

Essay

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Why negative communication online should be punished.

Humans come with bad behaviour. No one likes this, yet it is part of our nature. It is inevitable.ⁱ As a result, throughout the history, in all civilizations in the world, laws were introduced and enforced to act as a solution for this problem.ⁱⁱ

All nations had the freedom to implement their own laws.ⁱⁱⁱ And now, in the current modern world, all places have their own way to deal with bad human behaviour. Physical crimes are being punished.

Then came the rise of the internet.^{iv}

The internet allows users to be anonymous.^v This makes it safe for people to express their (negative) opinion, without having the fear of facing any consequences due to this whatsoever. Due to this, it is extremely easy to insult people. And with the popularity of the internet increasing^{vi} tremendously these last few decades, this is happening at an alarming increasingly rate.

Worldwide Internet users

	2005	2010	2017 ^a
World population ^[5]	6.5 billion	6.9 billion	7.4 billion
Users worldwide	16%	30%	48%
Users in the developing world	8%	21%	41.3%
Users in the developed world	51%	67%	81%

^a Estimate.
Source: International Telecommunications Union.^[6]

Ranging from simple trolling to cyber bullying. What are the (internet) laws about this?

If harassing people with negative communication is prohibited in (almost?) every country in the world, should this also be forbidden online?

On one hand, the internet is meant to be a free place.^{vii} However, bad behaviour should always be punished. This conflict raises the question: Should negative communication online be punished?

In this essay I'm going to talk about why it should. I will start by explaining that it will be very doable to implement these punishments. Next I will state the advantages of implementing this and how this can be expanded for even further improvements to our society. I will end by stating why the internet should not be a completely 'free' place without any laws and that, even though the internet is everywhere and laws differ by country, this does not matter for implementing these punishments.

Next I'll talk about how humans are social creatures^{viii} with a lot of potential and together we can accomplish many great things. We should always strive for treating each other right and unfortunately this means we should motivate each other to do the right thing, always, even if this means punishing humanity's sins. We should do this always and everywhere, no exceptions. If this means the freedom of the internet will suffer, so be it. But is it possible to implement this?

It's doable

Implementing these punishments is actually very doable: it's fast, accurate and cheap.

Computers can scan written text online, based on the quality of their programmed algorithms, very accurate. And computers work fast and accurate^{ix}; it's actually even better compared to human lawyers and judges, and a lot cheaper. Using computers in prosecuting offences and implementing fines is actually already being automated more and more in developed countries.

The benefits

This will improve human behaviour (online), which is a very positive thing in general for everyone. This impact can be huge for humanity because more than half of humanity uses the internet.

Prosecuting negative communication online will greatly stimulate people to behave better and treat each other less bad. Less bad means a better average. Improving how humans treat each other will greatly benefit society^x, as this impacts all internet users, which is more than half of the human population. This will result in less anxiety, a drop in suicide rate and depression which will further snowball into a more flourishing society.

This can be expanded

This could be expanded into rewarding positive communication towards people online. This will also motivate people to improve their behaviour.

If algorithms can be written to track down the bad stuff, than the opposite is also possible. And positive rewards are a greater motivation than punishing the negative.^{xi} Humans are sensitive to compliments and who doesn't want to unlock an increasingly higher milestone of good karma online to show off? These game mechanics are addictive; they have been proven to be effective.^{xii}

Sounds good, but what are the downsides?

The complications

One might argue that the internet can be compared to being off-planet: in space. It is everywhere, and thus not bound to any laws of a specific country. And because every country has its own laws, it would be impossible to make laws for the internet, for the same reason that we simply cannot elect a president for the whole world.

However, all countries on earth have agreed that crimes are forbidden and while the punishments may differ per country, they are all being punished none the less. Bad behaviour is not tolerated by any laws in any country, so why should we tolerate it on the internet?

It is true. Laws exist for a reason. Any country that has them prosecutes the bad stuff. There is literally no exception. However, expressing one's freedom of opinion is not punished as bad everywhere. But the point is, that it is punished everywhere^{xiii}; it doesn't matter to what extent.

But being a free place is the whole point of the internet!

Let's take a look at what this will cost us. Will this sacrifice our freedom of expression? Will this rob us of our human rights and send us back to the middle ages where we have no rights? Will this mean a dictatorship being implemented on the whole human society? Surely this will cause people to protest! As humanity has been fighting for freedom for like, its entire existence? ^{xiv}

But this is, to some extent, already being done. Criminal activities on the internet are already being tracked and punished when found. And people know this. They know telecom companies and the government/police have access to our data traffic^{xv}. Yet the majority of the human population in Europe, and other developed countries, takes no action to protest against this.



Your freedom should not come at the expense of other people

You can still express your thoughts freely, but don't be mean. You can write about contradicting thoughts, but don't direct that information to specific individuals. There is a big difference between writing racist stuff on a blog, compared to sending your opinion to individuals on social media. Don't direct hate to individuals. It's hurtful (or worse) and therefore wrong. People that choose to behave like a douche anyway, should be punished accordingly.

It is worth the freedom of the internet to punish bad communication. It is already implemented in several developed countries to counter criminals through the internet by monitoring their activities.^{xvi} The police even uses social media to watch what people are posting.^{xvii}

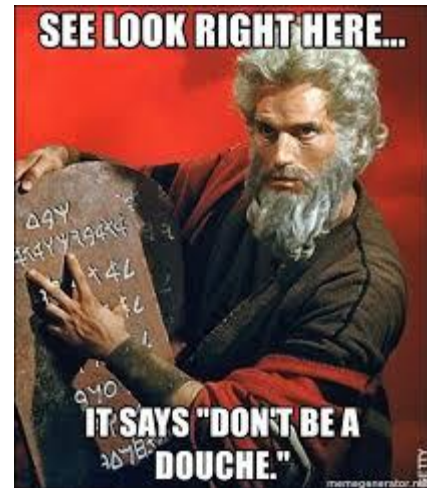
And again, if bad behaviour is illegal in any country, why shouldn't it be online? Isn't it about the nature of the activity, rather than the location of where bad stuff occurs?

And for all the people out there that say we can't make this work; how do we specify punishments? How do you decide the boundaries of communication being acceptable or (too) negative? That's not what this essay is about. I'm saying that this behaviour online should be punished. It is irrelevant if this is even possible, and if yes, how and to what extent.

This essay is about that this change should be implemented. Regardless of it being even possible (which it is). And yes, it will not be easy to specify the penalties/fines for this, but those details are not what this essay is about. It's about that it should be implemented; it's not about specifics like how this should be done.

Conclusion

Punishing negative communication online should be done. It is fast, accurate and cheap. It will bring great benefits for the human society in the form of people treating each other less bad, and motivating them to treat each other better. Punishing bad communication, like bullying, is not tolerated anywhere and the internet should not be an exception. If implementing this will sacrifice some of our freedom, so be it. Besides, our actions online are already being monitored.^{xviii}



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