

RADICAL ONLINE EDUCATION

KA2 STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP IN THE FIELD OF YOUTH



MODULE 4: How to build online counter-narrative and youth awareness programmes	
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INTRODUCTION

Module description

This e-learning module, self-paced course will benefit anyone interested in learning how to build online counter-narrative and youth awareness programs.

Benefits

The counter-narrative and raising awareness campaigns module offer a concentrated review of the counter-narrative in relation to radicalization as well as the building youth awareness campaigns. The module is being developed within KA2- Strategic partnership project called „Radical Online Education”. It also includes quiz at the end of the module. Completing the module will give a general overview and solid knowledge of the topic.

Description

Violent extremism is not associated with any particular religion, nationality, civilization or ethnic group. Quite the contrary, due to its global dimension, the phenomenon of radicalization leading to violence poses threats to the security and fundamental rights of the citizens of all our societies.

These trends must be seen in light of the increasingly blended off-line and on-line lives, especially of young women and men, which increases the need to address the information technology related dimensions of youth radicalization and extremism leading to violence. This complex challenge requires innovative, lasting and global solutions, underpinned by a strong commitment to cooperation and coordination between all relevant stakeholders at a national and international level.

Radical groups thrive by spreading their message. They have increasingly used social media to spread their propaganda and promote their extremist narratives. Including on websites such as YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter. In this project, the main question that we investigate is to what extent it is possible to use counter-narrative programs to de-radicalize individuals or prevent violent extremism among young people and what are the possible ways of combating radicalization.



Understanding online radicalization

The internet appears to create more opportunities to become radicalized and enables the terrorists to reach otherwise unreachable individuals. The reach of the internet has blurred the geographic barriers, and connected the distant individuals in the virtual world. It accelerates the process of radicalization - people who are searching any radical ideas to support their sketchy thoughts are likely to get some reinforcing contents on the internet due to its massive storage. The internet is a kind of 'one-stop shop' for all the information that an individual may seek to underline his radical ideas that expedites his radicalization process, by providing instantaneous and continuous connection to any violent idea. Therefore, the internet expedites the radicalization process of any individual by offering varieties of contents and continuous interaction.

Process of radicalization and de-radicalization

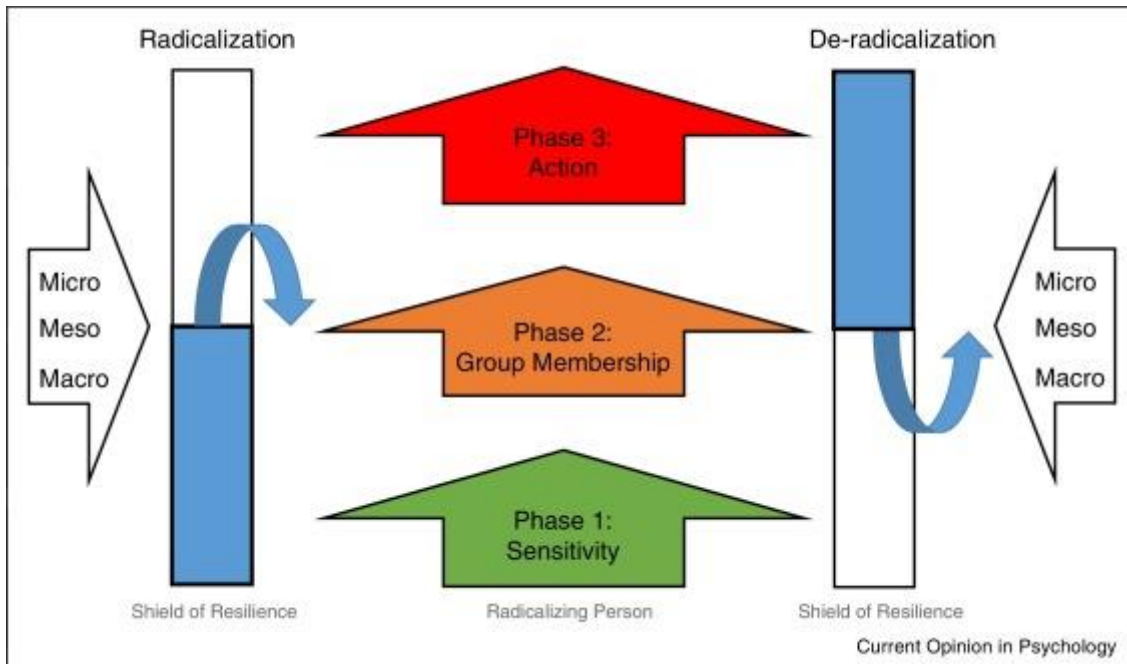
Radicalization is a process through which people become increasingly motivated to use violent means against members of an out-group or symbolic targets to achieve behavioral change and political goals. In figure below, we outline a model of radicalization (and de-radicalization). This model distinguishes three phases:

-**Phase 1** is characterized by a sensitivity to a radical ideology.

-**Phase 2**, an individual becomes a member of a radical group.

-**Phase 3**, this person is ready to act on behalf of the group's ideology, for example by planning an attack.

The model of radicalization and deradicalization



Most terrorists are not mentally ill. Rather, terrorism is a result of a radicalization process in steps that can happen to ‘normal’ people. The radicalizing person forms the central element in the model. As indicated earlier, this person follows three phases during the radicalization process: (1) *sensitivity phase*, (2) *the group membership phase* and (3) *the action phase*. Whether or not this person will follow all the phases depends on factors at three levels: micro (individual), meso (group) and macro (societal) level. At all three levels, however, this person may be protected against radical influences by a shield of resilience. Half way the group membership phase, the shield of resilience turns around. The radical group is making the person resilient against de-radicalization influences from outside the group.

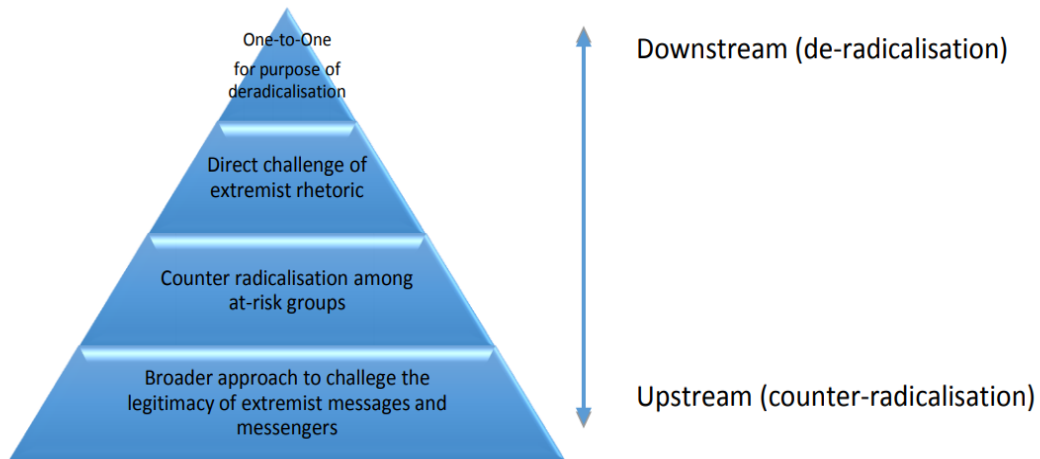
Phase 1 of radicalization: sensitivity - At the first level, the micro level, factors within the person that may influence this process. In the sensitivity phase, an important driving factor at the micro level concerns the quest for significance. A second important driving factor at the micro level is personal uncertainty. When people feel uncertain, they become motivated to identify strongly with a group that reduces their uncertainty by providing them with clear



norms and values. Radical groups are particularly able to do this, as they have a clear profile, offer a solid structure and a black-and-white world view. At the meso level, the radicalization process is likely to depend on the social environment (friends, family, and other groups). An important driving factor at this meso level is fraternal relative deprivation, the feeling of injustice that people experience when they identify with their group and perceive that their group has been treated worse than another group.

Phase 2 of radicalization: group membership In the second phase, the individual with a 'cognitive opening' joins a radical group. Mutual commitment is central in this process. The individual feels attached or fused with the group, and the group is fused with the individual. At the micro level, a person starts as a marginal member, and is motivated to show the loyalty to the group. As such, this person is likely to follow the norms and values of the group, for example by downgrading an out-group in public contexts. The meso level is of great importance, as during this phase, ties between the individual and the group are strengthened. This can be achieved via initiation rituals. In addition, physical and psychological isolation can cut people loose from their old social environment. At the macro level, the declaration of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq possibly has increased levels of perceived group efficacy. It has demonstrated that it is possible for Muslims to challenge Western influence and create a Caliphate in the Middle East, a long term dream of

Phase 3 of radicalization: action In this final phase, people turn to using violence against other groups. Though it may not be psychologically easy for people to commit violence, a driving factor at the micro level often is the confrontation with death of a relative or friend. At the meso level, an important strategy mentioned earlier to prepare for the use of violence (with the possibility of dying in action), is to have individuals write or videotape a testament. The idea is that once people have made this step, it makes it harder for them to withdraw. At the macro level, appeals by authorities to use violence play an important role.



De-radicalization process

As outlined, members of radical groups have a shield of resilience, which makes them less likely to be persuaded by anti-radical messages from outside their group. In some cases, however, this shield may fall apart allowing de-radicalization to start. De-radicalization is a process in which people reject the ideology they once embraced. This is one step further than disengagement, which is characterized by a change in behavior (stop using violence and leaving the radical group) without giving up one's radical beliefs. Often, de-radicalization occurs when people's commitment to the group decreases. A factor at the micro level can be the loss of the ideological appeal. By experiencing other major life events (marriage, birth of a child — which may strengthen other group ties), the radical group may offer less significance and meaning. At the macro level, prison can sometimes create a context in which people want to make a new start and de-radicalize.



What is a narrative?

Narrative as term in the language dictionaries appears as a rather formal term for a story or to refer to literary genres such as novels or prose. To narrate is to tell a story, to give an account of events or experiences, whether true or fictional. Both terms, narrative and story, are used interchangeably when they share the same general meaning: developing a narrative or telling a story implies creating characters and a plot. This means creating the people and the roles they will play in the story as well as the sequence of events or actions.



How narratives are related to prejudice and stereotypes?

As we define the term narrative and relate it to a story we can first assume that it is a safe word as we often believe and assume that stories are true, especially if they seem credible and come from people we trust or people who are entrusted with political, social, economic or cultural forms of power. For example, we tend to repeat stories we have never seen/felt ourselves but because we know someone who knows someone who met someone else who has for example bad experience with refugees. Even if statistics provide evidence that such cases are rare in the particular country, the people continue believing in the story/the narrative/ and give it more and more credibility.

Narratives shape the way we think and understand the world, including the online world. Furthermore, narratives online could have even worst effect as comments can be made anonymously. They are influential because of the huge outreach across multiple platforms. They are powerful as they contribute to defining what is perceived as normal and socially acceptable, for example, in the forms of jokes or videos shared when socialising online. In this case, young people are rather vulnerable-they are exposed daily to social medias and very easy to be influenced. Something else we need to take into account is also the level of media literacy of young people-usually is it not very high, thus fake news, propaganda and narratives can easily manipulate the youth. Thus, without any measures taken both online and offline, narratives online can eventually



have a huge impact on how young people see the world, what they perceive normal and being able to express hate freely online. Moreover, if this process is being left without supervision and monitoring it can lead to radicalization online. Because narratives are also used to justify and incite to violence. Extremist propaganda uses narratives based on violent and exclusionary ideologies by presenting polarised views of the world (“them” against “us”). By presenting negative stereotypes for “the others” the extremist narrative lead to acceptance and justifying any violence and violent behavior. Furthermore, young people are those who are particularly affected by that phenomena mostly because of the key role that internet and social media play in their lives. That is why youth work and youth workers and educators could play a central role in supporting young people’s learning experiences and reduce the chances of radicalization online.

Narratives and Terrorism

We all know that terrorist groups are exploiting religious beliefs in order to incite hatred and violence and to cause division and polarization in our societies and more and more we see it all around the world today. Terrorists and violent extremists blatantly use narratives to justify violent, promote hatred and target values such as peace, justice and human dignity. This is the core- terrorist bombs are targeted to devastate more than human lives but those common values. They aim to spread fear, to use stereotypes and prejudice, formulate narratives and promote hatred which leads to people`s radicalization and often terrorism. That is why it is crucial to now counter and refute false and nefarious narratives. Such narratives must also be replaced with compelling alternative visions, backed by tangible opportunities for meaningful and constructive engagement.

Groups like so-called Islamic State (IS) derive their strength from grand narratives embedded in their ideology and disseminate these through sophisticated propaganda campaigns. Those groups fighting IS, while countering the threat through military force, continuously fail to counter IS’ narratives, which is equally – if not more – important. It is essential to understand that visions need to be fought with visions so groups like IS to



be defeated a progressive counter narrative shall be in place against their ideology narratives.

Strategies of terrorist organizations using narratives

Narratives based Strategies of terrorist organizations

1. They are based on true stories

The terrorists have mastered the art of deception and have done so by mixing in elements of both truth and lies into their rhetoric and ideological arguments. They use real photos, real stories and situations but for their purposes to manipulate the public changing stories as they wish.

2. Justifying violence as some groups are being “oppressed”

It is very common for terrorist to justify violence as they are pretending to be protecting a group from an oppressor. They say that the certain group has suffered tremendous pain and they have the right to use violence in return to protect them. For instance, Osama bin Laden said, ‘But when the victim start to take revenge for those innocent children in Palestine, Iraq, Southern Sudan, Somalia, Kashmir and the Philippines, the ruler’s lama and the hypocrites come to defend the clear blasphemy’. Again here terrorists groups use narratives, supported by photos and videos showing “the great pain” of the innocent people and that is how the narrative immediately justify the violent and extremist behavior. In this context, it becomes very easy for the terrorist groups to manipulate young people, when they are presented with ‘insurmountable evidence, pictures and videos all around social medias. And young people become easily responsive to the theory of “an eye for an eye”

3. Violence on others behalf/we need to do it for the others/

Other way the terrorist groups use narratives to manipulate people, especially youth and start the process of radicalizing them, is using this theory –they are the protectors from the evil. Usually it happens when they tackle a minority groups-they protect the



minority from the majority. This justification is usually used with youth from background origin and usually Muslims who settled in Western countries. Those youth, are being brainwashed with narratives, supported again by rumors, someone else`s experience stories. For instance, Dr. Abdul Aziz Rantisi, one of the founders of Hamas, shared exactly this approach when he stated in an interview, ‘You think we are the aggressors. That is the number-one misunderstanding. We are not: we are the victims.’

4. Violence as the only option

This is also very common strategy used by extremist groups to justify their actions. They present narratives to support the idea that they are left without choice, no alternatives to violence can be found, thus the only way is to be violent. They portray themselves as victims, as the other deny to hear their voices, so the only way left is the violence. So what else they usually do is to use narratives to discredit the authorities, to make them look corrupt or not loyal in order to make people believe there is no other choice but violence left. Examples:

- IS and al Qaeda make a heretical claim to speak as the ‘true believers’ of Islam, and offer a religious justification for violence, based on that narrative in their ideology
- IS makes a strong appeal to a conjured sense of honour in service and sacrifice, with iconography which stresses the ‘nobility’ of violent jihad
- Both IS and al Qaeda have absorbed the lesson of Osama Bin Laden, who said in 2001: ‘When people see a strong horse and a weak horse, by nature, they will like the strong horse.’ So both promote a ‘winner’s narrative’ of ever-expanding borders
- IS offers recruits a Utopian vision of building a new caliphate in which the ideals of Muhammed’s life revived and brought to life once more. One survey found that about half of ISIS propaganda depicts happy civilian life.
- IS and Al Qaeda seek to create a powerful feeling of victimhood, offering graphic evidence of civilian casualties and framing the struggle with the West as a ‘defensive jihad’.



All strategies mentioned involve using narratives as a foundation of justifying violence behavior and terrorism. All these shows how much it needs to be done for counter-terrorism strategies, both by governmental organizations and bodies and NGO sector. So far the NGO sector and youth work have not been paying enough and sufficient attention to developing a counter narrative to that of the terrorists. Therefore, while great attention is paid to countering the terrorists mainly via hard power and kinetic force by governments and governmental organizations, small attention is given to the fact that much ground has been lost, particularly in tackling the youth at the mental, emotional and intellectual planes. So this is where youth work can play a key role in developing effective counter narratives, using also non-formal education in order to be part of the solution and support the hard powers fighting against terrorist groups and organizations using narratives for justifying their actions. As youth are usually very emotional, sometimes very idealistic make them easy to be manipulated using the right narratives. Countering terrorism without taking into account the message of the terrorist and the nature of their potential audience is both counterproductive and dangerous. Thus, youth organizations should invest in resources and competences and build counter narratives.

Alternative Narratives/Counter Narratives

In this part we will be explaining what are counter and alternative narratives, how they can be developed and by who, role of youth organizations and give some useful examples.

According to the book 'Towards a Guide for Constructing and Disseminating Counter narratives to Reduce Support for Terrorism', "Although there is no single pathway to terrorism, terrorist groups' extensive range of communicative strategies 'are critical for promoting the adoption of beliefs and attitudes that place nonviolent target audiences at greater risk for subsequent engagement in terrorism. The most persuasive of these strategies involves the use of narratives, the main function of which is to 'convey ideology, values, justifications, or core concerns' to audiences including sympathisers, would-be members, and the wider public". On contrary the counter narrative can be



simply explained as narratives which are discrediting and deconstructing the narratives on which they are based. They can show alternatives to the story or other points of view and perspectives. The term counter narrative is usually used in de-radicalization efforts and anti-terrorism work. The counter narratives are those which are used to deconstruct the narratives that justify violence, promote hate speech based on stereotypes and prejudice. So counter narratives may use various techniques, even humor, in order to make violent narratives used by terrorist not so attractive for young people. According to Council of Europe`s definition on alternative narratives they stress the importance of putting forward different accounts, and emphasises positive alternatives that are not just the negative image of the narratives they seek to counter and do not reinforce or accredit them by focussing on them. Even the terms seem at first quite similar and it is hard to differentiate them we can simply say that counter narratives are the ones who usually only oppose, denounce and deconstruct a violent narrative but alternative narratives also propose, develop and disseminate non-exclusionary human rights. The alternative narratives propose a different approach or interpretation altogether, emphasising “what we are for”, rather than “what we are against. Both counter and alternative narratives can be used to challenge the message of the terrorist groups, to change the hateful and violent narratives of terrorist groups and to offer a human-rights based narrative that show other interpretation. So in other words to build a counter narrative is to create another story with reversed roles or characters behaving in different ways which will change the whole story`s perspective. For example, we can build counter narrative challenging stereotypes or prejudice towards certain minority group by changing the scenario which will make people see this group with other perspective. For example, the counter narrative can portray refugees not only as invaders or rapists as in narratives used by extremist groups but portrays them as all other people with their professions-doctors, teachers, etc. So counter and alternative narratives could be a essential and helpful towards fighting against discrimination and hate speech, challenging stereotypes and prejudice often used by terrorist groups for radicalizing young people.



What	Why	How	Who
Alternative Narratives	Undercut violent extremist narratives by focusing on what we are 'for' rather than 'against'	Positive story about social values, tolerance, openness, freedom and democracy	Civil society or government
Counter Narratives	Directly deconstruct, discredit and demystify violent extremist messaging	Challenge of ideologies through emotion, theology, humour, exposure of hypocrisy, lies and untruths	Civil society
Government strategic communications	Undercut extremist narratives by explaining government policy and rationale	refuting misinformation, and developing relationships with key constituencies and audiences	Government

According to the definition of Council of Europe's manual We can- *TAKING ACTION AGAINST HATE SPEECH THROUGH COUNTER AND ALTERNATIVE NARRATIVES*

"Counter and alternative narratives combat hate speech by discrediting, and deconstructing violent narratives that justify it and by putting forward non-exclusionary visions of the world based on human rights values such as openness, respect for difference, freedom and equality. They do so in a number of ways. Some provide facts from different and credible sources to put into question negative misperceptions. However, research and practice have shown that only providing more information or facts is often not effective. Narratives need to connect to people's understandings and the contexts of their specific lives, creating new meanings and relating to their emotions and needs. Often this can be done through the use of humour and satire, appealing to people's emotional connections to the subject, facilitating spaces of direct personal contact with people with different perspectives, or creating opportunities to experience a different alternative narrative altogether".



What is the difference between counter and alternative narrative /defined by Council of Europe/?

	Counter Narrative	Alternative Narrative
How?	Directly confronting an oppressive narrative	Aiming at creating an alternative vision of society
What?	Undermine authority and myths that oppression relies on	Offer a “what we are for” as a different perspective to look at the issue from
Where and when?	Small scale, shorter period of time	Wide project, long-term
For example?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Debunking of discriminatory myths about a certain group in society through a public information campaign. • Former haters testimonies about the negative impacts of extremist movements on their lives. • Painting a mural celebrating diversity over racist comments on walls. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All Different – All Equal campaign, a campaign promoting human rights • Reports on inter-faith dialogue youth meetings • Documentaries about the lives of refugees depicting them as human beings and not as criminals • Series of posters showing how fathers can also enjoy paternity leave and take care of children (a role often taken by mothers).



“Counter-narratives” has become a catch-all term for a wide variety of activities that range from civil-society and youth to government strategic communications. Here we define a counter-narrative as a message that offers a positive alternative to extremist propaganda, or alternatively aims to deconstruct or delegitimise extremist narratives. Counter narratives are a long term strategy and their primary objective should be to sow seeds of doubt among at risk communities who are exposed to radical influence, and to highlight viable alternative approaches and behaviour.

Counter-Narrative campaigns encompass a wide range of communication activities including:



- Public diplomacy;
- Strategic communications by governments;
- targeted campaigns;

These activities are designed to raise awareness in communities and foster key relationships between government and communities, discredit the ideologies and actions of violent extremists, offer alternative narratives focusing on positive engagement and to directly counter violent extremist messaging. Improving digital literacy and critical consumption among target audiences is crucial and Governments should support such programmes through schools, as well as, youth and community organisations.

Stages of creating and launching an effective counter-narrative campaign:

1. ***Planning a Campaign:*** A successful counter-narrative campaign requires careful planning. This section presents the best methods for researching audiences, crafting messages, choosing messengers and mediums, setting realistic goals and objectives, and advice on funding and budgeting.



Defining Audience

Identifying the right audience for a counter-narrative campaign is the first important consideration.

- Create a preventative campaign educating a broader audience. This could be young people, parents, teachers or other practitioners working with youth.
- Reach a more specific age or gender group such as young women aged 18-25, or teenagers aged 14-18.
- Reach young people actively watching or searching for extremist content online who could be at-risk of radicalisation.
- Influence members of online extremist groups or followers of known extremist accounts.

Campaigns can attempt to reach more than one audience. However, it's important not to be too ambitious and try to reach everyone. Be as specific as possible when thinking about exactly who the right audience is.

The characteristics of the audience should determine the message, medium, and messenger for the counter-narrative campaign. It is vital that these characteristics are included when thinking about an audience, as these help a campaigner to really know who they are trying to reach.

Understanding how your audience acts both online and offline will help you to figure out who they are and how best to reach them. Researching your audience can be as simple as talking to them! It's important to engage with, and if possible, co-design counter-narrative content with members of the audience themselves. For example, if you are looking to engage with students then recruit and run focus groups with university students or student societies. Ask them what they think about your message or campaign and the kind of content they are likely to engage with.



Choosing the right message

Once the target audience has been decided, it is time to create the story. A story is a message with a purpose. At a basic level your message should speak with your audience, not at them. Creating a message that says “extremism is bad” without offering a positive alternative or a well thought-out explanation why is unlikely to have a strong or lasting impact. The most effective messages do not lecture the audience - they offer something to think about and reflect on:

- Facts from credible sources (for example former and returning foreign fighters) to deconstruct, discredit and demystify extremist messages;
- Emotional appeals highlighting the impact of extremism and violence;
- Satire and humour to de-glamorise and undermine the rebellious appeal of extremist groups;
- Positive stories and messages from people within your audience, or whom the audience admires.

Ways to present the message

Once the message is complete, consider how you want to package it. A counternarrative campaign could be made up of one or more mediums. Research can help you understand which types of content receive the best engagement among your audience. Content-creators should be creative and draw insights from other areas such as advertising or marketing. Extremist groups are constantly producing attractive and interesting content, so campaigners and content-creators should do the same. You're not just competing with extremist content but also everything else out there for the attention of your audience. Mediums to be considered:

- Videos: short films or animations.
- Text: slogans, hashtags or open letters.
- Images: photos or memes.



- Online literature: brochures or informative posters.

Messenger – who has the influence to reach wider audience?

It's important to have a messenger that your audience finds credible. Think of the messenger and message like a song. The lyrics might be powerful but the singer also needs a good voice. Consider who your audience is likely to trust, be inspired by or listen to.

- Survivors of extremism (“survivors”).
- Respected organisations, charities, or projects relevant to who you want to reach
- Individuals who your audience respects such as sporting figures, musicians or actors.
- Influential and respected faith, community or youth leaders and activists.

Setting a goal of counter-narrative campaign

Setting an overarching goal and a series of more specific, measurable and achievable objectives during the planning stage will help to focus a counter-narrative campaign. Tangible objectives help campaigners to have a target to aim for and provide a framework or benchmark to evaluate the impact your campaign has had. In order to define your objectives, consider the size of your audience, the resources you have available and the estimated costs for campaigning (including advertising, outreach or events). Some campaigns often have goals and objectives that are too broad and not realistically achievable with the resources available. Not every campaign will go viral and nor should it, focus instead on reaching your specific audience.

2. ***Running a campaign*** - exploring audience behaviour online is the best way to help you decide how best to reach them and can inform the methods and tactics you use during your campaign.

Choosing platforms

Getting a sense of where and how your audience spend their time online will help you choose which platforms will be best for your campaign. It is also important to remember



that different platforms have different advertising capabilities available for campaigners to reach their audience.

Facebook is the largest and most popular social network in the world. Most people use Facebook to connect with friends and family, participate in groups or like pages or organisations. Sharing lots of different types of content is easy and it offers advertising features that can be very useful for reaching your audience.

YouTube is the world's largest video hosting platform. Users can watch, upload and share videos not just on YouTube but on other social networks and websites as well. Viewers can interact with each other, commenting on videos and subscribing to channels. YouTube offers extensive advertising services via Google AdWords that can help you reach your audience. YouTube also offers a broad range of services through their non-profit programs. YouTube is also automatically connected to Google+, Gmail and other Google services.

Twitter varies in popularity around the world but is still one of the most popular social networks. Like Facebook it has become a popular tool for content-sharing among friends and like-minded users. Twitter is famed for its shorter messages, a faster pace, and its ability to break news and galvanise political and social movements. Twitter also offers advertising that can boost your tweets into your audiences' news feeds.

Instagram is primarily a photo-sharing platform that is also being used to share videos. With 70% of its users being millennials it is a great platform to reach a young audience and is most popular with mobile and tablet users.

Length of the campaign

A counter-narrative campaign could run for as long as there remains extremist propaganda to counter! Realistically though the length of a campaign is largely determined by the budget, capacity and objectives. When deciding how long to run your campaign think about how you can make the biggest impact on your audience. If your campaign is about public awareness, then you may want to make a big splash quickly to capitalise on media coverage or events. Other campaigns may try to engage with a more specific audience over a longer period of time.



Reaching the audience

Write posts, tweets or descriptions that resonate with your audience, reflect your message or mission and encourage sharing and comments. If you use more than one platform, make sure you link them together and cross-post content. If you want your audience to do something don't forget to ask. Inspiring calls to action can make a real difference. Depending on how long your campaign will run for you may want to consider staggering the release of your content to keep your audience hooked.

As a general rule, video and visual content receive greater levels of engagement across most platforms. However, not all sites you might want to use for your campaign will react as well to the same content, so try out a few different approaches and fine-tune your understanding of what works on each platform.

Another possibility to consider is linking your online campaign with real-world events. These can provide a valuable opportunity to engage with your audience, raise the profile of your campaign and get your message heard. You can promote events on social media and encourage guests to talk about the event live online by using hashtags or sharing your videos and photos. Events are also a good opportunity to invite the media, if appropriate for your campaign and your audience.

Ready to launch

It's always a good idea to refer back to the original campaign plan so that you can make sure you stay on message, on budget and on track. This is also a great way to double check you have all your content, social media accounts, website, posts and ads set-up and ready to go. Focus on your goals and objectives and remember how you plan to reach your audience. Don't be afraid to refine your tactics during the campaign if you need to.



Examples and good practices of initiatives, projects and campaign tackling terrorist narratives.

There are numerous global and regional initiatives that exist combating terrorist narratives. These include the numerous resolutions, strategies, and action plans of the United Nations (UN), which prescribe how Member States should counter extremist messages. Apart from the UN, some of the other examples are Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF), The Coalition to Defeat Daesh, Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism (GIFTC), Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications (CSCC), NATO and others but in this chapter we would rather show good practices of online and offline campaigns done by NGOs, non-formal groups or just individuals.

1. Abdullah X

Brain child of a former Islamist extremist who uses his experiences and insights to dismantle extremist narratives, Abdullah X is a young male living in the UK. The character talks about current events in the news, as well as issues that many youths can relate to. This allows Abdullah X to be more accessible to its target audience of young men living the UK that might be interested in what's happening in the world, equipping them with the critical thinking needed to build resilience to violent extremism and to better understand what it means to be a British Muslim. Examples of topical content that he discusses are Charlie Hebdo and ISIS. The videos are a mix of styles ranging from longer and more animated ones, to chat-show style videos. The chat show videos are cheaper to produce as they require less range of animation. Although the content is primarily video animations, Abdullah X now features in graphic novels alongside his female counterpart, Muslimah X. Abdullah X is primarily on YouTube, which acts as a hub for all the videos. However, the counter-narrative also has a website, and uses social media such as Facebook and Twitter to reach its audience. Very important about the campaign is that there is also a female perspective - by Muslimah-X, Abdullah-X's female counterpart.

Other key points are- it is online, easy to spread, videos are cheap to produce, it is youth friendly and it can react fast to current events happening.



It is very impressive that Abdullah-X was also featured in the White House Summit on Countering Violent Extremism.

2.Hero-Factor and Suleiman Bakhit's Wired Talk on fighting ISIS with comics

Hero-Factor is a graphic novel created by Jordanian entrepreneur and comic-book artist, Suleiman Bakhit. It is a super-hero comic that presents a positive role model for young Arabs and promotes heroism as an antidote to extremism. Hero-Factor is a powerful alternative narrative to counter the “adventure-seeking” narratives of extremist organizations. It also offers powerful role models to rival the notoriety of extremist figure-heads in the Arab nations.

In addition to following the adventures of heroes, Hero-Factor also tells stories of prominent Islamic historical figures. This gives the stories cultural and historical legitimacy among its target audience and rivals the often-historically inaccurate worldview of Islamic extremist narratives.

Hero-Factor comics were produced and printed with financial support from the Jordanian government, and in 2011 over 1.2 million were sold in Jordan. Unfortunately, the comics have since been put on hold. However, Suleiman Bakhit is still active and continues to **speak out** about heroism and extremism. **The key points** of the campaign are that it uses two very powerful and engaging tools for youth-storytelling and comics.

[\(link\)](#)

3. Not Another Brother was produced and launched in 2015 by the Quilliam Foundation

a counter-extremism think tank based in London. The campaign's video, an emotionally charged story of a young man who only comes to realize his mistakes after it's too late, was produced entirely using crowd-sourced funding.

The video was disseminated primarily via Twitter, where a campaign-specific hashtag #NotAnotherBrother helped to spread the counter-narrative content. The campaign challenges aspects of extreme Islamist recruitment narratives by addressing the harsh realities of fighting abroad. The campaign's call-to-action, asking people to share the video, proved simple but effective. The key points of the campaign are: it is online, easy



to share, it uses hashtag which is engaging and call to action. The campaign was featured in the press including The Guardian.

4. Average Mohamed

Average Mohammed is an animated video campaign created by Mohamed Amin Ahmed, a Somali-American living in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The short cartoons are targeted to young Muslims in order to build resilience early and counteract the narratives of Islamic extremism. The videos cover a wide range of topics including violent extremism, identity, religious tolerance, and being Muslim in the West.

The campaign is headquartered at its own website, but also maintains a consistent presence on social media. This is vital for bringing in new viewers and staying active in online discussions. The campaign is an example of the power of in-group communication that is vital for grassroots movements. As Mohamed himself **says**, it takes an average guy to reach average people. The key points of the campaign are-it is youth friendly about complex topics, videos made are short thus easy to share, animation is used which is also very engaging tool. ([link](#))

5. Operation Unmanifest

Operation UnManifest was a cooperative effort from the online hacktivists, Anonymous. The campaign aimed to destroy the “manifesto” written by Anders Behring Breivik, the perpetrator of the July 2011 attacks in Utøya and Oslo, Norway. Breivik uploaded his violence-promoting far-right manifesto online, asking would-be supporters to spread his violent ideology across the Internet. In response, a group of anonymous online activists planned a well-organised act of digital disruption to bury Breivik’s manifesto in the bottom of search engine results. The campaign called for online users to deface Breivik’s manifesto and create altered versions that use humour to mock its author and discredit his violent ideology. These new versions were then uploaded, masked as the original. The stated goal was to “let Anders become a joke, such that nobody will take him seriously anymore”. ([link](#))



6. No hate speech movement

The No Hate Speech Movement campaign stands for equality, dignity, human rights and diversity. It is a project against hate speech, racism and discrimination in their online expression. It was born from a proposal of the youth representatives of the Advisory Council on Youth and was endorsed by the Joint Council on Youth, which brings together the members of the Advisory Council on Youth and the governmental youth experts of the European Steering Committee on Youth.

OBJECTIVES OF THE CAMPAIGN The Campaign addresses and combats hate speech by mobilising young people as actors and multipliers for a culture of human rights and democratic citizenship, online and offline.

- To support human rights education activities for action against hate speech and the risks it poses for democracy and to the well-being of young people
- To develop and disseminate tools and mechanisms for reporting hate speech, especially its online dimensions, including through those at national level
- To mobilise national and European partners to prevent and counter hate speech and intolerance online and offline
- To promote media literacy and digital citizenship and support youth participation in Internet governance

7. We CAN -Taking Action against Hate Speech through Counter and Alternative Narratives

The manual offers guidance to develop counter and alternative narratives to combat hate speech and promote human rights, especially in online environments. The manual proposes a set of online and offline communication and educational approaches, and tools to undermine narratives, which sustain and legitimise hate speech. It aims to strengthen the toolboxes of youth workers, educators and activists already engaged in human rights work and education or willing to be engaged. It is designed for and within the context of the No Hate Speech Movement, a Council of Europe youth campaign for human rights online.



How to measure your alternative and counter narrative and campaigns

GAMMMA+ Model -model how to measure, monitor and evaluate the impact of an online counter or alternative narrative message was developed by Radicalization Awareness Network/RAN/. The model focuses on six elements of a successful campaign- Goal, Audience, Message, Messenger, Media, Action.

RAN guidelines for effective alternative and counter-narrative campaigns (GAMMMA+)

Extra: Annex with key findings from recent relevant research



If you want to develop effective alternative and counter-narratives, then these guidelines are for you!

The RAN's Communication and Narratives working group (RAN C&N) has developed the following practical guidelines for carrying out effective alternative and counter-narrative campaigns. The guidelines combine lessons learned and key elements from the RAN C&N meetings with an easily accessible overview of relevant research.

- Effective communication campaigns have goals that are clear, realistic and measurable.
- The promoted messages are relevant and the target audience considers the messengers credible.



- The campaign works with the target audience's preferred medium or online platforms, and is also present when the audience communicates offline
- Narrative campaigns in the form of monologues are unlikely to meet the needs of an audience that wants to talk, or is upset or outraged about a real or perceived injustice.
- Campaigns should offer a call to action for those wishing to become involved in the issue at hand, which will facilitate monitoring and evaluation
- Campaigns aiming to change minds and behaviours offer opportunity for sustained dialogue (both online and offline) with those in their audience who wish to talk.
- Campaigns which ensure they have monitoring and evaluation components in place from the start can then adjust ongoing activities if needed, and once completed, can learn whether they had the desired impact.
- Campaigns that produce a constant stream of content for their target audience to interact with increase their chances of having an impact. Authenticity and quantity are more relevant than technical quality.
- Alternative narratives promote positive alternative perspectives, courses of action and role models, and foster critical thinking. Counter-narratives, which aim at debunking extremist propaganda, should only be directed at a well-researched and understood audience which is already engaged with extremist content.
- Prepare for success and remember to take into consideration all security risks for your organization and partners.
- Don't reinvent the wheel — check the RAN collection for inspiring practices or for example the Hedayah Counter Narrative Library or the study for the EP LIBE Committee on Countering Terrorist Narratives.



Alternativi International TIPS&TRICKS on building a successful campaigns using counter and alternative narratives with youth

- **Setting up your goals right** -Set one clear goal with few smaller objectives-your goal should be more generic but your objectives should always be specific. When you set up your objectives they should also be measurable and realistic so at the end of the campaign you will be able to measure the results. Using metrics/quantitative criterias is rather important for the monitoring and evaluation of your counter-narrative campaign. There are hundreds of different metrics that can be observed and analysed in many different ways like metrics drawn from the websites and social media platforms used during your campaign. To make it easier to formulate your campaign goals you can use the SMART model.



- **Think about the resources** - Running an effective social media effort also requires adequate resources (time, finances, people) which should be assessed beforehand. It is also important to give consideration to potential partners. Involving partners from within local communities in campaign development and delivery may benefit a campaign effort. When especially working with local young people we tend to involve other stakeholders such as schools, university, online medias, Youth Centers, etc-remember to use the potential of all local partners!
- **Selection of channels-** when building a counter narrative campaign and actions it is essential to choose the right channels to deliver the message. You should research the usage of the channels and choose the one mostly used by your target group.



Moreover, it is recommended to combine online activism with offline activities-it is usually much more effective! Note-Importantly, social media may not be appropriate in all circumstances and using multiple channels is argued to be beneficial.

- **Use engaging and youth friendly approach**-in order your campaign to be successful you need to make young people hear your message. Use a youth friendly language, engaging post, hashtags, emojis, animations, digital effects. Put yourself in the shoes of the young people-present topics that are relevant for them, in an engaging and interactive way.
- **Know your audience**-knowing your audience will help you formulate and deliver your message in the best way possible-have in mind their characteristics, the language they use, their interests, so on. Campaigns targeting an overly broad and general target audience run the risk of being ineffective and may be counterproductive.
- **Get to know the narratives well before building counter narratives**-it is quite essential for you as a team first to understand the narratives you are about to build counter narratives for. The counter-narratives are strategically constructed storylines that are projected through strategic communication (or messaging) activities with the intention to undermine the appeal of extremist narratives of violent extremist groups but you need to firstly understand the narrative used by the extremist groups in order to provide alternatives and send out a strong message.