Hate Online

Student Version

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Hate Online: How People Deceive Others and Promote Hate Online

Synopsis

In the lecture video, we covered how different individuals and organizations want to mislead others online for financial gain or to support political interests. The in-class assignment will focus on hate speech and misinformation, which is an urgent threat to our society and has proven to be a threat to not only far away countries but also to stable democracies in Europe.

The Case

In today's in class activity we will discuss three articles that demonstrate how hate is spread online and its effects.

Background Part 1: Myanmar

Facebook is one of the most widely used social networking sites in the world with over 2.5 billion accounts created and 1.8 billion active users. However, the platform has been struggling to moderate the content that is being distributed on the website. Perhaps some of the most disturbing examples of how a social media site can be misused comes from Myanmar, where it has been used as a tool to increase hate towards a minority and coordinate attacks against them.

Interestingly, in many countries in south-eastern Asia, Facebook has played an active role in being the primary way to access the internet and even synonymous to it due to deals made with mobile phone providers and telecom companies. This has made the social networking site the primary source of information for many, which is not a great thing when combined with a lack of moderation by the platform and governments that are willing to spread misinformation to the population.

Reading Piece 1:

Please read the following New York times article titled "A Genocide Incited on Facebook, With Posts From Myanmar's Military" from 2018: https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/15/technology/myanmar-facebook-genocide.html

Background Part 2: Russian Trolls

If the first example seemed like something too distant, then the next example is going to be from a country that is closer. The Russian government backed Internet Research Agency has become famous

for spreading misinformation and fake news in the West to support political movements that promotes Russian interests. Although the most famous examples are from the US presidential elections in 2016 and 2020, the IRA has been involved in European political discussions and has been seen supporting astroturfing campaigns around topics such as anti-EU and anti-immigration.

Reading Piece 2:

Please read the following article "Inside the Russian Troll Factory: Zombies and a Breakneck Pace" from the New York Times which was published in 2018: https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/18/world/europe/russia-troll-factory.html

Background Part 3: Germany

Echo chambers are one of the issues in social media which may result in polarization of topics and peoples' opinions. An echo chamber is formed both intentionally by social media users that are following only accounts and pages that align with their opinions and unintentionally when the algorithm that guides what content people see on social media starts showing only material that aligns with the user's world view. As a result, the person stuck in an echo chamber interacts only one side of a discussion and often starts seeing increasingly extreme content, as radical posts gather typically more likes on social media and thus gets shared more.

The last example is about the effects of echo chambers in Denmark's neighboring country Germany, which shows that even highly educated populations with typically good media literacy skills may suffer from exposure to radical content on social media.

Reading Piece 3:

Please read the following article from the Atlantic: https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/09/facebook-violence-germany/569608/