The Young Peacebuilders’ Guide To Tackling Harmful Narratives
THE YOUNG PEACEBUILDERS’ GUIDE TO TACKLING HARMFUL NARRATIVES

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Naming things incorrectly, using concepts interchangeably, or using terms as a catch-all phrase makes the phenomenon of harmful narratives even more confusing and complicated to understand.

To add another layer of complexity, most of the terms related to disinformation do not have a universal definition, as their relation to key human rights concepts—such as freedom of opinion, expression, and non-discrimination—are often disputed at national, regional, and international levels. As such, definitions of the concepts and terms below vary among international organisations, national laws, and scholars. Definitions in this resource stem from the United Nations, the European Commission, the Council of Europe, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and the Committee to Protect Journalists.

**Conspiracy theory:** The belief that certain events or situations are secretly manipulated behind the scenes by powerful forces with negative intent. Conspiracy theories have six things in common: i) an alleged, secret plot; ii) a group of conspirators; iii) evidence that seems to support the conspiracy theory; iv) they falsely suggest that nothing happens accidentally or by coincidence, that nothing is as it appears and everything is connected; v) they divide the world into good or bad; vi) they scapegoat people and groups.

**Disinformation:** False content that is spread online with the intent to cause harm. The terms ‘false news’ or ‘fake news’ are also used to describe such a phenomenon. However, true information can also be labelled and instrumentalised as ‘fake news’ by a party aiming to delegitimise certain facts and undermine the work of journalists. In 2021, the Committee to Protect Journalists recorded the highest number of journalists jailed for having exercised their work.

**Fake news:** Interchangeably used with disinformation. There is reluctance to use this term because to be labelled as ‘news’, the reported information should meet a certain threshold of verifiability, so by its very definition, news cannot be fake; and such an oxymoron is often used to discredit the work of journalists and media outlets at large. As this term is often used to undermine the credibility of journalists and media outlets, this guide will use the term ‘disinformation’.

**Harmful narratives:** Also known as ‘toxic narratives’ and ‘negative narratives’, they encompass propaganda, coordinated hate speech, disinformation, and conspiracy theories.

**Hate speech:** Any form of communication (in speech, writing, or behaviour) that attacks or uses pejorative or discriminatory language with reference to a person or a group on the basis of who they are, in other words, based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, colour, descent, gender, or other identity factor.
Infodemic: An excessive amount of information, including false or misleading information, in digital and physical environments during a disease outbreak. It leads to confusion and risk-taking behaviours that can harm health. It also leads to mistrust in health authorities and undermines the public health response.

Malinformation: The sharing of genuine information with the aim to cause harm, often by moving information designed to stay private into the public sphere.

Misinformation: The sharing of false information with no aim to harm.

Propaganda: The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe distinguishes two types of propaganda in the media. The first is propaganda for war, as well as national, racial, or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility, or violence, as defined in international and national law. It is illegal and therefore demands judicial action with the appropriate measures in line with international human rights law standards. The second type of propaganda combines all of the rest. It may be an inappropriate and scornful activity; it damages the profession of journalism, but does not necessarily call for legal action.

Source of definitions:

European Commission, Identifying conspiracy theories


Committee to Protect Journalists, 2021 Prison Census (2021)


United Nations, What is hate speech?

Council of Europe, Information disorder: Toward an interdisciplinary framework for research and policy making (2017)

World Health Organisation, Infodemic

Dear peacebuilder,

‘Young people prefer violence over peaceful means’, ‘young refugees are sexual harassers’, ‘young people are spreading hate online’ ... the list of disinformation and hate speech on the fundamental role of young people in building peace goes on and on. These often unpunished harmful narratives are particularly worrisome, as they undermine the crucial work of young people in building peace and jeopardise their physical and mental health.

While a lot has been done to shed light on the phenomenon of disinformation, notably in light of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the infodemic that followed, European members of the United Network of Young Peacebuilders (UNOY Peacebuilders) expressed lacking guidelines to dismantle harmful narratives targeting young peacebuilders and young people at large. Hence, The Young Peacebuilders’ Guide to Tackling Harmful Narratives entails a concrete step-by-step methodology and tools to support young peacebuilders in their fight against harmful narratives, as well as four concrete alternative narrative campaigns that were developed by UNOY members.

Rather than creating the umpteenth resource that sheds light on the issue of harmful narratives, this by-youth-for-youth guide is a collaborative document that encapsulates the work and input of 11 UNOY members who took part in UNOY Peacebuilders’ (hereafter UNOY) capacity development programme—Youth Promoting Peaceful and Cohesive Societies in Europe—held between April and June 2022, as well as the insights of experts in disinformation and media development at large.

Are you ready to make haters and the fake news industry tremble?
Then let’s get started!

Manon Buret, Network Coordinator, UNOY
Carolina Resigotti, Network Officer, UNOY
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We would like to thank the UNOY staff, interns, and member organisations for sharing their vision, knowledge, and time during the development of the guide. Your contributions have been invaluable throughout the process. We hope that this guide will meet your needs and support your own journey to tackle disinformation and hate speech.

All of our gratitude to Brandon Oelofse for developing the capacities of UNOY members in addressing disinformation and for sharing a concise and youthful methodology that is captured in this document. Such achievements would not have been possible without the facilitation skills and solar energy of Khadija Amahal, to whom we express our deepest appreciation.

Many thanks to the United Societies of Balkans with whom UNOY worked hand-in-hand to implement the in-person component of the Youth Promoting Peaceful and Cohesive Societies in Europe programme in the vibrant city of Thessaloniki.

A final appreciation to the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) for supporting UNOY and allowing us to take the time and space to explore and address such a crucial issue.
In 2020, UNOY member organisations in Europe highlighted disinformation as one of their main challenges in their daily peacebuilding work. Disinformation and fake news found fertile ground at the early stages of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Such a phenomenon did not only jeopardise the scientific community’s efforts in curbing the spread of a pandemic, but also compromised the work of young peacebuilders. As an example, the infodemic that followed the outbreak of the COVID-19 hindered the work of UNOY member United Societies of Balkans (UNOY member, Greece) in integrating minorities, immigrants, and refugees, as well as youngsters with fewer opportunities into their youth activities.

The outbreak of the “infodemic” caused a daily accumulation of a large amount of information. Information that does not reach a satisfactory level of authenticity is proven to be extremely harmful and sometimes destructive to health. Too often this information consists of dangerous memes that circulate on the internet and are usually far from reality. They may relate to pseudoscience, pseudohistory, and false news, and spread to multiple areas. The spread of such information hinders the objectives of peacebuilders that fight for the promotion of principles and values of democracy and human rights through the mobilisation and mobility of young people. – United Societies of Balkans, Greece.

In the face of these issues, young people have been at the forefront of efforts to combat the spread of misinformation during the COVID-19 pandemic. Such efforts were recognised and highlighted in the ‘UN Secretary-Generals Second Report on Youth, Peace and Security (2022). This counters the reductionist dichotomy that often portrays young people as perpetrators of harmful narratives due to being tech-savvy or victims of harmful narratives due to their large presence on social media.
Aside from the COVID-19 infodemic, disinformation also constitutes a very destructive weapon in conflict-affected settings, as observed by Gyumri Youth Initiative Centre (UNOY member, Armenia):

‘As a result of the recent war over the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the rise of disinformation is unprecedented. The peace agenda is being undermined and the vision of lasting peace is vanishing in the face of rising polarisation narratives’.

~ Gyumri Youth Initiative Centre, Armenia

Being technology-savvy is not enough to win the fight against harmful narratives. Unfortunately, perpetrators of disinformation and hate speech find more and more elaborate and subtle ways to spread their harmful narratives. Moreover, openly tackling disinformation is not without risks for the safety and the health of young peacebuilders who may be subject to retaliation and threats.

To tackle these challenges and support our members in dismantling disinformation that targets their peacebuilding work and the principles of the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda at large, UNOY implemented the Youth Promoting Peaceful and Cohesive Societies in Europe capacity development programme held between April and June 2022. In total, 11 young peacebuilders from eight members in Europe gathered for two online learning sessions; one in-person training session in Thessaloniki, Greece; and one final online session to consolidate knowledge and collaboratively develop this guide.

**Online learning sessions:** 26 April and 2 May 2022

**In-person training session:** 17-20 May 2022

**Collaborative development of the guide:** 2 June 2022
Participating members:
- Sustainable Cooperation for Peace and Security, Italy
- Youth Voice Network, Albania
- Academy for Peace and Development, Georgia
- The Young Republic, Sweden
- Centre for Intercultural Dialogue, Republic of North Macedonia
- Youth Resource Centre Tuzla, Bosnia and Herzegovina
- United Societies of Balkans, Greece
- Gyumri Youth Initiative Centre, Armenia

As members were introduced to a wide range of tools, resources, and methodologies to address disinformation, hate speech, and create alternative narratives, they expressed the need to encapsulate all of these tools and resources into a single document that can be easily accessed by their peers and any youth-led peacebuilding organisation interested in addressing harmful narratives.

Next steps to address harmful narratives
At the end of this capacity development programme, members gained new knowledge, skills, and motivation to tackle disinformation impacting their peacebuilding work. As soon as they got home, members started to apply the methodology learnt within the scope of their work.

For instance, a participant from the Sustainable Cooperation for Peace and Security (UNOY member, Italy) has developed a campaign based on the methodology introduced during the programme, to sensitise public perception of migrants and refugees in their local context, namely in the Umbria region of Italy.
As another example, a participant from the Youth Voice Network (UNOY member, Albania) is planning to introduce the methodology outlined in this guide within the framework of the ‘Academy on Human Rights and Minorities’ that annually gathers over 30 young people for peer-to-peer learning and exchanges with experts and decision-makers on peacebuilding in the Albanian city of Voskopoje.

Are you a young peacebuilder, youth-led organisation, or youth ally interested in joining forces to tackle harmful narratives targeting young peacebuilders and the YPS agenda at large? Please reach out to network@unoy.org or directly connect with our members across the world!
Tackling disinformation without a proper methodology is like climbing a mountain unprepared and without proper equipment. At the foot of the mountain, it’s not clear which step should be taken first. Don’t panic! Let’s follow the step-by-step methodology that our members in Europe were acquainted with during UNOY’s Youth Promoting Peaceful and Cohesive Societies capacity development programme. Take one step at a time and don’t feel any pressure to leverage all of the tools captured in this methodology; some of them may be useful in your context, while others may not.

Reminder: Before delving into the methodology, do not forget the NUMBER ONE rule of health and safety first. Disinformation and hate speech are pervasive issues that often cause psychological and physical distress to their targets. More and more victims of hate speech are experiencing threats and aggression directed at them and/or their families. Combating disinformation and spreading positive alternate narratives may fuel such attacks and threats. Included in the resource library are guides that can help you protect yourself and your organisation when tackling disinformation and hate speech.

Now that we are all well equipped, let’s create a campaign...

‘Great idea, but what is a campaign exactly?’

A campaign can be defined as a system of stories that share themes aimed at persuading and changing behaviour.

‘And how do I create a campaign?’

By following the steps laid out in the campaign canvas.
Section 2

Campaign Canvas

1. Content Analysis
2. Specific Target Audience Statement
3. Persona
4. Plan your Channels
   Digital & Traditional
5. Persuasive Aim
6. Key Messages
7. Determine Tactics
8. SMART Goals
9. Campaign Branding
10. Content Planning
11. Calls to Actions
12. Risks
13. Measuring Engagement
14. Boosting Engagement
15. Success
1. CONTEXT ANALYSIS
   - Perform social listening: retrieve (online) information about your audience
   - Access your audience’s circles of influence on social media

2. TARGET AUDIENCE AND SPECIFIC TARGET AUDIENCE STATEMENT
   - Start by identifying your broad target audience
   - Develop a target question based on the behaviour you want to change
   - Pinpoint the main influencers of your target audience
   - Recognise your target audience’s agreed realities
   - Spot the emotional payoffs that your target audience gains from the behaviour you want to change
   - Choose one ‘slice’ of this information to determine your hyper segmented target audience
   - Create your specific target audience statement

3. PERSONA
   - Select the face of your campaign or an individual that is highly relatable to your target audience
   - Enrich your persona with as many details as possible

4. PLAN YOUR CHANNELS
   - Think about the channels used by your target audience
   - Decide where you want to circulate your alternative narrative:
     - Digital, internet-based channels
     - Traditional, offline channels

5. PERSUASIVE AIMS
   - Select a credible source: find someone or something that is highly relatable to your audience
   - Form a logical approach: start from your audience’s agreed realities
   - Craft emotional appeals: your audience should gain emotional payoffs from the changed behaviour
   - Formulate your aim statement based on this information
6. KEY MESSAGES
Develop your campaign’s key messages, which should be:
• Easy to understand
• Positive
• Believable

7. DETERMINE TACTICS
• Counter hate speech by acting, uniting, empowering, raising consciousness, educating, respecting, speaking up, sharing good practices, mobilising youth activists, and monitoring
• Downplay the action of negative influencers by partnering with positive influencers
• Respond to the firehose of falsehood through coordinated and continuous fact-checking
• Address the challenges of trolls and botnets by using reporting and flagging mechanisms, de-platforming, and community moderation
• Solve the issue of echo-chambers, filter bubbles, and epistemic chambers by offering counter-narratives and alternatives
• Focus on the bigger picture rather than fixating on the interests of a specific identity group

8. SMART GOALS
Determine SMART goals for your campaign:
• Specific
• Measurable
• Achievable
• Relevant
• Time-bound

9. CAMPAIGN BRANDING
• Create memorable, unique and relevant hashtags for your campaign
• Link people, places, and conversations

10. CONTENT PLANNING
• Aim for engaging, visual content
• Include diverse content: Video, Audio, Text, On the ground, Visual
11. CALLS TO ACTION
Get people involved in your campaign by developing calls to action that are:
- Clearly communicated
- Simple
- Doable
- Logical
- Meaningful
- Useful
- Fun
- Rewarding

12. RISKS
- Determine the risks of your campaign
- Come up with mitigation strategies for such risks

13. MEASURING ENGAGEMENT
- Measure the level of engagement of your audience on the channels you used
- For digital, internet-based channels, use online monitoring tools
- For traditional, offline channels, ask the companies that provided you with these channels for data, or find ways to do so manually

14. BOOSTING ENGAGEMENT
- Repeatedly share your content with hashtags and links
- Involve a dedicated moderator
- Use advertisement
- Engage influencers
- Participate in interviews, discussions, or talks on radio or television
- Include the possibility of winning a gift or prize for people who engage
- Link online and offline worlds
- Make it interactive
- Be creative

15. SUCCESS
Measure success through four groups of metrics and their relative social goal:
- Awareness - followers, likes
- Engagement - comments, shares, mentions
- Conversion - website clicks, email signups
- Promotion - testimonials, social media sentiment
Throughout the development and delivery of your campaign, it is crucial to perform social listening. Social listening involves the extraction of information from social media channels, blogs, news sites, video/photo sharing websites, forums, and message boards, to gain insight into your audience, to check how your campaign is being received, and to measure the results of your campaign.

What kind of information can you retrieve through social listening?

- Hashtags
- Authors (influencers)
- Country (location of source, geolocation)
- Site (all articles from a certain site)

What tools can you use to retrieve such information?

### Free tools
- Hashtagify
- Google Trends
- TweetDeck.com
- FollowerWonk.com
- Twitonomy.com
- TweetReach.com
- SumAll.com
- Build-in social media tools

### Paid tools
- Mention
- Brand24
- Buzzsumo
- Sprout Social
- Hootsuite Insights
- AgoraPulse
- Brandwatch
- Keyhole
- Awario
- Reputology

### How to use these tools to start a campaign (tips/examples):
- Go on Google Trends and find a search result that started trending in the past year and is unique to your country. Your research will be more effective if you look for search results in local languages.
- Use TweetDeck to search for tweets by location: pick a location, based on a story from your local news. Collect at least 10 tweets about this topic and analyse the tweets. What are they telling you?

To gain insight into your audience, it is extremely useful to access their circles of influence. Look for credible sources for your audience. Mine social media for potential influencers for your audience.

- **Twitter**: who are they following and which hashtags are they using?
- **Facebook**: which groups/pages do they follow?
- **Instagram**: who are they following and which hashtags are they using?
- **YouTube**: who are they following/subscribing to?
This failure was due to a technical error in the Facebook Domain Name System (DNS), making it impossible for users to access the social networks. During the outage, hate speech, disinformation, and conspiracy theories surrounding the reasons behind the systems’ failure proliferated across social channels. A key hate narrative was the ‘Globohomo’, or ‘Global Homogenisation’ conspiracy, which allegedly sought to destroy ‘traditional’ culture and values and replace them with a globalist uniculture led by LGBTQIA+ and Jewish elites. Within this narrative, Facebook’s founder Mark Zuckerberg was repeatedly linked to this global elite, which was believed to control all media. This example illustrates how dominant hate narratives can be identified by mining social media and performing social listening. A thorough context analysis of the Facebook outage also reveals how key hate narratives are spread within and adapted to multiple events (i.e. Facebook DNS failure): the content is repeated in connection to different events to generate further hate.

On 4 October 2021, the Facebook social media group (including Instagram, Whatsapp, and Messenger) stopped working globally for seven hours.

Case Study - Tracking Hate Around Facebook DNS

In order to identify your target audience, start by looking at your broad target audience, which is defined by demographic indicators (e.g. age, gender, ethnicity, income, qualification, marital status, sexuality, occupation, religion, nationality, lifecycle, language, race, media use) and geographic information (e.g. resources, culture, neighbourhood, city, region, country). Careful! Audiences like ‘all young men’ or ‘the international community outside of x country’ are too unspecific. An example of a specific broad target audience could be ‘young men between 15 and 25 from x migrant community, living in the capital, in the x neighbourhood’.

Broad target audiences allow you to narrow down, but do not provide enough focus to communicate effectively. For instance, two men from the same community and area may have vastly different channels, styles of communication, words and ways to form ideas. This is why you need a hyper segmented target audience.
Section 2

To identify this specific audience, the first step is to determine the **behaviour you want to change** and develop a ‘why’ question based on such behaviour; this is called the **target question**. Bear in mind that a behaviour is freely chosen (e.g. why do high school students in x country **not join climate strikes**) and it belongs to a specific community (e.g. why do **humanitarian practitioners in x country** not meaningfully engage with young people?). For a target question to serve your purpose, it needs to include the freely chosen behaviour you want to change and the specific audience that performs such behaviour.

**Exercise: Can you identify the ideal target questions?**
- Why do some British parents feed their kids junk food?
- Why are public officials in Europe not implementing the YPS agenda?
- Why are some children emotionally disturbed by divorce?
- Why do some adults in my country not exercise?
- Why are young people more tolerant towards the LGBTQIA+ community than older people?
- Why are Italian youth not taken seriously by politicians?
- Why do some people lie?
- Why do some Muslim youth in Europe choose to go and fight with ISIS in Syria?
- Why is tradition so strong in some communities?
- Why do many African politicians take bribes?

After having identified the behaviour you want to change, you can make use of the **behaviour change mapping technique** (see graph number 1). The first circle around the **target question** refers to **influencers**, defined as the people or things that have influence over the behaviour of your chosen target question community. The second circle, **agreed realities**, indicates the logic, beliefs, and views held by your target community in relation to the influencers. Finally, the last circle concerns **emotions**, and it is about the types of emotional payoffs that your target community has by performing that specific behaviour. For an example on how to use this map, refer to graph number 2. A range of possible emotions is provided in graph number 3.
Now that you have completed the behaviour change mapping technique, choose one slice: this is your **hyper segmented target audience**. Then, you can create a statement about the information you have collected surrounding your target audience. You arrive at your target audience statement by incorporating target question, influencer, agreed reality, and emotional appeal.

This is an example of a statement based on the mapping example: 'I am targeting young boys who start smoking because they think girls find boys who smoke sexy and cool and therefore feel desired'.

**Warning:** Sometimes you will not be able to bring any change to your targeted audiences, either because they are not going to change or because they cannot change. In that case, try to identify a person within the map that can help you, or move to a completely new map.
The last step to take in order to properly target your specific audience is to select a **persona** or the **face of your campaign**. A persona is a fictive character who embodies an individual that you are trying to influence through your campaign (your target). You can see a persona as an archetype. As such, this persona should appear highly relatable to your selected audience, and for this reason they should match the information in the slice you have chosen as your hyper segmented target audience. It is important to enrich your persona with as many details as possible, including age, gender, location, ethnicity, religion, education, income, language, etc.

Building personas will help you to understand who your campaign is trying to influence, as well as the strategy and means to influence them. The strategy to influence a middle-aged bi-national religious woman based in a city will differ from a young man from a rural background currently attending university.

**Important:** Participants from the *Youth Promoting Peaceful and Cohesive Societies in Europe* programme found it tricky to create personas, as it often builds around assumptions and clichés. While young people are well positioned to understand the risks of considering a large social group homogeneous—since young people are often seen as a single, homogeneous block—personas are simply made to help you understand how to direct your campaign.

You can think about creating more than one persona and sub-tailor your campaign around them. Also, whenever possible, you can engage with your different personas to make sure that your assumptions are real and not stigmatising.

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**Case Study - The Great Schlep**

The name of the campaign derives from the yiddish verb to ‘schlep’, which means to carry something that is difficult to move, and it alludes to the difficulty of addressing the false misconceptions that elderly Jewish people held regarding candidate Barack Obama. The campaign was considered a success as it resulted in the highest number of elderly Jewish votes in the state of Florida in 30 years. But what exactly determined its success? First of all, a thorough context analysis revealed that Florida’s elders can be influenced by their grandchildren, whom they rarely get to see. Rather than addressing the grandparents, the campaign specifically targeted their grandchildren who lived elsewhere. For this reason, all the components of the campaign were aimed at convincing young people to change their grandparents’ minds.
Most significantly, the chosen persona, or the face of the ‘Great Schlep’ campaign was the Jewish-American actress and comedian Sarah Silverman. Given her personal characteristics and young people’s positive perceptions of her, she hugely contributed to spreading the message among them. Furthermore, the campaign’s video featuring Sarah Silverman was specifically tailored to effectively reach young people, given its humorous makeup, simplicity, and use of slang, thus becoming the most seen video in the whole election.

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However, be mindful of assumptions that may result in overlooking an opportunity to engage with your targets.

Your choice of channels will also depend on your budget. It is important that you analyse in advance the budget you can spend to circulate your campaign through different communication channels. Fortunately, money is not a guarantee of success: some campaigns have proven to be very successful with very few financial means, and a lot of creativity!

4. Plan Your Channels

How do you plan to circulate your campaign? There are two main channels through which you can spread your alternative narratives:

- **Digital, internet-based:** social media (Facebook, Youtube, Instagram, TikTok), websites, blogs, vlogs, online radio, podcasts, online newspapers
- **Traditional, offline:** television, radio, newspapers, billboards, posters, flyers, brochures

Remember: **Your choice of channels will depend on your target audience**, so you need to identify the channels most appropriate for your target audience. For instance, if you are trying to reach young people, who are more familiar with internet-based media, then digital channels are relevant. On the other hand, if your target audience is composed of older people, then you should think of spreading your counter narratives through newspapers or television.

5. Persuasive Aims

In order to change behaviour, you need to persuade. **Persuasion** can be understood as a **learning process mixed with emotion**. So, it’s important to investigate your target audience’s preferred learning methods. In the process of identifying them, it is useful to know that there are three distinct learning domains: knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Here, the media have a crucial role in educating, entertaining, and informing about such domains. All three have a learning dimension associated with them. Just think about everything you have learnt through television or movies.

Using the chosen learning format, there are three steps you can take to effectively persuade people: **select a credible source, form a logical approach, and craft emotional appeals**. First, your credible source might be related to your target audience’s influencers, within their agreed realities: in other words, find **someone or something that is relatable** to the people you are attempting to persuade and/or is **seen as a role model**.
Also think about the media they are most influenced by. Second, focus on your audience’s logic to form an approach. It is their logic that you need to start from, not your own. Look at what your target audience believes. By choosing an influencer and the agreed realities they are linked to, you can decide what you want to change. We always start with what people already know is true. In the classical story structure this is ‘the perfect world’—the part of the story in which our audience is comfortable with their current agreed reality and level of knowledge, skills, or attitude. Third, emotional appeals need to be crafted through the logical approach and promoted by credible influencers. It is essential that your audience receives an emotional payoff by the changed behaviour.

An example of persuasion: Human beings started kissing with their eyes closed only recently. Hollywood had a problem. On film, close-ups of people kissing with eyes open made them look cross-eyed. So, they had actors close their eyes when they kissed. If you ask: Why do people kiss with their eyes closed? The influencer is ‘gender’ (men/women/people we are attracted to). The old agreed reality was ‘kissing with eyes open is natural/okay’. New agreed realities introduced in films were ‘kissing with your eyes closed feels better’ or ‘kissing with your eyes closed is more passionate’. The credible source was celebrities. The emotional appeal for ‘more passionate’ would be ‘loved’ as an emotional payoff or ‘confident’. The logical approach started where film viewers were: ‘Kissing with your eyes open is okay’ and a feeling that the act was ‘insignificant’.

They were then persuaded that ‘kissing with your eyes closed is more passionate’, making kissing with your eyes closed more ‘significant’ and ‘meaningful’.

How quickly different groups can be persuaded depends on their category of innovation. Different people adopt ideas or behaviours at different rates (i.e. see Everett Rogers’ distinction below). Some people will be innovators in one idea and can be laggards in another. There is a need to communicate the same message a number of times in order to reach different people.
Everett Rogers - Diffusion of innovations (1962)

- 2.5%: ‘Visionaries’ are the experimenters, the risk takers, and they change based on information only.
- 13.5%: ‘The Enthusiasts’ are selective and usually check sources before adopting. They are usually the leaders of change, as the early majority look to them for guidance.
- 34%: ‘Pragmatists’ take their time before adopting a new idea. They need to understand the new concept to adopt it. It needs a track record. They are not leaders and will accept change slowly, but quicker than the late majority.
- 16%: ‘Critics/Resistors’ are traditional and make decisions based on past experience.
- 34%: ‘The Mainstream’ adopt new ideas via peer pressure and emerging agreed realities. Most of the uncertainty around the new idea must be resolved before they adopt, out of necessity not out of choice.

All of this information is extremely useful to formulate an aim statement. Your aim statement should include your target audience statement, a new influencer, a new agreed reality, and a new emotional appeal. Remember that a campaign aim should always be brief, straight to the point, and easily understandable. Look at this example of a campaign aim statement:

To persuade young Bosnians (16-24) who follow toxic influencers, use hate speech online, and feel apathetic that they should follow good examples of youth role models, use more constructive criticism, be more open minded, and make them feel engaged.

6. Key Messages

Based on your aim statement, you can now formulate the key messages that you want to circulate for your campaign. First, key messages should be easy to understand, so you should simply state the problem (e.g. ‘Sharing disinformation is dangerous’). Second, they should be positive, hence the need to propose a solution (e.g. ‘You can verify information easily’). Finally, key messages have to be believable, so you should invite a specific action (e.g. ‘Stop the information epidemic from spreading’).

Here are some examples of key messages:

**Peaceful Demonstration**

- Understand the effects of violent protests
- Complete a poll on young people’s needs
- Sign our peaceful protest pledge
- Join our campaign meetings with decision-makers

**Active Participation**

- Find out about great youth-led organisations/civil society organisations in your city
- Sign up to volunteer at our profiled youth-led organisation
- Join our meetups at universities with parents
- Volunteer and share your positive impact
- See the success stories of other volunteers
- Access our free tools and resources for free courses
Unfollow Negative Influencers

- Learn to recognise negative influencers
- Unfollow negative influencers
- Find alternatives
- Sign our code of conduct for positive influencers

Stop Hate Speech

- Educate yourself on the problem of hate speech
- Hear victims stories
- Test your skills
- Follow our community standards
- Engage critically on our sites

7. Determine Tactics

When planning your campaign, it is imperative that you adopt a tactical approach to counter a number of issues affecting the circulation of online information.

First and foremost, hate speech is the most visible obstacle to your campaign’s effectiveness. Hate speech occurs when people are attacked verbally, in written or visual form, or with other means, on the grounds of national origin, skin colour, gender, sexual orientation, physical disability, religion, and more. This usually takes the form of making the group a villain or using stereotypes to describe them.

This problem has become significantly bigger in the last decade due to the growing use of the internet. Remember: Hate is always fueled by a combination of fear and ignorance.

These are some examples of hate speech:

- Threats to an individual or group;
- Online abuse and cyber-bullying;
- Words, images, and videos that call for or glorify violence against a group;
- Encouraging others to commit hate crimes;
- Grossly offensive posts or comments;
- Trolling (posting offensive, upsetting, or inflammatory comments online in an attempt to hurt and provoke a response);
- Other online communication that could incite hatred towards a particular group or person.

In order to overcome hate speech as an organisation, there are a few tactical actions you can take:

- Act through NGO programmes to bring the issue into the public debate;
- Unite with other organisations who are doing the same work on dismantling a specific harmful narrative. UNOY comprises over 130 youth-led organisations—reach out to them to join forces!
- Empower minority groups like refugees, gender diverse individuals, and victims of discrimination;
- Raise consciousness of hate speech through conferences and workshops;
• **Educate** project promoters, media, and bloggers to reduce acceptance of online hate speech;
• **Respect** cultural diversity and mutual tolerance, with educational activities for students and teachers that help to raise awareness;
• **Speak up** against trivialisation of vicious attacks online and risks for democracy;
• **Share** good practice initiatives fighting hate speech and extremism online;
• **Mobilise** youth activists to counter discrimination and create positive alternatives;
• **Monitor** through research, surveys, and mapping of hate speech online.

Additional difficulties are created by a multitude of negative influencers dominating the digital world. As we already know, influencers have a fundamental role in shaping people’s ideas and beliefs, and as such, there is a strong necessity to adopt a counter strategy for this problem. An efficient way to downplay the action of negative influencers is to **partner with positive influencers** who are truly passionate about your cause.

Sometimes, negative influencers might use a tactic that we call **firehose of falsehood**. This refers to the systematic circulation of disinformation and hate speech, aimed at confusing the public. When lies are disseminated by multiple sources, in a rapid, continuous, and repetitive way, they stick to people’s minds, making them difficult to expose.

If you encounter substantial hate and disinformation narratives, you should provide a positive response through coordinated and continuous communication aimed at flooding the landscape with positive, accurate information. In doing so, you can adopt the tactic of fact-checking and verifying information. There are five pillars of verification:

• **Origin**: Where did the article or piece of content originate from? Is this the original?
• **Source**: Who wrote or created the original content?
• **Date**: When was it written or created?
• **Location**: What website or account was the content published on originally?
• **Motivation**: Why did the website or account choose to publish the content?

An example of how this tactic was used to fight fake news online is the Lithuanian elves—a ‘digital army’ of volunteers who have been combating Russian trolls through fact-checking across the virtual realm. When the content you are trying to fact-check is in the form of images, you can use TinEye Reverse Image Search, which allows you to find where images appear online. By verifying its origin, source, date, location, and motivation, you can easily assess whether a certain picture is associated with fake news or not.

In the digital realm, trolls and botnets pose other substantial challenges to your campaign. A troll is a person who intentionally tries to instigate conflict, hostility, or arguments in an online social community.
Platforms targeted by trolls can include the comments section of YouTube, forums, or chat rooms. On the other hand, social media bots are automated programmes used to engage in social media. They appear as real people often used to favour opinions or de-favour dissenters from a particular point of view. There are many kinds of social bots. Some are harmless or even useful or amusing. Malicious bots, however, can be used to manipulate social media users by amplifying misinformation, creating the appearance that some people, ideas, or products are more popular than they are, committing financial fraud, suppressing or disrupting speech, spreading malware or spam, trolling/attacking victims, and other types of abuse.

Useful ways to address such challenges are reporting and flagging mechanisms, de-platforming, and community moderation. Moreover, you can make use of Bot-o-meter, a handy online tool to detect bots on Twitter accounts; you can check any Twitter account you want, in order to understand the amount of misinformation advanced by specific accounts.

Finally, there is the problem of echo chambers and filter bubbles, as well as epistemic chambers. Echo chambers and filter bubbles are online spaces in which a person is solely confronted with opinions and beliefs that are well aligned with their worldviews, resulting in the reinforcement of such perspectives. The main difference between the two is that the notion of echo-chamber is mostly used to refer to the other side’s weaknesses and shortcomings, and it is thus more pejorative, while the concept of filter bubble is applied to relate to one’s own deficiencies.

An epistemic chamber is what happens when a user receives a range of views on a topic, but chooses to stubbornly believe only one (usually extreme) version.

To solve this issue, it is good practice to raise awareness by offering counter narratives and alternatives to the information people are faced with in echo chambers, filter bubbles, and epistemic chambers. You can also do so by engaging influencers. A great tactic you can use when raising awareness is humour.

One last tactic to keep in mind while preparing a campaign is focusing on the bigger picture; as a way to make your message as relatable as possible. More concretely, this means that when you are advancing the rights and interests of a specific identity group, you can better persuade your audience if you frame your message in such a way that it also includes the interests and values of that audience. For instance, the civil rights movement, as well as the women’s liberation movement, were all about seeing people as equal individuals, not based on race or sex.

In 2015, Ireland became the first country to legalise gay marriage by popular vote, after a majority of 62% voted ‘yes’ to the referendum. Behind this success there was an extremely effective campaign, which tactically framed the messaging in such a way that would be widely accepted within Irish society.

**Case Study - Vote Yes Ireland**

In 2015, Ireland became the first country to legalise gay marriage by popular vote, after a majority of 62% voted ‘yes’ to the referendum. Behind this success there was an extremely effective campaign, which tactically framed the messaging in such a way that would be widely accepted within Irish society.
Since Ireland is a largely catholic country, the campaign creators moved away from messages highlighting LGBTQIA+ rights and identities, and focused instead on the concept of equal citizenship, which is strongly cherished in the country. So, instead of talking about ‘gay marriage’, the campaign used the wording ‘equal marriage’. By strategically emphasising notions of fairness and equality, the campaign reached a large majority of Irish citizens, including those who opposed gay marriage but favoured equality. Another significant tactical aspect of this campaign was the involvement of young people as positive influencers for their family members (see campaign video here). The coordinated mobilisation of young people across the country immensely contributed to spreading positive messages and persuading Irish citizens to vote ‘yes’.

8. Smart Goals

Smart goals can be used in a myriad of projects and endeavours, including campaigns against disinformation and fake news. According to the Smart goals, the aims of your campaign should be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound. Check out this example to better grasp the idea:

We are going to make a video with a creative agency featuring positive examples of young peacebuilders granted with the status of refugees in the Netherlands and we will convene 20 public officials in the Netherlands and 20 young refugee peacebuilders to incite consultations between these two groups when developing policies on refugees and young people. The video will be shared on YouTube, should generate at least 2,000 views, and there should be at least six consultations between public officials and young refugee peacebuilders in the coming year as a result.

Specific: Its success is specifically defined with 2,000 views and six consultations;
Measurable: You can measure the amount of views and consultations easily;
Achievable: We’re working with a creative company who’s going to produce the video and the YouTube channel is ready to go;
Relevant: The young refugee peacebuilders in the video will be relevant for our public officials target audience and the consultations will help public officials to engage with young refugee peacebuilders;
Time-bound: It will be achieved within one year.

9. Campaign Branding

It goes without saying that the more visible your campaign is, the more viral it becomes, the more likely it is to bring about substantial change. For this reason, you should focus on branding your campaign. A fruitful way to do so is by using hashtags.

Hashtags make it easier for people to find and follow discussions about campaigns. They also allow you to track your campaign’s performance across social media.
Hashtags can determine how easily you can target and track a campaign. But be careful with the hashtags you choose to use. Generic hashtags like #youth or #peace are far too broad and hard to track; imagine how many posts contain #peace each minute. You could spend weeks sorting through mentions of the hashtag to determine which apply to your campaign, so it’s important to create a unique hashtag that fits with your content. **A good hashtag is memorable, unique, and relevant to your campaign**, which means you can effectively keep track of engagement.

Another strategy to brand your campaign is linking people, places, and conversations: you can amplify your message by bringing people into conversations and using their networks through the @ function.

### 10. Content Planning

The content of your campaign should be as engaging as possible. You want to aim for a strong visual impact on your specific target audience. In recent times, videos have become extremely amplified on social media, with mobile phone recordings the most popular. That is why including a video strategy is a must. However, your campaign should not be solely based on video content. Some examples of what your campaign could include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Video</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>On The Ground</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Animation</td>
<td>Articles</td>
<td>Face to Face</td>
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<td>Short Videos</td>
<td>Written Reports</td>
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<td>Live Broadcasts</td>
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<th>Audio</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Podcast</td>
<td>Articles</td>
<td>Graffiti</td>
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<td>Radio</td>
<td>Written Reports</td>
<td>Takeovers</td>
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<td>Sound Bites</td>
<td>Essays</td>
<td>Theatre/Plays</td>
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<td>Activations</td>
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<td>Songs</td>
<td>Idea Clouds</td>
<td>Town halls</td>
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<td>Jingles</td>
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<td>Themes</td>
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### 11. Calls to Action

Getting people involved in your campaign can be a challenge, but it gets easier and more effective once you use the right words. A **call to action** should be **clearly communicated, simple, doable, logical, meaningful, useful, fun, and rewarding**. Some examples of calls to action are:

- Like
- Share
- Subscribe
- Sign up
- Join
- Buy
- Donate
- Claim
- Download
- Sign
- Give
- Learn more
- Spread the word
- Help us
- Fundraise
- Volunteer
- Participate (in a challenge)

### 12. Risks

It is essential to take into account any **risks** that you might encounter, as well as coming up with **mitigation strategies** for such risks. **Risk management is not about removing risks completely**, but about taking the necessary steps and preventive measures to bring the risks to an acceptable level.

Potential risks that may arise when developing a campaign:

- Target miscalculation
- High costs
- Backlash, retaliation, threats, cyber-attacks
- Unpredictable events (e.g. global pandemic)
- Quickly changing interests (e.g. your campaign may be eclipsed by the outbreak of a conflict)
- Scandals involving partners/influencers of your campaign

Your mitigation strategies will highly depend on the level of risk you may face, the harmful narrative you are trying to address, the local context, the timeline... and your budget.

**Warning:** While it is fundamental to spend time in listing and analysing all of these risks, some simply remain unpredictable. Remember the first outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020? So, the aim here is not to spend a lot of resources trying to remove ALL risks, but rather anticipate the ones that can be predicted.

### 13. Measuring Engagement

To determine the reach and magnitude of your campaign, you will be required **to measure the level of engagement** of your audience.
There are different ways that you can measure engagement, depending on the type of channels through which you decided to circulate your campaign. The initial step to take is pinpointing all of the channels you used. You can then proceed to estimate your audience’s engagement through some of the tools provided in the manual We Can! Taking Action against Hate Speech through Counter and Alternative Narratives (2017), developed by the Council of Europe.

For digital, internet-based channels:
- On social networks, you can easily track comments, likes and mentions through their integrated analytic tools;
- You can monitor conversations among people on social media thanks to various online tools, notably Netvibes, Keyhole, Social Mention, and the Facebook search function;
- You can connect and monitor all of the social media channels you used through Hootsuite;
- In case you developed a website for your campaign, Google Analytics can provide you with detailed information about the number of visitors.

For traditional, offline channels:
- To measure engagement via newspapers, television, and radio, you can directly ask for statistics regarding their audience and reach;
- If you made use of billboards, you can contact the company that provided you with it to provide data on how many people saw it;
- For flyers and brochures, you can simply count how many copies you have handed out;
- You can monitor conversations among people also in the offline world, by visiting the spaces where you have distributed your campaign’s material and observing how people are engaging with it.

14. Boosting Engagement

At this point, you have measured the engagement of your campaign, but you are not satisfied with the results. You will need to come up with strategies on how to boost your audience’s engagement. There are a few effective methods through which you can do this, but do not feel limited by what we provide you with. You can be as creative as you want here. The context and audience in which you are distributing your campaign also play an important role; always keep them in mind while you are determining your plans to boost engagement.

A straightforward way to enhance your audience’s engagement is by repeatedly sharing your content on different social media platforms, with the use of unique hashtags and links to people, places, or conversations (see section 9). The more active you are, the higher the likelihood of being seen and engaged with. On these platforms, you can strategically involve a dedicated moderator in charge of responding to direct messages, comments, and shares. Moderation hacks social platform algorithms and boosts your posts’ visibility.
Another efficient option is advertisement on social media: online ads are quite pervasive and repetitive, so they make it easier for people to come across your campaign. Moreover, engaging influencers is always a great choice. Social media influencers, in particular, can help you boost engagement by sharing your content in their profiles or by tagging you in their posts. You can also decide to increase your engagement with traditional media, by participating in interviews, discussions or talks on radio or television. Additionally, if resources and budgets allow, you can think about involving some kind of gift or prize that members of your audience can win. This way, people will be enticed by the opportunity and further engage with your campaign.

It is also very effective to find ways to link online and offline worlds through cross-promoting. In other words, you can ask people to go on social media and discover your online content during on-the-ground events, and vice versa, you can invite them to face-to-face events if they are only active in the digital world. Last but not least, make it interactive. Remember that people want to feel included, and not simply read some facts and figures. An effective way to do this nowadays is through temporary content on social media, such as Instagram stories: for example, a good idea is posting quizzes on your campaign’s Instagram stories where viewers can directly engage with your content and learn in an easy, fun manner. Finally, be creative!

### Section 2

Now that your campaign is completed and shared with your target audience, you will need to find ways to measure success. There are four groups of metrics you can take advantage of in order to assess the impact of your campaign relative to different social goals.

- Followers, likes, etc.: These metrics define your current and potential audience, meaning the number of people aware of your content, therefore signalling the awareness social goal.
- Comments, shares, mentions, etc.: These metrics illustrate how audiences are interacting with your content, assessing the engagement social goal (see section 13).
- Website clicks, email signups, etc.: These metrics demonstrate the effectiveness of your social engagement, or in other words, they illustrate whether your audience has concretely done something as a consequence of your campaign. An example of conversion is a person who sees your content and decides to act by signing up to your newsletter or signing a petition.
- Testimonials, social media sentiment, etc.: These metrics reflect how active customers think and feel about your campaign, evaluating the promotion social goal. This is about people becoming promoters or ambassadors of your content: for instance, how many social media influencers recommended your campaign, how many people did a particular challenge and shared it.
Take a look at the following example, which elucidates these four social goals and their metrics:

UNOY creates a post on Facebook inviting young peacebuilders to sign a petition to call for the inclusion of youth actors in a certain peace process.

- **Awareness**: number of likes
- **Engagement**: number of comments
- **Conversions**: number of people who accessed the petition website, added their names and completed the petition
- **Promotion**: number of people who took on the cause and promoted it across their circles by writing about their experiences and urging others to support the campaign
Resource Library

No Hate Speech Movement
This youth campaign led by the Council of Europe Youth Department seeks to mobilise young people to combat hate speech and promote human rights online.
**Type:** Youth-led campaign  |  **Owner:** Council of Europe  
**Language:** English/French

We Can! Taking Action against Hate Speech through Counter and Alternative Narratives
This manual was designed in the context of the No Hate Speech Movement, a Council of Europe youth campaign for human rights online. It provides communicative and educational approaches and tools for youth and human rights activists to develop their own counter and alternative narratives to hate speech.
**Type:** Manual  |  **Link:** Physical copy  |  **Owner:** Council of Europe  
**Language:** English  |  **Year:** 2017

Bookmarks- A manual for combating hate speech online through human rights education
This manual aimed to combat hate speech through human rights education. It was specifically created to support the No Hate Speech Movement. The manual presents activities designed for young people aged 13 to 18, but which are adaptable to other age groups.
**Type:** Manual  |  **Owner:** Council of Europe  
**Language:** English and French  |  **Year:** 2020

Measures and strategies for combating hate speech at the European level – an overview
This briefing paper is intended to provide an overview of recent studies, with analyses of and proposals on European regulation of online hate speech.
**Type:** Briefing Paper filled with other valuable websites  
**Owner:** Friedrich Ebert Stiftung  |  **Language:** English  |  **Year:** 2021

Countering online hate speech
This report provides a global overview of the dynamics characterizing hate speech online and some of the measures that have been adopted to counteract and mitigate it, highlighting good practices that have emerged at the local and global levels.
**Type:** Report  |  **Owner:** Unesco  |  **Language:** English  
**Year:** 2015

AGCOM Disinformazione
This website informs, mainly through two short videos, about basic information and rules on how to stop disinformation online.
**Type:** Website/videos  
**Owner:** AGCOM - Autorità per le Garanzie nelle Comunicazioni  
**Language:** Italian
The Media Manipulation Casebook
The Media Manipulation Casebook is a research platform that advances knowledge of misinformation and disinformation and their threats to democracy, public health, and security.
Type: Website | Language: English

Essential Guide to Understanding Information Disorder
This guide explores the different concepts gathered under the umbrella-term “information disorder”, namely satire, parody, false connection, misleading content imposter content, manipulated content and fabricated content.
Type: Guide | Owner: First Draft News | Language: English
Year: 2019

Escape the Eco-Chamber
This research paper delves into the phenomenons of echo chambers and epistemic bubbles.
Type: Research paper | Owner: C Thi Nguyen for Aeon
Language: English | Year: 2018

Identifying conspiracy theories
This European Commission’s webpage provides 10 infographics to counter conspiracy theories.
Type: Website page | Owner: European Commission
Language: EU official languages

Selma Hacking Hate
This two-year project co-funded by the European Commission which aims to tackle the problem of online hate speech by promoting mutual awareness, tolerance, and respect
Type: Website | Owner: European Commission
Language: English

Fake Off Project
This project co-funded by the EU’s Erasmus+ programme, recently launched an application to help boost your online smarts.
Type: Application | Owner: European Union
Language: English

StopFake.org
This website is an Ukrainian factchecking project
Type: Website | Language: Ukrainian

FactCheck
Georgian factchecking platform in Georgian, English, Russian, Azerbaijani and Armenian Languages
Type: Website | Owner: Georgia’s Reforms Associates
Language: Georgian, English, Russian, Azerbaijani and Armenian
Conspiracy Watch
This website monitors and documents conspiracy theories on Internet through a historical and political science lens.
**Type:** Website  |  **Owner:** Conspiracy Watch  |  **Language:** French

After Truth: Disinformation and the Cost of Fake News
This documentary examines the rising phenomenon of disinformation in the United States and the impact that disinformation, conspiracy theories and false news stories have on the average citizen in the age of social media.
**Type:** Documentary  |  **Owner:** HBO  |  **Language:** English  |  **Year:** 2020

Tofology
TikTok disinformation and extremism researcher
**Type:** TikTok Account  |  **Owner:** Abbie Richards  |  **Language:** English

Culture Warlords: My Journey Into the Dark Web of White Supremacy
This book explains how white supremacy and hate speech perpetrators proliferate online.
**Type:** Book  |  **Owner:** Talia Lavin  |  **Language:** English  |  **Year:** 2020

What to Do? Where to Go?
This infographic will guide you to resources and tips to defend yourself against online attacks.
**Type:** Infographic  |  **Owner:** Trollbusters
**Language:** English, Spanish, Russian, Turkish, Hindi  |  **Year:** 2017

Digital First Aid Kit
This project offers support to human rights defenders under digital threat, and works to strengthen local rapid response networks.
**Type:** Programme  |  **Owner:** Freedom Online Coalition
**Language:** English and Spanish

XYZ
This website provides practical tools to navigate digital security and privacy from a gender perspective, learn from each other’s activism, inspire one another and co-create.
**Type:** Website  |  **Owner:** Tactical Technology Collective
**Language:** English

Online Harassment Field Manual
This website provides practical manual to navigate online harassment, including how to protect yourself, how to respond, self-care and legal tools, as well as avenues of support and more.
**Type:** Website  |  **Owner:** Pen America  |  **Language:** English
Right To Be Resource Document: What To Do About Online Abuse
This document compiles a range of resources to help tackle online abuse, especially as a bystander, and covers biases, police/rights, self-care and more.
**Type:** Compilation of resources  |  **Owner:** Right To Be  
**Language:** English  |  **Year:** 2021

Totem
This online learning platform offers educational courses about digital security and privacy, and related tools and tactics for journalists, activists and human rights defenders in a safe, online classroom environment.
**Type:** Online learning platform  
**Owner:** Greenhost and Free Press Unlimited  |  **Year:** English
During the in-person training session of the Youth Promoting Peaceful and Cohesive Societies in Europe capacity development programme in Thessaloniki, participants followed the same methodology outlined above to develop four campaigns advancing alternative narratives to counter harmful narratives anchored in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Italy, the Netherlands, and the South Caucasus.

Key components of these four campaigns are presented in this guide to give you a better understanding of what a campaign might look like. Therefore, we invite you to engage in a series of back and forth between the different steps of the campaign canvas and the corresponding elements of the four campaigns outlined below.

EU4U2: Changing perceptions towards young immigrants in the Netherlands

In the Netherlands, harmful narratives surrounding young migrant people hamper their meaningful participation in local and national political processes. Such narratives mostly rely on widespread disinformation according to which ‘the country is being invaded by a concerning amount of Muslim migrants who pose a threat to Dutch culture and ways of life’. Dutch conservative community voters are the main carriers of this fearful agreed reality, thus leading some Dutch policymakers to discourage young migrant people from participating in national politics. To positively influence the target audience of Dutch policymakers, the authors of the EU4U2 campaign have developed persuasive methods to modify harmful perceptions towards young migrant people and enhance their participation in political processes.

Alaa Kadri - The Young Republic, Upplands Väsby, Sweden (main author)
Singhe Robinson Polak - The Young Republic, Upplands Väsby, Sweden
The Netherlands has a population of about 17.2 million, of which seven per cent are considered part of ethnic minority groups. In 2021, more people immigrated to the Netherlands than emigrated. From 2003 to 2007, the migration balance was negative: there were fewer immigrants than emigrants.

Based on this information, prominent negative influencers have been advancing detrimental narratives towards migrant groups. The main credible sources for this campaign’s target audience are politicians Pim Fortuyn and Geert Wilders, respectively the founder of the right-wing party Pim Fortuyn’s List in the early 2000s and the founder and leader of the Party for Freedom since 2006.

Both politicians’ xenophobic programmes and rhetorics instrumentalise the issue of migration, associating ethnic minority groups with criminality and a threat to the so-called ‘authentic Dutch culture’.

In summary, extracting all of this valuable information around the context in question is extremely useful to gain insights into the campaign’s target audience. In particular, the context analysis unveiled the main negative influencers surrounding migration dynamics in the Netherlands, as well as the audience’s agreed realities.

Meme conveying the harmful narrative that there is a massive presence of migrants in certain countries

A tweet issued by Geert Wilders in January 2017 on immigration and Islam

https://www.cbs.nl/en-gb/visualisations/dashboard-population/population-dynamics/immigration
In order to persuade Dutch policymakers that the political participation of migrant young people does not represent a threat to Dutch society, the three steps of persuasion—selecting a credible source, forming a logical approach, and crafting emotional appeals—were applied to create a concrete aim statement. First, the credible source is represented by migrant role models, such as the widely appreciated Queen of the Netherlands, Queen Máxima, who herself migrated from Argentina, and thus constitutes a new, positive influencer for the target audience. Secondly, the logical approach was formed in correspondence with Dutch policymakers’ logic, which entails rationality, and aims to spread a new agreed reality of open-mindedness. Third, the emotional appeal that the campaign seeks to craft consists of reassuring the rest of Dutch society and increasing their feeling of safety. On the basis of these elements, the aim statement is formulated as follows: To persuade Dutch policymakers influenced by conservative community voters, who believe that their culture is threatened by the participation of immigrant youth in political processes, that they should develop more rational arguments and give more attention to role models from migrant backgrounds, and remain open minded to feeling reassured and safe again.

The EU4U2 campaign encompasses two key messages, which are positive, believable and easy to understand.

**Key message 1:**
*Young migrant people need to be regularly included in political processes through exchanges with the Muslim community to reduce distrust.*

This message indicates that Dutch society needs to offer opportunities for young migrants to participate in political processes. In the Netherlands, the Muslim community has developed federations and local organisations that would be highly beneficial in positively impacting the political structure. The inclusion of such organisations would represent a learning opportunity for Dutch policymakers to reduce their distrust.

**Key message 2:**
*Migrant people cannot just separate themselves from their sending countries, ideologically, emotionally, or politically. It is necessary to exchange ideas and seek common understanding, including restoring trust in political participation.*
This message emphasises the fact that people who emigrate produce such an intersocietal convergence that cannot be understood from a geographical angle: even though emigrants are no longer physically in their sending countries, they are still part of them through a complex package of feelings of belonging, citizenship, memories, and family relations.

Campaign Branding

The leading hashtag of this alternative narrative is #EU4U2. Short for ‘European Union for You Too’, the name of the campaign captures the meaning and aim of the campaign, and its singularity makes it easier to track people’s engagement.

Queerspotting: Debunking harmful narratives towards LGBTQIA+ families in Italy

Elle Biscarini - Sustainable Cooperation for Peace and Security, Roverbella, Italy (main author)
Fabio Daniele - Sustainable Cooperation for Peace and Security, Roverbella, Italy
Carolina Resigotti - UNOY International Secretariat, The Hague, Netherlands (main author)

Campaign in a Snapshot

In Italy, LGBTQIA+ people are at the centre of a perpetual flow of disinformation. Harmful narratives portray the LGBTQIA+ community as a threat to traditional family values and children’s upbringing. The main holders of this agreed reality are Italian conservative families, who are therefore the target audience of this campaign. To persuade Italian conservative families that LGBTQIA+ youth and families do not represent a menace to their values and their children’s psychological growth, the creators of the Queerspotting campaign have developed a number of creative and interactive ideas to illustrate that LGBTQIA+ individuals are in fact highly relatable to them.
Section 3

Campaign Canvas

1. Content Analysis
2. Specific Target Audience Statement
3. Persona
4. Plan your Channels Digital & Traditional
5. Persuasive Aim
6. Key Messages
7. Determine Tactics
8. SMART Goals
9. Campaign Branding
10. Content Planning
11. Calls to Actions
12. Risks
13. Measuring Engagement
14. Boosting Engagement
15. Success
Target Audience and Specific Target Audience Statement

The target audience of this campaign consists of Italian conservative families who reject the LGBTQIA+ community. Some demographic indicators that define this audience are a right-wing inclination, a Catholic faith, and the possession of strong family values linked to the patriarchal structures of Italian society.

In order to identify a hypersegmented target audience, the behaviour change mapping technique was applied starting from the target question: ‘Why do Italian conservative families reject the LGBTQIA+ community?’ Building on this, the main agreed reality and influencer among the target audience in question appeared to be strongly related to children, and the idea that LGBTQIA+ individuals pose a threat to children’s psychological upbringing. The emotional appeal tied to this agreed reality is linked to an urge to ‘protect’ children from this perceived threat; the emotional payoff that stems from rejecting the LGBTQIA+ community is a feeling of justification.

Based on this information, the specific target audience statement is: ‘We are targeting conservative Italian families who reject the LGBTQIA+ community, as they believe that LGBTQIA+ parents cause psychological and emotional damage to children, and that they (heterosexual parents) should protect children and, therefore, feel justified in doing so’.

Persona

The Queerspotting campaign’s persona consists of a highly relatable family to the typical Italian conservative family. The idea is to convey the message that LGBTQIA+ families actually hold the same traditional values as conservative heterosexual families. Hence, this ‘family persona’ will comprise two gay dads (gay men are more acceptable within a patriarchal structure) with 9-to-5 jobs, who are extremely masculine and ‘straight-passing’—meaning that they do not display any traits that could be associated with non-normative sexualities—and two kids: a boy who plays soccer and wears blue, and a girl who dances and wears pink. The parents are Catholic, they hold right-wing political views, verging on centrism; they are strongly shaped by traditional, cisgender, monogamous standards; and they are against any form of ‘rebellious’ behaviour, such as getting piercings or tattoos, doing drugs, or drinking alcohol.

Be mindful that this persona entails a kind of representation of LGBTQIA+ families that might be detrimental to the diversity of the community. Hence, there is a possibility of backlash from the LGBTQIA+ community. However, the latter is not the target audience of this campaign. Italian conservative families are and in order to persuade them, the persona needs to be acceptable in their eyes.
Since the Queerspotting campaign is principally addressed to middle-aged family men and women, a mix of traditional and digital channels will be used. Italian middle-aged people are especially fond of their television. Watching TV is one of the main family activities for Italians, who simply love sitting on the couch after a long day of work and relaxing in front of entertainment shows or news channels. Another effective way to influence Italians is to disseminate posters and billboards around main Italian cities: these are usually very visible both to people on foot and by car or other means of transport. In terms of digital channels, the most popular platform among middle-aged Italians is Facebook; other than using it to share content with their peers, they rely on Facebook as one of their primary sources of news and information.

The idea is to randomly stop people in the streets, targeting middle-aged individuals, and to check whether they match the target audience by asking them about their political leaning. Afterwards, they will be asked whether they relate to LGBTQIA+ families, with a focus on children’s upbringing. Then, they will be presented with a choice: two persons will be standing in front of them, one of them is part of the LGBTQIA+ community and the other is not, but the LGBTQIA+ person is displayed as a ‘straight-passing’, conservative person. The objective here is to induce participants to answer incorrectly, as a way to illustrate that there is actually no salient difference between a heterosexual and an LGBTQIA+ person. Another question will be posed to the participant, asking them whether they would swap their partner with a LGBTQIA+ partner for a week, given that they could not tell a significant difference between the two during the game. If the participant responded positively to this question, they would be asked to participate in a reality show called ‘Swap the Spouse’.

The idea of a ‘Swap the Spouse’ reality show stems from an existing British reality show called Wife Swap, where two families swap partners and walk in each other’s shoes for two weeks. For this show, one parent from a heterosexual conservative family will swap with one parent from an LGBTQIA+ family.

The content of the Queerspotting campaign was designed to obtain as much public engagement as possible, with the aim to make it go viral through fun and interactive methods. More specifically, two activities were developed: a ‘spot the queer’ game and a ‘swap the spouse’ reality show.

The ‘Spot the Queer’ game is a face-to-face activity that will take place in Italy’s main cities. The game, together with the participant’s reactions, will be filmed and posted on social media.
Through this experience, the aim is to show Italian conservative parents that queer people do not pose a threat to children, and that LGBTQIA+ families actually hold the same traditional values as them. For this reason, the LGBTQIA+ families chosen for ‘Swap the Spouse’ will be conservative. Since Italians are fond of reality shows, this initiative has high chances of increasing discussion and ultimately awareness.

As a way to promote this content at a national scale, the campaign will make use of positive influencers that are popular among conservative Italians. There are some LGBTQIA+ and straight-ally celebrities who are widely accepted across the conservative audience (e.g. Barbara d’Urso, Enzo Miccio, Renato Zero).

**Risks**

**Online hate speech**: Campaign content might receive substantial criticism in the form of comments on social media posts or direct messages.

- Mitigation strategy: Moderate comments and decide on a plan to deal with hateful language and trolls. Refer to these comprehensive social media safety guides: HeartMob (iheartmob.org)

**Physical violence**: There may be a risk of physical violence during the face-to-face ‘Spot the Queer’ game.

- Mitigation strategy: Increase the game’s visibility through a livestream, to ensure that people are aware that other people are watching in real time.

**Criticism from the LGBTQIA+ community**: The ‘Swap the Spouse’ reality show might result in a backlash from the LGBTQIA+ community due to the show’s inaccurate representation of the community.

- Mitigation strategy: Consult LGBTQIA+ organisations ahead of hosting the reality show to draft a crisis communications strategy.

**Funding withdrawal**: Funding for the development of the reality show and its broadcasting on television might be withdrawn.

- Mitigation strategy: Develop a plan A and a plan B on funding to ensure an alternative to the reality show.

**Influencers stepping back**: Since this campaign aims to make use of famous pop-culture celebrities in Italy, they might decide to step back from the partnership due to image concerns.

- Mitigation strategy: Connect to one essential influencer who can help persuade others (potentially targeting B influencers) to participate.

**Low participation of audience and stakeholders**: This is a risk that is common to all campaigns.

- Mitigation strategy: Ensure that the campaign has enough time and attention through effective planning and resources.
In the 1990s, conflicts in the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina led to the displacement of populations and the ethnic-based polarisation of the society. In that context, the ‘two schools under one roof’ system—that ensures mono-ethnic schools—was temporarily established to address needs related to the education system in a post-war setting. A few decades later, this system prevails, fueling divisions and mistrust among ethnicities, and creating fertile ground for the creation and dissemination of divisive narratives. To prevent the spread of such harmful narratives, the #JustBalkansThings campaign intends to persuade politicians in Bosnia and Herzegovina that the ‘two schools under one roof system’ is a failure that leads to societal polarisation.

Determine Tactics

The tactical approach adopted for the #JustBalkanThings campaign includes the involvement of government officials of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina who are already trying to terminate the ‘two schools under one roof’ system, to disseminate key messages through their channels. The aim here is to use these positive influencers to elevate discussions around the ‘two schools under one roof’ system and the content of divisive political speeches. Another impactful tactic entails the analysis of speeches of key politicians adopting a divisive language; such analysis serves as a starting point to highlight dominant ‘us vs them’ narratives, which will then be used to discuss divisive language in politics more broadly. While opening up the debate through continuous discussion and raising awareness on the issue, alternatives will be presented to politicians on how they could positively modify their divisive language. Finally, case studies of schools that have abandoned the ‘two schools under one roof’ policy will be highlighted, as a way of demonstrating the positive outcomes of such a choice.

SMART Goals

An important part of the #JustBalkanThings campaign deals with the analysis of politicians’ speeches that use ‘us vs them’ language. The examined speeches will then be presented to the public through social media. The SMART goal for this tactic is as follows.
Specific: 1,000 views and 40 responses/comments on entire campaign content.
Measurable: Measuring the amount of engagement on social media, monitoring the discourse, seeing how people react to these speeches, and flagging divisive language. These measurements will feature in an analytical report.
Achievable: Cooperating with students of discourse analysis, who will offer credible material to raise awareness on the negative effects of 'us vs them' language. This should result in a methodological approach on how to fight the problem and try to mitigate it.
Relevant: Students of discourse analysis will be analysing the language and expressing its negative aspects on public services.
Time-bound: It will be achieved in five months.

Measuring Engagement

Given that the #JustBalkanThings alternative narrative will mainly be conveyed through digital channels, audience engagement will be measured by tracking online data, as well as qualitative information.

- The number of policymakers/institutional actors who engage with the campaign
- The number and type (positive/negative) of policymakers'/institutional actors' responses to the campaign;
- The number of schools who adopt new integration;
- The number of press mentions;
- The number of website visits;
- The number of blog post reads;
- The number of times #JustBalkanThings is used;
- The number of opened and read emails (but can only monitor this if using particular tracking software);
- Direct messages (on social media, via email, etc.) about the campaign;
- Any behaviour changes or commitments around the campaign topic.

Boosting Engagement

A number of strategies have been developed as a way to boost audience engagement with the #JustBalkanThings campaign. First, the campaign will be transmitted to traditional media audiences through the press, in particular, press releases with findings of the divisive speeches analyses will be created. Here, the organisers will make sure to stay topical by addressing up-to-date speeches and sharing the analyses in a swift manner. Second, valuable content will be shared across relevant groups on social media, and it will be boosted through online advertisements. Third, authors will join media discussions on the topic in order to amplify the campaign, as well as moderate conversations and comments on posts. Fourth, politicians and political parties will be tagged in discussions based on the speeches’ analyses. Lastly, statistics and data analysis will be promoted across all channels in the form of infographics.
Volunteering to be an actor of positive change: Promoting volunteerism among internally displaced people in Georgia and Armenia

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Decades of conflicts in the South Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia) have led to an important displacement of populations abroad (migrants and refugees) and within their own countries (internally displaced people, IDP). To a greater extent than the rest of the population, IDPs face numerous challenges, and as such, are often perceived as refugees in their own countries. In addition, IDPs are often a bone of contention during peace negotiations in the region, and as such, the issue is often instrumentalised and becomes a subject of disinformation. To convey alternative narratives around IDPs in the South Caucasus, the authors of this campaign are aiming to promote volunteerism among young IDPs in the region as agents of positive change.

In order to get young IDPs involved in volunteering, the campaign uses meaningful, engaging, and rewarding calls to action. These are the three main ones:
- ‘Take a step for your positive future!’
- ‘Be the actor of positive change here and now!’
- ‘Join our events and have fun!’

To measure the success of the campaign, a few goals were set in relation to social awareness and engagement. Success will be reached when:
- At least 200 people have reviewed information about volunteering;
- At least 250 young people have participated in face-to-face meetings;
- There have been at least 500 engagements on social media;
- There are at least ten young people who will take part in internships;
- There is a substantial behavioural change, indicated by increased youth engagement in community volunteering services.
Congratulations, you have made it until the end of this guide!

You are now ready to tackle harmful narratives and start to develop alternative narratives, which will highlight and emphasise the fundamental and positive role you have as a young peacebuilder.

Questions, feedback, insights? Please share it with us at network@unoy.org