Ex post paper
RAN CSEP kick-off workshop
Brussels (BE)

EX POST PAPER

EU Internet Forum – Civil Society Empowerment Programme

Kick-off workshop

Introduction

Terrorist and violent extremist groups continue to radicalise, groom, polarise and incite vulnerable individuals with their sophisticated material and rapid means of dissemination online. To drown out terrorist propaganda and messages of hate, credible voices providing alternatives need to be amplified. Civil society is best placed to counter violent extremist oratory online through moderate voices offering alternative paths to people targeted by terrorist recruiters.

To support civil society in providing alternatives to the violent extremist and terrorist narratives online, the European Commission, supported by partners from the internet industry (Facebook, Twitter, Google/YouTube) and the ESCN, has launched the Civil Society Empowerment Programme (CSEP) within the framework of the EU Internet Forum.

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Civil Society Empowerment Programme

Luigi Soreca, Director for Security at the European Commission's Directorate General for Migration and Home Affairs, opened the kick-off workshop for the Civil Society Empowerment Programme (CSEP) that took place on 15 and 16 March 2017 in Brussels. In the context of the EU Internet Forum, focus was not only on reducing extremist content online but also on empowering civil society organisations (CSOs) to develop alternative and counter narratives. To date, this has been supported via different initiatives, such as RAN and the European Strategic Communication Network (ESCN), as well as national initiatives; however focus now needs to shift to ramping up the scale and coordination of these efforts across the EU. With this in mind, Commissioner Avramopoulos launched CSEP at the 2nd EU Internet Forum in December 2016. CSEP will bring together two vibrant sectors, CSOs and social media platforms, and build a sustainable community that joins the two.

Starting in April, the RAN Centre of Excellence will roll out a capacity-building training programme in all EU Member States. The training has been developed in collaboration with the industry partners and the ESCN, and is intended to empower civil society actors who often have a credible voice, but lack the technical know-how to create and deliver messages and campaigns in a targeted manner. In this first phase of CSEP, the training will be delivered to 400+ CSOs across Europe.

Additionally, the European Commission intends to support civil society partners as they develop and implement effective campaigns across the EU. A call for proposals is foreseen for after the summer, inviting consortia of CSOs and private partners to submit proposals for the implementation of effective campaigns. Campaigns are expected to start in early 2018. More information will be provided on the website and in the CSEP and RAN newsletters in due course.

Insights and lessons shared by the expert panel

At the kick-off, an expert panel presented insights and lessons learned on alternative and counter narratives.

Extremists' behaviour online
VOX-Pol (the Network of Excellence for Research on Violent Online Political Extremism)[1] gave an overview of developments over the last 12 months in relation to terrorist behaviour online.
- In 2016 Daesh suffered a significant decline in online communication. This can be traced back to Daesh's reduced capability and output on the one hand, and internet companies' efforts to ensure their platforms do not host Daesh content (e.g. Twitter has been successful in curbing its use by Daesh) on the other. Despite the decline, online Daesh propaganda remains a challenge.
- In parallel, however, right-wing violent extremism has been on an upward trajectory and has been able to thrive online, with more and more people creating content. The migration crisis and the US elections fuelled this trend.
- There is an urgent need to focus actions against both Daesh and right-wing extremist material, so as to avoid escalation on both sides.
- Other splinter groups and extremist organisations on both sides of the spectrum have also been left largely unchallenged online.

Platforms used
- The extreme right has been using traditional forums such as 4chan and Reddit.
- Telegram (effective for communication) and YouTube (mostly in combination with other platforms) continue to be widely used by extremists.
- Live streaming, such as on Facebook or Periscope, may become more popular in the future.

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Counter- and alternative narratives

Although the internet and social media are exploited by extremists to spread their propaganda, they are also channels to plant seeds of doubt. Although online communication activities are not deradicalisation tools in themselves, they can be used as preventative tools, offering individuals multiple/different perspectives on societal challenges and, directly or indirectly, challenging extremist ideas. Where Counter Narratives (CNs) directly deconstruct, discredit and demystify violent extremist messaging, Alternative Narratives (ANs) undercut violent extremist narratives by focusing on what we are 'for' rather than 'against', or by putting forward a positive story about social values, such as tolerance, openness, freedom and democracy. Narratives can vary from the micro-level focusing on disengagement of individuals to a broader societal approach at the macro-level. Each narrative requires a distinct approach in terms of message, messenger, dissemination, tactics and partnerships.

Some lessons learned on online campaigning are highlighted below:

- Different target audiences need different types of narratives.
- We can only influence people's thinking under specific circumstances. The challenge is to find a window to change hearts and minds.
- We need not only awareness-raising campaigns, but campaigns to change behaviour:
  - to start or adopt a new behaviours;
  - ending something damaging / avoiding the adoption of a negative or harmful behaviour; and/or
  - changing an existing behaviour.
- This is very hard to do, and requires a qualitative assessment of impact / behavioural change.
- Online campaigns can be counterproductive, but not a lot of research had been done in this field. VOX-Pol will therefore conduct research into the effect of online initiatives (what works, what does not work?).

- A lot of campaigns are monologues. Sometimes this is good enough, but more can be achieved by creating dialogue.

The GAMMMA model and marketing techniques
- The GAMMMA model provides a useful framework for building a campaign:
  - Goal
  - Audience
  - Message
  - Messenger
  - Medium
  - Action
- You need to be clear about the goals of your activity and know who you want to reach out to. If this is not clear, a lot of opportunities are missed.
- Often goals / objectives – and the audience – are too broad. Make sure they are specific and measurable. Know your audience well, by going beyond demographics:
  - How do they receive and transfer information?
  - What context are they living in?
  - Who are their influencers?
  - Who is sending and sharing?
  - What language do they use?
  - How do they think?
- Make sure you are familiar with their language so that you can get your message across, and do not spread something your audience is not looking for.
- Campaigns should focus on showing what your target audience can do. Include a call to action:
  - only ask for one action;
  - make it social;
  - show that it's what everyone else is doing;
  - use the power of networks – collective action, and mutual support.
  - get people to make a public commitment.

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Important tips and tricks from social media companies

Some of the largest social media platforms in the world are official partners of CSEP. In order to effectively campaign on these platforms, it is important to be aware of their specific characteristics and the tools available.

Facebook
Facebook can count over 1.86 billion active users. One billion photos are uploaded every day. Within this enormous volume of content, dealing with extremist propaganda, hate speech and other inappropriate items is a challenge. Facebook relies on their users to flag content as inappropriate, and around 100 million items are flagged every week. The platform's policies are laid out in its community standards.

Among the billions of posts, there are also many that counter hate speech, extremism and other inappropriate content. This happens organically every day, without Facebook promoting it. However, there are tips and considerations CSOs can take into account to make counter-speech campaigns on Facebook even more effective:

Tips for campaigning on Facebook
- Counter speech for the sake of counter speech doesn't work. Users are more likely to interact if an initiative relates to news and current affairs; this is more relevant to the audience.
- Counter-speech campaigners should not feel obliged to post 100 times a day. Research shows that posting once a week can be very effective.
- A credible voice, as well as the form and tone of speech, are very important. This should be considered before launching a campaign, and not after.
- The message should differ depending on whether it targets hate speech creators, hate speech sympathisers, indirect influencers, or society in general.

- Content works when it's conversational, authentic and seems like a real person's voice.
- Visuals will catch the viewer's eye.
- Keep content on Facebook simple and short. For more extensive information, you can post links to your website.
- If a former extremist reaches out, it is more effective to be casual, especially with those who are the most difficult to reach.[2]
- If CSOs do not acquire EU funding through CSEP, Facebook may be able to give seed grants to help get campaigns started.

Tools
- 'Insights' on the group page tells you about your online reach and engagement. Use this information to strategically adjust your campaign.
- 'Facebook Live' can be used for broadcasts and notifications. These are useful for hot topic Q&As, breaking news, interviews, performances and behind the scenes reports. Some pointers for using FB Live:
  o tell people when you're going to be broadcasting;
  o write a catchy description before going live;
  o ask viewers to subscribe to Live notifications;
  o broadcast for longer periods to reach more people (up to 90 minutes);
  o Let people know when you're signing off.
- For videos, aim for clips of 30-60 seconds for maximum engagement. Make a teaser video that leads to a longer one.
- Boost a post. It is possible to target a very specific target audience with a boosted post.

More detailed information is available at https://nonprofits.fb.com/.[3]

Twitter
People use Twitter to express themselves, give other people a voice, form a movement and ask questions. However, 40 % of Twitter users simply listen and do not tweet themselves. Users benefit

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greatly from following others and following trends. Conversations on Twitter move very quickly: the trending topic of today can be old news tomorrow.

The reach of Twitter is not restricted to its users: Twitter is entirely public. Both users and people without an account can see your tweets. So measuring success is not just about retweets and followers.

Tips on campaigning on Twitter
- Campaigns do not have to revolve around new ideas. Some of the best-known movements on Twitter existed outside of Twitter first, e.g. #BlackLivesMatter. This online campaign joined the dots of campaigns taking place across the country and made the topic a national conversation.
- Personality matters. Publish everyday content – be personal, show compassion and engage with your audience. Use this to build a relationship with your followers. The. Dalai Lama is a good example of this approach.
- Talk and behave as you would in the real world. If a tweet reads like it's been written by a lawyer, people probably won't read it.
- Not all of your tweets need to be about extremism. Talk about things that interest your target group. Sell 20 % of the time, build relations 80 % of the time.
- Draw your audience closer with a regular Q&A session.
- The number of people you follow shows how much you communicate/engage.
- Alternative narrative is not about direct confrontation, e.g. #RefugeesWelcome. Counter-narratives are about opposing another narrative e.g. #OpenYourEyes.
- Use intellectual ammunition. Educate people. Success isn't immediate, small steps and endurance matter. Success comes from consistent education and persuasion as your personality comes out and credibility grows.
- Don't create a new campaign account as you won't be able to use it afterwards. Build it into your own account with a hashtag.

- Stay disciplined. Don't delay to strive for perfection.
- Go live – think about where the audience is, how you are relevant, signpost people, don't shout at them.
- Calls to action: be clear and direct.
- Many conversations taking place on Twitter are in response to traditional media. Press coverage leads to an online reaction, e.g. #1in5Muslims.
- Pick a good picture. Even if you have an account for an organisation, you can still use pictures of people. They make it more personal. Natural pictures are always more effective.
- Experiment and measure to see what works, and repeat what does. Post the same video at three different times of day. Tweet timing matters.

Tools
- Mute and block.
  Mute: You don't see that person's notifications, and they won't know about it. Block: The persons know you've blocked his/her account.
  Mute is less antagonistic. You can now also mute certain content, e.g. anyone who tweets you with the hashtag #Brexit.
- Pin a tweet. A pinned tweet always stays at the top of your profile.
- Tweet pictures and videos. Tweets with pictures get more retweets. Tweets with videos get six times as many retweets as those with pictures.
- 80 % of the users only use Twitter on mobile phones. Since most mobile phone users mute the sound, subtitles are important when posting videos.
- Use hashtags wisely. If someone can't pronounce a hashtag, they will probably not use it. Keep hashtags short and simple.
- You can't tweet someone unless you're connected to them. There is however a function allowing anyone to tweet you for a private conversation.

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- If you have more than 140 characters, use tweet stops. Reply to your own tweet to do this.
- www.tweetdeck.twitter.com allows you to filter information. For instance, you can search for every tweet containing a certain word that has been retweeted more than x times.

More information can be found in the Twitter handbook for NGOs.[4]

YouTube
The types of content that have grown popular on YouTube are those for which there is no other outlet for discussing the topic. People look for information not covered by traditional media. Educational content is a key growth area. When browsing, users can go down a 'rabbit hole', diving deeper and deeper into a topic.

Over 50 % of millennials say that a YouTube video has changed their lives, suggesting that YouTube can be used to interact with (vulnerable) young people.

A vocal minority is currently using social media for hate and young people can be receptive to their arguments. It is better to adopt an alternative narrative approach for YouTube, rather than a counter-narrative approach. Experience has shown that some counter-narrative initiatives had to be taken down as they violated YouTube's policies.

Tips for campaigning on YouTube
- TV-quality content is not required.
- Draft a content strategy. Plan a series of videos. You have to build an audience.
- Create conversation – talking to your audience is a powerful tool because it builds loyalty and repeat views. There are different ways to be conversational and it doesn't have to be all face-to-camera shots.
- Don't sound preachy. Viewers need to feel that the person understands them.
- Create consistency – (schedule, personality, format, voice). If you're going to have a

schedule, advertise it. Consider a consistent host or use a consistent format, as TEDx does.
- Sustainability – see how many episodes you can get out of a single idea. Build an audience that will want to come back every time, e.g. by using the same format.
- Discoverability – YouTube is more similar to a catalogue than Twitter or Facebook. People come back to view old content. It is therefore important that your videos are easy to find. Use keywords in the first three sentences of your video description. You can add tags once you upload a video as well.

Tools
- Flagging tool – inappropriate comments can be flagged and will be removed by YouTube.
- Block comments – it is possible to block comments altogether, but dialogue with your viewers is often very desirable.
- Playlist – you can create a playlist and others can add the playlist to their channel.
- Thumbnails – A thumbnail will give viewers a brief trailer of your video when they are browsing YouTube.

Learn more about the 10 fundamentals for YouTube at
http://services.google.com/fh/files/misc/10fundamentals.pdf [5]

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Additional reading

[1]VOX-POL
Violent extremism and terrorism online in 2016
https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/news/docs/year_in_review_2016_en.pdf

Case study future trends: Live-streaming terrorist attacks?
https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/news/docs/live_streaming_sterrorist_attacks_en.pdf

Online behaviour of convicted terrorists
https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/news/docs/online_behaviours_convicted_terrorists_en.pdf

[2] RAN ex post paper 'Setting up an Exit intervention'
Working with formers, page 4
https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/about-ran/ran-exit/docs/ran_exit_setting_up_exit_intervention_berlin_13-14_022017_en.pdf

[3] The Facebook non-profit page:
https://nonprofits.fb.com/

[4] Twitter handbook for NGOs.
Not available online. Mail to ran@radareurope.nl for the pdf.

[5] 10 fundamentals of a creative strategy on YouTube
http://services.google.com/fh/files/misc/10fundamentals.pdf

VOX POL report 'Roles and Responsibilities of Social Media Companies' publication ca July 2017 (see http://www.voxpol.eu/)