ماعت للسلام والتنمية وحقوق الإنسان
Maat For Peace, Development, and Human Rights

On Sidelines of International Day to Combat Hate Speech

Study about

Hate Speech & Media
Current Situation and Combat Strategies

June 2024

Contents

Introduction

In his remarks, UN Secretary-General António Guterres emphasized that confronting hate speech does not mean restricting or prohibiting freedom of expression. Rather, it means preventing the escalation of hate speech into something more dangerous, such as incitement to discrimination, hostility, and violence, which is prohibited under international law.

Similar to expected and tangible benefits of media institutions, which have become an essential part of daily life and a basic source of knowledge, learning, and insight into the world, there is also a dark side - "media hatred." This can be used as a tool to ignite wars and conflicts. Media has always played a role in awareness, development and achieving peace, but at other times it has also been the primary factor in fueling conflicts and even igniting them in the first place.

History has witnessed the use of the media as a weapon of war, as seen in the Balkan conflict, in which the traits of violent fighting were spread among the components of the former Republic of Yugoslavia by media incitement, and the negative role of external media in sectarian conflicts in Iraq.[1] Various examples testify that speech has found a gateway to spread through media, particularly with the rise of digital media, which offers relative advantages in terms of expansion, reach, and ability to target a wide audience, unlike traditional media.

History is still a witness to the use of the media as a weapon of war, as happened in the Balkan War, as well as the negative role of external media in sectarian conflicts within the components of the Iraqi people. There are many examples that testify that speeches Hatred has taken the media as a gateway to spread throughout the world, and has even begun to expand due to digital media, which has relative advantages that allow it to expand, spread, and target the largest segment of the public, unlike traditional media, which was expressed by United Nations Secretary-General; António Guterres, who said, *"We must confront intolerance by working to tackle the hate that spreads like wildfire across the internet."[2]*

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[1] دور الإعلام الدولي في بناء السلام، مركز النهرين، أكتوبر 2019. https://tinyurl.com/3888padn

[2] التحديات التي يثيرها خطاب الكراهية على الإنترنت، الأمم المتحدة، https://tinyurl.com/36f3km9b

On the occasion of the International Day to Combat Hate Speech, June 18 of each year, Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights is launching a new study titled "Hate Speech and Media: Current Situation and Control Strategies." This study aims to identify the forms of media hate speech, its causes, international efforts to confront it, and roles of civil society in developing strategies to address this challenge.

Axis I: Hate Speech Concept, Roots, and Causes

Hate speech is a diverse phenomenon shaped by context and nature of a situation or issue. Before identifying underlying reasons for its formation, it is necessary to define what it is. Multiple definitions of hate speech have been presented, and despite this diversity, they all contain the experience specific to each individual or country, and in their collection, they bear the common characteristics of what speech is. United Nations defines hate speech as "offensive speech that targets a specific group or individual because of characteristics inherent in them (such as: race, religion, or gender), which may threaten social peace."[3]

United Nations' Strategy and action plan on combating hate speech further defines it as "any type of communication, oral, written or behavioral, that attacks or uses derogatory or discriminatory language about a person or group based on identities, such as religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, color, ancestry, gender or other determinants of identity."[4]

Multiple factors can lead an individual to adopt feelings of hatred and hostility towards others, which may be limited to a mere feeling or may lead to an extremist violent act. These factors go beyond temporary motives and can be traced back to the individual's socialization. In this context, we can group individual's motives for hatred into three effects:

- Socialization Effect:

An individual who grows up in an environment free of conflicts and disputes, with a solid understanding of pluralism and religion, will have a different outlook than someone who is raised in a society fueled by violence and extremism. The role of the family in instilling

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[3] ما هو خطاب الكراهية، الأمم المتحدة، https://rb.gy/h0spt

[4] استراتيجية الأمم المتحدة وخطة عملها بشأن مكافحة خطاب الكراهية، الأمم المتحدة، https://rb.gy/9s8vc

values of intolerance and hostility towards differences can make an individual more susceptible to engaging in hate speech and extremist acts, which could lead to engaging in extremist terrorist acts because he carries these motives essentially within him without any external influences.[5]

- Political & Economic Factors:

Some circumstances, such as suffering from poverty, hunger, injustice, persecution or marginalization, as well as violation of human rights and lack of security, can lead individuals to adopt hatred or engage in violent acts. An individual upbringing may be relatively peaceful, free of violence and extremism, but governments corruption and failure to implement standards fairly and equally may drive people to seek alternatives elsewhere. This factor is heavily exploited by those who practice hate speech, offering economic, political, or social incentives. Sometimes, individuals may engage against their will due to threats.

- Technological Advancements Impacts:

Technological developments, particularly Internet and social media, have become a fertile ground for the proliferation of hate speech. These platforms offer advantages such as the absence of security barriers, lack of restrictions and openness for all, ability to hide identities, and low-cost global reach, allowing individuals and groups to spread their hateful rhetoric and recruit a large number of young people.[6]

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[5] خطاب الكراهية في مناهجنا، صحيفة الغد، يناير2018. https://rb.gy/8cs6n

[6] مخاطر استخدام الذكاء الاصطناعي ضمن ترسانة الإرهاب المستقبلية، العربي، https://rb.gy/xh7bf

Axis II: Media as Open Space for Spreading Hate Speech

Misuse of media content is a primary means through which hate speech can infiltrate societies. Media, whether traditional (radio, television, print) or social, has become a reliable and influential source of information and culture for individuals. They were the only window opened to the world. However, today, social media has surpassed traditional media as the main source of news and information for many people in recent years. According to a survey conducted in 16 countries last year, the reliance on social media as a daily source of information has exceeded the level of reliance on print media, radio, and television over the past fifteen years (See Figure 1).[7]
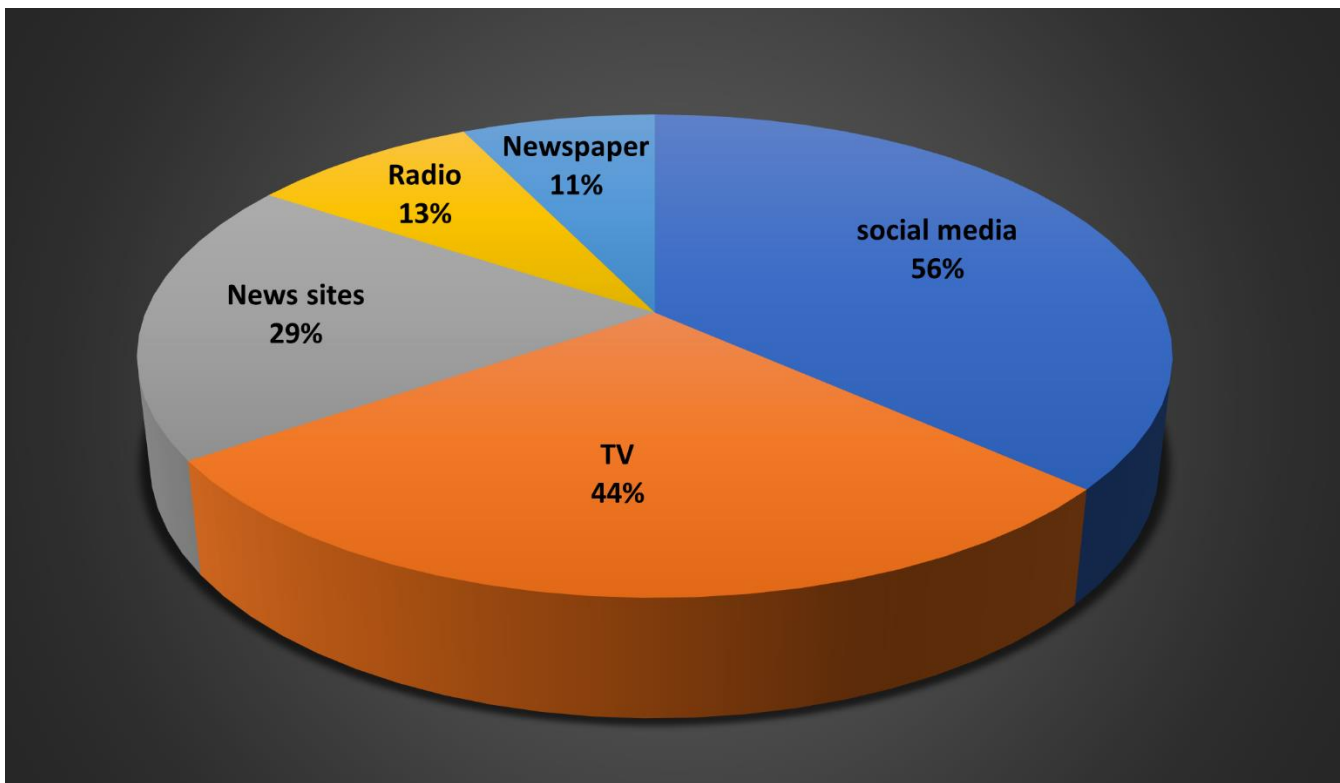

Figure 1: Percentages of reliance on media outlets to obtain information

The negative impact of misuse of these media platforms is not limited to just a specific individual or group. It has, in some cases, even led to the outbreak of violent civil wars. History is replete with examples of how hate speech disseminated through media has fueled conflicts and atrocities, such as the genocide in Rwanda. In the Rwandan case,

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Survey on the impact of online disinformation and hate speech, Ipsos, Sep 2023. https://tinyurl.com/3ckmpc5p[7]

media, in particular, the government-owned radio station "Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines (RTLM)", played a crucial role in spreading hate speech, insults, and contempt towards the Tutsi minority, portraying them as "foreigners" and "invaders." The station actively incited and encouraged the killing of Tutsis, described as enemies of land using explicit and direct language, as well as inflammatory songs and insulting metaphors and names that likened the Tutsis to "cockroaches." One such song that was broadcast says "If we exterminate all cockroaches, no one will rule us... We will be the victors."[8]

While radio played a central role in spreading hatred and inciting violence against the Tutsi minority during the Rwandan genocide, it wasn't the only media outlet used. Between 1991 and 1993, over 20 newspapers, led by the Hutu-run "Kina Matika," actively participated in this campaign. "Kina Matika" dehumanized Tutsis by portraying them as snakes in illustrations and suggesting they were not true Rwandans but feudal oppressors who deserved elimination for trying to kill members of Hutu.[9]

Similarly, social media-fueled ethnic hatred during the 2020 Tigray War in Ethiopia. Specific ethnic groups were targeted with derogatory and violent language, labeled as "traitors," "terrorists," and "murderers," and incited to violence. This hateful content went beyond text; pictures and video clips promoting the killing of Tigrayans circulated widely. One broadcaster even displayed an image of Satan next to the Tigray flag, accompanied by insults towards the Tigray People's Liberation Front. While social media platforms eventually removed this content, it took significant time after these materials had already gained widespread viewership.[10]

The recent events in Palestine showcase that Israeli media have mounted a concerted effort to frame the actions of the Israeli occupation as a justified "self-defense Strategy," while simultaneously demonizing and dehumanizing the Palestinian people by likening them to terrorists.[11]

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[8] إعلام الموت.. مليون قتيل والفاعل معلوم، رؤيا للبحوث والدراسات، فبراير 2018. https://tinyurl.com/bddjd225

[9] الابادة الجماعية في رواندا، أموالي، مايو 2023. https://tinyurl.com/yc8x245h

[10] الفيسبوك والحرب. حاضنة خطاب الكراهية، لجنة دعم الصحفيين، فبراير 2022. https://tinyurl.com/zmebby4r

[11] مأساة غزة في الإعلام الغربي: بين حرب السرديات والتغطية البديلة، مجلس الشرق الأوسط للشؤون الدولية، ديسمبر 2023. https://tinyurl.com/2p9ztcwb

This one-sided narrative is further amplified through hate speech and racist rhetoric circulating in Western media outlets. A glaring crisis of media misinformation is evident, with a deliberate failure to provide balanced coverage of the Palestinian victims. For instance, articles often emphasize and repeat the word "dead" when discussing Israeli casualties, while including personal details and social context. Israeli casualties are described in detail, emphasizing their roles as "mothers" and "friends."

This disparity is evident in major Western publications like The New York Times, The Washington Post, and The Wall Street Journal. During the first three months of the conflict, these outlets mentioned "dead people" in reference to Palestinian victims only 8-9 times, despite Palestinian deaths exceeding 15,000. This highlights the deceptive tactics employed by Western media.[12]

The Western media has also propagated misleading narratives, falsely portraying the situation as a "war between two parties" with equal standing, rather than an asymmetric conflict marked by the brutal occupation and disproportionate use of force by the Israeli military.[13] Alarmingly, some outlets have even amplified false claims about Hamas killing infants in Gaza, while downplaying the devastating bombings by the occupation forces that have left bodies dismembered and reduced to ashes. All of this comes with a clear rejection of any journalist or media person who stands on the other right.[14]

Moreover, the Western media has largely ignored or failed to report on the most egregious forms of hate speech from Israeli officials. This includes the Defense Minister's threat to "paralyze Gaza" and the Heritage Minister's suggestion to "drop a nuclear bomb" on the Palestinian territory, as well as the dehumanizing description of Palestinians as "human animals."

However, Western media largely ignored or downplayed the hateful pronouncements of Israeli leaders during the conflict. These pronouncements included statements by Israeli

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[12] بالأرقام والإحصاءات.. عنصرية الإعلام الغربي ضد غزة والفلسطينيين، الجزيرة، يناير 2024. https://tinyurl.com/yvv6rvem

[13] كيف نظر الإعلام والرأى العام الغربي لحرب غزة 2023؟، مركز الأهرام للدراسات السياسية والاستراتيجية، أكتوبر 2023 . https://tinyurl.com/2tc4xja4

[14] ازدواجية الإعلام الغربي في تغطية العدوان الإسرائيلي على غزة، مركز المعلومات ودعم اتخاذ القرار، يناير 2024. https://tinyurl.com/36zmwy2c

Defense Minister Yoav Galant,[15] who threatened to "paralyze Gaza as we have never seen it before" and declared that "the price that will be incurred...will change reality for generations." Even more disturbing were comments by Israeli Minister of Heritage, Amichai Eliyahu,[16] who referred to Palestinians as "human animals"[17] and threatened to "drop a nuclear bomb" on the Gaza Strip."

Axis III: Strategies to Combat and Restrict Hatred in Media Institutions

Traditional media, on the one hand, begins with **fostering awareness**. This awareness campaign educates and trains not only the public but also **all workers within media institutions**. The training focuses on building capacities for responsible information transmission, emphasizing importance of verifying information's reliability and authenticity before broadcast. Additionally, it equips workers with critical thinking skills and the ability to choose appropriate language that avoids bias, racism, or hatred toward individuals or groups.

In addition to the media-related challenges, there are critical legal and regulatory considerations that must be addressed. Legislation should mandate the inclusion of provisions on impartiality, anti-racism, and the prohibition of hate speech or violent rhetoric. Equally important is the need to provide relevant individuals and groups with platforms to voice their experiences and suffering, thereby raising awareness about the harm caused by such hateful speech.

When it comes to digital media, the control mechanisms must focus on how internet platforms and social media companies confront and mitigate harmful content. These entities must adhere to principles of neutrality and non-discrimination in their content moderation practices, swiftly removing any material that incites violence or promotes hatred towards specific people or communities.

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[15] غالانت يتعهد برد إسرائيلي في غزة "يغير الواقع لأجيال "، سكاي نيوز عربية، أكتوبر 2023. https://tinyurl.com/599hse4e

[16] وزير الدفاع الإسرائيلي: قطاع غزة "لن يعود أبدا إلى ما كان عليه"، CNN عربية، أكتوبر 2023. https://tinyurl.com/awhdrk3b

[17] ما أبرز ردود الفعل تجاه تصريح وزير إسرائيلي بإلقاء قنبلة نووية على غزة؟، بي بي سي نيوز عربي، نوفمبر 2023. https://tinyurl.com/2pks3rz7

Governments play a pivotal role in addressing hateful content, whether in traditional or digital media. Their responsibility extends beyond enacting the necessary legislation to also include effective oversight, policy-setting, and the implementation of monitoring and deterrence measures. Without them, we cannot guarantee compliance, in addition to establishing a set of strict controls on the media.

Civil society also has a crucial part to play in this process. Without the active involvement of civil society, efforts to combat hate speech in the media will remain incomplete. Civil society organizations are instrumental in raising awareness, whether with regard to hate speech, or necessity of respecting basic rights and freedoms of every individual and not violating them in general, which is called the policy of counter-speech. Civil society organizations document and monitor cases of hate speech, organize training and dialogue programs, and launch targeted social media campaigns, particularly targeting younger audiences. Moreover, civil society can play a vital role in supporting government strategies and communicating with policymakers to establish the foundations and rules that must govern media institutions, ultimately leading to creation of a hate-free media environment.

Axis IV: UN Role in Combating Spread of Hate Speech in Media

With the rise of hate speech and its diversification across various media outlets, international efforts to combat media-driven hatred and prevent the spread of hate speech are diminishing. This is under the umbrella of the **United Nations Strategy and Action Plan on Hate Speech**, which includes several aspects that can be addressed and worked on to achieve a media landscape free of hatred and intellectual extremism.

First: United Nations Strategy on Hate Speech

United Nations strategy and plan of action to combat hate speech is a preventive legislative approach that supports national plans in this regard. It is comprehensive, addressing the root causes of the phenomenon, and systematic, relying on education as a fundamental value in uprooting hate speech from its foundations, understanding it, and monitoring its dynamics.[18] This Strategy was launched by Secretary-General Antonio

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[18] بناء المناعة ضد فيروس الكراهية، مجموعة الامم المتحدة للتنمية المستدامة، يونيو2022. https://rb.gy/0mdln

Guterres on June 18, 2019, with Adama Dieng appointed as Special Adviser to Secretary-General on Prevention of Genocide, serving as coordinator and implementer of this plan.

The Strategy takes a comprehensive approach to address the full life cycle of hate speech, from its root causes to its impact on societies. It acknowledges that promoting alternative, positive, and counter-narratives is a key response to hate speech.[19] This came within the framework of responding to the allegations against Strategy regarding its violation of international human rights with regard to the right to freedom of expression, which was also mentioned in Strategy's document, stating that countering hate speech does not mean restricting this right, but rather taking necessary measures to prevent hate speech from escalating.[20] The Strategy has two overarching goals, implemented at global and national levels:[21]

1. Strengthening United Nations' efforts to address the underlying causes and drivers of hate speech.
2. Enabling United Nations to effectively respond to impact of hate speech on societies.

To achieve these goals, the Strategy includes **thirteen key commitments**:[22]

- Monitoring and analyzing hate speech
- Addressing root causes, motivations, and actors behind hate speech
- Engaging and supporting victims of hate speech
- Collaborating with relevant stakeholders
- Working with new and traditional media
- Leveraging technology
- Using education to counter hate speech
- Fostering safe, inclusive, and just societies
- Conducting advocacy
- Establishing external communication guidelines
- Building partnerships
- Enhancing UN staff skills

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[19] الامين العام يطلق استراتيجية الامم المتحدة لمكافحة خطاب الكراهية، الامم المتحدة، يونيو2019. https://rb.gy/k4hw7

[20] United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech, United Nations, https://rb.gy/kqsm8

[21] United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech, المرجع السابق

[22] United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech, المرجع السابق

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- Supporting member states

Amidst efforts to fulfill these Commitments, Strategy is guided by several key principles,[23] including

- Respecting right to freedom of opinion and expression
- Making efforts to counter hate speech shared responsibility among governments, communities, and private sector, starting with individual women and men.
- Empowering a new generation of digital citizens to recognize and stand up to hate speech in the digital age.
- Coordinating data collection and research on root causes and conditions leading to hate speech

Second: #SpreadNoHate Project

SpreadNoHate Project, launched by UN Alliance of Civilizations, is a social media campaign that includes international discussions, media campaigns, and policy reports to explore widespread phenomenon of hate speech and its links to violent extremism, xenophobia, and racism.

Another initiative under this umbrella is a symposium held in partnership with the European Union in Brussels on January 26, 2017. This event was based on the New York Declaration on Refugees and Migrants and aimed to focus on changing negative perceptions and attitudes towards refugees, exploring the relationship between the rise of populism and the role of the media, the link between hate speech and the treatment of migrants and refugees, as well as the role of internet intermediaries and social media platforms in combating hate speech and improving the quality of media coverage about migrants and refugees.[24]

Third: "MailClicks" Initiative by UNESCO on Social Media

"MailClicks" initiative by UNESCO is part of a series of efforts to advance media and information literacy around the world. The framework for this initiative involves a collaborative approach between the Global Alliance for Partnerships in Media and Information Literacy (GAPMIL), current and future partner organizations, and other actors

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[23] United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech, United Nations, https://rb.gy/aw4fi

[24] #SpreadNoHate Project, gfmd, Aug 2016. https://tinyurl.com/4vv7md2b

in the media and information literacy (MIL) community. The initiative aims to raise awareness levels and enable people to acquire MIL competencies in their daily use of the internet and communication means, as well as develop critical thinking skills, creativity, intercultural interaction, citizenship, knowledge, and sustainability.[25]

Fourth: Policy Summary on Safety of Information on Digital Platforms

In June 2023, the UN Secretary-General introduced a policy summary regarding the safety of information on digital platforms. This proposal sets forth a set of principles for a code of conduct to help Member States, digital platforms, and other stakeholders "make the digital space more inclusive and secure."[26] These principles include commitment to information integrity, respect for human rights, support for independent media, increased transparency, empowerment of users, enhanced research and access to data, strengthened measures, tightened discouragement measures, and the enhancement of trust and safety.[27]

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[25] MIL CLICKS Social Media Initiative, unesco, https://tinyurl.com/3b527fje

[26] إستشارة الأمم المتحدة من أجل مدونة سلوك لسلامة المعلومات على المنصات الرقمية، الأمم المتحدة، https://tinyurl.com/5fj4p2p7

[27] https://tinyurl.com/23eabzcc

Recommendations

1) The need for further involvement and activation of United Nations strategies and initiatives to combat media hate, and to work to follow the same approaches at the local levels.

2) The link between digital media and intellectual extremism must be severed, and this begins with international mechanisms exerting pressure on social media companies by tightening their measures against incitement content.

3) We encourage all governments to provide more space for civil society organizations to play their main role in combating hate speech in general, or as a pivotal assistant in strengthening the implementation of media controls and building social awareness.

4) Governments should establish clear and specific rules for actions that constitute incitement to violence and extremism through various media, while including the necessary penalties to deter these behaviors.

5) Governments should develop courses related to neutrality and combating media hatred in the curricula of media colleges and institutes, and train students on critical thinking skills and correct media controls.