TACKLING RADICALISATION OF YOUTH WITH DATA ANALYTICS

SOLUTIONS

presents:

S. Freud1: "Sanity is the ability to love and to work".
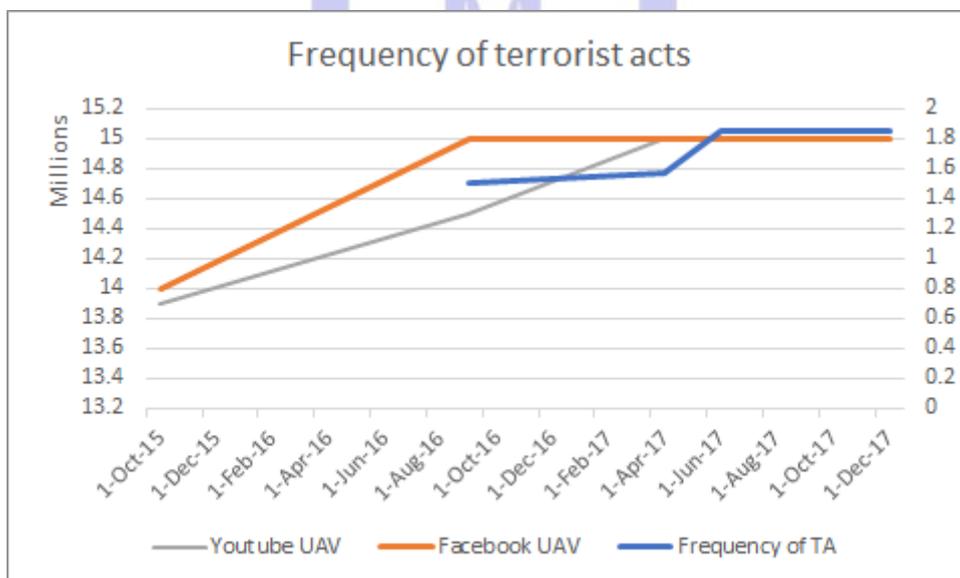

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Data analysis is being put to many purposes, from marketing goods, to swaying elections. It can also help solve social problems by facilitating counter-terrorism by prevention of misinformation, informational isolation, and radicalisation.

Australian society is facing increasing difficulty coping with segregated information channels (increasingly people consume their information through social media sites like Facebook, Reddit, and YouTube, which do not exhibit the same homogeneity as TV). An individual's understanding of the world based on these sources defines their reality. For people on the fringes of society, this interpretation becomes increasingly dangerous. By focusing on this societal gap, mainstream Australian society could help realign the disparate fringes with more acceptable behaviours, before irreparable damage is done to Australian society.

The graph below shows that the frequency of terrorist acts in Australia (which exemplify imposing extremist views of reality on the rest of society) has grown since 2015 (based on an assumption of a Poisson distribution). The prevalence and use of YouTube and other social media (Tufekci, 2018, Koehler 2014) has also grown (see graph below), which helps explain the propagation of the extremist perception of reality. What could Australia have done to an 18-year old youth to make him stab another human being (2014 Endeavour Hills Stabbings - Time, 2018), or the 15-year old boy who got a gun and shot an innocent civilian, who was old enough to be his grandfather (2015 Parramatta Shooting - Time, 2018)? Events such as these have horrified mainstream society by their clear lack of motive.

Source: Cowling D., 2018 and Time, 2018

Previous incidents not cited because frequency was considerably lower

When one reflects upon the foreign names of those involved in terrorist activities, it is easy to blame this problem on immigration. The obvious solution is to prevent immigration from Muslim majority countries (The White House, 2017). One must look no further than the recent projections of population growth versus migration policy as published by ABC News (just this month) to explain

why Australia has not implemented this solution: Australia needs to maintain immigration to balance the aging population. It remains a key component of keeping Australia's workforce young.

Australia has, so far, welcomed migrants from diverse backgrounds, and this has enabled the country to continue growing and to maintain its multiculturalism and vibrancy. For migrants, this is best embodied by the professional skills lists maintained by Department of Home Affairs for immigration purposes (see excerpt below). The lists allow the newly migrated to find and settle into society niches which need them. Migrants can join an Australia that wants them, and wants them to contribute the maximum possible amount of their skills to the nation.

Occupation	ANZSCO Code	List	Visa subclasses (streams or type)	Assessing Authority
Accommodation and Hospitality Managers nec	141999	STSOL	190, 407, 489 (S/T), TSS (S)	VETASSESS
Accountant (General)	221111	MLTSSL	186*, 189 (PT), 190, 407, 485 (GW),489 (F), 489 (S/T), TSS (M)*	CAANZ/CPAA/IPA
Actuary	224111	MLTSSL	186, 189 (PT), 190, 407, 485 (GW),489 (F), 489 (S/T), TSS (M)	VETASSESS
Acupuncturist	252211	STSOL	190, 407, 489 (S/T), TSS (S)	Chinese Medicine Board of Australia
Advertising Manager	131113	STSOL	190, 407, 489 (S/T), TSS (S)	AIM
Advertising Specialist	225111	STSOL	190, 407, 489 (S/T), TSS (S)	VETASSESS
Aeronautical Engineer	233911	MLTSSL	186, 189 (PT), 190, 407, 485 (GW),489 (F), 489 (S/T), TSS (M)	Engineers Australia
Aeroplane Pilot	231111	Regional	407, 489 (S/T), TSS (M)*	CASA
Agricultural Consultant	234111	MLTSSL	186, 189 (PT), 190, 407, 485 (GW),489 (F), 489 (S/T), TSS (M)	VETASSESS
Agricultural Engineer	233912	MLTSSL	186, 189 (PT), 190, 407, 485 (GW),489 (F), 489 (S/T), TSS (M)	Engineers Australia
Agricultural Scientist	234112	MLTSSL	186, 189 (PT), 190, 407, 485 (GW),489 (F), 489 (S/T), TSS (M)	VETASSESS

Australia is one of the few countries taking active measures to maintain as much as possible equality and available opportunities to all layers of its population (Human Rights Commission, 2018). This is driven by the belief that every person has something to contribute to the society, and the bigger the contribution the better the outcome for the society as a whole.

The question however remains as to how Australia can manage the risk that immigrants bring to the country, while maintaining its strategic immigration goals and equality ideals.

As present, the Australian Police Department maintains a watch list of people who are suspected of trying to orchestrate a terrorist act. Having identified the likely individuals police rely on methods such as community informants, collaborative intervention and others, to prevent terrorist acts from occurring.

The current model for preventing terrorism is based on the understanding of the world as a social construct where residents of the community in which the suspect resides are able to influence the person's behaviour to produce a positive outcome. Yet this approach fails to comprehend the nature of radicalisation which occurs in youth, that is, predominantly online, by socialisation with people in communities that reside outside of immediate observation or reach of the department.

The current approach does not attempt to remould the radicalised individual prior to preparing to commit an act of terrorism. Instead attempts are made to constrain them from committing a violent act by enforcing a set of expectations on the community surrounding the potential perpetrator. Australian society offers little help or chance to change the individual's mind; instead, it tries to get disaffected young potential terrorists to fit into the mould that they are desperate to escape from and that they are keen to upset and disrupt as much as possible, the very community they live in.

A more interactive approach would involve attempts to engage the disaffected individuals through the channels they consume, namely, online approaches, to get them to leave radical media channels they consume and to engage with mainstream Australian society voluntarily. This effectively enables deradicalisation[2] to begin before the individual has been completely radicalised. Additionally, it allows for a gradation of effort intensity for deradicalisation, by the amount of exposure already received. It makes for an easier task, and requires less resources.

By analysing the majority of perpetrators, as mentioned, one can observe that the people who slip through the existing police prevention network are young, and without substantial life experience or understanding of the world (2014 Sydney Hostage Crisis (Time, 2018) being the notable exception). Blindly applying Laplace's rule of succession (1829) based on the outcomes observed implies that a perpetrator is far more likely to be young. In reality, the absence of a clear dataset for the number of terrorist acts prevented, by age and further specifics of the perpetrators, it is impossible to make a conclusion whether lack of outreach to youth is the cause of prevalence of radicalisation for this age group or higher preponderance of terrorist propensities. As a result, measures suggested here are targeted to be more effective for the younger demographic, but are more holistic in their nature. The approach suggests automation of monitoring and implementation of initial deradicalisation measures in a similarly automated format.

The most concrete example of a solution to the problem of criminal activity among young people is the one implemented by private enterprises in the city of Utrech (The Guardian, 2018) using predictive data analytics for behaviours among young people (e.g. burglary), and monitoring social media, akin to babysitting its youth. This could be directly translated into flagging potential radicalisation of young people in Australia based on online behaviour, media consumed, and intervening and redirecting their attention elsewhere, before they are radicalised.

In general, an intervention is supported by the kin of the perpetrator (GIRDS, 2018, Koehler, 2016). With regards to the future potential of the person in question, even allowing Australian culture's emphasis on freedom and allowance for mistakes, this also maximises the benefits. If the beliefs of youth are transposed in an organic way, as deradicalisation occurs in a sufficiently anonymous way, so too will prevention of irreparable damage to the individual's future (MEI, 2018).

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[2] Note, that term deradicalisation is used for the ease of comprehension, however this term is meant to refer to at least three different programs: deradicalization, counter-radicalization, and anti-radicalization (MEI, 2018).

Outside of ethical issues surrounding the ownership of the data, privacy concerns are less of a pertinent issue. Mechanisms such as these identify individuals only when certain flags are raised, but the aggregate data remains anonymous. Treasury and Financial Intelligence (TFI) at the US Department of the Treasury (US Treasury, 2018) perfected the art of identifying terrorists financial dealings, for instance by requesting identities of suspects who used the *SWIFT* global interbank messaging network about 10 years ago, and all with very little data other than financial transactions. Furthermore, as of right now every large social media enterprise in Australia tries to package and sell user data in order to be able to generate revenue from otherwise "free" users, hence the tweaks require little work from programming point. Rather, the bulk of labour would have to be spent identifying behaviours and ways to encourage their correction (e.g. first step would be actively burying terrorist channels on Youtube (Wakabayashi, D., 2018[3])).

Counter-terrorism agencies have to go beyond the current approach of monitoring those who may be prone to terrorism, and actively work with them encouraging them to move them away from their current extremist perception of reality as radicalisation is happening.

It is unclear as to which interventions are involved when it comes to radicalised youth. However, considering the demographic of the recent terrorists, Australia needs to move the battle with radicalisation to the medium where radicalisation is occurring. Society can't reach young people by sitting them down and talking to them, especially not when the majority of their life is lived out online. One can, however, make a difference by recognising these individuals as people with interests beyond one obsession and slowly and carefully disentangling them from the worldview that brought them there, capitalising on other interests they may have, and bringing the positive impact of these interests into mainstream Australian society. Considering the amount of data gathered by social media enterprises, creating an interest profile for the suspects and inserting potential segways into their information feed is merely a different application of existing algorithms.

Terrorism can only occur when there is a "them" and an "us". By getting these individuals to voluntarily engage with society, and helping them integrate into roles where they may be useful, Australia will erase these boundaries, and immunize them against future radicalisation. Situations where their skills can be used in a constructive way, while being mentored and guided towards a more positive world view by somebody with many years of experience will help re-socialise these people. If one can distract children all the time from unwanted interests, why can't this be implemented with young people online?

Public entities working to prevent terrorism have to take active steps and partner with social media enterprises to prevent radicalisation of young people. The mechanism of the prevention has to be based on the assumption that these people are individuals with their own preferences and views that have to be gradually amended. Only after these individuals can appreciate and love the society they live in, can they be expected to work, contribute and integrate into it.

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[3] Note, that the move was the parent company's initiative, and it did not stem from a request of a public entity.

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