

Identifying cyber hate: overview of online hate speech policies & finding possible measures to counter hate speech on internet

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Abstract

Being the fastest growing and highly accessible medium, today internet is becoming a powerful source to disseminate any sort of content by individuals. World Wide Web (www) is crowded with a variety of content in the form of information, posts, comments, and messages etc. which are readily available to internet users. The cyber world is the hot spot to spread any particular ideology, belief, propaganda, violence or hatred against any individual or group in society for any significant or insignificant reason that also includes spreading or becoming victim of cyber hate.

This research aims to study online hate speech policies and the preventive measures that can be taken to counter cyber hate. Researcher has evaluated top five search engines and their hate speech policy to report any type of abusive or hateful content to be removed that may target any specific group, bullying or dehumanizing individuals, spreading political violence and defaming sacred or revered figures on internet.

Keywords: *cyber hate, online hate speech, hateful content, hate speech on internet, hate speech policy, counter online hate speech*

Introduction

Other than traditional media, internet is now being used as a powerful medium to disseminate any kind of information from any corner of the world as it is becoming highly affordable and accessible for all. With the invention and widespread usage of smart phones, notebook, iPad and laptop, internet has gained more popularity and

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media organizations use internet to address traditional functions of media which include information, education and entertainment, while individuals are using internet for many reasons such as; to stay updated with news and latest happenings in the world; to become socially active by using social media; and to share their views and thoughts. Internet has confined the world in our hands and therefore, anyone can enjoy an access to add or post any piece of information or content throughout the World Wide Web that has turned it into a most powerful and susceptible medium for spreading any particular ideology, belief, propaganda, violence or hatred.

Internet is viable to target any individual or group in society for any significant or insignificant reason that also includes becoming victim of cyber hate. The phenomenon is much vivid in virtual world of internet than the real world therefore there is a need to identify various types of online hatred and scrutinize the content from victims' as well as producers' perspective.

Researcher has evaluated top five search engines and their hate speech policy keeping in view the fact of presence of millions of web pages with hateful content. The purpose is to acknowledge how hateful content can be removed by taking legal steps and how one can avoid it at personal level. Moreover, the paper evaluates the level of education and awareness among users regarding online hate speech and the best practices for responding to cyber hate.

This study is an effort to highlight hate speech policy of search engines, social networking sites, chat forums or reporting abuse while browsing internet. The researcher intends to know what steps we can take to combat cyber-hate speech and suggesting possible measures

of cyber hate education to deal the issue.

Literature Review

“Cyber hate” is becoming the growing concern today that needs to be dealt by educating internet users of cyber security. Like Europe and America, Pakistan also needs to take possible steps to combat online hateful content, and protecting one’s right of standing against online hate speech.

The worldwide web contains multiple web pages with variety of content and for any group or individual these web pages have become a platform for blowing hatred against any other group or individual. Though all search engines have privacy policy and other terms and conditions speaking about protection of all sort of violence including content that targets gender, race, nationality, religion or ethnicity, but despite that such content is searchable all across web pages with just a click.

This results in feeling insecure or being victimized of such hatred, thus creating a situation of unrest, and religious intolerance

Hate speech is, outside the law, speech that attacks a person or group on the basis of attributes such as gender, ethnic origin, religion, race, disability, or sexual orientation, and the term “Cyber Hate” refers to expressions of hate (discriminating remarks, harassment, insults) on the Internet against persons based on their skin colour, so-called “race”, origin, sexual orientation, disability, illness, faith, etc. Cyber hate also includes anti-Semitic remarks or remarks that deny the occurrence of the holocaust.

Other types of cyber-hate include cyber bullying, blasphemy,

political satire or racist hate speech. In a pilot study that attempts to quantify hate speech in commercial radio, Noriega tracked language on the Lou Dobbs Show, Savage Nation and the John & Ken Show (Latino Policy and Issues Brief, 2/09). On these programs he found “systematic and extensive use of false facts, flawed argumentation, divisive language, and dehumanizing metaphors that are directed toward specific vulnerable groups” – which results, Noriega argued, in marginalized populations being “characterized as a direct threat to the listeners’ way of life.”

Many organizations are working to deal online hateful content and have devised policies to report such type of content. They address all forms of online hate speech by bringing worldwide web in line with human rights where everyone has right of being secured and protected.

As only search engine policies are not sufficient, there exist such online websites where cyber hate is countered by promoting mutual respect. These web pages look into the illegal discriminatory content, anti-Semitism, holocaust denial, other religious discrimination, ethnic bully and such type of prejudiced web content.

Some of the ways suggested by cyber world gurus to keep a check on content flow are through acknowledging the concept of social responsibility, learning web ethics and keeping abreast of online content policy to know the freedom of speech and other code of ethics to be practiced whenever posting any comment, message or content on web pages.

Individuals search with keywords, and key phrases to browse relevant data. These queries land them to blogs, public comments

rooms, videos, chat groups, photo or video sharing websites or sometimes hate sites. This type of web content creates cyber-hate and as a reaction the intolerance is witnessed turning from virtual world to real world.

Theoretical Frame Work

This research draws base from Uses and Gratification Theory that is “an approach to understand why and how people actively seek out specific media to satisfy specific needs”. It assumes that media compete with other resources for need satisfaction and people have enough self-awareness of their media use, interests, and motives to be able to provide researchers with an accurate picture of that use and the value judgments of media content can only be assessed by the audience.

The research is based on hate speech policy of search engines that makes everyone safe from cyber-hate and to know that people in Pakistan are aware of legal laws to counter online hate speech or not and also knowing the steps or measures that can be taken to counter cyber-hate speech. By using survey method based on questionnaire, this study proposes following hypotheses:

H1: Hate speech policy of search engines ensures cyber-hate safety of everyone

H2: We are educated enough to counter cyber-hate speech by reporting it online.

For hate speech policy, a sample of popular search engines: Google, Yahoo, Bing, Ask, and Aol and their hate speech policies are considered and the unit of analysis are the existing sites with hate

speech (violating the policy).

For questionnaire, the universe is educational institutes and software houses and a sample of university students and software houses of Lahore are studied. Masters and M.Phil level students, teachers, SEOs, web designers and web developers are the unit of analysis. Questionnaires are filled by this unit of analysis and then findings are interpreted through graphical presentation.

Findings & Interpretations

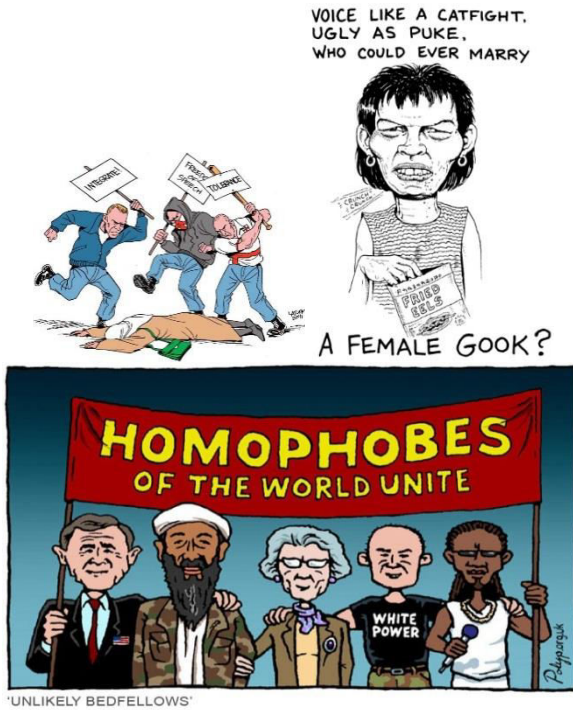
During the survey, researcher has asked the respondents a total 57 questions divided in three sections. The first set of 14 questions aim to explore their knowledge of cyber-hate speech, second is based on how do they identify hateful web content and the last to find out the ways to stop hate speech on internet.

Both males and females were assessed, of which 44% belonged to IT field and 56% were from non-it field of study with an exception of 4% individuals who do not use internet, whereas 96% use internet for information seeking and social reasons. 70% respondents have experienced abuse, harassment, threat, bully, and satire in real life or on or internet in the form of comments, cartoons, messages, and images. When asked about a particular group of society facing hate-speech, 65% associated it with politicians, and celebrities, whereas 39% identified religious groups such as Muslims, Christians, Jews, Hindus to be victim of hate-speech, and rest answered about race and ethnicity.

92% consider an increase in hate speech following a national or religious crisis or due to other worldwide conflicts and the popular

ways to hate on internet are comments 73% and cartoon or images 36%. For this purpose, the researcher has asked respondents to identify hate-speech through comments such as, "Muslims are terrorists" that 85% answered as hate speech, "Islam is a hate-cult religion" identified by 80% respondents, "Jackson is a loser and must be thrown out of school" by 65%, "Julia is a fatty, pathetic woman, she should not work in office" by 73%, "Slap White people, they are nonsense" by 68%, "Hey you transgender, you have no right of education" by 70%, and "Spit on him, he is minority" identified as hate speech by 70% respondents.

Researcher has selected three images to know whether respondents perceive them as hate-content. One image shows three men beating a religiously clad man lying breathlessly on earth who is wearing a head cover and long gown, whereas the men beating him, are dressed in jeans with jackets and shirts. They are raising slogans in their hands that read as "integrate", "freedom of speech" and "tolerance". Second image shows a skinny woman with short hair, and broader nose and lips. The image has content, "voice like a catfight. Ugly as puke, who could ever marry", and showing "a female gook". The third image shows five men standing together and raising a slogan, "homophobes of the world unite", one man resembling the former United States president George W. Bush, one man in beard who resembles Usama Bin Laden, one resembles a scholar with spectacles and grayish short hair, a bald man wearing black shirt with printed words "white power" and a black man with long hair. 87% respondents identified these images as hate-content on internet.



Cyber bullying, blasphemy, misogyny (women subjugation), homophobia (transgender), political satire, and racism are considered as cyber hate by 95% respondents, and possible reasons of it are for making fun of others as replied by 36%, human rights violation by 14%, terrorism by 26%, bias for a group replied by 44%, racial prejudice and intolerance by 27% and ethnic cleansing threat by 10%. 34% people use internet for hate speech as it is free, 34% to hide identity, 31% as propaganda tool and 39% use it for having unfiltered communication and 68% people replied against social networking sites to have more cyber-hate that results in spreading more hate, violence and increasing discrimination.

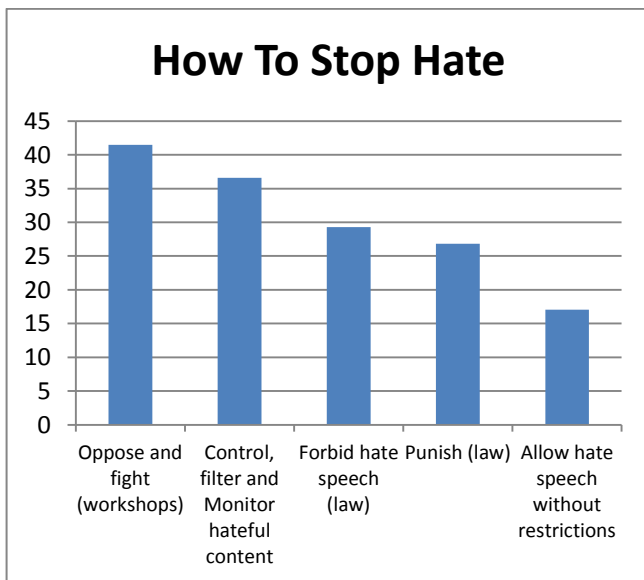
60% of the respondents know about hate speech policies of

search engines, social networking sites, chat forums, blogs, and websites and for all content on internet. 75% people said that it is important for everyone to feel safe online and 87% responded to respect other people’s human rights on internet.

95% said that there should be free speech without hate speech on internet. When asked about training on cyber security and to counter cyber-hate, 95% showed ignorance on the terms of use, or hate speech policy of search engines, and the ways to report it however, 82% said that online hate speech should be punished.

Ways to Stop Hate Speech on Internet

92% of the respondents are not aware of Pakistan laws against hate speech and have never heard about any hate speech movement in Pakistan to counter cyber hate. 90% have no idea about what to do to react or report online hate speech but 57% want to remove hateful content on internet.



82% responded that internet world must apply human rights same like real world and 78% said that government initiatives are the right ways to address hate speech issue instead of protest and rallies and 92% people said that the issue must be highlighted for educational Institutes, Government, Organization for Islamic Corporation, and United Nations to stop hate speech on internet.

Discussion & Analysis

Internet is a popular medium to post any hateful content that people can not to do so face to face or due to geographical limitations. People today recognize any type of hate speech both in real and virtual world. They identify hateful web content.

Bias for a group is resulted highest as the reason of cyber hate and social networking sites are considered highly used tool to spread hatred. Though many people ignore it but highest percentage of population wanted to know the search engine policies to combat hate speech on internet.

It is important for all to feel safe online and consider internet as an inappropriate place to post any hateful web content. Respecting human is also important in cyber world and online hate speech should be punished.

Highest percentage of people are not trained to ensure cyber security but want to be trained to report it online and stopping hate through education or spreading awareness. There is no such law to avoid hate speech and more people want to remove hateful content on internet.

Many people suggested that cyber hate should be opposed and

internet rights should be same like human rights. Reporting is not the only solution but government initiative will help in that regard. A highest percentage of people agreed that issue must be highlighted in educational Institutes, Government, Organization For Islamic Corporation (OIC), as well as in United Nations. The selected population considered this research and survey very useful to raise awareness about cyber hate.

Conclusion

Internet is a popular medium of information among students and teachers. Though the hate speech policy of search engines makes everyone safe from cyber-hate but people in Pakistan are not that much aware of legal laws to counter online hate speech. Therefore, we need cyber-hate education on institutional level and to know the steps or measures that we can take to counter cyber-hate speech.

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