

A person wearing a dark hoodie is seen from the side, looking at a screen. The background is a dark, abstract image with blue and purple hues, possibly representing a digital or network environment. The person's face is not visible, and they appear to be focused on the screen.

Graphika

Viral Vendetta

Inside the Conspiratorial
Movement Waging a Cross-Platform
'Psychological Warfare' Campaign
Against Covid-19 Vaccine Advocates

The Graphika Team

12.2021

Takedowns

Viral Vendetta 🇺🇸 🇺🇸

Inside the conspiratorial movement waging a cross-platform 'psychological warfare' campaign against Covid-19 vaccine advocates

Executive Summary

On Dec. 1, Meta [said](#) it had removed an “adversarial network” of authentic, duplicate, and fake accounts on Facebook linked to a group known as the V_V movement. The network originated in Italy and France, and was used by anti-vaccine activists to harass specific individuals, as well as spread Covid-19 conspiracies and health misinformation. “The approach behind this group’s social media activity appeared to be two-fold,” Meta said. “First, they sought to mass-harass individuals with pro-vaccination views into making their posts private or deleting them. Second, they tried to take advantage of popular Pages’ audiences to spread anti-vaccination misinformation through commenting at high volume.”

Graphika has [tracked](#) the [growth](#) of conspiratorial movements online throughout the course of the Covid-19 pandemic, seeking to understand how these communities have evolved, and to what extent they have enabled real-world and online harms. In the case of V_V, we have observed what appears to be a sprawling populist movement that has combined pre-existing conspiracy theories with anti-authoritarian narratives, and a groundswell of health misinformation. The group claims to be a self-organizing collective of internet “warriors” engaged in a guerilla “psychological warfare” campaign against the oppressive forces of “medical Nazism.”

As noted by Meta, V_V members are distinct for their propensity to orchestrate and engage in harmful behavior. Online, this has included the vicious and widespread harassment of [journalists](#), [health workers](#), and [public officials](#), as well as coordinated down-voting of social media posts advocating for Covid-19 health measures. Some actions have also directly targeted offline spaces, where [health facilities](#) have been [defaced](#), and V_V members have [attempted](#) to disrupt public vaccination programs. Italian media [reported](#) on Nov. 18 that local law enforcement had [raided](#) the homes of multiple individuals connected to the V_V movement, as part of an investigation into threats made against doctors and conspiracy to commit criminal damage.

V_V should be understood against the wider backdrop of conspiratorial Covid-skeptic movements that have taken root over the past 18 months, and perpetuate both on- and offline harms. These include [Querdenken](#) in Germany, and often present as evolving and fractured social movements coalesced around a common narrative or set of beliefs, as opposed to clearly defined and

delineated organizations. Their members frequently coordinate openly online, under their real names, while collectively engaging in harmful behavior. This presents challenges for researchers, public bodies, and social media platforms that wish to address malicious activity while preserving freedom of speech and online expression.

This report aims to contribute to the basis for an informed discussion about how to tackle those challenges by providing an in-depth understanding of the V_V movement, its activities, and organizational structure. Our findings are non-exhaustive and benefited from the work of the open-source research community, as well as journalists at Italian media non-profit [Open](#), and French outlets [Libération](#) and [LCI](#). Below is a summary of our key findings:

- Elements of the V_V movement are highly-coordinated and organized, while other parts are more diffuse. Recruitment, communication, and “civil disobedience” actions are orchestrated by a core network of active members on Telegram, who are often identifiable by their “warrior” status and a corresponding numerical rank. Other users appear to engage more as passive followers and supporters.
- Graphika estimates V_V’s following currently totals around 20,000 people, with a smaller subset of users actively engaged in the identified harmful behaviors. But the movement appears to be growing - it is now established in Italy, developing in France, and making efforts to build a base in Germany, Spain, the United Kingdom, Ireland, and Brazil.
- V_V’s active members are responsible for repeated acts of online and offline harm. Proponents of public health measures are frequently subjected to torrents of coordinated abusive messages on social media, hospitals and public buildings in Italy have been defaced with graffiti, and the movement has orchestrated efforts to disrupt vaccination programs by repeatedly booking and cancelling medical appointments.
- V_V’s activities are overt and appear to be predominantly conducted by real people using authentic accounts. Rather than attempting to hide, the movement seems to actively seek out public recognition and notoriety, encouraging members to display V_V insignia on their social media profiles and celebrating news reports about their actions.
- The movement draws heavily on language that portrays its activities as an organized insurgent force, and frequently references resistance fighters from the Second World War, presenting its members as “warriors” struggling against a Nazi regime. This is combined with an element of gamification, where new recruits are tested on their understanding of V_V’s practices in order to progress along the “path of a warrior” and gain access to online forums used to coordinate acts of “civil disobedience.”

Keyboard Warriors

Members of the V_V movement have documented their practices and beliefs in a series of posts on Telegram, the primary social media platform used by the group. V_V first originated in Italy, and accordingly many of the posts appear to have been written in Italian before being translated into different languages. The writing takes on a doctrinal tone and is at times nonsensical and difficult to follow, but nevertheless provides a fascinating insight into the group's ideology, goals, and sense of collective identity.

According to posts reviewed by Graphika in Italian, German, English, Spanish, and Portuguese, the name V_V is derived from the Italian verb *vivere* ("to live") and is intended to represent the movement's fight to preserve "freedom, dignity, and fundamental rights" in the face of restrictive public health policies introduced during the pandemic. This concept of anti-authoritarian resistance fighting is at the heart of V_V's identity, and is underpinned by a core narrative asserting that vaccines and other Covid-19 safety measures are a new form of "medical Nazism."

V_V warriors accordingly have a duty to fight against this purported creeping authoritarian control through a coordinated and sustained campaign of nonviolent "civil disobedience." "The goal of civil disobedience is to cause the enemy's reaction, so to unveil their evil and nazi nature in front of everyone," reads one message posted to the fledgling V_V UK-Ireland Telegram channel. The movement tells its members an integral part of their fight must take part on social media, which is "an environment where the system manipulates and spreads its propaganda." Despite celebrating acts of real-world vandalism (detailed below), V_V warns against engaging in, or inciting, physical violence. Rather, members must organize to "occupy the online territory" by promoting their cause, spreading the message, and exposing alleged Nazis.

5 THE ENEMY AND THE FIGHTING TALK

💡 TO UNDERSTAND THAT NAZICOMMUNISM IS THE ENEMY AND THAT WE ARE NOW FACED WITH A FORM OF MEDICAL NAZISM, SEEING THAT THE SYSTEM WANTS TO DEPRIVE US OF OUR RIGHT TO SAY "NO" TO A TREATMENT. THIS IS OUR FUNDAMENTAL RIGHT SANCTIFIED BY THE NUREMBERG CODE, WHICH WAS DRAFTED TO PUT AN END TO THOSE NAZI LAWS THAT HAD PERMITTED OPPRESSIVE AND COMPULSORY "PUBLIC HEALTH" POLICIES, BASED ON LIES, TO VIOLATE FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN RIGHTS, JUST LIKE WHAT WE SEE TODAY. THE NUREMBERG CODE ESTABLISHED THAT THE NATURAL RIGHT OF AN INDIVIDUAL IS TO BE PUT BEFORE THAT OF LAW AND CONSTITUTIONS, THUS GIVING BIRTH TO THE UNDENIABLE RIGHT OF ANYONE TO CONSENT TO EACH MEDICAL TREATMENT.

👉 TO CALL A "NAZI" ANYONE WHO SUPPORTS "MEDICAL NAZISM" BY COERCING OR BLACKMAILING ANYONE INTO RELINQUISHING THEIR RIGHT TO SAY "NO" TO UNWANTED TREATMENTS. TO CALL "COLLABORATIONIST" WHOEVER SUPPORTS OR READILY ACCEPTS NAZI MEDICAL DIRECTIVES.

9 ACTIONS ON THE WEB AND COUNTER PROPAGANDA

💡 TO UNDERSTAND THAT THE ACTIONS ON SOCIAL MEDIA ARE FUNDAMENTAL BECAUSE IT IS AN ENVIRONMENT WHERE THE SYSTEM MANIPULATES AND SPREADS ITS PROPAGANDA. THE V_V WARRIORS MUST ACT IN AN ORGANISED WAY SO TO OCCUPY THE ONLINE TERRITORY THROUGH COUNTER PROPAGANDA AND BY DISPLAYING THE SYMBOL REPRESENTING EVERYONE'S NON-VIOLENT FIGHT FOR FREEDOM AND HUMAN RIGHTS. THE MORE TERRITORY WE OCCUPY ONLINE AND ON THE GROUND, THE MORE RESONANCE OUR FIGHT WILL GAIN.

👉 TO COMMIT YOURSELF TO TAKE PART AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE IN THE ACTIONS ON SOCIAL MEDIA.

10 CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

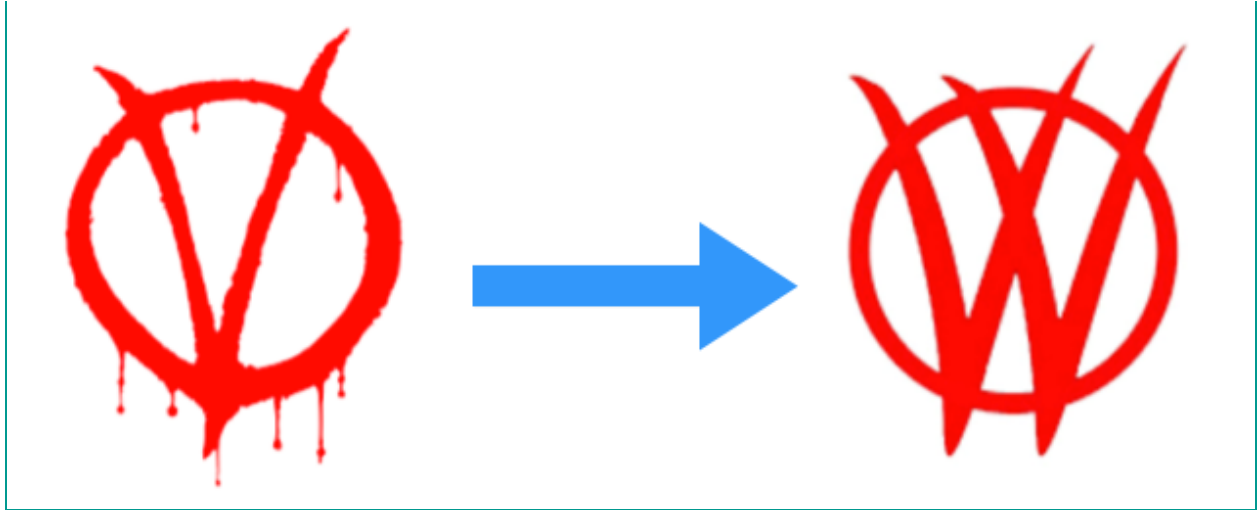
💡 TO UNDERSTAND THAT IN ORDER TO PRACTICE CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE, SIMPLY DISOBEYING AN UNJUST LAW IS NOT ENOUGH. THE GOAL OF CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE IS TO CAUSE THE ENEMY'S REACTION, SO TO UNVEIL THEIR EVIL AND NAZI NATURE IN FRONT OF EVERYONE. TO DISOBEY WITHOUT TRYING TO ELICIT SUCH A REACTION IS NOT REAL CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE. OUR FIGHT IS NON-VIOLENT BUT ACTIVE, PUBLIC AND THEATRICAL, IRRITATING AND RELENTLESS UNTIL THE VICTORY IS ACHIEVED.

👉 TO BE READY TO PARTICIPATE IN CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE ACTIONS ACCORDING TO ONE'S POSSIBILITIES AND ABILITIES.

Three of the V_V movement's 12 governing rules, which have been translated into multiple languages and shared across Telegram

This narrative allows V_V to frame itself as an insurgent force struggling against an authoritarian regime, and members frequently reference the activities of resistance fighters and partisan groups that fought against German-led powers in Europe during the Second World War. The movement openly states that it has taken inspiration directly from the 2005 dystopian action movie "[V for Vendetta](#)", which tells the story of "V" - a masked revolutionary who leads a popular uprising against an oppressive police state.

The movie's distinctive [Guy Fawkes mask](#) has since been adopted by anti-establishment groups around the world and widely popularized by the hacking collective Anonymous. V_V has also seized on the ready-made pop culture symbolism, incorporating the Guy Fawkes mask and other visual elements from the movie into their content and online activities. Indeed, the movement's V_V symbol, consisting of two overlapping Vs breaking out of a red circle, is a direct pastiche of the "V for Vendetta" logo.



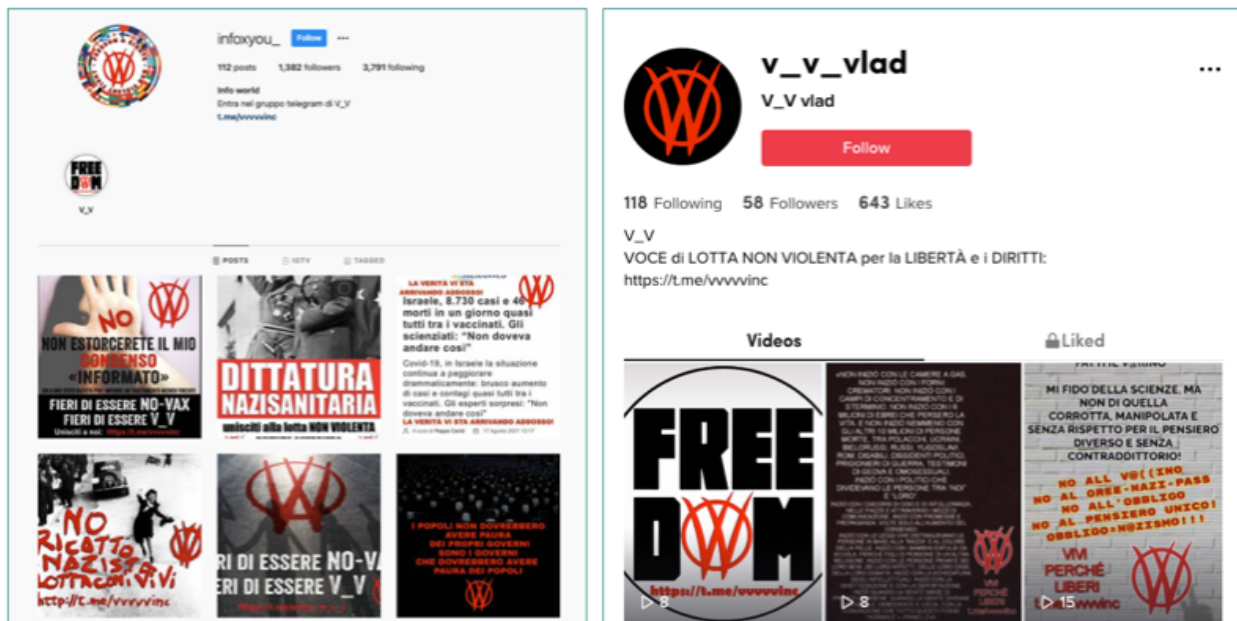
Left: The V for Vendetta logo. Right: The symbol created and used by the V_V movement



An image posted by a V_V Brazil Facebook page urging people to join the movement and showing the masked Guy Fawkes figure from 'V for Vendetta'

V_V claims to be leaderless but is organized via a hierarchical web of Telegram groups. These seem to be the movement's primary online venue, and are used to recruit new members, for general communication, and to coordinate acts of "civil disobedience." Different levels of access, however, are granted to individual users based on their level of involvement and status within the community. Entry-level Telegram groups are used to disseminate general V_V messaging and are publicly accessible, perhaps explaining how some have managed to amass up to 20,000 members. The next level is for individuals who want to become V_V warriors and are engaged in an in-depth initiation process detailed below. Groups in the final tier are mostly private and used to coordinate on- and offline actions - these are reserved for members who have achieved "warrior" status.

Despite organizing and communicating mostly on Telegram, V_V's "psychological warfare" campaign appears to primarily target Facebook, where its members display the group's double V symbol in their profile pictures and swarm the comments sections of posts advocating for Covid-19 vaccines with hundreds of abusive messages. Other Facebook groups and pages associated with the movement attempt to recruit new members while promoting conspiratorial narratives and health misinformation. Graphika has also identified V_V activity, albeit to a lesser extent, on platforms including Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, Twitter, and VKontakte.



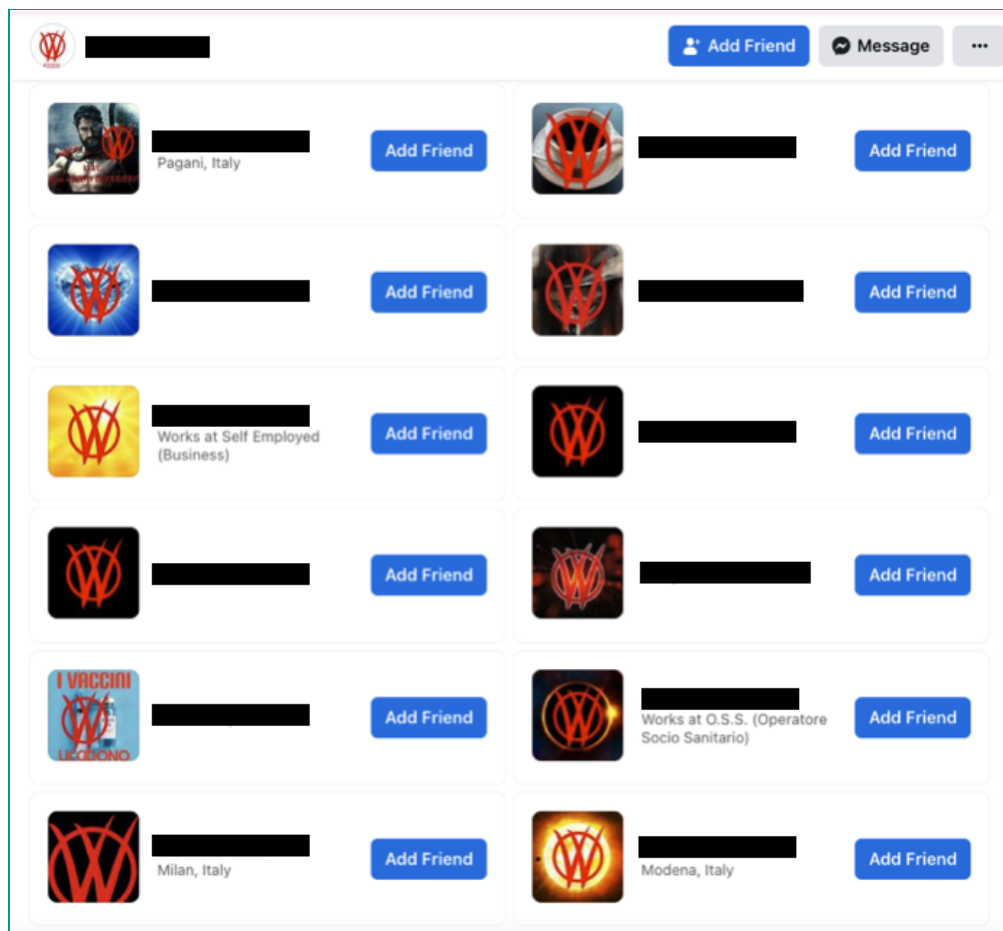
V_V affiliated accounts identified on Instagram and TikTok

Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures

'Public and theatrical'

A stated strategic objective of the V_V movement is to “occupy the online territory” and group administrators encourage followers to be overt in their affiliation and activities. As an unknown author wrote to a V_V Telegram channel reviewed by Graphika: “our fight is non-violent but active, public and theatrical, irritating and relentless (sic) until the victory is achieved.”

One of the most prominent tactics used to achieve this is requiring all active V_V members to change their social media profile photos to a variation of the movement’s logo. The result is that online spaces can feel to be inundated with users who are all immediately identifiable as part of the same coordinated effort. Often, viewing the friends or connections page of a V_V account reveals dozens more users, all displaying the same red symbol.



The Facebook friends page of a V_V member in Italy showing multiple users affiliated with the movement

As previously discussed, V_V also makes heavy use of symbols taken from “V for Vendetta”, usually in the form of eye-catching visuals that are distributed online with anti-vaxx narratives and calls to join the movement. More recently, Graphika has observed some V_V members using images from the film “300”, which tells a similar story of an outnumbered band of warriors taking on a seemingly undefeatable enemy force.

Aside from the movement’s ubiquitous double V insignia, however, the most commonly used visual symbol is the Nazi swastika. This image is used to abuse and vilify doctors, journalists, and public officials accused of being Nazis, and some V_V members have even produced a series of cartoon images showing targeted individuals with a swastika imposed on their foreheads.

Graphika has also noted V_V members using alternate spellings and text symbols to refer to the movement, possibly in an attempt to avoid content moderation efforts by social media platforms. These include using “ViVi” and “vv” instead of the more widely-accepted “V_V,” as well as check mark symbols (✓✓, ✓✓✓✓), and emojis (👉 👉).



A V_V video posted to Facebook showing a Nazi swastika

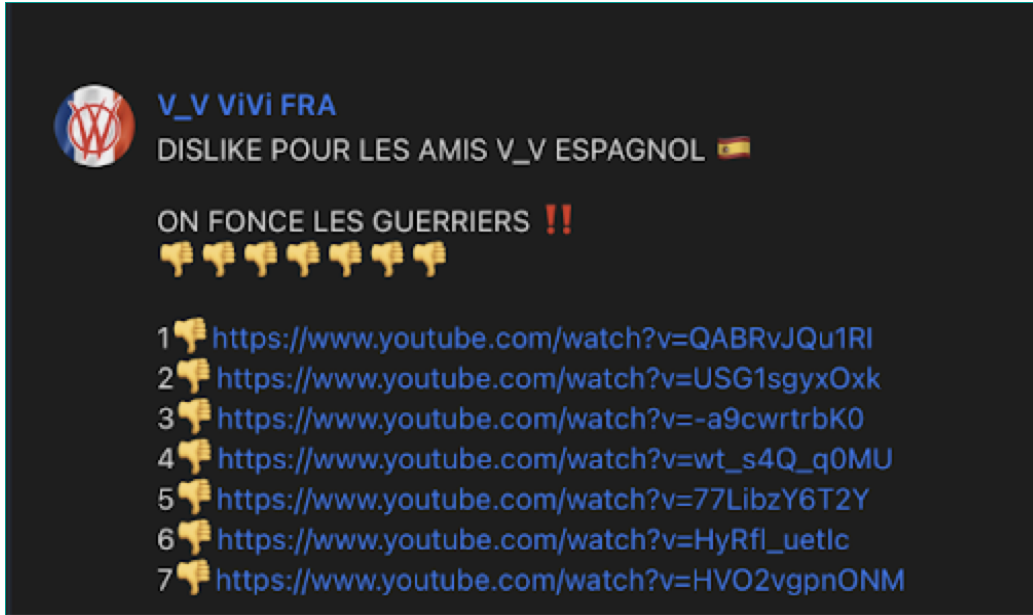
International Cooperation

According to the French newspaper [Libération](#), V_V first emerged in Italy in the first half of 2020. The group has since become an established presence in Italian online spaces and made [local](#) news headlines due to its activities targeting public figures on social media, and instances of V_V-inspired vandalism. It has also built a small but burgeoning presence in France, and Graphika identified Telegram channels and other social media accounts catering to audiences in Germany, Spain, the United Kingdom, Ireland, and Brazil.

The different language communities within the movement appear to be highly connected, frequently linking to each other's groups and posts, and translating the same content and materials in order to reach multiple audiences. Graphika even observed V_V members soliciting, and responding to calls for users to help carry out coordinated online actions in other countries.



Logos from V_V Telegram channels catering to audiences in Spain, Germany, France, and the United Kingdom



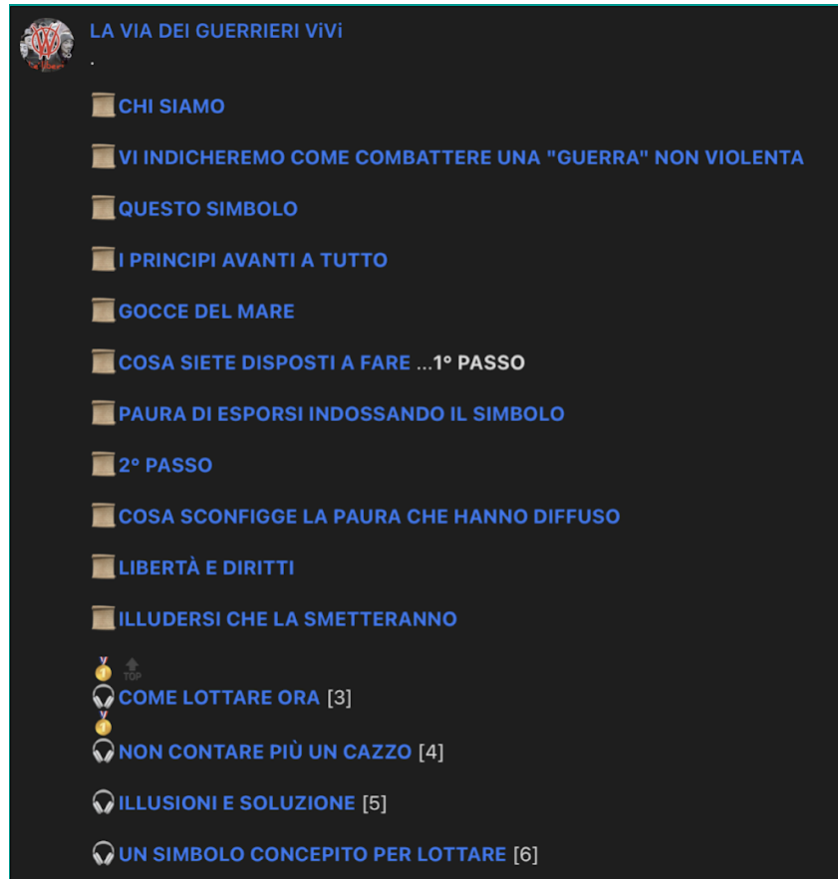
Post to a French-language V_V Telegram group asking members to help our 'Spanish V_V friends' with a coordinated effort to down-vote specific YouTube videos

Recruiting for the Revolution

V_V has an in-depth and multi-stage initiation process for new members, requiring them to study the movement's ideology and practices in order to progress along the "path of a warrior." This is clearly visible in the Italian, French, and German V_V communities, which all have dedicated Telegram channels catering to users interested in joining the movement. These channels act as repositories of documentation about V_V, with pinned messages linking to scores of other posts and lengthy audio files. The provided "learning materials" cover everything from the movement's cause and strategy, to advice for educating children as a V_V parent. Once recruits have finished studying the materials they are directed to contact a group admin to continue their training.

According to [reporting](#) by French news channel LCI, the next stage requires users to answer five detailed questions about the V_V movement and its practices, four of which can be submitted as written answers with at least one answered via an audio message. Recruits are also told to provide an email address and links to their social media accounts.

After passing the initiation process, new members are accepted as V_V warriors and granted access to Telegram groups used to coordinate on- and offline actions. These groups are usually closed and restricted to trusted users, but some switch between public and private at a set time each day. Each warrior is assigned what appears to be a numerical rank based on the order in which they joined the movement, which is then displayed on their social media profiles as a hashtag - e.g. #194.

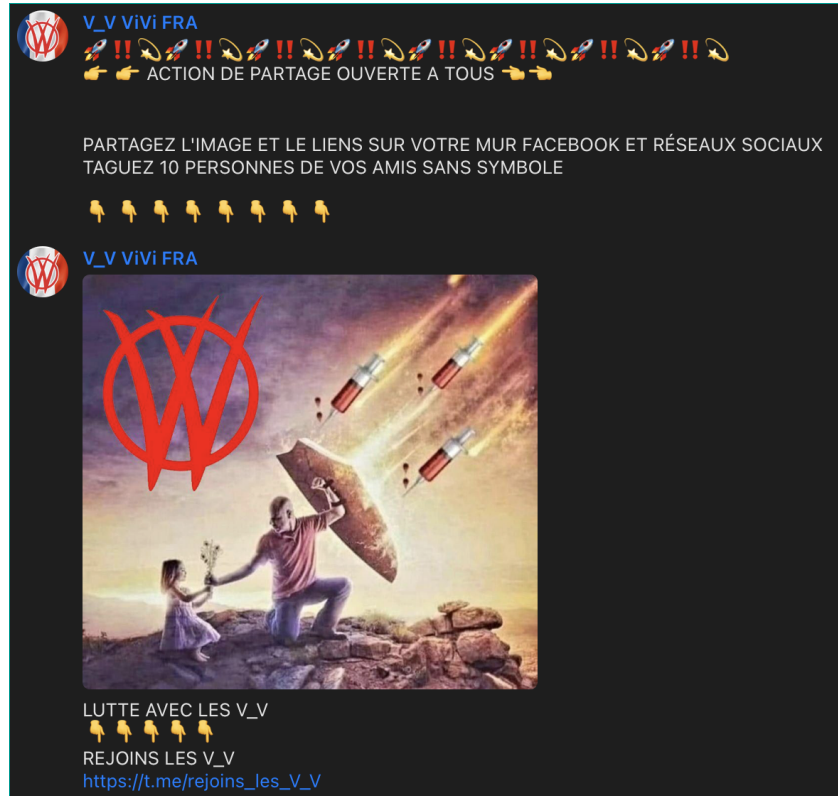


Post to an Italian V_V Telegram channel with some of the documentation provided for new recruits

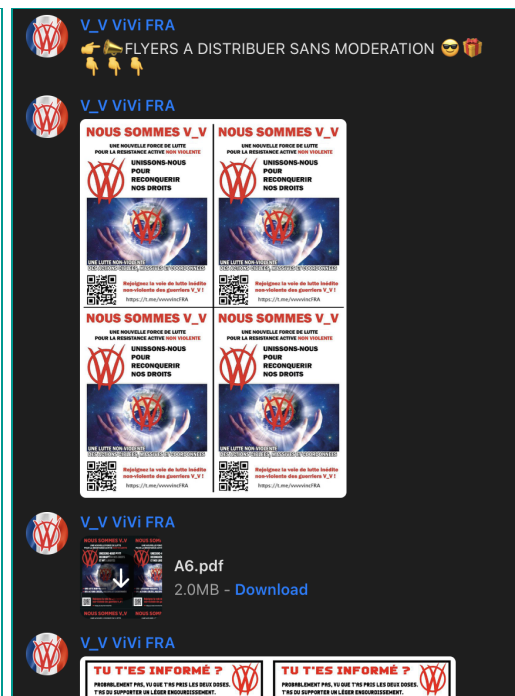
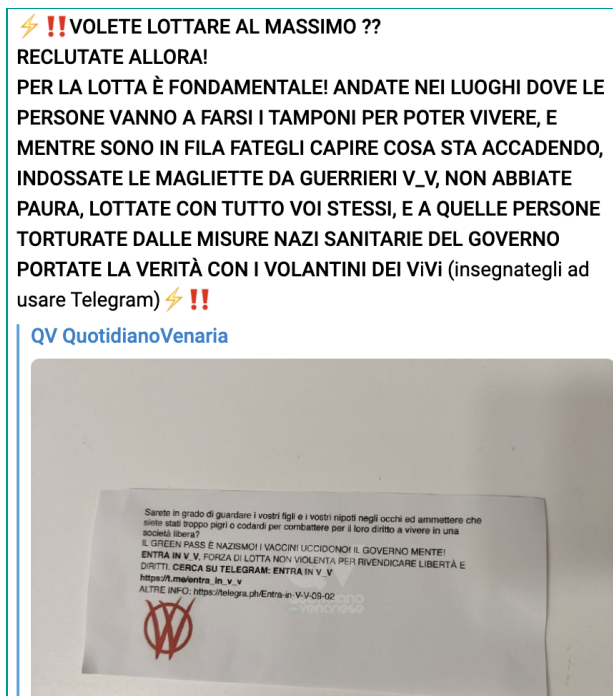
V_V is on a constant drive for new members and regularly attempts to direct users from platforms including Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, to its Telegram channels. Each V_V warrior is told to recruit at least five people and encouraged to seek out individuals that hold vaccine-skeptic views on social media, as well as in discussion forums on news websites.

One particularly prominent recruitment technique involves posting eye-catching V_V-branded visuals to social media and then tagging mutual friends and connections to start a conversation about the movement and its goals. Often these posts are accompanied by links to the relevant V_V recruitment channels on Telegram, which members are instructed to share with their contacts on Signal, WhatsApp, and other messaging platforms.

V_V members in Italy and France have also employed on-the-ground recruitment tactics. According to local media [reports](#), hundreds of residents in Italy have received V_V-branded flyers through their mailboxes, warning about the dangers of vaccines and “health Nazism,” and directing concerned citizens to V_V recruitment channels on Telegram.



Example of a recruitment drive on Facebook organized by members of the French V_V community



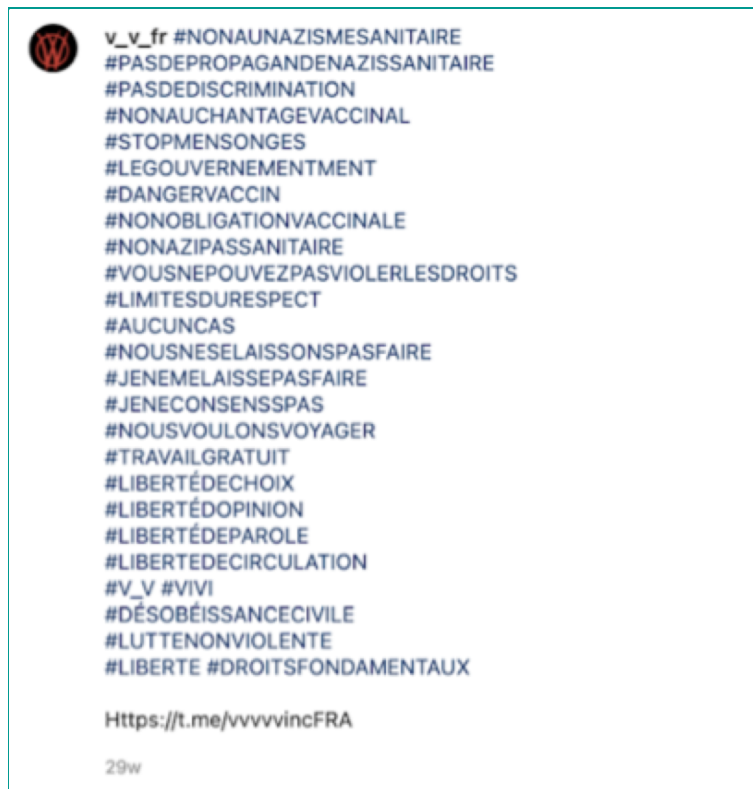
Left: A V_V flyer distributed in Italy. Right: A post to a French-language V_V Telegram channel with flyer templates for members to print and distribute

Coordinated Content

Perhaps the most distinctive aspect of the V_V movement's online behavior is engagement in coordinated posting. This activity is primarily orchestrated on Telegram and then carried out on platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. V_V warriors are provided with multiple pro-forma posts, including text passages, URLs, and pre-packaged images to share on social media. The templates are available in multiple languages, and it is not uncommon to see cross-language activity - for example, an Italian V_V member posting in French, German, or Spanish. The promoted content usually pushes the movement's core messaging narratives, and nearly always includes the phrase "Nazi dictatorship" with links to V_V recruitment channels on Telegram.

The illustration below (page 14) shows a post template sent to members of the Italian V_V Telegram channel SUPER MEGA AZIONE VERITÀ (Super Mega Truth Action), which was then shared to Facebook by multiple V_V accounts within a matter of hours.

V_V members also post identical blocks of hashtags which are shared to Telegram channels for followers to simply copy and paste onto other platforms. The hashtags typically relate to the central V_V narrative, such as #NoToHealthNazism, but some accounts have engaged in basic content amplification techniques, using hashtags including #followback and #likes4likes.



Examples of hashtag blocks used by French V_V accounts on Instagram



Examples of coordinated content posting on Facebook that was organized on a V_V Telegram channel

'SFONDIAMOLI DI DISLIKE'

On multiple occasions Graphika observed V_V members engaging in coordinated campaigns to down-vote and report social media posts, in an apparent effort to reduce their online engagement or even have them removed by content moderators. This technique predominantly targeted videos on YouTube that promote Covid-19 vaccinations. Typically, a V_V channel will post a “call to action” alongside links to the targeted videos, and instruct warriors to respond by “disliking” and reporting the content for policy violations.



Post to an Italian V_V Telegram channel calling for followers to dislike specific YouTube videos

Similarly, V_V members have been encouraged to engage in coordinated efforts to manipulate the results of public polls and surveys about the Covid-19 pandemic and vaccinations. These actions often target polls published by media organizations, such as in the below example which shows an instruction to German V_V members to “Say NO!” in an online survey about compulsory vaccinations hosted by broadcaster MDR.

V_V ViVi DEU
Sag NEIN ! 🙅🙅🙅 20 👁️ edited 21:47

V_V ViVi DEU
Forwarded from ALLES KOMMT ANS LICHT

Prominent Ratgeber Podcast Redaktion Service

Stimmen Sie hier ab!

Datenschutz

it. Würden Sie eine generelle Impfpflicht in Deutschland befürworten?

Ja	23.77%
Nein	75.33%
Ich bin mir nicht sicher.	0.9%

!! MDR-Umfrage: Würden Sie eine generelle Impfpflicht in Deutschland befürworten??? !!

▶ Macht alle mit !!!

Hier ist der Link:
<https://www.mdr.de/brisant/pinpoll-abstimmung-224~direct.html>

20 👁️ 21:47

Post to a German V_V Telegram channel instructing members to "Say NO!" in a poll about vaccinations

Harmful Behaviors

Targeted Harassment

V_V members regularly engage in acts of coordinated and targeted harassment, which they claim are necessary in order to provoke Nazi proponents of Covid-19 vaccines into revealing their “true identities.” These actions have so far mostly taken place in Italy and France, where some victims have [reportedly](#) appealed to local authorities for assistance.

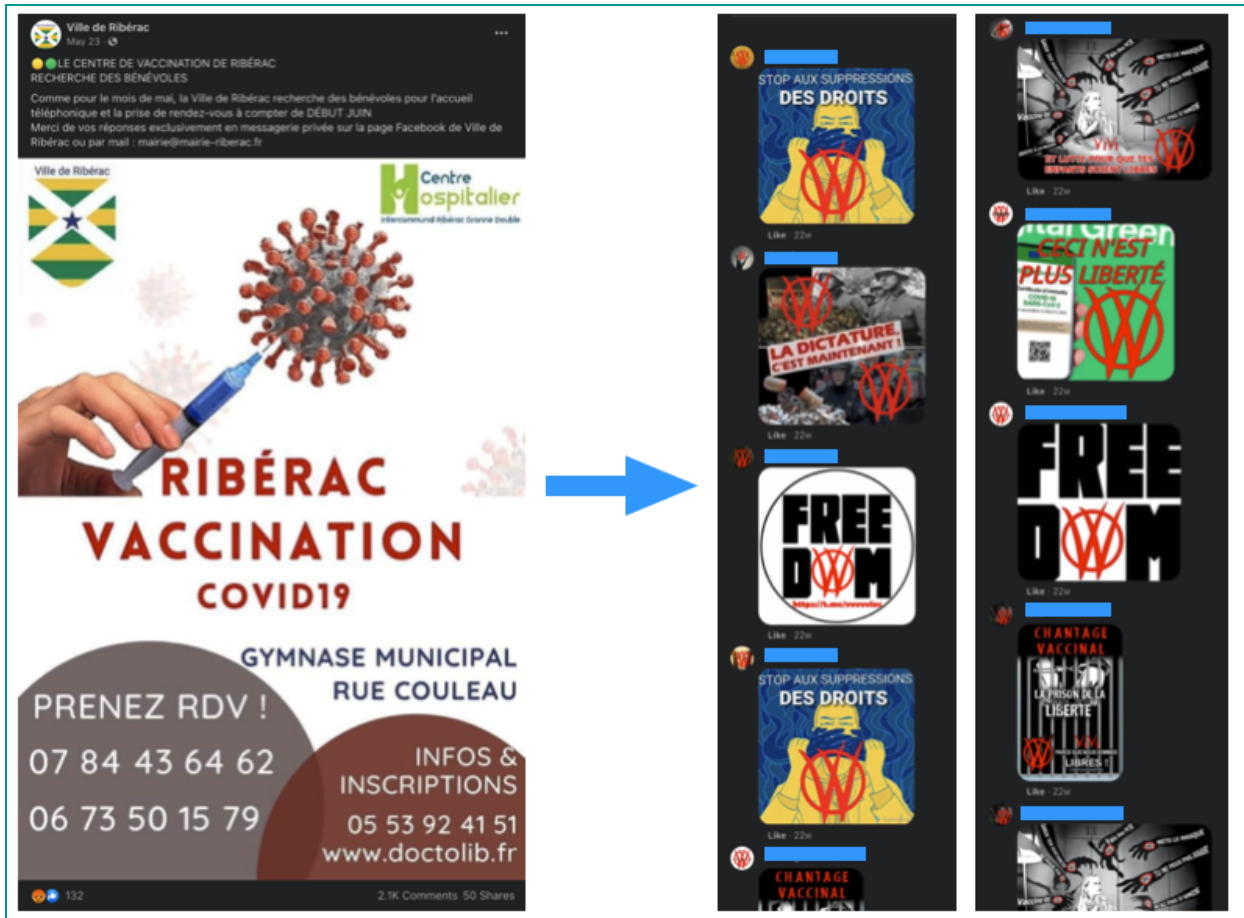
As with V_V’s other coordinated online campaigns, the activity is primarily orchestrated on Telegram, where channel administrators will name a targeted individual or organization, and provide links to specific social media posts. Members are then able to choose from a selection of pre-written messages to copy and paste into a post’s comments section. Messages are usually written in block capitals, accompanied by swastikas, and accuse the victim of being a Nazi and conducting genocide through mass vaccinations. The result is that targeted social media posts can be flooded with hundreds of abusive comments in a matter of hours, overwhelming the online conversation, and dissuading internet users from sharing important public health information.

V_V’s targets have ranged from individual health workers, politicians, and journalists, to medical facilities, government bodies, and media organizations. Any person or entity that advocates for the use of vaccines to fight the spread of Covid-19 is accused of being a Nazi oppressor and viewed as a legitimate target. After online actions are deemed to be successful, V_V members will congratulate each other in Telegram groups with messages detailing their activities.

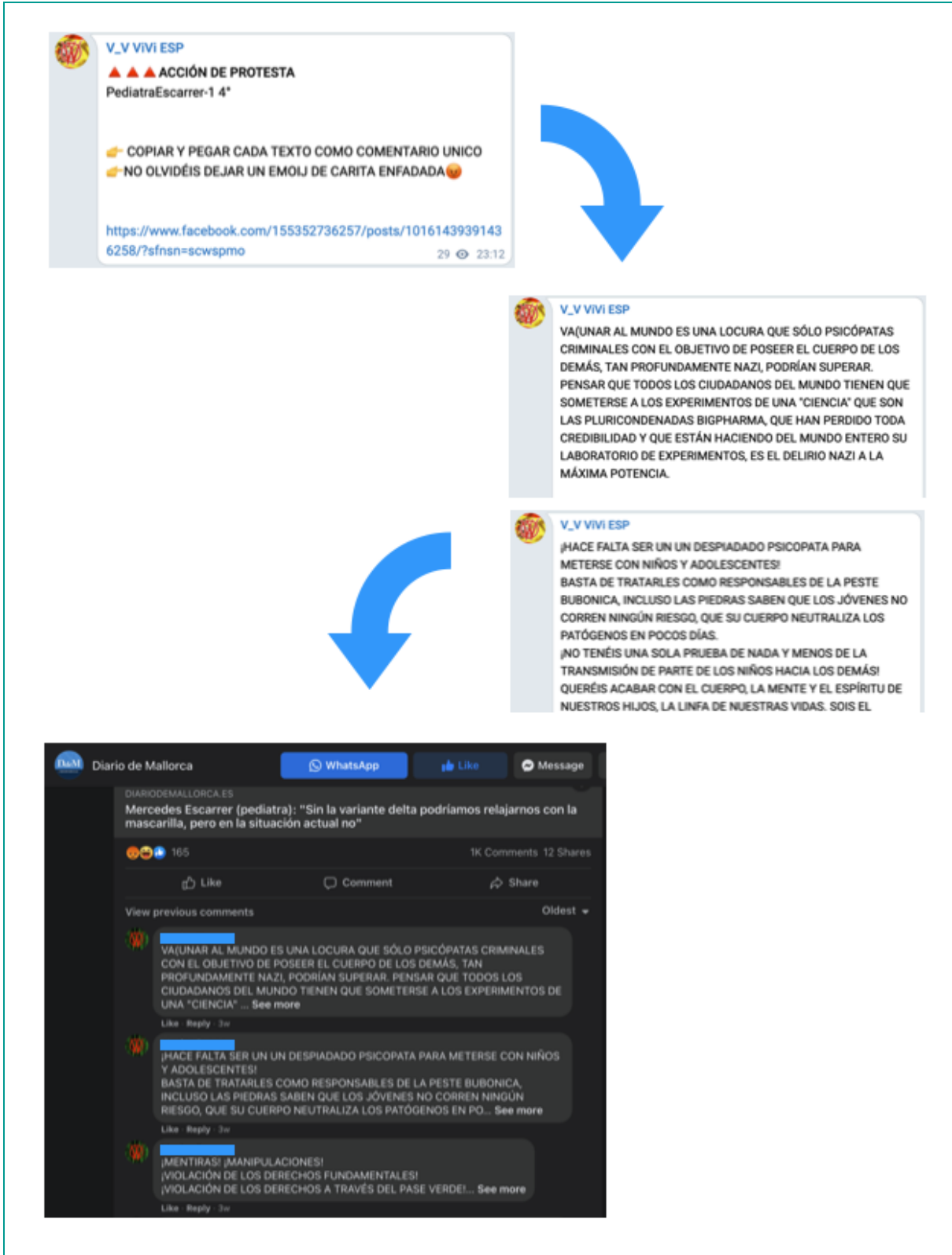
A particularly vicious example of this harassment is a series of V_V-produced cartoon images that target public figures including Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi and the United Kingdom’s Prince Harry, as well as a local doctor in France. The images show each individual with a swastika on their forehead and a speech bubble that reads: “I am a Nazi and I want to impose a Nazi dictatorship.” The images first appeared on Telegram in June this year, and have since been spread on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and VKontakte.



Cartoon images produced and disseminated by the V_V movement targeting Prince Harry and Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi



Left: A post by the Facebook page of the French city of Ribérac calling for volunteers for its vaccination program. Right: V_V members target the post's comments section

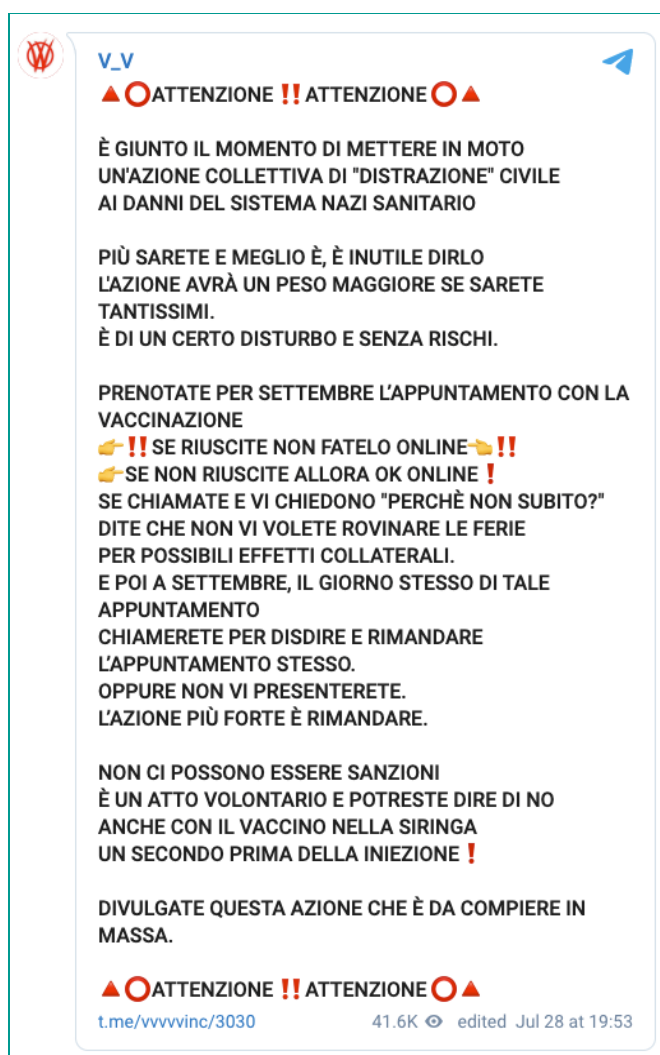


Example of coordinated activity organized on Telegram to target the Facebook page of Spanish news outlet Diario de Mallorca

Disrupting Vaccination Programs

One of the most potentially harmful actions taken by V_V members was an attempt in late July to orchestrate a coordinated effort to disrupt Covid-19 vaccination programs. In two messages sent to over 17,000 users, operators of Italy's second-most-popular V_V Telegram channel called on their followers to book vaccination appointments in September, and then deliberately cancel or postpone them at the last minute, in an apparent attempt to prevent inoculations being provided to members of the public.

It is not clear how many, if any, V_V members responded to the call for action, but the two posts have since been viewed over 75,000 times. The unidentified Telegram administrators said the planned activity was a legal and risk-free act of protest, aimed at undermining "the Nazi health system." "The goal is to disrupt the system ... without even leaving home," they wrote. "We are at war, do you remember?"



A Telegram post with instructions for V_V members to disrupt Covid-19 vaccination programs

V_Vandalism

V_V members appear to have committed multiple acts of real-world vandalism. This often takes the form of tagging buildings and sidewalks with the movement's double V symbol, or leaving stickers in public places with V_V slogans and messaging. Some members have also reportedly targeted [health facilities](#) and [vaccination centers](#).

Posts to V_V Telegram channels warn followers about the risk of engaging in criminal damage and violence, as opposed to what the movement defines as "civil disobedience." One message to a French-language channel, for example, advised V_V warriors not to put stickers on shop windows or use paint that can't be removed. Other posts, however, actively encourage members to spray paint and mark public spaces with V_V symbols and slogans, even suggesting specific language such as "Freedom and rights" and "No to public health Nazism."

Photographs of vandalized buildings are then celebrated in V_V Telegram groups and shared to other social media platforms. Members seem to take particular delight in any news reporting on their actions, which they claim shows the movement is gaining momentum and traction among the wider population.



Left: A V_V Telegram channel shares photos of V_V-inspired graffiti in Italy. Right: A V_V member posts a news article to Facebook about V_V warriors engaging in acts of vandalism



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