

**ONLINE**      **UK Insight Report**

**CIVIL**      *November 2017*

**COURAGE**      **'Tracking Online Hate Speech and Identifying Online 'raids' in**  
**INITIATIVE**      **the UK'**

### **OCCI Research: Insight Reports**

The OCCI Insight Reports equip NGO partners on an ongoing basis, with the knowledge needed to develop effective, targeted campaigns. Without access to in-depth, data-driven insights into the fast evolving landscape of extremist and terrorist propaganda, narratives and networks, it is impossible to mount a proportional targeted response. Additionally, the reports highlight recommendations for future counterspeech campaigning to address the identified narratives. OCCI will work closely with any organisation who is interested in piloting and implementing these recommendations.

### **What is the focus of this report?**

The Online Civil Courage Initiative's core partner, ISD, has been tracking both positive and negative responses to terror attacks in the UK this year, to understand how to improve counterspeech in the UK. This report contains advice for NGOs working towards challenging hate speech and extremism online with recommendations/suggestions for how they can respond speedily and effectively in the aftermath of an attack, and improve understanding on the coordinated efforts (online raids) that are designed to undermine positive speech.

**The usability and practical application of the reports depend on the feedback of its recipients.**

**Please contact [uk@occisupport.org](mailto:uk@occisupport.org) with any feedback and recommendations you have so that we can ensure that these reports meet the needs of OCCI partners and community.**

## Terminology and Definitions

For the purposes of the OCCI Insight Reports, ISD uses the following definitions:

For **hate speech**, the OCCI adopts the Facebook definition: “Content that attacks people based on their actual or perceived race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sex, gender or gender identity, sexual orientation, disability or disease is not allowed. This does not include clear attempts at humour or satire that might otherwise be considered a possible threat or attack; including content that many people may find to be in bad taste (ex: jokes, stand-up comedy, popular song lyrics, etc.)”

**Extremism** is understood as any individual or group whose belief system condones, supports or pursues hate speech within its rhetoric and messaging.

**Violent extremism** follows the same definition as extremism, with the addition of the individual or group also condoning, supporting or pursuing violence.

For **terrorism**, the OCCI team adopts the UN definition: “the unlawful use of force and violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives.”

For **counterspeech** the OCCI team defines it as a tool to challenge the ideologies, narratives and stories of extremists. They work to discredit, deconstruct or demystify extremist messaging. An alternative narrative provides a different solution or message to believe in.

## Action Sheet | Counterspeech recommendations and OCCI support

Key insights for counterspeech campaigning drawn from the data analysis:

1. After deciding on an extremist narrative to challenge with counterspeech, it is important to then find out who promotes the narrative, where it is present and what encourages its usage. Finding relations between how events are used to promote a narrative can inform a communication strategy for counterspeech.
2. Links between different extremist ideological narratives can be seen when analysing the topics used by fringe and mainstream audiences during coordinated attacks on counterspeech. This can inform counterspeech campaigns led by multiple partners focusing on different points of the ideological spectrum.
3. The utility of blogs and forums to facilitate conversation has allowed extremist ideologies to spread and fortify, and online communities to operate unchallenged by counterspeech or counter-narratives.

The following recommended counterspeech concepts have been designed in response to the data analysis. If your organisation would like to pilot one of these concepts, then please email us at [uk@occi-support.org](mailto:uk@occi-support.org) to receive direct support from the OCCI's **Help Desk** including Facebook advertising support.

### Action Focus 1

Counterspeech campaigners can hijack or re-appropriate terminology present within hate speech narratives, to increase the opportunity of those using the terminology being exposed to opposing views.

#### Counterspeech Concept 1: Re-appropriate

Turn a descriptive term or phrase into weaponised memes of empowerment, like during the 2016 US elections with 'nasty woman' and 'deplorables'

#### Counterspeech Concept 2: Hijack

Using a hashtag or term to ironically subvert its power i.e. "The Iman who bravely protected the Finsbury Park attacker #muslimscum"

These tactics can not only provide another perspective to people engaging with extremist content, it can also empower communities that are feeling marginalised. This could occur at specific events when hashtag usage is at its highest.

### Action Focus 2

Counterspeech campaigns with content that is shareable and digestible across forums and blogs are needed to reach more isolated and exclusive communities online.

#### Counterspeech Concept 1: Live Forum Q&A

Directly engage with an audience, and ensure varied respondents to cover a range of topics, but remain aware of risks from active audience.

#### Counterspeech Concept 2: Infiltration

Actively dispel lies and falsehoods in active threads on open forums and blogs, especially when coordinating negative responses.

Engaging directly with your target audiences on their preferred platforms can be a way to increase the reach of your messages and improve your credibility. Safety and security is vital in these moments. The OCCI's **Help Desk** can offer advice on risk mitigation.

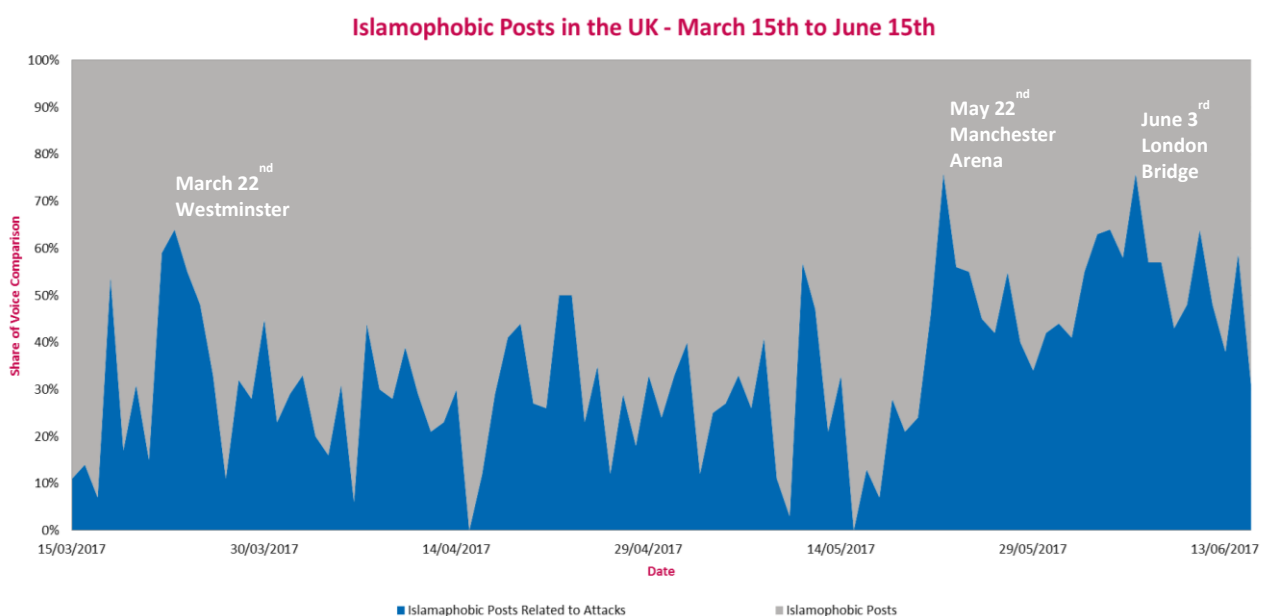
## Data Analysis 1 | The influence of terror attacks on anti-Muslim narratives online

Between March 15<sup>th</sup> and June 15<sup>th</sup> 2017, ISD used social listening software to uncover the frequency of Islamophobic slurs in posts across social media platforms, blogs and forums. The team was then able to determine when these slurs were being used in the context of the UK terror attacks in Westminster, the Manchester Arena and London Bridge. The objective was to determine how quickly a counterspeech response is required in the wake of terrorist violence, and the scale on which terrorist attacks are used as an opportunity for individuals to express Islamophobia.

A total of 3,441 posts were identified to have used one or more of these Islamophobic slurs in the three month period (see next page for details on this identification). Of these posts, 48% directly referenced one of the three terror attacks. This correlates with UK Met Police statistics on Islamophobic hate crimes following attacks, released on June 2017<sup>1</sup>. Additionally, Islamophobic slurs related to the attacks increased in volume not just in the immediate aftermath of the attacks, but in the days and weeks that followed.

As the graph below illustrates, Islamophobic slurs relating to the attacks (blue) had a majority share of voice in relation to all Islamophobic posts (grey) in the 24-48 hour period following the attacks. This relationship was sustained for a longer period of time after the Manchester Arena bombing and London Bridge attack than the Westminster attack. The implication of this finding is that increased frequency of attacks also increases the usage of them as a focus within anti-Muslim narratives.

Pre-planned campaigns with ready-made content will improve the ability of civil society organisations to challenge negative voices following a terror attack. Pre-planned coordination between organisations can also help with increasing the campaign's reach and diversifying the audiences. This type of campaign should have a long-term strategy to ensure that the positive voices do not subside whilst negative voices continue to use the attacks to promote their narratives.



<sup>1</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-manchester-40368668>

## Identification Methodology for Islamophobia Online

ISD analysis of Islamophobia focused on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Blogs, Forums, Google Plus and Tumblr.

The search criteria used for this analysis had to contain at least one term from BOTH lists below to be deemed Islamophobic.

1. At least one of the following contextual words or phrases referring to a UK terror attack:

*manchester OR "ariana grande" OR "manchester arena" OR "mancunian" OR "manc" OR manchesterarenaexplosion OR onelovemanchester OR "westminster terror attack" OR london OR westminster OR "westminster terror incident" OR "stabbing at westminster" OR "westminster stabbing attack" OR "terror attack in westminster" OR "westminster bridge attack" OR "westminster bridge terror attack" OR "london attack" OR "london terror attack" OR "london terrorist attack" OR attack*

2. At least one of the following Islamophobic words or phrases:

*muzzie OR "muslim scum" OR "muzzie scum" OR muzrats OR "muslim murderers"*

Posts including the following words or phrases were removed from the search to minimise influence of news stories in the analysis:

*breaking AND "breaking news" AND report AND reports AND bbc AND "bbc news" AND "itv news" AND itv AND story AND "channel 4 news" AND "channel 4"*

The results from this analysis were then compared to an analysis of posts on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Blogs, Forums, Google Plus and Tumblr that contained the same Islamophobic words or phrases, but did not reference a UK terror attack.

## Data Analysis 2 | Influence of extremist narratives on mainstream conversation

On June 20<sup>th</sup> 2017, YouTube Spotlight posted a video from their Creators for Change project titled #MoreThanARefugee. The video detailed the stories of three people who had been forced to leave their countries and find a new home. Over the preceding week, members of the 4Chan and Reddit community coordinated a large scale response to undermine the message of the video. Within a month, the video had accrued +16 million views, +144,500 likes, +458,000 ‘dislikes’ and just under 80,000 comments - the majority of which were negative.

ISD research identified how the campaign originated from smaller sites such as 4Chan and Reddit, on sub-threads such as /pol/ and /r/The\_Donald, but quickly gained traction on larger platforms such as Twitter. Early conversations were on how best to undermine the YouTube campaign’s hashtag, and what the focus should be on. One user on 4Chan posted a screenshot of a comment they were making on the video and asked “What additional details should I put in?” Another asked whether the video should be reported for supporting terrorism. In the end, the focus at the start of the campaign appeared to be to frame refugees as terrorists. The first 4Chan posts about #MoreThanARefugee, which instigated the negative attack, can be seen below.



Once a mainstream audience engaged with the ‘dislike’ campaign, the focus shifted from refugees onto topics such as YouTube undermining free speech by deleting comments and dislikes; culminating in multiple response videos addressing both refugees and YouTube that have collectively received close to 1 million views. The trend wave area graph illustrates how the initial attempt to depict refugees as terrorists peaked early on, before receding in volume as the campaign gained wide-spread interest. A user on Quora attempted to explain this shifting focus of their negative campaign by asserting “most of the comments are [now] about how YouTube is using its platform to spread a narrative, and how it is suppressing free speech by deleting comments as well as manipulating votes.” These comments were still interspersed with hate speech, exposing the audiences who had engaged via mainstream platforms to the narrative of the extreme right.

Communities on forums and blogs name these campaigns to spam or mock social media content as ‘raids’. Calls for Twitter or YouTube ‘raids’ help the co-ordinators of a negative campaign to quickly

on-board and mobilize other users, as there is an immediate understanding of what is required to participate. OCCI recommends that NGOs running counterspeech campaigns should set-up Google alerts for mentions of their campaign names and organisation, and to understand the implication of the term 'raid' should it appear in the context of their campaign.



The #MoreThanARefugee campaign highlights how important the messenger of a campaign is. If they are not deemed credible by an audience, then it could distract people away from the content of the message. YouTube became the target and focus of conversation due to its high public visibility, and unwillingly encouraged negativity towards the subjects of their video. It illustrated how branding and affiliation can influence audience reception to the content and message of a campaign.

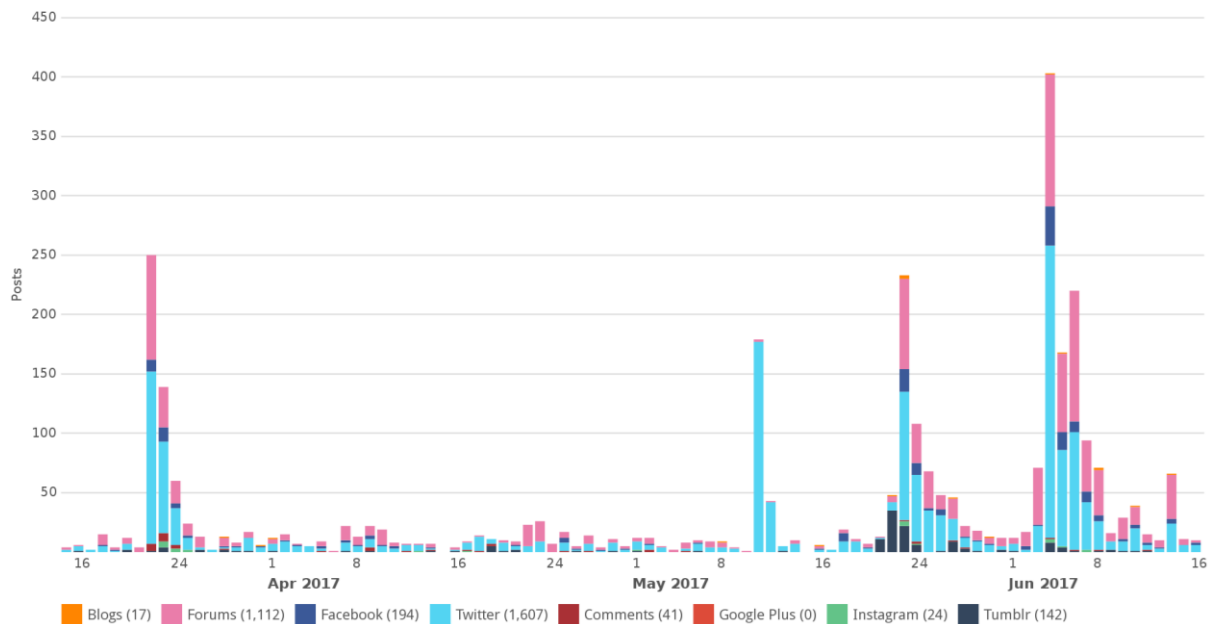
This campaign also illustrated how individuals who push anti-Muslim narratives can still instigate broader hate speech conversations from a wider audience. In a similar way, Islamophobic posts following UK terror attacks showed how Sadiq Khan was used as a popularising topic to bolster visibility of Islamophobic narratives. This highlights the need for multi-lateral coordination between organisations working in counter extremism, either through joint campaigns or collaborative campaign support.

### Data Analysis 3 | Influence of forum and blog communities on the mainstream

Analysis revealed how a substantial number of Islamophobic posts following terror attacks were found on forums and blog sites (40% of the total analysed), in online places where extremist narratives and messaging are left largely unchallenged. Additionally, a disproportionate amount of people responding negatively to the YouTube #MoreThanARefugee campaign video also operated and coordinated their activity on forums and blogs.

The campaign originated from smaller communities on sites such as 4Chan and Reddit, but quickly gained traction on larger platforms such as Twitter. This brings into question whether there is an adequate counterspeech response occurring on the forums and blogs where these individuals are active.

The proportional area bar graph below illustrates the variety of platforms used by people to disseminate hate messages within the criteria of ISD's analysis.



This data is limited to platforms offering the most publicly available data, a consequence of the software analysis technology available to ISD and the lack of access to data made available by platforms such as Facebook, but it remains a useful indicator of volume share between platforms.

**For more information on the findings of this report please contact the OCCI on**  
**[info@occisupport.org](mailto:info@occisupport.org).**

**Please use the OCCI's [Help Desk](#) to request support for any current or upcoming counterspeech campaigns your organisation is running.**



## The Online Civil Courage Initiative (OCCI) Help Desk

### What is the Help Desk?

The OCCI's Help Desk works with civil society organisations to provide tailored support and guidance on developing, managing and measuring online counter-speech. We can help you design a campaign that meets your needs and objectives, and connect you with organisations who can fill any skills gaps you may have.

### What does it offer?

- ✓ Personalised recommendations and guidance
- ✓ Connections with relevant professionals and experts
- ✓ Identification of hate speech and extremist narratives
- ✓ Support for defining campaign goals and objectives
- ✓ Advice on mapping and identifying audiences
- ✓ Guidance on message writing
- ✓ Help in selecting an appropriate campaign messenger
- ✓ Connections to production teams for content development
- ✓ Offering best practices in managing and mitigating risk
- ✓ Advice on creating a bespoke communication strategy
- ✓ Sharing best practices for measuring and evaluating success



### Contact Us

The **Help Desk** is only available to civil society organisations in the United Kingdom, Germany and France.

We can be reached Monday-Friday 09:00 to 17:00 GMT. We aim to respond to requests within 24 hours.

To ask for help, please email your regional OCCI support team:

United Kingdom – [uk@occisupport.org](mailto:uk@occisupport.org)

Germany – [de@occisupport.org](mailto:de@occisupport.org)

France – [fr@occisupport.org](mailto:fr@occisupport.org)



## OCCI Suggested Resources

Click on the links listed under each section to explore the suggested resources. These lists are by no means exhaustive, but are useful introduction into the online resources that are available to support your organisation.

### Overall Campaign Resources

[Counter-Narrative Handbook](#)

[Counter-Narrative Toolkit](#)

[OCCI Counterspeech Handbook I](#)

[OCCI Counterspeech Handbook II](#)

### Campaign Design

[Facebook Non-Profits](#)

[Facebook Business](#)

[YouTube Non-Profits](#)

### Management and Safety

[Facing Facts](#)

[No Hate Speech Movement](#)

[Safety @ Facebook](#)

[Digital Security Helpline](#)

### Measurement and Evaluation

[Counter-Narrative Monitoring & Evaluation Handbook](#)

[Facebook Analytics](#)

[Twitter Analytics](#)

[Google Analytics](#)