

# Countering Violent Extremism: From Defence to Attack

Sharyn Rundle-Thiele and Renata Anibaldi

While efforts directed at countering violent extremism have increased globally, the rates of radicalisation continue to grow, which suggests that alternative change approaches warrant consideration if we are to combat terrorism. Placing the needs and wants of the target audience at the heart of strategic thinking has been used for more than a century by market leading companies. This article contends that countering violent extremism may be enhanced by adopting a marketing philosophy and continues by providing an overview of how a marketing approach would be applied to counter terrorism.

Recent figures indicate that more than 20,000 people worldwide have left to fight in Syria and Iraq, surpassing Afghanistan conflict numbers experienced during the 1980s,<sup>1</sup> and this figure is continuing to grow. Like any aspirational company, Islamic State (IS) has a clear strategic plan. Its target audience is young Muslims, aged twenty to thirty, around the world, who are feeling alienated by the society in which they live. The stated aims of IS are to create an Islamic state in the Middle East, and to recruit fighters and supporters from around the world. IS sees itself as an alternative to governments around the world, and what it offers is proving attractive to its target audience.<sup>2</sup>

The marketing tactics of IS rival that of a top advertising agency. It conducts market research, produces merchandise—including branded T-shirts—and employs a tiered social media strategy to amplify its message. For one selected target audience, values such as adventure, fighting for a good cause, becoming a hero, and hanging out with brothers are emphasised,

---

<sup>1</sup> P. R. Neumann, 'Foreign Fighter Total in Syria/Iraq now Exceeds 20,000; Surpasses Afghanistan Conflict in the 1980s', ICSR, 26 January 2015, <[icsr.info/2015/01/foreign-fighter-total-syriairaq-now-exceeds-20000-surpasses-afghanistan-conflict-1980s/](http://icsr.info/2015/01/foreign-fighter-total-syriairaq-now-exceeds-20000-surpasses-afghanistan-conflict-1980s/)> [Accessed 11 January 2016].

<sup>2</sup> Emma Reynolds, 'ISIS: Slick PR, Great Wealth and Strategies to Rival any Corporate Machine', news.com.au, 24 August, 2014, <[www.news.com.au/world/isis-slick-pr-great-wealth-and-strategies-to-rival-any-corporate-machine/news-story/256f9d838a6addc37974ed665dcb9729](http://www.news.com.au/world/isis-slick-pr-great-wealth-and-strategies-to-rival-any-corporate-machine/news-story/256f9d838a6addc37974ed665dcb9729)> [Accessed 11 January 2016].

while for western Muslims a different strategy underpins engagement.<sup>3</sup> The appeal to western Muslims emphasises

no one is helping us, America is not helping us, the West is turning a blind eye because only Muslims are being killed, we need you, we understand you're studying, you're working, you have a family, but at this point in time if being Muslim means anything to you, you have to step up and come here and help out and defend your brothers and sisters.<sup>4</sup>

The number of IS recruits clearly indicates success in more than 20,000 cases for fighters alone, suggesting IS appeals are able to engage the target audience.

With random terrorist attacks on western targets being a growing concern, the tactics employed globally to counter violent extremism (CVE) require re-thinking. In contrast to other behaviour change approaches, marketing advocates an audience-oriented approach (i.e. bottom-up philosophy), as opposed to the more expert driven, top-down approach that is prevalent in many change disciplines including policy, law, education, and so on. Drawing on commercial marketing literature, organisations that focus on target audience needs and wants may achieve better outcomes in countering violent extremism compared to less audience-oriented approaches.<sup>5</sup>

This article commences by providing an overview of recent literature on the approaches to countering violent extremism, demonstrating limited use of marketing or a bottom-up philosophy to guide strategic decision-making. A bottom-up philosophy centres the target audience at the heart of strategic thinking, ensuring that any offering is delivered to meet the needs and wants of the target audience. This article continues with an overview of marketing to demonstrate how a marketing philosophy can be employed ensuring that any tactics are delivered to effectively meet the audience's needs and wants. It concludes by arguing that marketing may offer an alternative approach that can be used to effectively engage and retain the target audience, thereby counteracting CVE.

## Countering Violent Extremism: The Current State of Play

Countering Violent Extremism<sup>6</sup> has emerged in recent years as a priority policy and practice area for governments around the world, although its

---

<sup>3</sup> Matthew Liddy and Colin Gourlay, 'Explained: Where do Foreign Fighters in Iraq and Syria come from?', ABC News, 6 February 2015, <[www.abc.net.au/news/2015-02-06/map-foreign-fighters-iraq-syria/6052544](http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-02-06/map-foreign-fighters-iraq-syria/6052544)> [Accessed 11 January 2016].

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> E. M. Van Raaij and J. Stoelhorst, 'The Implementation of a Market Orientation: A Review and Integration of the Contributions to Date', *European Journal of Marketing*, vol. 42, nos 11/12 (2008), pp. 1265-93.

<sup>6</sup> Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) is defined as the banner used to describe efforts of Australian governments to prevent processes of radicalisation leading to violent extremism,

definition, typology, and process have evolved and continue to evolve since it was first referred to as a discrete field in the context of broader counter-terrorism activity in the mid-2000s.<sup>7</sup> The large variation in initiatives classed as CVE—from those that aim at changing behaviour, to ones that challenge ideas and beliefs, through to activities aimed at social cohesion—has resulted in many CVE approaches being unable to define the specifics of what they are preventing, let alone how or whether they have prevented it.<sup>8</sup> Heydemann commented that as a field of practice,

despite its impressive growth, CVE has struggled to establish a clear and compelling definition as a field; has evolved into a catchall category that lacks precision and focus; reflects problematic assumptions about the conditions that promote violent extremism; and has not been able to draw clear boundaries that distinguish CVE programs from those of other, well-established fields, such as development and poverty alleviation, governance and democratization, and education.<sup>9</sup>

Partly as a result of definitional ambiguity, the evidence base on the effectiveness of CVE remains largely disorganised. However, the failure to win the ‘war on terror’, and significant developments—such as the rise of IS, home-grown terrorism, the phenomenon of foreign fighters, and the primacy of cyberspace as a tool and stage of terrorism—have led governments to reflect on and refocus CVE policy and practice efforts.

At a broad level, CVE approaches have been classified based on their methods and their purpose in countering violent extremism. The juxtaposition of hard power and soft power is a frequent theme in policy and practice approaches in CVE<sup>10</sup> and has been used as an organising conceptual framework. Hard power approaches are generally associated with offensive or defensive interventions and include military, legislative, policing, infrastructure protection, crisis planning, and border security operations. Soft power approaches to CVE tend to be more pre-emptive or preventive and include: ideological interventions that counter religious extremism, promote liberal democratic ideals and encourage pluralistic world-views; communicative interventions that disrupt or counter extremism

---

including terrorism, and where possible to help individuals disengage from a preparedness to support or commit acts of violence to achieve political, social or ideological ends (Australian Government, 2015, p. 9).

<sup>7</sup> Peter Romaniuk, *Does CVE Work? Lessons Learned from the Global Effort to Counter Violent Extremism* (Indiana: Global Center on Cooperative Security, 2015).

<sup>8</sup> Shandon Harris-Hogan, Kate Barrelle and Andrew Zammit, ‘What is Countering Violent Extremism? Exploring CVE Policy and Practice in Australia’, *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression*, vol. 8, no. 1 (2016), pp. 6-24.

<sup>9</sup> Steven Heydemann, ‘Countering Violent Extremism as a Field of Practice’, United States Institute of Peace *Insights*, no. 1 (Spring 2014), pp. 1-5.

<sup>10</sup> Minerva Nasser-Eddine, Bridget Garnham, Katerina Agostino and Gilbert Caluya, *Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Literature Review* (Edinburgh, SA: Counter Terrorism and Security Technology Centre, Defence Science and Technology Organisation, 2011).

through narrative approaches, language and rhetorical strategies; political approaches that address grievances through political processes, state building, activism, political support for civil society groups, and political support for moderate views; social interventions that address social conditions that are thought to generate support for violent extremists, providing opportunities for disengagement from violent extremism, supporting alternative pathways to joining violent extremist groups, supporting civil society and approaches that foster social cohesion.<sup>11</sup>

Echoing the different aims of offensive or defensive activities and pre-emptive activities, Romaniuk<sup>12</sup> distinguished between measures that are CVE specific and those that are CVE relevant. CVE-specific measures directly target violent extremism that is evident through behavioural and cognitive radicalisation. On the other hand, CVE-relevant measures indirectly target extremism by reducing vulnerability to factors presumed to favour extremism through education, development, and women's rights and youth initiatives.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, Aly et al.<sup>14</sup> conceptualise a CVE pyramid which includes three levels of CVE, from community based prevention, to intervention, to reaction which represent a transition from soft to hard power measures with an increasingly targeted focus.

Based on a public health framework of Primary-Secondary-Tertiary (PST) intervention points, Harris-Hogan et al.<sup>15</sup> categorised federally funded and coordinated Australian CVE projects run between 2010 and 2014, based on project goals, target groups, outputs, and measures of change. Primary interventions focus on prevention by addressing conditions, behaviours, and attitudes which may be conducive to radicalisation. Secondary interventions target individuals on the periphery of extremist groups who may be engaging in social networks containing extremist influences, or expressing support for a violent extremist ideology. Secondary measures include education on the consequences of radicalisation, motivational training, family involvement, and specialised assistance to deter or reverse ideological or cognitive radicalisation. Finally, tertiary-level CVE programs are designed to de-radicalise individuals who may or may not have engaged in violent extremist behaviours. Tertiary interventions include those taking place in correctional facilities with returned fighters.

The results of Harris-Hogan et al.'s<sup>16</sup> categorisation of Australian CVE projects based on the PST framework indicated that the point of intervention

---

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Romaniuk, *Does CVE Work?*

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Anne Aly, Anne-Marie Balbi and Carmen Jacques, 'Rethinking Countering Violent Extremism: Implementing the Role of Civil Society', *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism*, vol. 10, no. 1 (2015), pp. 3-13.

<sup>15</sup> Harris-Hogan et al., 'What is Countering Violent Extremism?'

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

for the majority of projects has been at the primary level involving broad geographic prevention which aimed to address cognitive radicalisation by building resilience at the community level and increasing social harmony, through mentoring, intercultural and interfaith education, and online resources and training. However, there is little to no independent research suggesting that social cohesion or prevention initiatives have led to an actual reduction in violent extremism anywhere in the Western world.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, conceptually linking counter-terrorism, violent extremism with social harmony and cohesion in broadly-targeted community approaches has been criticised for stigmatising Muslim communities and for being based on flawed assumptions about the role of religion in violent extremism.<sup>18</sup>

The focus on broadly targeted prevention initiatives has meant that CVE projects in Australia have rarely directly engaged with individuals on a radicalising trajectory. However, in its recent review of the nation's counter-terrorism strategy the Australian Government has committed to prioritising activities that focus on threats from individual violent extremists.<sup>19</sup> This is evident in the 'Living Safe Together'<sup>20</sup> program which emphasises diverting individuals from behavioural radicalisation and violent extremism through tailored intervention programs, education, and engagement activities and online initiatives. This program also predicts a greater role for community-led interventions which are likely to represent greater long-term solutions to reducing terrorism, as well as having greater benefits for offenders, their families and their communities. For example, the evaluation of online campaigns promoting non-violent political activism or aiming to counter violent extremism in Muslim youth in Western Sydney found that, relative to government-badged campaigns, community-developed and sponsored initiatives had better reach and acceptance.<sup>21</sup> The involvement of civil society at the grassroots level is also advocated by Aly et al.<sup>22</sup> as effective in formulating and delivering relevant and effective counter-narratives to those of extremism.

Although the greater targeting of CVE is now a programmatic priority, the identification of populations, groups or individuals at risk is a key challenge. Much of CVE programming is posited on (implicit or explicit) theories of change of how a person or group moves from non-violence to violent extremism, and vice versa. However, there is as yet little evidence or

---

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Aly et al., 'Rethinking Countering Violent Extremism'.

<sup>19</sup> Romaniuk, *Does CVE Work?*

<sup>20</sup> Australian Government, 'Living Safe Together', <[www.livingsafetogether.gov.au/pages/home.aspx](http://www.livingsafetogether.gov.au/pages/home.aspx)>

<sup>21</sup> Roslyn Richardson, 'Fighting Fire with Fire: Target Audience Responses to Online Anti-Violence Campaigns', ASPI Report (Canberra: Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 2013).

<sup>22</sup> Aly et al., 'Rethinking Countering Violent Extremism'.

consensus on the motivational and structural factors of the radicalisation and counter-radicalisation processes, nor a representative terrorist 'profile'.<sup>23</sup>

Ali et al.<sup>24</sup> suggest that marketing strategies can enhance the development of CVE prevention initiatives that also target attitudinal and behavioural change. Concepts commonly applied in commercial and social marketing such as the theory of reasoned action<sup>25</sup> are suggested as offering a framework for understanding attitudes, behaviours and intentions in relation to violent extremism and the construction of counter narratives. In Australia, it seems marketing has not been applied to CVE, although marketing concepts are being introduced to military training in the United States as a means to 'shape' perceptions of indigenous populations in combat zones.<sup>26</sup>

## Marketing as a Combat Tool?

The application of marketing to countering violent extremism might be non-intuitive in the first instance. Marketing is mostly associated with the commercial world, to engender, promote, and support an exchange between parties, a customer who buys a product (a good, a service, or an idea) and a seller who provides the product. The effectiveness of commercial marketing is indisputable, and the tools and techniques that marketers employ cause us to knowingly and unknowingly make consumption choices each and every day.

In simple commercial marketing terms, the two parties involved in an exchange would be a customer who buys the product (a good, service or idea) and the organisation that sells the product (a good, service or idea). Marketing involves understanding the market to then design, implement and deliver a product that resonates with the wants and needs of the customer, by either offering a solution or satisfying a want. Recall that IS has been implementing a clear strategic plan that evolves over time as the organisation's needs grow. Initially, IS targeted young Muslims around the world, aged twenty to thirty, who were feeling alienated by the society in which they live; today IS has extended its targeting to young women as it actively seeks wives, accountants and a broader community to the Islamic state. For some time now, IS has been offering a solution and in doing so satisfying the needs and wants of its target audiences—fighters, wives and accountants.

---

<sup>23</sup> Lasse Lindekilde, 'Introduction: Assessing the Effectiveness of Counter-Radicalisation Policies in Northwestern Europe', *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, vol. 5, no. 3 (2012), pp. 335-44.

<sup>24</sup> Aly et al., 'Rethinking Countering Violent Extremism'.

<sup>25</sup> Icek Ajzen, and Martin Fishbein, *Understanding Attitudes and Predicting Social Behavior* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1980); Martin Fishbein and Icek Ajzen, *Belief, Attitude, Intention, and Behavior: An Introduction to Theory and Research* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1975).

<sup>26</sup> Todd C. Helmus, Christopher Paul, and Russell W. Glenn, *Enlisting Madison Avenue: The Marketing Approach to Earning Popular Support in Theaters of Operation*, Vol. 607 (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2007).



Marketing extends far beyond selling of product and services. Since Theodore Levitt proposed a link between a market orientation and business survival, in a paper called 'Marketing Myopia',<sup>27</sup> marketing has, indeed, become the driving force in many successful organisations.

At its core, marketing is a philosophy or a way of thinking that entails in-depth understanding of the factors that are significant in the lives of those in the target market and then the ability to design, implement and deliver a program (a good, a service or an idea) that addresses those key driving factors. The philosophy underpinning marketing can be applied in any setting. For some decades now politicians have been using marketing to win power and be elected into government. Similarly, marketing has been used to combat environmental, social and health problems such as unhealthy eating,<sup>28</sup> problem alcohol use,<sup>29</sup> water use, littering, immunisation and unsafe sex.

Marketing is an approach that puts the target audience at the heart of all decisions. Rather than asking which ideal should we communicate, marketers who adopt best practice marketing thinking ask what would our target audience value or like us to offer and then they deliver a program that meets the identified needs and wants.

Firms with a market orientation perform better than firms without a market orientation.<sup>30</sup> Research shows that companies who have a well-defined marketing strategy perform better than companies that do not have a well-defined marketing strategy.<sup>31</sup>

Marketers need to learn what the target audience wants and needs and to then deliver a solution accordingly. This is an ongoing process as target audience preferences are continually evolving and satisfaction with the offering needs to be monitored to ensure that audience expectations are met. Target audience needs and wants change with each product purchased, service consumed, magazine read, competitor action and reaction, conversation had or television program watched. Marketers must

---

<sup>27</sup> Theodore Levitt, 'Marketing Myopia', *Harvard Business Review*, vol. 38, no. 4 (July/August 1960), pp. 45–56.

<sup>28</sup> Julia Carins and Sharyn Rundle-Thiele, 'Eating for the Better: A Social Marketing Review (2000-2012)', *Public Health Nutrition*, vol. 17, no. 7 (2014), pp. 1628-39.

<sup>29</sup> Krzysztof Kubacki, Sharyn Rundle-Thiele, Bo Pang and Nuray Buyucek 'Minimising Alcohol Harm: A Systematic Social Marketing Review (2000-2014)', *Journal of Business Research*, vol. 68 no. 10 (2015), pp. 2214-22.

<sup>30</sup> John C. Narver and Stanley F. Slater, 'The Effect of a Market Orientation on Business Profitability', *Journal of Marketing*, vol. 54, no. 4 (1990), pp. 20-35.

<sup>31</sup> Robert G. Cooper, Christopher J. Easingwood, Scott Edgett, Elko J. Kleinschmidt and Chris Storey, 'What Distinguishes the Top Performing Products in Financial Services?', *Journal of Product Innovation*, vol. 11, no. 4 (1996), pp. 281-99; B. C. Gosh, Teo Sock Kim, and Low Aik Meng, 'Factors Contributing to the Success of Local SMEs: An Insight from Singapore', *Journal of Small Business and Entrepreneurship*, vol. 10, no. 3 (1993), pp. 33-45.

use information to maintain their understanding. Marketers must be creative, responsive, adaptive, fast and able to develop new ideas ensuring that the offering is superior to competing alternatives. Markets are cluttered and there are many options available to the target audience. The best marketers are able to offer something over time that is more highly valued than competing alternatives for the target audience.

## **The Marketing Process**

The *marketing process* involves understanding the target audience in order to design, implement and later evaluate a program designed to overcome the problem at hand. A simplified overview of the marketing approach to counter IS is now offered. In practice, this requires vast experience and training in marketing to address social problems.

### **UNDERSTANDING**

Marketers start by understanding the target audience, the market and how they are currently situated. This involves undertaking extensive primary research to gain insights into the problem the marketer currently faces and/or reviewing data to understand what is (and is not) reaching the target audience. In terms of countering violent extremism some research exists to guide initial enquiry. Firstly, we know that Muslims around the world aged twenty to thirty may be at higher risk of feeling alienated in the societies in which they live. Armed with this knowledge the market is defined for the marketer.

Marketers need to undertake a situation assessment to understand how they are positioned relative to alternatives that are available to the target audience. First, this requires understanding what competes for time within that market. A marketer needs to undertake a competitive assessment to understand the activities, occupations and other things that occupy time for Muslims twenty to thirty years old. By understanding the activities and occupations that compete for time a marketer is better placed at developing an offering for the market that is different, and offers superior benefits to the activities that are currently being undertaken by the individuals they wish to target. Importantly, in the case of countering violent extremism marketers need to assess the attraction to IS for targets recruited. Typically, marketers seek to develop a market offering that is superior to the competition, which in this instance would require developing an activity that is more appealing than joining brothers in arms in the Middle East. A competitive assessment would assist to understand which other activities offer the motivation to join.

A key understanding in marketing is that the market is not homogenous—rather, markets are comprised of individuals who have different beliefs, backgrounds (demographic factors such as age, income, family structures, etc.), behaviours and places lived. With this understanding marketers seek to segment the market. In this case, a large scale survey of Muslims aged



twenty to thirty living in Australia offers a critical first step to arrive at a detailed understanding of the market. According to current understanding of best practice this understanding should be theoretically derived to ensure optimal outcomes. For example, the theory of planned behaviour has been successfully used to explain behavioural intention in a wide range of settings,<sup>32</sup> enhancing capability to predict behavioural intentions. Further, examples of theory driven approaches exist including socio-ecological models that take the broader environment into account to more directly account for behaviour.<sup>33</sup> Examples of segmentation studies abound resulting in descriptions of groups that inform decision-making in the design stage.<sup>34</sup> Ideally, personas are used to assist strategic and tactical thinking.

Market segmentation is underpinned by the idea that a heterogeneous market can be divided into smaller homogeneous markets based on their different product preferences and/or their different response to market offerings. At the core of segmentation lies a desire to optimise the efficiency and effectiveness of marketing efforts to ensure the most effective use of limited resources. Individuals who share similar characteristics can be identified and grouped so the companies can target the group(s) offering most appeal with a tailored offering delivering better reach, trial and retention.

## DESIGN

Armed with an understanding of the market in which they are trying to compete and the group(s) to be targeted, the marketer then commences with the design of the program (in cases where an equivalent is not currently available) or program re-design to better meet the needs and wants of the groups to be targeted. The creative process involves developing a brand that resonates with the target audience to capture their awareness and a marketing program that encourages trial and later repeated use of the offering. For marketers, decisions need to be made around the program to be delivered to market (including pricing, human resourcing, program composition), how the program is to be communicated with and delivered to the target audience(s) recalling that different programs may be necessary for different segments or alternative approaches to reaching different segments with one program may be warranted. Recall that marketing is a bottom-up approach. Consequently, the design phase involves consultation with the

---

<sup>32</sup> Lisa Schuster, Krzysztof Kubacki and Sharyn Rundle-Thiele, 'A Theoretical Approach to Segmenting Children's Walking Behaviour', *Young Consumers*, vol. 16, no. 2 (2015), pp. 159-71.

<sup>33</sup> Julia Carins and Sharyn Rundle-Thiele, 'Fighting to Eat Healthfully: Measurements of the Military Food Environment', *Journal of Social Marketing*, vol. 4, no. 3 (2014), pp. 223-39.

<sup>34</sup> See, for example, Timo Dietrich, Sharyn Rundle-Thiele, Lisa Schuster, Judy Drennan, Rebekah Russell-Bennett, Cheryl Leo, Matthew Gullo and Jason Connor, 'Differential Segmentation Responses to an Alcohol Social Marketing Program', *Addiction*, vol. 49 (2015), pp. 68-77; Schuster et al., 'A Theoretical Approach to Segmenting Children's Walking Behaviour'.

segment group(s) to be targeted and recently co-design methods have been detailed ensuring that program design is customer oriented.<sup>35</sup> Additionally, approaches are tested during development ensuring the target audience is favourable towards the program being designed.

### **IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION**

During implementation and at the conclusion of a marketing program, marketing metrics and other systems can be used to *evaluate* marketing performance. Marketers seek to assess brand awareness. Ideally, brand awareness levels of at least 80 per cent are sought to ensure that the market knows the program exists. In the event that awareness is high and program uptake is low, marketers rapidly understand their program has failed to beat the competition and research is needed to understand why the target market has failed to take up the program. If the program is succeeding marketers understand that they cannot rest on their laurels as markets are dynamic. Competing marketers, in this case IS, would respond to attacks by altering their appeals in an attempt to reverse drops in recruit numbers. Armed with this understanding marketers continuously evaluate program performance to understand how programs can be further optimised to deliver what the target audience needs and wants. Program adjustments are made to continually deliver an offering that is designed to beat the competition.

The marketing cycle is best considered as an ongoing loop where marketing programs are constantly revised and refined. It is evaluation, throughout and after marketing efforts, that makes the marketing process cyclical in nature. It is also evaluation that truly enables a marketer to know, understand and respond to changes in the market.

Violent extremism in western countries has manifested itself mostly in the phenomenon of 'foreign fighters' and through acts of terrorism committed by lone wolves. Although there are reports that IS is losing ground, and evidence of a reduction of western fighters joining IS, the wars and civil unrest in Iraq and Syria, and their surrounding regions, continue. It is not possible to predict the impact of this developing situation on violent extremism in the West. However, the strife of Muslims populations in war regions, and perceptions of concerted victimisation of Muslims by the West (supported by extremist propaganda) have accompanied the rise of radicalisation and extremism in the past. Diminishing military strength of IS and persistent conflict and instability in Muslim majority countries may ultimately increase the threat of random extremist acts.

The overview of recent literature earlier in this article indicates that multiple factors may be implicated in individual and group trajectories towards violent extremism, although there is not conclusive evidence on how these factors

---

<sup>35</sup> Timo Dietrich, Sharyn Rundle-Thiele, Lisa Schuster and Jason Connor, 'Co-Designing Social Marketing Programs', *Journal of Social Marketing*, vol. 6, no. 1 (2016), pp. 41-61.

may combine into 'typical' profiles or pathways. Against this background, countering an extremist threat requires addressing what is known about structural and individual factors that potentially facilitate radical and extremist discourse and action, as well as providing support for sources that may have a moderating impact.

Research indicates that there are shortcomings in broadly based preventative interventions that have characterised many government-led responses to radicalisation and extremism. While there is agreement that prevention is an important element of countering violent extremism, the impact of programs that target entire groups based on religion is not amenable to measurement, is prejudicial and may actually be counter-productive.

The research evidence, while incomplete and inconclusive in several areas, points to the need for specifically targeted programs that are developed and delivered by the community in response to identified risks and needs. Programs of this type can include interventions that are amenable to being informed by cognitive and behavioural evidence-based theories, and adjusted to specific circumstances and situations. Marketing offers a theory and a practice for contributing to the development of such programs and interventions as it is founded on understanding the target audience. Communicating the advantages and disadvantages of a product (good, idea or service) is achieved by responding directly and indirectly to the wants and needs of targeted individuals. The success of IS online propaganda illustrates the power of messaging that creates and/or appeals to individual wants and needs, and countering extremist discourse with equally powerful messaging needs to be at the forefront of countering violent extremism in the future. In addition, as amply demonstrated by political and health campaigns, marketing based on social psychology can foster the emergence of common goals and norms in groups of people, pointing to the need to actively understand and involve family, friends and networks, in targeted interventions.

## Conclusion

At present Australia is mounting a defensive operation to counter terrorism and this must change. Given that attack is the best form of defence<sup>36</sup> the Australian counter-terrorism narrative needs to be redefined. To do this a clear understanding of the target audience values is needed if we are serious about countering violent extremism. A unified view of what it means to be an Australian in 2016 for citizens and visa holders from all walks of life needs to be ascertained. According to the Australian Government's

---

<sup>36</sup> Andrew P. Dickerson, Heather D. Gibson and Euclid Tsakalotos, 'Is Attack the Best Form of Defence? A Competing Risks Analysis of Acquisition Activity in the UK', *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, vol. 27, no. 3 (2003), pp. 337-57.

Department of Immigration and Citizenship, Australian society values respect for the freedom and dignity of the individual, freedom of religion, commitment to the rule of law, parliamentary democracy, equality of men and women, and a spirit of egalitarianism that embraces mutual respect, tolerance, fair play and compassion for those in need, and pursuit of the public good.<sup>37</sup> Rather than communicating Australian Government ideals, we need to ask what our target audience values and what being an Australian should offer and then we should deliver activities, employment and opportunities that make appeals from IS irrelevant. Delivering what the target audience values is needed to tackle the narrative that leads some to turn against their country.

*Professor Sharyn Rundle-Thiele leads Social Marketing @ Griffith and is editor of the Journal of Social Marketing. Her research has been published in over eighty books, journal papers and book chapters. [s.rundle-thiele@griffith.edu.au](mailto:s.rundle-thiele@griffith.edu.au).*

*Renata Anibaldi is a Senior Research Assistant at Social Marketing @ Griffith. [r.anibaldi@griffith.edu.au](mailto:r.anibaldi@griffith.edu.au).*

---

<sup>37</sup> Department of Immigration and Citizenship, *Life in Australia* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2007), <[www.border.gov.au/LifeinAustralia/Documents/lia\\_english\\_full.pdf](http://www.border.gov.au/LifeinAustralia/Documents/lia_english_full.pdf)> [Accessed 11 January 2016].