
Policing Of Online Hate Speech

The introduction of the internet brought about a new revolution of connectivity and communication, but along with accessibility of communication arose the simplicity to discriminate against individuals and large groups of people with the touch of a finger. Derogatory and inflammatory speech in the United States has technically been around since the country's founding, but it was not classified as a hate crime until the expansion of the Hate Crime Laws in 2009. Though there has been debate over its potential conflict with the First Amendment, the line of criminality at which hate speech lies is where it begins to infringe on the rights of others. Policies have been put in place in the hopes of reducing the occurrence of this in the real world, but it is unclear on the correct manner with which to police online instances. Legislative actions that ban or criminalize online hate speech might be somewhat useful; however, filtering by the community and policies placed by networking sites would prove to be a more reliable source for stopping discrimination done through the internet. Policing this to a complete and just extent would either be an overstep of power or just not possible. Some suggest that the United States federal government has no business interfering with the internet realm since it is accessed internationally. This, of course, would make it more of an international issue rather than a national issue. Others would argue that it is no one's business at all. These people believe that such interference would be an abuse of government power. In both cases, there is a fear that government intervention would give the United States too much power.

The first step in pushing back on bigots would be to 'arm the public' with the availability to identify and report hate speech. In Source A, Scott Rubin, an executive from Google and YouTube, states, "...we count on our community...to flag videos." Mr. Rubin is referring to the authority they have given to their platform users to decide what they find offensive. Mr. Rubin and other Google executives understand the importance of making certain that both their subscribers and casual users feel safe in that community. YouTube and several other online media companies are combating hate speech by instilling discriminatory discretion with the public in the form of standardized guidelines. They advise these users to keep their content from being too controversial or indecent while at the same time suggesting that users report such content so that it can no longer persist in offending or oppressing other users. The mechanism of allowing all users to flag illicit content does not fully prevent the problem, but it is good at hiding inappropriate posts from viewing. In internet spaces where there is no option either to flag or to hide posts, some organizations and advocacy groups have taken the matter into their own hands by commenting directly on the original post to defend others (Source A). They make it their social responsibility to sift through thousands of comments and posts to isolate hate speech criminals even further. These examples illustrate that allowing other users to flag posts that they are offended by is more useful for getting the site to take it down. Since the United States is all about giving power to the people, this philosophy should not be a problem. As Source G points out, "...we should look for creating empathy." A site that allows all to share their feelings in a justified manner ensures that everyone is heard clearly. Although when some speak their minds it may be offensive, the hurt can be combated with the same basic principle. Implementing ways for the community to fight back peacefully is key in taking down hate speech.

A more legalistic approach proves to be troubling in more specific cases. Germany's new

Network Enforcement Act, meant to protect internet users solely against hate speech, is starting to take down expressions of opinions, and “...the law is achieving the opposite of what it intended” (Source B). The Network Enforcement Act was put in place to protect those with a pure voice and punish those with a nefarious voice, but it seems as if the line between them is often blurred by the artificial intelligence filter. On top of this, law enforcement could potentially view any deleted posts as destruction of evidence, putting the social media companies at risk of running afoul of the law. It’s the very definition of a Catch-22: the media company might just be trying to keep other people from being hurt by the post, but the German government needs the post to prove guilt. Other parts of this act give over too much control to the private business owners instead of the people. To restate a previous claim, the social media companies must assist in allowing the public to decide what is and what is not hate speech. The problem with this act in particular does not bode well for any similar legal plans to be made in the United States in the future, especially with our generally more conservative populace. Source C outlines an instance in which bans and suspensions from a network site improved the community and lessened hate speech. This solution might open up new job positions and improve the site’s well being. However, those in charge of the post-flagging and time-outs work for the company and can place an account on ban for any reason they please, even if it is just an expressed opinion that the individual happens to agree with. This does not seem completely fair to all of the users since their security can be upheld or denied by bias. While there can be some result in restrictive policies, the overall outcome does not guarantee freedom of opinion. The acts of the legislature in Germany and the Reddit bans demonstrate why this legalistic approach is not just unhelpful but infringing.

In order to fully police online hate speech at a court level, strict policies and laws would have to be put in place that would diminish the freedom that is the internet, and that's only in the United States. According to Source F, “some 11,500 sites [are] devoted to discriminating against groups of people.” Any United States law put into place would not be capable of fully criminalizing domains that permit or encourage hate speech. At best they, could only stop viewers from seeing the content. Most other countries would have to follow suit to make any kind of drastic difference. But if these privately owned sites can not be criminalized, and they will not be affected by the other solutions previously mentioned, then what can be done? Well, maybe nothing. There are two major areas where hate speech occurs: social media and private blogging sites. Social media could be looked at as unavoidable since platforms like Facebook and Instagram are so widespread, but private blogs that are meant to discriminate do not even have to be clicked on. The only thing that could be done without restricting their freedoms would be to have search engine sites tack on a disclaimer to the URL or link that clarifies the intention of the blog. “The way to combat hate speech...is...to contest it” (Source D). Another solution would be to create uplifting sites of the opposite matter to overshadow the hate sites. This wouldn’t necessarily punish the other site owners, but it would outshine the hate. Every citizen deserves their freedom, on- or offline, as long as it does not infringe on the rights of other people. As we have seen in Germany, laws might only worsen the problem.

Hate speech is a widespread issue with no firm, end-all solution to the problem. Source E demonstrates that 55 percent of adults who have experienced harassment that includes severe behaviors think the government needs to do more about it. Of those surveyed that have had no previous experience with harassment, 33 percent also believed that it was not taken seriously enough. Though we have seen that it would not be possible to enforce, these responses still demonstrate the extent of the issue. This goes to show how upsetting it is that people are being attacked with no real justification.

The only viable solution immediately available to society is for each citizen, every time he or she interacts on the internet, to keep an eye out for any particularly alarming posts or comments and flag or report them. In some cases, if especially severe or persistent, citizens should report the user of origin to further prevent any more one-sided discrimination. Also, being kind to others, especially on the internet, and never partaking in any kind of hate activity will begin to have a positive cumulative effect. The only way to fight hate is with kindness. Internet users who don't find themselves in those types of situations often can still help put an end to this issue by continuing to spread awareness.

How extensively does hate speech actually hurt the population? As shown in Source F, there are thousands of sites dedicated to discriminating and targeting others. For perspective, there are 4.5 billion unique internet users as of 2019. This just shows how many people could be potentially affected by these sites. This source does not even mention the amount of hate posts or comments made on other social media sites which may affect even more individuals. Targeted groups and individuals are massively affected by this type of speech, but there is not much that can be done effectively through the force of law.

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