

CHALLENGING THE SPREAD OF ONLINE HATE SPEECH

DEFINING ONLINE HATE SPEECH

Online hate speech refers to any communication that vilifies, discriminates against, or incites violence against individuals or groups based on attributes such as race, religion, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or other identity markers. This harmful content spreads rapidly through social media platforms, fostering an environment of hostility and prejudice. The anonymity and reach of the internet allow perpetrators to target victims more easily, amplifying the impact of their harmful messages.

ISLAMOPHOBIC HATE SPEECH ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Islamophobic hate speech specifically targets individuals and communities based on their Muslim identity. This form of hate speech includes stereotypes, misinformation, and lies about Muslims, often portraying them as violent, backward, or a threat to society. Our study of over 3 million tweets reveals that Islamophobic content is alarmingly prevalent on social media, especially in response to significant global events.

For example, spikes in Islamophobic rhetoric were observed following the Brexit referendum, the Christchurch terrorist attack in 2019, and during the Covid-19 pandemic. These events highlight how hate speech can be manipulated to exploit societal tensions and fears.

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THE IMPORTANCE OF ADDRESSING AND COUNTERING HATE SPEECH

Addressing and countering online hate speech is crucial for several reasons:

1

PROTECTING INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITIES

Hate speech can have severe psychological and emotional effects on targeted individuals and communities, leading to feelings of fear, isolation, and trauma. By challenging these harmful narratives, we help protect the well-being of vulnerable groups.

2

PROMOTING SOCIAL COHESION

Hate speech fosters division and mistrust within society. Counter-narratives that challenge hate, and promote understanding and solidarity can help bridge divides and foster a more inclusive and cohesive community.

3

DISCOURAGE EXTREMISM

Exposure to hate speech can perpetuate extremism in society by reinforcing existing divisions. By countering hate speech, we can diffuse these tensions and suggest alternative perspectives and solutions.

4

UPHOLDING DEMOCRATIC VALUES

A healthy democracy relies on respectful and informed public discourse. Countering hate speech ensures that online spaces remain platforms for constructive dialogue rather than breeding grounds for hatred and misinformation.



KEY INSIGHTS & THEIR IMPACT ON SOCIETY:

OUR GROUNDBREAKING STUDY REVEALS KEY INSIGHTS ESSENTIAL FOR NAVIGATING AND INTERACTING IN ONLINE SPACES TO PROMOTE UNITY AND EFFECTIVELY COUNTERACT HATE.

TWITTER (NOW X) AND HATE SPEECH

Twitter, now called X, plays a significant role in both spreading and countering anti-Muslim racism. This dual role became especially apparent during trigger events like Brexit, the Christchurch terror attack in 2019, and the Covid-19 pandemic.

IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

Social media platforms react differently to specific events based on their user base and functionality.

PATTERNS OF HATE SPEECH OVER TIME

The shifting trends in hate speech, such as the decrease in far-right Islamophobic content in the US from 2016 to 2020 and the rise of Hindu nationalist rhetoric in India during the Covid pandemic, highlight the dynamic nature of online hate.

SUSTAINABILITY OF COUNTER-NARRATIVES

While social media provided vital support to communities after the Christchurch attack, maintaining this support over time is challenging.

EVENT MANIPULATION

Specific events can be twisted to spread hate, such as how white nationalists used Brexit for anti-Muslim propaganda. However, these events can also inspire stronger counter-narrative efforts.

RISKS AND CHALLENGES

Engaging with hate speech carries risks, including the potential to amplify harmful messages. It also takes an emotional toll on activists.

MODERATION DIFFICULTIES

Moderating hate speech is complex due to its frequent disguise as cultural or religious debate.

THE FUTURE OF X

Changes in the ownership and moderation policies of Twitter/X raise important questions about its role in activism.

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THE POWER OF ONLINE NETWORKS

NETWORKS OF SOLIDARITY AND HATE

AMPLIFICATION OF MESSAGES

Online networks have a remarkable ability to amplify messages, whether positive or negative, due to their expansive reach and the speed at which content spreads. Social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram can turn a single post into a viral sensation within hours. This amplification can serve both constructive purposes, such as raising awareness and fostering community support, and destructive ones, such as spreading misinformation and hate speech.

VISUAL DATA REPRESENTATION

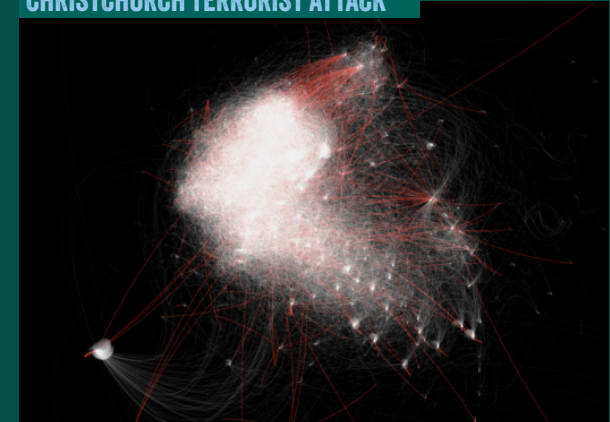
The following visualisations are derived from our analysis of over 3 million tweets, demonstrating the spread and impact of hate speech and the effectiveness of counter-narratives. The diagrams illustrate how online networks can both segregate into echo chambers and come together in moments of crisis. By understanding these dynamics, we can better harness the power of social media to counteract hate speech and promote positive narratives.

NETWORK DIAGRAM 1: BREXIT HATE SPEECH



This diagram shows the networks of retweets and quote tweets related to Brexit, illustrating the formation of echo chambers. People with similar views connected primarily within their own groups, reinforcing their beliefs. Large white circles indicate influential figures, such as a Labour MP posting their support for Muslims and an anti-Muslim white nationalist.

NETWORK DIAGRAM 2: CHRISTCHURCH TERRORIST ATTACK



This diagram highlights the network of retweets following the Christchurch terrorist attack. Most users shared messages of condolence and support for Muslims from celebrities, politicians, and public figures. The cohesive network indicates widespread solidarity, though fringe elements with extreme views were also present.

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HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF FROM HARM ONLINE

IF YOU SEE HATE SPEECH ONLINE:

DON'T ENGAGE WITH IT

- Engaging can direct hate back at you and is very dangerous.
- Engaging also helps spread their hate further.

REPORT IT

- Report hate speech to the platform, Ofcom, or tell a trusted adult.
- Report it to civil society organisations such as the Center for Countering Digital Hate, Get the Trolls Out, or Hope not Hate for additional support and safeguarding.

DOCUMENT IT

- Screenshot abusive messages for evidence.

USE PLATFORM TOOLS

- Utilise tools to block anyone who is abusive.

SPREAD POSITIVITY

- Share positive narratives, stories, and examples to counter hateful ideas.
- Participate in community events, charity efforts, or acts of kindness.
- Use hashtags to increase the visibility of positive posts or join a #campaign.

THINK BEFORE YOU SHARE

- Consider if your message could cause harm to you or others now or in the future.

MAINTAIN CIVILITY

- Keep a civil tone in your messages.
- Use evidence in your arguments, not abusive language.

BE MINDFUL WITH HUMOUR

- Be careful with humour or sarcasm as it can provoke further negativity.

SUPPORT YOUR FRIENDS

- Check in with friends who have been victims of online attacks.
- Ensure you and your friends have a support group.

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