Countering the misuse of gaming-related content & spaces:

Inspiring practices and opportunities for cooperation with tech companies

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RAN

Practitioners

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Introduction

The potential exploitation of video games, gaming (-adjacent) platforms and gaming-related content by extremist actors has become an increasingly debated issue over the last years. International organisations, policymakers, tech companies, researchers and practitioners alike devote a considerable amount of attention to delineating how and why extremist groups of multiple ideological backgrounds have been using gaming content and spaces and what implications this may have on the spread of propaganda as well as radicalisation and recruitment processes ([1]). It is clear that extremist actors have been using video games and gaming chats ([2]), as well as gaming (-adjacent) platforms such as Steam or DLive to disseminate propaganda, livestream attacks, and communicate both with each other and with individuals potentially at risk of radicalising ([3]). They have also incorporated and appropriated gaming-related content and aesthetics in their propaganda outputs ([4]) and sought to gamify the experience of their followers ([5]).

The exploitation of gaming, gaming spaces and gaming-related content is a serious issue. The gaming industry and gaming (-adjacent) platforms have a duty of care to keep all players and users in their gaming communities safe and protected from harmful conduct, including from extremism ([6]). Gamers and whole gaming communities suffer due to the hateful content they encounter in gaming spaces — leading many to withdraw from such communities ([7]). The countermeasures taken by gaming companies and gaming (-adjacent) platforms differ widely as each company applies different standards to content moderation, regulations, deplatforming, banning of users, muting certain terms, supervising chats, etc. Some gaming (-adjacent) platforms and companies with gaming-related products have also joined the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism (GIFCT) to combat extremism in their spaces ([8]).

However, despite the experience of other social media companies that proactive, positive measures are needed to combat extremism, many measures taken by the gaming industry so far are generally solely reactive in nature — e.g. removing content deemed to violate the community standards of the gaming space in question. Actors in preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) actors, on the other hand, have begun to trial active, positive intervention measures in the gaming sphere and have sought to incorporate games, gaming spaces and gaming-related content into their projects. Such proactive measures are crucial for a holistic approach against extremism in gaming spaces and can contribute to making playing video games and the use of gaming (-adjacent) platforms a safer, more positive and more inclusive experience for all users — and prevent the exodus of players and users who wish to remove themselves from hateful content and individuals. **While deplatforming, moderation and other regulatory activities are important, positive interventions can play a *complementary* role to existing reactive approaches, support the *active* facilitation of positive communication in gaming spaces, and benefit the development of safe gaming communities devoid of extremist content.** In other words, positive P/CVE interventions can support the gaming industry's duty of care towards its players.

This RAN Practitioners paper aims to inspire members of the tech and gaming communities to collaborate with P/CVE practitioners and support gaming-related prevention projects. To this end, six key recommendations for the tech industry and several opportunities for collaboration are detailed (see p. 16). This paper presents a range of inspiring practices, which have been implemented by P/CVE actors in the gaming sphere to counter extremists' exploitation of these spaces and provide complementary, positive approaches to deplatforming and other measures. As this paper shows, video games, in-game communication features, gaming (-adjacent) platforms and other gaming-related content can support P/CVE efforts and contribute to more positive, healthy and safe experiences for players and users of all ages. It will

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([1]) Extremism and Gaming Research Network, State of Play: Reviewing the Literature on Gaming & Extremism.
([2]) RAN, Digital Grooming Tactics on Video Gaming & Video Gaming Adjacent Platforms: Threats and Opportunities; Schlegel, Jumanji Extremism : How games and gamification could facilitate radicalization processes; Robinson & Whittaker, Playing for Hate? Extremism, Terrorism, and Videogames.
([3]) Davey, Gamers Who Hate: An Introduction to ISD's Gaming and Extremism Series; Anti-Defamation League, This is Not a Game: How Steam Harbors Extremists.
([4]) Dauber et al., Call of Duty: Jihad – How the Video Game Motif Has Migrated Downstream from Islamic State Propaganda Videos.
([5]) Schlegel, Jumanji Extremism: How games and gamification could facilitate radicalization processes.
([6]) GamesBeat, The gaming industry's 'duty of care' in keeping players safe; Griffith, Call of Duty (of Care): Social Responsibility and the Videogame Industry.
([7]) Schlegel & Amarasingam, Raiding the Dungeon: Examining the Intersection Between Gaming and Extremism; Anti-Defamation League, Free to Play? Hate, Harassment, and Positive Social Experiences in Online Games.
([8]) See: https://gifct.org/

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** ([9])**:**

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 ([10]). 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.

([9]) RAN, Extremists' Use of Video Gaming – Strategies and Narratives, p. 3.
([10]) RAN, Extremists' use of gaming (adjacent) platforms – Insights regarding primary and secondary prevention measures.

6. **Application of gaming (cultural) references:** Gaming cultural references include the use of direct references to popular video games, the incorporation of gamer language (e.g. "respawn") [11], and the appropriation of the visual style and aesthetics of video games in non-game contexts such as text-based communication or (counter-) narrative campaign videos. The potential applications are manifold and provide ample room for the creative use of subcultural knowledge of gaming culture in P/CVE campaigns and for tech and gaming companies to ensure their games are used for positive content to take a stand against extremism.

7. **Gamification:** Gamification refers to "the use of game design elements within non-game contexts" [12] — i.e. the transfer of game components such as points, scoreboards, badges, rankings, quests/missions, guilds, etc. to contexts not traditionally regarded as spaces of play. It has been used in various circumstances, including educational and work-related settings, and can increase users' motivation to engage with content or take a "desired" action by providing entertainment, positive reinforcement, friendly competition and feelings of competency [13]. Theoretically, gamified elements could be used in both online and offline P/CVE projects and may be implemented on a variety of platforms — e.g. via caption contests on Instagram, quests or challenges on TikTok, or collecting points for Twitter posts [14].

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[11] Respawn refers to the re-appearance of a video game avatar after they have been killed.
[12] Deterding et al., From game design elements to gamefulness, p. 9.
[13] Blohm & Leimeister, Gamification: Design of IT-Based Enhancing Services for Motivational Support and Behavioral Change; Sailer et al., How gamification motivates: An experimental study of the effects of specific game design elements on psychological need satisfaction; Robson et al., Is it all a game? Understanding the principles of gamification.
[14] Schlegel, The Role of Gamification in Radicalization Processes; RAN, The gamification of violent extremism & lessons for P/CVE.

Inspiring practices

Generally speaking, video games, gaming spaces and gaming content have not featured prominently in P/CVE projects. Consequently, the number of gaming-related elements used by P/CVE actors and the pool of campaigns to choose from to delineate inspiring practices are relatively limited. Nevertheless, a range of projects have begun to incorporate gaming in the P/CVE context. **The list below constitutes a preliminary record of inspiring P/CVE practices containing gaming-related components and serves as a call for tech companies, gaming firms and gaming associations to increase their attention to the inspiring work already done in this space and to improve collaboration between them, gamers and P/CVE actors to make gaming spaces safer, utilise the positive effects of gaming, and facilitate more tolerant, positive and inclusive gaming communities.**

Production of bespoke video games

DECOUNT

Summary: DECOUNT is a decision-making game developed and delivered by a consortium of Austrian organisations. It is aimed at young people and enables players to learn more about the mechanisms and processes potentially facilitating radicalisation as well as opportunities to thwart such processes through an interactive game. It can be played in German or English and was developed with the help of formerly radicalised individuals as well as teenage test players, who provided feedback on both content and style. Players can choose one of four stories — two on right-wing extremist radicalisation and two on Islamist radicalisation, with two male and two female story leads — and act as the decision-makers for the four protagonists, either leading them down a pathway of radicalisation or not. In the beginning, the decisions seem harmless or even trivial, but the situation progressively escalates.

Key qualities: DECOUNT is highlighted because it focuses on one of the key characteristics of gaming, namely fast decision-making with limited information available, to highlight individual agency in countering or facilitating radicalisation processes. It is mainly driven by character-driven storytelling rather than grandiose visuals, fight scenes or open-world explorations, but because it was developed in cooperation with professional game designers, the game nevertheless looks and "feels" professional. Basing the game on the experiences of formerly radicalised individuals and testing it with young people increased the likelihood that it would be perceived as appealing and engaging by the target audience.

Website: www.extremismus.info

Contact: Daniela Pisoiu, contact@extremismus.info

Gali Fakta

Summary: Gali Fakta is a disinformation inoculation and media literacy game developed by Moonshot and delivered to an Indonesian audience. The game design is based on a family chat group and players can collect points by correctly answering and reacting to a number of situations pertaining to media literacy lessons. If they answer incorrectly, they may lose points and receive information on the correct answer from an in-game character.

Key qualities: Gali Fakta is included here because it was developed with the help of an Indonesian gaming company and distributed via Moonshot's Redirect Method — i.e. it was only shown to users who searched for disinformation online — which ensured that the content matched the Indonesian context and desired audiences were reached. Another key quality of the project is that the game was not only tested with members of the target audience but constantly adjusted based on player retention and bounce rates during the implementation phase. Crucially, engagement with the game was directly compared to a non-game website. On average, users spent over 5 minutes engaging with the media literacy game and only 26 seconds with the media literacy website — i.e. the game generated 12x longer engagement on average than the non-game condition did, an increase of over 1 000 %, which attests to the potential of games and gaming content for P/CVE.

Website: https://moonshotteam.com/

https://moonshotteam.com/resource/advancing-media-literacy-in-indonesia-building-resilience-and-measuring-behavior-change/

Contact: Rachel Fielden, rachel@moonshotteam.com

UNDERSTAND RADICALISATION INTERACTIVELY

Radicalisation is often a gradual process. The game's four protagonists — Marco, Jasmin, Jens and Franziska — are ordinary teenagers. In the course of the game, they find themselves in situations in which they have to make decisions. Depending on their decisions, their story ends up taking — or not taking — a radical turn. The game tries to get across the active role teenagers and adolescents play in shaping their lives and convey that their decisions have consequences. The game's aim is to strengthen teenagers' ability to think critically and raise their awareness of mechanisms of extremist propaganda and of recruiters.
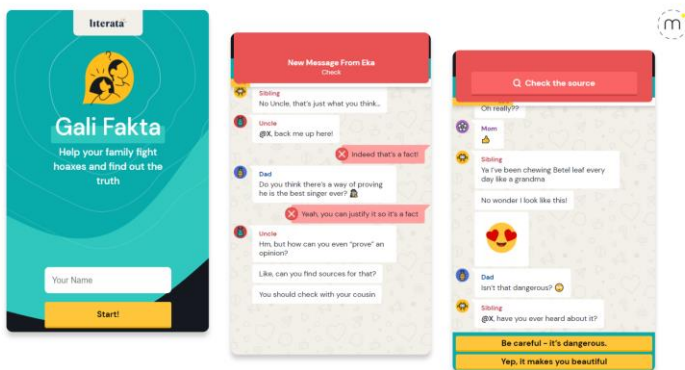
Screenshots from DECOUNT (top) and Gali Fakta (bottom)

There are a number of additional games in the realm of P/CVE and counter-disinformation that are also worth highlighting here. These include: Flashpoint ([15]), Klif ([16]), ISIS the End ([17]), Leon's Identität ([18]), the GAMER project ([19]), and various other games — e.g. produced in the context of different United Nations projects ([20]). **The production of bespoke video games seems to be the primary way P/CVE actors have sought to incorporate gaming into their projects, which presents a clear opportunity to collaborate with gaming companies in making even better video games for the P/CVE context and build upon the promising results described above.** Interestingly, these games usually fall into the realm of primary prevention — i.e. they are aimed at non-radicalised audiences, which suggests that gaming companies would not have to

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([15]) See: https://icct.nl/flashpoints-game/
([16]) See: https://www.klif-game.nl/ [in Dutch]. Please contact reinout@kleinebeerfilm.nl for more information and the login password.
([17]) See: https://isistheend.com/#Accueil [in French].
([18]) See: https://leon.nrw.de/ [in German] .
([19]) The GAMER project developed a Massive Online Battle Arena (MOBA) game mirroring popular MOBAs such as League of Legends. The title of and link to the game are withheld due to security considerations, but the project lead can be contacted for more information via georgew@labenevolencija.org. A recent RAN webinar also provided deeper insights into the GAMER project: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jBtB4k_xW7Y
([20]) See: https://unric.org/en/category/united-nations-digital-engagement-hub/united-nations-video-games/
https://undp-asia-pacific.shorthandstories.com/Level-up-development/index.html
https://mgiep.unesco.org/gamesforpve

engage in direct counter-speech efforts to collaborate with P/CVE actors. Rather, building resilience and inoculating audiences could be the primary goals for such collaborations.

Contrary to the persistent (but unfounded) stigma surrounding the negative effects of video games [21], games can actually have a range of positive effects, including on prosocial behaviour, perspective-taking, the reducing of stereotyping, increase of empathy and knowledge on peaceful conflict resolution [22]. **Gaming companies and game designers could collaborate with P/CVE actors to develop games that elicit positive effects on resilience against radicalisation, inoculate gamers or educate players on related issues. By doing so, they could further emphasise the positive outcomes of gaming and continue to establish games as valuable tools for positive social change.**

P/CVE actors could also support gaming companies to include storylines revolving around radicalisation and extremism into new (mainstream) video games during the design and production phase. Such consulting activities could not only provide gaming companies with relevant information for the correct presentation of such issues in games but also ensure that these topics can be safely included in mainstream games without risking, for instance, a potential normalisation of extremist narratives in the games.

In addition, many existing P/CVE games were produced with obvious budget constraints, leading to relatively simple (binary) decision-making as the main mode of playing and a reliance on text-based gameplay. Multiple games, for instance, use group chats as a way to drive the story forward — which may be easier and cheaper than the production of cut-scenes or open-world games, but potentially also less exciting. In addition, most if not all of these games focus on serious content and much less emphasis seems to have been placed on creating a high entertainment value, "fun" gameplay or less serious storylines. **Professional game designers and gaming companies could also support P/CVE actors in enhancing the entertainment value and storytelling of future bespoke video games. Such collaborations may also facilitate a greater variety in P/CVE games, support the move from decision-making–based games to freer gameplay and, ultimately, allow for the production of more sophisticated video games.**

Modification of existing video games

To the knowledge of the author, there is no publicly available information on modifications of existing video games that have been developed specifically in the context of a P/CVE project or with the explicit goal of taking action against radicalisation, extremism or hate speech. It is possible that such modifications have been developed by individuals in a bottom-up manner, but not by formal P/CVE actors. Therefore, mods present a hitherto largely unexplored possibility for P/CVE. Modifying existing games may be a convenient route to utilising the appeal of popular video games the target audience already enjoys and decreasing the amount of time and financial resources gaming companies, game designers and P/CVE actors would need to dedicate to developing gaming-related interventions.

Game designers and companies producing video games may be especially suitable entities to collaborate with P/CVE actors on the design and release of modifications with P/CVE content to ensure a high quality of the modification as well as their general fit to the main game. By doing so, these companies could offer their players additional (side-) stories or additional ways to win the game while simultaneously making a positive impact on preventing extremism and radicalisation. For instance, a number of gamers have attempted to complete first-person shooter games without making a single kill [23]. Mods developed with P/CVE actors could engage players seeking such unusual gaming experiences or challenges and concurrently provide an opportunity to educate players on non-violent conflict resolution.

In addition, existing popular games have also been adapted to educational contexts, including peace education, conflict resolution and related fields [24]. **Gaming companies could work with P/CVE actors on adaptations of their existing games to the context of preventing or inoculating against extremism**

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[21] American Psychological Association, APA Reaffirms Position on Violent Video Games and Violent Behavior.

[22] Gentile et al., The effects of prosocial video games on prosocial behaviors; Greitemeyer & Osswald, Effects of prosocial video games on prosocial behavior; Alhabash & Wise, PeaceMaker: Changing Students' Attitudes Toward Palestinians and Israelis Through Video Game Play; Alhabash & Wise, Playing their game: Changing stereotypes of Palestinians and Israelis through videogame play.

[23] See: https://www.transcend.org/tms/2019/02/what-can-video-games-teach-us-about-peace/

[24] Darvasi, Empathy, perspective and complicity: how digital games can support peace education and conflict resolution.
See also: https://education.minecraft.net/

and radicalisation. By doing so, they could further emphasise the positive, prosocial effects of video games and encourage educators and youth workers to use their games as tools in their work.

Use of in-game communication features

Similarly, in-game communication features such as video game chats have rarely been used by P/CVE actors — likely due to practical issues of access: in order to use in-game features effectively, one needs to play the game and be embedded in the community, which would require practitioners to spend part of their working hours playing and making connections to other players in the game. It also requires real-time engagement, for instance in group chats, which may be most active outside of regular 9-5 office hours. In addition, it is unclear at this point in time which (if any) games are (most) exploited by extremist groups.

Gaming companies could benefit from collaborating with P/CVE actors to delineate which (if any) of their games are exploited by extremist actors or radicalised individuals and, subsequently, how to implement P/CVE measures to make the games safer, inclusive and extremist-free spaces. After being granted access to in-game communication features, P/CVE actors could trial established digital P/CVE practices such as digital youth work in an in-game context. They may also be able to assist in monitoring and analysing in-game communication to identify problematic discourses or at-risk users. Doing so would be a significant step to take proactive measures not simply to delete content or ban users but to identify and work with at-risk individuals before they radicalise. Considering that a recent study by the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism found that many gamers leave gaming communities in which they witness extremist, racist, anti-Semitic, misogynistic, homophobic or other toxic content ([25]), and that by proactively countering the spread of such content, in collaboration with P/CVE actors, gaming companies could facilitate a more positive atmosphere amongst their players and prevent gamers from removing themselves from such spaces.

Playing games to open lines of communication

Cops vs Kids and Gamen Met De Politie

Summary: Cops vs Kids, initiated and implemented by the North Yorkshire Police (UK), and Gamen Met De Politie (Gaming With The Police), initiated and implemented by the Dutch police, operate on the same assumption: by playing video games with young people, police agencies can open channels of communication to (potentially vulnerable) audiences, which would otherwise be difficult to reach. Through the shared experience of gaming, barriers and insecurities may be overcome, conversations on a range of issues may emerge, and young people may feel comfortable to approach the police officers with questions and concerns. Both projects used popular existing video games to target audiences familiar with games such as Fifa or Rocket League.

Key qualities: Cops vs Kids and Gamen Met De Politie are of interest because these projects seek to utilise and build on the popularity of well-known video games to break down communication barriers and engage with young people and potentially hard-to-reach or vulnerable audiences. Employing existing games on existing consoles ensures that the approach is easy to set up and adapt to various (national or local) circumstances, because it does not require a high amount of (financial) resources or training; it makes use of what already exists and what audiences are familiar with. The two projects demonstrate that the approach can be used for both online and offline communication with target audiences — Gamen Met De Politie was implemented online, whereas Cops vs Kids took place in a youth centre via LAN. Cops vs Kids in particular also illustrates the cooperation between a law enforcement agency and an e-sports association — a collaboration other P/CVE actors may seek to emulate.

Website: https://gamenmetdepolitie.nl/
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WIxx9mp8z8M [Video on the Cops vs Kids pilot]

Contact: Stefan Jansen, Stefan.jansen.1@politie.nl
Chris Simpson, chris.simpson@northyorkshire.police.uk

([25]) Schlegel & Amarasingam, Raiding the Dungeon: Examining the Intersection Between Gaming and Extremism.

Going forward, gaming organisations such as e-sports associations, gaming/tech companies or popular gamers could support such approaches — e.g. by advertising such initiatives, inviting similar P/CVE projects to their conventions, or, in the case of gamers, participating in such events. The projects discussed above illustrate that gaming can make a positive impact on local communities, including strengthening the connection to potential at-risk communities. Supporting such initiatives would further demonstrate the inclusivity and positive effects of gaming to strengthen all kinds of social bonds. **Gaming and e-sports associations could also connect P/CVE actors to e-sports athletes and other prominent gamers. Similar to, for instance, football players participating in campaigns against racism, e-sports athletes and popular gamers could act as role models and good examples for those who look up to them and collaborate with P/CVE actors to take a stance *against* extremism, violence, racism, anti-Semitism or related issues and *for* tolerance, diversity, inclusion and a positive gaming culture.**

Presence on gaming (-adjacent) platforms

Good Gaming – Well Played Democracy

Summary: Good Gaming – Well Played Democracy is a project developed by the Amadeu Antonio Foundation that seeks to inform, empower and support both gaming communities and practitioners in taking action against extremism and hate speech in gaming spaces. The core component of the project is the monitoring of right-wing extremist activities on gaming (-adjacent) platforms such as Discord and Steam. The information gathered during monitoring is then used to develop workshops, recommendations for gamers and publications. It is also used as a foundation for digital youth work carried out on gaming (-adjacent) platforms and related spaces such as YouTube and Instagram. During the digital youth work, users potentially at risk of radicalising and engaging with right-wing extremist material are addressed in a one-to-many approach with the option to begin one-to-one conversations should the opportunity arise.

Key qualities: Good Gaming – Well Played Democracy is featured here because it builds the P/CVE components of the project on the knowledge gained from monitoring of extremist activities on gaming (-adjacent) platforms. This ensures that all P/CVE measures — from workshops to publishing recommendations for gamers, and digital youth work — are built on a solid understanding of the structure, conventions, tone and types of content posted on gaming-related platforms as well as substantial subcultural knowledge on the modes of communication employed by extremist actors in such spaces. Because the project combines monitoring and P/CVE, practitioners benefit from up-to-date information and knowledge on trends generated through the monitoring, which allows for the immediate adaptation of approaches should such change be required. In addition, the project illustrates that there is no need to "reinvent the wheel" for P/CVE in gaming spaces but that existing approaches such as digital youth work can be adapted and transferred to the gaming context.

Website: https://www.amadeu-antonio-stiftung.de/projekte/good-gaming-well-played-democracy/

Contact: Mick Prinz, goodgaming@amadeu-antonio-stiftung.de

Gamers For Peace

Summary: Gamers for Peace is a project by Veterans for Peace aimed at creating more positive, inclusive gaming communities. In addition to currently developing multiple e-sports teams, the project members have been livestreaming on Twitch and YouTube [26] and manage an open Discord server. Through the Discord server, users are informed about current initiatives and can take digital action or coordinate offline events, choose different roles

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in various sub-projects, socialize and play with each other, share their experiences and suggest new Gamers for Peace projects.

Key qualities: Gamers for Peace is featured here because it takes a multi-channel approach and makes use of the particular characteristics and opportunities afforded by two different gaming (-adjacent) platforms, namely Twitch and Discord. It is also a community project and illustrates how bottom-up initiatives can be coordinated via gaming (-adjacent) platforms and how users can be empowered to take (digital) action. Through predefined project roles such as "Peace Goblin", users are playfully motivated to join initiatives and take on different responsibilities within gaming spaces.

Website: https://www.veteransforpeace.org/take-action/gamers-peace

Contact: Chris Velazquez, gamers4peace@veteransforpeace.org

Gaming (-adjacent) platforms could benefit from collaborating with P/CVE actors who seek to utilise their platforms for a range of intervention measures, including digital youth work, the support of bottom-up counter-speech, identifying at-risk users to begin a conversation with these users, livestreaming or other types of projects. While content moderation and deplatforming efforts are crucial, complementary proactive and positive intervention measures could not only make platforms safer but facilitate a more positive atmosphere within the communities of users. Users may be inspired to work with professional P/CVE actors in a bottom-up manner and take ownership of the communities they are part of — e.g. by reporting problematic content and users but also by working towards a more positive, inclusive discussion culture in these spaces. In addition, gaming (-adjacent) platforms could support collaborations between successful streamers and P/CVE actors. **As streamers are important role models for young target audiences, their involvement as credible messengers and ambassadors against extremism could enhance the success of P/CVE campaigns involving livestreaming** [27]**.**

Application of gaming (cultural) references

Jamal al-Khatib

Summary: Jamal al-Khatib is a counter- and alternative narrative campaign implemented on YouTube and Instagram by the Austrian organisation TURN. It aims to reach teenagers and young adults in Austria and Germany who might be interested in jihadist narratives or have already encountered jihadist propaganda and may be considered at risk of radicalising. The video campaign utilises gaming cultural references by appropriating the visual style and aesthetics of popular video games, especially first-person shooter games [28]. This includes, for instance, depicting the main character as an avatar-like, shadowy hero similar to, for example, the main character in the *Assassin's Creed* video games (image 1), adopting certain camera angles and over-the-shoulder shots (image 2), showing game-like fight scenes (image 3), and employing Quran verses like instructions in a video game tutorial (image 4).

Key qualities: Jamal al-Khatib is showcased because it utilises gaming (cultural) references and the pop-cultural appeal of popular, widely known video games outside of gaming. By incorporating the visual style of first-person shooter games into the counter-narrative/alternative narrative video campaign, the project transfers the aesthetic allure and attractiveness of gaming media to a non-gaming context. This presents a subtle yet effective way to employ gaming cultural references in a P/CVE intervention without the need for additional, gaming-specific project components. It demonstrates how the use of gaming references can be used in and improve existing P/CVE approaches such as narrative campaigns. As Islamist extremist groups such as the so-called Islamic State have sought to use the appropriation of video game aesthetics in their propaganda outputs to reach young (Western) men, mirroring this strategy is a suitable choice for P/CVE campaigns to attract the attention of young target audiences that are both familiar with gaming culture and potentially at risk of radicalisation.

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[27] For example, a smaller project by the German Federal Agency for Civic Education collaborated with two YouTubers and a streamer to combat fake news. See: https://www.bpb.de/lernen/bewegtbild-und-politische-bildung/webvideo/unfake/ [in German].
[28] Ali et al., 'You're Against *Dawla*, But You're Listening to Their *Nasheeds*?' Appropriating Jihadi Audiovisualities in the Online Streetwork Project Jamal Al-Khatib–My Path!, p. 232.

Website: https://www.bpb.de/lernen/bewegtbild-und-politische-bildung/webvideo/jamal/
https://www.youtube.com/c/JamalalKhatib/videos

Contact: Felix Lippe, info@turnprevention.com

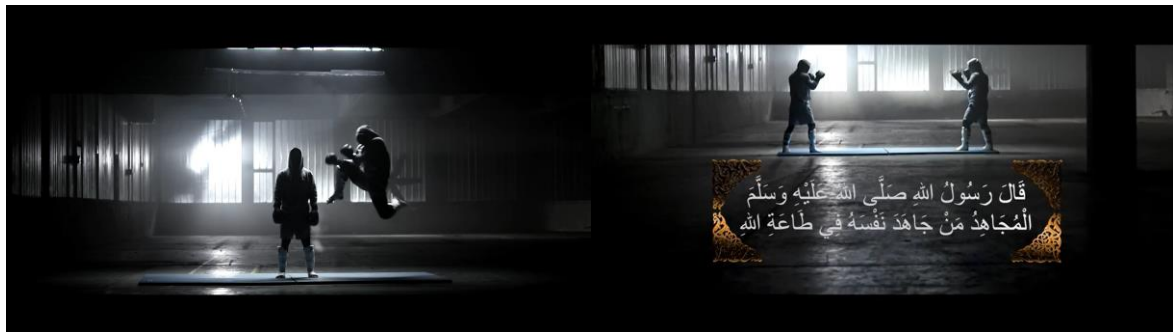Image 1: Jamal al-Khatib 1(4) ([29]); Image 2: Jamal al-Khatib 2(3) ([30])

Image 3 & 4: Jamal al-Khatib 1(3) ([31])

While Jamal al-Khatib appropriated a general video game aesthetic without direct support from the gaming industry, game designers, game production companies and tech companies could support P/CVE projects in making more concrete and specific gaming cultural references. This could take place, for instance, by sharing their subcultural and expert knowledge on game aesthetics and making suggestions on which particular games would lend themselves for the use in such gaming cultural references or in seeking to reach specific target audiences. Videos and images appropriating gaming-related references and aesthetics could be used on a variety of platforms — not only gaming (-adjacent) platforms but also other social media channels such as Instagram — to draw attention to P/CVE content.

Gamification

Detect Then Act

Summary: Detect Then Act (DTCT) is a project against online hate speech delivered by a consortium of NGOs, tech companies and research institutions from multiple European countries. It uses artificial intelligence to detect online hate speech and then encourages "upstanders" — volunteers from various European countries who received training on countering digital hate — to respond to the hateful messages with text-based comments, GIFs or humorous cat memes. DTCT has incorporated several different gamification elements, including a dashboard tracking the development of various types of digital hate speech detection in progress graphs and scores indicating a post's reach, threat level, and the degree of racism, sexism, etc. identified in it. In addition, the project included the #1dayofonlinehappiness online event, in which upstanders were divided into teams and engaged in a friendly

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([29]) Mein Bruder - Mein Weg: Jamal al-Khatib (Teil 4 von 4): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cDDDqwTlTs0&t=154s [in German].
([30]) Ehre - Mein Weg: Jamal al-Khatib (Staffel 2, Folge 3): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yRb3lLxOllA [in German].
([31]) Jihad an-Nafs - Mein Weg: Jamal al-Khatib (Teil 3 von 4): https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=AqRbiHqPwvQ [in German].

competition of who could respond to more hateful posts within 24 hours. The teams received points for each post they replied to as well as every reaction (comment, like, share) their reply received, which were then displayed on a scoreboard.

Key qualities: DTCT is highlighted because it demonstrates that gamification elements can be incorporated into P/CVE campaigns with relatively little effort. Elements such as initiating cooperation by dividing contributors into teams, employing a straightforward way to collect points and keep score, as well as displaying progress bars, are simple yet effective ways to present a group's achievements and motivate individuals to take action and contribute. While a higher degree of gamification may yield even more impact, DTCT illustrates that even a limited number of gamified elements can support P/CVE projects in generating engagement and reaching their goals.

Website: https://dtct.eu/

Contact: Gijs van Beek, info@textgain.com
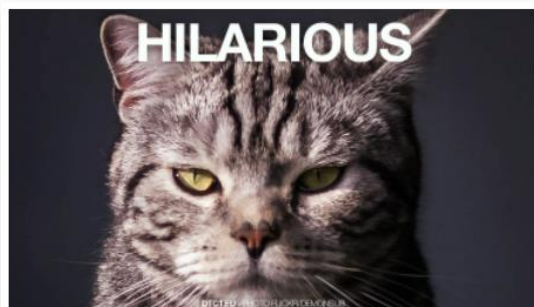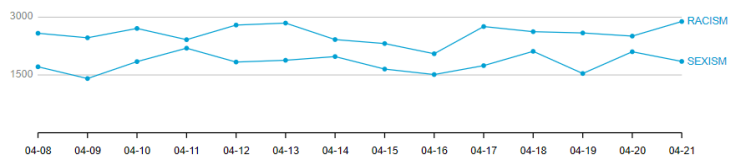
Screenshots from the "upstander" dashboard of DTCT and suggested cat memes

DTCT used only a few and relatively simple gamification mechanisms. Going forward, gamification experts and game designers could support P/CVE actors who may want to design projects with more sophisticated and/or elaborate gamification elements. In doing so, game designers and gamification experts may collect further evidence on the possibility to influence behaviour through gamification elements and explore how far it may also contribute to deterring certain behaviours such as radicalisation — valuable case studies for the future of gamification applications.

Areas of collaboration between gaming companies and P/CVE actors

As shown, a range of P/CVE projects have sought to incorporate videogames, gaming (-adjacent) platforms and gaming-related content. However, gaming is only beginning to be explored by P/CVE actors. While it is likely that many existing P/CVE measures, such as digital youth work, can be adapted and transferred to gaming spaces and it is not necessary to completely "reinvent the wheel" to incorporate gaming into P/CVE, there is nevertheless room for improvement and innovation to enhance gaming-related interventions. There are several areas of collaboration between actors working in the gaming sphere and P/CVE actors, which may contribute to such improvements.

Areas of collaboration

1. **Research:** Research on gaming and extremism is still in its infancy. Consequently, there is no substantial basis of knowledge that gaming companies and P/CVE actors could build upon to decide which games or gaming spaces should be prioritised or are especially suitable for P/CVE measures and how (if at all) the exploitation of gaming spaces by extremists influences radicalisation or recruitment. **By collaborating with academics and think tanks in the P/CVE space, gaming companies could collect more data and broaden their knowledge on how extremists seek to exploit gaming to, subsequently, be able to counter it effectively in conjunction with P/CVE actors.**

2. **Practical experiences:** Although, as we have seen, a number of P/CVE projects have sought to incorporate gaming and gaming-related content, there is still a lack of practical experiences of what "works" and what does not work for P/CVE in the gaming sphere. **Gaming companies could encourage and support P/CVE actors in implementing more practical projects and, through a trial-and-error method, gain insights into which measures are most suitable for which gaming space, how to improve the safety and positive atmosphere in gaming-related spaces through P/CVE projects, and which forms of collaboration between gaming companies and P/CVE actors are most effective.**

3. **Subcultural knowledge:** Communicating effectively with gamers, being part of and posting appealing content on gaming (-adjacent) platforms, and the use of gaming language and gaming cultural references requires substantial subcultural knowledge. P/CVE campaigns without such subcultural knowledge are bound to fail. **Gaming companies and other gaming-related actors have an interest in having the most effective P/CVE measures possible on their platforms and games, and by collaborating with P/CVE actors, they could ensure that a sufficient amount of subcultural knowledge and knowledge of the specific gaming community in question is included into the design and implementation of the project.**

4. **Platform knowledge:** P/CVE actors need to know how to navigate gaming (-adjacent) platforms, each of which presents a different set of opportunities and challenges. Each platform has a different structure, logic, conventions for interactions, tone and content standards. These specificities need to be understood and adhered to for successful P/CVE campaigns on gaming-related platforms. **Gaming (-adjacent) platforms could benefit from a close collaboration with P/CVE actors designing and implementing projects on their platforms by sharing their platform knowledge to ensure that the project is a good match to the specific characteristics and affordances of their platform.**

5. **Skills:** Researching and monitoring activities, playing video games with target audiences, and the production of bespoke games or modifications require gaming skills and technical expertise. Certain areas, such as in-game chats, may only be accessed with a sufficiently high level of skills pertaining to a specific game. Similarly, livestreaming may seem like an easy and straightforward activity but may necessitate substantial preparation and mastery before it draws audiences. **In order to make P/CVE interventions effective, P/CVE actors either need to learn such skills or — the more fruitful alternative — to collaborate with gaming experts and gaming companies to build sophisticated P/CVE interventions with gaming components together.**

6. **Funding:** It is not unusual to advocate for more funding for all areas of P/CVE. However, in the gaming sphere, more sophisticated interventions (e.g. better video game design, gamification beyond "pointification", etc.) will be more successful as audiences are used to professionally made gaming-related content. **Gaming-related companies could fund P/CVE projects to be implemented in their games and on their platforms — ensuring not only enough budget for sophisticated interventions but also guaranteeing that the project suits the goals and characteristics of the gaming space it is supposed to be implemented in by collaborating closely with the P/CVE actors involved.**

7. **Expertise:** Relatedly, some P/CVE interventions — e.g. those seeking to produce bespoke video games — require specialist expertise. This includes not only technical expertise and game design skills but also creative resources and experience with high-quality storytelling in a gaming context — e.g. expertise in developing games with a high entertainment value. Gaming cultural references, especially

in the form of appropriating video game aesthetics, may also require such expertise. Similarly, while gamification may seem straightforward, more sophisticated and elaborate gamified interventions may benefit from a professional perspective. **Again, gaming companies could benefit from sharing their expertise with the P/CVE actors they collaborate with to ensure that gaming-related interventions are professionally designed, are a good fit for the gaming space in question and match the expectations of the gaming communities the companies cater to.**

Key recommendations for the cooperation between P/CVE actors and tech/gaming companies

Recommendations

1. **Knowledge & information exchange:** Knowledge and information exchange formats are essential for a collaboration between tech stakeholders and P/CVE organisations. Tech/gaming companies may benefit from the exchange, for instance by gathering information on recent propaganda trends, emerging extremist groups, or knowledge on how and why extremist actors move from platform to platform. They may also profit from a deeper understanding of the campaigns run in their games or on their platforms as well as the problems P/CVE actors encounter in seeking to utilise these spaces. GIFCT and the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) are two organisations that could provide a framework for such exchange formats, but other arrangements should be discussed as well. P/CVE actors can benefit from a deeper understanding of video games, platforms and company policies as well as from trends identified by content moderators — who may often be the first to catch changes in discourses. Ideally, tech companies could support P/CVE practitioners in delineating the spaces in which countermeasures to extremism may be most needed and provide them with an introduction to the subcultural practices and knowledge necessary to navigate these spaces.

2. **Training:** The provision of trainings and training material may also be beneficial for both sides. Tech/gaming companies have expert knowledge on all aspects of their products, including game elements, game design, platform characteristics, how to generate reach in gaming spaces, etc., which would be tremendously beneficial to P/CVE actors. P/CVE organisations, on the other hand, may be able to support the training of content and community moderators in identifying and reacting to extremist propaganda, provide guidelines and recommendations to affected moderators/streamers/users, and aid the judgment of difficult individual cases — e.g. decisions on whether a user exhibiting problematic behaviour should be referred to an NGO working on deradicalisation or to law enforcement agencies.

3. **Complementing reactive approaches:** While deleting content and deplatforming actors are valuable measures, it is clear that these measures are not sufficient. A more holistic approach is needed. Positive interventions and countermeasures could complement such reactive approaches and existing efforts of moderation and regulation to facilitate safer, more positive and inclusive gaming communities. P/CVE actors have the necessary expertise and tools developed in other digital contexts to support gaming companies in the design and implementation of such active, positive interventions. Hence, a collaboration between gaming companies and P/CVE actors could provide vital avenues to proactively prevent extremist discourses in gaming spaces and build gaming communities every gamer feels welcome in.

4. **Direct collaboration:** Direct collaborations could take many forms and occur in all project phases (planning, design, implementation, evaluation). Tech/gaming companies may lend their creative and technical expertise to P/CVE actors seeking to create P/CVE projects with gaming elements, support the production of bespoke games and modifications, grant P/CVE practitioners access to in-game chats, prioritise and upgrade P/CVE content on their platforms, help promote P/CVE campaigns, support bottom-up counter-speech efforts driven by their user communities, test and give feedback on planned P/CVE measures, and support impact evaluations with the data they collected about a P/CVE campaign on their platform or in their game. Direct collaboration is likely the most effective way to

ensure that P/CVE projects meet the needs of gaming companies in making gaming spaces safer and gaming communities positive spaces of interaction devoid of harmful content.

5. **Indirect collaboration:** Collaboration may also take place in an indirect fashion — e.g. through informal consultations and advisory activities, by exchanging information with P/CVE actors about new trend, countermeasures and lessons learned, by displaying information to users on their platforms about how to reach and access support by P/CVE actors, by supporting research efforts (e.g. by sharing surveys within their network of gamers), or simply by protecting P/CVE actors from having their accounts blocked or deleted when extremist groups orchestrate coordinated shitstorms against them or instigate hundreds of users to report a P/CVE account. This type of collaboration may also involve connecting P/CVE actors to e-sports athletes, clubs and gaming associations as well as to successful streamers and gaming influencers, who may then take part in P/CVE campaigns.

6. **Funding:** Lastly, tech/gaming companies may support P/CVE efforts financially — e.g. by providing funds to projects and organisations seeking to implement creative, innovative and promising P/CVE measures on their platforms or in their video games or by funding research on gaming and extremism, for example through the Extremism and Gaming Research Network. As funders, these companies could collaborate closely with P/CVE actors in designing and implementing exactly the right P/CVE measures for a particular game or platform and ensure that the project is a good fit for both the characteristics of the gaming space in question and the specific gaming community the company caters to.

Further reading

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