PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY SPOKEN QUESTION ON NOTICE

Select Committee on Social Media and Australian Society

1 October 2024

QoN Number: 01

Subject: Radicalisation of children on online platforms

Asked by: Zoe McKenzie

Question:

Zoe McKenzie MP: I'd like to go to the part of your submission that refers to violent extremism and radicalisation. I'm mindful we've heard a lot of evidence about what parents are capable of seeing, thinking, knowing about what their children are doing online […]Can you give us some description of what's going on in that space, how certain children are targeted, how big the problem is? […]If you could just provide some more detail in as plain English as possible because it's our job to explain to parents that this risk is real and they need to think about it, they need to know what signs to look for.
 Jeni Whalan: Thank you for the questions, I suspect I will need to take some parts of your questions on notice to be able to provide a more fulsome response that speaks to issues that are beyond the scope of my role

Answer:

On 11 October 2024, Mike Burgess, Director General of the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation, said that around 20% of the organisation's current priority counter-terrorism cases involve minors.

The radicalisation process varies for all individuals. Young people who demonstrate curiosity or empathy with extremist narratives can be deliberately targeted for online grooming and recruitment by users with extremist ideologies. Algorithmic recommender systems can serve content that glorifies violent extremist ideologies and targets young people who have previously shown curiosity with extremist content. Alternatively, users can be passively exposed to violent extremist content or ideologies, which generates interest to investigate further. A young person being radicalised may not formally join an organisation or subscribe to a particular ideology.

While the signs vary for all individuals, there are some common factors:
- Adopting an '*Us vs Them'* perspective often with clear 'enemies'
- Sympathising, or identifying with, extremist ideology and groups
- Showing intense political, ideological or religious interest, and becoming increasingly angry about issues they feel are unfair or unjust

- Demonstrating an intolerance to alternative views
- Accessing violent extremist literature, images and or video clips.

If someone has a concern about a person close to them, they can make a report to the National Security Hotline on 1800 123 400. They can make a report anonymously. They can also seek help through their local police or local school.

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY SPOKEN QUESTION ON NOTICE

Select Committee on Social Media and Australian Society

1 October 2024

QoN Number: 02

Subject: Fringe and alternative platforms

Asked by: Zoe McKenzie

Question:

Ms McKENZIE: When you say they may be drawn to fringe and alternative platforms, what are we talking about? I think part of the problem is no-one knows—
Ms Whalan: I don't have that detail to hand.
Ms McKENZIE: what to listen out for, frankly. If one of my kids said they're on blah, blah platform, I wouldn't know if that was an extremist site or not. It's a bit of a concern.
Ms Whalan: I'm happy to take that on notice and provide you some more detail.
Ms McKENZIE: Are there some platforms that are worse than others, in terms of the gateway platforms? In other words, are you more worried about Snapchat and WhatsApp because of their encrypted invisibility or are we talking Facebook, Instagram? Are we talking Reddit? Are we talking Discord? Which ones are we meant to be mindful of, as places where this alternative thought grows?
Ms Whalan: I'd like to be able to provide you a more fulsome response than I can today and to take input on that from colleagues, in the Centre for Counter-Terrorism Coordination, who have primary responsibility for that within Home Affairs, so I'll need to take that on notice today

Answer:

Fringe and alt-tech is a term for small to medium sized digital platforms that are permissive environments for sharing and discussing violent extremist content and ideologies. Mainstream platforms moderate user-generated content to ensure it is legal and in compliance with that platform's terms of service. Fringe and alt tech platforms do not. These platforms may market themselves as freedom of speech or anti-censorship alternatives to their mainstream counterparts.

People with extremist ideologies can utilise mainstream platforms to attract people to join fringe and alt-tech platforms. While the signs of radicalisation vary for all individuals, there are some common factors:
- Adopting an '*Us vs Them'* perspective, often with clear 'enemies'
- Sympathising, or identifying with, extremist ideology and groups
- Showing intense political, ideological or religious interest, and becoming increasingly angry about issues they feel are unfair or unjust

- Demonstrating an intolerance to alternative views
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1 October 2024

QoN Number: 03

Subject: Rebranding of Twitter

Asked by: Zoe McKenzie

Question:

Ms McKENZIE: Alright. There's a sentence here that says: "The Department is also concerned about the recent increase in terrorist and violent extremist content and rhetoric online, especially following the Hamas attacks on Israel on 7 October 2023 and Twitter's rebranding to X Corp". That Twitter's rebranding to X Corp should be mentioned next to the Hamas attacks on Israel tells me that was, indeed, a significant shift in the nature of that platform, Twitter now known as X. Are you able to elaborate on that or is that something you'll take on notice as well?
Ms Whalan: That is something I'll take on notice.

Answer:

The spread of terrorist and violent extremist content (TVEC) on digital platforms, including X, and the role of TVEC in online radicalisation remains a concern in Australia. Between 1 June 2024 and 31 August 2024, Home Affairs referred 1,656 instances of TVEC to digital platforms for removal consideration against their terms of service. X had the most TVEC referred over this period, with 1,099 referrals. 57% of referred content was removed.

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Select Committee on Social Media and Australian Society

1 October 2024

QoN Number: 04

Subject: Combatting negative content

Asked by: Zoe Daniel

Question:

Zoe Daniel MP: I presume you'd have to take that on notice, but I'm curious to know if Home Affairs has done any research into the idea of combatting negative content with positive content. If you look at a viral algorithm model, whether throwing viral content for good at the algorithm would travel as well, if it was done properly, as negative content, and that is a technical question but if there's been any research, I think that would be useful to know.

Answer:

The Department has previously commissioned research into strategic communications approaches to address violent extremism, but has not conducted research into combatting negative content with positive content or using viral algorithm models.