

Governance of Digital Hate Speech from the Users' Perspective

Summary

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Dealing with digital hate speech is a fundamental societal and political challenge and task (see, e.g., Kuehn & Salter, 2020; European Commission, 2016) not least to the high prevalence of hate speech in current societies (for Swiss data see e.g., Stahel et al., 2022). The question arises as to which actors are responsible for the governance of digital hate speech or should be responsible, and what possibilities for intervention they have (see, e.g., Helberger et al., 2018; Heldt, 2019). This project examines the hitherto less focused action options and perspectives of users in research. The project investigates affordances, i.e., functions and features, as well as information for users on possibilities for intervening against hate speech on social media platforms and in comment sections of news sites (Package I, affordance analysis). In addition, it examines how users perceive such functions as well as the perceived potential but also the problems in the governance of hate speech (Package II, focus groups). Thus, the project identifies important starting points for political and platform-side measures and can demonstrate whether and where adjustments or, for example, communication with users, information campaigns, or media educational interventions are appropriate to strengthen the fight against digital hate speech and the agency of users. The results of the project can thus complement approaches to regulation, co-regulation, and self-regulation for the governance of digital hate speech.

Our research reveals a notable gap between social media and Swiss news sites with respect to the perceived affordances and the expected responsibility for tackling hate speech. Users exhibit a lack of knowledge concerning reporting hate speech on Swiss news sites, which can be attributed to, on the one hand, the limited information provided by Swiss news sites and, on the other hand, a firm belief in their editorial responsibility. The findings can be read as a need for augmenting transparency on Swiss news sites to develop moderation practices that align with user expectations for combatting online hate speech more effectively. Conversely, users are familiar with the mechanisms for reporting inappropriate content on social media platforms. However, they express concerns about the effectiveness of these mechanisms, highlighting the limitations of automated content moderation and its susceptibility to errors. Despite recognizing these flaws in addressing hate speech online, users often do not hold social media platforms accountable. This underscores the importance of enhancing digital literacy to foster a more responsible view of social media platforms in their critical role in combating hate speech and protecting online spaces