

# Manage the Monsters: Promoting Media Literacy and Awareness of Propaganda & Disinformation

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# The Challenge

State and non-state actors have used disinformation, propaganda, tailored narratives, and amplification techniques to exploit every demographic, both online and offline, altering the political and social environment in which we operate.

# The Methodology

- Reviewed the literature on...
  - inoculation theory (McGuire, 1964; Braddock, 2019; Flynn, Nyhan, and Reifler 2017);
  - disinformation campaigns and conspiracy theories (Nimmo 2020; Watts 2018; Rottweiler and Gill 2020; Berger 2020; GEC 2020);
  - radicalization and recruitment into racially and ethnically motivated violent extremism (Goldsmith 2019; Simi, Bubolz, and Hardman 2013; Simi, Windisch and, Sporer 2016; Miller-Idriss 2020).
- Spoke with **leading experts** from academia, government, and think tanks working on the role of state and non-state actor disinformation and propaganda in racially and ethnically motivated violent extremism

# The Approach

- Urgent need to **provide education and create discovery tools** regarding disinformation, propaganda, and manipulation of social media content.
- Designed a creative asset and campaign to **raise awareness of and safeguard against** disinformation and propaganda.
- Will best serve those with little to no engagement with disinformation and propaganda, with the goal of **intercepting individuals before they can radicalize** potentially into violent extremism.
- Individuals already engaging deeply with such content are prone to **psychological reactance** and difficult to reach without tailored interventions.

# The Campaign

**To promote awareness and media literacy**

## Recognizable

Increase audience engagement and recall through simple text and appealing visuals

## Apolitical

Prevents further polarization and avoids psychological reactance

## Scalable

Applies to both foreign and domestic audiences of all ages, and can be easily folded into a wider campaign

# Role of the Monsters



- Based on persuasion theory (O'Keefe, 2015)
- Raises the threat level to the audience
- Symbolizes the nefarious actors spreading and amplifying disinformation and propaganda online
- Helps audience understand that everyone is vulnerable
- Persuades audience to unite and build resilience against the threat



# The Creative Asset



# Dissemination

Marketing theory suggests that it takes

7

exposures from a variety of media sources for a viewer to build familiarity and trust in a source through **social validation**.



# Getting to 7 Requires

A broad-based campaign that segments your audience and tailors the tactics and messaging to each through a combination of online and offline strategies including...

# Strategies

## ONLINE

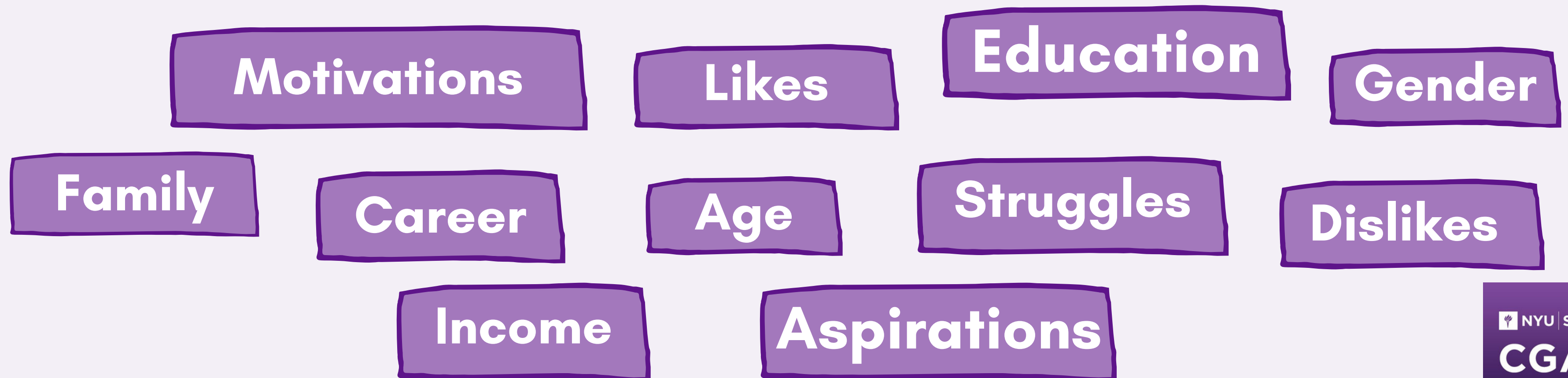
- **Credible Community Voices**
  - Local government & law enforcement social media pages
  - Community listservs
  - Local journalists, artists, & influencers
- **Search Engine Marketing & Optimization**
  - Google Ads, Amazon Ads, Infolinks
- **Video Game Streaming Platforms & Influencers**
- **Blogs & Message Boards**
- **Social Media**

## OFFLINE

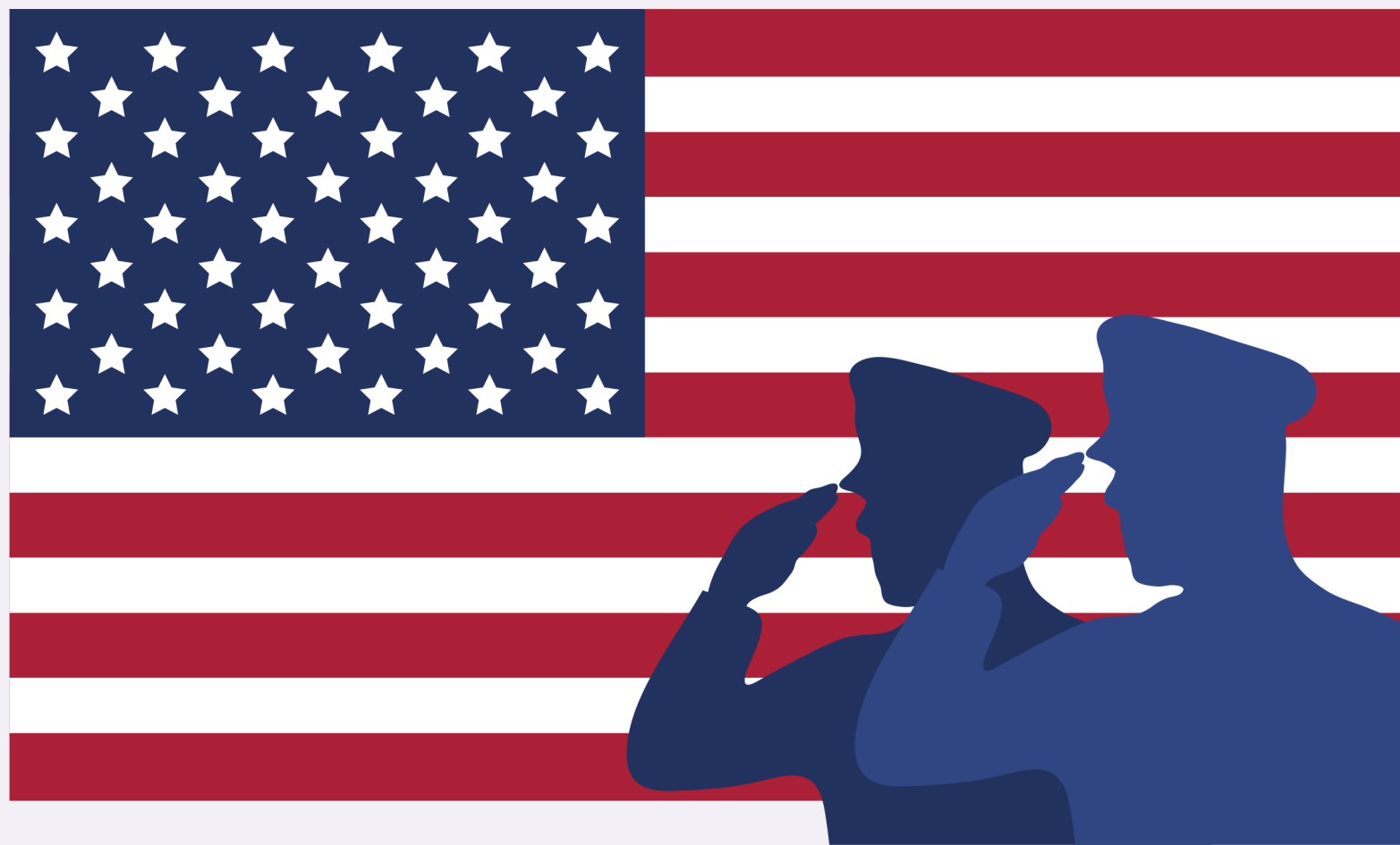
- **Credible Community Voices**
  - Law enforcement & local government
  - Religious & community leaders
  - Teachers
- **Out-of-Home**
  - Public transit
  - Libraries
  - Religious & community centers
  - Schools & college campuses
- **Print Media**
  - Local & national magazines & newspapers
  - Sporting events

# The Audience Persona

Speaking to different audiences will require different messaging. The following factors must be considered, in addition to cultural perspectives, in order to create an effective campaign that reaches various global audiences.



# Two Example Audiences



# A Closer Look At Military, Law Enforcement & Veterans

## Why Are They Vulnerable To Violent Extremism?

### *Military & Law Enforcement*

#### **High targets** for recruitment

- Weapons knowledge, storage, and procurement
- Tactical knowledge, training, and resources
- Hypermasculine/authoritarian attitudes and warrior culture

### *Military Veterans*

#### **Prime targets** for recruitment

- Loss of identity and purpose after leaving service
- Social stress and failure to meet military requirements may cause one to blame the government and/or minorities

(Simi, Bubolz & Hardman, 2013)

## Targeted Strategies

### *Online Strategies*

Utilization of recreational groups, career resources, support systems, and veteran initiatives to spread awareness through dialogue.

- Transitioning veteran job boards (companies like Hilton)
- Military spouse social media groups #milspouse
- Official military news sites, sources, and blogs

### *Offline Strategies*

Post flyers of the creative asset and other content in:

- Military bases
- Veteran support organizations
- Local/State law enforcement agencies
- Military publications
- Recruitment offices
- Local precincts

## Looking Ahead & Taking A Step Further

Implement educational training for military and law enforcement or related personnel on the dangers of disinformation, propaganda and online radicalization and how to gain access to appropriate resources.



# A Closer Look At Young Adults

## Why Are They Vulnerable to Violent Extremism?

- Overrepresentation of young adults, especially men, in violent extremism
- Transitional developmental state with rapidly fluctuating, exploitable needs
- Desire to ascribe meaning in one's life
- Peer pressure or need for acceptance and/or social support
- Feelings of grandeur/promise of fame or glory

(FBI, Preventing Extremism in Schools, 2016; UN, Tackling Terrorist Exploitation of Youth, 2019)

## Targeted Strategies

### *Online Strategies*

Utilization of school, extra curricular, and community event social media pages to spread awareness through posting of creative asset:

- Online student groups (on social media)
- Alumni networks
- Digital community message boards

### *Offline Strategies*

Post creative asset or related print content in:

- Educational institutions
- Career centers
- Local arts & social events
- Community magazine or newspapers
- Community centers & extra curriculars
- Sporting events

## Looking Ahead & Taking A Step Further

Young adults feel overwhelmed and disempowered by the amount of information they see (Poynter, 2021). While they spend much time online, offline strategies and social validation of messaging, re-enforced by online targeting, is beneficial in reaching this demographic.

# Amplifying the Campaign

Adapting the creative asset to get to **7**

**Radio**

**Children's Book**

**Hashtags**

**Commercials**

**Educational Modules/Videos**

**Memes**

**Gamification**

**Merchandise**