

ANTISEMITISM POLICY TRUST

Policy Briefing

August 2020



ONLINE AND
OFFLINE HARMS:
THE CONNECTION

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Introduction

For over a decade, the Antisemitism Policy Trust has been working to tackle anti-Jewish hatred online. During this period, the number of antisemitic incidents has risen dramatically. One key feature of that rise has been the number of online antisemitic incidents reported to the Community Security Trust, with 344 such incidents reported in the first six months of 2020, constituting the highest number ever recorded.¹ Online antisemitism ranges from overt racist anti-Jewish material to the often legal, but equally harmful, antisemitic stereotypes. Our report on Big Data revealed that negative stereotypes about Jews found to be searched on Google included the smears “Jews are evil”, “why are Jews so greedy” and “Jews are racist”. Violent searches about Jews on Google are also numerous, such as “kill Jews” and “Jews must die”.²

Online harms can manifest in numerous ways, from hatred targeted at many different communities and individuals, to disinformation and conspiracy theories, which are spreading at an alarming rate. This briefing

includes several case studies which demonstrate how online harms can impact the offline, physical world. As well as stoking tensions and prejudice, hate online has led to violent and murderous offline consequences: harassment, intimidation, vandalism, destruction, murder sprees and terrorism. The British Government has often stated that what is illegal offline must be illegal online and must not be tolerated. However, the link, whether causal or not, between online legal harms and illegal activity must be examined further, and there is a strong case for technology companies being subject to a meaningful statutory duty of care, something proposed for the UK Government’s forthcoming Online Harms Bill.

This briefing will examine the far right’s resurgence in the United Kingdom, terrorism, radicalisation, the danger posed by the incel community, the QAnon conspiracy theory and misinformation regarding coronavirus. Each of these issues exemplifies an element of online harm, with real world consequences.



Robert Bowers @onedingo

2 hours ago

HIAS likes to bring invaders in that kill our people.
I can't sit by and watch my people get slaughtered.
Screw your optics, I'm going in.



Comments



Repost



Quote

Post by Robert Bowers on social media platform Gab before he attacked a synagogue in Pittsburgh, murdering 11 people.
See page 6 for more information.

¹ <https://cst.org.uk/public/data/file/c/5/Incidents%20Report%20Jan-Jun%202020.pdf>

² <https://antisemitism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/web-extended-online-harms-briefing-2020.pdf>

Case Study One: Terrorism and Radicalisation

One of the most direct and obvious ways in which online harms can manifest offline, is through terrorism and radicalisation.³ Over a number of years, static websites and online extremist forums have moved to social media, allowing for a wider net of radicalisation.³ Though other significant instruments like mass media, family influence, education and other socio-political factors still remain, the use of social media for online radicalisation cannot be ignored. Radicalisation has been described as “a process leading towards the increased use of political violence”⁴ and the internet is certainly part of this stimulus, now labelled by experts as a “new media ecology”.⁵ Some have argued that membership of an online community is a far greater ‘pull factor’ than any ideological ‘push factor’ or motivation; propaganda online, and the kinship created, is the only reason some are drawn to a group with politically violent end goals.⁶ So significant is the online element to radicalisation, that the Head of the UK Prevent counter extremism programme called self-radicalisation via online materials a “greater threat” to Britain than Islamic State (ISIS), due to the volume of potential online recruits mobilised who may then commit violence acts.⁷

The internet alone is not the cause of radicalisation, but it has been labelled a “facilitator and catalyser” towards more violent acts by allowing for both the radicalisation and recruitment of potential terrorists.⁸ The design of social media to appeal to an individual’s interests, which then points them in the direction of like-minded users,

has led to an echo chamber effect, with other ideas drowned out. Extremists have taken advantage of the opportunities this environment presents.⁹ Whilst the full impact of radicalisation online, from the extreme right, particularly American neo-Nazis, Jihadist strategists, and other extreme groups seeking political violence,¹⁰ remains uncertain, it is clear by the examples presented in this section, and those that follow, make it clear that online harmful content can have serious and even fatal consequences. Professor Matthew Feldman, from the Centre for the Analysis of the Radical Right, has called the internet a “one-stop shop” for would-be terrorists; from radicalisation, sourcing weapons and learning how to build bombs.¹¹ Heidi Beirich, former head of intelligence at the Southern Poverty Law Centre succinctly described the possible radicalisation process that leads from online harms to offline violence:

“Assured of the supremacy of his race and frustrated by the inferiority of his achievements, he binges online for hours every day, self-medicating, slowly sipping a cocktail of rage. He gradually gains acceptance in this online birthing den of self-described “lone wolves,” but he gets no relief, no practical remedies, no suggestions to improve his circumstances. He just gets angrier. And then he gets a gun.”¹²

3 Alexander Meleagrou-Hitchens and Nick Kaderbhai, Research Perspectives on Online Radicalisation: A Literature Review, 2006 – 2016. Available from: https://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/ICSR-Paper_Research-Perspectives-on-Online-Radicalisation-A-Literature-Review-2006-2016.pdf

4 Ibid

5 Ibid

6 Ibid

7 <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/terrorists-radicalise-online-isis-threat-prevent-counter-extremism-attacks-a9257221.html>

8 Alexander Meleagrou-Hitchens and Nick Kaderbhai, Research Perspectives on Online Radicalisation: A Literature Review, 2006 – 2016. Available from: https://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/ICSR-Paper_Research-Perspectives-on-Online-Radicalisation-A-Literature-Review-2006-2016.pdf

9 Ibid

10 Ibid

11 <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/australasia/brenton-tarrant-christchurch-shooter-attack-el-paso-norway-poway-a9076926.html>

12 <https://www.splcenter.org/20140331/white-homicide-worldwide>

Christchurch Mosque Attack

In March 2019, Brenton Tarrant attacked two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, leaving 50 people dead and many injured. The inter-relation between online harms and consequent offline harms and violence is abundantly clear in this case. Prior to his attack, Tarrant had accessed 8Chan, the self-styled free speech platform, and posted his attack plans, writing that it was “time to stop shitposting and time to make a real-life effort.”¹³ This reference highlights his use of the platform to access and promote hate content. Prior to his attack, Tarrant posted a 17,000-word manifesto online, labelled The Great Replacement.

Tarrant has inspired others to commit similar atrocities. John Timothy Earnest, who carried out a gun attack on a synagogue in Poway, California, wrote online; “Brenton Tarrant was a catalyst for me personally. He showed me that it could be done. And that it needed to be done.”¹⁴ Similarly, 22 people were murdered in El Paso by Patrick Crusius who called himself a “supporter of the Christchurch shooter and his manifesto.”¹⁵

Many of the terrorists carrying out attacks are glorified online, on alternative platforms like Bitchute, and the so-called ‘gamification’ of their attacks seeks to reduce the human tragedy, inspiring others towards harm.¹⁶

Pittsburgh Synagogue Attack

On October 27th, 2018, gunman Robert Bowers entered a synagogue in Pittsburgh murdering 11 congregants and injuring six others. Co-workers of Bowers from the 1990s recalled a normal man, “with a bit of an anti-government streak” but not an antisemite inspired by violent hatred.¹⁷ Bowers was, however, later radicalised by white nationalism online, and became a follower of “aggressive online provocateurs of the right wing’s fringe.”¹⁸ Prior to his attack, Bowers had used the social media network Gab to post antisemitic messages about the Jewish community, in particular the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS). Five minutes before the police were alerted to the shooting, he wrote online, “HIAS likes to bring invaders in that kill our people, I can’t sit by and watch my people get slaughtered. Screw your optics, I’m going in.”¹⁹ He had also posted imagery of his guns a month before the attack.²⁰ After his attack and arrest, Bowers allegedly espoused more antisemitism, stating that he wanted all Jews to die and reportedly informing a SWAT team that “they [Jews] were committing genocide to his people.”²¹ Based on the testimony of those who knew Bowers in the decades before his attack, it is evident the online harms and hate he was consuming fuelled his anger. He found a scapegoat, immigrants, and exploded with antisemitic hatred, believing the conspiracy theories he had consumed online.

Bowers was later charged with dozens of counts of illegal behaviour, including hate crimes, using a firearm to commit murder, obstruction of religious freedom and use and discharge of a weapon. As of August 2020, Bowers has pleaded not guilty and is awaiting trial.²²

13 <https://hackinghate.eu/news/when-online-hate-speech-goes-extreme-the-case-of-hate-crimes/>

14 <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/australasia/brenton-tarrant-christchurch-shooter-attack-el-paso-norway-poway-a9076926.html>

15 Ibid

16 <https://cst.org.uk/news/blog/2020/06/11/hate-fuel-the-hidden-online-world-fuelling-far-right-terror>

17 <http://www.post-gazette.com/news/crime-courts/2018/11/10/Robert-Bowers-extremism-Tree-of-Life-massacre-shooting-pittsburgh-Gab-Warroom/stories/201811080165>

18 Ibid

19 <https://www.cnn.com/us/live-news/pittsburgh-synagogue-shooting/index.html>

20 <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/10/27/us/synagogue-attack-suspect-robert-bowers-profile/index.html>

21 Ibid

22 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-46062277>

Finsbury Park Mosque Attack

The speed at which online radicalisation can take place, leading to dire and fatal offline consequences, is most clearly evidenced in the attack perpetrated by Darren Osborne against Muslim worshippers outside Finsbury Park Mosque in 2017. The case itself demonstrates how the internet increases opportunities for self-radicalisation.²³ Described as a “loner”, Osborne was a “functioning alcoholic”. Like the Christchurch killer Brenton Tarrant, he was not seen as a threat and had not shown signs of aggression or strong political views.²⁴ He had become “obsessed” with Muslims through the consumption of far-right material online, provoked by his anger about the Rochdale grooming scandal. He was said to have subsequently begun to espouse hateful views about Muslims, grooming gangs and terrorism.²⁵

On the 19th June 2017, during Ramadan, Osborne, using a hired van, proceeded to drive into pedestrians at Finsbury Park Mosque, killing one person and injuring nine others. Eyewitnesses reported hearing Osborne shout “I want to kill all Muslims” amongst other inflammatory phrases.²⁶

Police describe Osborne as having been radicalised in only three to four weeks, through his consumption of online harmful material about Muslims, such as posts by former English Defence League leader Tommy Robinson and content by Britain first, amongst others.²⁷ Due to his quick radicalisation,²⁸ he was not known to the security services. He was later found guilty at Woolwich Crown Court and sentenced to life imprisonment.

Harmful Online Rhetoric Reactions to Online Reactions to Offline Harm

Online harms can lead to serious offline harm, but this can also work in reverse, leading to a cycle of abuse. Following Brenton Tarrant’s 2019 attack in Christchurch, harmful anti-Muslim rhetoric began to rise online. Moonshot CVE, which works to disrupt and end violent extremism, analysed the top online keywords related to the attack. It found that the top searches included anti-Muslim hatred, extremism and searches for radicalisation material:²⁹

- “Remove kebab lyrics” – an online reference popular amongst neo-Nazi groups, promoting ethnic cleansing of Muslims.
- “The Great Replacement PDF” and “The Great Replacement Book” and “The Great Replacement Download” (Brenton Tarrant’s racist manifesto)
- “Brendon Tarrant video” and “Brenton Tarrant video”
- “Antipodean Resistance Website” (a neo-Nazi hate group in Australia)
- “I will see you in Valhalla” (from old Norse for ‘Hall of the Slain’ where those who die in combat go to after death. Valhalla is often used in neo-Nazi and far right rhetoric)

23 Ines Von Behr, Anaïs Reding, Charlie Edwards, Luke Gribbon, Radicalisation in the digital era: The use of the internet in 15 cases of terrorism and extremism, Rand Europe, 2013

24 <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/darren-osborne-finsbury-park-attack-who-is-tommy-robinson-muslim-internet-britain-first-a8190316.html>

25 Ibid

26 <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/live/2017/jun/19/north-london-van-incident-finsbury-park-casualties-collides-pedestrians-live-updates>

27 <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/darren-osborne-finsbury-park-attack-who-is-tommy-robinson-muslim-internet-britain-first-a8190316.html>

28 <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/live/2017/jun/19/north-london-van-incident-finsbury-park-casualties-collides-pedestrians-live-updates>

29 Moonshot CVE, Analysing the Online Space After Christchurch, 2019. Available from: <http://moonshotcve.com/online-space-christchurch/>

Case Study Two: The Far Right Online in Britain

The far-right in Britain has become more organised and sophisticated, increasing hatred and the threat posed to civil society.³⁰ This sophistication includes an online element which has connected individuals and groups, focused on their fear of immigrants, hatred of Jews and others who they do not deem British, and their belief in Jewish control. Some of those consuming this content not only propagate it further online, but have brought it onto the streets, threatening Jews, the Jewish community and others.

National Action

One of the most significant developments on the far right in recent years is the formation of the neo-Nazi group National Action. This organisation was rooted heavily in the British National Party's youth wing, which was founded by two men in their twenties in 2013. In December 2016, National Action was proscribed by the British government as a terror group, meaning that belonging to the group or showing signs of support is illegal.³¹ This was the first far right group to be proscribed in the United Kingdom since the Second World War, and several other proscriptions have since taken place. However, that proscription did not fully curb the harm the group spreads online, which has led to offline consequences.

National Action was an umbrella body for a new breed of far-right activists. These activists used the online space in a way that other far-right groups and individuals had not. They produced slick videos, memes and images which they shared online. They were labelled by anti-racism experts, Hope Not Hate, as "masters of manipulation on social media."³² Through these mechanisms National Action activists shared their



Zack Davies who attacked a man in North Wales. Still taken from a video Davies uploaded to YouTube

hatred of Jews, of liberal democracy and minorities.³³ They venerated Adolf Hitler and called themselves "White jihadis."³⁴ They regularly posted videos on social media videos, including of their various activities including training to fight, daubing antisemitic graffiti and about their ideology.³⁵ This would attract followers to their cause, often individuals yearning for kinship and a purpose. Offline, National Action held training camps to teach violence and self-defence.³⁶ They have been labelled "ISIS inspired", with training camps including preparation for using knives and engaging in hand-to-hand combat.³⁷

Zack Davies, a high-profile adherent of the group, attacked Dr Sarande Bhambra with a hammer in a branch of Tesco in Mold, North Wales in 2015.³⁸ He said he chose his victim because he "looked Asian."³⁹ Davies claimed the attack was revenge for the murder of Fusilier Lee Rigby, who was killed by two adherents of the Islamist group Al Muhajiroun. Davies was alleged

30 <https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/State-of-Hate-2018.pdf>

31 <https://cst.org.uk/news/latest-news/2016/12/12/cst-welcomes-government-announcement-to-ban-neo-nazi-national-action>

32 <https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/research/investigations/briefing-national-action/>

33 Ibid

34 Ibid

35 <https://www.channel4.com/news/national-actions-zack-davies-guilty-of-attempted-murder>

36 <https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/research/investigations/briefing-national-action/>

37 <https://www.channel4.com/news/national-actions-zack-davies-guilty-of-attempted-murder>

38 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-north-east-wales-34218184>

39 <https://www.channel4.com/news/national-actions-zack-davies-guilty-of-attempted-murder>

to have developed “extreme racist views”, he posted online videos of himself standing in front of a Nazi flag and frequented online racist forums.⁴⁰ He was also allegedly involved in Ironmarch, a Russian online network advocating for race war.⁴¹ Matthew Collins of Hope Not Hate has called Davies “clearly disturbed” and a person who was “radicalised by the online activities of a group that promise him some kind of kinship.”⁴² Former MP David Hanson said that Davies was “radicalised on the internet by neo-Nazi and Hitler

worshipping material.”⁴³ The case of Zack Davies, later sentence to life imprisonment, highlights the perils of online extremism and its radicalising effects.⁴⁴

Examining National Action’s web-based activities also helps to demonstrate how online harms can lead to non-violent, but threatening and abusive offline behaviour, which can lead to people living in fear. In 2014, a member of National Action, Garron Helm, was jailed for four weeks after posting an image on Twitter

of former Member of Parliament Luciana Berger with a Star of David superimposed onto her forehead and an antisemitic caption. He started a campaign of antisemitic hate against Berger, whilst a second front was opened up against her, spearheaded by the far-right in America. She received 2,500 antisemitic message in just three days, which included death threats.⁴⁵ This was part of the “Filthy Jew B***h Campaign” led by the white supremacist site, the Daily Stormer.⁴⁶ The abuse included images manipulated with violent, sexual and Holocaust imagery.⁴⁷ This online abuse spilled into the offline



National Action North West Branch Twitter account.
Note the Holocaust mockery in the bio and the use of ‘white jihad’



Post by National Action member, Garron Helm, which led to his imprisonment

40 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-north-east-wales-34218184>

41 <https://www.dailypost.co.uk/news/north-wales-news/zack-davies-mold-race-war--11889918>

42 <https://www.channel4.com/news/national-actions-zack-davies-guilty-of-attempted-murder>

43 <https://www.leaderlive.co.uk/news/15957051.calls-for-government-to-act-on-online-radicalisation-in-light-of-mold-machete-attack/>

44 <https://www.dailypost.co.uk/news/north-wales-news/zack-davies-mold-race-war--11889918>

45 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-merseyside-30545824>

46 <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/dec/07/racist-troll-guilty-harassing-labour-mp-luciana-berger-joshua-bonehill-paine>

47 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-merseyside-30545824>

sphere, and following Helm's imprisonment, a group of ten individuals turned up at Berger's Merseyside constituency office to hold an "antisemitic protest" in solidarity with him.⁴⁸ Although the protest was thankfully stopped by police, she had to have specialist security advice from police and was forced to change her behaviour, including avoiding travelling alone at night.⁴⁹ Unmistakeably, online harms and threats had a devastating impact on Berger's ability to conduct a normal life offline, free from fear of abuse, harassment or violence.

Joshua Bonehill-Paine

Unfortunately, this is not the only time that Berger has faced online and consequently offline threats from the far right. Joshua Bonehill-Paine has been described as a "racist internet troll."⁵⁰ He wrote a series of internet blogs about Berger which were hate-filled and antisemitic. He called her a "dominatrix" and an "evil money grabber" with a "deep-rooted hatred of men"⁵¹ Bonehill-Paine also echoed the antisemitic trope of Jewish control by suggesting online that the number of Jewish MPs in the Labour party was a "problem."⁵² Bonehill included offensive images in his posts, , including one with Berger's head superimposed on a rat.⁵³ Earlier in 2016, another internet troll, John Nimmo was convicted for saying Berger would "get it like Jo Cox", the Labour MP who was murdered by neo-Nazi Thomas Mair, and for telling Berger to "watch you back Jewish scum."⁵⁴

The offline impact of Bonehill-Paine's antisemitism harassment campaign, as well as the abuse by others online, was clear in Berger's evidence at trial. She stated that she felt sick and "under attack" and highlighted that "what happens online does not always stay online."⁵⁵ She also made clear in her evidence, summarised by the prosecutor, that "she was active, busy person who went



48 <https://www.liverpoolecho.co.uk/news/liverpool-news/no-further-action-against-neo-nazis-8552340>

49 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-merseyside-30545824>

50 <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/dec/07/racist-troll-guilty-harassing-labour-mp-luciana-berger-joshua-bonehill-paine>

51 Ibid

52 Ibid

53 Ibid

54 Ibid

55 Ibid



Demonstration at Whitehall, relocated from the heart of the Jewish community in London, Golders Green

about her daily business without concern” who changed to someone who had to cancel events due to fear.⁵⁶

The year prior, in 2015, Bonehill-Paine had also found himself in court, this time for inciting racial hatred which had led to an antisemitic demonstration in the heart of the Jewish community in London. Bonehill-Paine published a series of antisemitic leaflets and posts on his website, including a flyer for a demonstration in Golders Green, which called on people to “Liberate Golders Green for future generations of White People.”⁵⁷ He labelled the event an “anti-Jewification” demonstration and called for a “round-up” which would be an “absolute gas”, both references to the Holocaust.⁵⁸ The event, which was meant to take

place in Golders Green on the Jewish Sabbath, was relocated to Whitehall, with approximately 20-25 neo-Nazis showing up.⁵⁹ One attendee made a speech which included false accusations of a blood libel and was called a “compendium of just about every possible antisemitic accusation.”⁶⁰ This demonstration, had it taken place in Golders Green, could have had significant consequences for the feeling of safety and actual security of the Jewish community.

Following the case of racially aggravated harassment, Bonehill-Paine was found guilty in December 2016⁶¹ and was consequently jailed for three years and four months, to run consecutive to the prison term he was already serving for inciting racial hatred.⁶²

56 <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4013774/Anti-Semitic-troll-called-Jewish-Labour-MP-rodent-evil-money-grabber-deep-rooted-hatred-men-series-online-rants-jailed-two-years.html>

57 <https://jewishnews.timesofisrael.com/police-swoop-in-race-hate-arrest-ahead-of-gg-rally/>

58 Ibid

59 <https://cst.org.uk/news/blog/2015/07/07/what-happened-on-4-july>

60 Ibid

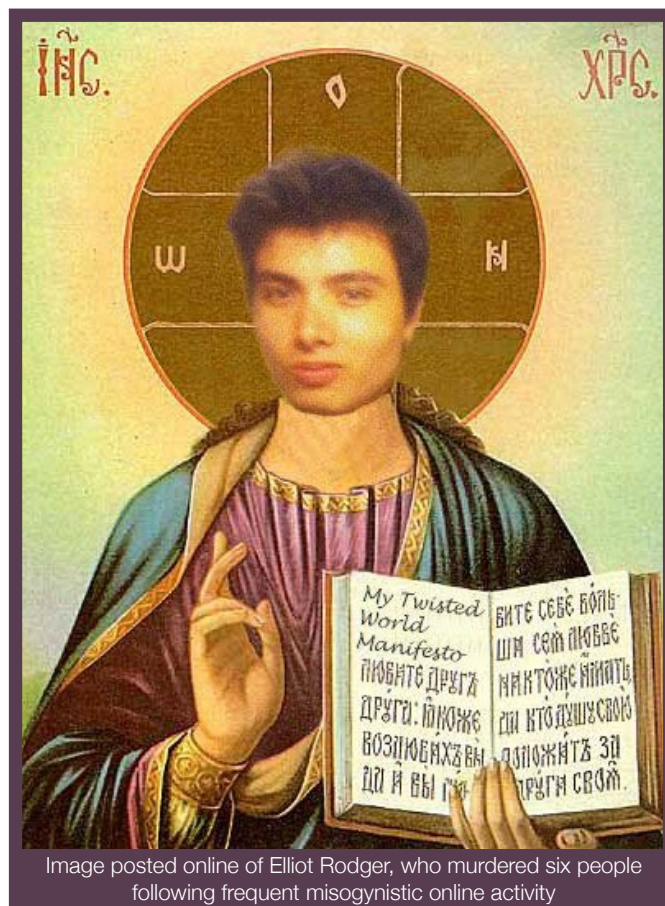
61 <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/dec/07/racist-troll-guilty-harassing-labour-mp-luciana-berger-joshua-bonehill-paine>

62 <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4013774/Anti-Semitic-troll-called-Jewish-Labour-MP-rodent-evil-money-grabber-deep-rooted-hatred-men-series-online-rants-jailed-two-years.html>

Case Study Three: Incel Danger

Involuntary celibates, otherwise known as incels, are part of the “online male supremacist ecosystem.”⁶³ They believe in a socio-genetic conspiracy theory that prevents them from having sexual relationships with women.⁶⁴ They have been described as part of an online subculture, starting in the 1990s and early 2000s, which was then described as a “kind of social justice warrior community”.⁶⁵ However, as Moonshot CVE has made clear, they are now a community who “self-hate, self-harm and increasingly take their own lives”.⁶⁶ The online harms experienced can negatively impact both the wider community offline, as well as those involved in the subculture themselves. At least six mass killings have taken place from members of the online incel community, with 44 deaths, since 2014.

Online, the incel community claim they have been “redpilled”,⁶⁷ a reference to the Matrix movie franchise, in which a person becomes enlightened to their situation. They call for violent attacks against people they call “Chads and Staceys”; people they perceive as successful sexually.⁶⁸ Low-level misogyny abounds, and this low-level hatred morphs into violent chatter, which leads to offline harms. Discourse focussing on women all being dishonest, shallow, superficial, and only attracted to looks and money is common.⁶⁹ None of these comments are illegal in the sense that they are considered a hate crime. However, the violent hatred online includes celebrating female murder and calling for the rights of women to be curtailed.⁷⁰ Reddit, an online forum style social media platform, banned the ‘r/incel’ subreddit which had over 40,000 members for “hosting violent content.”⁷¹



Offline, the cases of Elliot Rodger, who murdered six people in California in 2014, and Alek Minassian, who murdered 10 people in Toronto in 2018, demonstrate the level of danger presented by this online harm, namely the socio-genetic conspiracy theory of women being to blame for the incel’s supposed sexual inferiority.

In 2014, Elliot Rodger took to the streets of Isla Vista, California and murdered six people and injured 14 others, through gunshot, stabbing and vehicle ramming, before killing himself. He murdered three men

63 <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2018/04/24/i-laugh-death-normies-how-incels-are-celebrating-toronto-mass-killing>

64 <http://moonshotcve.com/save-incels-from-themselves/>

65 <https://www.vox.com/the-highlight/2019/4/16/18287446/incel-definition-reddit>

66 <http://moonshotcve.com/save-incels-from-themselves/>

67 Ibid

68 <https://theconversation.com/incel-violence-is-a-form-of-extremism-its-time-we-treated-it-as-a-security-threat-138536>

69 <https://www.elle.com/life-love/sex-relationships/a33782/involuntary-celibacy/>

70 https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/unmaking-of-an-incel_n_5b11a9aee4b0d5e89e1fb519?guccounter=1

71 Maria Scaptura and Katlin M Boyle, ‘Masculinity Threat, Incel Traits and Violent Fantasies Among Heterosexual Men in the United States’, Division on Women and Crime of the American Society of Criminology, July 2020

in his apartment, before setting off to a sorority house and shooting three women outside it. He also killed a man inside a restaurant and shot pedestrians, also hitting them with him his car. Rodger's first misogynistic incident was not the murders. He had been known to engage in low-level assaults, such as throwing drinks on women.

Online, Rodger frequently used the online forums PUAHate (PUA stands for 'Pick Up Artists' Hate) and Forever Alone, both known to be frequented by the incel community with high levels of misogynistic activity. Rodger himself contributed to the toxic atmosphere online. He set up a YouTube account where he recounted his isolation. Rodger sent out a 107,000-word manifesto, My Twisted World: The Story of Elliot Rodger, which detailed his plans for an attack, which he did not carry out. He called for concentration camps to be set up for women where they would be "deliberately starved to death". Rodgers posted a YouTube video where he complained about being rejected by women and called the next day, the "day of retribution".

Had Rodger's online behaviour, misogyny and the wider online harms he was espousing been addressed at system level, the situation might have been different. After the attack Rodgers was labelled an incel hero online.⁷² He was labelled the "supreme gentleman."⁷³ The Retribution video, posted by Rodger moments



before his attack, faced calls to be pulled offline as it could trigger copycat crimes from others in the incel community.⁷⁴ Indeed, in Toronto, one supporter, Alek Minassian, drove his van into a crowd murdering 10 people and injuring 15. Online, Minassian posted 'The Incel Rebellion has already begun!' and referenced Rodger's attack.⁷⁵

72 Maria Scaptura and Katlin M Boyle, 'Masculinity Threat, Incel Traits and Violent Fantasies Among Heterosexual Men in the United States', Division on Women and Crime of the American Society of Criminology, July 2020

73 <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2018/04/24/i-laugh-death-normies-how-incels-are-celebrating-toronto-mass-killing>

74 <http://www.newstatesman.com/science-tech/social-media/2017/01/why-we-should-stop-using-phrase-lone-wolf>

75 Maria Scaptura and Katlin M Boyle, 'Masculinity Threat, Incel Traits and Violent Fantasies Among Heterosexual Men in the United States', Division on Women and Crime of the American Society of Criminology, July 2020

Case Study Four: QAnon, Pizzagate and Coronavirus

The QAnon conspiracy theory, which has gained popularity online, began by an individual called 'Q' posting on the so-called freedom of speech platform, 4Chan in 2017.⁷⁶ Q, the poster, claimed to have top-level government security clearance, and continues to post in coded messages.⁷⁷ Some believe he is veteran SWAT-team sergeant, Matt Patten, who was pictured with Vice President Mike Pence in December 2018.⁷⁸ The theory claims a 'deep state' power struggle linked with a pyramid of political and media control, including the Israeli secret service, Mossad.⁷⁹ In essence, the theory claims to be seeking an understanding of 'the real truth' which is allegedly being concealed. The QAnon theory also claims that children are being detained and used by high-level paedophile rings. This has given QAnon believers a cause to believe in and supposed legitimacy for their movement.⁸⁰ In July 2020, following the arrest of Ghislaine Maxwell, an friend of Jeffrey Epstein who was accused of trafficking under-age girls for sex with high-level figures, the #SaveTheChildren hashtag exploded on Facebook and Instagram, with a huge spike in search interest on Google.⁸¹

Media Diversity Institute, who monitor for harmful and hateful content online, have found that many who propagate the QAnon conspiracy theory use antisemitic dog whistling and coded words.⁸² The theory is being used to denounce Jewish public figures, and global Jewry, echoing antisemitic theories of global Jewish control similar to that found in the antisemitic forgery, The Protocols of the Elders of Zion.

Pizzagate

The QAnon theory grew from the Pizzagate conspiracy theory, which went viral during the November 2016 American Elections. The theory claimed that emails leaked by WikiLeaks in November 2016,⁸³ from John Podesta, Hilary Clinton's campaign manager, included coded messages connecting members of the Democratic party of America to a human trafficking and child sex ring. The alleged paedophile ring was supposedly being run from the Washington D.C restaurant, Comet Ping Pong pizzeria.⁸⁴ In December 2016, gunman Edgar Maddison Welch, who was consumed by the legal but harmful conspiracy content, stormed the Comet Ping Pong Pizzeria, convinced that the family-owned business was an undercover paedophile ring and that words from Podesta's emails about pizza and pasta were actually about children.^{85, 86} Welch had allegedly "binge-watched" YouTube content with the Pizzagate affair and called his attack a 'rescue mission'.⁸⁷ He used a knife to try to unlock doors, to uncover the ring, and let off shots from his gun.⁸⁸ Luckily, no one was injured or killed in Welch's gun attack, and he was arrested and later sentenced to four years in prison.⁸⁹ Given Welch was carrying a revolver and an AR-15 on his mission, radicalised by the Pizzagate conspiracy, he could have very easily harmed innocent individuals.

76 Media Diversity Institute, QAnon and the growing conspiracy theory trend on social media, June 2020

77 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-53692545>

78 <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2020/06/qanon-nothing-can-stop-what-is-coming/610567/>

79 Media Diversity Institute, QAnon and the growing conspiracy theory trend on social media, June 2020

80 Ibid

81 <https://www.politifact.com/article/2020/aug/12/qanon-pizzagate-conspiracy-theories-co-opt-savethe/>

82 Media Diversity Institute, QAnon and the growing conspiracy theory trend on social media, June 2020

83 <https://wikileaks.org/podesta-emails/>

84 <https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-features/john-podesta-pizzagate-766489/>

85 <https://antisemitism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Online-harms-publisher-liability-August-2020.pdf>

86 <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2020/06/qanon-nothing-can-stop-what-is-coming/610567/>

87 <https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-features/john-podesta-pizzagate-766489/>

88 <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2020/06/qanon-nothing-can-stop-what-is-coming/610567/>

89 <https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-features/john-podesta-pizzagate-766489/>

Coronavirus

In the first few months of 2020, the need to address legal but harmful content online became ever more apparent with the spread of Coronavirus. Misinformation about the virus, cures, and 5G causation conspiracy theories led to a clear offline impact. 5G masts were being burned and people were being peddled dangerous cures for Coronavirus.⁹⁰ Others were being told that Coronavirus was fake, and that there is no need to protect oneself from the virus, leading to people risking not only their own health but the health of others. Anti-vaccination campaigners, misguided by debunked claims about vaccinations and autism, have alleged that Bill Gates, who has funded efforts to control the virus, is using the vaccine to control people.⁹¹

QAnon has been linked to the undermining of the Coronavirus pandemic, labelling it a “deep state” hoax to control the population.⁹² Adherents of Q alleged that Trump’s decision to wear a yellow tie to a briefing about the virus was a sign it was fake as, allegedly, the yellow flag represents there are no infected people aboard a ship.⁹³ In April, Q posted about ‘the elites’, saying “they will stop at nothing to regain power” and called worries about the Coronavirus pandemic “mass hysteria” alleging it was being used for political gain.⁹⁴

A study from the American Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene into misinformation and conspiracy theories about coronavirus showed this material has directly led to

the death of hundreds, with almost 6,000 people admitted to hospital, according to a study released in August 2020.⁹⁵ People were hurt by drinking bleach and other cleaning products and even cow urine.⁹⁶ Researchers found that states with the highest numbers of coronavirus infections, were also some of the top countries where misinformation about the pandemic was being spread.⁹⁷ The journal Psychological Medicine, from King’s College London, also found in a study from June 2020, that those who get their news mainly from social media are more likely to engage in risky behaviour and break lockdown rules.⁹⁸

As well as the risk of injury and death caused by the consumption of false conspiracy theories online, the theory about 5G radio waves causing coronavirus has led to attacks on 5G masts. Over 70 5G masts,⁹⁹ and other masts which have nothing to do with 5G have been vandalised in the United Kingdom, and telecom workers have been threatened.¹⁰⁰ In April 2018, a man in Gateshead accused the council of erecting 5G “antenna” which have started “killing everyone.”¹⁰¹ Two years later, during the early stages of the Coronavirus pandemic, they were believed by some to be harmful to health and having caused the virus.

Social media platforms have rightly engaged in cracking down on this behaviour, but this is due to the “imminent harm” caused,¹⁰² suggesting long-term effects of legal but harmful content online is less likely to be removed or considered.

90 <https://antisemitism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Online-harms-publisher-liability-August-2020.pdf>

91 <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-020-01452-z>

92 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-53692545>

93 <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2020/06/qanon-nothing-can-stop-what-is-coming/610567/>

94 Ibid

95 <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/gadgets-and-tech/news/coronavirus-deaths-conspiracy-theories-misinformation-cure-covid-19-facebook-5g-a9669311.html>

96 Ibid

97 Ibid

98 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-53085640>

99 <https://www.businessinsider.com/77-phone-masts-fire-coronavirus-5g-conspiracy-theory-2020-5?r=US&IR=T>

100 https://www.vice.com/en_uk/article/pke7yv/5g-coronavirus-conspiracy-theory-origin?utm_source=stylizedembed_vice.com&utm_campaign=m7jip3&site=vice

101 Ibid

102 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-53085640>

Regulation of Online Harms

It is evident that online harms, whether the content is legal or illegal, have led to offline harms, ranging from harassment and assault to murder. American social psychologist, John Suller, argued that a combination of anonymity and absence of moderating influences has led to the proliferation of hate online. Users not only engage in hateful bubbles, as we have seen through the previous case studies, but they “spur each other on.”¹⁰³

It is clear that self-regulation of the social media companies and internet platforms which allow for user-generated content, does not work. It requires legislation of the online sphere to curb these harms and their insidious spread. Several prosecutions have taken place for harms and antisemitism espoused online, but these represent a tiny fraction of the overall harms taking place. These cases include convictions under the Public Order Act, the Malicious Communications Act, the Crime and Disorder Act and the Communications Act.¹⁰⁴ However, it is crucial for legal but harmful content to be regulated, due to the potential harms, which are outlined in this briefing.

Legal harms can include discrimination. The British Board of Film Classification, which classifies films for release in the United Kingdom, extends provisions to any content which could “harm risks to potential viewers and through their behaviour to society.”¹⁰⁵ Online, this should certainly include antisemitic conspiracy theories which often lead to incitement and hatred against Jews. Ofcom already regulates against harms carried by programmes on our television screens. There must be a levelling up of the regulatory landscape.

In April 2019, the UK Government released the Online Harms White Paper which outlined the Government’s plans to regulate online harms. In order to efficiently enforce any new regulatory framework, an independent regulator, separate from the Government and from social media companies is required.¹⁰⁶ The regulator requires

broad powers including a mandate to promote education and awareness to further curb harms online that can spill into the offline sphere. Parliament would need to have a ‘hands-on’ approach in order to effectively scrutinise the regulator.¹⁰⁷

Online harms are not only spread on the larger, more well-known platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram. Effective regulation to curb online to offline harm must include any platform which allows for user generated content, such as start-ups. Platforms that have been co-opted by the far right and extremist groups, such as Telegram and Bitchute, should also be covered by any regulation, as they allow for echo chambers of hate. So too, self-styled ‘free speech platforms’ such as 4Chan and 8Chan must also be in scope. In each case, the platforms should be subject to a statutory duty of care, and follow codes of practice, including one on Online Harms which will help them develop systems-level approaches to addressing harm, including not directing consumers to harmful content.

However, it cannot be solely up to Parliament, the Government and civil society groups to police the internet. Social media platforms need to have accountability for items they host on their platforms.¹⁰⁸ Their own codes of practice must be pivotal in tackling the challenges of online hate, leading to offline harm. Safety features need to be implemented, algorithms need to filter out known abuse and hate words and imagery, and victims and witnesses need to have the confidence to report to the companies and know that action will be taken. Again, a duty of care and codes of practice will help develop a minimum standard for tackling online harms.

There is an argument that the current legal position relating to technology and social media companies has allowed for harms online to flourish. Under the European E-Commerce Directive (ECD) social media companies cannot be compelled to monitor by Member States

103 Institute for Strategic Dialogue and the Online Civil Courage Initiative, Hate Speech and Radicalisation Online, 2019

104 <https://antisemitism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/web-extended-online-harms-briefing-2020.pdf>

105 Ibid

106 Ibid

107 Ibid

108 Ibid

(though the platforms are free to do so). The companies have sometimes argued that if they do monitor proactively, it puts them in a position of risk because they could be considered to have ‘actual knowledge’ of illegal activity, at which point they could lose their liability shield.

Both through the rejection of the imposition of general monitoring and the liability exemption which such platforms enjoy, the reality is that the current system relies on self-regulation, which has failed. Additional clarity on what oversight can be applied to these platforms and clear accountability rules are required.

Conclusion

Through the case studies examined in this briefing, it is clear that illegal and legal harms online, often in the form of hate speech targeting a variety of identities, as well as misinformation and disinformation, can lead to serious offline consequences.

The internet has been shown to facilitate those with existing extreme and radical views to be led towards supporting or engaging in violent political acts, or terrorism, through online radicalisation. The internet, acting as an echo chamber, can provide greater opportunity than offline interactions to confirm these beliefs and fuel them.¹⁰⁹

The online space has been used to spread conspiracy theories concerning real world problems, such as child trafficking and coronavirus, in an effort to legitimise the claims of bad actors. This disinformation has led to direct harms, evidenced by events such as the Pizzagate attack, the death of hundreds due to coronavirus and the vandalization of telecom masts.

Criminologists have long made the connection between those who aggressively fantasise about murder and

violence, and those who go on to commit suicide, homicide, and mass violence.¹¹⁰ Those who have long term frustrations, whether justified or not, often find solace online in communities and forums where they can vent their grievances. Indicators online are often the espousal of hatred, calls for violence and engaging in aggressive chatter with others who share the same hate-fuelled frustrations. The “cumulative strain” can lead to violent fantasies, which can then lead to offline harm with serious consequences.¹¹¹ As we have seen in the case on incels, the cumulative strain of isolation and other frustrations, leading to engagement with misogynistic and violent chatter has led to several mass murders.

Both better understanding of harms and how they present, and regulation of the online space, are crucial to curbing the impact we experience. The online sphere does not exist in a vacuum. It leads to harm, destruction and death, which in turn leads to more harm online. The cyclical nature of this phenomenon needs to be controlled, and by controlling aspects of the online element, we will be one step closer to controlling the tide of increasing antisemitism, extremism and terrorism.

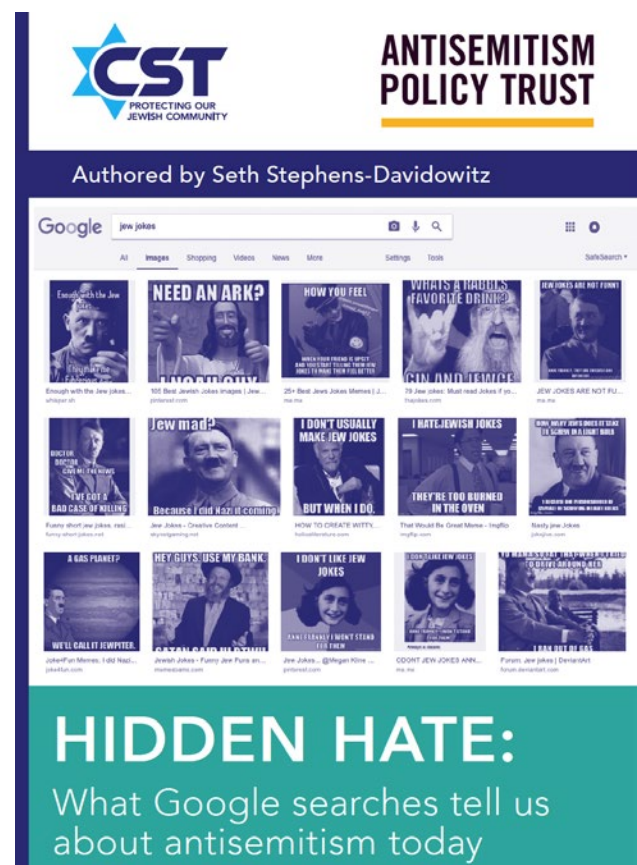
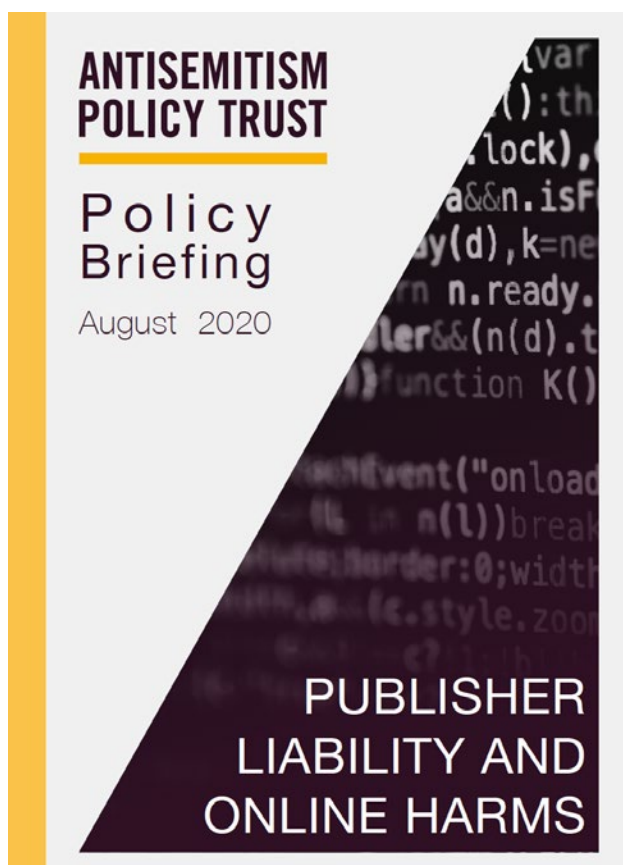
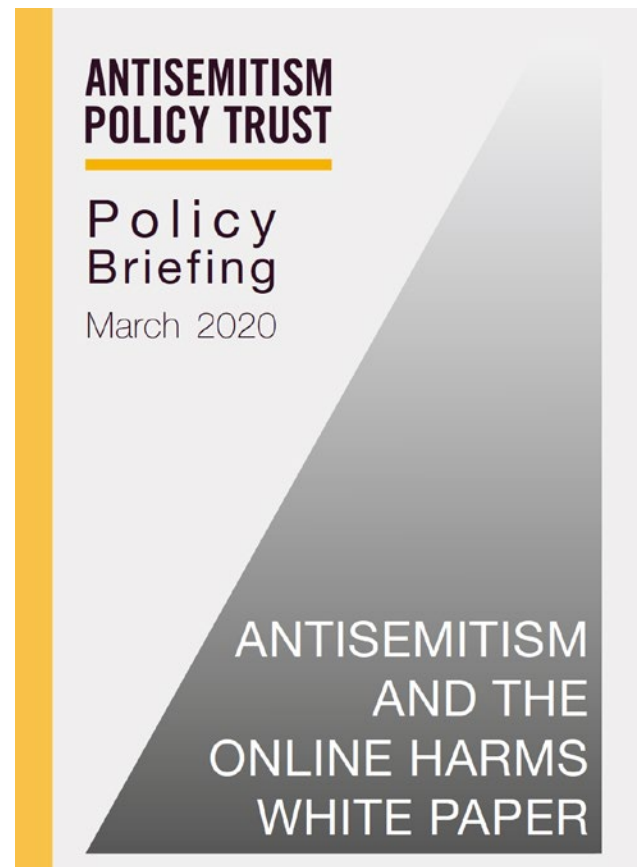
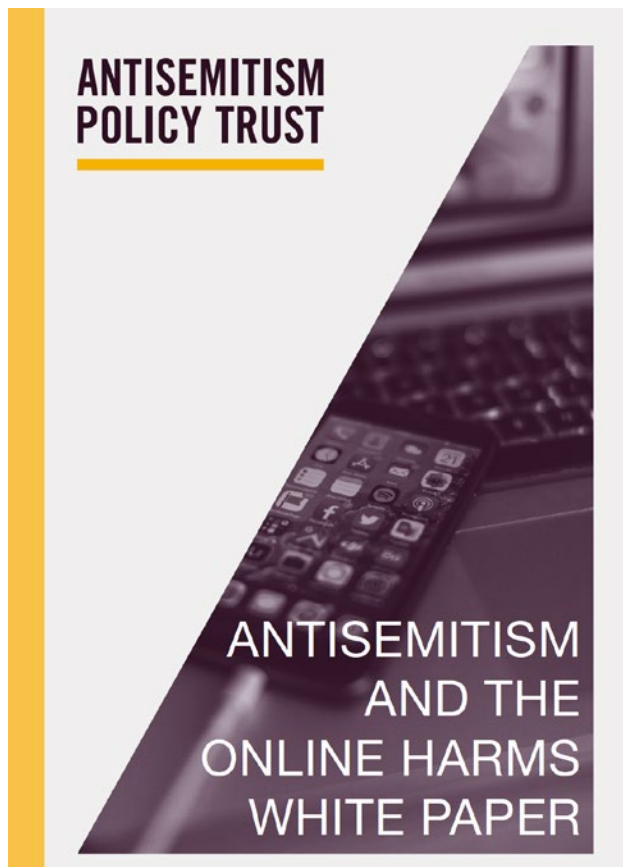
109 Ines Von Behr, Anaïs Reding, Charlie Edwards, Luke Gribbon, *Radicalisation in the digital era: The use of the internet in 15 cases of terrorism and extremism*, Rand Europe, 2013

110 Maria Scaptura and Katlin M Boyle, ‘Masculinity Threat, Incel Traits and Violent Fantasies Among Heterosexual Men in the United States’, *Division on Women and Crime of the American Society of Criminology*, July 2020

111 Ibid

Antisemitism and Online Harms

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