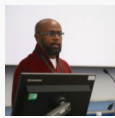




## Network Blogger



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## Hate Speech on Social Media Undermines Important UN Declarations

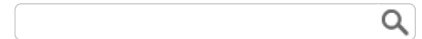
By [Luiz Valerio P. Trindade](#) | Published: April 22, 2019

**E**vidence suggests that one effect of the growing phenomenon of online hate speech is that it fosters varied forms of inequalities (e.g. class, race, gender, and place of origin) and, consequently, also (in)directly undermines important *United Nations* declarations promoting human rights.

In the past 15 years, two important phenomena have emerged on a global scale. First, the surge of hate speech across several societies, and second, the emergence of major social media platforms. In a matter of a few years, this digital technology has become ubiquitous across the globe, and the number of active monthly users has grown at exponential rates. The [most recent figures](#) range from 328 million on Twitter and up to two billion active users in the case of Facebook (and these figures evolve dynamically). However, [hate speech has become more salient](#) across several societies a few years after the current prominent social media platforms arrived (Facebook in 2004, YouTube in 2005, Twitter in 2006, WhatsApp in 2009 and Instagram in 2010).

Consequently, social science literature reveals that with the increasing reach of this digital technology, unconstrained by physical geographical borders, the proponents of hate speech have turned social media platforms into vehicles for racist, xenophobic, misogynist and bigotry discourses. Another important aspect of this phenomenon is oftentimes missed: It severely undermines fundamental human rights that have been fostered by the United Nations and its member states over the course of several years.

Taking into consideration three important United Nations declarations ([the Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#), [the 2011 Durban Declaration](#) and [the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#)), it is possible to observe that, combined, they tackle a common social issue: different dimensions of inequalities.



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Analyzing different scholarly studies addressing hate speech on social media platforms (e.g. [Arango](#); [Brown](#); [McGonagle](#); and [Recuero](#)), a common element becomes evident. In essence, the hateful discourses on social media realm amplify and exacerbate the varied dimensions of inequality: a) racial inequalities; b) gender inequalities; c) inequalities based on sexual orientation; d) inequalities based on professed religion; e) inequalities based on place of origin; and so on. Most importantly, hate speech on social media promotes and exacerbates this array of inequalities; and oftentimes their proponents convey this discourse without any *crise de conscience*. In other words, this technology enables users to engage like-minded people and naturally enact and reinforce their hateful ideologies in the online environment and, in addition, to amplify the reach and potential harm of their voices in ways not commonly seen offline.

**T**he [United Nations Human Rights Council](#) has already called attention to the seriousness of this phenomenon. It has argued that the dissemination of hateful online leads people to accept these views as something normal. We risk considering online hate speech as a natural and inevitable component of the digital landscape, and part of people's daily lives. In addition, more recently, the [European Commission against Racism and Intolerance](#) has argued that "people exposed to discrimination and intolerance often have neither the capacity nor the resources to enforce their rights".

Furthermore, paragraph 91 of the 2011 Durban Declaration, clearly expresses "deep concern about the use of new information technologies, such as the internet, for purposes contrary to respect for human values, equality and non-discrimination." As for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Goal #10 aims at reducing inequality within and among countries, whilst Goal #16 aims at promoting peaceful and inclusive societies. Finally, in its first article, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights establishes that every human being is born free and equal in dignity. Nevertheless, hate speech goes in the opposite direction to this set of values. In essence, its proponents disregard people's dignity, promote exclusion and convey discriminatory ideologies.

This growth of hate speech on social media platforms may trigger different negative events in various societies. These could include heightening ingrained discriminatory ideologies fueled by ancient colonial legacies, supporting political circumstances that foster extremist views, allowing the arrival of migrants and refugees to be perceived as 'threats' to the established social order, or fostering phobia to certain non-hegemonic religions seen as menacing social cohesion or security. Regardless of what events it triggers, social media hate speech undeniably exacerbates, amplifies and reinforces inequality.

In conclusion, the perpetuation of this phenomenon severely undermines important UN declarations (which are invaluable pillars to achieve improved well-being to all) that are the result of several years of dedicated work by a number of people, as well as complex negotiations and agreements for the common good of peoples of all nations. Thus, the roots of hate speech must not only be understood but also ideologically deconstructed through educational and awareness campaigns because, ultimately, such initiatives coalesce with the combat against varied dimensions of inequalities, just as the three mentioned UN declarations aim to achieve.

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