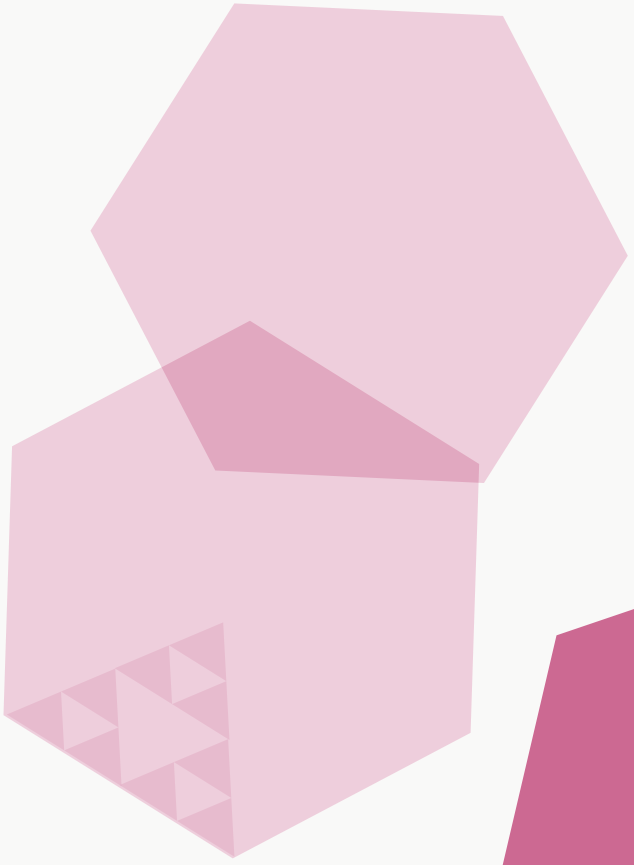
THE COUNTER-NARRATIVE MONITORING & EVALUATION HANDBOOK



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About

The Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) is a London-based 'think and do tank' that has pioneered policy and operational responses to the rising challenges of violent extremism and inter-communal conflict. Combining research and analysis with government advisory work and delivery programmes, ISD has been at the forefront of forging real-world, evidence-based responses to the challenges of integration, extremism and terrorism.

About this Handbook

Given the proliferation of violent extremist content online in recent years, developing effective counter-narratives — messages that offer a positive alternative to extremist propaganda, or deconstruct or delegitimise extremist narratives and challenge extremist ideologies — is an increasingly necessary alternative to online censorship. The evaluation of counter-narrative campaigns, in order to assess impact, build on best practice and raise the quality of counter-narrative campaigning is vital to this effort.

This Handbook has been funded with support from the European Commission. It was created by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) to help anyone looking to evaluate their counter-narrative campaigns, and is intended as a beginner's guide for those with little or no previous experience of counter-narrative campaign evaluation. This publication reflects the views only of the authors, and the European Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

It takes readers through the main stages of designing and implementing an effective counter-narrative campaign evaluation. It can also be used alongside ISD's freely available online Counter-narrative Toolkit, which can be found at www.counternarratives.org, The Counter Narrative Handbook, which can be found at http://www.strategicdialogue.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Counter-narrative-Handbook_1.pdf, and The Impact of Counter-Narratives report, which can be found at http://www.strategicdialogue.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Impact-of-Counter-Narratives_ONLINE_1.pdf.

Our advice is based on ISD's experiences in creating, running and evaluating in-house campaigns such as Extreme Dialogue, and collaborating with independent content-creators, from civil society and NGO campaigners to young activists, to amplify their counter-narrative messages through training, networking and campaign support. This Handbook therefore focuses on civil-society, youth or NGO-led online counter-narrative campaign

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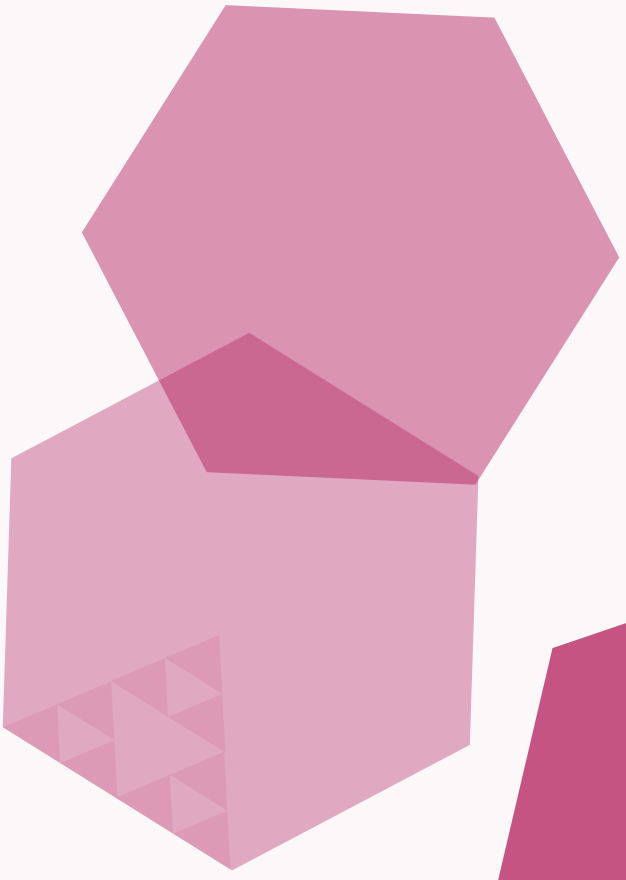


Introduction

Why is measuring the impact of counter-narrative campaigns important?

The promotion of narratives legitimising extremist ideology, justifying the use of violence, and sowing division within societies is critical to the success of violent extremist groups. Counter-narratives can play a vital role in combatting extremist propaganda, promoting positive alternatives to extremist messages, and deconstructing and delegitimising extremist narratives. In the last few years civil society counter-narrative campaigns have become a core part of national and international counter extremism strategies.

As internet usage has grown around the world, the digital commons has become a vital space in which to explore, develop and contest political, social and cultural positions. Young people especially now spend increasing amounts of time online, primarily through social media. Extreme groups have proved adept at harnessing the potential of the internet to radicalise and recruit. As a result, online counter-narrative campaigns have become increasingly important to ensure that online communications by extreme groups and their supporters do not remain uncontested.

Social media presents a practical and cost-effective way to deliver counter-narrative campaigns to vital groups. It allows campaigners to reach individuals who are becoming involved in or are part of extremist organisations, to spread awareness to broader audiences, to reach out to parents and teachers, and to otherwise engage people in the fight against extremism.

Yet social media is not just a practical, accessible medium. The online spaces used by young people are contested ground, where a range of actors, not least extremist groups and individuals, seek to influence young people's values, perspectives and actions. If civil society fails to challenge extremism online, we not only lose an opportunity to positively influence young people, but also make it more likely that extremists will be able to do so.

While the number of online counter-narrative campaigns has increased, those applying effective Monitoring and Evaluation practices (M&E) remains limited. Unfortunately, many campaigners do not evaluate their campaigns, or conduct a limited evaluation after the fact, as opposed to considering M&E throughout the design and delivery phases. There are many factors that can deter civil society campaigners from undertaking effective evaluations, from tight delivery timeframes and a lack of evaluation expertise, to insufficient public or private sector support or funding.

This lack of effective M&E, particularly amongst smaller civil society campaigners, means that we have limited knowledge about the effectiveness of many counter-narrative campaigns, and little consensus around what works and does not. It also means that many powerful campaigns do not always receive the necessary long-term funding or support.

To make the most of limited resources, governments and other funders are increasingly insisting that effective M&E is embedded throughout all counter-narrative campaigns, and restricting continued funding to organisations that can effectively demonstrate that the activities they undertake have a measurable impact. All organisations involved in counter-narrative campaigning must therefore be capable of undertaking effective M&E.

Effectively measuring the impact and outcomes of a counter-narrative campaign online is difficult. Correlation – a connection between two factors, for example the launching of a counter-narrative campaign and a reduction in the profile of an extremist group in the same time period – is not the same as causation, where one factor can be shown to have influenced the other. Causally connecting your project activities to often abstract and complex goals, such as reduced interest in extremist narratives, is a significant challenge. Successful evaluation requires forward planning, fixed goals and objectives, and clear criteria for success.

While evaluating counter-narrative campaigns can be a challenge, counter-narrative campaigners should not be put off. Even simple M&E efforts can provide useful insights and conclusions. Moreover, effective M&E does not necessarily require significant expertise in research or evaluation. This Counter-Narrative M&E Handbook is therefore designed to help civil society campaigners design and execute effective M&E for their own campaigns, understand the impact they are having, and improve the effectiveness of future campaigns.

The Counter-Narrative Monitoring & Evaluation Handbook

The aim of this Handbook is to provide civil society campaigners with the knowledge and skills they need to undertake high quality counter-narrative campaign evaluations. It presents model frameworks and case studies of successful counter-narrative M&E, as well as a range of useful tools and resources that counter-narrative campaigners can use to support their M&E efforts, including:

- A description of key metrics and how to interpret them.
- An explanation of various research methods that can be used in online M&E.
- Guidance on potential risks and ethical considerations for counter-narrative M&E.
- A flexible M&E framework that can provide a starting point for evaluation planning.
- Three case study examples of high quality counter-narrative campaign evaluations.
- A glossary of key M&E terms.
- An index of useful online M&E tools.

This Handbook is part of a larger package of counter-narrative resources for civil society campaigners offered by ISD:

- For a beginners guide to counter-narrative campaigning, designed for those with little or no previous experience, see our 2016 publication The Counter-Narrative Handbook.
- For a step-by-step guide to creating a counter-narrative campaign, frequently asked

questions about campaign development, a best practice guide and case study examples of successful counter-narrative campaigns, go to www.counternarratives.org.

- For a case study-based examination of the impacts of social media counter-narrative campaigns, see our 2016 report The Impact of Counter-Narratives.

GLOSSARY

Glossary

Antagonistic sustained engagements: where someone repeatedly disputes or dismisses the content or campaign to other users (or campaigners), and/or expresses extreme views or offensive slurs.

Audience retention: the amount of your video your viewers watch, expressed as either the average amount of time viewed or the percentage still watching at a given point. May also be referred to as the "drop-off" rate.

Awareness: the extent to which your content is seen by the desired audiences (including impressions, reach and video views.

Awareness metrics: metrics that indicate the number of people exposed to a campaign (e.g. impressions, reach or video views), and demographic information (e.g. age, gender or geographic location) that provides insights as to whether the right audience was reached.

Boosted posts: advertised posts or tweets that have been promoted to appear in selected audiences' news feeds.

Bounce rate: the number of people that visit your website and then leave again without moving past the landing page. This is most frequently expressed as a percentage.

Call to action: a call to action asks audiences to do *something* immediately in response to your campaign, and makes it clear why it is important. This could be as simple as asking the audience to share your video, or a bigger ask such as volunteering their time to support your campaign or organisation.

Clicks: the number of times people have clicked on your ad or a link in your posts.

Constructive sustained engagements: where someone comments more than once in a positive manner in an online conversation about the content, campaign or issue.

Counter-narrative: a message that offers a positive alternative to extremist propaganda, and/or aims to deconstruct or delegitimise extremist narratives and propaganda.

Downstream: a campaign aimed at those at-risk of becoming extremists, viewing extremist content, or actively participating in online extremist communities or networks.

Engagement: interaction between audience members, or with campaigners themselves, which could be positive or negative and help provide insights into reactions to a campaign.

Engagement metrics: metrics that show how much, and in what manner, people interacted with a campaign's content, social media accounts or websites (including video retention or drop-off rates, numbers of likes, comments or shares).

Exit rate: the percentage of users who leave your website from a given page, rather than clicking a link or button on your page and continuing to more of your website or content.

Impact: a measurable change in audience attitudes, behaviour or knowledge (online or offline), ideally constructive, that can be

attributed to exposure to, or engagement with, counter-narrative content.

Impressions: The number of times content or adverts appear on a user's screen online. Avoid over-relying on impressions as a metric of true reach or impact, as people don't necessarily take notice of every ad that appears on their screen.

Impression frequency: the number of times your ad or post appeared on an average individual's screen. Use this metric to ensure you're not over-exposing the same people to your campaign.

In-built analytics: analytics services available on social media platforms that allow you to monitor your campaign's reach and levels of audience engagement, and help determine whether your online objectives were met.

Metrics: different social media or website analytics services will offer different types of data or 'metrics'. There are a vast range of different metrics that can help you understand who you reach, how well you engage your audience, and the impact your campaign is having.

Natural Language Processing: the application of artificial intelligence (AI) to human language – words, phrases and sentences that convey meaning – in order to observe patterns and analyse content.

Organic growth/reach: audience reach or engagement on websites or social media platforms generated from searches, and/or as a result of unpaid campaign strategies and tactics.

Promoted content: videos, posts or tweets that have been promoted through paid advertising to selected audiences on social media or search platforms.

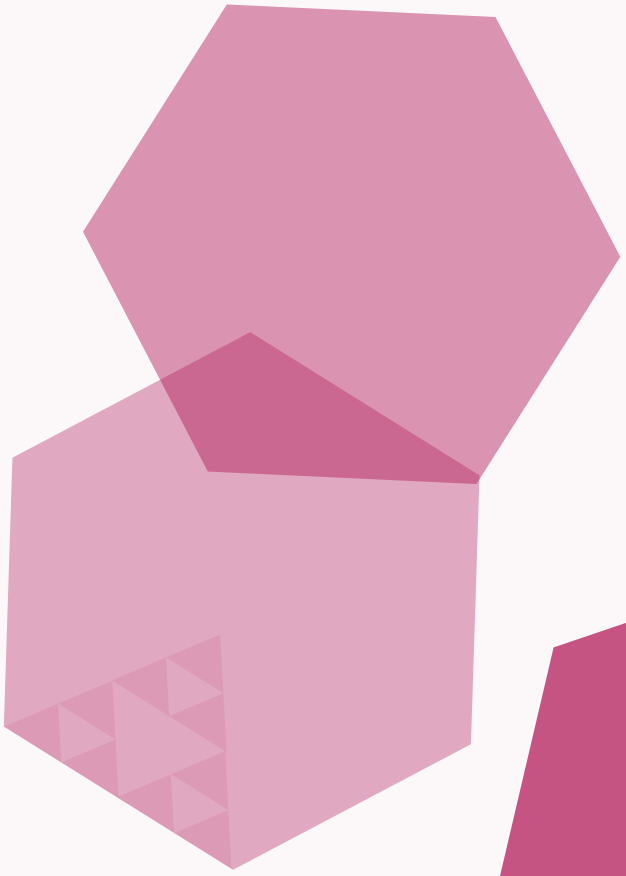
Reach: the total number of people that received an impression of your post or ad on their screens or newsfeeds.

Sustained engagements: on-going interactions between audience members or with campaigners themselves. These could be positive or negative and help provide an insight into reactions to a campaign.

Upstream: a preventative campaign aimed at a broader, but still specific audience, with the intention of building resilience to extremist narratives or propaganda, or increasing knowledge and awareness of radicalisation, recruitment or online safety.

Views: the number of times a video is watched or played.

EVALUATION METHODS



Evaluation Methods

This chapter explains the metrics and methods you might use to evaluate an online counter-narrative campaign.

Goals and Objectives

The very first thing to consider in the planning phase of a counter-narrative campaign is what its overall goal is, and within that what objectives might be set for the campaign.

Setting a clear goal will keep your campaign true to its original purpose. Setting a series of objectives, related to the overall goal of the campaign, will provide a series of quantifiable milestones against which to measure the success of a campaign:

- Objectives should be **specific**. They should relate not to abstract ambitions such as 'engage young people', but quantifiable measures of a desired effect, such as 'have 1000 online conversations with young people through comments or direct messages.'

- They should also be **measurable**, with campaigners confident before the inception of the campaign that they will be able to discern, from available metrics and evaluation activities, whether or not they were achieved.

- Finally, they should be **realistic**. Considering a campaign's time-span, budget, intended audience size and available resources, as well as the performance of previous campaigns, can help campaigners decide what objectives are realistic.

Metrics

The monitoring and evaluation of online counter-narrative campaigns centres on the metrics drawn from the websites and social media platforms used during your campaign. There are hundreds of different metrics that can be observed and analysed in many different ways as part of the M&E process. Deciding which metrics matter, and how you want to analyse them, is an important part of M&E planning and should be established before a project starts.

Ultimately, the key to understanding whether your campaign met its goals or not is to have a clear understanding of what success and failure would look like, and to decide which metrics are best placed to help you judge the eventual outcomes of the campaign.

Social media metrics can be drawn into two broad categories, *awareness* and *engagement*:

- Awareness is the total number of people who view your campaign content (whether videos, ads, posts, websites or other digital content), and who those people are. It is important to consider awareness metrics which help you understand the characteristics of your audience: how, when and where they were exposed to your campaign, and which parts of the campaign reached them.

- Engagement is defined as the volume and types of interaction between audience members, campaigners or campaign materials. Engagements can include everything from likes and shares to email responses, and can be positive or negative. The number and nature of engagements can help campaigners understand their audience's reactions to the campaign or its content.

These metrics can be combined and analysed to build a comprehensive picture of a counter-narrative campaign's performance, and help campaigners understand the *impact* they are having.

- Impact is a measurable change in the audience's knowledge, attitudes or behaviour that can be attributed to exposure to or engagement with counter-narrative content. Awareness and engagement metrics, when properly analysed, can be brought together to help evaluators understand the impact of their campaign. Additional indicators, such as evidence of offline action, or the qualitative evaluation of online comments, can contribute to the overall impact picture. The measurement of impact – and ultimately the answer to the question of whether a campaign succeeded or failed – will be defined by the goals and objectives set at the very start of the project.

In all counter-narrative campaign M&E, awareness and engagement are critical to understanding impact. However, the relative importance of each metric, and the particular metrics evaluators focus on, is dependent on the type of counter-narrative campaign.

For example, a downstream counter-narrative campaign – one designed for those individuals who are at higher risk of joining extremist groups – might place a greater emphasis on metrics that measure sustained engagement. An upstream counter-narrative campaign – focused on a broader audience – might by contrast concentrate on achieving greater awareness. If a campaign is intended for a particular audience, it would be appropriate to consider not only awareness in general, but the awareness of the specific audience groups which are the focus of your campaign.

Presented below is a summary of each type of metric, how they are presented through social media data, and what considerations should be made when using them for campaign analysis and evaluation.

Awareness

There are two types of awareness metrics. The first relates to the scale of the audience: how many people saw or interacted with your campaign in any way. The second describes the nature of the audience in demographic or characteristic terms, such as gender, location, age, device type and so on.

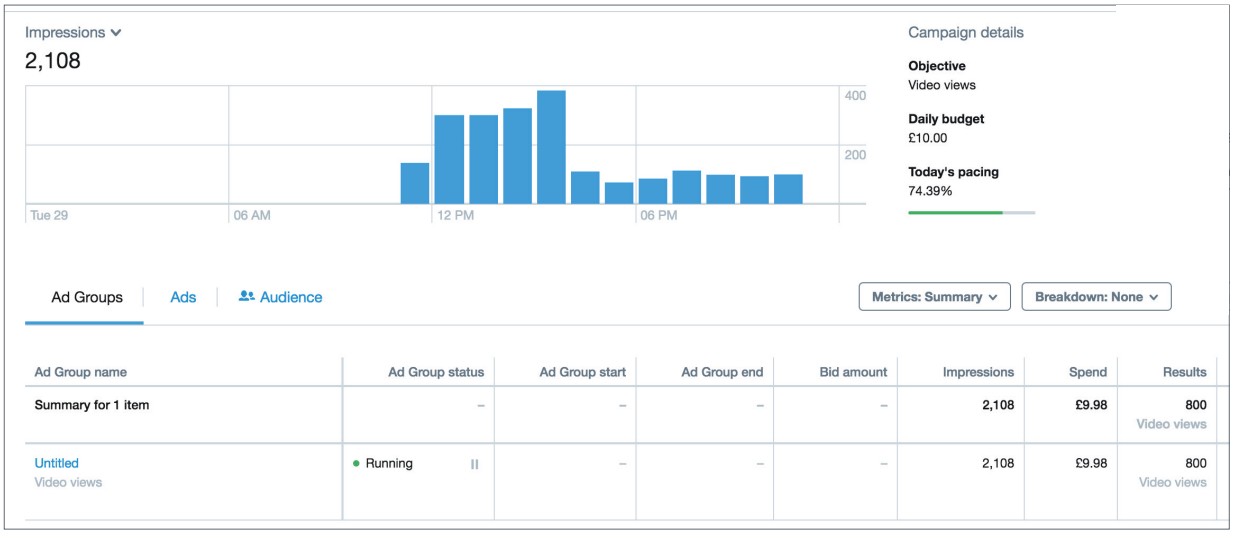
It is important to note that while it is possible to observe broad demographic characteristics of your audience through analytics tools, it is not possible to observe the demographic details of individual users. This protects the privacy of individual social media users.

There are a number of metrics through which to consider awareness that are often vital to counter-narrative M&E.

Impressions occur when your content, often a post or an ad, appears on someone's screen. Total impressions represent the most basic and broad measure of your audience. In fact, it is entirely possible that an impression can take place without an individual even noticing your content. For this reason, it's important not to focus too much on impressions, which are often overvalued in M&E campaigns as a large number which is relatively easily generated.

For paid campaigns however, examining the demographic breakdown of your impressions is an effective way of checking whether your ad targeting is accurate – whether your content promotion is creating impressions with the right groups. Impressions can also provide a baseline measurement of whether your content is attracting an audience. A high number of impressions but a relatively low number of clicks on your content might indicate that your content is not appealing, while a low number of impressions and a relatively high number of clicks might suggest that it is just not reaching enough people.

Impressions is a term used by Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and other social media platforms, and can be measured through their content promotion and advertising tools. However, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube each offer slightly different definitions of an "impression". For Facebook an impression includes the number of times the content from your page is displayed, for example in a newsfeed or side-bar; for YouTube, a 'video impression' is counted when the content or ad appeared as an in-stream advertisement, and is different to a 'thumbnail impression', which is counted every time someone sees your video ad displayed with your video thumbnail; and for Twitter, an impression is defined as the number of users who see a *Promoted Campaign*'s content.



Twitter Ads Manager impressions chart

Reach is the total number of people who receive an impression of your content on their screen. Total reach will be lower than the total number of impressions, as some social media users will receive more than one impression of your content.

Reach is a term used by Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and other social media platforms. It can be measured through Facebook's content promotion and advertising tools, and through AdWords, the system used by YouTube. It can also be measured through third party applications and services on Twitter, but it is not included in their standard advertising or promotional tools.

Impression frequency is the number of times an individual saw your content over a defined period of time. If the content you are promoting is being delivered through ads, impression frequency can help you understand whether you are spending too much money too quickly, or whether your targeting criteria is too narrow. If you find your impression frequency is very high, this might be the case. Too high an impression frequency can over-saturate individual users, irritate your target audience, or leave people feeling unfairly singled out by your campaign.

Views refer to the number of times a video is watched or played. What counts as a view varies across social media platforms. For example, on Facebook (where a video is automatically played without sound on a user's news feed) or Instagram, a video is counted as 'viewed' if it is watched for 3 seconds or more, while on Twitter (which also employs auto-play) the same rule applies as long as a video is 100 per cent on a user's screen for those 3 seconds. For YouTube a view is only counted if a video is watched for 30 seconds or more. These varying definitions mean that views are representative of a more or less substantive audience interaction with the content on differing platforms. This is one of the reasons why viewer retention or drop-off rates, explored in the engagement section of this chapter, can be valuable.

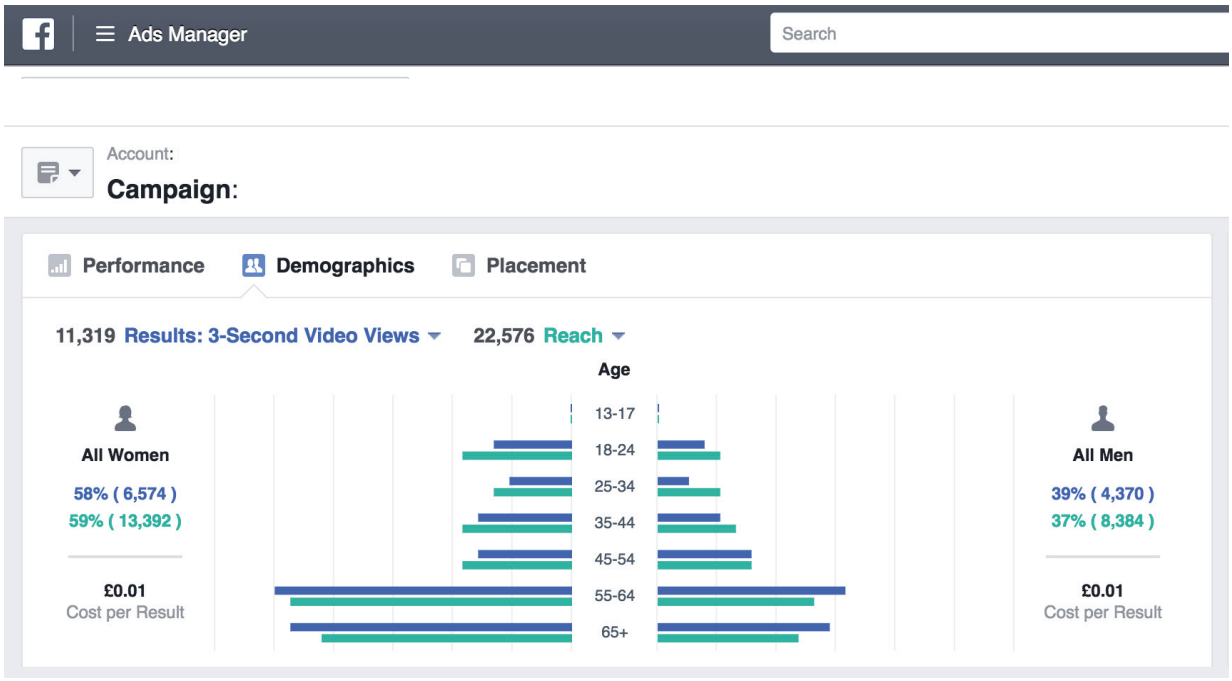
The table below presents an overview of how different social media platforms define different metrics:

METRIC	FACEBOOK	YOUTUBE	TWITTER
IMPRESSIONS	Facebook defines impressions as the number of times a post from your page is displayed in a news feed or sidebar.	YouTube defines impressions as the number of times your content or ad appears in an in-stream or in-display advertisement.	On Twitter, the number of impressions is defined as the number of times a promoted tweet appears in a user's feed.
REACH	Facebook defines reach as the number of people who received impressions of a page post.	On YouTube's advertising function AdWords, reach is determined as 'unique viewers by cookie.' This means that reach is calculated by the number of unique cookies (which store individual's preferences and useful information on their browsers) that view a video.	There is no way to measure reach through Twitter's in-built analytics, and therefore no Twitter definition of reach. However, reach can be calculated or approximated through third-party tools, such as Tweetreach or Hashtracking.
VIEWS	For Facebook, a view of a video counts if the video runs on autoplay for a minimum of three seconds. Facebook autoplay is muted, but even if the viewer doesn't click to engage audio, it still counts as a view. Facebook also displays metrics for video views at 25%, 50%, 75% and 95%, as alternative ways of counting views or calculating drop-off.	For YouTube, a view of a video is only counted if that video is watched for more than thirty seconds. For videos under this length, a view is counted as a percentage of the video's length.	For Twitter, a view is counted when a video plays for three seconds, with the condition that the video is 100% visible on a user's screen for at least three seconds.

Demographics and advertising tools

Advertising tools can also provide an indication of the demographic breakdown of the audience being served content. These types of insights can help an organisation understand who is responding to their content, and to consider designing different content for more specific demographic groups (e.g. a specific video designed for parents and promoted specifically to parents through advertising tools).

Demographic and location data will not however reveal individuals within your audience. For example, although Google Analytics enables demographic data to be collected on certain users, it also applies limits on the availability of age, gender and interests data under **certain circumstances**. A threshold may be applied to prevent the possibility of inferring the demographics or interests of individual users. If this threshold is not met then some information is withheld for that category resulting in an incomplete picture of the data.



Facebook Ads Manager campaign demographics display

Engagement

Engagement metrics demonstrate the extent to which individuals interact with a campaign's content, social media accounts, campaigners or websites. Metrics like impressions or reach, used for understanding awareness, provide no indication of whether any substantive engagement has taken place. Engagement metrics, many of which will be familiar – such as likes, shares, retweets or comments – do provide an indication of the quality and frequency of interactions between audiences and a campaign. Combined with awareness metrics they contribute to an evaluator's understanding of the impact of a campaign.

Some metrics provide evidence of a more substantial engagement than others, and certain types of counter-narrative campaigns will prioritise certain types of engagement. For example, a campaign seeking to reach the widest possible number of people for an awareness raising effort might place more value on likes and shares than comments or other forms of engagement. In contrast, a campaign seeking to engage people currently involved in or at particular risk of becoming involved in extremist groups might place a higher value on comments or direct message interactions.

In general however, actions that require greater effort, like typing a comment, can generally be regarded as a more substantive interaction than those that require less effort, like clicking 'like'.

While awareness and engagement metrics come together to contribute towards measures of impact, engagement metrics are generally regarded as more valuable than awareness metrics. Engagement metrics can tell you whether people who saw your counter-narrative campaign found it interesting, and whether the tone, content or even targeting of the messaging was effective. Rather than simply telling you that your content was seen, engagement metrics tell you how it was perceived and interacted with.

As with awareness metrics, different social media platforms have different metrics for engagement. For example, Facebook evaluation typically focuses on likes, shares, comments, link clicks and page likes from promoted posts, adverts and videos, while Twitter focuses on retweets, favourites and replies to tweets.

Several types of engagement are open to qualitative evaluation, which can provide insight into how a campaign is received. Most obviously, comments, or other text-based reactions can be usefully coded and analysed for sentiment, key themes and so on, either manually or through social media analytics software. Other types of engagement, including likes, favourites or other sorts of responses (such as the emoji list available on Facebook reaction tabs) can also be analysed to reveal how content is received.

Clicks are the number of times people have clicked on your ad or a link in your posts. This is a useful indicator of the number of individuals who have made a proactive decision to engage with your counter-narrative content.

Sustained engagements are interactions between campaigners and users that go on for an extended period of time. Frequently, sustained engagements take the form of conversations, for example, they may be conducted through comment feeds, direct messages or email. While sustained engagements consist of an exchange or exchanges of multiple messages, there is no formal definition of what constitutes a sustained engagement.

Generally, campaigns that seek to engage a smaller audience in a more detailed way – for example counter-narrative campaigns aimed at getting individuals to leave extremist groups – are more concerned with generating sustained engagements as a key goal than those which seek to reach a broader audience with a goal such as awareness raising.

While further research is needed into the process of disengagement and deradicalisation in general, sustained engagement with a counter-narrative campaign is regarded as an important way of establishing the idea of leaving, or an avenue for providing practical help to those already considering leaving, extremist groups.

There are two types of sustained engagement, *constructive* and *antagonistic*:

> **Constructive sustained engagements** are where someone comments more than once in a positive manner in an online conversation about the content, campaign or issue.
>
> **Antagonistic sustained engagements** are where someone repeatedly disputes or dismisses the content or campaign to other users (or campaigners), and/or expresses extreme views or offensive slurs.

Depending on the goal of your campaign, either type of sustained engagement could represent a positive impact.

If you are seeking to raise awareness of an issue or increase your audience's knowledge on a particular topic, then a constructive sustained engagement can help illustrate that your message has been considered and absorbed. If someone has entered into a constructive discussion and considered alternative viewpoints then the campaign has encouraged thinking critically about the issue or message. In many cases, a preponderance of sustained antagonistic engagements might be discouraging, suggesting a poor reaction among the intended audience. However, in some cases – for example in efforts to engage the members of extremist groups – it might be regarded as positive outcome, and evidence that members of that group have engaged with and found themselves challenged by the content. These interactions can potentially help to sow initial seeds of doubt and, if the time is right, may contribute to changing that person's perspective or attitudes.

Video-specific engagement metrics can provide insights into the quality of engagement with viewers.

> **Audience retention**, sometimes referred to as viewer retention or a video's drop-off rate, refers to the amount of time viewers spend watching the video, expressed as either an absolute time or a percentage of the length of the video. Audience retention provides an indication of the extent to which the content of the video is interesting or engaging for users.
>
> Audience retention can be further subdivided into **absolute audience retention** and **relative audience retention**. Absolute retention refers to the number of viewers who continue to watch a video until a certain point through it, while relative retention is the number of viewers who continue to watch a video relative to other videos of the same length on that platform. An analysis of audience retention rates can reveal points at which more viewers stopped watching a given video, providing an indication of which parts of the video are less effective in maintaining user engagement and put viewers off. This can inform future content design by highlighting parts of a video

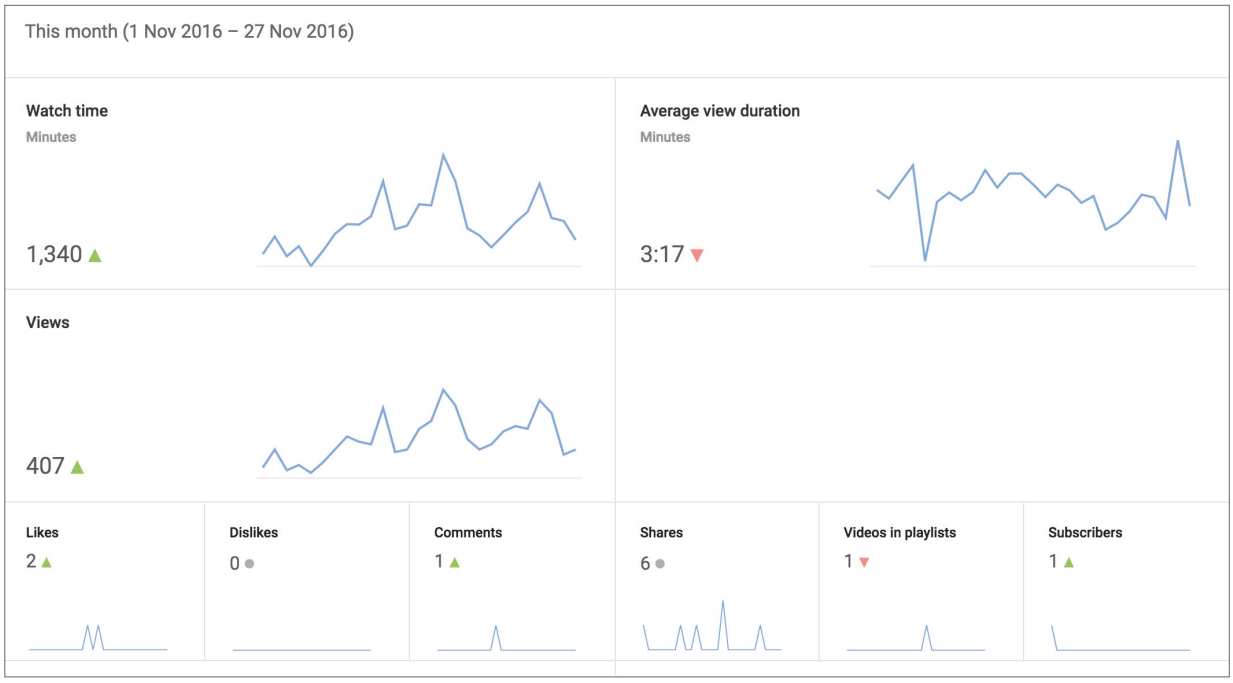
that can be changed, or by encouraging the production of shorter, more engaging videos. Audience retention is measurable on YouTube, Facebook and a range of other platforms.

Website engagement metrics

If your counter-narrative campaign includes a stand-alone website, for example as a platform for the hosting of additional content or a call to action, there are specific metrics that will help you judge the performance of that website and individual pages within it.

The **bounce rate** is the number of people who land on your website and then leave again without moving past the landing page. This is most frequently expressed as a percentage. The bounce rate can provide an indication of the extent to which your landing page draws website users in. As a general rule, the higher the bounce rate, the less engaging the content on the landing page. This being said, bounce rates are relative, all websites have a certain bounce rate, and bounce rate is heavily dependent on engaging by website design.

The **exit rate** provides a more sophisticated measure of website user retention than the bounce rate. Each page has an exit rate. The exit rate is the percentage of users who leave your website from a given page, rather than clicking a link or button on your page and continuing to more of your content. At some points, a higher exit rate might be expected – for example on a page that tells users they have successfully registered their details. On other pages, a higher exit rate would be undesirable – for example on the page of a call to action or just before a certain piece of content is presented. Exit rates can show you which pages or stages in a user experience are the least appealing, or where technical problems on your website might be. If your website presents a range of materials – for example three different packages of resources, or a number of different calls to action – exit rates can help you understand which elements of content are more or less popular.



Facebook Ads Manager campaign demographics display

Impact

The awareness and engagement metrics that your M&E efforts focus on are defined by the nature, goals and objectives of your campaign. These awareness and engagement metrics come together to provide insight into the extent to which a counter-narrative campaign achieves it stated impact.

Discerning whether or not a counter-narrative campaign has achieved the desired impact, and what that impact might have been – whether it is actually changing people's attitudes or behaviours – is a difficult task. Our fundamental understanding of the impact of online counter-narrative campaigns remains limited, and measuring abstract attitudinal or behavioural impacts on such a sensitive question is difficult.

Moreover, the anonymity that the internet provides, and the often loose connection between online and offline personas, makes it difficult to know exactly who a campaign's audience is and how they are reacting on an individual level. While analysis of the metrics described above will provide insights into online impacts, the translation of likes, shares and comments into measurements of offline impact is more difficult.

This being said, the examination of engagement and awareness metrics in combination can furnish the highest possible quality of M&E, and the use of additional quantitative and qualitative research methods, as described in the section below, can provide valuable depth and context to an evaluation.

Quantitative and Qualitative Methods

M&E efforts related to social media counter-narrative campaigns typically focus on the analysis of the metrics described above. These awareness and engagement statistics will typically form the core of a counter-narrative campaign M&E. However, there are a range of other measures that can provide insights into the impact of counter-narrative campaigns.

In some cases, further analysis of the tone of comments or the frequency of keywords can provide additional quantitative insights. In other cases, while more qualitative approaches such as interviews or focus groups do not offer the statistical certainty of awareness and engagement metrics, they can offer depth to your understanding of how the audience reacts to or perceives your campaign. Additional research of this type can be more or less appropriate for different types of campaigns and audiences. For example, focus groups might not be appropriate where individuals could be uncomfortable airing their views in front of others, might be at–risk, or even existing members of extreme groups. Considering the ethical and risk considerations of additional research efforts is therefore vital, and these are described in more detail in the next chapter.

Sentiment analysis

Sentiment analysis is the use of data mining and Natural Language Processing (NLP) to gather a sample of text and analyse it for meaning using an automated process. Sentiment analysis can seem complex, but the principles are quite simple.

Put simply, data mining in the context of social media research is the process of extracting data for analysis. Often in practice this means collecting online text or other types of content, frequently defined by the inclusion of a particular keyword, or publication over a certain time period, from a social media platform. NLP is the application of artificial intelligence software to human language: words, phrases and sentences that convey meaning. Through the application of NLP to mined text, large volumes of writing can be automatically analysed for meaning, for example positive or negative sentiment.

There are free or low-cost software packages that can be used for this purpose, though a number of them, particularly the free packages, require basic computer science knowledge.

At a basic level, this kind of analysis can categorise comments, tweets, blog posts or any other kind of text into categories of meaning: positive or negative, action-orientated or passive, or other more complex categories. This kind of analysis can work at a large scale, adding new quantitative insights to data that has been gathered throughout the M&E process, like comments under YouTube videos, or tweets interacting with a campaign hashtag or account.

A number of free resources are available that can provide evaluators without extensive technical expertise with the software tools that they need to operate natural language processing software. Some of these tools are listed in the tools section of this Handbook, but they include TextRazor and Crimson Hexagon.

Geo-location analysis

Geo-location based social media analysis tools allow researchers to understand how social media users engage with their content in different geographic locations, by allowing not only the analysis of social media content, but the geographic placement of individual interactions. This can allow users evaluating the impact of counter-narrative campaigns to discern the geographic as well as the digital reach of their campaign, and understand how different regions have interacted with their content. As with sentiment analysis, free tools such as Geofeedia and Sysomos are available. See the tools section of this Handbook for more information.

Online surveys

The delivery of online surveys to target audiences or campaign participants can be an effective way of gathering a greater depth of data on the impact of a counter-narrative campaign, albeit at the cost of limited breadth. Surveys can be used to gather open

text responses as well as detailed quantitative feedback. At the same time, the contact details gathered could be used (and only with express prior permission) for focus group recruiting, telephone interviews or follow up campaigning and promotion.

However, the use of online surveys for the purpose of evaluation poses a number of methodological problems. Respondents are self-selective, biasing the sample itself. This is because the characteristics of people responding to the survey might not be representative of the overall audience. For instance, they might be more likely to be negative, filling out the survey to complain, or more engaged in the content than the average audience member and thus more likely to undertake a survey. Online surveys can also suffer from "survey fatigue", leading to higher levels of drop-off and non-completion, or inaccurate completion as the survey goes on. Additionally, many of those who interact with a counter-narrative campaign might be reluctant to share personal details, leaving some important audiences under-represented. For this reason, online surveys are best used as a supplement to other quantitative analysis approaches.

Surveys can be promoted to individuals who have interacted with the campaign through links embedded in the material – on webpages, in the descriptions of videos or on social media pages – and can gathered over the course of a campaign. Completion of surveys can be incentivised, for example through a prize draw, though careful ethical consideration must be exercised in the use of incentives. While more often useful for research and development than monitoring and evaluation, surveys can also be delivered through social media advertising tools, for example on Facebook or YouTube. The demographic and location based targeting functions of these platforms allow for the accurate surveying of a particular audience.

In-depth interviews

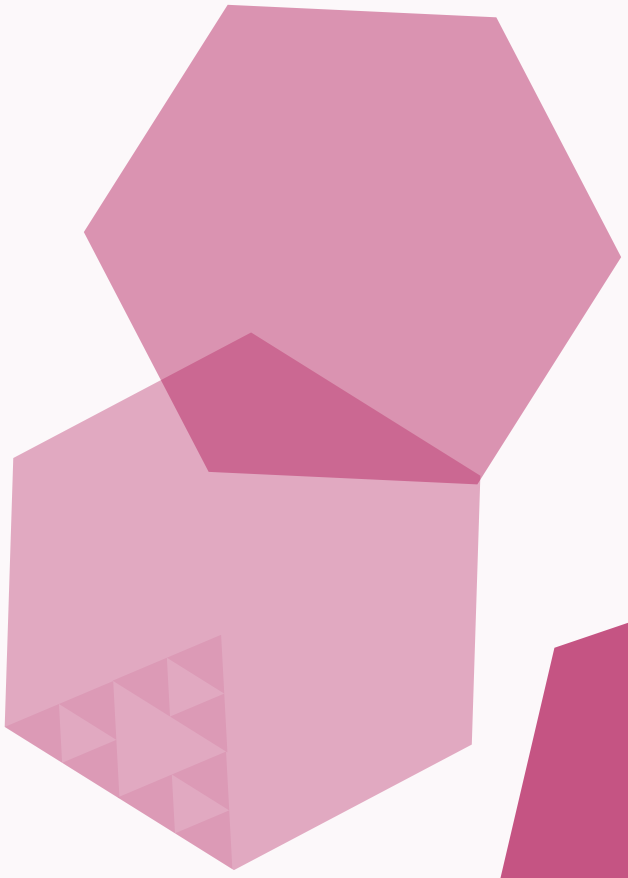
Interviews, conducted over the phone or in-person and based on a scripted framework offer the greatest possible depth for evaluators, and allow evaluators to directly talk through the strengths, weaknesses and impact of a counter-narrative campaign with participants. While interviews are difficult to establish, particularly in the context of a topic as sensitive as counter-narrative campaigning, they can add valuable context and humanise impact in a way that adds value to other metrics.

Focus groups

Focus groups can add qualitative insight and contextual depth to an evaluation, with a greater claim to accuracy than individual interviews. The group dynamics of focus groups can help draw out details that might not emerge in interviews, and while focus groups have no greater claim to representivity than interviews, the presentation of a plurality of views adds weight to the opinions drawn from them. Focus groups can be very difficult to arrange, particularly with regards to an online campaign in such a sensitive area, where individuals may be keen to remain anonymous. However, focus groups can be conducted online to reduce some of these risks and attract participants, for example through Google

Hangouts. As with interviews, significant ethical and risk evaluation considerations need to be exercised in terms of incentives, anonymity, and how results are drawn from focus groups.

RISKS AND ETHICS



Risks and Ethics

Counter-narrative campaigns inevitably deal with a sensitive subject matter, open up conversations that can put audiences and campaigners at-risk, and can expose participants to everything from physical harm to significant legal consequences. The specific risks a campaign must consider vary depending on the type of campaign, as well as factors such as the national and likely personal contexts of intended audience members. Beyond the ethical challenges related to counter-narrative campaigning in general, M&E efforts can themselves open up additional risks. However, these risks can be effectively mitigated through careful planning.

This section is not intended to present a full list of ethical, risk and planning considerations, which are many and varied and inevitably vary between counter-narrative campaigns. However, this section seeks to present a range of risks counter-narrative campaigners (as well as campaign messengers) can face when conducting M&E, and considerations that should be made in the planning process.

There are two types of risk that should be considered in counter-narrative M&E: *campaign risks* and *ethical risks*.

Campaign Risks

Campaign risks can undermine the credibility or effectiveness of counter-narrative M&E, but do not necessarily represent an ethical challenge. Listed below are a number of campaign risks that evaluators should be aware of:

Vanity Metrics

Vanity metrics are measures that sound impressive, but do not necessarily accurately describe the impact of your campaign. For example, if your campaign was designed to engage a specific, limited group of people, then a reach of 100,000 might not reflect well on the campaign. Instead, 250 sustained engagements might be a more impressive and useful measure of your campaigns' impact than 200,000 impressions.

Poor targeting

Serving unintended audiences with a message designed for consumption by a specific group can have a range of negative effects. For example, messages designed to draw people away from white nationalism, if served to people who are not at-risk of falling into white nationalist groups, could cause offense, feelings of alienation or even confirm negative views. Poor targeting can be related to vanity metrics, in that it can be tempting to address an unnecessarily large group in order to chase impressive M&E statistics.

Virality

Going viral – the tendency of an image, video, or piece of online content to be circulated rapidly and widely between internet users – is often regarded as the highest achievement of any campaign. However, while viral content might be useful in some regards, increasing the breadth of engagement with material for example, in other cases it can be harmful. Among certain audiences, mainstreamed content loses its appeal, and the benefits of circulation within a select audience can be lost. Whether or not content becomes viral is often outside of the control of counter-narrative campaigners, considerations such as how and where content is promoted or advertised can have an impact on a campaign's potential for virality.

Ethical Risks

Ethical risks can compromise research ethics or put campaigners or audience members at risk if they are not properly considered. Listed below are a number of ethical risks that evaluators should be aware of.

Measuring negative outcomes

Counter-narrative campaigns can have a range of complex impacts, not all of which will necessarily be positive. When it comes to planning the M&E effort that will accompany a counter-narrative campaign, it's important to consider not just what positive effects your campaign might have, but what negative effects it might have. Campaigners can then weigh the positive impacts against the negative, and judge the potential value of a campaign, as well as undertaking efforts to mitigate possible negative outcomes. If these negative effects are measurable, an evaluation framework should seek to measure them.

Risk to audiences and campaigners

While it's generally important in the planning of counter-narrative campaigns to consider the risks to audiences, it's particularly important to do so with regards to the M&E aspects of a campaign. M&E activities, from the collecting of email addresses to the publishing of social media content, can carry potential risks to the audience of a campaign. These risks need to be considered in advance of any M&E activity. Within this risk analysis, it is particularly important to give consideration to the local legal and cultural context in which participants interact with the counter-narrative campaign.

It is also important to consider the risks to campaigners engaged in counter-narrative campaigns, and the extent of the appetite within your organisation for those risks, particularly given the potential for a negative reaction from extremist groups or individuals. This risk has fewer implications for M&E efforts than risk to your audience, but should be taken into account.

Sustained engagement and safeguarding planning

Many counter-narrative campaigns do not pursue sustained engagements with individuals who are at-risk of falling into extremism, or who are currently members of extremist groups. However, all counter-narrative campaigns should have measures in place for what to do if they are approached or directly messaged by such individuals. While this is a general consideration, it is particularly worth keeping in mind in any potential interactions with audiences for the purpose of M&E, including requests for comment, interviews, focus group participation or survey completion.

Relevant considerations might include: how to respond to vulnerable individuals in a way that reduces their personal risk and addresses their needs; how to avoid over-reaching into activities that individual campaigners are not qualified to undertake; and, which authorities or civil society campaigners to connect vulnerable people with. Acting in an appropriate way when faced with a vulnerable person reaching out to a campaign is not only an ethical requirement but an opportunity to achieve important impact.

Data protection

Secure and ethical data protection and storage practices are important for any type of social research, and counter-narrative campaign M&E is no exception. However, it is particularly important that research data related to counter-narrative campaigns is properly handled given the sensitivity of the subject matter and individuals concerned. This necessitates secure data handling and storage policies. Further guidance on how to securely and ethically handle data can be found on the websites of national research organisations, such as the Economic and Social Research Council, or on the websites of prominent research universities such as Berkeley and Princeton.

Anonymity in M&E reporting

Evaluations of counter-narrative campaigns should, as a rule, be published publically. The public availability of a counter-narrative campaign evaluation adds credibility to it and shares best practice with other organisations campaigners. Ultimately, sharing what works and what does not increases the efficacy of counter-narrative campaigning.

When M&E reporting is published, it is important to take care to anonymise the content of messages, emails, posts, tweets or anything else that makes an individual user identifiable. Making content anonymous should not only involve the obscuring of user or account names, and the removal of individual's real names. Social media content can often be retrieved through simply copying text and entering it into a search engine or crawler. For this reason, extracts of text written by private citizens – for example Tweets or blog posts – should be modified to prevent this kind of search activity, by changing two or three words a sentence to comparable words. The anonymising process should also involve the obscuring of geo-tagged location data or information that places an individual a narrow geographic area – for example a small town.

Below is a hypothetical example of this:

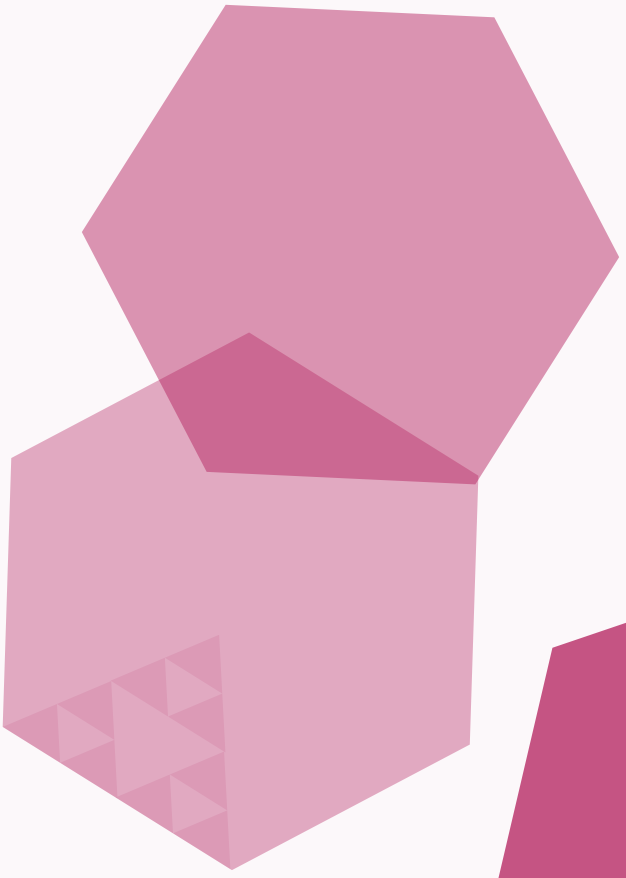
Original version:

> **John Smith @Smithy46567: I'm a dedicated anti-fascist and I love this campaign – hoping soon the whole of Balder Valley will be clear of neo-Nazis!**

Reported version:

> **User 1: I'm a dedicated anti-fascist and I love this campaign – hoping soon the whole of Balder Valley will be clear of neo-Nazis!**

MONITORING AND EVALUATION



Monitoring and Evaluation framework

The previous chapters have covered the methodological, ethical and risk considerations that should be made as part of counter-narrative campaign M&E. This chapter presents a flexible framework for counter-narrative campaign M&E, providing guidance on how to plan and structure an effective evaluation. While exactly how M&E activities should be conducted will vary between individual campaigns and should be defined by its activities and characteristics, this framework provides a prompt to help campaigners design their own M&E plan. This framework is laid out as a series of six research stages.

Stage 1: Preparatory planning

The first stage of counter-narrative campaign M&E takes place before the launch of the campaign, during the design of the campaign itself. If a campaigning group has not already done so, it is in this stage that they should allocate the budget and time to be set aside for M&E activities. In this phase, the key awareness and engagement metrics that will be used should be defined, their relative importance prioritised, and any additional qualitative or quantitative research activities should be planned.

Key planning considerations should include:

What does a successful campaign look like, and how can it be measured?

If the objective for a campaign is to raise awareness of an issue among Muslim women in London through video-based adverts on YouTube, then a successful campaign might be characterised by a large number of impressions among Muslim women in this area, effective targeting that is demographically precise to that group and that location, a high level of viewer retention, and a large number of likes, shares and comments.

It may be appropriate for this campaign to solicit feedback through surveys or interviews from Muslim women. To understand what scale of impact you might expect to achieve in a successful campaign, you might consider the scale of the Muslim female population in London, and the performance of previous campaigns designed to engage this group, and develop an estimate based on that evidence.

What does an unsuccessful campaign look like, and how can that be measured?

If the objective of a campaign is to reach out to those engaging in far-far-right extremist content online, and promote counter-arguments to far-right extremist arguments, then an unsuccessful campaign might be characterised by a large number of impressions and a reach much larger than the desired group. An unsuccessful campaign might also be characterised by a large number of likes or shares, and few comments, direct engagements or sustained engagements, with little or no negative

or contesting reaction through comments or direct messages. Understanding what might characterise a campaign failure in advance will ensure clarity in the assessment of a campaign's impact.

What risks are there in the M&E process, and how can they best be addressed?

Key risks to the audience, research participants and campaigners related to the M&E process should be identified in advance, justifications for any potentially risky actions provided, and mitigating actions outlined.

Below is an example of how a table to register risks and mitigation actions might look:

RISK	PROBABILITY	SEVERITY	JUSTIFICATION FOR RISK	MITIGATING ACTION
A commenter on a video shares hate speech, or otherwise uses the comments section on a video in an illegal or problematic way.	HIGH	MEDIUM	Making the comment section active on the video is required to stimulate engagement and allow audience members to reach out to campaigners, to stimulate debate and ultimately to increase the impact of the videos.	Comments will be pre-moderated and rapidly reviewed and approved by campaign staff in order to reduce the risk of problematic comments being made public.
The offline identity of an individual referenced in our evaluation report is uncovered by an extremist group or individual and publicised, leaving that person at-risk.	LOW	HIGH	Referencing specific examples of online interactions that are part of the campaign is important for establishing depth of understanding and can be accomplished safely if the proper considerations are made.	Social media content and individual accounts mentioned in our evaluation report will be anonymised, including through the changing of names, account names and associated text and pictures, in order to ensure that the identity of individual users are not determinable.

When the initial planning stage is complete, campaigners should know how they will measure the success of their campaign, what metrics they will use and what mitigating actions they will take to counter any potential risks.

Stage 2: Scale

When evaluation activities begin, the first thing to establish is the scale that the campaign achieved, in terms of the awareness achieved and the number of engagements across

the various websites and platforms that were part of the campaign. What impressions did various elements of the campaign and the campaign as a whole achieve? What was the number of views on videos, or page visits on web pages? How many likes, shares and comments were initiated as part of the campaign? Establishing the scale of the campaign, as well as itself being a key contributory measure of impact, lays the groundwork for further analysis.

In assessing the scale of a campaign, as well as in assessing engagement metrics, it's important to distinguish between effects achieved through organic means, and that which was achieved through paid placement and advertising of content.

> **Organic reach** is defined as audience reach or engagement on websites or social media platforms generated from searches and/or as a result of unpaid campaign strategies and tactics.
>
> **Paid reach** is defined as audience reach or engagement generated from paid advertising or content promotion directed at specific groups.

There is nothing wrong with the use of paid content per se: paid advertising can be useful for a wide range of purposes, from establishing momentum behind a campaign, reaching otherwise difficult to access groups, or rapidly upscaling engagement. However, the distinction between paid and organic reach is important, because it has implications for understanding the appeal of content, and the likely longevity or sustainability of the impacts achieved after a campaign is completed or project funding is otherwise no longer available. If two identical campaigns achieved the same awareness and engagement, with one generating this purely by organic engagement and one purely through paid advertising, it would imply a greater appeal for and longevity of the organic campaign.

Stage 3: Demographics

Having established the scale of the campaign in terms of awareness and number of engagements, the next step in evaluating impact is to understand the characteristics of the audience the campaign reached, in terms of demographic details like age and gender, geographic location and interests across the various platforms that were part of the campaign.

Establishing the details of the audience of campaign content will not only tell you if your campaign material reached the right (or wrong) people, but also whether you have failed to reach any specific groups within your desired audience. Examining the demographic details of the audience for different pieces of content over time might help you understand which aspects of the campaign resonated most with your audience or with different audiences, and which promotional activities were most effective. Social media advertising and in-build analytics tools typically contain valuable demographic details, and can be a good starting point for this aspect of evaluation.

Stage 4: Interactions

Having established the scale of the campaign, and the types of people it reached, a number of significant indications of the impact of a campaign have been achieved by the fourth stage. Evaluators will know how many likes, shares, comments, email exchanges, retweets and other types of interaction took place, and who initiated or undertook them. The fourth stage involves the analysis of the type and quality of those engagements, establishing the fine detail of the online impact achieved.

This can be achieved through a number of techniques, including the manual or automatic coding of comments or other textual interactions for key themes or sentiment, which can provide significant evidence regarding precisely how a campaign was received and perceived by those who engaged with it. Additionally, qualitative examination of interactions with individual audience members can provide examples that illustrate examples of positive and negative interaction with the campaign.

Stage 5: Additional research

At this stage, many campaign evaluations would be concluded, but in some cases it might be appropriate and beneficial to conduct additional research, either to fill in gaps within the existing M&E framework, or add depth to impact observations.

While it might not always be appropriate to conduct interviews or focus groups with audience members, due to the potential risks to participants and the practical difficulties of doing so, such qualitative research efforts can add a greater level of detail or new insights to M&E.

Stage 6: Cost and time

For both promoted and organic content, the amount of time and money expended during efforts to stimulate audience uptake or engagement can be an important measure. It can provide another measure of the value of a particular piece of content, and an important measure of the sustainability of a campaign's impact; if the success of a piece of content is dependent on significant applications of staff time or large advertising expenditure, it might not be sustainable. On a number of social media platforms, the cost per click or view of an advert increases or decreases as a result of the organic appeal of the content, among other factors. This type of calculation can therefore be augmented through the examination of cost per view or cost per click calculations accessed through social media advertising tools, in the case of promoted content.

Metrics considerations table

The metrics that can help indicate the success or failure of a campaign vary depending on the type of campaign that is being evaluated. Some metrics are a more important indicator for one campaign than for another, while sometimes the same values that

suggest failure for one campaign can suggest success for another.

The table on the following pages lays out some (but not all) of the considerations that one can make regarding which metrics to choose by describing how they might relate to two different types of campaign: a downstream campaign focused on promoting and supporting disengagement from extremist groups (of the kind typified by ExitUSA) and an upstream campaign focused on sharing the stories of those effected by extremism to build resilience to extremist narratives (of the kind exemplified by Extreme Dialogue).

Overviews of both of these campaigns can be found in the case study section of this report. There are many types of campaign but the differences between an 'upstream' and a 'downstream' campaign demonstrates the kinds of considerations evaluators need to make.

	METRIC	UPSTREAM	DOWNSTREAM
AWARENESS	***IMPRESSIONS***	As a general rule, a larger number of impressions is more desirable and a greater indicator of success for upstream campaigns, where mis-targeting risks are less profound and broader engagement more desirable.	As a general rule, downstream campaigns should be less focused on a large number of impressions, which can be an indicator of mis-targeting and too broad an appeal.
	REACH	As with impressions, a larger reach might be important as a measure of awareness for upstream campaigns. Because upstream campaigns seek to engage a broader group, a low ratio of impressions to reach, indicating that fewer people saw content more than once, is more desirable.	A larger reach might be important as a measure of awareness for downstream campaigns. Because downstream campaigns seek to engage a narrower group, a high ratio of impressions to reach, indicating that some people see the content more than once, is more acceptable or even desirable.
	VIEWS	A larger number of views is more desirable for a broader campaign, because high volumes of exposure to campaign content is more desirable.	A larger number of views is not necessarily a bad outcome for a downstream campaign, because it can imply multiple views and that content is being actively engaged with in a desirable way. However, it is generally a less important measure than for upstream campaigns.
	WEBSITE PAGE VIEWS	As with reach or impressions, an upstream campaign, more focused on engagement volume, might place greater value on website page views.	Conversely, downstream campaigns, less focused on achieving volume, might be less focused on website page view volumes.
	DEMOGRAPHIC ACCURACY	Demographic accuracy is important to both upstream and downstream campaigns, but upstream campaigns can afford a greater level of mis-targeting for the same reason they can afford a higher level of impressions.	Demographic inaccuracy can be an important indicator that content is not being circulated in the right groups for downstream messaging. This is a particular problem for downstream campaigns because mis-targeting risks are more profound and it is easier to miss members of the desired audience.

	METRIC	UPSTREAM	DOWNSTREAM
ENGAGEMENT	***VIEWER RETENTION***	Viewer retention on an individual level is generally equally important for upstream and downstream campaigns, because it is an important indicator of the quality of the content. However, because upstream campaigns can afford to be less efficiently targeted, average viewer retention might be lower overall. This being said, higher viewer retention across core demographic groups remains important.	Viewer retention averages can be more important to the success of a downstream campaign, because a smaller audience means fewer opportunities to make a meaningful impression on individuals engaged with the content.
	SHARES	Shares are an important indicator of the success of an upstream counter-narrative campaign, because they indicate the organic appeal of a piece of content.	Shares are a measure of the success of counter-narrative content for downstream campaigns too, but a low number of shares might not indicate failure for a downstream campaign: people within extremist groups or part of extremist communities might engage with content but be unwilling to share it within their networks.
	LIKES	A higher number of likes and approving reactions to content can be a measure of a successful upstream counter-narrative campaign, because it suggests the content resonates with the audience.	The number of likes or approving reactions is not necessarily an indicator of success for a downstream campaign, because combative or negative reactions from the audience can be a measure of the extent to which content has provoked reaction, or even discussion and debate.

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ENGAGEMENT	***COMMENTS***	A larger number of comments are desirable for both upstream and downstream campaigns, because comments represent evidence of a higher level of engagement. Upstream campaigns however might be more concerned with achieving positive comments as evidence of resonance within the audience.	Comments of either a negative or a positive nature are potentially valuable for a downstream campaign, because either can suggest audience engagement. Downstream counter-narrative campaigns, focused on creating fewer, higher quality engagements might be particularly focused on comments as a metric.
	BOUNCE AND EXIT RATES	Upstream campaigns might well consider page bounce and exit rates as an important metric, because it can reflect the quality of content, site design or technical efficacy. However, higher bounce or exit rates can be tolerated, because of the higher volume of traffic upstream campaigns might generate.	Like upstream campaigns, downstream campaigns might well consider page bounces and exit rates as an important metric for the same reasons. However, higher bounce or exist rates are more of a problem for downstream campaigns, because overall volume might well be lower.
	SUSTAINED ENGAGEMENTS *(CONSTRUCTIVE AND ANTAGONISTIC)*	Sustained engagements are a useful metric for both upstream and downstream campaigns. However, antagonistic or negative engagements might be less valued than constructive or positive engagements, because an upstream campaign would usually seek to be positively received.	For downstream campaigns, sustained engagements might be a more important measure, because more in-depth engagement with a smaller audience might be the campaign's goal. At the same time, negative or antagonist responses might be acceptable or positive, because the content is designed to counter extremism and is aimed at extremists or those vulnerable or extremist groups.
	ENGAGEMENT-TO-IMPRESSION RATIO	In general, upstream campaigns might be willing to achieve fewer engagements per impression, views or other awareness metric, because of the larger overall audience of the campaign and a reduced focus on in-depth engagement with a small group.	In general, downstream campaigns might regard a low number of engagements for a given number of impressions, views or other awareness metrics, because of the smaller audience of the campaign and a focus on in-depth engagement with a small group.

	SUSTAINED ENGAGEMENTS *(CONSTRUCTIVE AND ANTAGONISTIC)*	An upstream campaign might be less willing to tolerate a high cost per click, because it is aimed at a larger audience, and promoting content to wider social media audiences is generally cheaper. For this reason, a high cost per click might indicate a less successful campaign.	A downstream campaign might be more willing to tolerate a high cost per click, because it is aimed at a smaller audience, and promoting content to a more defined audience is generally more expensive per click. For this reason, a high cost per click might not be taken as a metric indicating an unsuccessful campaign.

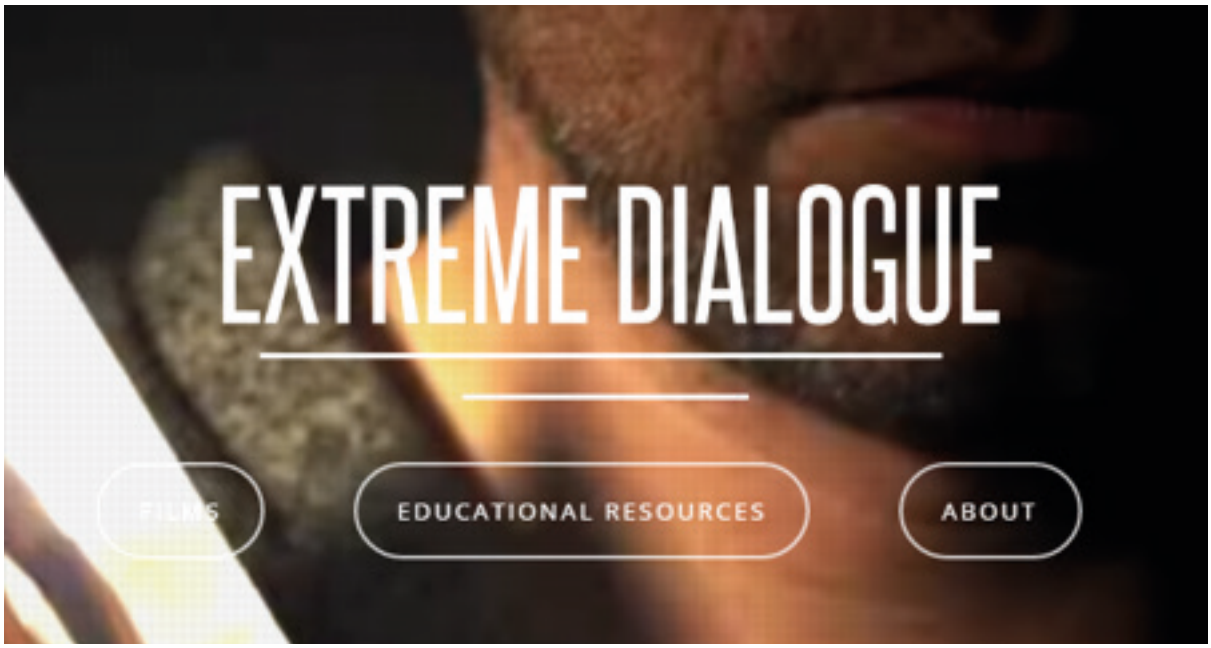
EVALUATION CASE STUDIES

Evaluation Case Studies

This chapter presents a series of three counter-narrative campaign case study evaluations: an upstream counter-narrative campaign based around educational resources and videos, Extreme Dialogue; a midstream counter-narrative campaign, Average Mohamed, based around a series of short animated videos discussing key issues related to extremism; and ExitUSA, a downstream campaign seeking to disengage far-right extremists from the ideology, using four short videos to sow the seeds of doubt.

These case studies are designed to highlight how effective M&E can provide insights into the impact of a campaign, indicate what kind of improvements might be made to materials to improve them, and provide inspiration for your own M&E efforts.

Extreme Dialogue: An upstream counter-narrative campaign evaluation



The Extreme Dialogue project is an educational workshop model, created by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) in partnership with the film-makers Duckrabbit and the Tim Parry Johnathan Ball Foundation for Peace. The project is comprised of a series of educational resources and short films delivered in schools and other informal educational settings, designed to build young peoples' resilience to violent extremism through active discussion and enhanced critical thinking.

The centrepieces of these workshops are a series of short emotive films, which tell the personal stories of individuals profoundly affected by violent extremism, including a former member of the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) whose father was killed by the Irirsh Republican Army (IRA), and a mother from Calgary whose son was killed fighting for ISIS in Syria. In addition to conducting workshops, Extreme Dialogue promotes these films on social media to counter extremist narratives, dispel extremist myths and encourage empathy with and understanding of the 'other.'

ISD conducted an online dissemination campaign, using online advertising and organic methods to distribute the films and attract users to the website and social media accounts associated with the campaign. The primary audience of the project were 14-25 year olds, with teachers as a second audience (as the primary intended users of the educational resources). Content was also promoted to parents in order to raise awareness of radicalisation and to enlist potential advocates for the use of the films and resources with young people.

Evaluation Method

The campaign was evaluated primarily through awareness and engagement metrics across the principle distribution platforms, YouTube, Facebook and Twitter. The key awareness metrics examined were impressions and reach, with particular consideration given to the demographics of the two intended audiences (14-25 year olds and 25+ year old teachers/parents), and the location (Canada, where the resources were initially launched). A wide range of engagement metrics, including likes and dislikes, shares and comments, video views and viewer retention were examined. The relative effectiveness of paid and organic content was also assessed.

Results of the Campaign

During the first week of the campaign, the videos on the Extreme Dialogue YouTube channel were viewed 50,673 times, and the channel attracted a net total of 73 subscribers as well as 53 likes, 6 dislikes and 6 favourites. The films were shared 55 times, added by users to playlists 43 times and received 22 comments. This suggests wide awareness but relatively low engagement.

The Facebook adverts resulted in over 504,000 impressions, with a reach of 362,500 unique users during the paid advertising period, resulting in 1,835 clicks. This large volume of impressions and low volume of clicks suggests that the adverts might not have been reaching the right audiences, or the adverts might not have been appealing to that audience. However, these clicks resulted in 923 actions (likes, shares and comments) from 916 unique users, consisting of 765 Facebook page likes, 111 visits to the project website, 45 post likes and 2 shares. This indicates that while few people clicked on the adverts, those who did were subsequently drawn to engage with the material.

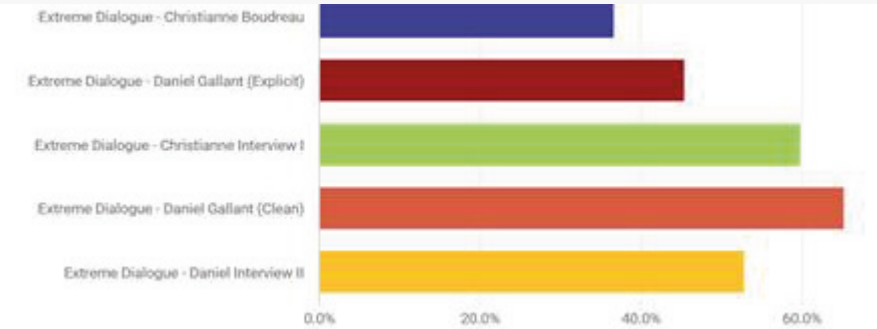
The campaign's success in reaching the different audiences varied by platform. Facebook content was far more effective at reaching older audiences, with the Facebook page

receiving the highest proportion of likes (20%) from the 35-44 age group, whereas the 13-17 age group made up less than 1%. By contrast, engagement on YouTube from those in Canada came overwhelmingly from the 18-24 age group (78%), suggesting that it succeeded in reaching its target audience on that platform.

Compared to organic content, paid content had a wider reach, but led to less engagement. On YouTube for example, advertising accounted for 89% of total views during the first week of the campaign, but only 53% of total subscriptions, 44% of shares and 23% of likes. In fact, successful YouTube engagement with the 13-17 age group relied on organic content as those under-18 cannot be targeted by advertising.

Examining viewer retention

The Extreme Dialogue project centred on the promotion of video content, so viewer retention rates were an important metric for evaluating engagement. What's more, the campaign involved the dissemination of a series of videos, allowing evaluators to compare how effective different types of video content had been.



The graph above shows viewer retention rates for Extreme Dialogue's top five YouTube videos. The two main films - **Christianne Boudreau** and **Daniel Gallant** (Explicit) - have lower overall viewer retention rates. This is unsurprising as they were both viewed by users arriving predominantly via advertising. All the views for the other films were either organic (i.e. unpaid) or earned from viewers attracted through advertising (i.e. the more engaged users that chose to watch further Extreme Dialogue videos). Within these two groups, it might be deduced that the Daniel Gallant videos were marginally more engaging.

Conclusion

The evaluation found that the campaign was successful in reaching a wide audience. It was given momentum in the first few days by paid advertising across the different platforms, although more sustained reach still relied on organic content. Despite its effectiveness early on in the campaign, paid content did not carry over into a sustained interest, and the effects of Facebook and YouTube advertising were not sustained after the first week of the campaign. This suggests the need for an understanding of how to consistently and effectively engage audiences through organic means in future campaigns.

The evaluation also found that good branding and effective content encouraged direct engagement, and some of the campaign content garnered much more frequent and sustained engagement than others, providing an indication of what types of content should be the focus of future efforts, what works and what does not.

Average Mohamed: A mid-stream counter-narrative campaign evaluation

Average Mohamed is a non-profit organisation that uses the medium of animation to counter the ideology of Islamist extremist groups. Created by a Somali-American, it promotes democratic principles as an alternative, to channel frustrations. The Average Mohamed campaign involved five videos that each addressed a distinct theme: *identity, gender equality, democracy, being a Muslim in Western culture, and slavery*. The videos revolve around the central character, Average Mohamed, who discusses the themes with other characters.

ISD conducted an online dissemination campaign, using content promotion and organic methods to distribute the films and attract users to the website and social media accounts associated with the campaign. The target audience for the campaign was primarily young Somali-Americans aged 14-25 in communities with high Somali Muslim populations in Minneapolis, San Diego, Seattle and Washington, but included a broader US reach. The organisation also wanted to go beyond a US audience, which led to experimental targeting in the UK. The counter-narrative content is educational and preventative, which allowed for broader targeting.

Evaluation Methods

The campaign was evaluated primarily through awareness and engagement metrics across the three principle distribution platforms, Twitter, YouTube and Facebook. The key awareness metrics examined were impressions and reach, with particular consideration

given to the demographics of the intended target audience (14-25 year olds in the US and the UK). A wide range of engagement metrics, including likes and dislikes, shares and comments, video views and viewer retention were examined.

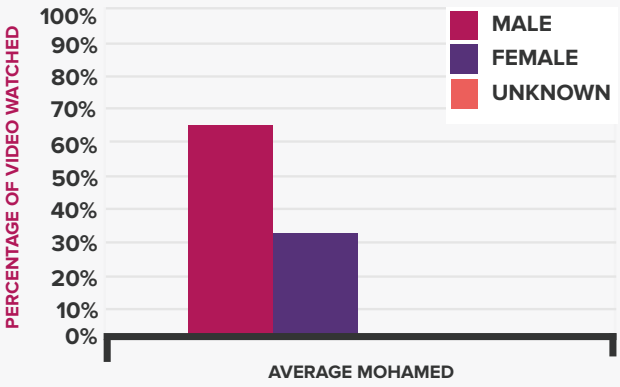
Results

Collectively, the five videos had a reach of 456,113 people on Facebook. Average Mohamed's page likes on Facebook increased sevenfold, while the campaign doubled its number of Twitter followers and YouTube subscribers.

Although Facebook and Twitter had more impressions in absolute numbers than YouTube, impressions did not necessarily translate into higher levels of engagement. Twitter, for example, had the best engagement to impression ratio - 1:14 compared to 1:304 for YouTube and 1:141 for Facebook. Moreover, the videos that received the most engagements on Facebook or Twitter were not necessarily the videos that received the most engagements on YouTube. Although it had lower engagement, YouTube had a higher viewer retention rate, possibly because it is a dedicated video platform.

These results illustrate the difference in engagement and viewer retention across different platforms. This was probably influenced by the nature of each platform, since Facebook and Twitter are interactive social media sites, whereas YouTube is primarily a content-viewing platform, and has more limited options for engagement.

Viewer-specific promotion



Of the five Average Mohamed videos, approximately 67% of total viewers were male, and 33% female. However, for the Be Like Aisha video (which dealt with the status of women) female audiences were targeted more heavily, and the total impressions had a higher number of female users. It is important to note that even within a campaign, different kinds of content might have more resonance with specific audiences, and paid advertising can be used to better effect if these target audiences are anticipated beforehand.

Conclusions

Average Mohamed successfully sparked debate on the role of gender and identity in Islam, two topics which seemed to resonate well with audiences. Measured by the popularity of the videos *Be Like Aisha, A Muslim in the West,* and *Identity in Islam*, these topics prompted high engagement and continued their reach after the end of the campaign. The video on slavery prompted less engagement, suggesting the audience did not deem

it as relevant to their own lives. A good understanding of the topics most important to the target audience should therefore be well-understood before the campaign content is devised.

Viewer retention rates also varied between videos, and did not necessarily correlate to higher engagement. *A Muslim in the West* had the highest average percentage of video viewed on Facebook, but the lowest number of total engagements, while *Be Like Aisha* had the highest number of engagements on Facebook but not the highest average percentage of video viewed. This may mean that the message in the *Be Like Aisha* video resonated with the viewership and they were compelled to engage with the content. This highlights the danger of relying too heavily on a single metric, which can be interpreted in an unhelpful way if viewed in isolation.

ExitUSA: A downstream counter-narrative campaign evaluation

ExitUSA is an "exit" outreach programme run by the US-based non-profit organisation Life After Hate (LAH). It is intended to help individuals who want to leave white supremacist groups, as well as provide support for former members of these groups. Their focus is on the far-right in the USA. Its counter-narrative campaign consisted of four videos, designed to discredit far-right extremist groups, 'sow the seeds of doubt' in far-right extremist individuals, and promote their exit program among to disaffected 'formers' looking for a way out, as well as their concerned families and friends.

The videos centre on the stories of both ExitUSA staff and the Against Violent Extremism (AVE) network's 'former' members to highlight personal experiences and the myths often perpetuated by extremist groups. The organisation was keen to target the videos at a broad geographic audience, as their research indicated violent white-supremacists were sparsely located across all areas of the US. They therefore broadly targeted 13-60+ year olds, male and female, across the US. However, to narrow the demographic, they also

focused on keywords that appeared in audience interests, such as 'Aryan Brotherhood', 'Skinhead', and White Genocide.'

Evaluation Methods

The campaign was evaluated primarily through awareness and engagement metrics across the three principle distribution platforms, Twitter, YouTube and Facebook. The key awareness metrics examined were impressions and reach, with particular consideration given to the demographics of the intended target audience (13-60+ year olds in the US). A wide range of engagement metrics, including likes and dislikes, shares and comments, video views and viewer retention were examined.

Results

Collectively, the four videos had a reach of 212,051 people on Facebook. By the end of the campaign, the ExitUSA Facebook page likes had increased from 192 to 286, and the followers of its Twitter account more than tripled, from 50 to 155.

There were 4,421 engagements across all three platforms, with the highest number (2,127) coming from Facebook, and the lowest (42) coming from YouTube. Twitter, which had 1,692 engagements, had the highest engagement to impression ratio – 1:123, compared to 1:889 for YouTube. However, despite lower views and rates of engagement, YouTube had a higher viewer retention rate. These results indicate the difference in engagement and viewer retention across different platforms. As with Average Mohamed, this was probably influenced by the nature of each platform, since Facebook and Twitter are interactive social media sites, whereas YouTube is primarily a content-viewing platform.

There was a high male-to-female viewer ratio. Approximately 70% of viewers were male, with 20% female and 10% unknown. The fact that much of the content touches on topics of masculine identity, and used the personal stories of male formers, may have given them greater resonance with male audiences.

There was also an impressive volume of sustained engagement, with comment discussions between multiple users and the campaigners. This is indicative of well-targeted content, which is able to promote discussion among the audience. The campaign's aim was to disengage those already sympathetic to extremist ideology, or at least plant a seed of doubt.

Examining sustained engagement

It is extremely unlikely that a user who clearly has violent views will proclaim a change of heart after watching a counter-narrative video. Nonetheless, sustained engagements – or individuals reaching out to counter-narrative campaigners for assistance – can provide the clearest indication of impact for downstream counter-narrative campaigns.

> **[EXIT Former 1]: Hey guys I am a former white supremacist**
>
> **[ExitUSA]: Hi [former]. Thank you for reaching out. How can we help you?**
>
> **[EXIT Former 1]: I have been away from it for a few months but I still get old feelings an thoughts**

The dialogue above gives an example of sustained constructive engagement. People reaching out for help is perhaps the clearest example of downstream counter-narrative content being successful. However, ExitUSA had a high capacity for dealing with these engagements, in the form of its trained intervention specialists, and any organisation likely to deal with similar requests would have to have contingencies for how to deal with them.

The evaluation of the campaign suggests there were a few factors which led to these levels of engagement. The first was the authentic voices of the formers, both in the videos and from those replying in the comments. Credibility of the narrator had a great effect on the credibility of the narrative. The speed of reply and the quality of responses were also important in sustaining dialogue. ExitUSA had a dedicated team of responders, all trained in intervention. The responders were very active in responding to both positive and negative comments, and they noticed much more engagement from users when they did.

Conclusion

The evaluation found that sustained engagement, both antagonistic and constructive, was likely the campaign's clearest success. This was helped in large part by ExitUSA's trained and highly active response team. The clearest examples of dialogue involving far-right extremists or sympathisers came from Facebook. This may be due to Facebook's comment interface, which makes viewing and responding to other users comments a relatively simple process without the interaction being posted on a commenters' own personal feed. This suggests that the platform used to promote content, and the forms of engagement it encourages, are an important factor in measuring a campaign's effectiveness.

The evaluation also concluded that the audience targeting, generally defined without regard to gender, still made a greater impression on males (around 70-80%) than females (around 20-30%). This suggests the need for sufficient research on target audience behaviours and interests before creating and disseminating content. Understanding this better requires further testing and research: trialling more and varied counter-narrative campaigns, but also other research – for example, with focus groups (for those aiming at preventative target audiences), and with 'formers' who have gone through the process themselves.

TOOLKIT

Toolkit

This section presents a series of online tools that might be useful in the evaluation of counter-narrative campaigns. These tools include social media monitoring apps, Natural Language Processing (NLP) programmes and other online resources. They are presented in order of complexity, with the most simple, free tools first and the more complex and typically commercial tools towards the end of the section.

Simple Tools

These tools provide basic functions that you can use to make monitoring and evaluating your campaign easier. They are easy to use and supplement the in-built analytic functions of social media platforms.

Google Alerts

Google Alerts can be used to track media coverage or mentions of your campaign or any other keywords or phrases. It is very easy to set up and sends email updates with links to where your campaign has been mentioned.

Google URL Shortener

Google's URL Shortener is quick way to track content that you share on social media. It allows you to easily shorten URLs (for posting on Twitter or other platforms with character limits) and view metrics related to people that click on your shortened links.

Hootsuite

As well as offering a quick way to manage accounts across multiple social media platforms, Hootsuite also offers in-built analytics that can give you a quick view of your campaign's overall performance. A basic Hootsuite package is free.

Google Hangouts

Google Hangouts is a communication platform that allows instant messaging and video chat between two people or between groups of up to 10 users. It's straightforward to use, free, and can facilitate online focus groups or interviews undertaken as part of M&E.

Advanced Tools

These tools provide more advanced functions, allowing you to monitor and visualise social media over a geographic area in a more sophisticated way, allowing you to understand your campaign's awareness and engagement metrics in a more sophisticated way and providing avenues for further qualitative research.

Hashtracking

Hashtracking provides hashtag tracking and analytics tools that can provide useful additional data for campaigning on Twitter or Instagram. Hashtracking aggregates all engagement with a hashtag and provides thematic insights into related discussions. It can be useful to monitor the success of your campaign if you decide to attempt to hijack an existing extremist hashtag. A basic Hashtracking package is free.

GoBabl

GoBabl is a social media monitoring tool that allows the collection and analysis of keywords or hashtags in a specifically defined geographic area. GoBabl collects and analyses content from Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr and Instagram, and can analyse top influencers, trends, and sentiment. GoBabl is not free, but costs for a simple package are low.

Sysomos

Sysomos is a social media analytic tool that gathers data from a range of platforms including Facebook and Twitter on the basis of geographic location. It can collect real-time content as well as historical data, and tell you how your campaign has been discussed in a particular area and/or demographic. Sysomos is also a paid service.

Google Analytics

Google Analytics is a free service that tracks, measures and reports website traffic, and can also be used for apps or your YouTube channel. It can help you understand the audience of your website and provide useful insights to help improve its design and usability.

Complex Tools

These tools facilitate more difficult types of social media analysis, using NLP and other more sophisticated methods to provide insights into your campaign. They are not required for an evaluation, and may require a higher degree of technical skill, but they can add depth and detail to counter-narrative M&E.

TextRazor

TextRazor API is an NLP software that works in ten languages. It extracts keywords, analyses sentiment and performs a range of other analytic functions on tweets, webpages and other text-based content. TextRazor is a commercial product.

Crimson Hexagon

Crimson Hexagon is a social media insights company which offers social media analysis services. Its capabilities include sentiment analysis and more complex NLP functions, as well as user-friendly data visualisation. Crimson Hexagon is a commercial product.

FURTHER READING

Further Reading

Counter-Narrative Campaign Evaluation Case Studies

- **Counter-Speech: Examining Content That Challenges Extremism Online**, Jamie Bartlett & Alex Krasodomski-Jones (2015), Demos
- **Fighting Fire With Fire: Target Audience Responses To Online Anti-Violence Campaigns**, Roslyn Richardson (2013), Australian Strategic Policy Institute
- **Making 'Noise' Online: An Analysis of the Say No to Terror Online Campaign**, Anne Aly, Dana Weimann-Saks & Gabriel Weimann (2014), *Perspectives on Terrorism* (Vol 8, No 5)
- **'Meta-analytic evidence for the persuasive effect of narratives on beliefs, attitudes, intentions, and behaviors',** Kurt Braddock & James Price Dillard (2016) *Communication Monographs,* (Vol. 83, Issue 4)
- **One to One Online Interventions: A Pilot CVE Methodology**, Ross Frenett & Moli Dow (2015), ISD
- **Public Diplomacy 2.0: An Exploratory Case Study of the US Digital Outreach Team**, Lina Khatib, William Dutton, & Michael Thelwall (2011), Center on Democracy, Development and the Rule of Law (CDDRL)
- **Anti-Terrorist Advertising Campaigns in the Middle East**, Ahmed K. Al-Rawi (2013), Journal of International Communication (Vol 19, No 2)
- **Walk Away From Violent Extremism: A Campaign to Address Violent Extremism Online**, Anne Aly (2014), Journal Exit-Deutschland (JEX)

Counter-Narrative Theory and Best Practice

- **Countering violent extremism through media and communication strategies: A review of the evidence,** Kate Ferguson (2016), Partnership for Conflict, Crime and Security Research.
- **Delivering Alternative Narratives, from 'Preventing Radicalisation to Terrorism and Violent Extremism'** (2016), Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN)
- **Developing Effective Counter-Narrative Frameworks for Countering Violent Extremism** (2014), Hedayah & International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT)
- **FREE Initiative How To Guides,** "Responding to Hate Speech and Incitement" & "Raising Awareness of the Problem", Vidhya Ramalingam (2014), ISD
- **'Guiding Principles for Countering and Displacing Extremist Narratives',** Alejandro Beutel et al. (2016), *Journal of Terrorism Research* (Vol. 7, No. 3)
- **Promoting Online Voices for Countering Violent Extremism,** Todd C. Helmus, Erin York &Peter Chalk (2013), RAND Corporation
- **Review of Programs to Counter Narratives of Violent Extremism,** Rachel Briggs & Sebastien Feve (2013), ISD
- **Strategic Communications and Foreign Fighters,** Shivit Bakrania (2014), Governance and Social Development Resource Centre (GSDRC)
- **'The Narrative Rationality of Violent Extremism',** Steven Corman (2016), *Social Science Quarterly* (Vol. 97, Issue 1)
- **'The Next Generation of Government CVE Strategies at Home: Expanding Opportunities for Intervention',** John Cohen (2016), The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, (Vol. 668, No. 1)
- **'Toward a Framework Understanding of Online Programs for Countering Violent Extremism',** Garth Davies et al., 2016, *Journal for Deradicalization* (No. 6)

- **'Towards a Comprehensive Approach to Combating Violent Extremist Ideology in the Digital Space: The Counter-Ideological Response (CIR) Model',** Kumar Ramakrishna, Combating Violent Extremism and Radicalization in the Digital Era (2016)
- **Understanding the Role of Former Extremists and Counter Messaging,** Zahed Amanullah (2016), ISD

Counter-Narrative Theory and Best Practice

- **Anti-Social Media,** Jamie Bartlett, Jeremy Reffin, Noelle Rumball & Sarah Williamson (2014), Demos
- **Cyber-Safety Action Guide, Responding to Cyber-hate: Toolkit for Action & Confronting Hate Online,** Anti-Defamation League (ADL)

INSTITUTE *for* STRATEGIC DIALOGUE

The Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) is a London-based 'think and do tank' that has pioneered policy and operational responses to the rising challenges of violent extremism and inter-communal conflict.

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