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Online Hate on Social Media

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PREFACE

This manuscript empirically explores the various ways, methods, strategies used, and online communities involved in spreading hate on social media. I do not claim that I have surveyed all the above features, but this book offers the reader a modest understanding of the major current problems faced by social media users, especially among vulnerable groups such as racialized minorities, LGBTQ+ members, and women. When intersectionality is involved, such as in the case of racialized women, the quality of online hate becomes much worse.

Each chapter in this book delves into a platform, community, or area around online hate. I used a variety of manual and digital research methods in order to capture enough data and generate meaningful narratives. For example, I used thematic analysis, descriptive statistics, co-occurrence and frequencies, sentiment analysis, Hatebase assessment, automated visual analysis, data visualization, and critical approaches to qualitatively analyze the findings. I also used the basic reverse engineering method to empirically examine the algorithmic policies followed by Twitter and Instagram regarding hate against religions. In terms of platforms and instead of limiting myself to one, I focused on three social media sites including Telegram, Instagram, and Twitter in order to give a more holistic overview of online hate. Finally, I investigated different target groups while taking into account the intersectional nature of different members such as religion, ethnicity, gender, and race.

Chapter 1 offers the reader an introduction to the relevant literature around bullying, harassment, trolling, and hate. It also discusses the far-right online communities in some detail because of their active and connected activities that generally aim at sustaining racist ideologies such as white supremacy. I am using the plural for the word “communities” because there are a variety of groups that can be situated within the far-right ideological spectrum that vary in the intensity of hate and violence. These communities routinely exchange hate symbols, hashtags, memes, emojis, GIFs, videos, and text to create a false sense of belonging and objectivity among their geographically scattered members.

As for Chapter 2, it discusses the far-right community on the mobile app, Telegram, and describes the Kekistani community on Instagram and Twitter. To avoid detection and removal from the latter social media platforms, the community members often use coded language inspired by the QAnon conspiracy theories. As for Telegram, I argue that it is a dark social media site because of its encrypted features, allowing bad actors to spread some of the worst types of online hate. In fact, some of the Telegram posts call for genocide against some racial and religious minorities, especially as the moderation policies on this platform are highly lax.

As for Chapter 3, it explores the way emojis and hashtags are weaponized and strategically used to spread hate about Christianity and Islam. Based on the type of content identified, I investigate the way populist groups like the far-right in North America and Europe as well as ultranationalist Hindus use Instagram and Twitter in order to attack and demean Islam and Muslims, often calling for genocide. I also reference the algorithmic policies implemented by these two platforms to better understand the regulations followed around the use of hashtags.

Chapter 4 investigates online hate and bullying against three female journalists who are active on Twitter. These journalists have different backgrounds, but they are all advocates for pro-social, equity, and human rights, and justice issues and causes. While they all have supportive followers and fans, we find systematic and ongoing hate targeting them by other communities, depending on the type of causes they advocate. Though there are not major differences among them in terms of online attacks, we can find qualitative differences in the hateful messages, especially when intersectionality is taken into account.

Finally, the Conclusion sums up the findings of the different chapters of this manuscript and offers some recommendations and future research trajectories.

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