1. Introduction

Racism was a pressing social problem long before the emergence of the digital age. The advancement of digital communication technologies such as the Internet has, however, added a new dimension to this problem by providing individuals and organisations with modern and powerful means to support racism and xenophobia. The use of the Internet as an instrument for the widespread dissemination of racist content is outlined in this introductory chapter. A typology of racist content on the Internet will also be provided.

There is no generally agreed definition of “hate speech” or “racist content”. Generally, speech that incites or promotes hatred towards individuals, on the basis of their race, colour, ethnicity, gender, nationality, religion, sexual preference, disability, and other forms of individual discrimination can constitute “hate speech”. In 1997, a Council of Europe recommendation on hate speech stated that the term “hate speech” should be understood as covering “all forms of expression which spread, incite, promote or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, anti-Semitism or other forms of hatred based on intolerance, including intolerance expressed by aggressive nationalism and ethnocentrism, discrimination and hostility against minorities, migrants and people of immigrant origin”. The European Court of Human Rights refers to “all forms of expression which spread, incite, promote or justify hatred based on intolerance (including religious intolerance)” as “hate speech” but “only statements which promote a certain level of violence qualify as hate speech”. Racism, on the other hand, is described by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) as “the belief that a ground such as race, colour, language, religion, nationality or national or ethnic origin justifies contempt for a person or a group of persons, or the notion of superiority of a person or a group of persons”.

It should, however, be noted that the term “hate speech” should be understood as covering “all forms of expression which spread, incite, promote or justify hatred based on intolerance (including religious intolerance)” as “hate speech” but “only statements which promote a certain level of violence qualify as hate speech”. Racism, on the other hand, is described by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) as “the belief that a ground such as race, colour, language, religion, nationality or national or ethnic origin justifies contempt for a person or a group of persons, or the notion of superiority of a person or a group of persons”.

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that “such speech does not necessarily imply the expression of hate’ or emotions. Racial discourse may be concealed in statements that at first sight appear rational or routine”.5

However, disagreements and variations exist on these definitions, and the content of “hate speech” or “racist content” could be broader based upon cultural, political, moral and religious differences around the world, and perhaps more evidently within the European region. Such differences, combined with historical, legal, and constitutional background, often lead into the adoption of different legal measures to deal with such content, and variations also exist with regards to what constitutes criminal conduct. While states such as the United Kingdom, Germany, Austria, and Belgium criminalise the denial of the Jewish Holocaust, other European states such as the United Kingdom, Ireland, and Italy do not have similar criminal provisions.

Racism and the dissemination of ideas based on hatred and racial superiority were a pressing social problem prior to the emergence of the information age and digital communications. Long before the Internet entered our homes, racist groups made use of other communication tools including the telephone networks as far back as the 1970s. For example, the Western Guard Party, a white supremacist neo-Nazi group based in Toronto, Canada, had a telephone answering machine which was used to propagate hatred, and was the subject matter of a long legal dispute in the late 1980s. The advancement of digital communication technologies such as the Internet has, however, added a new dimension to this problem by providing individuals and organisations “with modern and powerful means to support racism and xenophobia”.6

Historically, concerns about “digital hate” date back to the mid 1980s and relate to the documented use of computers, computer bulletin boards and networks to disseminate racist views and content.” according to the Simon Wiesenthal


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observed as a growing trend amongst racist organisations to spread racist or systems in the early 1990s.12 The BBS movement quickly jumped on the Internet, creating a community around the white power movement, while Ernst Zündel’s Holocaust Denial website was launched during 1998 in Canada. New methods of dissemination of anti-Semitic and revisorist propaganda about the Holocaust (including video games, computer programs and the Mindol system in France) were noted by a United Nations Secretary-General report in 1994,13 and the growing use of modern electronic media in international communica- 
tions between right-wing radical groups (computer disks, databanks, etc.) was recorded in 1993.14 Officially the use of electronic mail and the Internet was first observed as a growing trend amongst racist organisations to spread racist or xenophobic propaganda in 1996.15 The UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance in his 1997 report declared that:

The Internet has become the new battleground in the fight to influence public opin- 

ion. While it is still far behind newspapers, magazines, radio and television in the size of its audience, the Internet has already captured the imagination of people with a message, including purveyors of hate, racists and anti-Semites.16

11. Ibid.
Although the majority of online racist content was disseminated through North America in the mid 1990s, it was accurately predicted that this would change with the rapid growth of Internet use around the globe. Easy and inexpensive access to the Internet, as well as the development of the World Wide Web, provided new and ready opportunities for publishing and this extended to material of a racist and xenophobic nature. Flyer and pamphlets that had traditionally been distributed locally by hand and had limited visibility could be distributed and accessed globally through the Internet. In fact, the “slow, insidious effect of a relatively isolated bigoted commentary … has now changed to a form of communication having a widespread circulation” around the globe.

Quantifying the nature of online hate
There is strong documented evidence to show that racist organisations and individuals are currently using the Internet to disseminate racist content. Furthermore, since the 11 September terrorist attacks in the United States, terrorist organisations have started to make use of the Internet for spreading propaganda and inciting violence.

The resurrection of Nazi ideology in Europe and violent radicalisation across the world are also partially blamed on Internet publications as information and publications associated with such movements are easily and freely available on the Internet.

While there was only a single racist website in April 1995, the Simon Wiesenthal Center estimated that there were more than 5,000 websites in 2005 in a variety of languages which promote racial hatred and violence, anti-Semitism and xenophobia around the world. The Center’s study, entitled “Digital Terrorism & Hate Recruitment to Terrorism,” reported that there were more than 50,000 racist and xenophobic Hate Websites on the Internet in 2005. Meanwhile, the Council of Europe (2006) estimated that there were an additional 177,000 racist and xenophobic websites in 2005.

Among those who disseminate online racist content, there is a growing number of individuals who use the Internet to promote their racist ideas and activities. This has been documented in various reports, such as the European Union’s “Hate and the Internet” report, which estimated that there were more than 500,000 racist and xenophobic websites in 2005.

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2005, reported a 25% increase in such websites compared to 2004 indicating that the problem of racism and xenophobia over the Internet was growing. The estimated number of websites which promote racial hatred and violence reached over 6,000 in May 2006 according to the “Digital Terrorism & Hate 2006” report. A 17% increase was witnessed during 2007 with the estimated number of websites reaching almost 7,000. In May 2008, in a report entitled “Online Terror and Hate: The First Decade,” the Simon Wiesenthal Center identified 8,000 websites and Internet postings that carried racist content as well as terrorist propaganda. This represented a 30% increase over the Center’s 2007 findings. The Center’s 2008 report provides an interactive snapshot into the many spheres of the global problem of Internet hate, exposing the inner workings of such notorious groups as al-Qaeda, Hamas, Hezbollah, Combat 18 and the Ku Klux Klan among others. While assessing the growing number of websites and forums that are associated with known racist and terrorist organisations the report states that “the Internet’s unprecedented global reach and scope combined with the difficulty in monitoring and tracing communications make the Internet a prime tool for extremists and terrorists.” More recently, in May 2009, the Simon Wiesenthal Center in a report entitled “Facebook, YouTube +: How Social Media Outlets Impact Digital Terrorism and Hate” claimed that the number of websites and Internet postings carrying racist content, and terrorist propaganda surpassed 10,000.

The nature of online hate

While anti-Semitism is a prevalent theme among online extremists, no group is immune from attack and at the same time, no group is immune from having online extremists in their midst. Catholics, Muslims, Hindus, homosexuals, women, immigrants are some of the most targeted groups. Several controversial publications of a racist nature, or publications which encourage violence, are currently disseminated through a number of websites, blogs, and newsgroups. For example, a considerable number of websites disseminate controversial publications of a racist nature, or publications which encourage violence, are currently disseminated through a number of websites, blogs, and newsgroups. For example, a considerable number of websites disseminate

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anti-Semitic materials, including the fraudulent document known as the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, which purports to be the actual blueprint by Jewish leaders to take over the world. Although several other controversial publications of a racist nature or that encourage violence are available over the Internet, none are as widely available as this anti-Semitic forgery which "refuses to die." The Protocols of the Elders of Zion was first published in Russia in 1905 and is available through a number of websites including Hamas Online (website of the Palestinian Sunni Islamist militant organisation) and is still a bestseller in print format in many Muslim countries. There are also several websites which deny the existence of the Holocaust or which try to minimise or justify the Nazi atrocities of the Second World War. The distribution of literature with such ideas was largely limited until the mid 1990s but since then several, including the infamous Zundelsite, came to existence, and pamphlets such as Da Six Million Really Die? are freely available to download from these websites.

During the mid 1990s Andrew MacDonald’s The Turner Diaries, which has been considered by the US Justice Department and the FBI as the bible of right-wing militia groups, was also made available widely over the Internet and is believed to have provided the blueprint for the Oklahoma City bombing. Similarly, the Encyclopaedia of the Afghan Jihad, a manual of Jihad in 10 or 11 volumes, details how to make and use explosives and firearms, and how to plan and carry out assassinations and other terrorist acts. TheEncyclopaedia is regarded as the "blue-print for terror" and is also available over the Internet in Arabic, and it bore a "dedication to Osama Bin Laden, among others, and suggested Big Ben and the Eiffel Tower as targets for attack, the prosecution alleged. The manual urged that plans 'should be laid out to hit buildings such skyscrapers, ports, airports, nuclear plants and football stadiums, the prosecution said, and it talked about attacking large congregations of people at Christmas.' Other often-cited publications of anti-Semitic materials, including the fraudulent document known as the Protocols of the Elders of Zion which purports to be the actual blueprint by Jewish leaders to take over the world. Although several other controversial publications of a racist nature or that encourage violence are available over the Internet, none are as widely available as this anti-Semitic forgery which "refuses to die." The Protocols of the Elders of Zion was first published in Russia in 1905 and is available through a number of websites including Hamas Online (website of the Palestinian Sunni Islamist militant organisation) and is still a bestseller in print format in many Muslim countries. There are also several websites which deny the existence of the Holocaust or which try to minimise or justify the Nazi atrocities of the Second World War. The distribution of literature with such ideas was largely limited until the mid 1990s but since then several, including the infamous Zundelsite, came to existence, and pamphlets such as Da Six Million Really Die? are freely available to download from these websites.

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Evolution of nature of online hate and Web 2.0 technologies

In time, this type of content would be presented in more attractive high-quality formats including that of online racist videos, cartoons, music, radio, and audio-visual transmissions in a variety of languages. Furthermore, games such as the US National Socialist Movement's ZOG's Nightmare, the National Alliance's Ethnic Cleansing, in which ethnic cleansing is the main theme, and the modified version of an old racist game KZ (German for Concentration Camp) Manager, which involved the Turkish minorities in Germany, are freely available to download from a number of websites on the Internet.

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In May 2008, the Simon Wiesenthal Center's “Online Terror and Hate: The First Decade” report pointed out that “extremists are leveraging 2.0 technologies to dynamically target young people through digital games, Second Life scenarios, blogs, and even Youtube and Facebook style videos depicting racist violence and terrorism.”45 Web 2.0 is a recent term which refers to new technologies designed to be used on the World Wide Web with the intention of enhancing information sharing, and collaboration among users rather than simply retrieving information with interactivity taking centre stage. Well-known examples include the development and evolution of web-based content hosted services such as the popular social networking sites Facebook and MySpace, video-sharing application YouTube, photo-sharing application Flickr, extremely popular blogging sites and communities such as Wordpress and Blogger, and user-driven multilingual, web-based, free content encyclopedia project Wikipedia, and tag and share web pages using social bookmarking services such as del.icio.us and Digg.

Following the extreme popularity of these free-to-use Web 2.0 technologies, racist organisations and individuals have started to use Web 2.0 technologies and applications such as YouTube and other on-demand video and photo sites to disseminate audio-visual content involving hatred, and to “dynamically target young people.”46 For example, it was documented in Germany that YouTube hosted controversial videos such as Jud Sull (The Jew Suss), a 1940 anti-Semitic propaganda film, as well as content from banned German rock band Landser which depicts Nazi military operations in their music video clips. It was reported by the London Sunday Times that the Central Council of Jews in Germany was planning to bring criminal charges against YouTube with regard to the availability of this particular Nazi propaganda video on YouTube. YouTube subsequently removed the video clips concerned but the council complained that there were several other Nazi related clips that were not removed by YouTube and Google. Judgenschutz.net, the German Internet hotline which tackles the problem of online hate, documented about 700 videos with right-wing content on YouTube during the course of 2007. Judgenschutz.net reported in their 2007


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annual report that other video-sharing platforms based on YouTube with neo-Nazi themes have been developed during 2007. Similarly, Austria’s Defence Ministry launched an investigation following media reports suggesting that a particular YouTube video clip showed Austrian soldiers making Hitler salutes in Austrian army barracks.40

In April 2008, a New York Times article revealed that “among the millions of clips on the video-sharing Web site YouTube are 11 racially offensive Warner Brothers cartoons that have not been shown in an authorised release since 1968.41 According to the New York Times, the cartoons, known as the ‘Censored 11’, have been unavailable to the public for forty years. Subsequently, the majority of these offensive videos were removed but some are still accessible through YouTube.”

A French Jewish group, the National Bureau of Vigilance Against Anti-Semitism (BNVCA), announced in August 2008 that it would take legal action against YouTube and Dailymotion over a clip showing a host of Jewish public figures to the soundtrack of a pre-war anti-Semitic song.42 The clip shows a slideshow of more than 150 French politicians, TV stars, journalists, writers, philosophers, actors, singers and comedians with the sound of a song recorded before the Second World War, called Rebecca’s wedding, which describes the guests at a Jewish wedding as dirty, rude and dishonest. The French group decided to take legal action due to the anti-Semitic nature of the video clip.

Racist ideas and content are also disseminated through MySpace43 and Facebook.44 The presence of the racist British National Party (BNP) on Facebook prompted a major boycott of Facebook by high-profile companies including Vodafone, and Virgin Media, who pulled their advertisements from Facebook. An investigation by a campaign group, Unite Against Fascism, discovered that there were Facebook profile images of Ku Klux Klan members posing with a sword under the subtitle “Local BNP meeting, blacks welcome!”45 More recently, the National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union in South Africa condemned the racist content and comments posted by a group of University of North West students on a Facebook site.46 There were also reports to suggest that white supremacist groups

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44. The Calgary Sun (Alberta), “The new face of hate; The swasticking skinheads and marching jack-boots have all but vanished, but make no mistake: The poisonous ideology of white supremacy is alive and well in Canada”, 23 September 2007.
the Internet social networking site of allowing a platform to racists”. The media reports suggested that seven different Facebook groups had been created with titles advocating violence against Roma people. Following complaints Facebook, which does not pre-screen content going on its system, stated that it would “remove any groups which are violent or threatening,” and which therefore violate its terms of use which bans users from posting anything which is hateful, or racially, ethnically or otherwise objectionable. The existence of such groups was described as “repulsive” by Martin Schultz, Socialist leader in the European Parliament, who lodged a complaint with Facebook based in California. The Simon Wiesenthal Center, instead, asked Facebook to create technology to filter out hate speech and racist content.

Furthermore, it was reported that even Internet-based virtual gaming worlds such as Second Life® and World of Warcraft have been used by certain groups to disseminate racist content and to create presence on such virtual fantasy environments.

Close relationship between racist discourse and racist violence

The relationship between hate speech on the Internet and hate-motivated violence has not been investigated in a comprehensive manner, but numerous cases strengthen the assumption that there is a link under specific circumstances. According to a recent report of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), “the intersection of racist discourse on the Internet and racist violence was a theme that received increasing attention in 2006, including the use of the Internet to identify particular individuals as targets for violence and to disseminate their personal information.” For example, according to the report, “explicit

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instructions for racist attacks on particular individuals in Russia were found on the websites of skinhead groups.62 The ODIHR report also pointed out that “instructions for racist, anti-Semitic, and homophobic violence were found on a Redwatch website hosted in the United States that was maintained by a right-wing organisation in Poland”63 Redwatch, originally produced by “Combat 18”, started publishing the names and addresses of anti-racist campaigners in Britain in print format in 1993, almost ten years before they set up their website.64 It now has branches in Germany and Poland and the Polish version, which was hosted in the United States, posted the names, addresses, and telephone numbers of representatives of Jewish, anti-racist, and left-wing organisations and encouraged violence against them” according to the ODIHR report. In June 2006, the Polish police arrested two individuals for ties to the website and charged eight others with collaborating on the site. Polish authorities also asked the United States for help in closing down the website.65

Similarly, it was reported by Der Spiegel in July 2008 that neo-Nazi groups in Germany are “trying to intimidate left-wing politicians and activists by publishing their names, photos and addresses on World sites, often accompanied by increasingly blatant threats.”66 According to Der Spiegel, “calls for violence against left-wing activists, trade unionists and journalists are becoming increasingly blatant on the approximately 1 700 far-right Web sites in Germany.”67 Several examples of neo-Nazi websites revealing personal details and addresses and calling for violence were cited by Der Spiegel including the following:

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One website mocks the sister of an anti-Nazi activist for frequently spending her holidays in Turkey.

A judge in the northern city of Kiel who had sentenced a member of the far-right National Democratic Party to pay a heavy fine was hit even harder. Neo-Nazis published his address on a website, revealed how many children he had and that “some of our readers would relish the opportunity to slay a judge or public prosecutor in the wild”.

Neo-Nazis in the western state of Hesse published maps showing the locations of left-wing politicians or members of anti-Nazi citizens’ groups.

As in the case of the Redwatch UK website, the German efforts to remove some of these websites proved to be hopeless. The majority of these websites are based outside German jurisdiction and they are usually hosted in the United States.

Seeking solutions

The Internet has thus become the medium of choice for propaganda, disseminating hatred, recruiting, training, fundraising, and for communications by racist as well as terrorist organisations.

Obviously there is major concern about the availability of racist content, hate speech and terrorist propaganda on the Internet, and many governments and international and regional organisations, including the Council of Europe, the European Union, the UN and the OSCE are in agreement that racism and manifestations of racism through the Internet should not and will not be tolerated. However, the major question that is being faced by international organisations and state-level regulators is how to regulate the flow of racist content over the Internet. The question becomes even more complex by the fact that different political, moral, cultural, historical and constitutional values exist between different states. This undoubtedly complicates efforts to find an appropriate balance between the rights to freedom of opinion and expression and to receive and impart information and the prohibition on speech and/or activities


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