HATE SPEECH ON TWITTER: ATTITUDES TOWARD THE DRIVERS OF ELECTRIC SCOOTERS

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Abstract

Extensive use of social networks has resulted in a wider space for hate speech on the Internet, but also contributed to new forms of emergence, new categories of target groups and an additional degree of victim vulnerability. Associated with sudden / intensive social changes or technological innovations, social network become an ideal playground for escalation of the hate speech. Considering this, authors of this paper conducted an empirical research based on the content analysis of Twitter posts that address the use of an electric scooters as an alternative means of transportation in urban communities, but also as an ultimate fashion trend triggering the public debate. According to findings, a numerous posts fulfil all features of hate speech, while a significant number of them meet some of the criteria to be considered hateful.

Keywords: social network, Twitter, online hate speech, electric scooters

Introduction: Hate speech in online communication

Hate speech is "speech or expression which is capable of instilling or inciting hatred of, or prejudice towards, a person or group of people on a specified ground" (Gelber & Stone 2008, xiii). It has also been described as speech which destroys a targeted person or groups' assurance that there will be no need to face hostility, violence, discrimination, or exclusion by others' as they go about their daily life (Waldron 2012). It includes content that is offensive, slanders a person, or smears somebody`s good name (Lovrec 2014, 26). Hate speech is considered harmful not just because of its impact on individuals, but also because it undermines the 'public good of inclusiveness' in society (Waldron 2012, 4).

Hate speech has gone through an extraordinary transformation in the past fifteen years and it is a common occurrence on the Internet (Eadicicco 2014; Kettery & Laster 2014). Waldron warns that hate speech becomes embedded in 'the permanent visible fabric of society' (Waldron 2012, 4), and this is even more true online, where the virtual world is made entirely of speech.

Hate speech has found a particularly fertile ground in online communication, where it can spread almost seamlessly without fear of serious consequences. Specifically, the features of internet communication have made it much more efficient to spread all messages, including hate speech. There are several methods in use to spread hate on the Internet. Hate speech could be spread via internet sites dedicated to promoting or inciting hate against a particular group or groups; blogs and online forums; emails and personal messages; gaming; social networking sites; videos and music. Also, since the Internet communication often causes polarization and extreme opposing views, it seems that communication on the Internet is flooded with a variety of content that is often very offensive to many, most minority members, and even to open calls for mobilization and virtual, and even a real violent actions. Despite certain legal mechanisms in place to prevent hate speech, given the constant increase in the overall number of participants in online communication, the number of actors and the complexity of content that characterizes hate speech is increasing. This situation creates a feeling of insecurity for citizens, especially for members

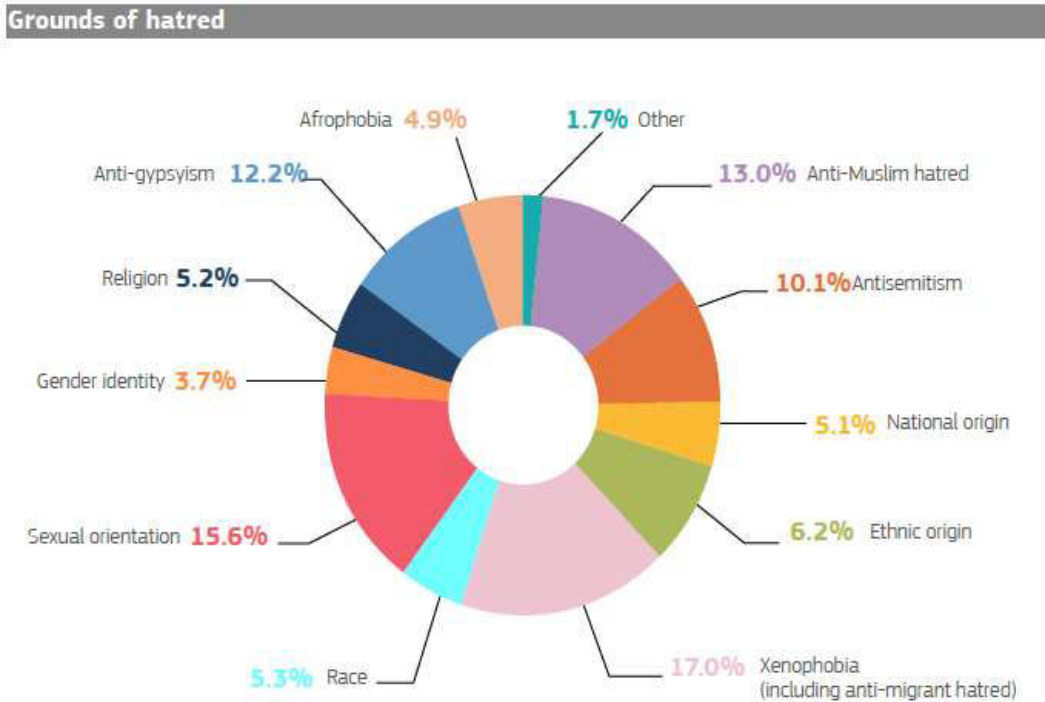of minority groups, who become the target of discrimination and even hate-motivated crimes (Nikolić 2018, 3).

There is a widespread opinion that the hate speech is more common that really is. In the research conducted by Council of Europe in 2012, around 78% internet users faced hate speech in communication. Two-fifths felt personally threatened by this way of spreading hate speech, while every twentieth acknowledged that he had personally posted a message online that could be characterized as hate speech (Council of Europe 2012).

To prevent and counter the spread of illegal hate speech online, in May 2016, the European Commission agreed with Facebook, Microsoft, Twitter and YouTube a *Code of conduct on countering illegal hate speech online*. In the course of 2018, Instagram, Google+, Snapchat and Dailymotion joined the *Code of Conduct*, and Jeuxvideo.com joined in January 2019. According to the fourth round of monitoring of Code of Conduct in 26 Member States, overall, social network sites removed 71.7% of the content notified as hate speech. YouTube removed 85.4% of the content, Facebook 82.4% and Twitter 43.5%. Both Facebook and, especially, YouTube made further progress on removals when compared to the last year.
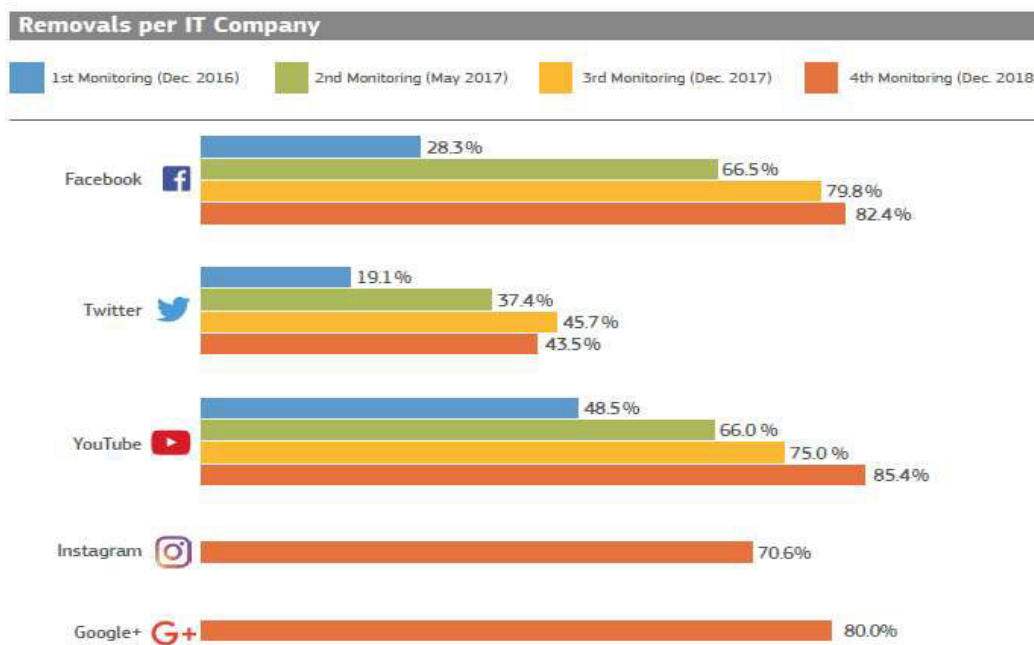
Twitter, while remaining in the same range as in the last monitoring cycle, has slightly decreased its performance (European Commission 2019, 3).

The same evaluation showed that xenophobia (including anti-migrant hatred) is the most commonly reported ground of hate speech (17%), followed by sexual orientation (15.6%) and anti-Muslim (European

Grounds of hatred

Afrophobia **4.9%**   **1.7%** Other

Anti-gypsyism **12.2%**   **13.0%** Anti-Muslim hatred

Religion **5.2%**   **10.1%** Antisemitism

Gender identity **3.7%**   **5.1%** National origin

Sexual orientation **15.6%**   **6.2%** Ethnic origin

5.3% Race   **17.0%** Xenophobia (including anti-migrant hatred)

Commission 2019, 5).

As it is evident from the brief overview, an extensive use of social networks has resulted not only in a wider space for hate speech on the Internet, but also contributed to new forms of emergence, new categories of target groups and an additional degree of victim vulnerability. Associated with sudden / intensive social changes or technological innovations, social network become an ideal playground for escalation of the hate speech. Considering this, authors of this paper conducted an empirical research based on the content analysis of Twitter posts that address the use of an electric scooters as an alternative means of transportation in urban communities, but also as an ultimate fashion trend triggering the public debate.

Hate speech Twitter policy

The enormous boom in social media sites, such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube and the saturation of our daily lives by the media have made the hate speech more pervasive and ubiquitous than ever before. Social media platforms have the largest online engagement and the greatest ability to take a message of hate viral. The anonymity and low threshold of entrance of online forums, comment sections of news portals and social media sites provide fertile ground for cyber hate (Berecz & Deviant 2017, 3). Physical distance and the openness of online society make the expression of hate more prevalent online than in face to face interactions in society.

Research on hate speech on Twitter have been especially vivid in the past several years (Waseem & Hovy 2016; Davidson et al. 2017). Twitter is a defensible and logical source of data for the analysis given that users of social media are more likely to express emotional content due to deindividuation (anonymity, lack of self-awareness in groups, disinhibition) (Festinger, Pepitone & Newcomb 1952 in Burnap & Williams 2015). Moreover, Twitter, enables a locomotive, extensive and near real-time data source through which the analysis of hateful and antagonistic responses to "trigger" events can be undertaken (Burnap & Williams 2015, 224). Such data affords researchers with the possibility to measure the online social mood and emotion following some events, whether disruptive and explosive, such as terrorist act, or sudden but not so violent, such as introduction of a new technological device or solution.

What is considered as social network abuse is threatening its users, using pejoratives and spreading offensive speech. Insults or mean comments are not necessarily hate speech. Therefore, some researchers differentiate hateful speech and offensive speech (Davidson et al., 2017). Hate speech targets disadvantaged groups in a manner that is potentially harmful to them (Jacobs and Potter 2000; Walker 1994).

Faced with criticism for not doing enough in this field, both Facebook and Twitter created their own provisions against hate speech through policies that prohibit the use of these platforms for attacks on people based on characteristics like race, ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation, or threats of violence towards others (Davidson et al. 2017, 512). According to Twitter hateful conduct policy:

You may not promote violence against or directly attack or threaten other people on the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, religious affiliation, age, disability, or serious disease. We also do not allow accounts whose primary purpose is inciting harm towards others on the basis of these categories.[1]

According to Twitter policy, the behaviours, posts, images that Twitter find hateful will be as follows:

- *Violent threats* (declarative statements of intent to inflict injuries that would result in serious and lasting bodily harm, where an individual could die or be significantly injured)

- *Wishing, hoping or calling for serious harm on a person or group of people* (hoping that someone dies as a result of a serious disease; wishing for someone to fall victim to a serious accident; saying that a group of individuals deserve serious physical injury)

- *Inciting fear about a protected category*

- *Repeated and/or non-consensual slurs, epithets, racist and sexist tropes, or other content that degrades someone*

- *Hateful imagery* (logos, symbols, or images whose purpose is to promote hostility and malice against others based on their race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity or ethnicity/national origin).

In order to define more precisely the features and discourses of hate speech on this social network, Waseem and Hovy (2016, 89) argue that tweet is offensive if it:

- uses a sexist or racial slur.
- attacks a minority.
- seeks to silence a minority.
- criticizes a minority (without a well-founded argument).
- promotes, but does not directly use, hate speech or violent crime.
- criticizes a minority and uses a straw man argument.
- blatantly misrepresents truth or seeks to distort views on a minority with unfounded claims.
- shows support of problematic hash tags, e.g. "#BanIslam", "#whoriental", "#whitegenocide"
- negatively stereotypes a minority.

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[1] Available at https://help.twitter.com/en/rules-and-policies/hateful-conduct-policy

- defends xenophobia or sexism.
- contains a screen name that is offensive, as per the previous criteria, the tweet is ambiguous (at best), and the tweet is on a topic that satisfies any of the above criteria.

Research Methodology[2]
Research phases and sampling

Triggered by intensive reaction of Serbian public on sudden introduction of electric scooters as an alternative mean of transportation in urban communities during the 2019, the authors decided to use this social phenomenon as a ground to conduct the empirical research on reporting and posting about electric scooters in daily newspapers, but also on Twitter. The research had been conducted in the period June-September 2019, split into the two research phases:

Research phase I: Analysis of the daily newspapers' reporting on the use of electric scooters

During this stage, we examined media coverage of the e-scooters in leading agenda-setting newspapers, precisely, their websites from June to September 2019. Eight popular daily newspapers were selected: Novosti[3], Blic[4], Politika[5], Danas[6], Alo[7], Kurir[8], Informer[9] and Srpski telegraf[10]. Considering the wide audience they gather, we found them relevant for framing the public discourse on the main research problem.[11] The initial search of the daily newspaper portals yielded a total of 248 articles. After reviewing and eliminating duplicates, as well as articles where the electric

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[2] For more data about this research, see: Kolaković-Bojović, Milica, and Ana Paraušić. "Electric Scooters - Urban Security Challenge or Media Panic Issue" Teme 43, no. 4 (2019), in press.

[3] http://www.novosti.rs/ last accessed September 25, 2019

[4] https://www.blic.rs/ last accessed September 25, 2019

[5] http://www.politika.rs/ last accessed September 25, 2019

[6] https://www.danas.rs/ last accessed September 25, 2019

[7] https://www.alo.rs/ last accessed September 25, 2019

[8] https://www.kurir.rs/ last accessed September 25, 2019

[9] https://informer.rs/ last accessed September 25, 2019

[10] https://www.republika.rs/najnovije-vesti

[11] https://serbia.mom-rsf.org/rs/mediji/print/ last accessed September 24, 2019

scooters were mentioned incidentally or non-motorized scooter were in question, the final sample consisted of 115 newspaper articles.

Research phase II: Analysis of Twitter posts on the use of electric scooters

In order to get a more complete picture of the discussion about electric scooters on the city streets, the survey also included a Twitter analysis with its dynamics and debates. We analysed posts made on Twitter in the six weeks long period (July 24th -September 4th, 2019) that had been previously identified as the pick of media reporting on electric scooters. We focused exclusively on posts written in Serbian in order to get results on attitudes toward electric scooters in Serbian urban communities (mostly in Belgrade). We identified 304 posts that fulfil above mentioned criteria.[12] Posts' coding process showed that some of the posts addressed more than one of the identified topics, meaning that we as the final outcome, analysed 338 Twitter posts.

Methods

Content analysis was used as the main research method and the unit of analysis was single text/tweet with all visual and content related parts. Each news/tweet item was examined to identify the main topics, the actors involved, the activities they perform, and how they are characterized. Specifically, the analysis focused on the issue and themes that were considered significant since the introduction of e-scooters on the Belgrade streets and how this significance was expressed (in positive, negative or neutral terms).

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[12] In order to avoid contamination of the sample, we decided to exclude 36 posts written in the middle of the analysed period that mentioned electrical scooters, but only as a side issue while discussing political topics. Namely, local Belgrade politician who belongs to non-ruling party used the electric scooter to show that reconstruction of the streets in the city centre resulted in extremely unpleasant conditions to drive electric scooters in that part of the city. This attracted a significant interest of Twitter users and public in general and triggered intense debate. As a result of that debate, a numerous posts were made. Some of them were focused on issues relevant for our research and consequently included in the sample. In parallel, 36 aforementioned posts mentioned electrical scooters exclusively as a side issue while discussing topics in the field of politics- pro and contra ruling party on local and global level. This qualified them for the exclusion from the research sample.

In terms of procedure, after extracting an every single news/post from the newspapers' websites and Twitter, using the Google tool and Twitter Search option, based on the key words (scooter(s), electric scooter(s), trotinette(s), electric trotinette(s)), each news item or a twit we identified broad, had been analysed, after finishing the coding process that had been conducted in order to identify the main topic(s) it addresses, the sentiment of the news/post, the main arguments (if any) it provides to support an attitude publicly expressed.

Twitter posts analysis

On this occasion we will focus on the part of the research dedicated to the Twitter posts analysis, conducted based on six thematic categories, as given below:

Thematic category I: Electric scooters' use and impact on health.
Thematic category II: Electric scooters as an alternative means of transportation and/or ecology and financial benefit.
Thematic category III: Electric scooters as an urban security challenge.
Thematic category IV: Electric scooters as a fashion trend and/or status symbol.
Thematic category V: Hate and/or negative attitudes toward electric scooters without providing arguments or reasons in support of this attitude.
Thematic category VI: Affirmative posts about electric scooters without providing arguments or reasons in support of this attitude.

During the coding process, in addition to the number and tone of posts within the above listed categories, we tried to identify the main issues, discussion subtopics and attitudes for all categories.

Findings
The coding process showed that the most of Twitter users (289 of 338, or 85% of them), who had addressed the issue of electrical scooters did it negative manner.

Table 1: The main topics of twitter debate on electric scooter

No.	Topic/ Thematic category	Number/ percentage of posts	Sentiment of the post	
			positive	negative
1	Electric scooters' use and impact on health	16	0	4
		5%	0%	100%
2	Electric scooters as an alternative means of transportation and/or ecology and financial benefit	54	28	26
		16%	52%	48%
3	Electric scooters as an urban security challenge	149	6	143
		44.1%	4%	96%
4	Electric scooters as a fashion trend and/or status symbol	71	5	66
		21%	7%	93%
5	Hate and/or negative attitudes toward electric scooters and/or their drivers without providing arguments or reasons in support of this attitude.	38	0	38
		11.2%	0%	100%
6	Affirmative posts about electric scooters without providing arguments or reasons in support of this attitude.	10	10	0
		4%	100%	0%
	Total number of posts	**338 (100%)**	**49 (15%)**	**289 (85%)**

Having this in mind, the initial task was to make distinction between those posts who are just negative and others that fulfil conditions to be considered as hate speech, based on above described theoretical concepts and Twitter policy. As a result, we took two of six earlier mentioned thematic groups of posts into consideration: Thematic groups IV and V.

Thematic category IV- Electric scooters as a fashion trend and/or status symbol

During the coding process, three subtopics had been identified when Twitter users were addressing electric scooters as a fashion trend and/or status symbol. Namely, the most of Twitter users find the use of electric scooters to be sign that a person belongs to certain social group (62%). Almost a third of those who posted in this thematic group marked the use of electric scooters as simply the fashion trend (28.2%). Finally, 9.8% of users address this topic referring to electric scooters as a privilege of rich people/status symbol.

Table 2: Topic 4- Electric scooters as a fashion trend and/or status symbol

No.	Subtopic	Number/percentage of posts	The sentiment of post	
			positive	negative
1	Electric scooter as a privilege of rich people/status symbol	7	2	5
		9.8%	28.6%	71.4%
2	Electric scooters- simply the fashion trend	20	3	17
		28.2%	15%	85%
3	Electric scooter as the sign that person belongs to a certain social group	44	0	44
		62%	0%	100%
	Total number of posts	**71 (100%)**	**5 (7%)**	**66 (93%)**

From the hate speech perspective, the most interesting subtopic was "Electric scooter as the sign that person belongs to a certain social group," considering the further thematic content and the sentiment of the posts. More precisely, all of the 44 posts addressing this subtopic were followed by negative sentiment fulfilling the hate crime criteria.

Table 3: Topic 4/3- Electric scooter as the sign that person belongs to a certain social group

No.	Categories	Number/percentage of posts
1	Hipsters[13]	10
		22.7%
2	City centre located citizens	4
		9.1%
3	Programmers/IT experts	4
		9.1%
4	Homosexuals or not manly enough	12
		27.3%
5	Lazy people	2
		4.5%
6	Middle-age crisis persons	5
		11.4%
7	Drug addicted/sectarians/mentally disabled	7
		15.9%
	Total number of posts	**44**
		(100%)

If we focus on social groups addressed/mentioned in analysed posts, we can identify seven categories: Hipsters (addressed in 22.7%); city centre located citizens (9.1%); programmers/IT experts (9.1%); Homosexuals or not manly enough (27.3%); Lazy people (4.5%); Middle-age crisis persons (11.4%); Drug addicted/sectarians/mentally disabled (15.9%).

All of these posts were written in "black & white" manner (e.g. "Every time I see some guy driving electric scooter, I know he is 100% percent gay!", or "When you meet guy on electric scooter, you can be sure that he has his laptop in the backpack! God! Only those IT idiots drive electric scooters!", or "I cannot watch anymore those guys with stylish beards, in skinny trousers and plaid shirts on electric scooters! They are all gays for sure!").

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[13] Cambridge Dictionary Online (2019) identifies hipsters as a person who is under the influence of the most recent ideas and fashion. Hipster is a member of a loosely defined, highly self-conscious subculture who favours retro fashion and obscure musical styles. This new incarnation of the hipster, typically a young adult male and portrayed wearing heavy-framed glasses, is often derived as pretentious, tiresome ironic and/or neekly (Thorne, 2014). It is a media stereotype used as a pejorative label to describe someone who outwardly seeks nonconformity through niche consumerism and boycott against mainstream culture.

Thematic category V- Hate and/or negative attitudes toward electric scooters without providing arguments or reasons in support of this attitude

In terms of Thematic Category V, "Hate and/or negative attitudes toward electric scooters and/or their drivers without providing arguments or reasons in support of this attitude", we found the most extreme examples of the hate speech within the analysed sample.

In this category, we analysed 38 posts in total that addressed the use of electric scooters in extreme negative manner, but without addressing particular topic (e.g. security aspects, influence on health, etc.). The only idea of these posts was to express hate toward the electric scooters and those who use them.

Table 4: Topic 5- Hate and/or negative attitudes toward electric scooters without providing arguments or reasons in support of this attitude

No.	Subtopic	Number/percentage of posts
1	**Threats of death/ calls for violence/curses and insults**	**13**
		34.2%
a.	Threats of death	3
		7.9%
b.	Calls for violence	7
		18.4%
c.	Curses and insults	3
		7.9%
2	**Other**	**25**
		65.8%
	Total number of posts	**38**
		(100%)

It is emerging data that 34.2% of posts in this category include threats of death, calls for violence and/or curses and insults. 7.9% of posts contained threats of death or even open calls for lynching/killing electric scooters' drivers, while 18.4% of those who posted "pure hate twits", called for violence against electric scooters' drivers. Some of the posts contained very cruel examples or proposals what should be done to against electric scooters' drivers (e.g. "For all those on electric scooters, I suggest electric chair!" or "I will break his scooter by hitting him in his had!").

When it comes to 7.9% of Twitter users who posted various insults, it is important to mention that, compared with posts from Category IV where electric scooters' drivers where declared to be part of some social group followed by discriminatory/insulting approach, in this particular category, insults were posted without providing any explanation/reason/argument.

In term of category "Other", were belong 65.8% of posts based on "pure hate", we found two different types:
- **non-offensive posts** where Twitter users just express negative feelings toward electric scooters' drivers (e.g. "I hate these electric scooter drivers!", or "They annoying me so much!")
- **offensive posts** where Twitter users express negative feelings toward electric scooters' drivers indicating a lack of further patient for them, but without concrete threats.

Conclusion

Hate speech is a verbal act of discrimination, contempt, stereotyping, hostility, aggression and / or violence, especially against minority, vulnerable and marginalized groups. Thus, a message sent through hate speech has the (in) direct intent to cause negative consequences for an individual or group, e.g. to generate hatred and feelings of threat and fear, based on one's personal attribute, or belonging to a minority group. Undoubtedly the transformative and revolutionary potential of the internet makes online hate speech specific phenomenon. Firstly, the speed and reach of the internet disable governments to enforce national laws to combat hate speech when it comes to the online sphere. In addition, the production of hate speech on the Internet is comparatively simple, easy and cheap. Consequently, the possibilities for accessing and disseminating hate speech on the Internet are dramatically and incomparably greater than the communication of hate speech in the traditional media. Moreover, hate speech can stay online for a very long time and in different formats on different platforms.

One of the specific characteristics that Internet users face is the visibility, ubiquity or proliferation of hate speech, as well as aggressive speech and threats on the Internet, especially when compared to offline communication. When it comes to the internet, the effect of online disinhibition, in which the absence of face-to-face interaction is a key factor could be recognized. In addition to invisibility ("You don't see who I am"), additional factors contributing to online disinhibition are anonymity ("You

don't know who I am"), lack of synchronicity ("You will read later") and, of course, minimal or non-existent sanctions for offensive communication (Vehovec et al. 2016, 12).

Bearing this in mind, social network platforms, especially Twitter, represent an efficient means for spreading the hate speech threats. Social networks transformed and widened the traditional definition of hate speech, introducing new target groups and additional degree of victim vulnerability. Therefore, we conducted the empirical analysis on Twitter debate surrounding the introduction of specific alternative means of transportation, e.g. electric scooters on the streets of Belgrade.

Summarizing above given findings of the research, it is obvious that posting about the use of electric scooters fulfils all of the main criteria of the hate speech as defined in the social science theory, but also as a part of Twitter policy. In addition to this, an amount of cruelty and discrimination compared to (non)seriousness of the use of electric scooters as a topic should be considered as emerging sing that as community we are not ready to easily accept novelties, even if they don't tackle any of the vital parts of the culture of society.

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