CYBERCULTURE AND HATE SPEECH: A CASE STUDY ABOUT THE POLICIES AGAINST HATE SPEECH LEAD BY THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

Luís Cardoso[1i]
Ana Catarina Bruno[2]
[1]Polytechnic Institute of Portalegre,
Portugal
[2]Student of Master in Media and Society,
Polytechnic Institute of Portalegre,
Portugal

Abstract:

Social networks are interactive platforms developed to facilitate relations and exchanges of information between people who share the same interests, experiences and opinions (Recuero, 2009). The main goal of this study is to know the definition of cyberculture and cyberspace and understand the phenomenon of hate speech on social networks. The theoretical framework of the article is about the understanding of cyberculture and cyberspace, the evolution of social networks and the definition of hate speech and its targets. Finally, a case study is carried on the combat policies against hate speech lead by the Council of Europe. The methodology will include state of art analysis, literature review and the observation of the Council of Europe website.

Keywords: cyberculture; social networks; hate speech; Council of Europe

1. Introduction

With the appearance of the internet, there was a great change in socialization and in the way of being/being of citizens. We know that this evolution influences the way we communicate and how we establish connections with other people, as well as the fact that it has greatly improved our life, simplifying it. At the same time that we observe improvements, especially in interpersonal relationships, we also observe some problems that arise from this evolution and from the new way of communicating that has become, many times, more aggressive. The internet and social networks perpetuate the sense of unlimited permission which, together with the shield of anonymity, encourages the existence of prejudiced, discriminatory and offensive discourses and narratives in the online community. Hate speech increasingly comprises victims, but also aggressors who

---

[i] Correspondence: email lmcardoso@ipportalegre.pt

use freedom of expression and ideology as a way to justify their actions. The internet and, in particular, social networks play a key role in this issue because they are places of distilling of hatred, where prejudices and offences are freely uttered. It is considered that the major problems are the difficulty of universally defining the concept because each person has a different perception of "hate", the lack of legislation (national and international) that allows such behaviour to be punished and the issue of data protection and lack of action from the digital platforms themselves. The theme was then a considered choice because we are witnessing an overwhelming increase in intolerance, prejudice and hatred, something that should bother anyone because as human beings and civilized citizens we must live in a community and respect others and their differences. Thus, this article aims to: know the definition of cyberculture and cyberspace, key concepts that are at the heart of the issue; identify hate speech and its main targets and, finally, understand what measures to combat hate speech have been implemented and promoted by the Council of Europe. This article seeks to answer the following starting question: "How has the Council of Europe been fighting hate speech?". The article is structured as follows: Summary and Abstract, briefly explaining the subject under analysis and discussion, as well as mentioning the keywords; the introduction; the theoretical framework, divided into two subtopics – 1. Cyberculture and Cyberspace, 2. Social Networks and Hate speech; then the Methodology, which demonstrates how the results found were arrived at; the Case Study, where a contextualization and research is done regarding the work of the Council of Europe on the subject; then the Discussion of results, where the data obtained are analyzed and it's meaning for the study is read; then the Final Considerations and, finally, the References.

2. Cyberculture and Cyberspace

When talking about cyberculture and cyberspace, the concepts that most often appear associated are reality and virtuality. Lévy (1998) interpreted the concept of virtuality, originating from the Latin - virtus, as everything possible, but not current, that is, the antagonistic concept of virtual would be current and not real, as this author considers (Lévy in Duke, 2015). Lemos (2008) states that there is a new relationship between digital technologies and social life, primary characteristics of cyberculture and that "*the underlying thesis is that cyberculture results from the convergence between contemporary sociality and new microelectronic-based technologies*" (We read in Ferreira & Vilarinho, 2013). Thus, communication occurs without borders and physical presence, in cyberspace, a term developed by William Gibson in his book Neuromancer, from 1984. According to Gibson, cyberspace is a non-physical place, composed of computer networks, responsible for causing the information to circulate freely (Matos, 2017; Lima, Lima and Silva, 2010). Serra (1995/96) states that cyberspace *is neither a mere mathematical space nor a simple science-fiction metaphor, but a «new frontier», a «new world» that is open to the action of new «explorers» and « colonizers»"* (Serra, 1995/96, p.22). Lévy (2008) states that cyberspace is the new means of communication originating from the worldwide interconnection of

computers, opportune for the adhesion of subjects from different social strata and age groups, but it is the young people who most frequent the online medium and social networks (Lévy in Ferreira & Vilarinho, 2013). With the evolution of the digital environment, we observed the existence of a reconfiguration of information, which started to assume different formats – text, audio, image, videos, hypertext, etc. With Web 2.0, the possibility of manipulation, alteration/complementarity of documents by users emerged (Lima, Lima & Silva, 2010). Nunes (1995) considers that the maximization of hyper-reality, through the internet, can be seen as an attempt to hide all reality, as well as a challenge to new understandings of what human beings are and what makes them up – their personality, the body and the community in which it is inserted (Nunes in Moreno, 2013).

Baudrillard states that evolution is completely open and that the world does not end with hyperreality, but can develop within it (Moreno, 2013, Duque, 2015). Thus, the definition of virtual is based on the experience corresponding to the way it is constructed concerning the world, with technological simulations and dissimulations (Duque, 2015). One cannot talk about hate speech on social networks without first observing and understanding cyberculture and cyberspace, which are the engines of technological evolution and the emergence of the internet and digital platforms.

With the emergence of the internet and social networks, the way of communicating and establishing relationships with other people has completely changed. At this moment it is possible to establish simple and quick contacts with anyone, which on the one hand is very positive given the ease and speed with which information and communication are dissipated, on the other hand, it entails great dangers because it gives people the feeling of unlimited freedom and a platform for disseminating hate speech and intolerance. The internet caused the development of social networks, originating in blogs and forums, evolving the format to personal blogs where people feel the need to express themselves abroad and share experiences, ideas, opinions and ways of thinking with others (Oliveira, 2013). Social networks have many more aspects than the possibility of friendships between people, as they can have a more business and organizational component, aimed at obtaining profits, quickly and efficiently, through forms of e-commerce and marketing.

The number of users of the various social networks increases exponentially daily, due to various reasons, such as searching for information, sharing content, debating opinions, socializing with various people (from anywhere in the world), leisure, etc. (Brandtzaeg & Heim, 2009). Any online activity is calculated by algorithms that organize information according to its quantity and not it's quality (Maréchal, 2018). Social networks are then interactive platforms developed to facilitate relationships and the exchange of information between people who share the same interests, experiences and opinions (Recuero, 2009). At this moment, they are also the main enhancers of hate speeches, (de Latour et al, 2018: 9). Carpinelli (2017) considers that there are many examples of hate speech in the history of society and that many evolved towards the dehumanization of social groups, reaching the point of mass extermination. He claims

that the most obvious example was the Holocaust, which took place during World War II in Nazi Germany (Carpinelli, 2017). Keen & Georgescu (2016) relate hate speech with the impunity present in the virtual world.

Carvalho (2016) considers that Arendt's thought (about the banality of evil) is part of our current situation, as it confirms the existence of intolerant, aggressive and hateful comments in our environment, boosted by the internet, but adds that "*how any human product, the internet is subject to contradictions in its uses*" (Carvalho in de Lucena, 2019). In addition to the individualized use that internet users give to hate speech, it has recently been one of the weapons used by political parties, for example in presidential elections in the United States of America, Brazil and also in the Brexit campaign. Hate speech travels through social networks, websites and forums, intending to reach users through interactions that later turn into false information created to generate anger and revolt, overshadowing and attacking the democratic process. These changes in relationships lead to a rise in intolerance and hatred, especially against ethnic, racial, religious, political and gender minorities (de Lucena, 2019). According to the manual "Alternatives" for combating hate speech, there are three ways of looking at the problem: through privilege, intersectionality and social norms and norms. Privilege is the systematic benefit given to members of certain social groups, who often may not see themselves in that group, but who continue to have opportunities because of that "belonging". Intersectionality refers to the fact that an individual does not belong exclusively to a social group, having several cultural identities, which will influence their social opportunities and path. Social norms and norms establish the hierarchical relationships between social groups, they are rules of the expected behaviour of people in a given context. Social norms are ways of guaranteeing privileged status to individuals or groups and it is because of them that positions of disadvantage and marginalization are also reproduced (de Latour, Perger, Salaj, Tocchi & Otero, 2018). Neves (2015) states that the Council of Europe has been categorical in defending the fight against hate speech, considering that States should legislate against it and find solutions to conflicts between this and freedom of expression and other rights (Neves, 2015). The issue of free speech and hate speech is quite complex, first of all, because there is no single, universal definition of hate speech. Secondly, because concepts such as discrimination, prejudice, humiliation and offence, for example, are subjective and always depend on how offended or sensitized the individual is when confronted. Thirdly, due to the legislative freedom of each country, that is, what can be considered an offence in Portugal, in other places it is not and until there is an exact definition of the concept, very complex legislation on this matter cannot be elaborated (Ribeiro, 2012).

3. Methodology

The methodology adopted in the elaboration of this article was reduced to the identification of the «state of the art», the documental research, the bibliographical review of authors and important works for the compilation of the theoretical framework that

focused on the new media and social networks; participation in public space and hate speech. In a second phase, the case study was analyzed, that is, the identification of the work to combat hate speech carried out by the Council of Europe, through the observation of the website and the publications available on it. Thus, we resorted to the technique of qualitative data analysis, more specifically the content analysis which, according to Guerra (2006) "*intends to describe situations, but also to interpret the meaning of what was said*" (Guerra, 2006, p.69). As mentioned above, the website of the Council of Europe was explored, from which the data and information necessary for the preparation of this case study were obtained, which aims to answer the starting question: "How has the Council of Europe been fighting the discourse of hate?".

4. The fight against hate speech by the Council of Europe

Recently the General Secretary of the Council of Europe, Marija Pejčinović Burić, stated that Europe is facing a "shocking" reality due to the growing influence of "*ultranationalist and xenophobic politics across Europe, hate speech on social media, anti -unbridled Semitism and anti-Muslim hatred*", as well as the aggressive environment in which NGOs work. All of these concerns are reflected in the 2019 report of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (an independent expert body of the Council of Europe against Racism and Intolerance). The report highlights restrictive policies adopted by various nations, several major political parties and the various seats won by extremist, ultranationalist and xenophobic parties in European elections and various nations. The report also highlights that racism, intolerance, hatred and violence are a risk for all, hence the need for the ECRI (European Commission against Racism and Intolerance) to monitor European countries, trying to create solutions and alternatives that work in the long term. The general secretary gives the example of a shooting in the city of Hanau, Germany, in which 9 people died and several were injured. Violent acts and hate crimes are often motivated by hateful words and conspiracy theories circulating on the internet and social networks (Burić, 2020).

The European Commission's initiatives have covered measures to combat violence, discrimination and prejudice faced by people or groups based on race, language, religion, nationality, ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender identity. In 2013 a campaign to mobilize young people against hate speech – The No Hate Speech Movement, promoted by the Council of Europe was launched. The purpose of this campaign is to combat the phenomenon through the mobilization and awareness of youth, with the cooperation of 45 countries. inside this campaign around 270 actions were developed by the responsible entity and the other partners. Some of the publications launched under the scope of this campaign were: Bookmark/Connexions, a manual to combat hate speech based on education for human rights, suitable for the age group between 13 and 18 years old; WE CAN!/Alternatives, a manual that presents communication and educational tools to combat this scourge, through the elaboration of narratives and counter-narratives; a short film "Ce qui vous regarde… No Hate", which

seeks to make young people aware of hatred on digital platforms and cyberbullying; three mapping studies on the reality of hate speech in younger people and how it affects them, also presenting projects and campaigns developed to try to solve it – Starting Points; a board game to educate children about hate speech, discrimination and digital citizenship – WediActivists; a manual on the difference between freedom of expression and hate speech, with practical examples, legislation and international law – Manual on hate speech; a publication about a pilot seminar that enables stakeholders to multiply knowledge (especially in terms of Human Rights) and projects – Combating Hate Speech through Human Rights Education; a report on the evolution and follow-up of the campaign "The No Hate Speech Movement" during the Strasbourg Conference in 2015, which seeks to assess the impact of the aforementioned campaign, adapting it to the context of the time – The End of the Beginning ; a report on a forum about the campaign "The No Hate Speech Movement" in 2014 in Azerbaijan – The Gabala Forum; a document on measures for mobilizing, planning and establishing contacts for the realization of the campaign "The No Hate Speech Movement" – The Conference of the No Hate Speech Movement; a report on the evolution and closing of the Conference of the No Hate Speech Movement Youth Campaign in Strasbourg (2018) – Is This It? ...

There are other publications focused on human rights education for the youth segment: Compass; Compasito; All Different – All Equal, with ideas and resources for intercultural education with young people and young adults; Mirrors, a manual to combat hatred against the Roma community; Gender Matters, a handbook on gender-based violence. ECRI (an independent body of the Council of Europe) has been monitoring problems involving cases of racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, intolerance and discrimination in the various member states and based on this observation it has drafted the general policy Recommendation No.15 on combating hate speech, which promotes guidelines on the performance of countries in the aforementioned problems. The Anti-Discrimination Department is also a body of the Council of Europe, responsible for all its work in policymaking, monitoring and education for discrimination, hate speech and for strengthening and building inclusive societies. The Council of Europe also deals with other themes and problems, such as discrimination in the area of education, sport, Treaty of Rome, gender equality, sexual orientation, gender identity and internet and media monitoring.

After analyzing the Council of Europe website, from which all the information regarding the case study was taken and it was verified how it acts concerning the scourge of hate speech, we were able to understand that, in its majority, the Council of Europa limits itself to making recommendations to its member states, making observations and reports to that effect. There is a great concern in dealing with this issue close to young people, listening to their contributions and encouraging them to act. The Council of Europe carries out many activities, actions and campaigns exactly for this segment, considering that the best way to combat and prevent hate speech is through human rights education, especially online. Thus, we believe that in political terms the recommendations of the Council of Europe and ECRI can even be correct and effective,

but the final word will always be the respective countries, which ends up making the role of these organizations merely descriptive, with no tangible effects and/ or visible in most cases. From an educational and academic perspective, they end up having excellent interventions, publications and information. The various manuals could be used in schools (not least because they contain specific materials and actions for this case), which would be very good to reinforce the idea that this problem will only be solved, or at least minimized, through education, citizenship, human rights and respect and tolerance for others. Thus, we believe that the Council of Europe and its independent bodies have done a good job of identifying hate speech and trying to show their member states the importance of fighting it by drafting legislation to that effect and showing the results. terrible things it can have on citizens, specifically on ethnic, racial and migrant minorities.

4. Conclusion

We recall the starting question of this article – "How has the Council of Europe been fighting hate speech?" and, through the research carried out and the results presented, we can say that there are two aspects to take into account when answering this question. The first is the work carried out at the educational and academic level, which has shown very positive and important results for the definition of the concept, for combating it and also for encouraging young people to act and become active agents in the community. online, like offline. The second strand is the work carried out at the political level which, while it cannot be considered negative, is not entirely positive either. Despite the recommendations that the Council of Europe and other bodies make, the member states end up having the independence to decide whether to accept the recommendations and do something or not, for example, we recently observed the anti-lgbtqi+ policies that one of the member states of the Council of Europe, Hungary, implemented. Measures to combat hate speech must include both the virtual and the real and, as Carpentier (2012) argued, the internet has contributed to increasing citizen participation in the process of discussing ideas and opinions in the public space, but the immediacy and the lack of reflection have caused major problems in social networks. Online or in-person participation is always defined by power relations (Carpentier, 2012). To prepare this case study, we read several scientific articles, reviewed the literature and tried to understand what the «state of the art» is. We developed a theoretical framework that initially focused on cyberculture and cyberspace, with special contributions from Lévy, Duque, Lima, Lima and Silva, for example. Finally, to understand hate speech, its definition and interconnection with social networks, through the contributions of Recuero, Latour, Perger, Salaj, Tocchi & Otero; Keen & Georgescu, as well as Lucena, among others. We then went on to define the methodology that corresponded to content analysis and document research on the Council of Europe website. Finally, we started the practical part, that is, the defined case study, in which we analyzed the contents found on the website, the publications and manuals available, as well as some resolutions, trying to answer the starting question. We believe that this article is useful for understanding

several concepts, corresponding to the established objectives: to know the definition of cyberculture and cyberspace, key concepts that are at the heart of the problem; identify hate speech and its main targets and, finally, understand what measures to combat hate speech have been implemented and promoted by the Council of Europe.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interests.

References

Brandtzaeg, P. B. & Heim, J. (2009). Why People Use Social Media Networking Sites. Springer Berlin Heidelberg. https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007%2F978-3-642-02774-1_16.pdf

Carpentier, N. (2012, maio/agosto). O conceito de participação. Se eles têm acesso e interagem, eles participam de fato? Fronteiras – estudos midiáticos, 14(2), 164-177. http://revistas.unisinos.br/index.php/fronteiras/article/view/fem.2012.142.10/1001

Carpinelli, A. (2017). Discurso de ódio e liberdade de expressão: permissão, proibição e criminalização no atual cenário sociopolítico ocidental. [Trabalho Académico, Universidade de Lisboa]. Repositório Institucional da Universidade de Lisboa. https://repositorio.ul.pt/bitstream/10451/37573/1/ulfd137531_tese.pdf

Contacto. (2020, fevereiro 27). Comissão Europeia alerta para a ascensão de discursos de ódio e descriminação em toda a Europa. https://www.wort.lu/pt/mundo/comiss-o-europeia-alerta-para-a-ascens-o-de-discursos-de-dio-e-descriminac-o-em-toda-a-europa-5e58244fda2cc1784e3571a7

de Latour, A., Perger, N., Salaj, R., Tocchi, C. & Otero, P. V. (2018). Alternativas. Agir contra o discurso de ódio através de contranarrativas. (Text. rev). Instituto Português do Desporto e Juventude. https://www.cnpdpcj.gov.pt/documents/10182/14804/Alternativas+-+Agir+contra+o+discurso+de+%C3%B3dio+atrav%C3%A9s+de+contranarrativas/1f291065-6d8f-4f30-814d-30a53278856a

de Lucena, V. L. C. (2019). Discurso de ódio e incivilidade no digital: uma cartografia dos comentários de notícias em um Brasil polarizado. [Trabalho Académico, Universidade do Minho]. Repositório Institucional da Universidade do Minho. http://repositorium.sdum.uminho.pt/bitstream/1822/64569/1/3_Dissertacao_PG34180_VanessaLucena.pdf

Duque, J.M. (2015). Utopias Neognósticas do pós-humano na cibercultura. Para uma leitura filosófico-teológica. Perspectiva Teológica. https://repositorio.ucp.pt/bitstream/10400.14/21590/1/Po%cc%81s-humanoPT.pdf

Ferreira, F. O. & Vilarinho, L. R. (2013). Territórios digitais: dilemas e reflexões sobre práticas de adolescentes na cibercultura. Interacções. https://doi.org/10.25755/int.3365

Guerra, I. C. (2006). Pesquisa qualitativa e análise de conteúdo. Sentidos e formas de uso. Princípia Editora.

Keen, E. & Georgescu, M. (2016). Referências. Manual para o combate ao discurso de ódio online através da educação para os direitos humanos. (Text. rev). Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian. https://rm.coe.int/16806f9aeb

Lima, M., Lima, E. & Silva, E, (2010). Reflexos da cibercultura: a democratização do acesso à memória histórica documental. Proceedings of the IV Simpósio Nacional da ABCiber, UFRJ, Rio de Janeiro. http://www.bocc.ubi.pt/pag/lima-lima-silva-reflexos-da--cibercultura.pdf

Maréchal, N. (2018, novembro 16). Targeted Advertising Is Ruining the Internet and Breaking the World. Vice. https://www.vice.com/en/article/xwjden/targeted-advertising-is-ruining-the-internet-and-breaking-the-world

Marques, C. T. (2004). Potencialidades e limitações da aplicação simultânea de aromas e de pigmentos sensíveis ao calor e à luz em artigos de moda praia. [Dissertação de Mestrado, Universidade do Minho). Repositório Institucional da Universidade do Minho. http://repositorium.sdum.uminho.pt/handle/1822/899

Matos, P. F. (2017). Redes emaranhadas no ciberespaço: indivíduos, objectos virtuais e ideias em circulação. In H. Pires, M. Curado, F. Ribeiro e P. Andrade (Eds.). Cibercultura: Circum-navegações em redes transculturais de conhecimento, arquivos e pensamento (1st ed., pp. 167-182). https://repositorio.ul.pt/bitstream/10451/31812/1/ICS_PFMatos_Redes%20emaranhadas_CLI.pdf

Moreno, J. C. (2013). A internet em McLuhan, Baudrillard e Habermas. ISCTE- Instituto Universitário de Lisboa. https://repositorio.iscte-iul.pt/bitstream/10071/17641/1/A%20internet%20em%20McLuhan%2c%20Baudrillard%20e%20Habermas.pdf

Neves, M. R. (2015). Liberdade de expressão, religião e discursos do ódio no Tribunal Europeu dos Direitos do Homem. [Dissertação de Mestrado, Universidade Católica Portuguesa]. Repositório Institucional da Universidade Católica Portuguesa. https://repositorio.ucp.pt/bitstream/10400.14/21961/1/Maria%20Raquel%20Neves.pdf

Oliveira, N. (2013). Redes Sociais e sua Influência nas Práticas de Gestão e Marketing Relacional: Uma Aplicação ao Turismo do Distrito de Portalegre. [Relatório de Projeto, Instituto Politécnico de Portalegre]. Repositório Científico de Acesso Aberto de Portugal. https://comum.rcaap.pt/bitstream/10400.26/17077/1/Redes%20Sociais%20e%20sua%20Influ%c3%aancia%20nas%20Pr%c3%a1ticas%20de%20Gest%c3%a3o%20e%20Marketing%20Relacional%20Uma%20Aplica%c3%a7%c3%a3o%20ao%20Turismo%20do%20Distrito%20de%20Port~1.pdf

Recuero, R. (2009). Redes Sociais na Internet. Editora Meridional. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Raquel-

Recuero/publication/259328435_Redes_Sociais_na_Internet/links/0c96052b036ed2
8f4d000000/Redes-Sociais-na-Internet.pdf

Ribeiro, R. (2012). O discurso de incitamento ao ódio e a negação do holocausto: restrições
à liberdade de expressão? [Trabalho Académico, Faculdade de Direito da
Universidade de Coimbra]. Repositório Ius Gentium Conimbrigae.
https://igc.fd.uc.pt/data/fileBIB2017823122655.pdf

Serra, P. (1995/96). O problema da técnica e o ciberespaço. Universidade da Beira Interior.
http://www.bocc.ubi.pt/pag/jpserra_problema.pdf

Vaz, S. (2010). Web 2.0: Formas de Utilização e Estilos de Aprendizagem dos Alunos do
Ensino Secundário. [Dissertação de Mestrado, Instituto Politécnico de Bragança].
Biblioteca digital do Instituto Politécnico de Bragança.
https://bibliotecadigital.ipb.pt/bitstream/10198/3994/1/susana_vaz_MSI_2010.pdf