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Rapid Evidence Assessment on Alternative Narratives

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This report does not constitute Victorian Government Policy.

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Key Findings

1. Alternative narratives can be more effective at challenging extremist narratives because they can directly address real and perceived grievances as well as the psycho-social needs that may lead to engagement with extremist discourse
2. There has been a focus within P/CVE on alternative narratives that address jihadi inspired or attributed narratives, and there is little attention being paid to far-right narratives within an official capacity.
3. The role and impact that gender and gendered language plays in extremist narratives remains underdeveloped and under-researched. The literature suggests that much more focus needs to be placed on alternative narrative approaches that incorporate gender perspectives and language.
4. The most effective alternative narrative programs were grassroots pilot programs that incorporated alternative messaging into wider resilience and capacity building programs that included education, vocational and social work workshops.
5. Evaluation of the efficacy of alternative narrative programs is extremely limited. It often relies on 'clicks' and 'comments' alone. Providers have built business cases around these measures, potentially resulting in significant expenditure for little if any gain.

Policy Considerations

- Emphasis should be placed on working with grassroots, civil society organisations and university partnerships to develop alternative narrative campaigns within integrated interventions that promote strengths-based resilience-oriented and capacity building approaches.
- More attention needs to be paid by practitioners and academics to alternative narratives that can address and challenge far right narratives and narratives emerging out of the manosphere, militant wellness and COVID-19 disinformation.
- The literature suggests that much more focus needs to be placed on alternative narrative approaches that incorporate gender perspectives and language. To this end, deeper understanding of the role of masculinities in pathways to violent extremism and the creation of 'angry young men' is urgent.
- Creative approaches to alternative narratives that involve young individuals in the co-creation of content ensure that there is a sense of empowerment and ownership of the messaging.
- There is a strong need for a review of the efficacy of existing alternative narrative programs. Future alternative narrative programs would benefit from consistent monitoring and evaluation.
- Investment in community-led, academically informed, alternative narrative program development is needed to build trust, openness and to promote relationship building with target audiences.

Executive Summary

1. This research provides a preliminary evidence base to examine and determine the effectiveness of alternative narratives as a strategy to disrupt violent extremism. It identifies key psycho-social needs targeted by violent extremist narratives and examines how alternative narratives can address these. The research provides insights into how violent extremist narratives can be challenged through alternative narratives that are part of an integrated intervention policy.
2. Alternative narratives are understood within the report as focusing on standing 'for' rather than 'against' something. They do this by conveying positive content, centring on aspects of democracy and openness, including the promotion of tolerance, diversity and mutual understanding.
3. The literature suggests that, in contrast to counter-narratives, alternative narratives can be more effective at challenging extremist narratives because they can directly address real and perceived grievances as well as the psycho-social needs that may lead to engagement with extremist discourse.
4. The literature suggests that emotion is underutilised in developing alternative narratives to those used by terrorism and violent extremist narratives and that it is necessary to understand the push and pull factors that contribute to individuals engaging with extremist discourse. The influence of extremist discourse and narratives tends to be an outcome of broader socialisation, online and offline social networks and wider grievances regarding state policies and civil conflict.
5. The literature on P/CVE indicates that identity and belonging are closely linked with the reasons why young people engage with violent extremist groups. Creating the space for those considered to be "at risk" to explore their identities, voice their grievances through dialogue and validate their voices is viewed as way to avoid experiences of marginalisation.
6. Much of the literature suggests that there has been a focus within P/CVE on alternative narratives that address jihadi narratives, and that there is little attention being paid to far-right narratives within an official capacity.
7. Extremist narratives online and offline have gained more currency in the context of conspiracy theories against the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting the need to address the broader context through alternative narratives.
8. The role and impact that gender and gendered language plays in extremist narratives remains underdeveloped and under-researched. The literature suggests that much more focus needs to be placed on alternative narrative approaches that incorporate gender perspectives and language. This is particularly the case in relation to understanding the role of masculinities.
9. Whilst the literature provides several best practice examples of alternative narratives, the research found that there is emphasis on programs that target broad audiences.
10. Measuring the effectiveness of these programs is often based on social media analytics and metrics which only indicates engagement with content rather than potential changes in behaviour or attitudes towards extremism.

11. One of the most common themes across the literature is that alternative narrative approaches are most effective when targeted at those individuals that are viewed sitting on the fence, i.e., those that are not fully supportive or fully opposed to extremist messaging or those that might be tempted by extremist messages.
12. The most effective alternative narrative programs were those pilot programs that incorporated alternative messaging into wider resilience and capacity building programs that included education, vocational and social work workshops.
13. The literature further suggests that alternative programs developed at the grassroots level that included those vulnerable to extremist rhetoric or former extremists within the production of alternative narratives tended to appeal and resonate more with the target audience such as in the example of *Jamal al Khatib-My Path*.
14. Alternative narrative programs developed by government authorities were shown to be less effective as they were viewed with suspicion and lacked credibility. Distrust in government and public institutions is a key factor in engagement with violent extremism. Narratives that come from government institutions are likely to fall flat and lack impact because of this distrust.
15. Effective alternative narrative approaches deconstruct or appropriate the style and language used by extremist groups such as incorporating similar multimodal visual and audio styles in content creation. They moreover use these multimodal registers to promote narratives that reframe the 'us' versus 'them' in and outgroup discourse to appeal to the intended target audience.
16. Alternative narrative approaches work best when they consider local contexts and social, economic and political factors that might impact on an individual's engagement with extremist narratives.
17. Effective alternative narratives use credible messengers such as peers, former extremists, grassroots organisations, community members and influencers to disseminate and spread positive messages.
18. The efficacy of existing counter programs has been poor. Future alternative narrative interventions require robust monitoring and evaluation.

Methodology

Narrative is at the forefront of concerns about terrorism and violent extremism (Glazzard 2017; Kruglanski, Bélanger and Gunaratna 2019). Narratives are an important ‘pull factor’ recruitment mechanism into violent extremism, providing a source of meaning to those engaged with them. This has been recognised in counter terrorism approaches for some time.

This Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA), grounded in a systematic review of studies of alternative narratives, is focused on determining the efficacy of alternative narrative approaches to disrupting violent extremist narratives. The REA:

1. Examines how alternative narratives are defined in a variety of literature (moving beyond violent extremism and counter-terrorism literature to other fields where the concept has been used).
2. Explores the specific psycho-social needs targeted by violent extremist literature and examines how alternative narratives can address these;
3. Explores the evidence, where it exists, about the effectiveness of alternative narratives at different stages of an individual’s trajectory toward violent extremism. This requires careful consideration as to the key factors shaping the appeal to violent extremism in the first place and the role of emotion including anger, alienation and anxiety (Standing 2011; Roose 2020).
4. Explores whether and how alternative narratives are more or less efficacious at some stages than others; and
5. Determines the elements of effective alternative narrative messaging (content, format, platform and delivery) and in which circumstances and contexts these are likely to occur.

The Rapid Evidence Assessment

The Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA), also known as ‘rapid review’, is a literature review methodology that provides timely reviews on efficacious approaches to inform decision making (Varker et al. 2015). Rapid reviews are a ‘form of evidence synthesis that may provide more timely information for decision making compared to standard systematic reviews’ (AHRQ 2019) and can be used to gain an overview of the quality and density of evidence on a particular issue, support programming decisions by providing evidence and support the commissioning of future research by identifying key gaps (UK Government 2015). The REA is particularly helpful to policymakers, addressing fast moving demands whilst maintaining the rigor of a full review (Hailey, Corabian, Harstall and Schneider 2000).

This REA will inform the construction of alternative narratives which address the needs and concerns of vulnerable individuals while providing prosocial, non-violent modes of expression and action. It will also provide evidence to demonstrate by what means and in what contexts alternative narratives may be perceived by and impact on vulnerable individuals.

Method

This REA draws on the Rapid Evidence Assessment Toolkit developed for the British Government by the Government Social Research (GSR) team (United Kingdom Civil Service 2014) and best practice examples derived from REA’s commissioned by the United Kingdom Government. This consists of a series of six steps outlined and elaborated upon below.

Formation of REA Team and Involving Users

The GSR Toolkit asked several questions, including whether the REA team have the necessary skills to carry out the REA, the perspectives needed in the team, which users should be involved and how user engagement will be made meaningful given tight deadlines.

To ensure consistency with best practice models, we engaged the end user (Department of Home Affairs) during the REA process. This included developing the protocol after initial mapping of the literature and input in interpreting and communicating findings.

1. Research Question and Conceptual Framework

The GSR Toolkit sets out three key questions to be addressed in confirming the questions: what type of question is the REA attempting to answer; how is the question being limited?; and how does this impact the REA conclusions?

This REA focuses on key questions stipulated in the outline:

- Definitions of alternative narratives and how they are distinguished from counter-narratives;
- What are the psychosocial needs targeted by violent extremist narratives and how can alternative narratives address these?
- At what stage of an individual's trajectory toward violent extremism are alternative narratives likely to be most and least effective?
- What are the elements of effective alternative narrative messaging (including but not limited to content, format, platform and delivery) and in what circumstances and contexts are these more effective?

We propose that the gendered dimensions of these psychosocial needs are important and must be looked at in particular. The focus is limited to alternative narratives.

2. Specifying the Methods of the Rapid Evidence Assessment

This literature review uses a rapid and systematic approach to identifying and analysing the scholarly and policy literature on alternative narratives in relation to both violent extremism and policies and programs to counter violent extremism (CVE). This rapid, systematic review comprises three main strategies, namely a search of:

- Peer-reviewed journal articles in five leading academic databases;
- Google Scholar, to identify relevant books and book chapters, further journal articles, and 'grey' literature; and
- Publications produced by intergovernmental, governmental and non-governmental bodies working on CVE issues

The systematic nature of the review is based on the use of an agreed set of search keywords. The keywords were selected to identify literature relating to alternative narratives in the context of countering violent extremism and counter terrorism literature. To be included in this review, at least one of the CVE/CT and one of the Narrative key words had to be identified in the text to ensure overlap between the categories. The review was limited to English language literature due to time constraints.

3. Describing Studies

Quality and relevance were assessed through an examination of the authors' expertise, the funder (if applicable) and the use of specific keywords. Peer-reviewed research was prioritised. Reports and other literature that falls outside of this were also assessed on a case-by-case basis. Anything that did not meet the required standard has been documented and discussed with the funders.

4. Synthesis of Findings

We also draw here on the Australian National Health and Medical Research Council's (NHMRC) best practice approach to the synthesis of evidence. Planning the synthesis in advance, including of techniques and methods, reduces the risk of inadvertently introducing bias into the process and ensuring consistency (NHMRC 2019). Findings have been synthesised on three grounds:

1. A statistical breakdown of all sources gathered including country of origin, whether it was qualitatively or quantitatively informed and whether it was accompanied by evaluation, will provide a 'state of the field' (Appendix 1);
2. A qualitative synthesis of content focused specifically upon definitions, the practices utilised to form and deploy alternative narratives and how efficacy was assessed following a consistent format throughout;
3. Tables constructed allowing ease of comparability across the study on these grounds.

Underpinning this synthesis was a particular concern for identifying the reason for different outcomes across the literature examined. A primarily qualitative synthesis occurred through exploring differences between populations, sample sizes and socio-political contexts.

C/VE keywords	Narrative keywords
terrorism OR violent extremism OR extremist OR political violence OR religious violence OR radicalisation OR radicalisation OR right-wing extremism OR left-wing extremism OR Islamist OR men's rights OR incel OR CVE OR white nationalism OR white nationalist OR white supremacism OR white supremacist OR jihadism OR jihadi OR far right OR alt right OR manosphere OR fundamentalism OR fundamentalist OR Propaganda or	Narrative OR alternative narrative OR counter narrative OR story or propaganda OR message OR market OR rhetoric OR communication OR influence or engagement OR emotion or feeling

The databases used were:

- Academic Search Elite: A leading scholarly database chosen for its comprehensive multidisciplinary content and strong international perspective;
- Informit: Included due to its strong focus on research from across Australia and the Asia-Pacific;
- JSTOR: Chosen based on its facilitation of interdisciplinary and historical research; and
- Project MUSE: Included due to its strong presence in both humanities and social sciences.
- Google Scholar

The literature review included works that were published over 2010-2021, in the English language, and addressed violent extremism / counter terrorism *and* made reference to narratives as per the keywords above. The Keyword search was only applied to abstracts and their associated keywords in the academic databases. Once identified, each item was reviewed for relevance based on its title and the content of the article abstract, refining the selection further.

The search yielded the following results:

	Initial search	After abstract-based elimination
Academic Search Elite	230	110
Informit	60	43
Taylor and Francis	380	120
JSTOR	212	93
Project MUSE	142	42
Google Scholar		112
Hand search of organizational 'grey' literature		62
Total before de-duplication		582
Duplicates		21
TOTAL		561

A coding scheme, developed iteratively in reviewing this literature, was used to identify and analyse major themes and issues.

Literature Review

Introduction

Communication strategies are a central part of countering violent extremism policy and programming. The vast literature on P/CVE communication strategies focuses predominately on counter-narratives, however, there has been a shift in recent years to a focus on the impact that alternative narratives can have in reducing radicalisation by designing ‘positive stories’ that can displace violent extremism content and advocate anti-violent behaviour (Beutel et al. 2016: 35; Hemmingsen and Castro 2017: 32). Much of the literature on P/CVE communication strategies notes that whilst counter narratives and alternative narrative approaches aim to alter the behaviour and attitude of target audiences, they fail to apply ‘recognised practice in behaviour and as a result fall back on strategies of mass persuasion’ (Freer and Glazzard 2012: 90).

Counter narratives have dominated P/CVE communication strategies and are defined as intentional or direct efforts to ‘discredit, deconstruct and demystify violent extremist narratives through ideology, fact, logic or humour’ (Biggs and Feve 2013: 13). Alternative narratives on the other hand are ongoing, distinct, proactive and aim to undercut violent extremist narratives by focusing on what ‘we are for rather than against’. Alternative narratives present positive stories about social values, openness and democracy’ (Biggs and Feve 2013: 13). Ferguson further elaborates on this by using examples from international development to demonstrate how alternative strategies or narratives use ‘existing media such as journalism and drama to contribute to efforts to tackle root causes of division, prejudice and identity-based violence’ (Ferguson 2016: 17).

This report focuses on the efficacy of alternative narrative approaches within the P/CVE space. Although counter narratives have been the norm within P/CVE activities, these practices have been questioned over their efficacy and impact. As noted by Lee, this is because most initiatives are government funded, institutions and voices which are often not seen as trustworthy or legitimate to the target audience (Lee 2019: 165). CSO’s and private sector actors, however, ‘overwhelmingly prefer the development of alternative narratives over and above counter narratives’ in addressing violent extremist narratives (Barzegar, Powers and El Karhili 2016: 28). Whilst in recent years alternative narratives have become more prominent within the P/CVE landscape, the literature suggests that more evidence is required to support the efficacy of this approach in tackling violent extremist narratives and eliciting a change in behaviour of those who may have been exposed to violent extremism.

Alternative Narratives and Emotions

Research on the impact of alternative narratives within P/CVE indicates that such narratives cannot alone ‘de-radicalise’ or redirect individuals but to be effective must be used alongside a combination of interventions and initiatives (Waldman and Verga 2016). For instance, the majority of P/CVE programs tend to focus on countering violent extremist ideologies whilst overlooking the complexity of factors that might contribute to the appeal of violent extremist membership. Smith argues that there needs to be attention placed on the links between emotion, value judgements and violence when countering extremist narratives. Smith uses interviews with former members of the IRA to demonstrate how emotions are connected to identity and these emotions experienced collectively can lead to like-minded people gravitating towards each other, forming an ‘integral aspect of group political solidarity’ (Smith 2018: 442).

The literature suggests that emotion is underutilised in countering terrorism and violent extremist narratives. The emotional pull that terrorist organisations have is linked with how they make sense of the world and concepts such as justice, equality, autonomy and meaning (Smith 2018: 445; Cottee and Hayward 2011: 973). Push factors such as environmental grievances, unemployment, lack of access to opportunities, poverty, youth marginalisation, and other socio-economic differences can drive individuals to join violent extremist groups. Moreover, pull factors including psychosocial benefits such as employment, sense of belonging, identity and protection for oneself or family contribute to the appeal of extremist narratives. This is reinforced by studies which articulate that extremist groups like Islamic State exploit social encapsulation, kinship, friendship and established bonds for recruitment, dissemination, and amplification of narratives. (Day and Kleinman 2017: 17; Freer and Glazzard 2020: 92).

The influence of and receptivity to extremist discourse and narratives are often the outcome of broader socialisation, online and offline social networks and wider grievances regarding state policies and civil conflict (Glazzard 2017: 6). The Institute of Strategic Dialogue (ISD) (2016) expands on this by noting that alternative narratives must acknowledge and at some level address the “kernel of truth” that extremist narratives address and exploit. Narratives of returning to a pre-colonial Islamic order as articulated by ISIS, for example, resonate broadly across communities damaged by colonisation and there is a need to acknowledge the legitimate grievances that extremist discourse taps into. It is therefore imperative to understand the motivating factors and socio-economic vulnerabilities for violent extremism within the context of local, regional, and global politics.

Understanding the local context of radicalisation and recruitment is critical in designing communication strategies and interventions to counter radicalisation. Studies that address this include Bakker’s Transnational Terrorism, Security and Rule of Law model which looks at root causes, personal experiences, social networks, and potential trigger events that might lead an individual to radicalisation as well as Bigo et al who argue that for a P/CVE program to be effective it must encapsulate and address all these issues (Bakker 2015: 281; Bigo et al. 2014). In addition, there is an acknowledgement that there is a need to address wider social and cultural narratives around racism, xenophobia, and dog-whistling which Grossman argues can produce social and political alienation as well as disenchantment (Grossman 2014: 323).

Alternative Narratives and Pro-Social messages

Literature on alternative narratives advocates the use of ‘pro-social messages’ that focus on social values, tolerance and democracy to challenge the solutions that are proposed by extremist discourse. Storytelling, as argued by Glazzard, can open opportunities for cultural production that offer an alternative to the appeal of terrorist groups (Glazzard 2017: 16). Many of the alternative narrative programs observed in the literature are pilot programs with the most effective approaches taking place on an interpersonal basis in which former extremists work with civil society organisations to identify individuals showing signs of potential radicalisation or extremism (Barzegar, Powers and El Kahili 2016: 6). It should be noted that across most of the literature, a common theme is that alternative narrative approaches are most effective when targeted at individuals viewed as ‘fence-sitters’, i.e. those that are not fully supportive or fully opposed to extremist messaging or those that might be tempted by extremist messages (Barzegar, Powers and El Kahili 2016: 6; Briggs and Feve 2013: 4; El Sayed, Faris and Zeiger 2017: 33; Schmid 2015: 14). The literature suggests that there is a gap in alternative narrative programs that focus on those that have already been radicalised or recruited by extremist groups. This may be because Exit programs are intensive and disengagement support groups often require ongoing services and significant resources (Voogt 2016: 35).

Online productions such as *'Abdullah X'* and *'Avenger Mohammed'* work as alternative narrative approaches as they critically explore the interests, anxieties, and frustrations of vulnerable individuals rather than engaging in counter-messaging (Jones 2020: 16). *Abdullah X* is a widely cited example of an effective alternative narrative approach. Developed by a former extremist in the UK, the animated program, in which the character Abdullah engages in frank discussions regarding grievances and issues such as Muslim identity in the UK and the Syrian Civil War, has had over 60,000 views on YouTube (RAN 2015: 12). *Abdullah X's* blend of advice, religious considerations, and discussion of the role of Muslims in the modern world appeals because it retains the 'moral and aesthetic vision provided by Islamic States narratives while undermining the conclusions they reach about normative action' (Digby 2020: 71). However, whilst *Abdullah X* is cited as an effective approach, it is one of the only programs highlighted in several reports on counter and alternative narratives (RAN 2015: 12; ISD 2016: 40-43; Reed, Ingram and Whitaker 2017: 25-26). The championing of *Abdullah X* as an example of effective alternative content has been questioned regarding evaluation and efficacy.

Counter-messaging programs funded by governments like *Abdullah X* and *Avenger Mohammad* are very generalised and do not target a specific audience (Lee 2020: 69). RAN notes that evidence of *Abdullah X's* success is the number of views that the YouTube videos have received, however this suggests that evaluation of such programs is focused on measuring metrics such as shares, views and likes which do not capture shifts and changes in behaviour of the target audience or movement away from extremist beliefs (Digby 2020: 42; Cherney and Belton 2021: 627). Some scholars argue that this is emblematic of a wider issue in building effective monitoring and evaluation systems, particularly for smaller civil society groups and that measuring the impact of alternative narrative activities is often inconclusive and lacks empirical evidence (Jones 2020: 16; Glazzard 2017: 3). This is because there is no agreed way to measure either deradicalisation or disengagement from extremist groups within the field (Cherney and Belton 2021: 627). However, as noted by Ramakrashina et al, Ferguson and Jones, alternative narratives are supported by a stronger research and evidence base from multiple disciplines including 'development, peacebuilding and social cohesion' (Ramakrashina et al. 2021: 10; Ferguson 2016: 25; Jones 2020: 37).

Indeed, adopting a strengths-based approach to understanding what enables resilience to violent extremism, and beginning to measure this resilience (Grossman et al. 2020), is one promising way in which we can reframe our understanding of the efficacy of alternative narratives. For, very often, such narratives work in the space of 'pre-radicalisation' or redirection before extremist attitudes are adopted or violent action is contemplated. In a pilot study of youth resilience to violent extremism undertaken across Australia and Canada, for example, different kinds of social capital were found to increase youth resilience to violence. These included bonding, bridging and linking social capital. Bonding refers to homogenous, trustworthy networks such as fraternities or ethnic groups that create strong ties, shared identity and belonging, whilst bridging refers to bringing together heterogenous groups within divided societies such as race, class or religion. Linking capital is based on trust between community members and authorities. Social capital is a network of relationships among people who live and work within a particular society and involves the effective functioning of social groups through interpersonal relationships (Williams 2019: 2711-2713). The quantitative study found that, when such forms of social capital were combined with non-violent attitudes, the chances of youth engaging with violent extremism were reduced (Grossman et al. 2017; Grossman et al. 2020; Gerrand 2021).

The example of *Abdullah X* also suggests that more effective alternative narrative approaches need to have a focus on interpersonal dialogue and bottom-up approaches rather than top-down ones. The literature notes that terrorists involve their potential recruits in the communication process, whilst a counter-narrative model which assumes one-way transmission is not going to be effective in countering discourse if it does not engage with a specific audience or include direct intervention (Freer and Glazzard 2020: 102).

Recruits are active participants in the communication process. As noted by Castells, because we live in a networked society in which mass self-communication is “self-generated, self-directed and the reception of content online is self-selected”, this means that individuals have power within this space, making it much more difficult for agenda-setting strategies around alternative narratives to be effective (Castells 2013: xix). This agency and power, however, is complicated and compromised by recommender algorithms such as those on YouTube which frequently suggest extremist content to viewers. (Horta Riberio et al 2020: 10)

The preoccupation with messaging within P/CVE is critiqued by scholars like Archetti and Aly who note that P/CVE communication approaches tend to view radicalisation as a passive process (Archetti 2017: 218; Aly 2017: 74). Aly argues that there needs to be more emphasis on the audience of terrorist narratives as they exercise agency in the way they interact with messages and interpret those messages (Aly 2017: 74). The literature outlines how programs targeting specific audiences or engaging in direct interventions with those considered ‘at risk’ of radicalisation are more beneficial for disengagement (Braddock and Hogan 2016: 387; Frenett and Dow 2015). Where alternative narratives can be effective is when they incentivize participation through personal stories that speak directly to structural and individual factors that might steer them towards extremism such as identity, belonging, political beliefs, perceptions of exclusion and religion (Freer and Glazzard 2020: 102). Before looking at alternative narrative approaches and their effectiveness, it is important to understand the nature of the narratives being disseminated by different extremist groups.

Narratives of Islamist Extremism

Islamist Extremism draws on identity politics, perceptions of exclusion and othering, constructing an ‘us versus them’ narrative within jihadi propaganda to appeal to potential recruits. This ‘with us or against us’ construction of ‘us versus them’ resonates with the everyday experiences of the target audience (Ali et al. 2020: 225). Al Qaeda’s *Inspire* magazine for example engages with political myths and makes references to pop culture, framing the wider Al Qaeda narrative around an epic battle between the *Umma* (community) and an evil Western Crusader and Zionist coalition, with readers of the magazine required to engage in the defence ‘with us’ of *the Umma* by committing violent acts in their home countries or risk being outcast as traitors ‘against us’ who are ‘comfortable with the systematic persecution of Muslims’ (Kirke 2015: 284).

The polarised discourse promoted here aims to mobilise the Muslim population, accusing them of remaining impassive in the face of suffering, engaging in *Takfir* (accusing other Muslims of apostasy) (Aly, Weiman-Saks and Weimann 2014: 40). This narrative also plays on a sense of exclusion and victimhood, building on the target audience’s experiences of discrimination and abuse that might encourage feelings of anger. ISIS, whilst losing territory in Syria and Iraq, has presented a narrative which claims that the war is not over, engaging in what has been termed a ‘virtual caliphate’ (Munoz 2018: 34). This includes maintaining several channels on Telegram; publishing videos on YouTube and Archive.org and through groups like the Upload Knights, a terrorist media group that disseminates videos such as an IS recruitment video ‘You Will Be Superior’, a 35-minute video that urges people of all ages to join ISIS and shows footage of suicide bombers describing their lives before footage of their mission (Winter and Parker 2018).

Videos using similar language to *Inspire* call for recruits to ‘join the ranks of mujahidin in East Asia and inflict black days upon the Crusaders’ (Ingram and Whiteside 2017). The RAN 2019 paper on current and future narratives of Islamist extremism and the far right, notes that the following Islamist extremism narratives are some of the most prevalent online (Table 1):

Table 1: Narratives of the Islamist extremism

Narrative	Meaning and Implication	Effectiveness
Victimhood/Sense of Belonging	Addresses emotional needs and frames this within a broader narrative which states that “Because you are Muslim, you are threatened and denounced.” The narrative frames suppression of one aspect of religious practice as suppression of all Muslims. The only solution therefore is to join the <i>Umma</i>	Factual elements and truths regarding discrimination, political and social policies within the West are exploited to show that Muslims are not accepted. The effectiveness of this narrative is that it appeals to concepts of belonging and identity
Empowerment	This narrative encourages individuals to take control, i.e., men and women become soldiers and martyrs	This draws on perceptions of lack of control/agency, feeling rejected, excluded, and being treated as a second-class citizen whilst offering proactive solutions
Sense of injustice/grievance	This narrative focuses on the injustice felt regarding domestic and international policy and the hypocrisy of the state i.e., discriminatory laws, xenophobia as well as committing atrocities around the world but suppressing violence within borders	This narrative is constructed using historical events and facts. Again, the effectiveness of this narrative is that it provides kernels of truth and factual statements, feeding into and validating feelings of injustice

(Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) 2019: 3)

The role that narratives play in influencing and constructing group identities is a vital part of extremist propaganda. Whilst these narratives are prevalent throughout Jihadi propaganda, the participatory nature of the internet and social media platforms means that individuals who may be curious or engaged with jihadist narratives can re-interpret and create new ‘hybrid meanings and may inspire people who share the same symbols and the same search for a new identity’ (Vergani 2014: 606).

Narratives of the Far Right

Similar to Islamist narratives, narratives of the far-right play on feelings and struggles for identity, victimhood, masculinity and distrust of government. These narratives build upon experiences and feelings of frustration and discontent. Anger, a key element of far-right extremist narratives, is an emotion that resonates with individuals who feel like they are treated with a lack of respect or believe they cannot live up to societal standards (Roose et al. 2020: 2). Far-right extremists play on the struggle for identity that many, mainly young men feel, appealing to the need to protect national identities from perceived threats of migration, Islamisation and narratives of conspiracy and inequality. These are interwoven ‘with narratives of imperilment that give rise to fantasies of rebirth and regenerating the nation’ (Marcks and Pawelz 2020: 2).

Conspiracy theories that argue that most of the public has been deceived by government or mainstream media and that members of far-right groups possess superior insight such as QAnon or the Great Replacement Conspiracy theory are key components of far-right narratives (Voogt 2017: 37; Allchorn 2021: 10; Garry et al. 2021: 155). The far-right extremists who committed atrocities in Oslo, Christchurch, El Paso and Halle all referred to white genocide and claimed that the white race was endangered and had to be saved (Marcks and Pawelz 2020: 3).

In a study conducted by Davey and Ebner for ISD, they found that there were 1.5 million tweets referencing the Great Replacement theory between April 2012 and April 2019 in English, French and German (2019: 4). In addition to these narratives, the failure of far-right political parties, distrust of governments and institutions, a decline in belief of political solutions and rising immigration rates create perceptions of increasing disadvantage for the majority white population. Masculinity and male entitlement form a significant part of far-right extremism, whether it is performative chauvinism or the perception of the emasculation of society (Allchorn 2021: 10).

The narrative that societies are under threat because men cannot live according ‘to their nature’ because of feminists or the LGBTQI community permeates Incel and Neo Nazi propaganda. Furthermore, far-right narratives offer simplified explanations for what is a highly complex world. This sense of certainty can be seductive for those that feel lost or are looking for answers (Simi 2014). As Roose argues:

A sense of victimhood functions to provide an alternate source of meaning defined in opposition to a blameworthy ‘other’ and a sense of upward social and spiritual mobility through action.... those joining groups transform from ‘zero’ to ‘hero’ and gain an instant sense of belonging (Roose 2020: 84).

Common narratives to emerge out of far-right discourse include racist, xenophobic, homophobic, gender-based hate. These are included in the table below (Table 2):

Table 2: Narratives of the Far Right

Narrative	Meaning	Effectiveness
Identity	The struggle for identity and belonging. National identities are viewed as being under threat, framed through increased immigration rates, failure of multiculturalism, blaming minorities for lack of access to jobs	This narrative draws on perceptions of an idealised natural order in which the white race is superior. This provides personal meaning and identity and creates a sense of belonging. This narrative frames identity as something that is vulnerable and in need of protection. (Campion 2019: 215)
Masculinity	Societies are under threat because men cannot live according to the ‘natural way of things’	This narrative promotes a sense of male entitlement, framed within the manosphere and within the mythology of the <i>Red Pill</i> in which ‘feminist programming’ has subjugated men and they must awaken to this grim reality. Evokes feelings of control and empowerment. There is also an emphasis on brotherhood and that the far-right groups can bring order to men’s lives when traditional values are under attack (Roose et al, 2020 :30)
Victimhood	Governments favour ethnic and religious minorities; rising immigration has resulted in disadvantages for the majority white population	This narrative plays on racist and conspiratorial peril. Immigration is framed as invasion and a threat to the white race. Conspiratorial aspects include focusing on the Jewish population and left-wing actors who are viewed as controlling oppressive systems. The narrative feeds into perceived grievances.
Lack of trust in government	Governments have too much power over us, do not represent our views and are controlled by elites	This fosters distrust and questions the legitimacy of governments and institutions. This narrative propagates that the only way to combat this is to fight back
Accelerationism	Exploits events and crisis arguing that events of suffering and chaos such as natural disasters, economic upheaval etc are hastening the collapse of society and that the society will be rebuilt in a superior manner by white supremacist movements	This narrative plays into the threat and imperilment discourse, i.e., ‘we must secure the future for the existence of our people and children’ This is particularly powerful in crisis such as COVID-19 where anti-lockdown narratives and conspiracy theories play on health fears and distrust of government. Far-right movements are framed as the only way forward.

(Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) 2019: 5-6)

In addition to the above discourse, COVID-19 has led to the hybridisation of these narratives and conspiracies around vaccinations, government, and minority groups. The impact that physical distancing, lockdowns, and COVID-19 have had on employment opportunities, isolation, and feelings of disconnection from family and friends has created more opportunities for far-right groups to exploit and recruit young people online (All Together Now 2021: 2).

Wellness and social media influencers have also led to an increase in the spread of COVID-19 conspiracies on social media and amongst young people, particularly on Tik Tok (Dias 2020). The literature suggests that many alternative narrative approaches have hitherto targeted the Muslim community, tackling jihadi narratives. Given the rise of far-right extremism in Australia as well as the circulation of far-right narratives creeping into the mainstream, more focus on engaging in alternative narrative programs to address the threat from the far-right is critical (Ahmed and Fielitz 2020).

Gender and Extremist Narratives

The process of engagement with violent extremism is highly complex and differs from person to person. It is clear from the literature that there is a need for more of a focus on the gender of participants and social norms linked with belonging to a particular gender within society. In general, there is still a view that terrorism almost “exclusively concerns men” (Orav, Shreeves and Radjenovic 2018: 1). The engagement and involvement of women in violent extremist groups remains relatively under-explored within P/CVE and there is a significant gap in the ‘confidence of practitioners to understand, address and embed gender-focused approaches in their work’ (Colliver et al. 2019: 4).

Women historically have been involved in political violence in various roles and neglecting gendered pathways to engagement with extremist narratives can have negative impacts on the success of alternative narrative programs (Cunnigham 2010: 172; de Ledde 2018: 2-3). In addition, policies and programs that ignore the importance of engaging with a nuanced gender perspective can advance marginalisation and discrimination. Women who may live in societies that deny them full human rights, restrict freedom of movement, freedom of religion or economic opportunities may lead some to view participating within violent extremism to feel empowered, gain respect and emancipation. Conversely, violations of women’s human rights can also lead to feelings of isolation, exclusion and isolation that could lead to engagement with violent extremism (Malik and Hafiq 2015: 18).

The narratives within P/CVE have often portrayed men as choosing extremism, whilst women are portrayed as inherent victims to which extremism happens. Until 2017, gender stereotypes still influenced the way returnees from territories that were held by Islamic State were treated. (True and Stenger 2019). In this sense women are presented as lacking agency, and this dismisses the way that women actively participate in extremist narratives and movements. However, as argued by Sambaiga, women are agents and have agency in their own right, actively mobilising themselves and their communities within violent extremism and the P/CVE space (Sambaiga 2020: 2). Women and girls can play significant roles within violent extremism as recruiters, perpetrators, propagandists, and in domestic roles as well as simultaneously being the victims of sexual or gender-based violence (De Leede et al. 2017: 25; True and Stenger 2019).

As discussed earlier in the report, understanding push and pull factors is fundamental to challenging extremist narratives. Some of the reasons women may engage with violent extremism are similar to those mentioned in the above sections such as feeling isolated, uncertainty over belonging in Western culture, feelings of persecution as well as romanticising the experience or finding belonging and sisterhood (Saltman and Smith 2015: 8-17). For instance, forging new friendships online and offline were strong influences in driving female individuals and friendship groups into ISIS networks (Colliver et al 2019: 9; Hoyle, Bradford and Frenett 2015).

The search for identity can also be seen through a gendered lens as family rejection of ‘pious clothing’ can lead to individuals seeking acceptance within extremist groups. Pearson and Winterbotham recount anecdotal evidence of a Muslim girl whose father referred to her friends who wore burqas as ‘terrorist girlfriends’ and this contributed to the girl’s eventual recruitment into extremism (2017: 64). However, as Davis (2017: 2-3) notes, women more commonly join extremist groups when there is a ‘personal connection and are less likely to engage in extremist activities without a group structure’.

In developing alternative narratives to challenge extremist discourse it is critical to understand that the content and aims of extremist narratives are gendered (Johnston et al. 2020: 2). ISIS/Da’esh for example has explicitly targeted women for recruitment within their propaganda; this includes manifestos written directly for women in the online magazine *Dabiq*, playing on a ‘sisters of the Islamic State’ narrative and involving women as propagandists on social media (Saltman and Smith 2015: 18). Analysing gendered language and stereotypes as well as gender differences in the target audience within violent extremism is critical for formulating alternative narratives to challenge violent extremism, particularly as women actively engage in violent extremist groups online. As opportunities for engagement in public spaces may be limited for *Salafi jihadist* women or within certain political contexts, women are more likely to be recruited online (Pearson 2018: 853). Compared to offline spaces which tend to reinforce gender norms, online spaces can provide greater freedom for expression, particularly regarding female aggression. In their study of women extremists online in Indonesia, Johnston et al note how Indonesian women have been active in violent chatrooms and online spaces since 2004. They note that women account for about 33% of those searching the internet for violent extremism (Johnston et al. 2020: 3).

In terms of messaging online, women within extremist groups such as ISIS play a significant role as propagandists and recruiters. Women are framed as *muhajirat* (plural for female migrant) who disseminate messages of empowerment on social media channels such as Twitter, Telegram and Facebook. Saltman and Smith (2015), in their analysis of 12 social media accounts of female jihadi migrants, found that women involved with violent extremism are committed to recruitment roles. One of the examples they cite is that of the Halane twins from Manchester, aged 16, who travelled to Syria in 2014. It is interesting to note that Zahra and Salama Halane were well educated and engaged with the wider community, suggesting that perceived grievances are just as powerful for recruitment into violent extremism as real ones (Saltman and Smith 2015: 20).

The Halane twins had been influenced by their older brother Ahmed who had introduced them to violent extremist narratives and this links in with the earlier point made by Davis (2017) that women are more likely to join extremist groups if there is a personal connection (Saltman and Smith 2015: 20). The Halane twins were very active on Twitter and Instagram, forming bonds with perpetrators of extremist attacks such as that on Charlie Hebdo’s Paris office, with Zahra proclaiming on Twitter:

The kuffar [disbeliever] needs to understand we are the UMMAH of MOHAMMED SAW!!!! (Saltman and Smith 2015: 21).

The concept of *ummah* frames a global community of Muslims and *kuffar* is a derogatory term for the ‘Other’ non-believers. This framing connects with the ‘us’ versus ‘them’ rhetoric of extremist narratives, and this language demonstrates how identity can be constructed through such narratives and act as a crucial recruitment tactic (Saltman and Smith 2015: 22). Kinship and family networks also contribute to the recruitment of women into violent extremism, for example *Jemaah Islamiyah* affiliated schools often lead to members marrying another member’s sister, daughter or friend (Johnston et al. 2020: 4).

Women are active members of both jihadi extremist groups and far-right groups. Whilst traditionally underrepresented within Neo-Nazi groups, as noted by Ebner and Davey, women are becoming more important as propagandists, amplifying messages. Female social media influencers have contributed to the mainstreaming and normalisation of white-nationalist and anti-immigration views (Ebner and Davey 2019: 34). Within far-right narratives, hyper-masculinity, fetishization of traditional values and ‘redpilling’ has led to the growth of communities referred to as ‘TradWives’ who reject feminism and frame hostility against conservatives as a factor for engagement with extremist discourse (Ebner and Davey 2019: 34). Women, as noted by Stinton, engage with far-right extremism for the same reason that men do, motivated ‘by fear of losing what they have and feel entitled to keep’ (Stinton, 2021).

In this sense, despite, far-right discourse emphasising the position of men, white women still hold a privileged position within a white supremacist society. The appeal of far-right groups to women is evident in the martyrdom of Ashli Babbitt in the January 6 Capitol insurrection and Babbitt’s support of QAnon, in which conspiracies calling for children to be saved from alleged elite trafficking rings has particular appeal with women (Stinton 2021). This suggests that there is a need to develop a more nuanced understanding of gender within both far-right and jihadi narratives and in the development of alternative narratives that consider gendered language, messaging and target audience.

Alternative Narratives, Identity and Belonging

The literature on P/CVE indicates that identity and belonging are closely linked with the reasons why young people might engage with violent extremist groups. Creating the space for those considered to be ‘at risk’ to explore their identities, voice their grievances through dialogue and validate their voices is viewed as way to avoid experiences of marginalisation (Stephens et al. 2021: 351). Psychological studies indicate that there is a link between threats to belonging, control or understanding and support for or engagement with extremist organisations (Jasko et al. 2016: 817; Aggarwal 2017: 317). The alternative narrative programs observed in the literature target both online and offline activities of those considered to be at risk of being radicalised with varied results. Recent focus in the literature has been on how extremist narratives and propaganda are disseminated online, particularly regarding jihadi groups. Social media platforms facilitate social networks and virtual communities, and radicalisation can occur when interpersonal bonds are fostered, and grievances are validated through these online communities.

Halverson and Way (2012) use the case study of Colleen LaRose (JihadiJane) as an example of how social media allows individuals who might feel marginalised to construct new identities online and become part of a community that makes them feel valued. This ‘social nexus’ helps to create a ‘renewed sense of self, and greater meaning to troubled realities (Halverson and Way 2012: 148). As noted by Neo et al often the search for belonging and companionship can lead to radicalisation, citing the Underwear Bomber, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab as an example, they note that Abdulmutallab expressed feelings of loneliness on mainstream Islamic forums before moving to more radical forums and communicating with other violent extremists online (Neo, Dillion and Khader 2016: 1114). In this sense, extremist groups may act as potential replacements and surrogates for offline relationships and social networks (Ferguson 2016: 14).

Redirect Method and Social Media Metrics

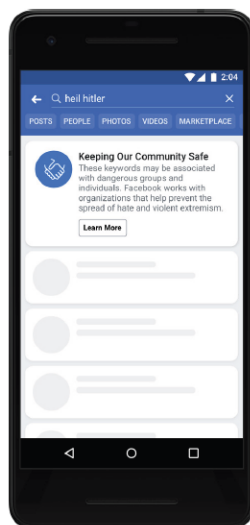
Alternative narrative campaigns that have aimed to address the appeal of extremist groups on social networks online have had varied results. The Redirect Method, developed by Moonshot and Google use videos on social media platforms such as YouTube, Twitter and Google Ads, to create alternative messages targeting users who have engaged with extremist content online. They do this by providing a curated video playlist including video messages from former extremists who have left movements (Redirect Method Canada, 2021: 2).

The Redirect Method, established in 2016, works by targeting those potentially susceptible to extremist messaging by their Google keyword searches and redirecting them to videos that undermine extremist beliefs using digital advertising techniques.

The Redirect Method's evaluation was based on impressions and clicks on the playlists. It should be noted that keywords that suggested a curiosity toward or research into extremist violence were not targeted, so for example the 'Turner Diaries' would not link to advertisement for the Redirect Method, but 'Turner Diaries PDF' would. The program used Google searches for 17,134 keywords related to white supremacism and 85,327 keywords related to Islamist-inspired extremism (Greer and Ramalingam 2020: 2).

In the US, an evaluation of the Redirect Method found that those who searched for 'fighting for white heritage' and 'prepare for race war' led to a 224% increase in watch time for playlists that undermined this white supremacist narrative (Greer and Ramalingam 2020: 3). However, as noted early in this report and by researchers at Moonshot, whether the videos helped to steer individuals away from hate or violence or second guess extremist narratives was unclear as evaluation was made based solely on views and social media metrics without accompanying assessment of Internet user behaviours offline (Greer and Ramalingam 2020: 3). Further, there is no way to know whether those who searched for keywords were supporters or sympathisers of violent extremism or researchers, activists or journalists as noted by Saltman, Kooti and Vockery (2020: 7).

Additionally, Moonshot has partnered with social media companies such as Facebook to pilot programs in Australia and US in partnership with civil society organisations, Exit Australia and Life After Hate, to redirect users who search for hate and extremist content. This included a safety module that appeared at the top of users' search results on Facebook when they searched for white supremacist, jihadist and/or neo-Nazi individuals or communities and redirected them to the websites of the CSO's where they could find supportive content and access intervention services (Moonshot 2020: 14). One of the observations made in the evaluation of this pilot program was that less judgemental language could be deployed and more calls to action were needed for the program to be effective (Moonshot 2020: 18). This aligns with arguments made by scholars such as Hamid that even if an alternative message resonates and reaches a target audience, if the narrative does not 'offer the viewer something they can actually do or some offline group to get involved with, then the resonance will wear off with no change in behaviour' (Hamid 2018).



The Safety Module

During the pilot, this version of the safety module appeared at the top of users' search results when they had searched for white supremacist and/or neo-Nazi individuals or communities. 'Learn More' took users to the website of either Life After Hate or Exit Australia, where they could find supportive content and access interventions services.

(The Safety Module, Moonshot 2020: 5)

A report on the pilot program noted that there was only a 4% click-through rate for the safety module, though in comparison to Moonshot's other redirect programs this was viewed as quite high (Moonshot 2020: 14). More broadly, Moonshot has found that those who might be at risk of white supremacist views expressed interest in consuming music from far-right groups (Greer and Ramalingam 2020: 4). Similar observations had been made regarding Jihadi extremist groups as well as how music and pop culture could potentially contribute to alternative narratives to combat extremist recruitment (Barzaegar, Powers and El Karhili 2016: 28; Jones 2020: 38).

Best practice examples of alternative narratives

Examples of pop culture such as the 'Burka Avenger' cartoon, created in 2013 in Pakistan and Hero Factor, a Jordanian graphic novel, were prominent in the literature as effective alternative narratives that can appeal to national identity, pride, and promote integration and tolerance. These grassroots programs are targeted at a broader audience, but it has been noted that the success and popularity of 'Burka Avenger' resides in the fact that it is a program created by Pakistani pop star Haroon in Pakistan. Grounding the narrative in Pakistani national identity, to emphasise the importance of girl's education, Burka Avenger is able to 'seamlessly weave powerful and diverse social forces into a coherent, resilient whole' (Barzaegar, Powers and El Karhili 2016: 28). However, these alternative narrative approaches are focused primarily on the mainstream, and it is not clear whether those who are exploring extremist narratives watch this content nor how they may respond to it (Jones 2020: 39).

Highly cited examples of effective alternative narrative programs that focused on both online and offline interventions are the STRIVE and STRIVE II pilot CVE projects, funded by the EU and RUSI in Kenya and Somalia. The STRIVE II program ran from 2016-2020 and aimed to reduce support for, recruitment and radicalisation into violent extremist groups in Kenya, Somaliland and Puntland. These pilot programs ranged from law enforcement training, women's groups and an alternative narrative approach involving a radio programming project (Freer and Glazzard 2020: 98). Whilst the pilot projects were independent, they were mutually reinforcing with a mentor program running in conjunction with alternative narrative approaches to target at-risk young people within the community. STRIVE identified at risk young men and women in areas where Al-Shabab recruitment occurred using the criteria of social networks and observable behaviours and invited them to join the mentorship project. This criterion included being a close relative or peer to someone who had been recruited or expressing and advocating extremist views. During the latter stages of the mentorship project, the participants engaged in alternative or what was referred to as preventative communication programs to foster bonding and linking (trust) capital (Freer and Glazzard 2020: 100).

What was unique about the approach of the STRIVE pilot project was that rather than engaging and addressing propaganda produced by Al-Shabab, the alternative narrative approach engaged with concerns and experiences of the mentees, concerns outside of terrorism such as fears around finding an income, finding a partner and family relationships. This approach included promoting and developing self-expression for young people at risk of recruitment through media content creation, radio journalism training programs and writing newspaper articles (Freer and Glazzard 2020: 99). One of the observations made during the STRIVE program was that there was very little representation for marginalised youth in Kenyan media and it was often framed to portray youth and Islam as being linked with terrorism, poverty and violence reinforcing stigmatisation, marginalisation, lack of representation and participation (Freer and Glazzard 2020: 100).

The program provided workshops on storytelling, radio journalism training, written and video content creation with participants disseminating content in print media or circulating content through social media platforms. One example cited included a participant writing a fictional series about a young woman in Kenya who experiences upheavals in her personal life whilst becoming involved in violent extremism. During the workshops it was noted that there was an emotional catharsis for participants and a change in perception of the participant's worth in the community (Freer and Glazzard 2020: 105). Much of the content developed, like a documentary to be broadcast on Kenyan TV, focused on themes and messages around violent extremism in Kenya. As the authors observed, however, it avoided the 'risk of controversy that could affect their local community' to evoke empathy and understanding (Freer and Glazzard 2020: 105).

The promotion of personal stories was emphasised over the voicing of political grievances, and it was noted that by focusing on personal narratives, there was a greater impact on participants wider social perspectives and opportunities. This suggests that focusing on local context and intersectional factors contributes to successful alternative narrative approaches. The success of such approaches is therefore contingent on their capacity to engage with the nuances of local circumstances. This demonstrates the limits of purely focusing on online activities as a way to combat extremist narratives.

Programs such as STRIVE engage in a theory of change approach. This asserts that:

If vulnerable youth are identified and brought together through a dialogue process that identifies and responds to their particular needs and conditions, then they will become more resilient to the narratives and incentives offered by extremist recruiters, leading to a reduction in extremist attitudes and behaviour, including recruitment (Brett and Kahlmeyer 2017: 8).

Alternative narrative programs employed in the STRIVE project were part of a broader community and peace-building initiative that emphasised interpersonal connections, promoting trust, relationship building, inclusion and resilience within the community. Other examples that support this analysis, include a study by Daniel P. Aldrich's on USAID's peace and tolerance radio programs in Chad, Mali and Niger over a 5-year period. Starting in 2008, the study concluded that alternative narrative programs worked more effectively when they were run concurrently with educational and vocational programs. Aldrich's study found that there was 'greater participation in local decision-making' and 'working to counter terrorism' for those recipients who had tuned into the radio broadcast (Aldrich 2012: 54).

It should be noted that this was a 5-year program, which means that there is considerable investment, resources and time needed for these types of projects to be effective. In addition, the Search for Common Ground media training program piloted in Morocco in 2017, supported participants to develop and use social media platforms as a tool for creating and disseminating alternative narratives. Participants developed online campaigns including a photography and visual arts competition focusing on tolerance and unity, an animated video recounting the experience of a former extremist and a video looking at the impacts of violent extremism on victims' families (Mansour 2017: 13-14). Participants in the program noted how messages needed to include appropriate language and context, with one participant stating that:

Simplifying and using the societal language is very important. Those who recruit, use the people's language and play on their emotions and humour. We need to use the same techniques to reach people with alternative messages (Mansour 2017: 29).

It is interesting to observe that these alternative narrative pilot programs are emerging from the developing world and Africa. This may be because policy focusing on violent extremism is linked with development goals and as articulated in the UN 2030 Agenda and UNDP, lasting peace and sustainable development are contingent on inclusive co-existence between groups (UNDP 2016: 9).

Push factors such as global and regional politics – be them international interventions or policies that might fuel xenophobia, inequalities such as political exclusion; lack of access to assets, land, jobs and social services; and discrimination based on culture, religion or language – contribute to perceptions of disempowerment and isolation (UNDP 2016: 21). Social capital resources are therefore critical to mitigating violent extremist influences. These drivers are not just limited to the developing world and there is a convergence of these push factors in Europe, USA and Australia. Individuals who commit acts of violent extremism in developed states are likely to be young, male and have limited opportunities, and in developing countries those that engage in violent extremism tend to also be young, unemployed men (Ferguson 2016: 18).

The vast majority of literature and government funded programs on counter and alternative narratives have focused on the Muslim community, framing Muslim individuals and communities as the ‘Other’, representing a risk and threat. This securitisation approach has been criticised for creating the very conditions that might steer and fuel attraction to violent extremism through the perpetuation of suspect communities (Heath-Kelly, 2013, p 401; Aistrophe, 2016, p196; Nguyen 2019: 97; Qureshi 2017: 2; Cherney and Murphy 2016: 483). There has been an over emphasis on Islamic extremism in the P/CVE space and within government funding. As noted by the All Together Now report on far-right extremism in Australia, the focus on Islamic extremism has meant that far-right extremists have ‘largely escaped the spotlight’ (All Together Now 2020: 3). As far-right parties and discourse have begun to occupy the mainstream, the question of which communities should be targeted in CVE interventions is increasingly pressing and complicated in a landscape dominated by right-leaning media and governing political parties.

Grassroots and Peer to Peer Approaches

Whilst programs like STRIVE are run by CSO’s and government funded, the literature points to programs targeting young people through grassroots initiatives, peer to peer communication and creative approaches as being more effective at engaging with participants (Tahiri and Grossman, 2013; Vergani et al 2018: 13; Frenett and Dow 2015: 24). This is due to the lack of trust in government institutions as they are often viewed as compromised and illegitimate sources. Credibility of the source is thus a ‘decisive factor for ensuring the persuasiveness of any communication’ (Aly et al. 2014: 43).

Rather than developing top-down approaches, Vergani et al (2018: 11) argue that governments and institutions should focus on supporting and engaging grassroots communities to develop messaging that is peer-to-peer in nature. Creating trust and building on an environment and message which comes from a credible source that the target audience can relate to is vital for the success of alternative narratives. Barzeager et al in their report on ‘Civic Approaches to Confronting Violent Extremism’, highlight that alternative narratives are most effective when they engage:

organically and are disseminated by trusted community leaders who have credibility and an understanding of the kinds of messages that will connect with at-risk audience (Barzeager et al. 2016: 28).

These alternative narratives include ‘peer to peer’ messaging such as the Peer 2 Peer program, a public-private partnership supported by US Federal Agencies but run by local community groups in which university students around the world were engaged in a competition to create and design social media campaigns including positive messaging such as highlighting contributions of immigrants in society and promoting tolerance and understanding (Szmania and Fincher 2017: 120).

Research Questions

1. Definitions

A narrative can be defined as ‘any cohesive and coherent account of events with an identifiable beginning, middle, and end about characters engaged in actions that result in questions or conflicts for which answers or resolutions are provided’ (Braddock and Horgan 2016: 382–3). Braddock and Horgan (2016: 385) identify the development and dissemination of narratives as the most common strategy adopted by extremist groups to spread their ideology and attract audiences to their cause. Opposing positions to narratives are referred to as counter narratives, and are central to the efforts of CVE (Sold and Gaspar 2020; Institute for Strategic Dialogue and Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) 2015).

Counter narratives ‘directly deconstruct, discredit and demystify violent extremist messaging’, by challenging the key ideologies contained in extremist messages (RAN 2015: 4), and in the process seek to discourage support for extremist ideologies and terrorism (Braddock and Horgan 2016: 383). Despite some successes, research indicates that attempts to prevent violent extremism through counter-narrative approaches have limited efficacy for a number of reasons (Conway 2020; Grossman 2014; Hemmingsen and Castro 2017; Meleagrou-Hitchens 2017; Rogers 2020; Rosand and Winterbotham 2019; Roy 2018). On the one hand, content-driven ‘pull factor’ interventions will be inadequate if ‘push factor’ underlying grievances that motivate radicalisation processes are not addressed (Gerrand 2020; 2021). On the other, potential reach does not necessarily translate into engagement (Rosand and Winterbotham 2019).

Others declare that counter-narrative approaches are ‘in essence reactive’ and using them is a ‘recognition of the terms laid down by the declared opponents’ (Hemmingsen and Ingrid Castro 2017). These approaches are understood to lack conceptual clarity and are built on weak theoretical and empirical foundations (Glazzard 2017). The United Nations Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate has noted that counter-narrative programming is often based on untested assumptions rather than a sound evidence base and that there is increasing criticism of the lack of robust monitoring and evaluation of counter-narrative initiatives in CVE (CTED 2017).

In the Australian context, scholars have noted the inherent flaws in counter-narrative approaches seeking to promote ‘moderate’ Islam, asserting that alternative factors including a sense of belonging and the possibility of upward socio-economic trajectories are more important (Akbarzadeh 2013; Gerrand 2015; Grossman 2014; Roose 2016; 2020). In contrast to counter narratives, alternative narratives focus on undermining extremist narratives by focusing on standing ‘for’ rather than ‘against’ something (RAN 2015: 4). They do this by conveying positive content, centring on aspects of democracy and openness, including the promotion of tolerance, diversity and mutual understanding (Sold & Gaspar 2020; RAN 2015: 4). It is also important to note that alternative narratives are identified by some studies as being a component of counter narratives (RAN 2015: 4; Sold & Gaspar 2020; Tuck & Silverman 2016).

In 2017 the United Nations recommended the development of ‘alternative narratives that promote a holistic worldview and encourage non-violent pathways to address grievances and feelings of powerlessness and alienation’ (CTED 2017). In the context of Australia, a study done in consultation with community leaders and government stakeholders indicated that the use of alternative narratives would provide positive/affirmative accounts of that which binds us together, socially and culturally, as Australians, rather than what sets us apart. This would also entail the creation of positive narratives of national identity and a shift in the discourse from ‘us and them’ to ‘we’ (Tahiri and Grossman 2013: 13).

Of course, counter terrorism studies is not the only arena where alternative narratives have purchase. The use of alternative narratives can be seen in the spheres such as anthropology, museum and heritage studies and postcolonial studies. The focus on alternative narratives in the Indigenous heritage field has been particularly important in calling to focus other ways of knowing and understanding Indigenous pasts (Nakata, Lightfoot and Simpson 2018; Simpson 2007). Audra Simpson (2007: 68) illustrated the pervasiveness of this deficit discourse in relation to the dominant narratives of the Mohawk people, whose colonial or anthropological representations presents them as passive and without ‘voice’. Simpson argued, however, that this is in sharp contrast with the lived realities of that community.

The dominant representation, therefore, not only erases Indigenous agency in the past but can also obscure their agency in the present (Simpson 2007; 2014). In this context, alternative narratives are an important means of disrupting the dominant discourse rooted in colonial narratives of subaltern communities as timeless, disadvantaged and marginalised. This is also the case for Muslim-background and racialized communities such as Somalis living in parts of the diaspora whose subjection to reductive misrepresentations in dominant Western media contrasts with their own alternative representations of complex identity and belonging (Gerrand 2016).

Alternative narratives have also been employed in the field of early childhood education, where they present an important means to challenge the dominant discourse surrounding this field (Moss 2019: 2). Moss for example, contends that alternative narratives are important because they do encourage critical thinking about early childhood and are also a means of resistance to the embedded ways of thinking and talking about things related to it (Moss 2019: 7). Returning our attention to the field of CVE, certainly, the use of alternative narratives has the potential to reinforce what binds us together as Australians rather than what sets us apart, shifting the focus from the ‘us and them’ to ‘we’ (Tahiri and Grossman 2013: 110). However, while the promotion of alternative narratives in this context has the potential to improve a sense of belonging, recognition and agency amongst individuals that may otherwise be drawn to violent extremism, very little is known about the efficacy of their use (RAN 2015; RAN 2015; Tahiri and Grossman 2013).

2. Targeting of the Psycho-Social

One of the key challenges of preventing and countering violent extremism is the clear identification of the drivers that promote terrorism. These drivers constitute a variety of push and pull factors which target the psychosocial needs of individuals and may help us identify what drives their radicalisation and recruitment. ‘Push factors’ include environmental grievances and socio-economic differences, such as poverty, discrimination, unemployment, state oppression, lack of opportunity and so forth, that lead certain individuals to adopt violent extremism (Zeiger and Aly 2015: 4). Whilst ‘pull factors’ refer to the psychosocial attraction that violent extremism poses in relation to an individual’s need, such as financial incentives, protection for self or family, sense of belonging and identity, religious rewards and so forth (Zeiger and Aly 2015: 4).

It is important to note however that the existence of push factors alone do not always act as a catalyst which compels certain individuals to violent extremism. Trajectories of violent radicalisation comprise an interplay of push and pull factors. As Peter Romaniuk (2015) illustrates in the context of Burkina Faso, the presence of push factors alone is insufficient to create conditions ripe for violent extremism, which has meant this is not an imminent threat in that nation. There are important lessons which can be drawn on from Burkina Faso and applied to the current Australian context. As Romaniuk further observes, the absence of pull factors in relation to push factors and also importantly sources of resilience located in state and civil society (such as inclusive state policies, socially responsible media and strong civil society actors who promote ethnic and religious coexistence) act as a crucial deterrent to vulnerable groups being drawn to violent extremism (Romaniuk 2015: 42–43).

Also, important to note here is the importance of challenging normative assumptions that all terrorists as undesirables of our society. This means that one needs to be cautious when making sweeping generalisations of those drivers which compel individuals to adopt extremist viewpoints (el Said 2015: 25; Amarasingam 2019; Gunasingham 2019). el Said observes that while some individuals were indeed motivated by religious ideology, especially in the case of the higher level leadership in extremist organisations such as ISIS and Al-Nusra, many of the lower ranking militia did not even have a basic grasp of Islam and had other motivations for joining the cause (el Said 2015: 26). Conversely, anthropologist Scott Atran contends in relation to members of ISIS, ‘... people like to sweep members of groups like ISIS, into undesirable categories ... But time and time again, research has shown this to be false; normal seeming people join radical movements all the time and do remarkably vicious things once they’re there’ (Atran cited in el Said 2015).

Scholars such as Amarasingam observe that while ‘the stereotypical profile of a terrorist is someone who is poor, aggrieved and unemployed, decades of research demonstrate this to be far more nuanced’ (Amarasingam 2019: 7). This is evident in relation to the terrorists involved in the 2019 Easter Sunday attacks in Sri Lanka and the 2016 Holey Artisan Bakery in Dhaka, Bangladesh, where several of the terrorists involved were from wealthy or middle class backgrounds and were also highly educated (Winsor et al. 2019; Amarasingam 2019; Gunasingham 2019). Successful extremist groups attract, recruit and retain members due to their ability to mobilise individuals around perceived or existing socio-economic fault lines and other inequalities based on religion, class, gender, sexuality and so forth (Mcneil-Willson et al. 2019: 23). However, it must be acknowledged that certain socio-economic and political conditions including individual psychological make-up do create conditions which may be conducive to certain individuals being attracted to radical/extremist thought (Wright-Neville and Smith 2009).

The diverse drivers which compel certain individuals toward radicalisation and violence mean that a more nuanced understanding of the myriad push and pull factors to violent extremism is required. Indeed, as Gerrand advocates, this complexity calls for an intersectional approach to understanding the motivations which drive violent extremist behaviour (Gerrand 2020). The ability for extremist groups such as ISIS to recruit from all levels of society points to the powerful lure of their narratives and is becoming increasingly evident with their shift toward a global insurgency model (Gunasingham 2019: 11; Barton 2018; Khalil 2019). In the context of ISIS’s foreign fighters, el Said argues that even those returned and disillusioned fighters continue to be vulnerable to extremist ideologies. He contends that counter narratives engineered by the state are in constant competition with extremist narratives to win the hearts and minds of this group, this means that the challenge of preventing them from relapsing into violent extremism is ‘not simply a matter of counter narrative exercise’ (el Said 2015: 28). Moreover, these challenges have only intensified in the current context due to the increasing time spent online due to COVID-19 restrictions (Gerrand 2020; Elias et al. 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic is a useful case study of what can happen when push and pull factors intersect with heightened intensity. Widespread job loss, trauma, uncertainty and vulnerability have combined in many contexts with increased time spent online within algorithmic architectures that support the reinforcement of sophisticated disinformation within closed groups, leading to an increase in bonding social capital at the expense of bridging and linking social capital. This has increased polarisation and arguably created an environment that is conducive to violent radicalisation. (Gerrand et al. 2021; Grossman et al. 2021: 6-10)

Research points out that existing counter narrative strategies fall short in the face of increasingly sophisticated extremist narratives, and that counter narratives can become counter-productive in some instances (Tahiri and Grossman 2013; Sold and Gaspar 2020; el Said 2015). Certain scholars point out that counter narratives can take on the same dogmatic sense as extremist narratives in some instances and are thus ineffective, and exposing extremist narratives alone will not act as a deterrence against radicalisation and recruitment (Sold and Gaspar 2020; el Said 2015). el Said argues that extremist narratives can be successfully countered only through the provision of dignified alternatives and making on ground differences for at risk groups (el Said 2015, p.28). Other scholars such as Gerrand (2020) express similar views and argue that attempts to curb online extremism need to be mirrored with activities offline. This means that together with online interventions for countering violent extremism, such as counter and alternative narrative campaigns, government and other relevant stakeholders need to build pro-social resilience to polarisation and violent extremism in order to enhance democratic and good governance, and thus restore trust in state infrastructure and civil society.

3. Efficacy of Alternative Narratives at different stages

The efficacy of alternative narratives at different stages requires careful consideration and is dependent upon the key factors shaping the appeal to violent extremism in the first place. This includes the role of emotion including anger, alienation, and anxiety (Standing 2011; Roose 2020). A good alternative narrative approach to counter violent extremism will understand the specific local attitudes, vulnerabilities, behaviours and media consumption of the target audience (Russell 2018). Based on the literature observed there is limited evidence to suggest the efficacy of alternative narratives in isolation, this is due to most measurements and evaluations of programs being based on social media metrics and there is a sparsity of empirical offline behavioural evidence available (Jones 2020: 39).

Further, rather than address violent extremist discourse, alternative narratives are viewed as promoting behaviours that are constructive such as civic or social engagement and, as articulated by Lindekilde (2012: 389), measuring changes in behaviour, worldviews and practices is information that is difficult to observe or access.

In addition, as noted in this review, literature suggests that alternative narratives are most effective when they target individuals that are viewed as being 'at risk' as these narratives are 'more capable of capturing audience interests and redirecting at-risk audiences in a more productive direction' (Barzegar, Powers and El Karhili 2016: 28; RAN, 2015). Alternative messaging has been found to be most effective when it is produced freely, organically and disseminated by trusted social and interpersonal networks. This is exemplified through grassroots initiatives such as *Jamal Al Khatib-My Path*, which will be explored in more detail below.

Effective Alternative Narratives: Jamal al-Khatib-My Path

Jamal al-Khatib-My Path is a good example of how local communities and CSO's can develop effective alternative narratives. Developed by a CSO, Turn-Association for the prevention of violence and extremism, 'a network of youth workers, filmmakers, Islamic studies scholars, former extremists, young Muslims and non-Muslims', the program frames its narrative around the story of a young prisoner who left the jihadist subculture in Austria and who wanted to help others (RAN 2018: 11). The program was targeted at adolescents who were at risk of encountering violent extremist content and young people who already sympathised with jihadi groups and narratives (Ali et al. 2020: 223).

Turn aimed to address and use social media to deconstruct the 'us versus them' discourse within jihadi narratives as well as mainstream narratives in Austria. This included acknowledging, creating space for discussion and publicly denouncing discrimination against Muslims and racism, particularly given the rise of Islamophobia and far-right groups in Austria (Ali et al. 2020: 223). In addition, the project used images appropriating the aesthetics of jihadi messages and used social media and the internet as a tool for doing so.

The program created a character, *Jamal al-Khatib*, by integrating different biographical aspects of young people into a single narrative. The program was designed through a participatory approach, in which young people, including those that had left the jihadi movement created, produced and shot short films which were posted on social media platforms (RAN 2018: 11). These short films were based on the reflections of the participants' own life experiences and thoughts, and the project offered a safe space to share the narratives which shaped beliefs and personal development (Ali et al. 2020: 229). Crucially, one of the key factors to the success of the program was challenging the 'us versus them' narrative by directly addressing issues of institutionalised racism.

Turn noted that racial profiling and being continually subjected to racism at school or by institutions such as the police can contribute to feelings of humiliation, powerlessness and exclusion (Ali et al. 2020: 230). One video from season 2 of *Jamal al-Khatib* addresses the *Takfir* narrative of "us versus them" that is prevalent in jihadi narratives but also addresses mainstream discourse which discriminates against the Muslim community (Jamal al-Khatib 2019).

In the video, *Jamal al-Khatib* recounts how he was discriminated at school and how this made him feel more and more isolated and that compared to school and his family life, the jihadi's groups narrative of "us versus them" was appealing as it framed non-Muslims as disbelievers:

the brothers/siblings (in the jihadi group) were strong, because they live their faith without compromise, abide all rules and empower each other (Jamal al-Khatib 2019).

The video goes on to show how members of the jihadi group attack Jamal al-Khatib's brother and this is the catalyst for him to move away from the group:

if the group rule says you are not allowed to love your parents, then they cannot be good rules and especially not a rule by God (Jamal al-Khatib 2019).

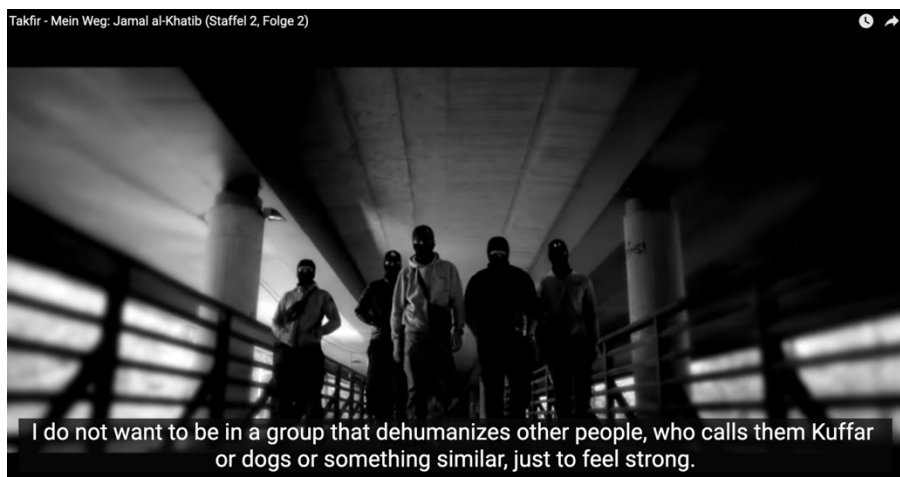
The table below, formulated by the project researchers, demonstrates how the extremist narrative was reframed and deconstructed (Table 3):

Table 3: Reframing Extremist Narratives

Takfir Extremist narrative	Discrimination Narrative	Alternative Narrative
<i>Kuffar</i> (disbelievers) vs Muslims as central concept	<i>Kuffar</i> is a derogatory term that refers to non-Muslims <i>Takfir</i> is used as a method by violent extremists to separate people	Only God can know whether someone is a believer or not My opinion towards people is based on the way they treat others, not their religion or identity

(Ali et al. 2020: 223).

Other tactics used by the *Jamal al-Khatib* program included framing videos to look like video games and using audio-visual techniques including exaggerated aesthetics, first person shooter style sequences and episodic structure. This aimed to attract the attention of young people who ‘find jihadi content appealing and are likely to spend hours watching it’ (Ali et al. 2020: 233). This online campaign combined social work or ‘online Streetwork’ in which youth workers would go into the digital spaces which young people visit, initiating debate and conversation regarding the content of the videos, including reaching out to target audiences on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube (Ali et al. 2020: 242).



(Example of an effective Alternative Narrative program: Jamal al-Khatib 2019)

Whilst the messaging reframes and deconstructs the jihadi messaging, the question of whether the videos had an impact on the target audience and whether that impact can be measured remains open. The initial measurements for success of the campaign were based on social media metrics including how many views the first and second season of *Jamal al-Khatib* received or likes of the Facebook page. However, Turn found by engaging in social network analysis, out of a sample of 500 accounts that liked the Facebook page, about a fifth of those also liked the page of German-speaking preacher and groups which were associated with the jihadi or neo-Salafist subcultures (Ali et al. 2020: 242).

Social network analysis (SNA) can be a helpful tool in identifying and understanding the online social networks that support violent extremism. SNAs can be applied to data from social media platforms such as YouTube channels, Facebook pages and Twitter accounts to potentially identify members of a group or network and can also be used to provide further information regarding key recruiters, influencers, and communicators (Waldman and Verga 2016: 9). However, SNA does not provide any indication of whether the message has resonated or had an impact on the target audience. The team behind *Jamal al-Khatib* reflected on the difficulty in measuring the efficacy of their program:

The decentralised online setting and the limited time period available for building relationships imposed upon us by the campaign structure make it hard to be certain how many viewers and commentators were inspired to engage in processes of self-reflection as a result of our work (Ali et al. 2020: 243).

The example of *Jamal al-Khatib* demonstrates how powerful alternative narratives can be when they target those that might be at risk of being influenced by violent extremist groups and indicates that alternative narratives are well suited for addressing sensitive issues and building trust and resilience through social capital and instilling non-violent attitudes (Gerrand 2021).

The literature is inconclusive on how alternative narratives engage with target audiences as even if audiences do click or view a video or post this may not necessarily indicate supportive behaviour towards a campaign or narrative. Some may be motivated by 'curiosity, morbid infatuation or a number of other factors' (Speckhard et al. 2018: 59). The use of metrics and qualitative engagement indicators such as comments on YouTube have been favoured by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue and their report on Counter-Narratives provides comprehensive impact evaluations on counter-narrative campaigns using these techniques (Silverman et al. 2016: 36).

Measuring engagement may be a way to determine the effectiveness of an alternative narrative campaign and could be understood as individuals leaving several comments on YouTube pages, direct messaging an organisation on Facebook or Twitter or engaging in constructive conversations regarding campaigns to other users or the organisation (Silverman et al. 2016: 37). Whilst this could be a way to measure engagement, it is limited in terms of measuring the impact on the views and attitudes of the audience. The literature indicates that programs that use positive and alternative narratives, advocacy and storytelling can supplement and support outreach and engagement programs (Jones 2020: 41). Gerrand and Grossman for example, in their study of families of radicalised family members or those attracted to violent extremism, found that participants viewed interculturally sensitive school programs as being crucial for creating an environment that supports resilience online. They suggested within the study that these programs could be 'delivered and recorded and published on social media as a durable response' (Gerrand and Grossman 2018: 30).

ReThink Project in the EU has used alternative narratives through social media campaigns targeting both jihadi and far-right narratives in Europe, and this campaign also included the use of short videos produced and disseminated on YouTube and Facebook. Individuals aged 18-35 from Romania, Hungary and Sweden who expressed interest in conspiracies related to the far-right for instance were targeted by ReThink's Conspiracy Theory Campaign (ReThink 2020: 10).

The videos also used real life narratives and stories of conversion to violent extremism from former extremists and NGOs working on rehabilitation of extremists. These videos included a video called the 'Candidate' which follows an individual called Danny who engages in posting videos regarding conspiracy theories online (ReThink, 2020). This video has over 61,000 views and ReThink notes that comments on the videos managed to create debate and open a space to discuss sensitive and controversial issues (ReThink, 2020, p 31). This returns to the point that providing an environment and space for controversial issues to be discussed is just as important as the message that is trying to be disseminated.

Creative Approaches to Alternative Narratives targeting young individuals engaging with extremist content

As mentioned earlier in the report, more creative alternative narratives methods that are integrated into other interventions are viewed as being the most effective when multimodal content creation is emphasised. In a study by Vergani et al, workshops in Greater Dandenong City engaged young people in developing videos using an app on their cell phones to challenge extremist narratives. The workshops were divided into two with one group working with a Bangkok-based social change agency 'Love Frankie' to support young Australians and develop and share positive stories about diversity online to counter extremist narratives. The other workshop followed the approach of a 'Self-Portrait Experience' in which participants produced photographic self-portraits to create personal stories that grapple with emotions and social transformation (Vergani et al. 2018: 14).

Topics of the videos included promoting diversity, promoting social cohesion, and addressing prejudice. The pilot program found that the most talked about video was one which looks at "Australian media and the police" and discussed the prejudice directed toward Sudanese Australians and Australians of African descent (Vergani et al. 2018: 14). Respondents to the video noted how it challenges prejudices and raised awareness regarding discrimination, shifting perspectives on the issue of African gangs, with one respondent noting that:

I found the video very confronting and shocking because I didn't truly understand the magnitude of the issue. The video exemplified the level of discrimination, prejudice and stereotyping that people from African backgrounds receive when these statements are made. I found the video to be very informative and eye-opening (Vergani et al. 2018: 53).

The videos were disseminated on social media, however some of the focus groups interviewed noted that rather than sharing the videos directly on social media, they could be used more "constructively to generate ideas for discussion (Vergani et al. 2018: 57). This again suggests that the power of alternative narratives is in the ability to create spaces for discussion and debate on issues like racism, discrimination and mainstream policies that might contribute to feelings of exclusion and isolation. Whilst these creative approaches can be effective at engaging with young people who are at risk of or have been exposed to extremist content, the conducive environment of push factors created by COVID-19 and the algorithmic design of social media platforms present formidable challenges for practitioners to counter extremist narratives.

COVID 19 and the Far Right

It is important to remember that recruitment and engagement with violent extremist narratives is a phenomenon that occurs both online and offline. As extremist groups use social media to expand their reach, appear credible and break into the mainstream, the focus on alternative narratives has shifted to online ecosystems. Ecosystems online mean that users engage in migration flows from one site to another as well sharing content such as videos or memes across platforms. Far right groups for instance may use public pages on Facebook for dissemination of content such as the Finnish group *Soldiers of Odin* to gain new followers and coordinate real-world meetings (Ganesh and Bright 2020: 3). These pages filter down to public groups which garner fewer members and allow for greater interaction and then filter down to private groups where active participation occurs. Engaging in alternative narratives that reach those in private groups proves challenging (Baele et al. 2020: 9).

In addition, extremist activity on the far right has also shifted to gaming platforms such as Stream, Discord and Twitch and, as found by O'Connor, there is growing evidence to suggest that far right groups use as many platforms as possible to avoid moderation efforts (O'Connor 2021: 5). The impact that COVID-19 and lockdowns has had on how people communicate has also led to a resurgence of violent extremist messages on platforms such as Tik Tok, Telegram, Facebook and WhatsApp. Lockdowns, social distancing and social isolation with increased time spent online have played a powerful role in the proliferation of conspiracy theories and extremist narratives online and on alternative alt right platforms such as Gab (Davies et al. 2021: 4). A study by Guerin et al for example found that on Gab, COVID-19 featured as one of the key topics on Australian far right posts at 13% whilst discussion of lockdowns in Victoria made up 4% (Guerin et al. 2021: 5).

The increased use of alternative platforms for far-right mobilisation is of growing concern and the ability to engage in countering the spread of these narratives is a significant challenge. The diversification of demographics who have engaged with the QAnon conspiracy including those in older demographics, the rise of 'conspirituality' and the spread of these messages by influencers demonstrates the need for an intersectional approach that builds on 'pro-social resilience' and promotes compassion and understanding (Gerrand 2020a, 2020b; Halafoff et al. 2020; Grosse 2020).

Manosphere and Incels

Further, there has been little focus on how alternative narratives can be used to engage with the manosphere or 'incels.' Roose et al (2020) note that peers and family were viewed as being more important in shaping responses than institutions. This indicates that there has been a 'decline of institutions as a factor shaping masculinity' and opens space for individuals to seek violent extremist narratives (Roose et al. 2020: 3). This form of extremism has failed to see official counter-narratives emerge whether it be by governments or social media companies to tackle the spread of misogynist hate. Unofficial alternative narratives have started to be developed, for example journalist Jess Hill's work on family abuse. Some of Hill's work arguably functions as an alternative narrative as it seeks to engage with the root causes of men's violence against women. In *See What You Made Me Do* (2019), Hill explores in detail the role that shame plays in perpetuating violent behaviour within this context and has drawn on in-depth interviews with perpetrators. Hill argues that, for men, emotional disturbances that present even a 'hint of vulnerability can be so intolerable' they must be expelled, 'usually by finding someone or something else to blame' (Hill 2019: 137).

The 'manosphere' is a host of social media pages, online blogs and forums that reject narratives of gender inequality and instead argue that men are the real victims who are oppressed by feminism. These blogs and forums include extreme misogynistic beliefs and at times promote violence against women. The victimhood narrative that the incel movement disseminates feeds into other extremist forums and the rise of neo-fascism with organisations such as the Lad's Society and Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW) (Roose et al. 2020: 30-32). COVID-19 lockdowns have meant that increasing numbers of young men are finding themselves in the position of so-called NEETs (an incel community term to designate those not in education, employment or training) and therefore are angry, without sense of purpose while spending increased time online. In a study conducted of incels and their response to COVID-19 in Canada, Morton et al (2021: 19) found that the enhanced isolation of lockdowns could increase immersion into extremist narratives. A quote from an incel blogger on incel.co demonstrates this isolation and resentment:

Normies now feel what we feel all the time. Alone, bored, sad, aimless, horny, empty, desolate, disconnected from the rest of humanity — the endless drone of whining and moaning I’m seeing on the social media timelines is the hellscape we have to endure constantly all the time during ‘normal times’, I can’t help but have a huge dose of schadenfreude over this — welcome to our world normiescum (Incels.co 2020 cited in Morton et al. 2021: 19).

Feelings of isolation, boredom, social anxiety, and resentment can contribute to the increased search for meaning and purpose and thereby vulnerability to extremist narratives and conspiracy theories. The recent anti-lockdown protests in Melbourne included a large cohort of what Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police labelled “angry young men”. Researchers have noted that masculinities are an important element of recruitment to both far-right and Islamist movements (Kimmel 2013; Gest 2018; Roose 2016;2021). This may be extended to anti-lockdown movements grounded in conspiratorial thinking and fed by disinformation that positions the protestors as ‘warriors’ battling state tyranny.

These narratives have also crept into the mainstream in recent months and policies which provide social support services access for those in lockdown are essential to combat the dissemination of extremist propaganda (RMIT ABC Fact Check, 2021). In addition, the vast majority of those who are exposed to extremist narratives do not engage in violent extremism and, as noted in Morton et al’s report, it is perhaps more important to understand why the vast majority of those exposed to violent extremism do not engage with violence or do not have an intention of engaging with violence to provide insights and potentially for more effective interventions (Morton et al. 2021: 28).

The ‘conveyor belt’ theory of radicalisation still permeates P/CVE with the assumption that there is a clear and direct line from holding particular political and religious beliefs to embracing the use of violence, the literature suggests that this assumption is unfounded. Whilst outside the scope of this report, there is a need to engage in further research on the impact of COVID-19 extremist narratives, manosphere discourse and potential alternative narrative approaches to address the challenge.

4. Elements of effective and ineffective alternative narrative messaging

Whilst there is limited evidence in the literature in terms of the impact that alternative narratives can have on changing behaviour or shifting attitudes when it comes to violent extremist narratives, reports from international institutions, NGO’s and government bodies do provide best practice or how to guides on crafting effective alternative narrative messaging (RAN 2015; RAN 2017; Russell 2018; Tuck and Silverman 2016; Briggs and Feve 2013; Barzeager et al. 2016). Based on the literature observed, the following section will look at effective and ineffective elements of alternative narrative messaging.

Credible Messengers

As mentioned early in this report, credible messengers are essential for alternative narratives to be viewed as legitimate by the target audience. Whilst governments and government agencies have reach and resources, they lack credibility and are often viewed as a ‘kiss of death’ for potential credible messages and messengers (RAN 2015: 6). The ‘Say No to Terror’ campaign is a good example of an ineffective messaging campaign. This campaign predominately targeted audiences in Saudi Arabia using Islamic symbols, scripture, and social and cultural norms of the audience, specifically the Muslim Arabic community. Campaign videos were posted on YouTube drawing on Arab/Muslim social constructs of the collective good to urge viewers to be vigilant about violent extremism and *Takfir* was challenged through criticising its use to serve certain political agendas (Aly et al. 2014: 39).

A study into the ‘Say No to Terror’ campaign found that of 281 comments on the YouTube videos, around 60 were negative in nature, with many of the posts questioning the origins of the video, lack of transparency and information regarding the creators of the video and accusations of astroturfing to try and ensure the credibility of the source (Aly et al. 2014: 44).

Anecdotal evidence observed by Aly et al suggested that there was suspicion among the Arab community that the source and motive behind the campaign originated in the US (Aly et al. 2014: 44). Alternative messages that are effective tend to be ones that are based at the grassroots level or peer to peer programs like the example of *Jamal al-Khatib* mentioned earlier in this report.

Local communities are a good source of messengers, influencers and contributors to alternative narratives. This is because they have proximity to the target audience, are viewed as having credibility as local voices and can speak with ‘emotion about local issues which contributes to authenticity and improves retention of the message’ (Russell 2018: 8). Additionally, partnerships and coordinated efforts with content creators, influencers, social media companies and private sector partners can substantially boost awareness and engagement of alternative narrative approaches.

An example of this is a campaign called Dare to Grey which was developed by a group of 21 students at Utrecht University who wanted to see more nuance in debates regarding the 2016 European refugee crisis (The Grey Narrative 2021). The students developed social media campaigns that challenged polarisation in society by promoting different views and voices through audio-visual content online. The organisation worked with local content creators to develop videos promoting diversity, debate, and empathy. Part of the campaign’s success was that it was run through grassroots, peer to peer organisation in which young people promoted community engagement and empowerment and the organisation has an estimated reach of over 10 million people (RAN 2019: 51).

The literature suggests that collaborative approaches in which governments support CSO’s through funding or access to resources and grassroots organisations who can leverage their credibility to connect with target audiences offer an effective approach to ensuring that alternative narratives have an impact (Barzeager et al. 2016: 16). More importantly, as suggested by the Dare to Grey example and as noted by Amarasingam and Ayad, engaging with young people as stakeholders is imperative and there is a need to involve young people in every stage of ‘design, development, deployment and campaign processes’ (Ayad and Amarsingam 2019: 6).

Message content and target audience

Whilst the literature emphasises the need to engage with credible messengers, just as important is the message and message content. Message content will be determined based on who the audience is, therefore determining whether an alternative narrative campaign is for a broader audience such as young people in general or whether it is targeted at individuals who might have expressed or hold extremist views is crucial (Russell 2015: 4). As noted early in the report, alternative narrative content that has been created or co-created with individuals that are part of the target audience such as those that may have been exposed to extremist narratives or may be former extremist themselves tend to have the most resonance (Ali et al. 2020: 231; Briggs and Feve 2013: 13).

For alternative narratives to be effective, the message must address or at least engage with the emotions or grievances that might cause individuals to seek out extremist material and narratives in the first place. Deconstructing or reframing alternative narratives as exemplified with the *Jamal al-Khatib* program demonstrates how this can be effective at retaining engagement with a message (Ali et al. 2020: 231). The literature emphasises a need to acknowledge the ‘kernel of truth’ within the grievances that those who subscribe to extremist narratives may have and this is an important aspect of effective alternative narrative content. For example, if we take grievances mentioned regarding far-right narratives and the idea of victimhood and identity (Table 4):

Table 4: Example of Alternative Narrative:

Current narrative and meaning	Potential Alternative Narrative
The struggle for identity and belonging. View that national identities are under threat, framed through increased immigration rates, failure of multiculturalism, blaming minorities for lack of access to jobs	Acknowledge the existence of grievances and that meaning, belonging and identity can be found within other spaces. This is linked with education programs and workshops demonstrating that an integrated intervention program is vital for reaching target audiences

By acknowledging grievances, this allows a space for the target audience to debate, discuss and engage with their own peers and is arguably the key element that differentiates alternative narratives from counter narratives. Cultivating relationships and providing support structures is an important aspect of alternative narrative approaches and online messaging and content needs to include offline programs to support those vulnerable to extremist content.

Providing a safe space for the exploration of ideas including ones that might be controversial or unpopular is important for building trust, openness and a sense that an individual’s voice is being heard. This means that practitioners should encourage open expression and avoid policing perceived or legitimate grievances (Barzegar et al. 2016: 8). When voices are dismissed or shamed, this is when they turn underground and pursue alternative radical or extremist viewpoints. Alternative narratives therefore need to connect with individuals’ understanding and the contexts of their specific lives so that they can create new meanings and relate them to their emotions and needs (Radical Online Education, EU, 2017, p 12).

The content must be more appealing, relatable and memorable, attention grabbing and easy to grasp, because violent extremist content can often be subtle, nuanced and difficult to find. Raamakrishna et al argue that for alternative narrative messaging to be effective it must match or at least be ‘stickier than violent extremist tropes available to local audience’ (Ramakrishna et al. 2021: 13).

It should be stressed that producing alternative narrative content is shown to be most effective when it is part of a wider suite of programs aimed at education, social work, vocational programs and resilience building (Frenett and Dow 2014: 24). If alternative messaging content does not include a call for action or option for offline intervention, then the positive message will end up seeking the ‘lowest common denominator’ or producing vague ‘statements that are watered down or hobbled by legitimate complaints of hypocrisy’ (Berger 2016: 5). Along with the message content, the format and delivery of alternative narratives will determine the effectiveness and impact of the approach.

Format

The literature suggests that the most effective formats for presenting and disseminating alternative narratives are through audio-visual content on social media and through viral campaigns. Just as violent extremist groups use videos, memes, music, and online posts to convey their narratives, alternative narratives can use these techniques to present content. Videos such as short films and animations, texts and images can be used to convey alternative messages and promote participation. Vergani et al (2018) note that video projects that involve a participatory aspect in which the target audience is involved can reinforce ‘positive messages and values such as mutual respect, tolerance and self-esteem’ (12). In addition, as shown by the *Jamal al-Khatib* example, emulating, or appropriating visual styles from extremist propaganda and using film language to convey arguments and meaning can be an effective method (Gerrand 2021). For example, using video game style shots or hand- held shaky cam documentary style cinematography, character building and similar music to extremist music can help to appeal to those that may spend hours watching extremist propaganda. (Ali et al. 2020: 232).

Viral campaigns are another way to frame alternative narratives and are cited numerous times in the literature. For example, Operation Trojan T-Shirts, a campaign run in 2011 in Germany, involved the assistance of an advertising agency to target Neo-Nazis who attended a rock music concert organised by the far-right political party NPD. T-shirts that showed a skull with 'Hardcore rebels' text were distributed for free at the concert. Following the concert, when participants washed their t-shirts, the message changed to a message from the group 'EXIT-Germany' stating: 'we help you to free yourself from right-wing extremism' (RAN 2019: 26).

In response, members of the Neo-Nazi groups started sending SMS' and Facebook posts warning about the T-Shirts; the story then went viral online and in the news. EXIT Germany noted that the immediate diffusion and viral nature of the campaign contributed to those contacting the organisation for help tripling in numbers (RAN 2019: 26). This example lies somewhere between a counter-narrative and alternative narrative approach as it engaged in ridiculing the legitimacy and power of the NPD's communication strategies whilst at the same time presenting an alternative way of life that could convince those extremists to potentially disengage from the movement.

It should be noted that these viral campaigns are risky and could lead to unintended effects or consequences as stated by Briggs and Feve (Briggs and Feve 2013). Much more effective, Briggs and Feve argue, are alternative narratives that create a movement for positive change through community outreach, education, and mass mobilisation (Briggs and Feve 2013: 12).

Delivery

In terms of the delivery of alternative narratives that can reach the intended audience, much of the focus has been on the development and delivery of online content. This is due to the proliferation of extremist content online and, as online networks are contested spaces, disseminating alternative narratives online can be effective at reaching target audiences and challenging extremist discourse. This is also because in terms of evaluation and impact there are at least surface level indicators that can be observed through social media metrics, advertising tools and website engagement metrics (Reynolds and Tuck 2016: 10-11). However, as noted earlier in this report, these evaluation and monitoring approaches are limited in terms of measuring long-term shifts in behaviour or changes in attitude.

Social media remains a powerful tool for engaging in alternative discourses, however delivery of alternative messages can also occur offline, disseminated by trusted and credible messengers. For example, educational institutions can be a vital frontline connection for target audiences. Using the case study of Muslim Mindanao in the Philippines, Ramakrishna et al show how the Ash'ari school of theology and religious institutions in the Philippines could engage in tackling misconceptions about extremist ideology by engaging and organising classes, public dialogues and roundtables (Ramakrishna et al. 2021: 14). Other examples include the use of film and theatre workshops that provide resilience and capacity building activities which create spaces for engaging with sensitive topics in indirect ways to convey alternative narratives (Gerrand 2021). The potential benefit of this approach is that it can create space for learning and discussion (Bartlett 2011: 173-195).

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Appendix 1: Alternative Narrative Programs and Evaluation Models

Name	Country of Origin	Year	Type of Funding	Program	Quant/Qual	Evaluation Y/N	Type of Evaluation
STRIVE II	European Union	2016-2020	Government funded-European Union	“Preventative communication” program as part of an integrated intervention-mentorship program, radio journalism training program and film workshops. Program is focused on Kenya and violent extremism perpetuated by groups like jihadi extremists	Quantitative and Qualitative	Y	Baseline and End line data from questionnaires. 26 interviews with mentors and 2 focus groups with 18 mentees in Kenya Social media analytics and metrics for documentaries and films produced Facebook paid advertising within a 4-month period showed 21,700 engaged users (users who clicked on the page to watch a video, comment, share or like the content. However, it did not generate the type of discussion the organisers wanted online. The promotion targeted 14–36-year-olds within a 40 km radius of 6 states in Kenya (Fisher, Range and Cuddlhy 2020: 80)
Redirect Method	United States	2019	Non-Government funding-Next Gen Foundation in partnership with ADL and Moonshot CVE	Focusing on Google Searches redirect those that search for violent extremist keywords from both the far right and jihadi extremists. Keywords such as the ‘Turner Diaries PDF’ were flagged and redirected through Google Ad’s to a tailored playlist with videos intended to undermine the extremist messages	Quantitative	Y	Measured through social media analytics and metrics-clicks and impression For White Supremacist redirect- 179, 684 impressions and 4,295 clicks For Islamist-inspired Extremist Redirect 21,624 impressions and 529 clicks (Greer and Ramalingam 2020)
Abdullah X	UK	2012-2014	Independent-Self funded	An offline initiative working with young people which shifted online. Animated shorts on YouTube, Twitter and Facebook as well as graphic novel focusing on Abdullah X. Using targeted	Quantitative	Y	Social media analytics- 60,000 views (70% from ads) 1 million ‘impressions’ (RAN 2019 :12)

				marketing the videos address contemporary and controversial issues such as racism and xenophobia in the UK and the violent extremist messages from jihadi extremists			
Operation Trojan T-Shirt	Germany	2011	Non-government funding-EXIT Germany and Ad Agency-Grabarz & Partner	Operation Trojan T-Shirt' evolved in cooperation with an advertisement agency in order to target the neo-Nazi scene directly. On August 6th, 2011, t-shirts showing a skull with the text 'Hardcore Rebels' and a flag of the Free Forces (militant neo-Nazi groups copying left wing strategies and methods) were distributed for free at a right-wing rock festival ('Rock for Germany') in Gera, which was organized by the nationalist party NPD in Thuringia. Once washed the t-shirts revealed a message: 'What your T-shirt can do, you also can do – We help you to free yourself from right-wing extremism. EXIT-German	Quantitative and Qualitative	Y	No information on social media metrics but evaluation mentions the viral campaign spread over 300 news outlets around the world and a media equivalence value of TV, radio and print media activity in Germany was valued at 201,000 euro. The campaign saw 6 active Neo-Nazi's contact EXIT Germany about distancing themselves from the scene. (RAN 2019: 26)
Search For Common Ground	Morocco	2017	Non-Government Funding	The Transforming Violent Extremism Media Training program engaged with 32 program beneficiaries to develop media campaigns and empower locally	Quantitative and Qualitative	Y	Social Media metrics and analytics- the campaigns reached over 1.5 million Facebook users, with the videos garnering over 400,000 views and total engagement with 117, 389 users (Mansour 2017: 4)

				credible alternative messaging. Workshops occurred over 3 days and participants worked on the production of three social media campaigns, short videos and one visual art competition launched on Facebook			
Jamal-al Khatib-My Path	Austria	2016-current	Government funding-Erasmus + (European Union) Non-Government-Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung (bpb)	The main aim of the project is to deliver authentic alternative narratives to jihadist extremist propaganda online by applying Online-Streetwork and narrative-biography methods. Likeminded professionals like youth workers, scholars, filmmakers, content creators and young people, some former extremists to create the character of Jamal-Al Khatib. The team with 9 youth who were viewed at being at risk of engaging with extremism created short films on YouTube, with accompanying GIFS and Instagram stories as well as posting on Facebook and Twitter. Online the team including the youth viewed at being at risk would discuss the content of the videos with the target group	Quantitative and Qualitative	Y	Social media analytics and metrics- First season received 200,000 views on YouTube Second season 450,000 Offline aspect of the project was evaluated by researchers at St Polten University. To find out, whether the target groups could be reached by the campaign, an explorative Social Network Analysis of the “likes” of the Jamal al-Khatib Facebook followers was conducted. To find out, whether the Online Streetwork interventions were successful, the comments on the videos were analysed qualitatively. (RAN 2019: 56)

ReThink Project	Italy	2018-2020	Government funding- Directorate General Home Affairs, Internal Security Fund Police (2014-2020)-Civil Society Engagement Programme	The project aimed to prevent vulnerable audiences from starting a social process of radicalisation and to support deradicalization by providing alternative narratives that deconstruct extremist rhetoric. This included producing video material addressing issues such as community belonging, debunking social myths, local community engagement. Engaging in debate in schools and developing 7 social media campaigns through Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram	Quantitative and Qualitative	Y	Social media analytics and metrics including- engagement, shares, reaches and impressions. The 7 social media campaigns had in total a reach of 5,982,7763, 120, 862 views, 33, 791 engagements in total, 195,232 clicks (ReThink 2020: 27)
Say No to Terror	Saudi Arabia	2013	N/A	Say No to Terror is a communication campaign including a website, audio-visual media, and social media content to construct narratives about terrorism, it's place in Arab society and its consequences	Qualitative	Y	15 videos we analysed by academic researchers to code the text to highlight core themes. Content analysis of comments on the YouTube videos suggested that there were some questions regarding the legitimacy of the videos and whether they were produced in the US, (Aly 2014: 37-40)
Dare to be Grey	Netherlands	2016	Project based funding-originally self-funded, recently Dare to Be Grey has received funding from the EU Civil Society Empowerment	Dare to be Grey is a foundation that challenges polarisation in society. It calls for recognition of the 'grey' middle ground in issues often mistakenly considered 'black and white'. The initiative seeks to promote the different	Quantitative	Y	Survey at Utrecht University of 200 plus students found that the number of people that identified as "being grey" grew from 65.6% to 76.8% within 2 months Media reach of 10 million The organisation gained more than 8,000 Facebook followers within a year Exceeds target engagement rate of 6% (RAN 2019 :51)

			Programme (CSEP) Police Fund	views and voices of the large majority of moderate thinkers, which are too often muted by more extreme voices. Dare to be Grey aims to raise awareness principally through online channels: using multiple video and photo campaigns, writing and disseminating online articles, and offering a platform for anyone with a 'grey' story to be told. Dare to be Grey also developed a dialogue technique called 'First Aid for Polarisation' and is often involved in offline actions.			
Burka Avenger	Pakistan	2013-2016	Non-government funding-through Haroon's production company Unicorn Black	An animated series created by the pop star Haroon and broadcast in Urdu language in Pakistan the cartoon series follows the Jiya a superhero who wears a burka to conceal her identity whilst fighting crime. The videos emphasise the importance of girl's education in Pakistan and abroad	Quantitative	Y	Social media analytics and metrics: Burka Avenger has over 157 thousand subscribers on YouTube with one episode garnering over 11 million views.
Peer to Peer (P2P) Challenging Extremism Initiative	US	2016-2019	Government funding: US National Institute of Justice-Department of Justice, Presidents and Fellows of	The P2P Challenging Extremism Initiative aimed to inform and educate youth on violent extremism and enhance acceptance and tolerance. The program was targeted at participants	Quantitative and Qualitative	Y	Social media metrics and analytics 24 interviews with faculties and students engaged in developing narratives. Two of the campaigns Kombats with Kindness and OP250 were chosen to evaluate the impact on target audiences including surveys. 7 out of 150 campaigns were focused on white supremacist

			Harvard College Award	between the age of 14-25 through social media posts and workshops. P2P programs were developed by participating universities			propaganda, 22 on jihadi propaganda and the rest were focused on promoting tolerance. The campaigns generated 484, 256 Facebook likes, with the most likes on Facebook going to the Kombat with Kindness (188,823) (Savoia 2020: 6)
CAPE	Australia	2013-2015	Government funded: Attorney General's Department Building Community Resilience Funding program	CAPE created "Trojan" style advertising tactics, like Redirect Method, by using Google advertising, CAPE's website exitwhitepower.com was one of the first websites that appears in a keyword search associated with the far-right including 'white power', 'white pride' or 'white genocide'. The website emulated the look of far-right supremacist websites and the social media websites for the website also emulated and used similar images of far-right discussion forums to attract the target audience	Quantitative	Y	Social media and website analytics and metrics. CAPE's website exitwhitepower.com attracted over 22,000 unique Australian users between 2013 and 2015, while the Facebook forum gained 2000 Facebook likes in its first year (Voogt 2017: 39)
USAID Peace and Tolerance Programme	US	2008-2012	Government funded: USAID	The USAID sponsored radio programming targeted communities in Mali, Chad, and Niger. These radio programs promoted peace and tolerance and challenged extremist narratives through alternative narratives	Quantitative	Y	Surveys were conducted with around 1,100 African residents in 2010, questions ranging from views on youth associations making a positive contribution to listening to radio programs that promote peace and tolerance. The evaluation found that the average rate of those surveyed who listened to the tolerance and peace was 1,050. Aldrich in his study found that individuals who listened to more peace and tolerance radio programming were more likely to report deeper levels of civic engagement in their communities. (Aldrich 2012: 50)

