

MOONSHOT CASE STUDY

YEAR
2018-19

 LOCATION
MALAYSIA

 SECTOR
GOVERNMENT





PARTNERS



SUBJECT

Countering Violent Extremism
Using Comedic Content

ONLINE HARMS

Violent Extremism
Mis-,Dis-, and Malinformation (MDM)
Conspiracy Theories

INSIGHT PRODUCTS

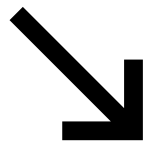
Insight Reporting

INTERVENTION PRODUCTS

Counter-Messaging

CONSULTANCY SERVICES

Capacity Building



Challenge

From August 2018 to September 2019, Moonshot delivered a project in partnership with Mythos Labs for the U.S. Department of State. We worked together to create, test and build capacity for comedic CVE content in Malaysia. Moonshot tested the content via a Redirect Method™ campaign, targeting audiences at-risk of violent Salafi-Jihadist extremism (**Product: Counter-Messaging**).

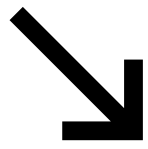
We wanted to establish whether or not comedy is an effective instrument for CVE. To do so, we ran two separate campaigns targeting audiences demonstrating sympathy, engagement or active support for Salafi-Jihadist organizations and ideologies. One contained traditional CVE content, such as testimonies from former extremists, and religious speeches by anti-extremist preachers. The other contained comedic short films produced by local creatives, specifically designed to resonate with the narratives and audiences Moonshot identified from our analysis (**Product: Insight Reporting**).

We found that comedic CVE content outperforms traditional CVE content in terms of both total watch time (by the audience as a whole), and average watch time (by an individual viewer), demonstrating empirically that comedic content can be an effective means to engage at-risk users who have been redirected away from harmful ideologies.

Approach

To identify, map and understand the at-risk audience in Malaysia, we used our in-house methodology to monitor searches for keywords that indicated curiosity or engagement with extremist, Salafi-Jihadist ideologies and organizations. These keywords were vetted by subject matter and regional experts for theological, cultural and linguistic sensitivities. By analyzing the data, we were able to gain insights into the nature and geographic distribution (by State/Federal territory) of the audience. For instance, we noted a high level of interest among women in violent extremist content, reflecting increased reports of women in the region declaring support for violent extremist groups and being involved in the planning of attacks. In total, 39,100 searches for these keywords were made in the first phase of the project.

To provide an evidence base for tailored interventions, a sample of the at-risk audience was selected for further analysis to understand its wider content consumption habits - both extremist and non-extremist - across Google Search, Facebook and YouTube. Compared to a random sample of Malaysian users, we found above average interest in religious, social and political affairs, consuming between three and four times the average level of interest in Malaysian news websites.



Mythos Labs then drew on Moonshot’s analysis to inform the themes, plots and characters of comedic CVE content. Mythos Labs worked with local writers and comedians to produce three comedic videos that were selected for a combination of their humour, the strength of the relationship between their central themes and the data gathered by Moonshot, and how successfully they might debunk popular jihadist narratives from the perspective of a Malaysian audience. For instance, some of the video content was tailored to at-risk women, employing female lead characters and actors.

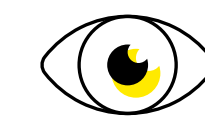
The videos were reviewed by a broad range of international and local subject matter experts and stakeholders to test for comedic value, local relevance, theological and historical accuracy and cultural sensitivity.

To further build capacity, Moonshot and Mythos Labs held a two-day workshop in Kuala Lumpur attended by local comedians, social media influencers, film students and media industry professionals, alongside project leaders and stakeholders. Participants were equipped first with the tools to understand the context of and strategies behind violent jihadist messaging and, second, to use comedy to counter that messaging safely and effectively. From these workshops, participants went on to produce two more high-quality comedic CVE videos.

Moonshot launched the Redirect™ campaign, pairing searches carried out by at-risk individuals in Malaysia with adverts that took them to YouTube playlists featuring the three short videos produced by Mythos Labs. The results from this campaign compared to those of the traditional CVE content allowed us to see which type of CVE content the Malaysian at-risk audience preferred.

Results

The data indicates (with statistical significance of $p=0.05$) that, overall, the at-risk audience found the project’s comedic CVE content more engaging than the curated traditional CVE content. The audience’s total viewing time of the comedic CVE content was 31% greater than that of the traditional CVE content, and 135% greater when it came to the average watch time of each viewer.



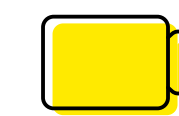
Total watch time

Traditional
CVE videos

**6 hours
28 minutes**

Comedy
CVE videos

**8 hours
29 minutes**



Average watch time

Traditional
CVE videos

**17
seconds**

Comedy
CVE videos

**40
seconds**



About Moonshot

Moonshot is a social enterprise working to end online harms by applying evidence, ethics and human rights. We work with global NGOs, governments, corporate clients and tech companies. We provide comprehensive insights on rapidly evolving threats and conduct the most advanced online interventions to safeguard vulnerable users.

Contact Us

We enable governments to understand threats to the public and protect the most vulnerable.

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