

Using social media to fight radicalization



Project 2021-1-BG01-KA122-ADU-000035679 Safety and success, Erasmus +

Partners:

Association of European Development - Applicant

EOS DEVELOPMENTAL SA – Hosting organization

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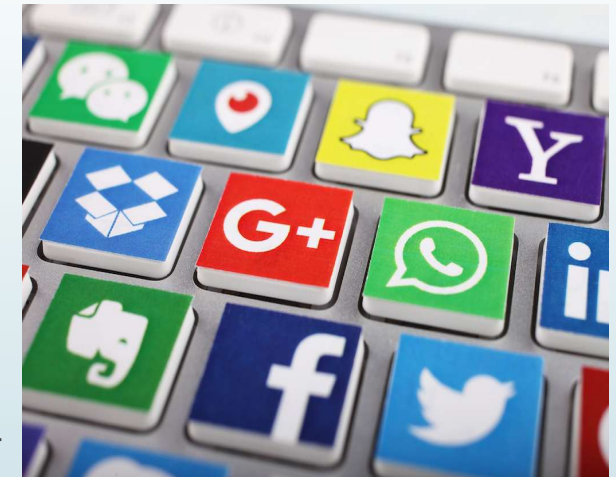
Social media and radicalization

- ▶ In the age of selfies, snaps, likes and shares, the internet and social media have transformed the way in which people communicate. In early 2019, global internet reached 4.4 billion users, and the overall number of mobile social media users reached 42%, or 3.2 billion people. This means that people are able to share ideas, communicate and interact more rapidly than ever before, including with audiences on the other side of the world.
- ▶ Terrorist groups have leveraged these new mechanisms and platforms for communicating amongst themselves and to potential recruits. For example, ISIS has been known for producing videos circulated on YouTube and Twitter, and has mastered new and emerging technologies and social media platforms, such as Telegram; all to promote its messages and recruit new members in cyberspace.

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Contemporary terrorist groups

- ▶ Contemporary terrorist groups are the first generation whose members have grown up with access to the internet and social media. These online platforms play a critical role in their approach to radicalizing and recruiting vulnerable individuals. Social media and the internet have become increasingly useful facilitators of the promotion, incitement, intimidation, and radicalization of a much wider audience.
- ▶ Many terrorist organizations achieved success through this approach. Online technologies, including social media, have many benefits - which are often leveraged by terrorist groups. They are able to reach audiences globally immediately, yet also tailor their messages to fit with different target audiences at the local level. They are able to develop rich content for the mass market, and still recruit individuals with privacy protections.



Prevention strategies for Radicalization

There are three broad areas of how prevention of radicalization online might be possible:

- ▶ preventing the spread of terrorist content online (detering producers);
- ▶ empowering online communities to counter the narratives of violent extremism and terrorism online and promote positive and alternative messages;
- ▶ and building digital resilience and media literacy (reducing the appeal).



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Preventing the Spread of Terrorist Content

- The first strategy for preventing radicalization on social media and the internet involves preventing the spread of terrorist content and propaganda in the online space using digital mechanisms and tools. This includes: legislative and policy measures; blocking content and access to social media platforms; and filtering and removal of terrorist content from platforms. These mechanisms are intertwined, as the legislation around digital prevention can only be adapted and changed as new technological tools emerge in the space of prevention.
- Example: Tech Against Terrorism, an initiative developed in support of the UN Security Council Resolution 2354 (2017) to tackle terrorist narratives online. The project builds the capacity of smaller start-up companies and provides online tools for the private sector technology industry to prevent the spread of terrorist content on their platforms. The project involves multiple private sector companies, such as Facebook, and works with the UN Security Council bodies.

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Empowering online communities

- ▶ Preventing radicalization online can be realized by empowering online communities to spread Positive Messages and Alternatives to Terrorism, instead of countering - or reacting to - the messages of terrorist groups. Preventing terrorism online can focus on promoting positive and alternative messages to terrorism. These messages can address both structural or personal grievances such as building positive identities and enhancing social cohesion.
- ▶ There are several examples of alternative narratives. In the Indonesian context, the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), one of the largest Muslim organizations in the world, has been conducting a campaign focused on highlighting Islam Nusantara, or Indonesian Islam, the tenants of which are outlined in a 90-minute film, "The Divine Grace of Islam Nusantara."
- ▶ One important component of alternative messaging is to provide a non-violent action that still addresses grievances that communities might have which can be underlying drivers of radicalization. For example, in South Sudan, the Anataban (campaign supports the "tired" people of South Sudan through music and art that promotes peaceful and non-violent movements.

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Building Digital Resilience

- In today's digital age, there is a massive challenge related to "fake news," and "disinformation," which are employed by terrorist groups. A third strategy for the prevention of terrorism online is through building digital resilience.
- Firstly, by building digital resilience, the citizen is able to overcome grievances that might lead to radicalization that are based on misinformation. Secondly, a citizen that is able to evaluate both the content and the credibility of the source more effectively, would less likely be persuaded by terrorist propaganda.
- It is important, that skills for building digital and media literacy are enhanced as a way of preventing terrorism online. Vulnerable youth should be equipped with the skills to navigate the communications environment they experience every day, including a social media presence. This approach has been adopted in UNESCO's preventing violent extremism (PVE) efforts, noting the importance of responsible behaviour online and offline as part of an individual's responsibility as a "digital citizen."

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