

Words are Stones: Countering Hate Speech among Young generations in Europe between grassroots perceptions and education.

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Hate Speech, an introduction

Hate speech is consistent all across Europe, being one of the most common hate crimes (Hall, et al. 2014).

It refers to a kind of offensive, intersubjective communication that fosters ridiculization of the other people and growing social tension mostly towards diversity.

It is a phenomenon that governments find difficult to stem for its widespread diffusion and difficult regulation (Banks 2010).

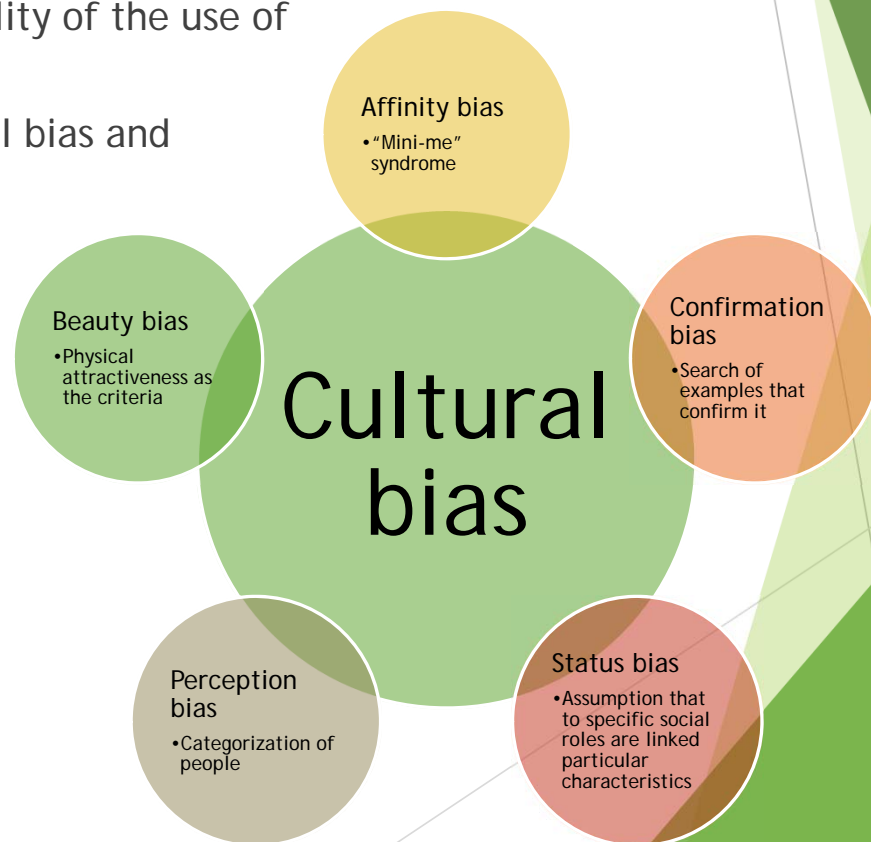
It spreads through new and old media, affecting virtual and physical public space.

Hate Speech, an introduction

- ▶ It is not a new phenomenon
 - ▶ 98% of Americans submit to have witnessed the acts of bullying in the workplace: it's not an epidemic, it's a rooted culture.
 - ▶ Only 18% of women who suffer violence consider them crimes, likewise female victims of harassment and bullying in the workplace often do not recognise those behaviours because of cultural mechanisms

Hate Speech, an introduction

- ▶ It is linked with a perceived acceptability of the use of a violent, offensive communication.
- ▶ The offense mostly draws from cultural bias and stereotypes.



Hate Speech, an introduction

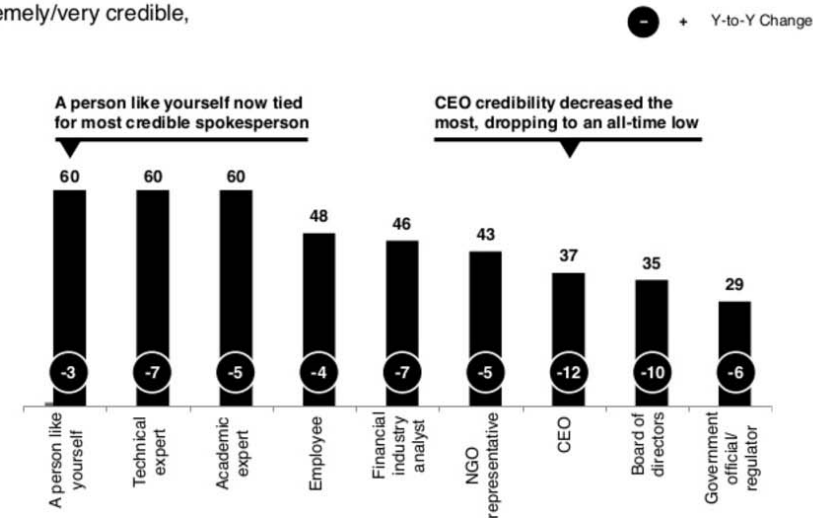
- ▶ It exploded thanks to social media.
- ▶ Social media, and the Internet in general, breaks spatial and temporal barriers of reality.
- ▶ It creates a flat space where all are perceived as equals.

Peers Now as Credible as Experts

Percent who rate each spokesperson as extremely/very credible, and change from 2016 to 2017

“People in this country have had enough of experts.”

— Michael Gove,
Member of Parliament, U.K.



Source: 2017 Edelman Trust Barometer Q130-747 Below is a list of people. In general, when forming an opinion of a company, if you heard information about a company from each person, how credible would the information be—extremely credible, very credible, somewhat credible, or not credible at all? (Top 2 Box, Very/Extremely Credible) General Population, 28-country global total, question asked of half the sample.

Hate Speech, an introduction

- ▶ The Internet made communication faster and more diffused.
- ▶ The digital egalitarianism though fostered post-truth boosted by the involution of social media and social digital space into *echo chamber*, made up of friends, contacts, follower who think it **exactly like me**.
 - ▶ In the echo chamber **opinions and beliefs** are amplified in real-time, thanks, to the power of social media media diffusion. They reverberate themselves and **becomes facts**.
 - ▶ In the echo chamber **the divergent opinions are ignored**, derided, underrepresented.

The project: “Words are Stones”

In 2017, the consortium led by ISES Association launched “Words are Stones” as a positive European action to counter the phenomenon.

Following the EU debate, and in line with the conclusions of the Annual Colloquium on Fundamental Rights of 2015, the project aims at developing dialogue at EU level with IT companies and professionals and actors of the sectors on how to address hate speech online more efficiently.

The project is funded by the European Union's Rights, Equality and Citizenship Program (2014-2020).

The project analyses HS in 8 European countries (Bulgaria, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Czech Republic, Romania, Spain, Hungary), designing and offering peer-to-peer educational programs and digital tools in order to sensitize European population, in particular teenagers and young adults, to recognize and contrast HS through grassroots initiatives.

The project: “Words are Stones”

- ▶ The project promotes counter-narratives emanating from civil society by:
 - ▶ Organising activities able to support civil society in developing counter-narratives online.
 - ▶ Organising activities able to support media literacy through training and data dissemination and sensitise the media to promote diversity and tolerance.
 - ▶ The general objective of the project is to combat racism and discrimination in their online expression of hate speech by equipping young social media strategists/managers, bloggers, online activists, youtubers...and young people in general with the competences necessary to recognize and act against such human rights violations.

The project: “Words are Stones”

- ▶ The project’s target groups are:
 - ▶ Young bloggers, social media activists, community managers, moderators, aged 18-30, with proven capacity to mobilise young people online.
 - ▶ We have identified this target group because, considering the actual situation, one possible and emerging result is the creation of a vicious cycle in which audiences convene around hateful content, converse in a self-selected group, and form new ideas or support their original biases aided by the hateful beliefs of others. However, a virtuous cycle is also possible. New media spaces can act to neutralize the negative impacts of hate speech and we want to give them the instruments to do this.
 - ▶ Young people, aged 14-25.
 - ▶ We have identified them as target group because young people are now ‘Web 2.0’ generation: those who use the internet are mostly familiar with its different aspects and fully able to make use of them. They are more likely to recognise the type of site which will attract their peers, the type of issues which concern their peers, and may be able to speak from first hand experience about the type of hate speech or hate sites commonly encountered by people of their generation. Young people are experts in young people. In this respect, they have an advantage over ‘professional’ educators or experts on cyberhate. But despite familiarity with using the internet, a very small proportion of young people - and of the population as a whole - are fully aware of the technologies behind the techniques they use everyday.

The project: “Words are Stones”

- ▶ The project activities are:
 - ▶ The organisation of a train the trainers course in Italy for young social media strategists/managers, bloggers, online activities, youtubers and its replication in each participating country
 - ▶ The organization of a “Youth media campaign” with on/off line local activities. Materials produced will serve as basis for the “WORDS ARE STONES hate speech award”, a European celebration moment through which it is possible to report and vote the best cases of hate speech management and the best conduct of internet users for a more inclusive internet.

The research

In April 2018 the first phase of the project was completed.

It involved a deep analysis of the perception of HS among users, activists and media experts of the eight countries.

The project organized 41 focus-groups across the 8 countries in order to study the phenomenon perception and the emic understanding of its causes.

Between February and April 2018, 367 people were involved and participated.

The research

- ▶ All the partners were asked to conduct at least 5 focus groups that had to involve professionals in mass-media and communication, activists in the field of the third sector, preferably human rights activists, and girls and boys between 16 and 26 years of age, who are the final users of the social media and the main target of the project.
- ▶ It was requested an even distribution among the three categories and all the participants had to be under 35 years old.
- ▶ Each section had to last 180 minutes, being the time allocated in precise activities, accordingly a standardized time-table.
- ▶ Each focus group was facilitated by a professional selected by the partner accordingly a criterion of interest in the topic and lack of direct relationship with the participants of the focus group.
- ▶ The focus group was designed to gather the emic understanding of the participants and providing them with a brief introduction to the most relevant results of the current debate about hate speech.
- ▶ The findings has been qualitatively analyzed in order to characterized the perception of the phenomenon across Europe and formulating a set of recommendation for the design of the training course.

	Italy	Bulgaria	Spain	Romania	Lithuania	Greece	Czech Rep.	Hungary
Activists	13	12	2	15	15	12	15	19
Professionals	14	11	13	19	15	11	15	19
Users	13	12	7	50	15	20	15	15
TOT	40	35	22	84	45	43	45	53

The research

The research: Perception of *Hate Speech*

- ▶ Academic literature and the press suggest new generations developed a fully aware relationship with the media (Buckingham and Willet 2013), however...
- ▶ The perception of *hate speech* is confused and underpinned by a not clear understanding of the relationship between social media and society.
- ▶ It is wide spread a perception that tends to clearly divide an online world from an offline one, which is also common in the way international mass-media reports Internet phenomena.
- ▶ It is not clear, not just among the youngest, the nexus between online behavior and offline repercussions.
- ▶ Hate speech mostly is linked to genre, sexual orientation and ethnicity. Limitedly, to political orientation.

The research: Differences across Europe.

- ▶ The research highlights a European landscape marked by differences.
- ▶ It is widely shared the understanding that hate speech is directly connected with the rehearsal of predated cultural bias and stereotypes, and the attacks are mainly targeted towards minorities or unprotected groups.
- ▶ Hate speech is linked to daily micro-actions involving proximity while the offensive behaviour develops both for mimesis and apathy, mostly generated by desensitization.
- ▶ The actual social description that groups provides, as well as the indications about strategies to be implemented in order to reduce the phenomenon appear to vary across the states.

Country	Emerging perception of hate-speech.		Social Mediascape. Main social media identified	Countering hate-speech. Main actions identified
	Causes	Target		
Italy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cultural bias. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minority groups; Gender; Ethnicity; Diversity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facebook Twitter Instagram WhatsApp. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specific training courses (civic education) in the school curricula; Public awareness campaigns about hate-speech and its effects; Implementation of proactive action to denouncing hate-speech.
Bulgaria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Insecurity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gender; Ethnicity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, Viber, Messenger, WhatsApp. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specific training courses (civic education) in the school curricula; Public awareness campaigns about hate-speech and its effects Implementation of proactive action to denouncing hate-speech; Implementation of proactive action to protecting one's own privacy.
Spain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cultural bias; Fear; Boredom. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diversity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, WhatsApp 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specific training courses (civic education) in the school curricula; Public awareness campaigns about hate-speech and its effects; Implementation of proactive action to denouncing hate-speech; Implementation of proactive action to protecting one's own privacy; Legal reform to embitter penalties for hate-speech.
Romania	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Perverse irony; Search for individual's acceptance; Sense of prowess. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diversity; Unprotected groups. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facebook, Instagram, Twitter. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specific training courses (civic education) in the school curricula; Public awareness campaigns about hate-speech and its effects; Legal reform to embitter penalties for hate-speech.
Lithuania	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cultural bias 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diversity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specific training courses (civic education) in the school curricula; Public awareness campaigns about hate-speech and its effects; Implementation of proactive action to denouncing hate-speech; Implementation of proactive action to protecting one's own privacy.
Greece	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Search for superiority; Envy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diversity; Subjects who are envied. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specific training courses (civic education) in the school curricula; Legal reform in order to push social media to controlling and limiting hate-speech.
Czech Republic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cultural bias. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minority groups. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facebook, Instagram, Tinder, Snapchat, Google+, YouTube. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specific training courses (civic education) in the school curricula; Public awareness campaigns about hate-speech and its effects; Legal reform to embitter penalties for hate-speech; On-line and off-line censorship; Software implementation to block hate-speech.
Hungary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Racism; Cultural bias. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minority groups. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, Tinder, Twitter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specific training courses (civic education) in the school curricula; Public awareness campaigns about hate-speech and its effects; Legal reform to embitter penalties for hate-speech; On-line and off-line censorship; Software implementation to block hate-speech.

The research: Social Mediascape.

- ▶ The perception of what are the social online tools used is limited.
- ▶ Overall the mediascape appears to be shared in all the countries with minor variation.
- ▶ Mostly it is linked to Facebook, Twitter, You Tube and Instagram, although other tools, in particular thematic, are mentioned (e.g. Reddit, LinkedIn, Tinder).
- ▶ The social reported includes also message tools that include the feature of creating and managing groups (e.g. WhatsApp, MSN).
- ▶ It is common the approach to social tools that privileges the use of them in close, identity groups, rather than as tools for searching for news and expanding social relationships.
- ▶ It is plausible there is an overlapping between the communities frequented online and offline.

The research: Narrations of Hate.

- ▶ Hate speech attacks social fragility.
- ▶ Fragility derives from the victim's inability of sustaining social pressure, the difficulty of facing the online public and the lack of strong relationship with other individuals.
- ▶ Hate speech generates exclusions only to people that are already socially fragile or marginal.
- ▶ The narrations describe a landscape of affects and social actors that scarcely involves the role of the State or of the families as pivotal element of control and support.
- ▶ The research testifies the weakness of the public institution in protecting and depowering the hate attacks.
- ▶ The portrays of the victims show a human landscape mostly populated by people unable to find in their kin, neighbors or acquaintances strong social bond able to sustain or protect them.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The research challenges the idea that young generations and Internet users have a clear perception of the effects and meanings of their digital actions.

It also suggest a widespread understanding of European society as a fragmented landscape of individuals unable to bind together.

The research suggests there should be three main lines of intervention to counter Hate Speech:

Education. In order to inform young generations and users to the real nature of hate speech and its threat.

Policy revision. In order to introduce more severe penalties against the hate speakers.

Software change. In order to ban/censure hate speech and limit the access to the social tools to hate speakers

Conclusions and Recommendations

- ▶ **Intervention should:**
 - ▶ **Raise awareness on hate speech**, because the overall perception of the phenomenon is limited.
 - ▶ **Address** mostly new user generations explaining the correct use of the social tools and, more important, what should be the etiquette they have to use.
 - ▶ Point out the variety of social tools through which hate speech is spread.
 - ▶ Clarify the actual dimension of the phenomenon and how the phenomenon does not involve only the victims but it is determined the very atmosphere of the Internet.
 - ▶ Make clear the fictitious division between online and offline world.
 - ▶ Explain the actual contribution that actors, such as family, state, NGOs, can have in preventing and alleviating hate speech.

Conclusions and Recommendations

- ▶ Although we are leaving a fast digitalization of our world, the boundaries of the phenomenon are not clear.
- ▶ If the solution of hate speech is digital empathy, there is still quite a lot to do.
- ▶ First of all, it should raise awareness on the social relevance of words and speech.
- ▶ Secondly, while Europe created its common shared roots in the medieval times by inventing and enforcing good manners across the courts and the social space, in front of the brutalization of political and public speech, and the opening of a new (digital) world, we need to restart from etiquette just to learn how to sit together at a common table.



▶ Thank you

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