



Platforms, Experts, Tools: Specialised Cyber-Activists Network

# Beyond the “Big Three”

**Alternative platforms for online hate speech**



Project funded by the European Union's Rights,  
Equality and Citizenship Programme (2014-2020)

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## About the Project

The EU-funded project [sCAN](#)– *Platforms, Experts, Tools: Specialised Cyber-Activists Network* (2018-2020) aims at gathering expertise, tools, methodology and knowledge on cyber hate and developing transnational comprehensive practices for identifying, analysing, reporting and counteracting online hate speech.

### Legal Disclaimer

This Analytical Paper was funded by the European Union’s Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (2014-2020).

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**Project funded by the European Union’s Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (2014-2020)**

## Introduction

In recent years, most international studies on hate speech online have focused on the three platforms traditionally considered the most influential: Facebook, YouTube and Twitter. However, their predominance as the biggest international social networks is no longer uncontested. Other networks are on the rise and young users especially lose interest in the 'old' platforms. In April 2019, Instagram had more active accounts globally than Twitter<sup>1</sup> and came fifth in terms of global page impressions<sup>2</sup>, after Facebook, Pinterest, Twitter and YouTube. Additionally, recent studies into the social media use of minors and young adults showed that Instagram is more important than Facebook to users younger than 30 in several countries<sup>3</sup>. Since hate groups and extremists move their propaganda to the channels where they can reach their target audience most easily, it is important to take those changes in the social media landscape into consideration.

Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram are all parties to the Code of Conduct on countering illegal hate speech online, established by the European Commission in 2016<sup>4</sup>, agreeing to take stronger and swifter action against hate speech on their platforms. Google+ has also joined the Code of Conduct in 2018. However, as the network was shut down in April 2019, it is no longer included in this analysis.

As hate speech moderation increases on the major social media platforms, hate groups and extremists turn to other networks where community guidelines against hate speech are less strictly enforced. Some of those alternative platforms, like VK.com or Gab.ai, have acquired a broad international audience and are considered 'safe havens' by far-right or right-wing extremist activists. Other platforms have a more local audience or are only relevant in specific countries.

This analysis offers an overview of the most prevalent social media platforms and websites used for disseminating hate speech in the countries of the sCAN project partners. Six partner organisations provided input and contributed with their extensive experience in the field of combatting hate speech online:

- ZARA – Zivilcourage und Anti-Rassismus-Arbeit (Austria)
- Romea (the Czech Republic)
- Licra - International League Against Racism and Antisemitism (France)
- jugendschutz.net (Germany)
- CESIE (Italy)
- University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Social Sciences (UL-FDV) (Slovenia)

Where not quoted otherwise, the examples in this analytical paper are derived from the input and work experiences of the partner organisations.

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<sup>1</sup> Statista (2019a). *Most popular social networks worldwide as of April 2019, ranked by number of active users (in millions)*. Available at <https://www.statista.com/statistics/272014/global-social-networks-ranked-by-number-of-users/> (last accessed 23.05.2019).

<sup>2</sup> Statista (2019b). *Marktanteile von Social-Media-Seiten nach Seitenabrufen weltweit von Februar 2019 bis April 2019*. Available at <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/241601/umfrage/marktanteile-fuehrender-social-media-seiten-weltweit/> (last accesses 23.05.2019).

<sup>3</sup> See for example Medienpädagogischer Forschungsverbund Südwest (2018). *JIM-Studie 2018 – Jugend, Information, Medien*. Available at <https://www.mpfs.de/studien/jim-studie/2018/> (last accessed 15.05.2019); Diplomeo (2018). *Paroles aux jeunes*. Available at [https://diplomeo.com/actualite-sondage\\_reseaux\\_sociaux\\_jeunes](https://diplomeo.com/actualite-sondage_reseaux_sociaux_jeunes) (last accessed 15.05.2019); SaferInternet.at (2019). *Jugend-Internet-Monitor 2019*. Available at [https://www.saferinternet.at/fileadmin/redakteure/Projekt-Seiten/Jugend-Internet-Monitor/Infografik\\_Jugend-Internet-Monitor\\_2019.png](https://www.saferinternet.at/fileadmin/redakteure/Projekt-Seiten/Jugend-Internet-Monitor/Infografik_Jugend-Internet-Monitor_2019.png) (last accessed 23.05.2019).

<sup>4</sup> European Commission (2016). Code of Conduct on countering illegal hate speech online. Available at [https://ec.europa.eu/newsroom/just/item-detail.cfm?item\\_id=54300](https://ec.europa.eu/newsroom/just/item-detail.cfm?item_id=54300) (last accessed 16.05.2019).

## Instagram

Among the social media platforms covered in this analysis, the images and video platform Instagram takes a special position in two ways. Firstly, its rapid growth and large user base, especially with younger users, have turned it into one of the most popular social media around the world. Sharing pictures and short videos of everyday life and communicating with friends and followers via comments and direct messages has become an essential part of youth culture in many countries. Recent studies show that 67% of German<sup>5</sup> teenagers aged 12 – 19, 71% of Austrian<sup>6</sup> adolescents aged 11 – 17 and 73% of French<sup>7</sup> youth aged 16 – 25 use Instagram regularly and the network has become more important than Facebook amongst users younger than 30 years. The platform is also widely used by young people in Austria, the Czech Republic and Slovenia. It is therefore not reasonable to regard it simply as an ‘alternative’ platform to Facebook, Twitter or YouTube. Instead, Instagram has to be analysed as one of the major players in the field in its own right.

Secondly, Instagram is institutionally linked to the Facebook company since 2012. While Facebook itself signed the EU Code of Conduct on countering illegal hate speech online in 2016, however, Instagram only joined in 2018. Nevertheless, this is an important step to take responsibility and tackle hate speech on the platform more vigorously. Instagram addresses the issue of hate speech in its community guidelines, which forbid to “support or praise terrorism, organized crime, or hate groups”, post “credible threats or hate speech” or “encourage violence or attack anyone based on their race, ethnicity, national origin, sex, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, disabilities, or diseases”.<sup>8</sup>

Nevertheless, hate groups and extremists use the platform’s popularity among adolescents to address a young target group and spread their propaganda. In Germany, Islamist extremists stage their images in a special ‘Instagram style’ and connect to popular youth culture to attract users to their profiles, where they also post content openly glorifying militant jihad. Right-wing extremists deliberately blur the lines between political agitation and their private lives, in order to portray extremism as a ‘cool’ community and a ‘fun’ alternative lifestyle. Extremists of both ideologies also utilize popular hashtags and features like the Instagram ‘stories’ function. The fleeting nature of those stories, which are deleted after 24 hours, makes endangering content difficult to control.

In France, several political accounts promote racism, hatred against refugees and hatred against Muslims. Right-wing extremists have created hashtags like #patriotes, #résistants and #aunomdupeuple (‘in the name of the people’) for promoting their racist theories. Even though Instagram has banned some hashtags, the content associated to them remains online. Some accounts also spread fake news. An example is the portrayal of the UN Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, dubbed the ‘Marrakech Pact’, as a pact designed to bring thousands of migrants to France. The French partner Licra also identified anti-Black, anti-Asiatic, misogynist and homophobic content on Instagram.

In Slovenia, most publicly visible profiles supporting pro-nationalist ideas and cultural superiority are not directly promoting hatred and violence, thereby staying below the legal threshold. Nevertheless, the partner UL-FDV identified also openly racist, homophobic and anti-refugee content. There were further profiles whose usernames or descriptions suggested potentially hateful content. However, those were private profiles and their posts are not publicly available. Therefore, they were not included

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<sup>5</sup> Medienpädagogischer Forschungsverbund Südwest (2018). *JIM-Studie 2018 – Jugend, Information, Medien*. Available at <https://www.mpfs.de/studien/jim-studie/2018/> (last accessed 15.05.2019).

<sup>6</sup> SaferInternet.at (2019). *Jugend-Internet-Monitor 2019*. Available at [https://www.saferinternet.at/fileadmin/redakteure/Projekt-Seiten/Jugend-Internet-Monitor/Infografik\\_Jugend-Internet-Monitor\\_2019.png](https://www.saferinternet.at/fileadmin/redakteure/Projekt-Seiten/Jugend-Internet-Monitor/Infografik_Jugend-Internet-Monitor_2019.png) (last accessed 23.05.2019).

<sup>7</sup> Diplomeo (2018). *Paroles aux jeunes*. Available at [https://diplomeo.com/actualite-sondage\\_reseaux\\_sociaux\\_jeunes](https://diplomeo.com/actualite-sondage_reseaux_sociaux_jeunes) (last accessed 15.05.2019).

<sup>8</sup> Instagram Community Guidelines. Available at <https://help.instagram.com/477434105621119/> (last accessed 15.05.2019).

into further analysis. In the experience of the Austrian and Czech partners, Instagram is not widely used for spreading hate speech in those countries.

Instagram was monitored in the 4<sup>th</sup> evaluation of the EU Code of Conduct on countering illegal hate speech online in November and December 2018. sCAN results<sup>9</sup> show that the platform took action (removal or geo-blocking) on 72% of the content reported to it by the partners through publicly available channels and on 84% of the content reported through the partners' trusted flagger channels.

## Alternative platforms and “Safe Havens” for online hate speech

As the most popular social media companies join the Code of Conduct and intensify their efforts to curb hate speech on their platforms, hate groups and extremists look for alternative platforms that are less regulated or even actively promote their lenient approach to content moderation.

### VK.com

The Russian multimedia platform VK.com (VK), sometimes described as the ‘Russian Facebook’, allows users to create groups, public pages and events, share and tag images, videos and audio files or play browser-based games. Additionally, it offers a music and movies platform that can be accessed without any age restrictions. The network has become increasingly popular outside of Russia in the past few years. In France, it is considered to be one of the 24 most important social networks<sup>10</sup> and in the German Alexa-Ranking the network is currently ranked 9th<sup>11</sup>. In Italy, the platform is used mostly for the uncomplicated sharing of (pirated) films and videos.

VK's terms of use prohibit content promoting “racist, religious, ethnic hatred or hostility”, propagandising “fascisms or supremacism” or containing extremist material<sup>12</sup>. However, those terms are only rarely enforced. In the countries analysed in this study, VK is especially popular with right-wing extremists and far-right actors. Most Austrian users of VK belong to the far-right Identitarian movement, self-identifying as “the most active and largest patriotic NGO of the country”<sup>13</sup>. The Czech partner Romea conducted several interviews with experts in the field who confirmed that VK has been openly advertised as an alternative to Facebook among far-right users in the Czech Republic.

In Slovenia, only a few actors publicly post hate speech on VK. During the research for this paper, our Slovenian partner UL-FDV for example a profile of a Slovenian political magazine posting anti-immigration, anti-left and anti-Islam content. Like on Instagram, the members' phrasing stays below the legal threshold and therefore does not directly promote violence.

In France, the trend of registering on VK started with the migration of very well-known figures of the far-right ‘Fachosphère’ (the ‘fascist-sphere’ in France), for example Alain Soral, Dieudonné or Boris Le Lay.<sup>14</sup> Licra identified two main drivers of this migration: Removal of their content and profiles on Facebook and a growing dissatisfaction with the perceived ‘censorship’ on the main social media platforms. Apart from pages of the Fachosphère, there are also groups associated to the ‘Génération identitaire’ – the French Identitarian movement – spreading racism, antisemitism, homophobia and hate

<sup>9</sup> sCAN project (2019). *Diverging responsiveness on reports by trusted flaggers and general users*. Available at [http://scan-project.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/sCAN\\_monitoring1\\_fact\\_sheet\\_final.pdf](http://scan-project.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/sCAN_monitoring1_fact_sheet_final.pdf) (last accessed 16.05.2019).

<sup>10</sup> LEPTIDIGITAL (2019). *Quels sont les 24 réseaux sociaux les plus populaires en France et dans le monde?* Available at <https://www.leptidigital.fr/reseaux-sociaux/liste-reseaux-sociaux-14846> (last accessed 16.05.2019).

<sup>11</sup> Alexa Internet (2019). *Top Sites in Germany*. Available at <https://www.alexa.com/topsites/countries/DE> (last accessed 16.05.2019).

<sup>12</sup> VK.com (2018). *Terms of Service*. Available at <https://vk.com/terms> (last accessed 16.05.2019).

<sup>13</sup> Identitäre Bewegung (no date). *Unser Weg*. Available at <https://www.identitaere-bewegung.at/unser-weg/> (last accessed 22.05.2019).

<sup>14</sup> Philippe-Viela, O. (2018). *Soral, Le Lay... Pourquoi une partie de la Fachosphère migre sur le ‘Facebook russe’*. Available at <https://www.20minutes.fr/high-tech/2200555-20180111-dieudonne-soral-lay-pourquoi-partie-fachosphere-migre-face-book-russe> (last accessed 16.05.2019).

speech against refugees and Muslims on VK. Some of these groups show connections to the yellow vest movement, which has been criticised for antisemitic attacks during demonstrations<sup>15</sup>.

In Germany, VK is considered a 'safe haven' for right-wing extremists since the platform operator only rarely removes illegal content. For years, the German partner jugendschutz.net has documented massive violations of national laws from the use of symbols of unconstitutional organizations to incitement of the people, glorification or denial of the Holocaust up to videos of brute force or killing scenes. Extremists also utilize the multimedia aspect of VK as a 'propaganda library' to share NS publications, pamphlets denying the Holocaust, misanthropic rock music and right-wing extremist killing videos.

The experience of the sCAN partners shows that VK usually takes no action against content reported by users. Although jugendschutz.net could establish a quite reliable direct contact with the support team in 2017 and achieved initial success, VK's removal rate has since receded again. Other partners had no success reporting to VK. ZARA forwards their complaints to the NS-Reporting Office of the Austrian Federal Ministry of Interior, but receives no further notice on the proceedings.

## Gab.ai

The social media platform Gab.ai (Gab) was created in the US in 2016. Users can create personal profiles and groups, post and share text, images or videos and follow or comment on other users' posts. Gab is often compared to Twitter, as the posts (called "gabs") have a maximal length of 300 characters. Gab openly advertises a radical free speech approach, allowing practically any content that doesn't contain direct threats, terrorism or illegal pornography<sup>16</sup>. Gab.ai usually does not respond to reports on hate speech or requests for removal. This is particularly attractive to right-wing extremists and white supremacists who are banned on other social media platforms.

Gab gained infamous reputation after the shooter who attacked a synagogue in October 2018 announced his attack on the platform. Gab was subsequently dropped by its registrar and other IT companies. The App was also removed from Google Play and Apple App Store for containing hate speech.<sup>17</sup> It shortly went offline but has since found a new webhost.

Even though the majority of users registered at Gab are American, there are also communities of users from European countries. While the platform doesn't play a significant role in Austria, there is an active German community. German right-wing extremists consider it a safe place for posting antisemitism, Holocaust denial, anti-Muslim hate speech and incitement to violence. Gab is frequently promoted and linked to on other Social Media platforms (e.g. Twitter) and far-right magazines like Contra<sup>18</sup>.

Furthermore, there are many English-speaking Italian users of Gab sharing anti-refugee, misogynist, racist and antisemitic hate speech. Many of them have moved to Gab after being banned from either Facebook or Twitter.

Most Slovenian users joined the platform during the last two years. Users mostly support ideologies based on intolerance and inequality or glorify the Slovene home guard, which during the occupation of Slovenia in the Second World War collaborated with the German National Socialists. However, overt hate speech or calls for violence are rare. Some profiles post warnings about a so-called 'white genocide', homophobia, antisemitic conspiracy theories and content approving the Third Reich. It is possible that the most extreme or violent content is marked as private by its authors and is therefore not publicly available.

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<sup>15</sup> Vandoorne, S. (2019). Yellow Vest protesters fan flames of anti-Semitism in France. Available at <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/03/08/europe/gilet-jaunes-france-anti-semitism-intl/index.html> (last accessed 23.05.2019).

<sup>16</sup> Gab.ai (2017). *Community Guidelines*. Available at <https://gab.com/about/guidelines> (last accessed 23.05.2019).

<sup>17</sup> BBC (2018). *Pittsburgh shooting: Gab drops offline after attack*. Available at <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-46017529> (last accessed 21.05.2019).

<sup>18</sup> Contra Magazin (2017). *Tschüß Twitter, hallo gab.ai!*. Available at <https://www.contra-magazin.com/2017/06/tschuess-twitter-hallo-gab-ai/> (last accessed 21.05.2019).

In addition to the social network, Gab has recently developed a browser extension called Dissenter, which adds a parallel comment section to all available websites and thus evades the websites' moderation policies. In April 2019, the IT companies Google and Mozilla blocked the extension for their browsers due to violations of their rules against hate speech<sup>19</sup>. Subsequently, Gab developed an own browser called Dissenter, which went online in May 2019. Dissenter's moderation policy allows all comments which are legal under the First Amendment of the American Constitution<sup>20</sup>. How it will work in relation to an international audience and national laws of countries other than the US remains to be analysed.

## **RuTube and Rutube.fr**

Rutube is a Russian video hosting platform. Users can report videos showing extreme violence and (potential) extremism to the platform<sup>21</sup>. However, both the reporting form and the community guidelines are only available in Russian.

Among the French Fachosphere, RuTube is promoted as an alternative for YouTube. Channels that have been banned on YouTube can often subsequently be accessed on RuTube. This includes channels and videos from well-known holocaust deniers Vincent Reynouard and Robert Faurisson. In order to better navigate the platform, French videos are listed on the website Rutube.fr, hosted on WordPress, in categories including 'Islamisation' and 'Migrants (crisis)'. The website also provides direct links for RussiaToday and Sputniknews but also TV Libertés, a far-right online media. Other right-wing websites like "fdesouche" ("français de souche" – "native-born French people") or "SITAmnesty" ("Sensibilisation à l'Islam Tout Azimut" Amnesty – "All-out awareness of Islam" Amnesty) are promoting the use of RuTube and helping with tutorials to understand the platform.

## **Telegram**

The messenger service Telegram allows users to communicate with each other via private chat, groups or channels. Push notifications allow the subscribers and specifically young people who are virtually always online with their smartphones to regularly and quickly receive new posts. The platform explicitly advertises its privacy settings and security measures. This has facilitated the creation of private groups sharing illicit content<sup>22</sup>.

In relation to hate speech, Telegram's terms of service forbid the promotion of violence on "publicly viewable Telegram channels, bots, etc"<sup>23</sup> only. In the FAQ section, Telegram elaborates: "All Telegram chats and group chats are private amongst their participants. We do not process any requests related to them"<sup>24</sup>. However, stickers, public channels and bots can be reported to the platform.

In Germany, far-right actors increasingly use Telegram channels to engage their followers. Even though channels offer no real possibility for interaction, they act accessible and appreciate their followers with exclusive videos and voice mails. Additionally, jugendschutz.net continuously monitors around 400 channels on Telegram sharing Islamist content, two thirds of which can be allocated to the militant jihadist spectrum.

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<sup>19</sup> Sommer, W. (2019). *Google Deals New Blow to Alt-Right Social Network Gab*. Available at <https://www.thedailybeast.com/google-deals-new-blow-to-alt-right-social-network-gab> (last accessed 23.05.2019).

<sup>20</sup> Dissenter (2019). *Frequently Asked Questions*. Available at <https://dissenter.com/help/faq> (last accessed 23.05.2019).

<sup>21</sup> Rutube (2019). *Сообщение о контенте с недопустимым содержанием*. Available at <https://rutube.ru/forms/invalid-content> (last accessed 21.05.2019).

<sup>22</sup> Puente, D. (2018). *Il lato oscuro di Telegram*. Available at <https://www.rollingstone.it/rolling-affairs/news-affairs/il-lato-oscuro-di-telegram/401846/#Part1> (last accessed 21.05.2019).

<sup>23</sup> Telegram (2019a). *Terms of Service*. Available at <https://telegram.org/tos> (last accessed 21.05.2019).

<sup>24</sup> Telegram (2019b). *There's illegal content on Telegram. How do I take it down?* Available at <https://telegram.org/faq#q-there-39s-illegal-content-on-telegram-how-do-i-take-it-down> (last accessed 21.05.2019).

In 2018, jugendschutz.net noticed a change in the Islamist propaganda on Telegram. Instead of depictions of graphic violence and calls to join terrorist groups, Islamists increasingly post detailed instructions of how to plan and commit attacks in their followers' home countries. Apart from the obvious militant propaganda, more and more subtle propaganda is being shared on Telegram. For example, so-called 'prisoner support groups' are calling on users to pray and donate for detained 'siblings in need'. In 2018, the messenger deleted or restricted access to 58% of Islamist content reported by jugendschutz.net.

## Jeuxvideo.com

Jeuxvideo is a French website specialised in news, information, and testing videos on video gaming. It consists of several forums and is very active in France. The 'Forum Charta' prohibits illegal content according to the French law: "Racist, xenophobic, revisionist messages, messages apologizing war crimes, discriminating or inciting to hatred against a person or a group of persons on grounds of origin or of belonging, or not-belonging, to a given ethnic group, nation, race or religion, gender or lifestyle"<sup>25</sup>.

One of the boards, Blabla 18-25 ans, was infamous for hate speech content and was considered the 'French 4Chan'. Users in this forum developed misogynist and homophobic cyber-harassment campaigns and spread far-right reactionary theories. Following a harassment campaign against journalist Nadia Daam in 2017, a stricter moderation policy was implemented. To avoid the moderation on Jeuxvideo, users created new forums hosted in the US specifically designed to resemble Blabla 18-25 ans. One of those forums, Avenoël, only prohibits "hatred against members" in its terms of service, yet also cautions members to "differentiate between humour and gravity"<sup>26</sup>.

## Disqus

Disqus is a plug-in used by media portals that enables commenting on their news articles. Disqus terms and policies don't allow hate speech, defined as content that "attacks people based on 'protected characteristics' which include race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, sex, gender, gender identity or serious disability or disease"<sup>27</sup>. In Slovenia, however, Disqus is used to spread hate speech in comment sections of online media.

The majority of hate speech and violent content that the Slovenian partner UL-FDV encountered during the exercise was posted via Disqus. This mainly includes anti-refugee, anti-Muslim and anti-left hate speech, some of it being quite extreme and violent. Hatred against Muslims and refugees is very common under every news article on that topic. Some of the commenters have each posted several thousand hateful comments. Disqus did not react to reports about this content.

## Discord

Discord is a messaging platform primarily developed for the gaming community. Users can chat with each other and create groups. Discord's terms of service prohibit posts that "defame, libel, ridicule, mock, stalk, threaten, harass, intimidate or abuse anyone"<sup>28</sup>.

In Germany, the right wing extremist group "Reconquista Germanica" uses Discord to coordinate online campaigns on Twitter and other social media platforms. One of their first campaigns was organised in the run-up to the parliamentary elections 2017. Right-wing extremists targeted well-known politicians and political parties in order to stir up public opinion against them. The election was referred

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<sup>25</sup> Jeuxvideo (2019). *Charte des forums*. Available at [http://www.jeuxvideo.com/forums\\_charte.htm](http://www.jeuxvideo.com/forums_charte.htm) (last accessed 21.05.2019); translation by Licra.

<sup>26</sup> Avenoel.org (2017). *Charte du forum Avenoel.org*. Available at <https://avenoel.org/topic/26022-1-a-lire-charte-du-forum> (last accessed 21.05.2019); translation by Licra.

<sup>27</sup> Disqus (2019). *Terms of Service*. Available at <https://help.disqus.com/terms-and-policies/terms-of-service> (last accessed 21.05.2019).

<sup>28</sup> Discord (2018). *Discord Terms of Service*. Available at <https://discordapp.com/terms> (last accessed 21.05.2019).



to as a ‘fateful election’ (German: Schicksalswahl) that would decide on the continuation of the ‘German people’ and the ‘Western culture’.

## ‘Alternative’ and Fake News outlets

Social media are not the only places, where hate speech is posted online. In recent years, more and more ‘alternative’ media outlets went online, writing extremely biased or out-right fake news articles mostly targeting immigrants and refugees. Examples from Austria include unzensuriert.at, wochenblick.at and allesroger.at, which have been described as “disinformation projects from the far-right fringe”<sup>29</sup> by the Documentation Centre of Austrian Resistance. Furthermore, right-wing extremist magazines like ZAROnews.world have a history of publishing openly antisemitic articles and denying the holocaust<sup>30</sup>.

However, hate speech is not only found in articles of those media, but also – more explicitly – in the comment sections underneath the articles. Especially unzensuriert.at has often been criticised by experts for allowing hate speech in its comment sections. In April 2019, unzensuriert.at deactivated its comment function, stating they didn’t want to provide a platform for people posting threats or abuse, but insinuating that hateful comments might have been intentionally placed on their website in order to incriminate them<sup>31</sup>.

## Spotify

Spotify is a digital streaming platform that provides access to music, podcasts and videos from a vast variety of artists world-wide. In May 2018, Spotify announced a new policy on hate content and hateful conduct. This policy forbids “content that expressly and principally promotes, advocates, or incites hatred or violence against a group or individual based on characteristics, including, race, religion, gender identity, sex, ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation, veteran status, or disability”<sup>32</sup>.

Nevertheless, music from known right-wing extremist German bands like Übermensch, Blutzeugen or Moshpit can still be found on the platform. While the Federal Review Board for Media Harmful to Minors has not restricted their distribution in Germany, some of their songs or album titles contain references to National Socialist ideology. Anti-democratic agitation can thus reach a broad user base, affecting especially younger users. Furthermore, algorithms automatically suggest similar content, increasing the risk of promoting right-wing extremist content even further.

## Pinterest

On the social network Pinterest, users can post collections of images (so-called ‘pins’) on their profile ‘boards’, usually around a common theme. They can also browse other users’ boards and share images or comment on the images. Pinterest’s terms of service prohibit hate speech and discrimination, as well as advocacy for them. Protected categories include race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability or medical condition, age, weight, immigration or veteran status<sup>33</sup>.

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<sup>29</sup> Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstandes (2017). *Neues von ganz rechts*. Available at <http://www.doew.at/erkennen/rechtsextremismus/neues-von-ganz-rechts/archiv/dezember-2017> (last accessed 22.05.2019); translated by jugendschutz.net.

<sup>30</sup> Der Kurier (2019). *Vizekanzler Strache teilt Seite, die Holocaust leugnet*. Available at <https://kurier.at/politik/inland/vize-kanzler-strache-teilt-seite-die-holocaust-leugnet/400472521> (last accessed 22.05.2019).

<sup>31</sup> Die Presse (2019). *Hass im Netz: "unzensuriert.at" schafft Leserkommentare ab*. Available at [https://die-epresse.com/home/kultur/medien/5611019/Hass-im-Netz\\_unzensuriertat-schafft-Leserkommentare-ab](https://die-epresse.com/home/kultur/medien/5611019/Hass-im-Netz_unzensuriertat-schafft-Leserkommentare-ab) (last accessed 22.05.2019).

<sup>32</sup> Spotify (2018). *What content is prohibited on Spotify?* Available at <https://artists.spotify.com/fag/music#what-content-is-prohibited-on-spotify> (last accessed 22.05.2019).

<sup>33</sup> Pinterest (2019). *Community Guidelines*. Available at <https://policy.pinterest.com/en/community-guidelines> (last accessed 22.05.2019).

In September 2017, there were 5.8 million Italian users registered to the site<sup>34</sup>. Even though Pinterest regulates hate speech, Italian users often include links to other websites within relevant pins, leading to more explicit hate speech. The Italian partner CESIE provided an example of a pin glorifying fascism by celebrating Mussolini and linking to a related blog on Tumblr.

## Tumblr

On the micro-blogging platform Tumblr, users can share multimedia content and re-blog content from other users. Tumblr's Community Guidelines prohibit users to "encourage violence or hatred" and to „post content for the purpose of promoting or inciting the hatred of, or dehumanizing, individuals or groups based on race, ethnic or national origin, religion, gender, gender identity, age, veteran status, sexual orientation, disability or disease."<sup>35</sup>

There are some examples of Italian blogs promoting fascism. However, those examples are quite rare and the majority of Tumblr's Italian users use their blogs to share non-violent and non-hateful content. In Germany, especially media-savvy right-wing extremist actors like the Identitarian movement use Tumblr blogs to network and promote their activities. Even though the quantity of hate speech on Tumblr appears to be less than on other platforms analysed in this report, the elaborate design and professional appearance of extremist blogs creates a relevance to the right-wing scene.

## Migration between platforms

As major social media companies like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram reinforce the moderation of hate speech on their platforms, users posting hateful content are looking for alternative platforms in order to avoid what they perceive as 'censorship'. Users who have been banned from the major networks for posting hate speech urge their followers to follow them to their new destination. A migration to platforms like VK.com or Gab.ai is often openly advertised on Facebook and Twitter, but also on right-wing websites and blogs. In a specific example, the Austrian platform unzensuriert.at opened a profile on VK.com, after their Facebook profile was banned for violations of the community standards. In an article on their homepage, they urged their readers to follow them to the Russian platform, decrying "an attack against freedom of press and censorship"<sup>36</sup>.

Very often, however, hate speech actors and extremist groups don't give up on the big social media platforms with their far-reaching audience altogether. Instead, they use profiles on different social media networks to reach different target groups. For example, Instagram, a network very popular among young people, is used as an 'eye-catcher' to establish first contact with subtle propaganda. From there, followers of extremist profiles are linked to more explicit and violent content on platforms with a more lenient stance towards hate speech.

ZARA also provided a more in-depth case study into the cross-platform migration of the Identitarian movement in Austria. Their main representative, Martin Sellner, has been repeatedly banned on Facebook and Instagram for violations of their community guidelines, leading him to open new profiles on other social media platforms like VK. When he posted on Twitter about having again been banned on Instagram, a follower commented that it would be better to follow him on Telegram. He also uses his Twitter profile to link to his website and YouTube channel.

However, users posting hate speech don't always migrate to already existing social media networks. Sometimes, they open their own new website instead. In France, users of the games forum Blabla 18-

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<sup>34</sup> Salvadori, A. (2018). *I social più frequentati in Italia: crescono Instagram e LinkedIn, male Snapchat e Google+*. Available at <https://www.engage.it/ricerche/i-social-piu-frequentati-in-italia-vince-facebook-male-snapchat-e-oo-gle/132636#2icZTw6pDH30YR3E.97> (last accessed 22.05.2019).

<sup>35</sup> Tumblr (2018). *Community Guidelines*. Available at <https://www.tumblr.com/policy/en/community> (last accessed 29.05.2019).

<sup>36</sup> Der Standard (2018). *Facebook sperrt "unzensuriert.at": Wechsel auf russische Plattform*. Available at <https://derstandard.at/2000088123608/Facebook-sperrt-unzensuriertat-Wechsel-auf-russische-Plattform> (last accessed 22.05.2019).

25 ans on Jeuxvideo.com created a new forum called Avenoël when Jeuxvideo started to enforce a stricter policy against hate speech. The description of the forum on Avenoël's website explicitly acknowledges this connection: "Avenoël is a free forum created in December 2014 by jeuxvideo.com members disappointed by Respawn and Webedia [French owners of the website; note by the author] [...] The moderation is light, which means that porn, gore, raids and extreme opinions, etc. have their place here to some extent"<sup>37</sup>.

Another option used by right-wing websites or blogs is the migration into the so-called dark web. This term describes a part of the internet that can only be accessed using a special browser called TOR that enables users to surf the internet anonymously<sup>38</sup>. After the French website Démocratie Participative was sentenced in court for illegal content promoting antisemitism, racism, and homophobia and inciting violence, the website avoided a total shut down by moving their most explicit content to the dark web. They still run a publicly available website, linking it to its "uncensorable" version and promoting the use of the TOR browser among its readers<sup>39</sup>.

## Conclusion

As the 'big three' social media platforms Facebook, YouTube and Twitter increasingly lose their relevance for young users, other social media, especially Instagram, step up to fill this space. Our research showed that hate groups and extremists wishing to influence minors or young adults with their ideologies follow their target group to those platforms. It is a welcome step that Instagram joined the Code of Conduct on Countering Illegal Hate Speech Online in 2018. Due to the increasing significance of this network and its relevance for children, future research on hate speech online should consider Instagram on a par with Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.

As the social media with the broadest audience strengthen their moderation and removal policies to tackle hate speech, extremists and hate groups are looking for alternative solutions. They find these in networks which do not enforce their community guidelines as strictly or advocate a far-reaching free speech approach specifically allowing hate speech on their platforms. Those platforms are very diverse and appeal to different audiences in different countries. In some countries, dedicated websites are set up in order to facilitate the use of networks operated abroad and to mediate possible language barriers.

Some online communities decide to set up their own infrastructure rather than relying on established social media to host their discussions or move the more extreme content to the dark web. An example is Avenoël in France, a forum specifically created to allow hate speech otherwise banned on their original platform Jeuxvideo. Other examples include Gab which, since its establishment in 2016, courts users dissatisfied with Facebook's and Twitter's moderation policy.

Further analysis is required to keep up with the ever-evolving issue of hate speech on social media. While the relevance of some traditional platforms decreases, new players emerge and new online communities form. Even though some of the platforms analysed so-far appear to be relevant only in some countries, the findings in this report can point out potential trends and platforms that should be kept in mind when monitoring hate speech online.

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<sup>37</sup> Avenoel (no date). *Bienvenue sur Avenoel!* Available at <https://avenoel.org/> (last accessed 22.05.2019).

<sup>38</sup> Klosowski, T. (2014). *What Is Tor and Should I Use It?* Available at <https://lifelifehacker.com/what-is-tor-and-should-i-use-it-1527891029> (last accessed 22.05.2019).

<sup>39</sup> Démocratie Participative (2019). *Homepage*. Available at <https://democratieparticipative.club/> (last accessed 22.05.2019).

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