

**Hate Speech and Social Media**  
**Influencing Factors and Combating Mechanisms**

## **Introduction :**

The past few years witnessed an explosion of social networking sites. Users of these sites grew significantly due to the ease of access to these sites. Accordingly, society has faced a new moral and legal challenge, that people should publish content compatible with International legal rules that protect the rights of others, which emphasizes that the infringement, defamation, or the dissemination of false news against any individual, whether he/she uses these sites or no, are unlawful practices.

The Internet is one of the most accessible mediums for spreading intolerance and abusing people through social media. Therefore, European Committee against Racism and Intolerance and other international organizations warn of these practices, which led member states of the European Union to ratify the committee's additional protocol concerning the criminalization of racist and xenophobic acts committed through social media.

Unfortunately, hate speech on social media had escalated in the past few years. Practices of hate speech contribute to increasing asylum seekers and immigration waves in many countries such as Syria, Yemen, and some African countries. Also, millions of refugees in European countries suffer from hate speech practices on social media. These practices had significantly deepened the distance between those countries' citizens and the refugees, igniting disputes between them.

Through its report, Skyline will shed light on hate speech on social media by defining what hate speech is and the reasons behind its increase, providing tangible examples in countries that have suffered -and are still suffering from hate speech- and showing its impact on individuals. Skyline stresses that confronting hate speech needs joint and real will and efforts from all countries by setting legal programs and rules that punish any individual who exercises hate speech. Skyline also stresses the importance of providing complete protection for those exposed to hate speech, including going to court to sue the violators.

## **What is hate speech?**

UNESCO defines hate speech, “speech that may include expressions that incite hatred, discrimination or hostility according to the targeted environment and the demographic or social group. It also includes speech that supports, threatens or encourages violent acts”.

Some define hate speech from a theoretical and practical point of view. Theoretically, hate speech is defined as every speech that promotes hate feelings against a person or group of persons in society and implicitly calls for excluding or expelling them, limiting their rights, and degrading them implicitly or publicly.

However, hate speech is defined in practical terms as “any content attacks people based on their race, religion, sex, national origin, disability, and disease.” Hate speech was also

described as speech containing some racist expressions against minorities and indigenous peoples.

The main issue arises between hate speech and freedom of expression, as both might converge.

What distinguishes hate speech-language is that it is an emotional language. According to Camden's freedom of opinion and expression principles, hatred is a state of mind characterized by intense and irrational emotions of hostility and contempt against a person or a group of persons. The "Camden" principles on freedom of expression and equality state that freedom of expression and equality are fundamental and comprehensive rights that play a vital role in protecting human dignity, ensuring democracy, and promoting international peace and security.

Accordingly, we can define hate speech as "hostile speech made by individuals and groups, which can be used on media and social media sites to achieve goals and interests of a hostile nature."

### **Freedom of opinion, expression, and hate speech:**

There is great confusion between hate speech and freedom of expression. While some consider hate speech as a type of criticism and freedom of expression, many consider it a speech that encourages evil, violence, racism, attack, and defamation.

Skyline indicates that the “hate speech” concept in social media has several meanings and does not have an internationally agreed definition. However, the European Commission’s Policy Recommendation Against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), issued on 8 December 2015, defined hate speech on social media as “advocating, promoting or inciting to defame, hate, harass, or threaten a person or group of persons and justify all these forms of expression based on race, color, language, religion, belief, nationality, national or ethnic origin, age, disability, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, and other characteristics or status.

Nevertheless, freedom of expression is an absolute value in any democracy, whether for the public or the media, taking into account others’ rights to express their opinions regardless of their race, religion, color, or state. Both hate speech and freedom of opinion and expression concepts refer to the individual and groups’ expression of ideas and principles on a particular issue, whether political, economic, social, or sports. However, when applying those ideas in a speech form, they must comply with the basic standards of freedom of opinion and expression and should not be based on hurtful words or racial or communal attacks.

## **The causes of hate speech:**

There are no specific causes of hate speech, but “Skyline” has identified several factors that have helped spread hate speech in recent years, namely:

- The absence of a clear definition and limitations of freedom of opinion and expression in many societies.
- The lack of a culture that accepts the other’s differences and opinions.
- There is lack of neutral news sources that help providing the right information, so individual get confused when trying to know political and historical events.
- The insufficient media that cannot urge the individual to express his opinion properly.
- The poor government’s role in clearly defining the components of a society of all sects and the lack of systematic plans to instill these components ’positive aspects to the generations.
- Religious intolerance, and the intellectual and cultural void in many societies due to the economic and social problems and unemployment problems.
- Some users use social media to promote individual events, especially in European societies, which includes different religious sects, whether citizens or immigrants. Individuals use social media to spread real attacks through social media which helps inciting hate speech against a specific category of people.

## **Social Media Sites:**

The tremendous progress in communication technology has led to the establishment of social media communication networks, which have made a change in individuals' social relationships and interactions. Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Youtube, and others narrowed distances, canceled barriers, and opened the way for learning about other cultures.

Social media sites are defined as online social gatherings that emerge on the Internet when enough people carry on discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace.

Social media sites have become one of the most powerful platforms that provide individuals with a space to express their views, beliefs, and critical opinions. Individuals also use social media platforms to spread the news in written, audiovisual, or multimedia form.

The dependence of individuals on social media as a news source has led to the emergence of new or alternative media terms, which means that individuals obtain daily news and events from alternative sources than newspapers or television channels. This tendency has opened the way for individuals and groups to exploit this vast space to spread hate speech and incitement to violence in a thoughtful, organized, and often random manner based on political and social interests and purposes of some parties and groups.

## **Hate Speech and the Role of Social Media:**

It is noteworthy that social media networks, most notably Facebook and Twitter, are limited to the social and economic aspects, including political factors. In other words, social media was used in the Arab Spring revolutions in Syria, Yemen, Tunisia, and Libya to gather crowds, mobilize demonstrators, topple authoritarian rulers who had been in power for thirty years and sometimes forty years.

Despite the positive role of social media in making positive changes in people's lives, it has negatively contributed to spreading bad cultures, hatred, sectarianism, social and religious disputes, and other negative issues.

Incidents have been reported worldwide. Much of the world now communicate on social media, with nearly a third of the world's population active on Facebook alone. As more and more people have moved online, experts say, individuals inclined toward racism, misogyny, or homophobia have found niches that can strengthen their views and urge them to practice violence. Social media platforms also offer violent actors the opportunity to publicize their acts.



## **Social networking sites and Helping factors:**

“Skyline” indicates that there are some common factors that help individuals and entities direct hate speech to many people through social networking sites, including the following:

- Social media platforms are largely unregulated; these means don't have clear limitations for publishing and communication, especially hate speech.
- Creating fake accounts on social media helps many parties, and individuals spread hate speech, considering that they cannot be identified or legally prosecuted.
- Social media sites are viral and universal, motivating dozens of users to spread their extremist ideas that encourage hatred and discrimination feelings for some of the recipients who have extremist tendencies.

## **Hate speech in some countries**

In the United States, several white, racist supremacist perpetrators have been documented against black people. These perpetrators have circulated among racist communities online. For example, investigations proved that “Charleston” Church shooter, who killed nine black men in June 2015, engaged in an online self-learning process that led him to believe that the goal of white supremacy required violent action.

- In Myanmar, military leaders and Buddhist nationalists use social media to insult the Rohingya Muslim minority before and during the ethnic cleansing campaigns, making up 2% of the total population. “Facebook has been an effective tool for

- those who tend to spread hatred,” said a UN fact-finding mission sent to find out the effects of the growing hate speech against the Rohingya Muslims.
- In many cases, India: Some types of communal violence originating with rumors on WhatsApp groups since the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) came to power in 2014.
  - Studies have shown an actual link between anti-refugee Facebook posts by the far-right Alternative for Germany Party and refugees 'attacks in Germany. Scholars Carsten Muller and Carlo Schwarz noted that the increase in attacks, such as arson or assault, followed spikes in hate-mongering posts.
  - The “great replacement” trope, which means that Western identity and whites are under siege, had the most prominent role in deepening racial discourse in many European countries, including New Zealand, which witnessed the killing of 49 Muslims while praying in March. 15 2019. The shooter ought to broadcast the attack on YouTube.

In Sri Lanka: rumors spread on the Internet targeting the Tamil Muslim minority. During a wave of violence in March 2018, the government blocked access to Facebook and WhatsApp and the messaging app Viber for a week, saying that Facebook had not been sufficiently responsive during the emergency.

## **Asylum and hate speech:**

Hate speech spreads in unstable and divided societies, as well as in countries receiving refugees and immigrants. Frequent spates of asylum and immigration have led to increasing hate speech against them. Dozens of users take advantage of social in sending anti-immigrant and refugee messages.

Some of those who criticize immigration and asylum also benefit from social media by forming and unifying movements and anti-immigrant networks. They use it to spread their extremist ideas and convey them to other users who support their views.

Governments and politicians also play a role in the increase of hate speech. Politicians exercise hate speech in elections against refugees and immigrants by attributing complex problems such as unemployment and declining economic performance. These campaigns have increased the calls for their deportation. For example, Syrian refugees in Lebanon have been exposed to hate speech on political, social, and cultural aspects due to the historical disputes between the two countries and the racist discourse of some politicians.

## **Mechanisms to combat hate speech:**

- Increasing awareness of individuals and groups 'political, social, and cultural rights, including freedom of expression and the limits of the right to freedom of expression.
- Educating individuals about the importance of respecting pluralism and hate speech risks.
- Establishing national response and follow-up committees to monitor hate speech and other forms that incite violence.
- Encourage hate speech victims and witnesses to report crimes related to hate speech.
- Providing psychological and legal support to people exposed to hate speech.
- Strengthening public and private institutions 'self-regulation, including elected bodies, political parties, and educational institutions, by adopting codes of conduct that provide penalties for those who breach these institutions 'provisions.
- End impunity for hate crimes and hold the perpetrators accountable by stipulating explicit and clear penalties in penal codes.

## **Conclusion:**

Finally, Skyline International for Human Rights affirms that the escalation of hate speech among individuals of the same community or even internationally, as we have seen in countries hosting refugees and immigrants, is alarming and has serious consequences that cannot be overlooked. Therefore, these countries should assume their roles in controlling this hate speech, starting from preparing well-thought-out plans and straightforward training programs for all ages to define freedom of opinion and expression, hate speech and its dangers, and how to confront it.

These countries should set up specialized committees to monitor and document any violation related to hate speech and support people exposed to any form of that speech psychologically and legally. They should set out deterrent penalties that are suitable for the harm caused by hate speech.

The international community and its UN agencies, foremost of which is the “United Nations”, should make more significant efforts to confront hate speech between countries, especially speech directed against refugees and immigrants, by providing legal support to these vulnerable groups and issuing an agreement specialized in hate speech forms on social media.

Social media also should combat hate speech on its platforms. It should define its strict published content’s policies and have accurate control over the content that encourages

the spread of hatred, taking into account the protection of people's right to freedom of expression and opinion.