



19.01.2015 – VoxPol Workshop
Ethics and Politics of Online Monitoring
of Violent Extremism



MONITORING RACIST AND XENOPHOBIC EXTREMISM TO COUNTER HATE SPEECH ONLINE: ETHICAL DILEMMAS AND METHODS OF A PREVENTIVE APPROACH

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LIGHT ON PROJECT (Jan 2013 – Dec 2014)

- LIGHT ON aims to tackle the normalization of online racism/extremism and its related images and habits, providing a set of tools for the community and for law enforcement authorities → through a preventive and participatory approach
- Objective: to contribute to the development of a culture that denounces racism and violent extremism, underlines its social disvalue, and promotes an active role of individuals in combating these forms of violence and intolerance
- LIGHT ON applies a preventive approach to racism, focuses on the recipients helping them to recognize discrimination, and promotes positive role models through a strong communication system and training tools





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DISGUISED RACISM AS A CHALLENGE IN COUNTERING HATE SPEECH

- In recent years online racism has quickly grown in many European and non - European countries, becoming a worrying global phenomena (Perry & Olsson, 2009).
- A meaningful example of such process is provided by the White Supremacist Movements online, whose strategy consists in disguising their hidden political agenda to subvert civil rights through an overturn of the rhetoric of the civil rights movement, aimed to destroy civil rights themselves (Daniels, 2009).
- The Light ON Project highlighted how racist discourse attempts to hide and disguise itself through “common sense” or “rational” arguments, so it is uneasy to set up effective policies to guarantee freedom of speech and to protect hate crime victims at the same time.





AMBIGUITY VS OBJECTIVITY IN ASSESSING HATE SPEECH REPORTS

- A huge amount of disguised racist contents is currently published on the Internet in form of occasional bigotry or individuals' outburst, whilst whereas they are professional products intended to foster racist attitudes among people and support racism normalization.
- Racist arguments are often exploited in populist movement's discourse: in any case allegations of racism and hate speech must be substantiated by evidences and a complaint must be proven to be more probable than not.
- Ambiguity and polysemy are the main features of such contents: since they can be interpreted in different ways, it is necessary to ground assessments on objective and factual arguments.
- Investigation on a suspected hate speech case must take in account all the available information about the source and the context in which messages have been spread.



GREY AND BLACK PROPAGANDA

- The on line communication strategy of hate mongers is often grounded on old style propaganda techniques, in which authorship, source, or real intention of a publication or broadcast are intentionally cloaked or disguised (Daniels, 2009: 119)
- In particular, LightOn found many examples of the so-called “black” propaganda, aimed to deceive target groups by spreading false material through a disguised source, and “grey” propaganda in which source is not identified and contents are at least partially true, even though these are carefully selected to induce certain effects such as persuasion and mobilization (see Jowett & O’Donnel, 1992; Mc Quail, 2000).
- It is almost impossible to establish if it’s grey or black propaganda by considering only the features of the message, without taking in account the source and its aims.



AN ETHICAL CHALLENGE

- The Internet is playing a crucial role in racism normalization: racist movements are exploiting the potential of social media to manipulate peoples' worries and outrage against minorities by promoting the sharing of such “disguised racist” contents (Andrisani, 2014).
- The internet is used by racist groups to create consent on discriminating issues, foster normalization also creating a moral alibi for discrimination, and even more violent actions as arsons and bashes.
- As it is recognized, hate speech is not about freedom of speech: it's a threat against public safety and rights of others (Nils Muižnieks, Council of Europe, Commissioner for Human Rights)
- The width of the phenomena introduces an important ethical dilemma: *how can we effectively tackle hate speech without undermining freedom of speech?*



IS IT ONLY HUMOR OR WHETHER IS IT SIMPLY RACISM?

- The “It is only humor” is one of the favorite disguising strategy exploited by racist groups.
- This disclaimer is employed to mitigate outrage and anger coming from victimized people and society at large.
- Is it possible to say if this is racism or whether it is not?
- Could this image be sold off as a lampoon as Salvini argued?
- Effective policies to counter such episodes must take in account the features of sources, context and victimized groups





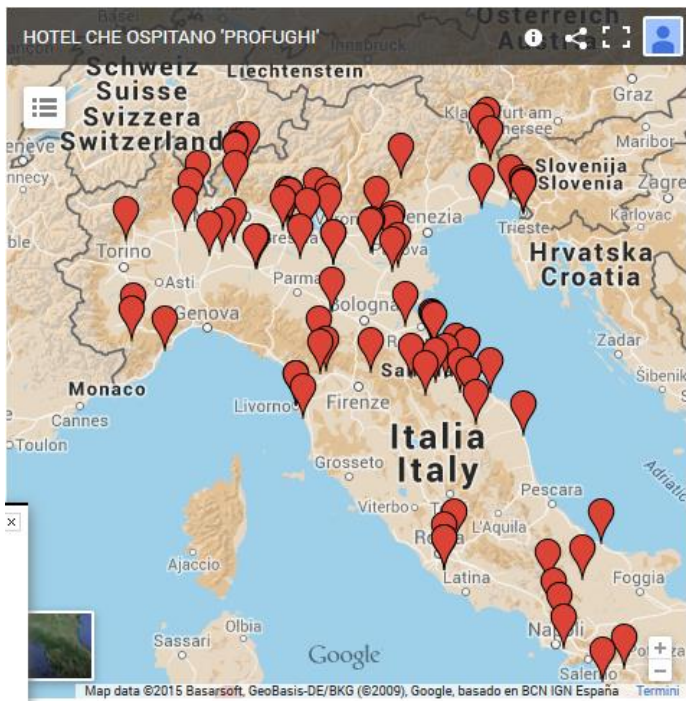
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LIGHT

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THE VOXNEWS INTERACTIVE MAP



VoxNews is an Italian based racist propaganda website, registered in Panama under fake names and hosted on US servers.

In November 2014 it was published an interactive map containing threats against refugees and asylum seekers hosted in hotels.

The incident was reported to authorities, who opened an investigation. On January 12th 2015 the page was still on line.

“Why publishing this interactive map? Because we want to give an opportunity to those who want to bring their solidarity to migrants. It’s also for those tourists who would choose the hotel by considering if they are or have been hosted the 'refugees' and to express empathy for those hoteliers” (emphasis added).



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REMOVED BY DEFAULT



- Mauro Biani, a well known Italian left-side and anti-racist cartoonist published this comic entitled «stille nacht» on «Il Manifesto», a way to warn about the rise of nazism across Italy.
- The drawing has been removed by Facebook staff, probably due to the symbol of the Swastika appearing in the comic.
- Should this be considered as a failure in Facebook reporting system rather than an unintended consequence of somewhat automated procedures?
- May any algorithm be able to discriminate about the racist meaning of such comics? Or should we consider it instead as a self defense to protect the reputation of web companies against racism allegations?



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LIGHT ON PROJECT: THE APPROACH

- LIGHT ON project adopts a multidisciplinary approach and encourages cooperation among experts working in different fields in countering online hate speech
- Such synergy suggested the importance of adopting → a victim-centered approach
- Importance of cooperation among civil society, researchers, local authorities and law enforcement entities to provide better understanding and effective counter-actions.
- The role of national authorities and groups providing legal advice in following up racist cases is of key importance





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NORMALIZATION OF RACISM: HOW TO FACE IT?

- Racist symbols and images often accepted as normal social expressions → BUT they can influence personal and collective behaviors, especially when they are shared on the Internet, where these visual expressions can easily engage broader audiences.
- 'Newer' forms of racism embedded in social processes and structures → even more difficult to explore and challenge
- In this view, some of the tools developed within the LIGHT ON project can provide parameters of evaluation to differentiate between instigation to hate / satire-comics-forms of free speech





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MONITORING AND REPORTING

Tools developed within the LIGHT ON project

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- LIGHT ON Visual database of symbols
- LIGHT ON Bliki - Glossary
- Training Manual on Investigating and Reporting online hate speech
- Anti-Racism Toolkit
- “SPOT racism online ” - practical guide
- Mobile phone application “LIGHT ON Racism”



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SOME LESSONS LEARNT

- Importance of adopting a victim-centered approach and cooperation among civil society organizations, researchers, local authorities and law enforcement agencies.
- Despite online monitoring can be a deterrent and a tool to prevent / control online racism and extremism → effectiveness stronger when monitoring is linked to the action of support groups or national authorities at national level also to encourage self-reporting.





TIPS FOR ONLINE REPORTING

- Evaluate the content of the speech and select the best strategy accordingly
- Always have a backup of the content of the hate speech incident!
- Main steps for reporting violent extremism on the most used social media: *Facebook, Twitter, You Tube, Wikipedia*

It is important that LEAs / professionals assisting victims are aware of these steps. Acquiring this knowledge effectively help victims by pointing them to the right path of reporting online. Even when the online reporting of the victims fails, there are increasing possibilities that ISPs may have established policies to collaborate more efficiently on the regulation and removal of hate speech.



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Understanding your safety settings

Choosing your experience

Dealing with issues online

Tips

Resources

Offensive content

Twitter is a social broadcast network that enables people and organizations to publicly share brief messages instantly around the world. This brings a variety of users with different voices, ideas and perspectives. Users are allowed to post content, including potentially inflammatory content, as long as they're not violating the [Twitter Rules](#). It's important to know that Twitter does not screen content or remove potentially offensive content.

As a policy, we do not mediate content or intervene in disputes between users. However, targeted abuse or harassment may constitute a violation of the [Twitter Rules](#) and [Terms of Service](#). If you are a victim of targeted abuse or harassment, you can read more about how to deal with your issue [here](#).

Have you seen something on Twitter you disagree with? Here are some tips that may help you deal with your situation:



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Serre Fion 8-9 @racyyne
 #UnBonJuif pic.twitter.com/xJSMabhF
 Hide photo Reply Retweet Favorite



4 RETWEETS 4 FAVORITES

2:48 PM - 16 Oct 12 · Details



Mamadou Lepen ^_^ @BlaackMajor
 #UnBonJuif doit être cuit à point.
 Collapse Reply Retweet Favorite

22 RETWEETS 5 FAVORITES

4:27 PM - 10 Oct 12 · Details



@JonathanZeitoun ג'ונתן זיתון
 "@ImenBahloul_: #UnBonJuif est un homme mort. :)" @LDJ @CRIF
 @Betar @HapoelTelAviv
 Collapse Reply Retweet Favorite

1 RETWEET



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POPULIST ARGUMENT/EXTREMISM ONLINE vs FREEDOM OF SPEECH

- Reconciling rights which are at the core of democracy, such as freedom of belief and religion and freedom from discrimination, with the right to freedom of expression represents a significant challenge
- When comedy and dark humour are included in the picture, establishing clear boundaries between what constitutes freedom of expression and what falls under the category of hate speech becomes an ever more complex challenge

BUT WHERE DO WE DRAW THE LINE?





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