



Network of Hatred

How right-wing extremists use social media
to court young people

Imprint



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1. Targeting young people

Why is right-wing extremism a case for youth protection?

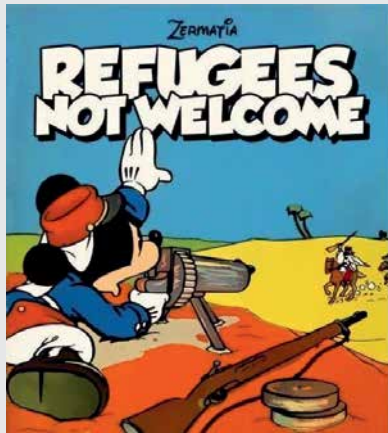
The trend has been obvious for years: Right-wing extremists turn their attention to young people with their propaganda as a powerful tool to lure them to their campaigns and groups. They specifically try to convince adolescents of their right-wing extremist ideology; those still developing their world view and searching for explanations for everything that is happening around them. Here, it is particularly risky that extremists can reach children and teenagers anytime and anywhere through smartphones and their propaganda apps. Young people's curiosity, thirst for adventure or rebellion, their longing for companionship and acknowledgement make it easy to get trapped by 'fishers of men' and their ideologies.

High risk of confrontation

Today, young people are always online – around the clock and everywhere and therefore also often beyond parental influence. The risk of using Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube or Instagram and stumbling across content that could frighten or harm them or promote an ideology of inequality has become higher than before. Living in the world of social media, internet services and mobile devices specifically makes young people's protection face new challenges.

Legal protection

With its legal provisions concerning youth protection on the internet, the Interstate Treaty on the Protection of Minors (JMStV) wants to protect adolescents as good as possible from negative effects of the internet and content that can impair or harm their development. In Germany, for instance, it is illegal – also in terms of the protection of minors – to show content depicting banned symbols like swastika, glorifying Nazi atrocities, violating human dignity, undermining the free democratic order or the concept of international understanding.



Social media with its multitude of options and broad range of audiences has meanwhile become the most important tool for right-wing extremists today to reach out to young people. To do this they also use elements of pop culture.
(Source: Facebook, Verdictum; original not pixelated)

Competence center for the protection of minors on the internet

As the joint competence center for the protection of minors on the internet at federal and state level, jugendschutz.net has the legal mandate to reduce the risks for young people online. This also includes taking action against right-wing extremist content if it puts children and young people at risks.

This is why jugendschutz.net has been conducting ongoing research on right-wing extremist activities online since 2000. jugendschutz.net puts platform operators on notice of all violations of youth protection laws and asks for deletion of the content. Internet users can report illegal content to jugendschutz.net via the website hass-im-netz.info. This work is funded by the German Federal Ministry of Family, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth within the program 'Demokratie leben!' i.e. 'Live Democracy!'.

2. From the desktop into the pocket

How has right-wing extremism evolved online?

Simple websites, blinking animations, text heavy pages – according to today's view of things, right-wing extremist online content was not very appealing to young people, at least not in 2000 when jugendschutz.net started researching. Meanwhile, extremists use blogs, websites and all social networks in a more targeted way: with a visually appealing design they often reach a wide audience. The dividing line between our offline and online life continues to dissolve, later online marketing of extremist activities is already well planned in advance. The aim: content going viral and reaching as many young users as possible.

Traditional web: Open neo-Nazi propaganda

Endless ideological texts, brightly colored headlines or huge swastika – the first right-wing extremist websites came from skinheads, comradeships, Holocaust deniers or the National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD). On the internet, they found the ideal space for disseminating their inflammatory pamphlets and political views. Much of what they posted online was already available offline: brochures, books and other propaganda material. They mainly targeted like-minded people as well as users who were susceptible to right-wing extremist ideas. With offensive imagery and propaganda and the thrill of what is forbidden they tried to attract young people.

Here, jugendschutz.net could take successful action. Providers put on notice deleted the content from their servers. Mostly it took months until these self-programmed websites were uploaded to a different location. Since the rise of editorial systems, blogs and forums this has changed substantially.



Today, this former website of the 'Thüringer Heimatschutz', a group around neo-Nazi comradeships, seems archaic. (Source: Thüringer Heimatschutz; original not pixelated)

Web 2.0: Subtle approach with topics specifically appealing to young people

The right-wing extremist scene used neo-Nazi forums like Blood&Honour or Thiazi to exchange their ideas, deny the Holocaust, disseminate hate music and stir up hatred against minorities. Young people's problems of everyday life like relationships and school related topics were also discussed. In blogs like Altermedia, extremists commented on campaigns, discussed new developments and consolidated their ideology. At the same time, a differentiation took place – next to websites clearly illegal under criminal law the first websites emerged with content not related to right-wing extremism at first sight. Behind this hide-and-seek: the aim to reach young people with an unstable world view. This trend still continues in some parts of the right-wing extremist scene.

Right-wing extremists also quickly recognized that they can exploit topics of everyday life to tie in young people's lives. For example, they posted their ideas in homework forums or in guest books of non-political websites. Here, they approach young people talking about 'innocent' subjects to slip in their right-wing extremist propaganda step by step. This 'bait and hook' strategy still applies on the internet today.

Social media makes it even easier to get in touch with young people. Many of the former platforms do not exist anymore today, e.g. the Austrian website uboot.com. At times, this platform was highly frequented by right-wing extremists until jugendschutz.net put the operator on notice who then took decisive action against the activities of right-wing extremist users.

Social Media: Viral content and a hip design

Meanwhile, global players like Google, Facebook and Twitter dominate the world of social media. Whereas the number of right-wing extremist content on websites is dropping it is increasing in the social web. Very often, individual persons and groups are active on various platforms. Video sharing platforms like YouTube allow users to create playlists of right-wing rock music making the 'schoolyard CDs' of the NPD relicts of former days. They make it easier to disseminate their propaganda and campaign videos like e.g. torchlight marches of 'The immortals', a neo-Nazi organization based in Germany using flash mobs to coordinate their activities, gather and demonstrate. Action oriented and trendy videos with music not only address young people much better, but also go viral very quickly.

This trend continues within groups like the right-wing extremist 'Identitarian movement'. In order to lure young people it uses smooth messages and innocuous terms, stages small and provocative internet campaigns and specifically relies on a stylish look. This is how a few activists can reach millions of users with sleek, provocative video clips. They do not target their campaigns at persons directly involved, but tailor their activities to suit a young online audience.



Right-wing extremist propaganda ties in with young people's lives: This Pokémon spreads gas clouds for an attack. The position right in front of the entrance to the Auschwitz concentration camp makes a joke of the mass killings. (Source: Facebook, nipster# .blog; original not pixelated)

Today, right-wing extremists can reach young people anywhere and anytime. They approach their audience directly through social media platforms, messaging and push notification services. Right-wing extremism online lurks everywhere: It is not only on the desktop PC at home, but has also arrived in teenager's pockets through their smartphones. Here too, the right-wing extremist scene exploits new internet developments and explicitly addresses young users with their first apps.

3. Particularly radical or deliberately innocuous

How do right-wing extremists 'fish' for young people on the internet?

Right-wing extremists have shifted their recruiting activities from the street to the internet a long time ago. Their most important target group: young people. Right-wing extremists approach them through communities, video portals and blogs and consciously adapt language and appearance to suit different audiences. Either deliberately innocuous: the right-wing extremist orientation hiding behind a sophisticated design. Or particularly radical: open cruel agitation and calls for violence.

Openly radical performances

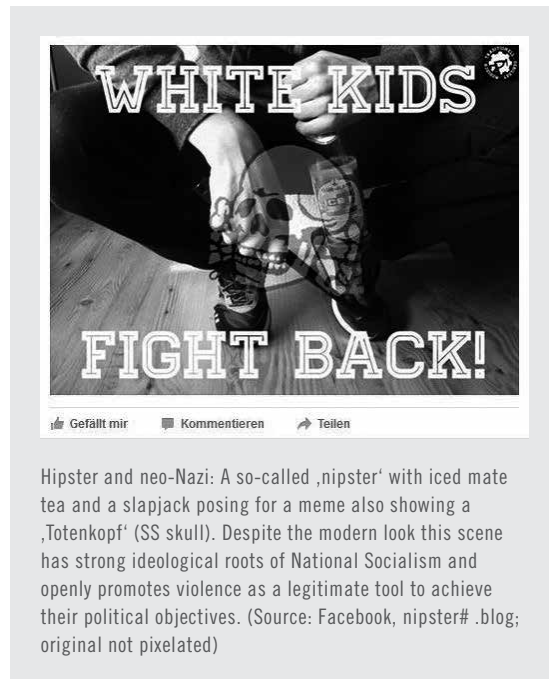
Extreme groups promote a 'straight edge' lifestyle (No drugs, no drinks, no problems) or blatantly embrace militancy and violence. They search online for young people who are ideologically established and ready for anything. They present themselves online in different ways.

› Comradeships: Manliness, strength and parties

Some groups take up the visual vocabulary of the comradeship scene in their social media profiles. They present a sworn circle that created a niche outside of societal conventions. It is all about manliness, strength and parties for shared experiences. Very often there are links to the hooligan or martial arts scene. Groups like this also call themselves 'fraternities' and it is not uncommon for them to use logos, clothing and patches reminiscent of motorcycle clubs. Specifically young people longing for clear hierarchies and companionship feel attracted to their propaganda.

› Nipster: Self-proclaimed avant-garde

Nipster groups (combination of Nazi and hipster) on the other hand present themselves as ironic and literate in their profiles. They understand themselves as the avant-garde of right-wing extremism. With their propaganda nipsters try to encourage already convinced activists to follow their 'straight edge' lifestyle: no drugs, no alcohol, self-discipline, and continuous ideological training and consequent transfer of the Nazi doctrine to their own lives. Therefore they love to create memes that seem hip tying in with the phenomena of pop culture like the hype around Pokémon Go. Though, however hip they pretend to be, in terms of their ideology 'nipster' profiles belong to the most radical content you can find on major platforms. In vegan cooking shows on YouTube or in their 'mobilization videos' they mask themselves wearing balaclavas. This shall seem 'top secret' and militant, but also protect them from criminal prosecution. With this rebellious attitude they specifically target young people who distance themselves from their parent's generation – and do not want to appear like dinosaurs here.



› Militant networks: Calls for fighting and killing

Users with already strong ideologies are also the target of militant international networks that specifically present themselves on the Russian Facebook equivalent VK. There, they feel safe from government surveillance and because of the service provider's lax policies they barely have to worry about their profiles being removed. The 'Misanthropic Division', e.g., has a VK profile, stages itself with handguns, machine guns or other weapons. In memes and other posts it openly embraces violence and calls for killing 'unwanted' groups of people. Here, the 'Misanthropic Division' also tries to recruit right-wing extremist volunteers for Nationalist combat units in the Ukrainian war.



Young women from the 'Identitarian movement' hide their right-wing extremist ideology behind innocuous sounding words like 'homeland' and 'tradition'. The movement's logo is clearly visible – this is how a visit to the local fair can be marketed as a political action later on. (Source: Facebook, Identitäre Bewegung Bayern i.e. Identitarian movement Bavaria; original not pixelated)

Compared with other profiles, the militant networks on the niche platform gain far fewer 'likes'. However, they are openly militant and therefore particularly risky for young people: It is not only about promoting hatred and cruel ideology, but also about actively inciting crimes and racial violence.

Apparently harmless content

They want to seem 'naïve' (internet slang for 'nice') and hide their ideology's devastating consequences behind innocuous sounding words. This is how the 'New Right' explores the balancing act: right-wing extremist content, and revolting against the parents' and teachers' generation, without being socially disgraced.

› The 'Identitarians': seemingly harmless and apparently '0 % racist'

Groups like the 'Identitarian movement' stage themselves and their campaigns as rebellious and innocuous at the same time. They claim to be '0 % racist' and still spread a xenophobic ideology. The whole trick is to consciously avoid historically burdened words like 'foreign infiltration' and rather create neologisms like 'major replacement' as a cover up. With their propaganda they want to create a positive image for words like 'homeland' and national 'identity'.

To achieve this they systematically combine all possibilities social networks can offer: from a campaign video on YouTube up to direct communication with the participating activists on ask.fm. They willingly discuss their own ideology, the right-wing extremist messages quickly spread to tens of thousands of social media users. By using modern visual vocabulary, sending apparently innocuous messages and 'openly showing their face' the 'Identitarian movement' aims at young people outside the scene whom they could not reach with traditional right-wing extremist websites.

› Youth organizations of right-wing extremist parties: 'Guerilla' propaganda for young people

The youth organizations of right-wing extremist political parties also camouflage their propaganda of no respect for human rights and democracy. Their online presence stops well short of being illegal under criminal law. At the same time, they give their former old-fashioned online presence a young touch and use elements of protest culture. Inspired by actions of the 'Identitarian movement', the 'Junge Nationaldemokraten' (youth organization of the NPD) disseminate their so-called 'guerilla propaganda': For example, dressed in animal costumes they visited schools and shared the video of this action under the name 'top dog' in social networks. Their aim: provocation and impulsive actions to win over students for their ideology.



Everyday life of young people as bait

Many young people stay well clear of blatant right-wing extreme content. Right-wing extremists react accordingly and tie in their profiles with the life of young people. On websites apparently focusing on specific topics, they lure young people outside the extremist scene into their ideologies: topics like street art, music, soccer, humor – whatever young people like to do online, rights-wing extremists are often just a click away.

> Neo-Nazis as animal rights activists: 'We are not bad at all'

Young people cleaning a forest, hanging up bird houses: They talk a lot about environmental protection and call on users to keep an eye on nature conservation when shopping. However, behind all this is not an environmental organization but the militant 'Misanthropic Division'. Disguised as 'Greenline Front' the violence-prone network tries to come off as innocuous on social media. For some years, neo-Nazis have claimed 'animal and nature protection' as their own objective using this to connect to young people. Nature is sold as the 'ultimate fascist' and Hitler staged as the inventor of animal protection.

The cruel ideology of right-wing extremists hides behind positive messages. Social media profiles of right-wing extremist environmental activists like to produce memes with cute animals or romantic forests; young people disseminate these widely.

› **Hooligan profiles: Dangerous pass to the outside right**

Facebook pages inspired by the hooligan and ultra culture and therefore attractive to young people, reach hundred thousands of users. These pages' most important credo: 'politics is politics and soccer is soccer'. Many users fall for this. In fact, many of these profiles are highly political: Sometimes, advertising for the right-wing extremist NPD is playing in between videos of fans choreographies, is linked to right-wing extremist shops or is mobilizing for demonstrations of the HoGeSa movement ('hooligans against Salafists'). Incitement against refugees, Muslims or homosexuals is also brought up in many posts.

› **Private blogs and other social media trends: Lowering the threshold**

Right-wing extremists adapt to the particular net culture. On Instagram or Pinterest, for example, there is much 'food porn' (highly aesthetic photos of cooking or eating). Right-wing extremist groups follow such trends and specifically

get their members' private accounts involved. An activist of the 'Identitarian movement', for instance, presents herself as a food blogger. The hidden political messages only become visible when taking a closer look: The sauce arranged on the plate has the form of the 'Identitarian' logo. The NPD chairman Frank Franz again steps into the fashion limelight. In his blog with images of socks and pocket squares he spills in NPD flyers or photos of campaign events – often edited with photo effects and filters young people also like to use.

Private accounts shall lower the threshold for the first contact and reach out to young people not searching for political content. This strategy often works: An activist sharing her scantily clad Tumblr photos calls on her audience to ask questions. One user asks: "Dear A.; What do you mean with 'defend europe'? I often read this on your page. I am looking forward to your response – Eva". The activist then is happy to introduce the group's political ideology.

- › 'News sites': Actually scaremongers and highly manipulative

Alleged news sites are key for right-wing extremists' aim to incite hatred online and drive people to radicalization. Here, they also intentionally launch fake news. As obviously incorrect these may be, they still reach a wide audience. In order to improve their credibility, these neo-Nazi 'news sites' rely on a mixture of dubious sources, real police reports and traditional media. In return, they systematically and continuously defame respected print, radio and TV media as 'the system's lying press, controlled from the top'. Given the high reach and smart cover-up tactics, there is the danger that young people fall for these hate messages. Since such 'news sites' occasionally also depict graphic violence, young people are also at risk of being confronted with such content.



- › Racist humor: Hatred under the guise of satire

Humor sites have a vast reach on social media and are specifically popular among young people. The more offensive, provocative and controversial a joke was, the more it spread creating a snowball effect. Under the guise of satire, many posts send out clearly racist and discriminating messages (e.g. referring to dark-skinned people, Muslims or homosexuals) and trivialize Nazi atrocities. These 'funny posts' are often 'shared' with peers or even the public without thinking. Thus, young people easily are faced with inflammatory humor. Every 'like' and 'share' makes them supporters of right-wing extremist campaigns.

4. Present everywhere and anytime

What kind of web tools do right-wing extremists use?

Right-wing extremists have professionalized their communication strategy through their increasingly sophisticated use of social media. Simultaneous presence on various platforms – adapted to the general practices and potentials – enables them to participate in as many online discussions as possible and reach entirely different target audiences. Here, they use different tools.

Shops: Propaganda material just a few clicks away

Shops are an essential part of online right-wing extremism and serve to fund the scene. Under names like Antisem.it, Hatestore, Wikinger-versand or Phalanx Europa they sell propaganda material that can publicly display the cruel ideology. In terms of design and assortment, many shops specifically address young people. They offer music, streetwear and (scene) clothing for men, women and children, stickers or books. They also deal with weapons, swastika flags, banned music and written materials of Holocaust denial, available via shops abroad.

Music videos: Low-threshold access

Music is a key element of the right-wing extremist propaganda strategy. New followers shall enjoy low-threshold and fun access to the right-wing extremist world of adventure, 'old' members of the scene shall further shape their attitude and world view. Next to 'far-right rock classics' more and more music styles like hip-hop or folk music play a major role. Extremists specifically produce music videos for this purpose: with propaganda sequences, elements of acting and performance or emotionalizing content they further enhance the impact on young people.



On this little-travelled road, almost nobody takes any notice of this graffiti action. On the internet however, nearly 65,000 people watched the video. Similar clips of the right-wing extremist street art activist reached far more than 100,000 Facebook users. (Source: Facebook; original not pixelated)

Apps: Direct access to young people

The right-wing extremist scene specifically counts on apps to have direct access to young people. On Google Play they offer Hitler's 'Mein Kampf', the most popular Hitler quotes, Nazi flags and symbols or a virtual city tour 'Germania' or Albert Speer's plan of 'New Berlin' for download. Right-wing extremist political parties, mail order companies, various anti-refugee groups 'Nein zum Heim' or militant neo-Nazis also pitch their apps.

Campaign videos: Created only for the internet

Meanwhile right-wing extremist campaigns only have one objective: going viral on social media. However trivial they may be, however few people actually participate – the videos are effectively staged, professionally filmed and cut, highlighted with dramatic background music and scandalizing comments and then posted online. This enables right-wing extremist activists to approach a high number of young people. And furthermore, it allows them to control the interpretation of their actions and to decide for themselves what they want to show and which impression they want to leave behind.

Online radio stations & podcasts: Direct contact to far-right rock star

Social media offer a multitude of online radio stations and podcasts for different topics. Right-wing extremists also deploy this media format for their propaganda. They like to broadcast live call-ins per skype or TeamSpeak. Here, they invite young users to have discussions with the moderators and guests, mostly known right-wing extremist activists and musicians. This is how those sympathizing with right-wing extremist ideas are encouraged to abandon their role as passive observers and become active. Podcasts on the other hand are used to disseminate relevant information and instructions for the political work. The producers assume that the spoken word leaves a deeper impression on the mind than written texts.

Messaging services: Accessing every lifeworld

Messaging services promise private communication not open to the public and protected from law enforcement access. Right-wing extremists specifically exploit services with end-to-end encryption.



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Chat with neo-Nazis: To promote its live call-ins, this online radio uses the lead singer of a well-known far-right rock band in their advertising. 'TeamSpeak', a communication software very popular among young users, makes it easy to start conversations. (Source: Facebook, FSN.tv; original not pixelated)

Apps like Threema and Telegram or widespread WhatsApp are very popular. jugendschutz.net also looked closely at Snapchat, an app specifically young people like to use. Right-wing extremists use messaging services to discuss campaigns or organize travel to demonstrations. Since mobile devices like smartphones and tablets are omnipresent nowadays, messaging services enable right-wing extremist groups to gain unhindered access to the private spheres of children and young people. This creates closed communication groups that can encourage radicalization.

The group: Consolidating the own worldview

On many social media platforms, users can create their own groups to communicate with like-minded. Content in public groups is also visible for non-members. In a closed group, users will not be able to see the activity and participate in discussions until they join. Secret groups are only available to invited members. Right-wing extremists use public groups to communicate with a broad fan base. In closed and secret groups they often also share content that is relevant under criminal law aspects. Acceptance as a member of such groups suggests being acknowledged in the scene and as a part of the movement. The secrecy, the uncontradicted communication and openly racist world views can accelerate the process of radicalization of young members.

Hashtags: Always looking for the latest trends

Right-wing extremists also make use of a very effective guerilla warfare tactic to spread their messages: They hijack trending hashtags, exploit them for their own purposes and chime in on current debates with their right-wing extremist ideas. Here, the hashtag #schauhin is a prominent example. Under this slogan, internet users originally took a stand against racism and voiced their outrage about racial incidents. Right-wing extremists meanwhile disseminate racist propaganda under this hashtag. They also have their



Teen pop culture as a stylistic element: In the design of Grand Theft Auto (GTA), a computer game very popular amongst young people, right-wing extremists use this meme to stir up hatred against refugees. (Source: Facebook; original not pixelated)

own hashtags and use these, for example, to call for anti-Semitic social media challenges.

Memes: Ideology in little bits to share

Right-wing extremists also send their messages through memes specifically young people go for. Here, they use well-known graphic arts or elements of pop culture and modern typography. For example, a Facebook page from this spectrum shows a young woman with a colorful jackknife in her hand. The comment accompanying the picture: "Cologne? Hamburg? Stuttgart? Girls arm yourselves!". With the pithy hashtag '#mommydidntraiseavictim' they unmistakably addressed a young audience.

5. Activities at many levels

How does jugendschutz.net take action against right-wing extremism online?

Right-wing extremism online is a problem throughout society and can only be combated together. Primary objective of jugendschutz.net: minimize the risk for young people of being negatively influenced by right-wing extremist propaganda. Here, jugendschutz.net focuses on removal of illegal content and preventive protection measures and for this purpose forwards cases to the media supervisory bodies for further action and collaborates with major internet service providers with a wide audience. jugendschutz.net regularly informs about the key results of its newest monitoring findings to enable politics and society to take quick action against right-wing extremist recruitment strategies. In order to have a most lasting effect, jugendschutz.net's work is based on strategic interactions with key players.

Supervisory bodies and law enforcement: Impose sanctions

Whenever jugendschutz.net records illegal content and identifies a responsible person liable under German law, the case is forwarded to the Commission for the Protection of Minors in the Media (KJM) for further action. The KJM is the central supervisory body in Germany for the protection of minors in the media and can initiate legal proceedings against those responsible for the content or forward cases to law enforcement. In case of imminent danger, e.g. whenever there are calls for concrete acts of violence and terrorism, jugendschutz.net directly informs the German Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA) or the appropriate state police office.

Index list: Making content harder to find

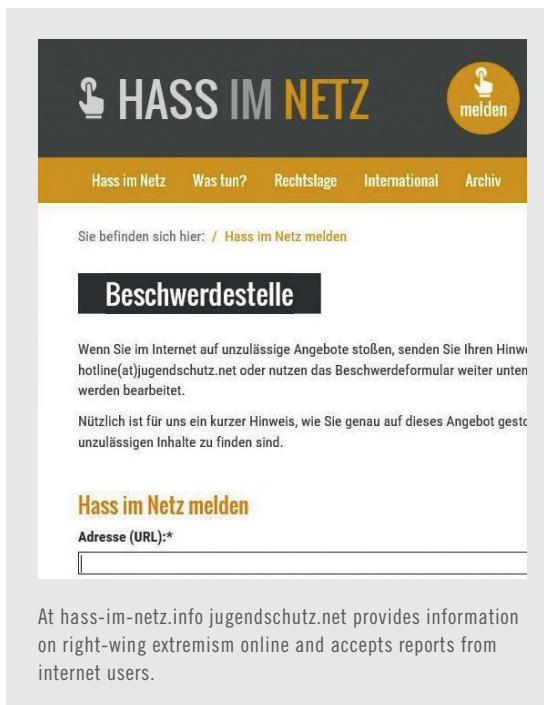
If there is no possibility for removal, jugendschutz.net initiates 'indexing' i.e. adding the illegal content to the list of media harmful to minors, generally referred to as the 'index list' by the Federal Review Board for Media Harmful to Minors (BPjM). Since German search engines do not reveal indexed content in their results lists and technical systems for the protection of minors can filter it, the content is harder to find.

Corporate culture: Quick deletion and preventive protection

If no responsible person could be identified, jugendschutz.net turns to service providers or platform operators and asks them – mostly successfully – to remove the content. Furthermore, jugendschutz.net keeps a critical eye on their company's policy in terms of dealing with harmful content, demands preventive protection measures and checks whether they shoulder their responsibility to protect young people.

Practice and science: Provide expertise

A major aim is to make all research findings available to practitioners as quickly as possible. This is why jugendschutz.net develops hand-outs, briefing papers and other publications for educational experts and other multipliers. jugendschutz.net also directly passes on its expertise to different target groups in workshops and presentations. Additionally, jugendschutz.net supports research projects of universities and academic initiatives to improve the knowledge about the effects and the reception of online propaganda within political extremism.



The screenshot shows the 'HASS IM NETZ' website. The header features the title 'HASS IM NETZ' in white and orange, a hand icon, and a 'melden' button. A navigation bar includes links for 'Hass im Netz', 'Was tun?', 'Rechtslage', 'International', and 'Archiv'. The main content area is titled 'Beschwerdestelle' and contains text about reporting illegal online content to jugendschutz.net. Below this is a form labeled 'Hass im Netz melden' with a field for 'Adresse (URL):*'. A footer note states: 'At hass-im-netz.info jugendschutz.net provides information on right-wing extremism online and accepts reports from internet users.'

International network: Cross-national collaboration

One of the pillars of combating hate speech on the internet is working together with international partners. Already in 2002, jugendschutz.net has joined efforts with the Dutch 'Magenta Foundation' and has founded the 'International Network Against Cyber Hate' (INACH) with partner organizations from Europe, Israel, Russia and the USA. Together the network partners analyze and combat hate phenomena on the internet from a transnational perspective and stand up for the respect for human rights in the online world.

jugendschutz.net

- systematically checks online content and services that are particularly significant to young people and processes reports from internet users concerning violations of youth protection laws;
- continuously monitors internet content in terms of violence, self-harm behavior, right-wing extremism and child sexual exploitation, collaborates with public authorities, voluntary self-regulation, international partners and service providers and assesses current phenomena on the internet specifically relevant to the protection of minors;
- challenges providers to comply with youth protection laws and mostly succeeds in having illegal content quickly removed or made inaccessible to children and young persons;
- contacts host providers and platform operators like Facebook or YouTube: When put on notice of illegal content they are liable and obliged to take action;
- supports initiatives and organizations in their efforts to make the internet safer and develops concepts and handouts for educational experts and parents on the media education of children and young people;
- is a founding member of the international networks INACH (International Network Against Cyber Hate) and INHOPE (International Association of Internet Hotlines combating the sexual exploitation of children and young people).

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