GENHA BRIEFING NOTE

This project is co-funded by the European Union

WORK PACKAGE 3 NEWS

In the last briefing report, we discussed the WP3 on social media in terms of companies, users and political parties. Now that we are reaching the end of this package, the efforts of all partners are bringing positive results.

On the one hand, WP3.1, led by the Hungarian team (CEU), has provided important information on how extreme right-wing parties in the participating countries develop their political discourse through social media (Facebook and Twitter).

In WP3.2, led by the Hungarian (CEU) and the German (UVienna) teams on the pilot experience of users' exposure to the agenda-setting of social media has shown significant advances, not only in the impact of news but also in the way in which users react to and interact in the virtual world with this news on social media.

Finally, regarding the WP3.3, Self-regulation of social media networks, Twitter and Facebook, led by the Spanish (UAB) and Swedish (UGoT) teams, we analysed the legal framework of these companies. We focused on their internal policies, and their most crucial feature: whether their self-regulatory mechanisms effectively prevent anti-gender hate speech online.

QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE REPORT

As mentioned above, this work package aimed to determine how far-right political parties operate in the participating countries.

The first results showed three specific themes across all countries: homophobia, sexism and anti-gender. The latter is focused on gender politics and the speakers or policies that support these ideas.

Beyond the differences that each country showed (in some countries, the far-right is in government, as in Hungary), we have found common patterns in communication and the type of hate speech that occurs through social media.

One of these focused on the exercise of 'pathological stereotyping' (e.g. Jewish, Black and Roma communities, migrants, etc.) that traditional liberal and conservative parties and ideology producers pursued in the early decades of the 20th century and can be easily traced in the observed social media conversations.

Another important aspect is that social media communication by right-wing political leaders, parties in parliament and civic platforms highlights what is intensely discussed in literature: populist exclusionary communication that relies on creating fear and hate as a communication tool.

PILOT EXPERIENCE

Based on the content analysis of posts and user comments on sexism, homophobia and anti-genderism, we are interested in (1) Finding out which content and individual characteristics influence users' perceptions and behaviour when confronted with hate postings. We are also interested in knowing about the intentions behind social media interactions: (2) What are the personal motivations for sharing, commenting, or flagging postings with gendered hate speech content?

We were particularly interested in the following aspects: Does it matter whether it is a politician or a layperson who disseminates content? Are there any differences between a man and a woman spreading hate speech on social media? Does the type of hate speech affect users' responses? How do

social media users react to agitation, defamation and rumours? Finally, is it relevant whether the post already has many likes, comments and shares with regard to whether to react to or not?

The experiment was administered online in May and June 2021. With 1255 participants recruited (Germany: n = 515; Hungary: n = 740), the University of Vienna started the experiment. The participants were informed that they would see a couple of political Facebook postings and we were interested in how they reacted to them, and how likely were they to like, comment on, share or flag the posts. Participants were then randomly assigned to one of two groups, with four different pairs of Facebook posts designed for this study.

The results illustrate clear differences in the perception of gendered hate speech between Germany and Hungary.

First, the presented postings on anti-gender, homophobia and sexism were more strongly liked and shared by the Hungarian participants. With regard to posting, German participants were reported to post almost twice as often as those in the Hungarian sample.

On commenting on a posting, Hungarian participants played the most important role in sharing the posting. However, for the Germans, hate speech played a decisive role.

Regarding the differences between social groups, some country-specific differences were found. In contrast, other differences are consistent across countries: homophobic posts are more prone to be liked in Hungary than Germany and less likely to be flagged by politically right-leaning participants. In both countries, right-leaning persons were more likely to like homophobic and anti-gender posts than left-leaning participants. In comparison, defamation is more likely to be reported than postings with agitational content. Voters of right-wing parties are more prone to like homophobic and anti-gender postings and less prone to like sexist content.

SELF-REGULATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA

This report aimed to identify and analyse the internal policies adopted by Twitter and Facebook on how to deal with tweets, post, comments, and messages from far-right political parties inciting hate crimes and hate speech with anti-gender content.

Interestingly, results showed that political hate speech, especially against gender theories, is not mentioned on either social media network. The intersection of hate speech and anti-gender seems to be new on Facebook and Twitter.

Self-regulation rules on both networks showed vagueness, generality, and practical arbitrariness. Some examples included in the analysed internal rules of Twitter and Facebook have generated perplexity among experts and activists.

Another important issue arising is the need for transparency and understanding of how algorithms work. People want a democratic mechanism to secure their accountability, so every state must create a powerful, technically skilled, and well-resourced body capable of supervising their potential misuses.

For this reason, a solid European legal framework is needed on this ground. Future legislation may require a more proactive involvement of companies such as Facebook and Twitter. They cannot be expected to be the "judges" or the human rights guarantors on the Internet. But the European Union legal mechanisms regarding the Internet should include binding tools to incorporate these social media networks as active actors.

WORKSHOPS AND NEXT STEPS

The next step is the organisation of workshops at national level to develop and enrich the outcoming legal and public policies proposals to prevent and combat anti-gender hate speech in European member states and at European level.

Focusing on these legal and public policies proposals, the next Work Package 4 will be led by the University of Gothenburg. Results will be available from November 2021.