'Breakthrough Generation' Haters—A Pilot Study

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Abstract. The internet is a powerful medium in nowadays society. As young people spend most time being online, they are getting brand new opportunities for their education, entertainment and personal development. Still they are exposed to new threats, as hate speech. Every participant of cyberspace creates his own e-personality, either intentionally or unintentionally, and that can be crucial for young people reaching adulthood. The author of this paper conducted a study among youngster form several countries to determine a level of hate speech they meet while being online and tendency to become aggressors – haters. The research was conducted in several stages. The first one was defining particular aims and scope of the study. Then a pilot research for testing and improving questionnaire was carried out. This paper concentrates on this stage of the research and is the first of series dedicated to this survey.

Introduction

Internet nowadays plays a crucial role not only for business, industry, economy, society and almost each aspect of everyday life but it affects all societies as well as individuals [1, 2]. Among threats that young people are exposed to on the internet, following can be mentioned: cyber-bullying, cyber grooming, hacking and downloading illegal content, identity theft and providing personal information, meeting online acquaintances in a real world as well as pornography and risky sexual behaviors [3].

The impact of the Internet on individuals and entire societies is reflected massively in a current literature. Internet users and their habits have become the subject of sociological, psychological, legal and economic studies. In effect various classifications of web surfers come into being, aimed at emphasizing the differences in this medium usage. It should be remembered, however, that the impact of the Internet on each individual can take a variety of forms and is so far poorly understood, that all classifications of its members can only be of a general nature. As every participant of cyberspace creates his own e-personality, experience with surfing all the distant corners of internet is a very unique and diversified for every person. Nevertheless, it is believed that young people are heavy internet users and this medium affects their lives the most. These conclusions turn up in practically every classification made on the subject. That is why they are the core group to research.

In Web 2.0 times, that have begun with the advent of 21st century, users participation in online reality is constantly growing. The internet now is perceived as a *read-write* instead of *read-only* model typical for Web 1.0 [4]. Thanks to social media, every user can publish and comment reaching broad audience and this has resulted in a steep rise in online social participation. Socializing online can be very advantageous for an individual as it was proven to be positively correlated with physical and mental health, happiness, self-esteem, earnings and business performance [5]. In a research from 2012, it was proven that social media positively influence community life and social capital [6]. Yet, such an active participation in online communities may become a potential source of threat – hate speech. Studies from 2011 and 2014 present that social media play a crucial role in spreading hate and in translating speech into action and provide new platforms for making hateful material visible to a greater extent for broad audience [7, 8]. It is even believed that – as a result of that situation – hate speech is considered as major concern in today's society [9].

This paper aims to investigate hate speech among young adolescents relying on research conducted by the author. The article describes first stage of the research, namely preparation and execution of a pilot study. The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 briefly reviews the related literature on young people classification as internet users and on hate speech. Section 3 is dedicated to an explanation of methodology and construction of the study. Findings, conclusions and future works are given in Sections 4 and 5, respectively.

Hate Speech among 'Breakthrough Generation'

One of the most important classifications of internet users has come into being thanks to Marc Prensky and his paper from 2001 where he introduced so called 'digital immigrants' and 'digital natives' [10]. According to his vision, digital immigrants are people aware of the Internet and modern technology, but born in the days before their widespread deployment so they encountered it at some stage of life. Regardless of level of adoption to internet technologies, they do not treat cyber space as equal to real life. They usually remain strangers, possessing an 'accent' emphasizing the fact that full assimilation in the new digital environment for them is impossible. Digital natives, though, are born in the time of dynamic dissemination of the internet as they can't imagine life without it. For this cohort, immersion in virtual reality takes the strongest form, resulting often in treating real and virtual space as one and the same. Prensky set 1980 as a date distinguishing immigrants (born before) from natives (born after). This classification indeed emphasize perceiving the internet and its influence on everyday life but do not refer to proficiency in the use of this medium.

Another categorization distinguishes six generations: greatest generation, silent generation, Baby Boomers, generation X, Y and Z. its timeline is presented below (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Generations timeline, based on [11].

For the aims of the study the most important generations are Y and Z. Generation Y is known as 'wired', 'net' or 'Millenials'. Most of them are digital natives, bringing numerous spheres of life – fully or partially – to the cyberspace: job, education, hobbies, shopping, communication, socializing, etc. Generation Z, still in their teens, are educated and brought up in a time of dynamic dissemination of the Internet and mobile technology. For them, cyberspace is obvious, a regular part of life, present from 'always'. A world without the internet can be seen as an abstraction. Not only they have mastered all the skills characterizing the previous generation, but also put a strong emphasis on the creation of their own personality through the network. Treating cyberspace as equally important as the real one, often they do not have inhibitions against placing a huge amount of private information on the cyberspace. In different literature time ranges often vary, making standardized definition difficult to provide.

Some researchers distinguish also generation C, emphasizing style of life rather than date of birth. The letter C is means creativity, desire to control, creativity and desire to present to the world their attributes (celebrity). Generation C representatives create online communities and actively participate in cyberspace, especially through social media. This generation is also referred to as generation V, derived from the word 'virtual' [12].

Young adolescents are therefore counted among different generations and classifications. That is why, for the purpose of this study, the author has coined a term 'breakthrough generation'. It described young people, born in the end of the last century or at the beginning of current, characterized by rich online life, immersion in cyberspace, being almost always online, creating new aspects of their own personality in a cyber reality and transferring social life to the Internet.

Hate speech is a form of verbal aggression and takes a form of comments that are offensive, insulting, intimidating, threatening, harassing and incite to violence, aggression, hatred, or

discrimination [13]. With the popularization of social media, hate speech spread significantly, yet its nature is still not well known [14]. Motivation to induce a hate speech online can be different for each individual, including thrill, defensive, mission, and retaliatory [15]. But also the nature of cyberspace: dissociative anonymity, invisibility, asynchronicity, solipsistic introjections, dissociative imagination and minimising authority, may intensify this phenomenon. People online may behave self-disclose or act out more frequently or intensely online than they would in person (so called 'disinhibition effect') [16].

Increasing amount of hate speech on the internet may cause serious effects, especially among young adolescents but also all society, because it deepens prejudice and stereotypes, influences emotional well-being of victimized groups and can inflame violent acts in real life [17].

Explanation of Methodology and Construction of the Pilot Study

The main aim of the study is to examine and define level of hate speech among young people. All perspectives should be taken into consideration – victim's, witness's and aggressor's. That is why the questionnaire includes questions inquiring about being hater, witness and victim. The construction of the research tool is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Questionnaire's construction.

Questions	Scope	Questions	Scope
1-5	Demographic	6, 8-16	Victim perspective
7-16	Witness perspective	17-21	Hater perspective

Some questions were mutual for witness and victim perspective as they inquired i.e. about place, type, reactions or legal consequences of hate speech. Questionnaire used for pilot study was also equipped in comment fields, allowing respondents to leave their opinions, used later for this form improvement.

The pilot study was conducted in Poland on a group of 89 young people. After collecting and analysing data as well as provided comments, the tool was adjusted and improved for the main part of research.

Findings

The aim of the pilot study was to try and improve designed questionnaire. That is why number of respondents was limited. Still, the number of comments provided along with tests results, helped to adjust questionnaire significantly. This section describes briefly the most important findings of the pilot study.

34% of respondents were victimized and 85% witnessed online hate speech. Most part of attacks took place on social media, with unquestionable Facebook domination. Most of participants declared to ignore haters (41%), but 20% chose to respond kindly to offensive behaviours. Only 5% decided to respond in an offensive manner. The most popular forms of attacks are presented in the Table 2.

Table 2. The most popular forms of hate speech attacks (multiple choice question).

Type	Number of attempts	Type	Number of attempts
Insulting a person	73	Event criticism	44
Insulting a group	49	Spreading false information	36
Threat	36	Others	1

In respondents opinion, online hate speech is a common phenomenon, mostly present in anonymous form. They perceive it as a dangerous aspect of virtual life, but still they usually aren't aware about legal responsibility of such activities.

80% declared not to perform online hate speech. Among those who declared themselves as haters, most of them were motivated by indignation, aversion to a person or a group, jealousy and bad mood. After performing a hatred act, they felt satisfaction, joy, relief but also fear and frustration. 78%

declared that publishing hate speech online has a negative effect on their mood, while the rest responded that it improves their state of mind.

As for limited number of respondents, these findings are not representative for the whole population of young people in Poland. Still they provide some interesting information, including deterioration of mood after performing hate speech, feelings of fear and frustration among haters but also general fear of this phenomenon as it is perceived as common and dangerous.

The main aim of pilot study was to test and improve the questionnaire. 89 participants provided 44 comments. They concerned lack of multiple answers, missing statements in closed questions, and algorithm of responding, as not all of question were obligatory. Taken into consideration, they significantly helped to improve the questionnaire, providing its final version that was then translated to English as the main part of research was planned to be conducted in various countries.

Discussion and Future Works

Numerous papers indicate massive spread of hate speech on social media, particularly through young people. As 'breakthrough generation' – youngsters that spend most of their time online – bring huge part of their lives online, socializing with their real friends but also with strangers, hate speech may influence their personal development and well-being significantly. This is why the author of that paper planned and conducted a study concerning hate speech among youngsters from victim, witness and aggressor perspective.

The pilot study described in this paper provide first interesting findings, including negative emotions like fear, frustration and poor mood accompanying haters during performing their aggressive acts. It also shows that hate speech online is well spread. But the most important was to provide a questionnaire of high quality for the next phase of the research. Diverse comments gathered during pilot test allowed to adjust and improve the form.

The next phase still is taking place in several countries, including Poland, Bulgaria, Romania, India and Hungary. While these data are still collected, future works can comprise expansion on further countries.

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