighted the threats of the gamification of violent extremism and terrorism – meaning the “use of game design elements in non-game context”. These attacks were livestreamed on social media and gaming platforms to emulate a first-person shooter game. All perpetrators of these attacks match the category profile mentioned above.

Less obvious are other violent right-wing extremist attacks and their links to gaming. Looking at Bratislava, the October 2022 attacker was a Slovak young man, who although did not gamify his attack nor seemed to spend much time gaming, consumed content on gaming-adjacent sites like Reddit, 4chan, 8chan, etc. In the wake of his attack, gamified rhetoric about the attack/er appeared on 4chan and 4kun forums. Language about “high

scores”, “leaderboards”, and “achievements”, including criticism for “not killing enough people” demonstrated gamified narratives and effects of gaming on assailants and other users.

#### **Socialisation Leading to Radicalisation**

Gaming and gaming-adjacent platforms, with their in-game chat function, interactive nature between players, and popular culture appeal and references, are inherently social spaces. Gaming chat spaces in particular are where socialisation processes, pop-culture references and propaganda blossom. It is where gamers form their community – they’re often close-knit groups and although it’s an online community, they tend to closely resemble real-world experiences. While socialisation and community building are generally positive, when you have toxic gaming communities and those espousing extremist ideologies, socialisation turns into a potential radicalisation tool.

Think about entering a gaming space with an immersive chat environment, you form connectivity with your group during gameplay and gradually become bonded through shared interactive experiences online – overtime that opens you up to hearing new ideas among your group. When those ideas come from your gameplay community – people you feel attached and bonded to – you may become more vulnerable to their ideas. Over time users may become desensitised to extreme ideas or normalise it; potentially even willing to adopt these ideas themselves. Inherently this socialisation process can act as a catalyst for radicalisation. It relates to the off-platforming problem as well. Say an extremist recruiter in a gameplay group uses the in-gamer chat to make a hateful, racist, sexist, or otherwise radical comment, observing the reactions from players, he can identify those with positive reactions to it, message them directly and continue the chat, building a relationship on those ideas. Given that gaming and gaming-adjacent platforms, such as Discord and Twitch, are not completely anonymised, the recruiter may direct them to more secure, end-to-end encrypted messaging sites, such as Telegram or Signal – a space where extremist narratives roam more freely and radicalisation booms.

### Other Content Challenges and Youth

Numerous cases evidenced gaming and -adjacent platforms being used by extremist groups to communicate, lure in new recruits, provide off-platform links, organise, etc. From the white supremacist [Unite the Right](#) rally in Charlottesville, USA, in August 2017 organised on Discord, to the [Feuerkrieg Division](#) – a right-wing neo-Nazi online network allegedly set up by a 13-year-old Estonian boy – utilisation of gaming platforms like Roblox and Discord to connect and off-link young gamers to Telegram channels to communicate, share propaganda and neo-Nazi imagery, with like-minded people from different countries took place.

Although not all gamers are young, the potential radicalisation of [children and young people under 18](#) is of serious concern. Young gamers tend to be more at risk of being targeted and vulnerable to exploitation for a myriad of reasons – for instance, struggling with identity or a sense of belonging, trouble socialising in real-life, less awareness of malign actors or the harms of radical ideologies, etc. Given that gaming platforms offer the opportunity to present extremist content and ideas through pop-culture methods – e.g., the production of bespoke games, using popular memes, images, and videos, speaking in youth slang – it can draw in more youngsters and normalise radical narratives. It highlights the necessity to increase digital literacy and awareness of extremism in gaming spaces among the younger generation.

### Other Security Concerns

The recent leak of classified US intelligence documents on Discord reiterated the [socialisation and communication power of gaming spaces](#). It was in his gameplay group and chat server that the 21-year-old young man working in the Air National Guard released hundreds of top-secret documents. The gameplay group and Discord server was described as a close-knit group of gamers, most far younger than the 21-year-old. Why he released hundreds of classified documents? [It is alleged that](#) he wanted to teach the younger gamers in his group about the “real world”, to open their eyes, look out for them, keep them informed – though some also allege it was to gain clout among his gaming group.

What this case, and other game-associated intelligence leaks like [War Thunder](#) – a realistic military-themed game – highlights are the powerful [social bonds built through shared gamer identities](#) and in-group dynamics created in community-driven online gaming spaces. This socialisation element in today’s interactive gaming environment is thus a major catalyst. Although there are many positive aspects to gaming, including the opportunity to join communities of like-minded people and forge friendships, socialisation can also offer opportunities for radicalisation and exposure to violent extremist content and ideas, including potential recruitment into violent extremism.

Emerging technologies and increasing immersive and interactive online spaces like gaming present new challenges for radicalisation and extremism. It further convolutes the offline and online radicalisation dichotomy. The bottom line is that the misuse and exploitation of gaming and gaming-adjacent platforms for violent extremist purposes is a more relevant topic than ever before – especially bearing in mind the emergence of the Metaverse. Recent efforts to increase evidence-based research has served a vital role in gaining a better understanding of the space, threats and risks, and prevention efforts. However, the paramount importance of continuing research on the gaming and extremism nexus cannot be understated.

*Petra Regeni is a Research and Project Officer in the Terrorism and Conflict group at RUSI Europe, based in Brussels, and a RAN Policy Support expert.*

A paper, published by RAN Practitioners in 2021, entitled 'Extremists' use of gaming (adjacent) platforms', discusses how traditional gaming (adjacent) platforms have contributed to extremist activities and how extremist individuals and organisations make strategic and organic use of the platforms. The paper also explores opportunities for primary and secondary prevention on gaming (adjacent) platforms. You can read the paper in full [here](#).

## Key Lessons

1. There is extremist content on almost all gaming (adjacent) platforms, from streams to dark humored memes and calls to violence. A substantial amount of this content is gaming-related.
2. These platforms are not inherently dangerous. They are used by extremists like any other digital platform. Also, the vast majority of content on gaming (adjacent) platforms is not related to extremism.
3. Gaming (adjacent) platforms often operate partially like social media sites. They encourage discussion among users and on livestreams on various topics, including political ideology. Fringe and extremist actors use these platforms to communicate with one another and potential new recruits, often expressing their views through their profiles and posts.
4. Content moderation, especially of livestreams, is difficult to achieve in real-time, especially when livestreams are conducted in languages other than English.
5. To gain a holistic view, the entire ecosystem of gaming-related content across all platforms must be considered rather than only traditional gaming (adjacent) platforms. Content originating on gaming (adjacent) platforms is often cross-posted or re-appears on other platforms, increasing its reach and the difficulty to delete such pieces of content.

<sup>(48)</sup> Singer & Brooking, *LikeWar*, p.247

<sup>(49)</sup> RAN, *Extremists' Use of Video Gaming – Strategies and Narratives*, p.3

<sup>(50)</sup> RAN, *The gamification of violent extremism & lessons for P/CVE*, p.9

<sup>(51)</sup> Schlegel, *Can You Hear Your Call of Duty? The Gamification of Radicalization and Extremist Violence*



In an episode of RAN Practitioners' podcast series, RAN in Focus, from 2022, presenters Jordy Nijenhuis and Veera Tuomala talk to three frontline practitioners and experts – Jon Kristian Lange from Save the Children, Ross Frenett from Moonshot and Linda Schlegel from modus | zad – about grooming tactics on online video gaming platforms. You can listen to the podcast in full on the RAN Practitioners YouTube channel [here](#).



# RAN PROFILES



**Jon Kristian LANGE**

Jon Kristian Lange is a senior consultant at the National Center for the Prevention of Extremism in the Center for Documentation and Efforts against Extremism in Denmark. In this role he focuses on prevention of online extremism and radicalisation. Prior to this role, Jon Kristian worked to improve the safety of the internet for children and young adults at Save the Children Denmark, with a focus on increasing digital literacy as a means to prevent online bullying and digital grooming.



**Ross FRENETT**

Ross Frenett is co-founder of Moonshot, a tech-driven solutions provider harnessing the power of the internet for good, and a co-chair of the RAN Communications and Narratives (C&N) Working Group. Ross grew up with a fascination for understanding terrorism, which took him from interviewing IRA prisoners to shadowing Hezbollah in a Lebanese war zone. He went on to partner with Google to build the world's first global network of former extremists and survivors of terrorism, designed to counter terrorism through deradicalisation and strategic communications efforts. A native of County Cork, Ross is a former member of the Irish Defence Forces.



**Linda SCHLEGEL**

Linda Schlegel is a Research Fellow at modus I zad and an Associate Fellow at the Peace Research Institute Frankfurt (PRIF). In her PhD research project at Goethe University Frankfurt (Germany) she is researching the storytelling quality of digital counter- and alternative narrative campaigns against extremism. In addition, Linda is a founding member of the Extremism and Gaming Research Network (EGRN) and a member of the RAN expert pool. Her areas of expertise include (counter-)narrative campaigns, digital radicalisation processes, gaming/gamification and (counter-)extremism.

A paper, published by RAN Practitioners in May 2021, entitled 'Digital Grooming Tactics on Video Gaming & Video Gaming Adjacent Platforms', discusses the similarities and differences found between grooming for radicalisation purposes and other purposes. The paper also highlights recommendations that have been made to use positive and empowering ways to prevent and counter grooming through video gaming. You can read the paper in full [here](#).

## Key outcomes

The online world is more and more a part of everyday life. Just as in the offline world, online threats and pitfalls are present that can harm people or, in this context, try to radicalise them. On the other hand, many positive and empowering things are also happening online, just as they are in the offline world. During the RAN Communication and Narratives Working Group (C&N) meeting on 'Digital grooming tactics on video gaming (adjacent) platforms', the threats were discussed, as well as the opportunities to use the online video gaming platforms in a positive way. This paper first discusses the threats regarding grooming tactics on video gaming and video gaming adjacent platforms by providing background information on different models of grooming that were shared during the meeting. The similarities and differences found between grooming for radicalisation purposes and other purposes (in particular, child sexual abuse and cults) are discussed. The second part of the paper highlights recommendations that have been made to use positive and empowering ways to prevent and counter grooming through video gaming.

The key outcomes of the meeting are:

- In different types of grooming, the groomer tries to feed on (the need for) certain **emotions of the potential victim**, e.g. loneliness, insecurities.
- On video gaming adjacent platforms, a groomer for extremism could talk to a gamer during gameplay and try to **steer the conversation towards feelings of anger**.
- **Awareness-raising campaigns** targeted at youth and their parents about grooming tactics on gaming (adjacent) platforms can help to build resilience against radicalisation.
- **Engaging role models through gaming** can also help. These could be popular gamers, influencers or offline leaders.
- Practitioners need to take into consideration the possibilities video games and adjacent platforms offer as an **online outreach tool** to reach individuals at risk of radicalisation.

**Galen  
LAMPHERE-  
ENGLUND**

**FEATURE**

# **The Extremism and Gaming Research Network (EGRN)**

**The evidence base for gaming and radicalisation is insufficient at present. The Extremism and Research Gaming Network (EGRN), which leads evidence-based research on the nexus between gaming and extremism, was set-up in 2021 to uncover how malign actors exploit gaming, and also the opportunities to use gaming for good to counter online harms. The network is dedicated to keeping gaming fun while pushing back against extremism and online harms.**

**FEATURE**

**The EGRN therefore brings together world-leading counter-extremism researchers, practitioners, policy makers and the private sector to better understand the exploitation of gaming and gaming-adjacent platforms by violent extremists and to create resilience-building solutions for gamers. Today the EGRN convenes over 80 members, ranging from United Nations agencies to think tanks and private sector organisations.**

By working collaboratively across academia and practitioners, we advise tech platforms and governments alike to help gaming communities become inclusive, diverse online spaces while curbing the impact of harmful online content. EGRN is therefore at the centre of emerging research and analysis while impacting policy and tech design.

From neo-Nazis and far-right groups to Islamic State, those seeking to instigate hate and violence for their ideological ends are finding new platforms to do so as traditional social media platforms crack down on their content. New platforms, including the chat application Discord, live-streaming sites such as Twitch, online games like Fortnite and gaming platforms like Steam, are rife with extremist content and recruiters. Games themselves are not the problem, but socialisation inside gaming-related spaces reveals real and pressing difficulties.

The EGRN works to expand and enhance evidence-based research on topics relating to gaming and extremism, The three overarching priority research areas of the network are:

1. Why and how are video games, gaming platforms, and gaming content used by extremist individuals or organisations? What are the implications for radicalisation and recruitment?
2. How does this trend differ across geographies, cultures, ideologies, and gender?
3. How can gaming, gaming-related spaces, and gamers themselves help prevent extremism? How can gamers and

gaming platforms be empowered to combat hate and facilitate building positive, resilient communities? At the same time, how

Similar initiatives, such as the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism (GIFCT), participate in the EGRN, allowing us to achieve substantial network effects, as well as leverage existing tools and expertise through collaborative means. We also act as a bridge from gamer communities and small CSOs developing their own games, all the way to donor governments and international policymakers at the United Nations through the mandated UN Office of Counter Terrorism (UNOCT) and other mandated UN agencies including UNDP and UNITAR.

There is no other initiative dedicated to convening cross-sector actors to prevent violent extremism and foster resilience among gamer communities. The network is dedicated to keeping gaming fun while pushing back against extremism and online harms. Core to this is our collaborative work with gaming platforms themselves.

*Galen Lamphere-Englund is senior research and strategic communications consultant at the nexus of violent extremism, conflict, and tech issues, co-founder of the EGRN and a RAN Policy Support expert.*

**RAN FILM**  
The gamification of extremism

RAN Practitioners met with Galen Lamphere-Englund, the co-founder of the Extremism and Gaming Research Network (EGRN) to find out how gaming is changing the behaviours of young people online, how gamified approaches are being used by violent extremists to radicalise and recruit and how gamified techniques can be adopted and applied in P/CVE. You can watch the video in full on the RAN Practitioners YouTube channel [here](#).

SPOTLIGHT  
RAN FILM

JUN 2023  
GAMES, GAMING AND GAMIFICATION

026-027



**RAN PAPER**  
**The gamification of violent extremism & lessons for P/CVE**

A paper, published by RAN Practitioners in 2021, entitled 'The gamification of violent extremism & lessons for P/CVE', provides an introduction to the concept of gamification, an overview of the use of gamification within extremist communities and the mechanisms by which it makes propaganda more attractive. The paper then explores the potential for the use of gamification in the P/CVE context. You can read the paper in full [here](#).

028-029



THE GAMIFICATION OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM & LESSONS FOR P/CVE

only familiar with such designs and know how to use them but will associate gaming with positive emotions and pleasure. The potential target audience for gamified applications is therefore very large.

Theoretically, gamification can be applied in any non-gaming context. However, the term is most widely used to describe the use of game elements in the digital realm, and the present paper is solely focused on the online sphere. Although actual video games such as the newly released Heimatdefender by the Identitarian Movement <sup>(10)</sup>, modifications of popular existing video games <sup>(11)</sup>, and the use of gaming servers such as Discord to organise collective action <sup>(12)</sup> are part of a larger trend towards gaming in extremist subcultures, they are excluded from the present paper. Only use of game design elements within non-game digital contexts is the subject of consideration.

**Background on Gamification**


1. Gamification is "the use of game elements in non-game contexts" online.
2. It is not the use of video games or gaming servers.
3. Gamification most often means introducing points, badges, leader boards and other gaming elements into other settings.
4. 2.4 billion people are gaming; game elements are familiar to a large audience.

**Evidence for gamification in extremist subcultures**

Extremists are early adopters of technological advancements <sup>(13)</sup> and gamification is no exception in this regard. While gamification has only recently become part of the extremist 'toolbox' and research into the phenomenon is still in its infancy, preliminary, anecdotal evidence for gamification in extremist subcultural milieus exists. Based on the existing evidence, a general distinction may be drawn between top-down and bottom-up gamification <sup>(14)</sup>.

	Top-down gamification	Bottom-up gamification
Who	Extremist organisations, recruiters, strategists	Individuals, small groups, online communities
What	Strategic use of rankings, badges, points, leader boards	Livestreaming, gamified language, virtual scoreboards, personal 'quests'
Why	Facilitate engagement with content and peers, visibility of commitment, motivate users to participate, appeal to young audience	Appeal to online community/subcultural milieu, look cool, make sense of reality via gaming content
Examples	Rankings, badges, etc. in forums; apps such as Patriot Peer	Attacks in Christchurch and Halle; small-group WhatsApp radicalisation; discussions on social media — e.g. desire to "beat his score" <sup>(15)</sup>

<sup>(10)</sup> Schlegel, No Child's Play.  
<sup>(11)</sup> Ebner, Going Dark.  
<sup>(12)</sup> Guhl et al., The Online Ecosystem of the German Far-Right, p. 22.  
<sup>(13)</sup> Bartlett, Why 2019 Will Be the Year of the Online Extremist, and What to Do About It.  
<sup>(14)</sup> For a full discussion, see Schlegel, Jumanji extremism?  
<sup>(15)</sup> Evans, The El Paso shooting and the gamification of terror.



**Countering the misuse of gaming-related content & spaces:  
Inspiring practices and opportunities for cooperation with tech companies**

Radicalisation Awareness Network  
**RAN** Practitioners

Authored by Linda Schlegel,  
RAN Expert Pool Member

#### INSPIRING PRACTICES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR COOPERATION WITH TECH COMPANIES

become clear throughout, however, that the gaming industry, gaming (-adjacent) platforms, and other gaming-related actors and organisations would benefit from a closer collaboration with P/CVE actors to tap the full potential P/CVE projects can offer in making gaming spaces safer and more inclusive social spaces as well as for using video games for positive social change. Hence, after presenting the inspiring practices, the paper then turns to potential areas of collaboration between P/CVE actors and the gaming industry or gaming (-adjacent) platforms as well as a discussion on the types of cooperation that would be beneficial for both sides. All practices presented include the contact details for the respective practice owners to facilitate easy contact and exchange.

#### Ways to use gaming, gaming (-adjacent) platforms and gaming-related content in P/CVE

There are various possibilities to use video games, gaming (-adjacent) platforms and gaming-related content in the context of P/CVE and to create a safer experience for users in general. **There is a range of possibilities for gaming and tech companies, game developers and gaming associations to collaborate with P/CVE actors<sup>(9)</sup>:**

- 1. Production of bespoke video games:** Gaming companies may produce or support the production of bespoke video games in the P/CVE context pertaining to a range of topics — e.g. on radicalisation or fighting hate speech. Theoretically, any video game genre could be used in the P/CVE context — from simple quiz and decision-making games to story-driven role play games to elaborate (open-world) adventure or strategy games, and even first-person shooters.
- 2. Modification of existing video games:** Modifying existing games may make it possible to adapt games to the P/CVE context without having to develop a bespoke game and involve existing gaming communities in P/CVE efforts. While sandbox games such as *Minecraft* may be particularly easy to modify, mods can theoretically be developed for every existing video game deemed suitable by gaming companies and P/CVE actors — e.g. to counter extremist content with positive mods, build resilience, distribute counter- and alternative narratives, or similar goals.
- 3. Use of in-game communication features:** Many contemporary video games have built-in communication features, such as (voice- or text-based) chats, often affording the possibility to communicate with friends but also strangers. Gaming companies could support a positive atmosphere in such chats by granting P/CVE actors access to these communication features to communicate with gamers, offer guidance on how to react to extremist content, and potentially detect and communicate with at-risk gamers.
- 4. Playing games to open lines of communication:** Existing games may also be used as conversation openers and tools to access target audiences. Gaming companies, e-sports associations and other gaming-related organisations could collaborate with P/CVE actors, for example, by hosting joint (digital or in-person) gaming tournaments, facilitating the use of video games in youth work, or working together on using video games for good — e.g. to promote knowledge on how video games elicit prosocial benefits.
- 5. Presence on gaming (-adjacent) platforms:** Gaming (-adjacent) platforms, like other digital platforms, provide various possibilities for P/CVE actors to distribute content and engage with target audiences<sup>(10)</sup>. Each platform affords different opportunities and requires different types of content. P/CVE projects could include, for instance, the establishment of a Discord server, digital youth work in forums on Steam, livestreaming P/CVE content on Twitch, or supporting influential streamers with large communities to prevent hateful comments in their DLive streams. The gaming (-adjacent) platforms could support such efforts to make their communities safer and more inclusive and counter extremist users or content in these spaces.

<sup>(9)</sup> RAN, *Extremists' Use of Video Gaming – Strategies and Narratives*, p. 3.

<sup>(10)</sup> RAN, *Extremists' use of gaming (adjacent) platforms – Insights regarding primary and secondary prevention measures*.  
5



**ARTICLE**

# Games as a tool for countering online harm

**Katie PASSEY**

The intersection between gaming and violent extremism remains understudied and, often, its conclusions tend to be prematurely and problematically drawn. The overused tropes that gaming leads to violent behaviour or that all gamers are extremists, are just a few. This is not to say that the gaming space is without fault. Violent extremists are certainly attempting to exploit the gaming landscape hoping to capitalise on the massive, youthful audience and the gaming world's deep integration within popular culture. But, this is not illustrative of a direct link between videogames, violence and ultimately radicalisation. Instead gaming has been co-opted by violent extremists as a tool to radicalise and recruit young people, and bring already radicalised people together, which is very different. Understanding this difference is crucial for practitioners as it enables us to develop our own gaming-methodologies to counter this vulnerability.

**The use of games in intervention campaigns has grown in popularity over the last five years. There are now many examples of games being designed to combat different types of online harm from violent extremism, gender-based violence, to dis/misinformation. These games vary considerably in terms of style and design, from scenario-based to fictional and cartoon to actors. However, they all share the same function: Games create an opportunity to test how turning passive consumption of counter-content into active engagement may potentially improve the success of that intervention.**

Since 2019, Moonshot has been developing and testing gamified content to advance media literacy in Indonesia. The game design is based on the inoculation method - which suggests that psychological resistance to disinformation can be developed by exposing individuals to weakened versions of fake or manipulated stories that they will come across in the real world. The purpose is to better equip them with the media literacy skills necessary to identify disinformation, both online and offline.

The game we have designed revolves around a group chat platform, developed to look like WhatsApp, but renamed 'Gali Fakta' - meaning 'Dig for the facts'. This format was created to reflect the real-world nature of how disinformation spreads in Indonesia. Family chats were reported to be the second most common place where disinformation is shared after Facebook.

The player has the job of fact-checking the articles and social media posts shared in the group chat by their family members, deciding whether to intervene and how to correct the family member if the information they shared is indeed fake. The game script transposes multiple such lessons, including how to identify when you are in an echo chamber, how to spot a fake social media account, and how to tell a reliable source from an unreliable one. Correct answers are rewarded by points and validation. Incorrect answers are docked points and met with general confusion or upset by family members.

**“Since 2019, Moonshot has been developing and testing gamified content to advance media literacy in Indonesia. The game design is based on the inoculation method - which suggests that psychological resistance to disinformation can be developed by exposing individuals to weakened versions of fake or manipulated stories that they will come across in the real world. The purpose is to better equip them with the media literacy skills necessary to identify disinformation, both online and offline.”**

**“Our gaming methodologies programme has been extended to enable further adaptation, testing and opportunity to advance media literacy online. We are currently modifying the game so that it can be deployed in other geographical contexts and languages. We hope in the future it could even support interventions addressing other forms of online harm. Although it currently lives inside the family chat format, we would like to pull out chapters of the game to form individual media literacy lessons that would be quick for the user to consume and then run those as interactive campaigns in their own right.”**

We discovered through the pilot run of our campaign that game-based content led to higher audience engagement levels compared to alternative digital intervention methodologies, such as YouTube videos, quizzes or an interactive website. Game players spent approximately 12 times as long engaging with the media literacy content in the pilot game compared to those who visited our intervention website without playing the game.

This clearly demonstrates the utility of game-based methodologies to engage our target audiences and is an important stepping stone towards understanding gaming’s various applications to communicate, engage and advocate.

Our gaming methodologies programme has been extended to enable further adaptation, testing and opportunity to advance media literacy online. We are currently modifying the game so that it can be deployed in other geographical contexts and languages. We hope in the future it could even support interventions addressing other forms of online harm. Although it currently lives inside the family chat format, we would like to pull out chapters of the game to form individual media literacy lessons that would be quick for the user to consume and then run those as interactive campaigns in their own right.

Games and gaming communities already contribute to social good in our society in so many different ways. Utilising those natural aspects of gaming which make them so successful allows us as practitioners to transfer them over into an effective method of combating online harm.

*Katie Passey works on the design and delivery of digital counter-messaging and intervention projects at Moonshot, specialising in the monitoring and evaluation of online at-risk user activity. Her work includes: CVE, extremism, radicalisation, M&E, jihadism, violent far-right, dis/misinformation, gaming, social media and technology.*



Silvia MENDES

FEATURE

# Play 4 Your Rights

A European project to fight sexism amongst teenagers through games and gamification. The 'Play 4 Your Rights!' project aims at fighting sexist hate speech – including gender stereotypes and gender discrimination among adolescent – through social media education strategies and gamification practices. For young people, games are a powerful tool for learning. By encouraging creativity and imagination they can be a means by which to address complex phenomena.

**Sexist hate speech is a form of violence against women and girls that perpetuates and aggravates gender inequality. It is a problem that must be addressed online but also in schools, in order to build a culture of respect, inclusion and rights. Teenagers are particularly exposed to online bullying. Women are the main victims of violence: the report EIGE (European Institute for Gender Equality) called “Cyber Violence against women and girls” (2017) underlined that ‘women are disproportionately the targets of certain forms of cyber violence compared to men. For example, in a survey of more than 9,000 German Internet users aged 10 to 50 years, women were significantly more likely than men to have been victims of online sexual harassment and cyber stalking’.**

Although the Internet has enabled the spread of such abuse, the root causes of sexist hate speech preceded technology and are fundamentally linked to unequal power relations between women and men. Sexist hate speech takes many forms both online and offline, notably victim blaming and re-victimisation; “slut-shaming”; body-shaming; “revenge porn” (the sharing of explicit or sexual images without consent); offensive comments on appearance, sexuality, sexual orientation or gender roles; but also false compliments or supposed jokes, using humour to humiliate and ridicule the target (Council of Europe, Combatting Hate Speech – Factsheets, 2016).

The project “Play 4 Your Rights”, supported by the EU’s Erasmus programme, combines the different experiences and expertise of six different partners in four European countries in the field of women’s rights and media education: COSPE, Casa delle donne per non subire violenza, Centro Zaffiria in Italy, Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies in Cipro, Women’s Issues Information Center in Lithuania, and medien+bildung.com in Germany.

The project uses gaming and gamification as a strategy for engagement and as a tool for the active participation of adolescents. It does this through the construction of counter-narratives that deconstruct gender stereotypes and bullying.

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# RIGHTS!



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At the end of the project, the materials produced will be available online for free, accompanied by a handbook and an app for teachers and educators. Communication activities at the national and the European level will also promote the project, with the aim of combating hate speech and gender stereotypes.

While the issue of gender equality and for the empowerment of women and girls has been given more visibility around the world in recent years, this goal is far from being achieved and it is important to build a culture of respect and rights for all, by involving the educational structure with innovative methodologies.

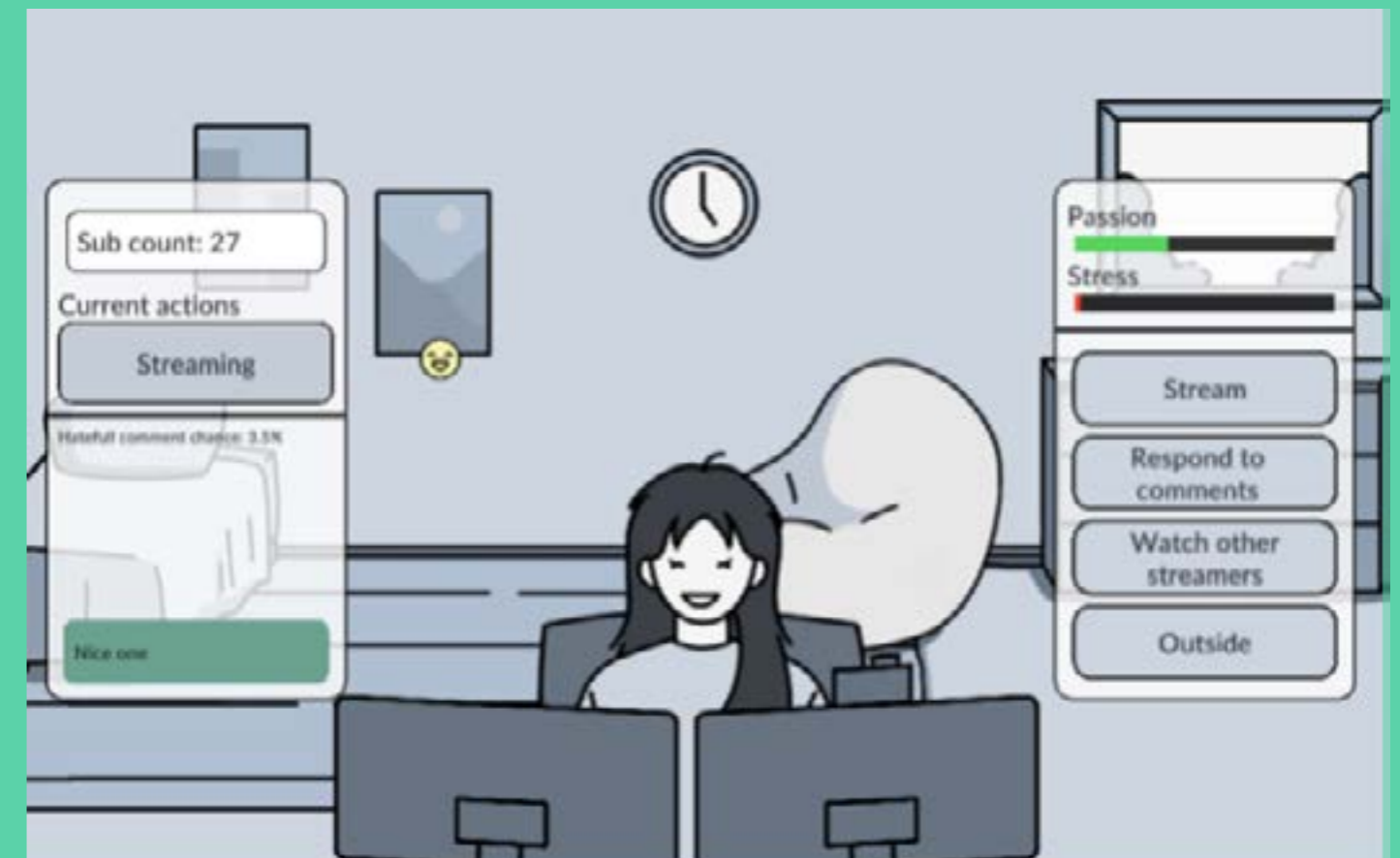
*Silvia Mendes is the project manager of the Play 4 Your Rights project from Zaffiria in Italy.*

ARTICLE

# The role of games and gamification counteracting online hate speech

Susana COSTA

Most young people engage in playing online games, interacting on social networks or in digital gaming communities as part of their daily routine. Such activities increase the likelihood of contact with online hate speech, which has been taking up a growing space on the internet, particularly in gaming environments and associated communities, whether spontaneously or in a programmed and strategic way.



**Games, especially those that incorporate role-playing elements, are a unique medium for engaging individuals on complex issues. Games offer a safe environment for youngsters to experiment and learn about diversity, equity, and inclusion. Furthermore, games can promote positive online behaviour. By incorporating elements of gameplay, like challenges, rewards, and competition, games can motivate players to learn about and actively counteract hate speech. Additionally, games can create safe spaces for individuals to explore sensitive topics and engage in meaningful conversations without fear of judgement or reprisal.**

In Role-Playing Games, the narrative is defined by a script based on a set of rules that allows the player to assume a particular character within the game. This subgenre originated in board games has evolved in recent decades into digital environments mediated by artificial intelligence. The project Play Your Role: Gamification Against Hate Speech, funded by the European Commission through the Citizenship, Rights and Justice programme, establishes a semantic relationship with the concept of role-playing games - becoming someone else, somewhere else - and with the idea that events are triggered by choices made by the player.

The conclusions of this project, implemented in European schools, reinforced the possibilities of gamification as a powerful tool to combat online hate, leading to the development of five serious games and 15 pedagogical lesson plans, accessible in open access, addressing the most relevant themes identified in the first phase of the project: misogyny, racism, radicalisation, grooming, racism, anti-Semitism, homophobia, xenophobia, cyberbullying, and discrimination.

The aim is for the experimentation of the five online games, mediated by educators with the support of the pedagogical lesson plans provided by the project, to contribute to the implementation of effective action against hate speech, promoting positive behaviour, reinforcing critical thinking about

the sources and content of information found online. More recently, in Portugal, the Project Props - Interactive Narratives Propose a Pluralistic speech, using interactive narratives, is being implemented in schools to promote diversity and inclusion in digital spaces. The project aims to create a more pluralistic speech by empowering users to explore different perspectives and engage in constructive dialogue. By offering a range of narratives and perspectives, the project encourages users to challenge their own biases and develop a more nuanced understanding of complex issues.

In [the Hate Booth] is the first serious game developed as part of the PROPS project. It is an interactive narrative that aims to raise awareness about the impact of hate speech in digital environments and to promote positive online behaviour.

The game is set in a virtual environment where players take on the role of a moderator in an online forum. The objective of the game is to identify and remove hate speech from the forum while maintaining freedom of expression and respecting users' rights. Players are presented with different scenarios in which they must use critical thinking skills to assess the content of the posts and decide whether they violate the forum's rules. The game includes different levels of difficulty, with more complex scenarios as players progress, increasing the challenge.

The game's mechanics are designed to promote learning and critical thinking. Players receive feedback and guidance throughout the game, and their performance is evaluated based on their ability to recognise and remove hate speech while maintaining a balance between freedom of expression and user rights.

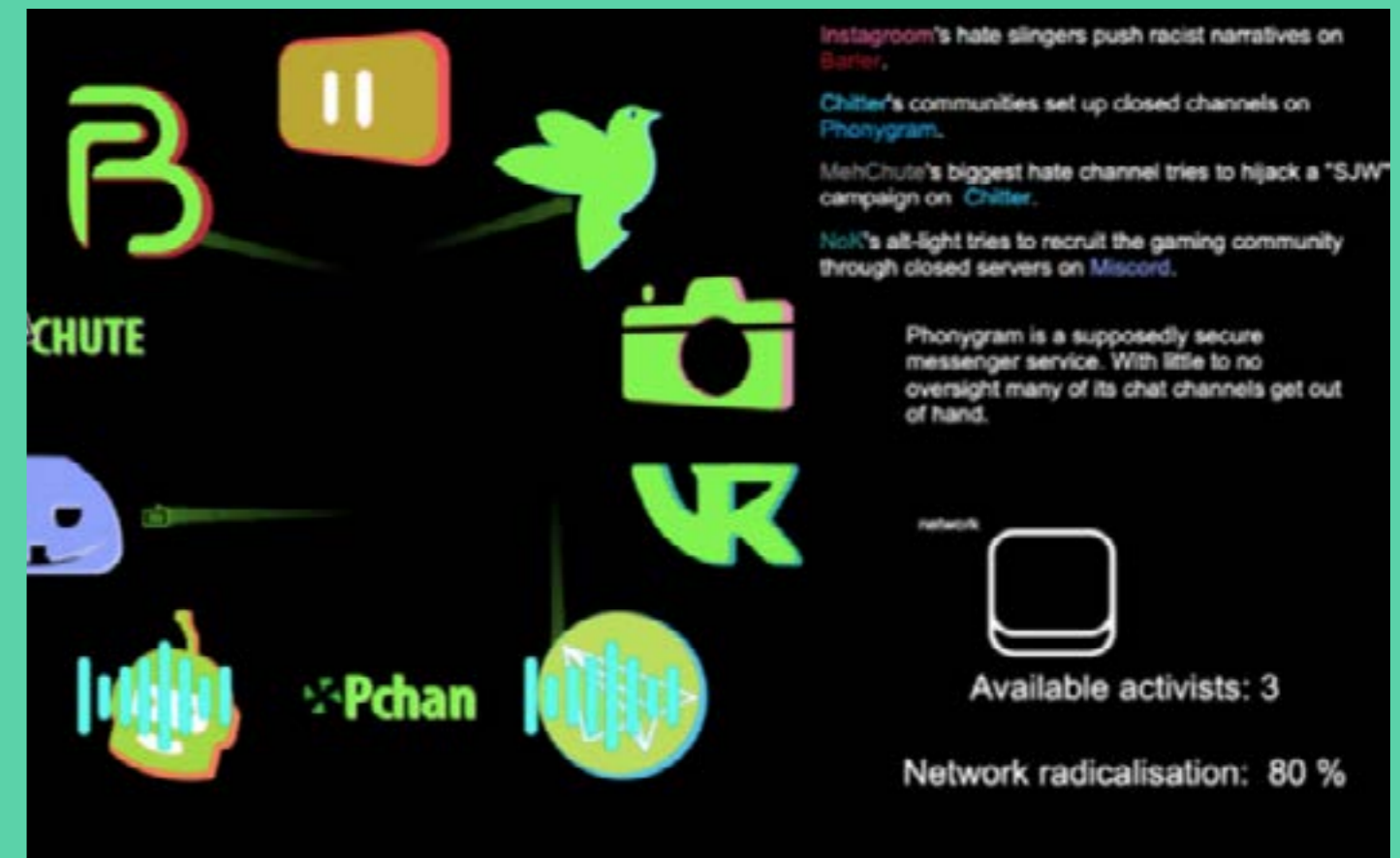
These projects have proven to be important steps towards creating a safer and more inclusive online environment, by promoting positive interactions and empowering users to be responsible digital citizens.



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Gamification, counter-narratives, media literacy, art, and activism are the tools that we propose in our approach to counter hate speech, focusing on the transformative value of artistic intervention, the culture of play, and the promotion of social spheres, as engines for the development of democratic values, critical thinking, and digital citizenship.

*Susana Costa is a researcher at the University of Algarve in Portugal and leads the projects ‘Play Your Role: Gamification against hate speech’ and ‘Props: Interactive Narratives propose pluralistic speech’.*



## Highlights: **RAN Practitioners activity**

The topic of online extremism has been addressed within a number of RAN Practitioners activities in 2022 and 2023. Stay tuned for updates on future events in the RAN Practitioners Update and on RAN Practitioners social media channels.

For more information about RAN Practitioners activities please visit the Calendar on the RAN website [here](#).

### **RAN C&N 6 November 2023s**

**'The future of online extremism and P/CVE - DSA and technological developments'**

# LIBRARY: DISCOVER MORE

If you would like to discover more about gamification you can get in touch with the RAN Practitioners Staff, take a look at the [RAN Collection of Inspiring Practices](#) or read through some of the latest [RAN papers](#). We have included some of these papers in a carefully selected collection of interesting and relevant articles below.

**UNCCT (2022)**  
[‘Examining the Intersection Between Gaming and Violent Extremism’](#)

**RUSI (2022)**  
[‘The Risks of Gamified Violent Extremism and How We Can Tackle It’](#)

**RAN Practitioners (2022),**  
[‘Integrating the online dimension into offline pedagogical practices’](#)

**RAN Practitioners (2022)**  
[‘Hybrid youth and social work’](#)





This publication has been commissioned by the European Commission and has been prepared by REOC Communications on behalf of RadarEurope, a subsidiary of RadarGroup.