DIGITAL CIVIL COURAGE

The internet and social media hold great potential for the good of society. At the same time, they are home to negative trends, such as hate speech and fake news, that can undermine social cohesion. What can each of us do to promote the good on the internet and in social media? And how can we learn civil courage?

#TAKEPART-Stories – an initiative of Deutsche Telekom AG
Facilitator’s guide for a workshop (approx. 90 minutes)
NOTES ON THIS GUIDE

This workshop is about “Digital Civil Courage.” It is aimed at helping participants to understand what digital civil courage is, what each person can do in this area and why it is important to take an active role.

The workshop emphasizes the following key points:

1. The internet needs people who are willing to stand up for what is right, in the interest of our cohesion as a democracy. We must not allow people to be abused and to lose sight of what is true and what is fake.

2. Online hate speech keeps increasing, and it is not going to go away by itself.

3. There are various ways to take action against this negative trend, including enacting laws, counter-speech, reporting hate speech and showing solidarity.

4. Each of us can find ways to resist exclusion and support democracy!

This guide is intended as a support for you in your role as a facilitator. It can enable you to conduct a workshop, even if you have little experience in facilitating such events and/or you don’t consider yourself an expert on the subject of digital civil courage. This guide is also available in shorter versions, for workshops of 25 and 45 minutes.

In the sections entitled “STRUCTURE” we offer recommendations on how to present and discuss each passage.

In the sections entitled “WHAT TO SAY”, we offer suggestions on things to say and questions to ask.

In the sections entitled “ADDITIONAL INFORMATION,” we offer background information that can help you in your preparation.

To conduct this workshop, you will need:

- a laptop or other device with which you can present the workshop images, and various links and clips on the internet

- a projector or monitor connected to your laptop or other device

- Internet access/Wi-Fi

- speakers connected to your laptop or other device.
Also:
The image pages provided in the module work best in full-screen mode. Full-screen mode is available in virtually all internet browsers (check settings).

The image pages include links – for example to audio files. In most cases, the links open in a new window. To return to the module from a link, switch back to the original window. You may then need to reactivate the full-screen mode.

Some image pages include links to additional information and resources, etc. These links are not intended for workshop presentations; they are included for the participants' benefit for further study.

Under “Downloads” you’ll find a template for invitations to participants, and a draft of an email, with the link to the module, that you might want to send out after completing your workshop.

Enjoy!
“Welcome to our workshop on digital civil courage!
(introduce yourself and explain the purpose of the workshop)

These are the topics we will be discussing in the next 90 minutes:

- The internet and social media hold great potential for the good of society.

- At the same time, they are home to negative trends, such as hate speech and fake news, that can undermine social cohesion.

- What can each of us do to promote the good on the internet and in social media?

- Is civil courage something that we can learn?

Hate speech is a major problem on the Internet and primarily refers to the strategic use of hate to manipulate opinions and people or to exclude entire groups. There is a connection between hate speech and democracy.

According to a study by the D21 initiative, a good quarter of the population in Germany sees digitization as a threat to democracy.

Another danger on the Internet is fake news. Their aim is to shape opinion, and shaping opinion often leads to hatred and exclusion.
WHAT WOULD A HATE-FREE INTERNET LOOK LIKE?

PROCEDURE
Briefly present the heading on the slide, as a question to consider, and then play the audio file.

For this, you will need speakers. We strongly recommend that you do a sound check before the workshop begins! The audio file runs for about 3 minutes.

Recommendation: Listen to the audio file prior to the workshop. The file describes a kind of utopia, set in some unspecified future. Two young men talk about how the internet used to be full of hate speech and fake news in the past.

Note: Do not start the discussion right after the first story – please wait until the second story has played (it comes immediately after the first on the next page).

VOICETEXT
“What would a hate-free internet look like?
Now we’ll hear a short audio sequence that will help us think about this idea.”
WHAT WOULD A RESISTANCE-FREE
INTERNET LOOK LIKE?

PROCEDURE

Briefly present the heading on the slide, as a question to consider, and then play the audio file.

Once again, you’ll need to have speakers connected to your system. The audio file runs for about 3 minutes.

Recommendation: Listen to the audio file prior to the workshop. The situation now described is a dystopic one. An imaginary news broadcast, set at some time in the future, presents a series of short news items that illustrate what has become of the internet and the people who use it.

Then, allow a brief period for feedback and discussion.

VOICETEXT

“What would a resistance-free internet look like? We have a short audio sequence about this, too.”

(After you have listened to the audio track, get a few reactions from your group – for example, on these questions:)

- What do you think about what you just heard – what sounds plausible to you, and what seems next to impossible?
- When you try to think about the future of the internet, what trends seem worrying?
- What trends give you hope?”
DEFENDING DEMOCRATIC VALUES

“Supporting a friend who is bullied on the internet because of her headscarf. Exposing a picture on Facebook as fake. Programming an app for reporting hate posts.

All of those are examples for civil courage on the internet. What do all of them have in common?

They go beyond pure helping behavior! Basic democratic values are defended courageously.

Civil courage is about refusing to tolerate injustice. It's about mustering the courage to speak your mind, even when it runs counter to what others – even persons of higher rank or seniority, or the majority – are saying. Civil courage plays out in public, not in secret. And it takes negative consequences into account.

These principles apply to civil courage in any sphere, whether in the digital or in the real world.

That said, we need to remember certain key ways in which the internet differs from the real world:

- **Coverage:** Way back, you would tell a person about something, and then, a day later, that person would tell it to someone else. Now, because of the possibility of following each other on social media, your message can reach huge groups of people, around the world, in seconds.

- **Speed:** Bots – robots working online – play a major role in the spread of hate speech. Bots today are able to autonomously write messages and post them, using false identities, to large numbers of groups. Nowadays bots are thought to be responsible for up to 30 percent of all hate posts. The reactions to their posts come from people – or from other bots.

- **Anonymity:** Because of the anonymity that often prevails online, users are often unable to know who the other users really are, or what those users’ real motives and aims are. In addition, users often underestimate the real impacts of the things they post online. Roles start to blur: Politicians often communicate online as private individuals, and not in their official capacities. Private individuals, on the other hand, become journalists. This kind of role-changing can be very difficult to recognize.

- **Legislation:** The legal situation on the internet differs from that in the real world. The internet lacks key supervisory bodies such as Press Councils, which monitor compliance with accepted ethical rules for journalists. But we'll come back to the issue of the legal situation later on!
Information overload: When people are online, they often read little more than headlines, simply because the online world is flooded with information. And people often like or share content, simply because they like the person who posted the content, and because they want to belong to that person’s group. Often, they don’t bother to actually read the content or try to understand it.”

A definition of digital civil courage: Courageous, public actions, in the digital world, aimed at defending basic democratic values or human rights. This includes actions that can entail negative consequences for the person showing civil courage – consequences such as exposure to attacks. Digital civil courage can play an especially important role in social media, in which hate speech and fake news are spread.

Civil courage is diametrically opposed to apathy and ignorance.

Examples of basic democratic values and human rights, in this context, include:

- human dignity
- the right to life in liberty and security
- the right to adequate living conditions
- the rejection of any and all discrimination based on gender, background, race, language, nationality, origins, beliefs, or any religious or political opinions
- freedom of speech

Examples of social media:

- social networks (such as Facebook)
- microblogging services (such as Twitter)
- photo / video platforms (such YouTube, Instagram)
- messenger services (such as WhatsApp/Telegram

Unfortunately, hate speech and ultra-right slogans are also increasingly appearing on gaming platforms used by children and adolescents.
PROCEDURE

You can play the clip without making any introductory remarks.

For this, you will need speakers. We strongly recommend that you do a sound check before the workshop begins!

Recommendation: Watch the clip prior to the workshop. It is a short clip produced in connection with Deutsche Telekom’s #TAKEPART #NoHateSpeech campaign, and was shown in soccer stadiums, movie theaters and on TV. It presents various life situations of a young man who belongs to a group that suffers a great deal of discrimination and victimization: transgender people. He was born as a girl and then underwent a sex change operation. This section is not about the topic of transgender people per se, however; it focuses on the following general questions: What kinds of negative treatment do members of minorities suffer? What sorts of people make a point of insulting and vilifying other people? How does such behavior relate to social cohesion based on democratic rules?

After running the clip, ask the participants to voice their immediate reactions. Voicing a provocative reaction such as “He probably brought it on himself!” could be a way of promoting lively discussion.

The clip runs for about 1 minute.

VOICETEXT

(Questions you can ask after running the clip:)

- “What is your reaction to what you have just seen?

- Were you aware of how strongly messages – even messages from complete strangers – can affect other people?

- What scene(s) affected you most strongly? What scene(s) did you find shocking?”

NOTES

The main character is a real person who actually experienced the hateful posts shown in the clip.

Examples of best practices are shown at the end of the clip. These best practices are discussed and explained in the course of the workshop.
“Hate speech and fake news are a problem for society as a whole.

According to a survey by HateAid, 50% of young adults in Europe are affected by hate on the Internet. Over two-thirds of Europeans encounter fake news at least once a week (Source: Statista, Inc.).

While hate can manifest itself on both an individual and a group level, hate between groups is often especially strong and relentless.

Populism plays an important role in the inciting of hate. It drives hate by emphasizing and dwelling on the differences between groups. In the process, it eliminates virtually all space for factually based discussion. People who fall victim to populism often repeat and spread slogans without really thinking about it. Contrary opinions are experienced as a thread, even on a personal level.

Such actions and views can reinforce cohesion within groups and lead to vilification of the opinions of other groups and their members. Misunderstandings often occur when people fail to actually read content and try to understand it – i.e. when people simply believe they know in advance what another person is trying to say. In populistically oriented groupthink, the question “are you for us or against us?” is never far away. Any contradiction is perceived as betrayal.

At the same time, algorithms in social networks ensure that people see more and more of the kinds of content they have liked or commented on in the past. This hampers people's chances of forming balanced opinions. It eliminates many of the important perspectives that people need in order to be able to weigh and challenge arguments.

The problem is compounded in that people tend to stick to their opinions fiercely, once they form them. They tend to show little willingness to consider evidence that contradicts their opinions. In fact, they can even see evidence to the contrary as confirmation of their positions. Does that sound unlikely? Well, there is a name for this: the “backfire effect.” The backfire effect refers to the phenomenon whereby people's opinions become all the more strongly held the more strongly they are called into question.

Hate speech is also used as a political strategy for silencing differently minded people. Silencing used in this way has nothing to do with misunderstandings or dissatisfaction. It is a strategy for swaying opinion.”
The term “populism” refers to a certain political style. It employs identity politics which happen to relate directly to the issue of hate speech. Populist demagogues exalt the members of their own group and work to disparage and exclude members of other groups. In general, populism is not tied to any specific political orientation. Some political parties tend to favor a populist style more than others do, however.
IS HATE SPEECH LEGAL?

PROCEDURE

The clip shown here is a video of a conference held by EURACTIV, an online news magazine, on the political and legal challenges involved in drawing the line between harsh criticism and hate speech on the internet.

VOICETEXT

“It is not always easy to draw the line between harsh criticism and illegal hate speech. In addition, finding a definition that different countries can agree on is a special challenge. This video provides an overview of the key arguments regarding the freedom of speech.”
THE INTERNET IS NO LEGAL VACUUM

PROCEDURE
Show the slide and then discuss whether laws are useful, effective means of reducing hate speech and fake news. There is no one “right” view on this; the participants should be encouraged to develop and express their own perspectives.

VOICETEXT
“In some countries it is unlawful to insult someone on the street. But what about on social media? Fundamentally, acts that are illegal in the analog world are treated the same way when carried out online. Criminal laws do not make a distinction between “offline” and “online.”

On an international level, there are a number of conventions that are relevant when it comes to online hate, such as the Convention on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the European Convention on Human Rights. With the „Digital Service Act,“ a new legal framework is also planned at the EU level that, among other things, will oblige platform providers to take more active action against hate and fake news and, for example, to report criminal acts to the relevant authorities. There are also corresponding national laws. Therefore, it makes sense to gather evidence and report offences. What is the value in reporting hate speech and fake news? Some of us have probably had the experience of doing just that and then seeing that it led to nothing and that the perpetrators were never identified.

Nevertheless:

- Reporting is digital civil courage at an entry level. It’s easy to do and entails no risk for the person doing the reporting. But it still sends a message of unwillingness to tolerate negative content.

- Furthermore, statistics on such reporting can inform policy makers about what types of action need to be taken and about how the public as a whole view this issue.

At the same time, we need to remember that most of our laws stem from a pre-online era in which the media consisted of newspapers, radio and a handful of TV channels. In other words, an era in which it was not easy for anyone to influence the media, at any time.

Currently, there is much discussion about the need to change laws and adapt them to the digital world
(Here is a selection of questions that the participants could discuss):

- Can laws for the digital world and social media be effective against hate speech and fake news?

- Who among you have ever reported posts / comments you found in social media, i.e. reported them to the platforms themselves or to the police? If so, what content did you report, and how?

- In your opinion, who should be held responsible for online content: Platform providers? Policy makers? Each and every one of us?

- Is the current discussion about the need for new laws overreaching, or is it failing to do justice to the real problem?"

**NOTES**

Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) gives everyone the right to freedom of expression. But the exercise of this right is restricted e.g. to protect the reputation or rights of others.

Article 4(a) of the UN International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) obligates signatories to make “all dissemination of ideas based on racial superiority or hatred” a punishable offense.

Article 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) requires the outlawing of “any advocacy of national, racial, or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility, or violence.”
THERE ARE MANY REASONS NOT TO ACT...

PROCEDURE

Read „What to say“ out loud.

We recommend opening the discussion after the next image, so that certain points can come into sharper focus.

VOICETEXT

“How should I put myself in the line of fire? Maybe I’ll come under attack myself...

Let’s take a look at the potential risks involved in pushing back online and in intervening when others are being attacked:

- **Shitstorm:** A person who intervenes can suddenly become the focus of ire and attacks on the internet. The mood online can suddenly shift against them. And then they receive a storm of negative posts. In social media, it is not uncommon for the attention of people involved in discussing a certain subject to suddenly shift completely away from that subject.

- **Blaming:** A person can be made out to be a perpetrator of some kind, and then get attacked on that basis. Example: In a discussion on human rights, a person states that everyone has a right to be free in their lives. The person then gets attacked for not offering any solutions to the refugee crisis and for supposedly supporting illegal immigration. The person even gets attacked for supposedly aiding and abetting illegal migrants.

- **Silencing:** Vilifying people with the aim of pushing them out of social media. Journalists and politicians are often the targets of hate speech. Strategically implemented hate speech becomes especially frightening when it includes threats of real-world repercussions. This happens often. Such threats can take the form of publication of the victim’s private address or telephone number. There is a special term for publication of such private information:

- **Doxing:** Publication of a victim’s address and contact data, with the aim of making the victim a target in the real world.

When you see such things happening, is it maybe better to stay out of it?”
“When no one speaks out against hateful messages or fake news aimed at social exclusion, the people behind the posts often feel confirmed in their efforts!

It is vitally important to ensure that hate speech does not become the norm. Unfortunately, hate speech is already trending in that direction. The problem is that if certain types of normally unacceptable language are used often enough, many people will start considering them acceptable. If an absurd argument gets repeated often enough, many people will no longer find it absurd, and may consider it to contain a grain of truth.

Language affects our attitudes and actions. Later on, we will discuss a project that is working to help people become more respectful of others in their use of language.

Can some pushback ever convince online haters to change their ways?

That depends on whether they are using hate to strategic ends. If they are, resistance would probably not give them any pause. If they are not, and have simply been caught up in a whirlwind of hate and rumors, then they might be willing to rethink their views.

In any case, there are always many undecided readers out there. Often, the point of pushing back against hate speech online is not to try to change the hater. The real point is to reach the readers out there, many of whom may be still be unsure of what to think. The idea is to offer those people a different perspective. One that can get them thinking and talking about the issue. In other words, the idea is to re-open the door to constructive dialog.

As a result, in standing up for what is right, in showing digital civil courage, it is important to avoid the weapons of the haters. Humor can certainly be helpful, but there is no humor in fighting hate with hate.

The next time you respond to an online post, remember this, and visualize yourself responding for all the readers out there. For all the readers who haven’t said anything yet and still aren’t sure what they think.

It is also very worthwhile to act on behalf of victims of hate speech. A lack of solidarity can be as bad and painful as the hate itself. Civil courage is also about standing up for those who will not, or cannot, defend themselves. Give a voice to those people who are afraid to speak their mind.

By the way: Your counter-speech can really make an impression on your friends and acquaintances. As Simon Teune, a sociologist and expert on social movements, explains, “Objections make people stop and think. When no one is objecting, a person who is making racist remarks (for example) will feel confirmed in what they are saying. That’s why it is important to let people know that you are unwilling to
tolerate certain things. And such reactions have special impact when they come from personal acquaintances. Similarly, counter-speech from Facebook friends has a greater impact than counter-speech by strangers or by anonymous users."

You feel great when you overcome your own shock and paralysis and take action! People who get involved, and take action gain a sense of belonging and feel less helpless than they otherwise would.
Just remember that hate has never conquered hate or solved any social problems. Often hate has caused new problems.

(Possible questions for a group discussion):

• Have you ever spoken up and objected to something online?

• What happened to you then? (see also the additional information)

• What do you think can help stem the tide of hate online?"

NOTES

Shitstorm & co.: How likely are you to become a victim yourself when you stand up for something online?

Many people who regularly practice counter-speech online find that while they may get some angry responses, they’ll usually get at least as much agreement as irate disagreement or attacks. Of course, you can simply have the misfortune of coming across a truly aggressive person. When that happens, remember that while a bot will not spend a lot of time firing back, a strategic hater or troll may simply be relentless. It can then make sense to ask others for help or simply to back out of the fray.

Those most often targeted include journalists, politicians and other people with similar public exposure. Haters often seek to marginalize such people.

When things get really nasty, report what’s going on, bring in groups such as #IAmHere or file a police report.

Fortunately, such nastiness is still the exception and is unlikely, especially when you consistently argue in constructive ways.

In the case of cyberbullying, it’s always a good idea to offer your assistance to victims.
EVERYONE CAN TAKE ACTION!

PROCEDURE

Explain the ideas given on the slide.

If there is enough time, ask the participants to contribute their own ideas – this is about building a collection of recommendations that are especially effective and that anyone can apply. There are of course many other ways to react, ranging from “the humorous approach” to “announcing that you’re going to ignore the person or discussion involved.” An example of the latter: “The subject we’re discussing is X, and I am not going to follow you into a discussion of Y.”

Recommendation:

Select 4-5 examples in advance that you can then discuss and explain.

VOICETEXT

“Here are some ideas on ways anyone can get involved:

Get involved in a constructive way!

- There are many different ways to get active: The first is to constructively contribute your opinion and to show other perspectives. Our democracy benefits from diversity of opinion. The important thing here is to argue in a comprehensible way.

Support victims – demonstrate solidarity!

- When posts are not acceptable – because they are untruthful, hurtful, or defamatory – then say so! But always use clear, objective language, to ensure that your message – even if it is very short – will be properly understood.

- Try to set a good example! In chats, speak up early, or even first, before the discussion goes off the rails.

- Support victims. That can include contacting them (and not the haters) outside of the chat framework and offering them consolation and encouragement. Contacting haters in such ways is not recommended. Often, people will use chats as an opportunity to post other people’s personal messages and emails, for purposes such as ridicule. Such practices can include posting other people’s email addresses without permission.

Seek and accept help!
One way to seek out help is to directly address other people reading the chat, and to ask them, “What do you think about this?” Or “I would be interested in learning your opinion about xy.” or “I am sure that there are experts about xy here among us. Who knows more about xy?” As in the real world, it is a good strategy to get others involved – don’t try to do it all yourself.

#IAmHere, for example, offers to help out in cases in which problematic posts are being reported and users are joining forces in order to respond collectively.

Strengthen supporters!

This complements “seeking help”. It’s important to back up those who are standing up against hate. That can take the form of likes, or of useful added comments – for example, comments you have added because you’re an expert on the subject.

Show solidarity with (potential) victims, yes, but also with other helpers. That reinforces your cause, and it shows passive readers that the person who is coming under fire is not alone in their views. By the way, this is a strategy that haters use very effectively ...

Do not allow yourself to be provoked

Admittedly, that’s easier said than done! Often, people try to provoke others into reacting negatively, simply so they then can say, “You see, you’re not one bit better!”

Call on others to stick to the rules for the discussion, or to the rules in force for the group.

It is good to answer promptly, but it’s not always necessary. If you find yourself taking something too personally, it is definitely a good idea to take a few deep breaths and turn your attention elsewhere for a little while. You can jump back in once you have calmed down and are seeing things a little more clearly.

Do not answer hate with hate.

As we have already seen, answering hate with hate often just escalates the discussion emotionally and even generates solidarity for the haters.

Set limits and recover!

When you get involved, remember that tried-and-true general rule: enough is enough. It’s also important to protect your own feelings. One good exit strategy can be to inform your readers that you plan to leave the discussion. When you do that, however, be sure to follow through! Other options include disabling notifications, blocking the group or the hater and, of course, reporting violations.

Discussions with people who don’t really want to discuss often lead nowhere. Some experts advise that you answer twice, make your point clearly, and then
exit the discussion.

- Make use of the advantages inherent in the digital world: Retain your ability to disconnect!

**Be prepared – practice counter-speech!**

When boundaries are crossed, however, it is equally important not to accept this, to counter-speak. Many of the groups that work against online hate speech, and against hatred aimed at specific groups, offer free online courses with practice in protected (offline) settings and with opportunities to try out new strategies. Such courses are offered regularly and are open to anyone.

**Use fact-checking – publish sources!**

- people seeking to marginalize and exclude certain groups often make use of stereotypes and fake news. In the process, their stereotypes and fake news often go unchallenged, and then get adopted by others.

- It's a good idea to draw on reliable sources and use them in your own arguments. If you fail to find any useful sources, do not be afraid to ask, “How do you know that? What exactly are you referring to?” Important: Be sure not to let absurd claims go unchallenged, even if the best challenge you can muster is “I can’t believe that!”

- Fact-checking is easier than many people would assume. Often, you'll find the same fake news items coming up again and again in chats. In such cases, the items have often already been checked by experts, and their findings and sources are available on the internet (the Duke University Reporters’ Lab offers a database of local fact-checkers, for example).

- A word of caution: Never introduce made-up results, and never try to combat prejudice and fake news with hearsay. If you lack facts, pose counter-questions and ask for pertinent background information.

**And remember: Often, in your answers, you will be speaking to all the silent readers out there, and not to the haters!**

- As explained a little earlier, this is a good strategy to ensure that you do not get pulled into a negative discussion.

**Report violations!**

- The simplest – but not always the most successful – way to report hateful posts is available on many social media platforms, for example on Facebook: Click on the three dots at the upper edge of the post and then answer the questions about the reasons for the report. Facebook will then look into the matter and give you at least one answer.

- Report hateful or harmful content to the police: Take a screenshot or save the
link – ideally, along with the pertinent name and the date/time. You can file reports either online or at any police station.

(Possible questions for participants):

- Have you ever done any of these things? What happened when you did so?
- Which of these ideas do you plan to try out?

(as a conclusion, if there’s still enough time:)

Here is a tried-and-true basic perspective to adopt:

- Human diversity includes a diversity of opinions – and just because someone disagrees, or is a little eccentric, that does not mean they are a hater.
- Do not always assume the worst.
- When someone indicates they are willing to communicate, then make constructive use of that willingness. The aim is not to shout people down, but to encourage and inspire them to think. Always work towards a constructive dialog!
- Avoid cynicism, because it only angers people.
- Expose hate speech and fake news, and call attention to negative posts, if you can see a real point in doing so.
- You are not responsible for what others write, but you certainly are responsible for the way you answer!
THERE ARE MANY GREAT EXAMPLES!

PROCEDURE

Recommendation: Choose just a few examples and then look at those in greater depth.

VOICETEXT

“Many different associations and organizations are already working in the area of digital civil courage. A great many great projects are underway.

Here is a small selection – needless to say, there is much more out there:

Facing facts

- European program tackling hate crime and hate speech. It offers online courses for private citizens, activists, decision makers and many more.

Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD)

- Global ‘think and do’ tank to understand and create innovative responses to polarization, hate and extremism. Besides research and grassroot networks they also developed an educational program.

Common Sense Education

- Supports parents and teachers with everything they need to empower the next generation of digital citizens.

REPORTERS’ LAB

- Center for journalism research. On the website they offer an overview of fact-checking initiatives worldwide.

#IAMHere

- Founded in Sweden by journalist Mina Dennert. Today, there are 14 different Facebook groups practicing counter-speech in their respective
languages.

**International Network Against Cyber Hate (INACH)**

- Combats discrimination on the internet e.g. by supporting groups and institutions who want to set up a complaints bureau.”

**NOTES**

All of these groups are can be contacted online and offer additional information for visitors.
This slide introduces a brief interactive exercise. The idea in the exercise is to try out ways of pushing back against hate speech and inappropriate comments online. It's not about developing sophisticated counter-speech strategies.

Each of the next 4 slides presents a comment. Before you start, choose the comments (2-3) that you would like to use in the exercise. Read each comment out loud and ask 2-3 volunteers to state how they could answer it. At the end of the exercise, offer some information about the features and patterns commonly seen in hateful comments. In addition, offer promising alternative answers in keeping with the tips given in the “Additional information” section.

After the last example, initiate a brief discussion.

(Possible questions for the discussion):

- What was the toughest challenge for you personally?
- Have you ever come across similar comments online? If so, on what platforms?

“...A great many organizations and groups are now doing great things in this area. That said, every little bit extra can make a difference. Now, we will run through a little exercise to try out our digital civil courage.

In just a moment, I will show you a series of the kinds of hateful comments (one at a time) that you see in social media these days. I’ll then ask you to share the answers that come to your mind with the group.

Ok? Let’s get started.”

To give you an idea on the possible responses, here are some strategies that could be used:

Ask for further information, and for specific examples/proof

Here’s how this strategy works:
- Calmly ask for further information about the statement, such as sources, background, etc.

- Insist on receiving concrete evidence and explain why such evidence is important.

Possible examples, and tips for practical implementation:

- Often, a request for further information will get no response. When it does, do a fact-check.

- Ask about the implications of the statement.

- Explain the background behind your request.

Caution:

- Requests for further information can easily sound reproachful, along the lines of “What you’re saying is total nonsense!” The better way is to express your wish for more information, and your wish to understand the statement, in ways that show an honest interest and intent.

Fact-checking

Here’s how this strategy works:

- Explain what aspects of the statement are not factual, and back up your own remarks with proven facts. Wherever possible, name your sources and link them.

- Claims, beliefs, conspiracy theories, etc. cannot be fact-checked.

Possible examples, and tips for practical implementation:

- Workshops on fact-checking are available.

- Check a website’s legal pages. Does the website you’re checking even have them? Who is behind the website, and what other sorts of things has it published?

- Do a reverse image search on Google, for example. Use YouTube DataViewer for videos.

- Check fact-checking pages. Has the statement or image already been checked?

- Three arguments are better than 12; concentrate on the most important facts.

Caution:
• Your “facts” have to be real facts! Only real, proven facts from trustworthy sources count.

A clarification will often prompt a reaction such as “That’s not the way I really meant that!” Don’t allow yourself to get sucked into some kind of “being right” ping-pong. Let the facts speak for themselves.

**Understand the patterns at work**

Here’s how this strategy works:

• Rather than (immediately) addressing the specific points the statement is making, identify the type of pattern you are seeing. Possible examples, and tips for practical implementation:

• This is especially effective when a person is hopping around from topic to topic: “You’ve touched on a great many topics. I would like to comment on xy.”

• Once you’ve chosen a topic in this way, stay with it, just as you said you would: “Topic z is certainly also very important, but this is now about xy and that’s what I would like to comment on it…”

**Caution:**

• Don’t try to play therapist. Identify the patterns you see and understand how they need to affect your answers.

• The patterns you see in others are often based on fears. Don’t assume that a person has bad intentions. Take possible fears or worries seriously!

**Take a stand**

Here’s how this strategy works:

• Clearly formulate your own position, in terms of your own views, valid rules, etc.

• Be clear: “I cannot endorse statement xy! I simply cannot endorse a statement that is inappropriate or that seeks to malign a certain group.”

• Wherever possible, try to find common ground to work from: “Like you, I am convinced that we need to do more for the environment. Nonetheless…”

**Caution:**

• Avoid sounding like a know-it-all or as if you’re looking down on anyone! Instead, invite people to join with you in considering the issue.

• People are often afraid to speak out, so pluck up your courage! Do not try to apologize or take away from your views. Add a later explanation only if you really
need to.

**Clarify**

Here’s how this strategy works:

- It’s similar to fact-checking, but it comes into play when no sources are available. For example, when very general statements are involved, such as statements about the values of a society.

- Focus on the big picture, and establish a broad context.

- This can often be combined with a suggested change of perspective, such as “If you were in that position …,” “surely you’ve experienced X …,” “I’m sure you also are for …”

Possible examples, and tips for practical implementation:
- “Governments often face dilemmas in their decision-making. Sometimes they simply have to decide in favor of one side of an argument, without being able to produce a win-win situation. Still, that does not mean that…”

Caution:
- An overly instructional mode will put people on the defensive. Instead of sounding like a know-it-all, say things like, “One thing you may have overlooked is that …,” “One thing I’ve looked into is …”

**Humor**

Here’s how this strategy works:

- Respond with humor and a quick wit. Use exaggeration to highlight potential consequences.

- The aim is to get people thinking.

- Humor is often just the right thing, because it can put people at ease and pave the way for discussion.

- A humorous remark will often be easier for others to remember and pass on than the original statement was.

- Often, humor functions best in a stand-alone role, rather than in combination with other strategies.

Caution:
- Humor – especially satire – can be embarrassing or even injurious. Do not overdo it, and refrain from getting personal.

- Humor does not work if it betrays a lack of respect or reverence – for example, in cases in which people have suffered injuries.
PROCEDURE

Read the comment out loud and ask the participants how they might respond to it. Then describe the type of pattern the hateful comment exhibits, and offer general recommendations on how to respond.

VOICETEXT

“Let’s say you see this comment in social media:

“The so called ‘refugees’ don’t belong here!!!! In 2019 there were almost 1,400 sexual offences per day. 90% of the offenders were foreigners!!!!!”

How would you respond?”

NOTES

The used pattern is “Statistics ping-pong and alternative facts”

Characteristics:

- Citing of studies, numbers and statistics – some of which may be made up – in order to create the impression that science has it all wrong.

- Sometimes, this will be combined with conspiracy theories, with denial of proven facts and with fake news.

Examples of counter-strategies:

- Ask for further information, such as specific examples and sources.

- Fact-check: Check the cited sources yourself.

- Take a position
“THIS JUST NEEDS TO BE SAID!” – TABOO BREAKER

PROCEDURE

Read the comment out loud and ask the participants how they might respond to it. Then describe the type of pattern the hateful comment exhibits, and offer general recommendations on how to respond.

VOICETEXT

“Let's say you see this comment in social media:

“Someone has to say it out loud! Dangers from Islamism and left-wing extremism are the worst! Our so-called government is lying. CORRUPT BASTARDS!!!”

How would you respond?”

NOTES

The used pattern is “This just needs to be said!” – Taboo Breaker.

Characteristics:

- The writer styles himself as a brave soul who is willing to speak up and say what everyone is thinking but hasn't been willing to say.

- This will often be combined with crazy claims about potential consequences, and with specious contexts.

- Often, the writer will simply claim to be asserting his right to freedom of speech. His understanding of that right will clearly be a distorted one, however.

Examples of counter-strategies:

- Break through the pattern: “That sounds as if it would be taboo to speak about Islamic or left-wing extremism. That’s not how I see it at all. Those two kinds of extremism are both well-represented in published crime statistics.”

- Clarify

- Take a position: “I can’t see how our government would profit by trying to cover up extremism – regardless of which side of the political spectrum it might be coming from.”
PROCEDURE

Read the comment out loud and ask the participants how they might respond to it. Then describe the type of pattern the hateful comment exhibits, and offer general recommendations on how to respond.

VOICETEXT

“Let’s say you see this comment in social media:

Why should WE clean up the MESS of those so-called asylum-seekers. If those ‘skilled workers’ are too stupid or feel above doing those menial tasks they should have stayed in their dirty countries. And why should WE share our country with Islamists and criminal Africans who rape our wives and daughters? Luckily, most people finally got the picture!”

How would you respond?”

NOTES

The used pattern is “1001 other topics”.

Characteristics:

- Stringing together of unrelated topics
- This tactic is used as a way of intentionally sowing confusion.
- It will often leave readers powerless to respond.
- If you allow yourself to be drawn into the confusion, you’ll get nowhere with your arguments.

Examples of counter-strategies:

- Break through the pattern: “You’ve mentioned a great many topics at once. I would like to respond to xy.” And then either stick with that topic or leave the discussion. You may find it necessary to address the speaker’s intentions: “I’m getting the feeling that you are trying to disrupt the discussion.”
“THERE IS NO HOPE!” – SCARE TACTICS

PROCEDURE
Read the comment out loud and ask the participants how they might respond to it. Then describe the type of pattern the hateful comment exhibits, and offer general recommendations on how to respond.

VOICETEXT
“Let’s say you see this comment in social media:

WAKE UP PEOPLE!!!!!! We cannot stop climate change! Give me a freaking SUV! ENJOY LIFE AS LONG AS YOU CAN!!!!!.

How would you respond?”

NOTES
This is the pattern “There is no hope!” – Scare Tactics.

Characteristics:

- Uses highly dogmatic, black-and-white statements with no room for nuance
- Tries to create a doomsday mood
- Stirs up emotions
- Seeks to show and justify defiant behavior

Examples of counter-strategies:

- Raise awareness: “From all the media reports, one can easily get the impression that all hope is lost. Latif Mohjib and many other climate scientists paint a different picture, however ...”

- Take a position: “If we want the world to change for the better, then we have to begin with ourselves. In my opinion, doing exactly the things that will make these problems worse is the wrong approach.”

- Humor: “Yes, indeed, that’s always worked, hasn’t it — wilder and happier than ever, and after us the deluge!”
“We’ve now come to the end of our workshop. We have heard a great deal about hate speech online and about how each of us can stand up against it.

We have also learned why this is such an urgent issue: Because hate speech destroys many of the great benefits we find in social media and online in general.

It is needless to say that the battle against hateful behavior online is not just an issue for civil society. Policymakers are called to pass clear laws in this area. Platform providers need to establish and enforce democratic rules for the interactions on their platforms. On the other hand, there is no reason why we should wait until all these things have happened. Each of us has some responsibility for the things that happen in our society. When our democratic rules get broken, it’s not just the rule-breakers who are responsible. All of us who allow the rules to be broken are responsible, too!

When we stand up against hate, we gain the opportunity to help shape our society for the better. After you’ve taken a first-aid course, you may suddenly find yourself having to put your new knowledge into practice. And now you may suddenly find yourself needing to get involved online and take action against hate. In any case, our discussion today will probably help you be more aware, and willing, to try out one or two of the strategies we discussed.

Be courageous!

(Possible questions for the final discussion:)

- What did you learn from this?
- What was new for you?
- What are you going to tell your family and friends?
- What questions do we still need to answer?”