



GENHA BRIEFING NOTE

January 2021, N. 4

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BRIEFING NOTE OF WORK PACKAGE 3

Over the past months, the GENHA consortium has been working mainly on two social media platforms, namely Facebook and Twitter. We are analysing their impact on anti-gender hate speech while focusing the analysis on how the political parties work on these two platforms and what type of security policies and self-regulation these platforms have to deal with hate speech.

Led by the Hungarian team, we have acquired social listening software to extract quantitative data and explore the origin and development of the political parties anti-gender hate speech in each country. Subsequently, qualitative data on hate speech will be also identified and analysed.

In a parallel manner, taking into account the impact on how citizens obtain information nowadays, we have been working on an experimental study exposing two samples of people to the “agenda-setting” theory, in order to know more about the perception and influence of the information through social media networks.

QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

We have been seeking companies which could help us with the monitoring, extraction, and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data. After a thorough search, the Hungarian team, as the leaders of the WP3 of the project, has proposed to choose the software SentiOne. This software works on social listening, mostly on private companies which want to know about people and current trends. However, this tool is not only used by these companies. Political analysts, researchers and journalists also use this software to work on big data. This is helpful for academia because it provides information on how many people engage on one particular topic and what they actually say.



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This tool is innovative in social sciences. Consequently, the Hungarian team required all the partners to first participate in three online workshops to learn how to use this software, and then in individual meetings to assess each partner's experiences.

A full licence to the software has been obtained to be used between 25th January to 25th February 2021. A team from each country is currently working on data collection and a new internal meeting in March has been scheduled to discuss experiences and the most significant data of the research.

SELF-REGULATION POLICIES

The influence of social media on our lives is undeniable. Some authors describe Twitter as a “nervous system for the planet” and a “global newsroom” hosting a large amount of real-time data about social behaviour and public communication.¹

Also, Facebook is the third most visited website on the planet (behind Google and YouTube). It has 2.74 million active users and reaches 59% of the world's social networking population, so it is the only social platform that reaches more than half of all social media users.²

As far as anti-gender hate speech and far right-wing parties are concerned, we can anticipate that neither of the two platforms have a clear definition of what this is. Even when discussing about sex, gender, or sexual orientation, they do not provide examples of tweets or posts which can violate their internal policies.

The temporal suspension of Donald Trump's Twitter account is a milestone in how Twitter has managed the accounts of world leaders. So far, social media seems to have swung between their highest priority of publishing information for public interest –that this person has in the public debate–and the violation of their own internal rules.

¹ Burgess, J. & Baym, N. K. (2020). *Twitter: a biography*. New York University Press.

² Source: <https://blog.hootsuite.com/facebook-statistics/>



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We have seen that self-regulation is clearly necessary, but further development is still needed in relation to key concepts and terms used.

Furthermore, the use of counter-narratives and alternatives narratives is not yet developed in either social platform.

This also relates to the use of algorithms and the lack of transparency on how these social platforms show tweets and post to the users when they access these networks.

To summarise, clear legislation is needed at European Union level, progressing from “soft law” to binding legislation in Europe.

AGENDA SETTING EXPERIMENT

The power of the information and news posted on these two social media platforms is evident. Serious analysis is needed of how the information actually arrives and impacts the users.

To do so, an Agenda setting tool was chosen. In other words, “What the public perceives as important is highly influenced by the media, who choose to cover certain stories over others”.³

In this sense, the use of algorithms of the information plays a determinant role in social media. Social media and their algorithms impact the topics we discuss and how we see the world. In short, they provide the news that influences public opinion.

For that reason, it is important to know how algorithms work, and in order to do that we are exposing a sample of people to agenda-setting. This pilot experience will give us important data on how reliable the influence of social media is and how they affect the news which impacts on public opinion and, of course, our lives.

³ McCombs, Maxwell E., and Donald L. Shaw. 1972. “The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media.” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 36 (2): 176–87.



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This pilot experience is still underway and preliminary results will be available in the next briefing report.

NEXT STEPS IN 2021

The next steps will be in package four (WP4) of the project. This will include a map of the main political parties using hate speech against the “ideology of gender” on social media and Internet in Europe and a proposal on a legal and non-legal framework to prevent and deal with hate speech by political parties at a national and European level.

Naturally, at a future date, when deemed safe to do so, COVID pandemic allowing, workshops may be organised to disseminate our first results of the research.

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