

A Proposed Typology of Online Hate Crime

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Abstract

Hate offenders and those convicted of 'radical' or 'extremist' terror-related offences have a well-established presence online, and hate incidents which occur in the real world are increasingly being linked to online 'virtual' activities (INCAH, 2010). Building on psychological research and theory, in particular McDevitt, Levin, and Bennett (2002), and Gerstenfeld, Grant, and Chang (2003), this study has developed an original typology of online hate offending, dividing it into four distinct types of user: Browsers, Commentators, Activists, and Leaders. In a partial test of this typology, an online search was conducted for hate incidents relating to a single London borough over seven months. The search uncovered a wide variety of online incidents. Content and thematic analysis supported the division of the typology into four distinct superordinate themes. Amendments to the typology and recommendations are then discussed.

Keywords: Hate crime, online hate, prejudice

Introduction

The increasing scope of the Internet, along with the difficulty in monitoring communications, has made it a powerful communicative tool for extremists and hate offenders. As the influence of the Internet on our society increases, the role of the Internet in hate offending needs to be examined and its influence understood if we are to combat hate crime. This paper presents a theoretical framework of online hate crime in a way designed to aid and influence policing practices. It is hoped that this classification may help with monitoring, prosecuting, and ultimately enhancing the rehabilitation of hate-crime offenders.

Hate crime is a wide-ranging, multi-faceted problem that appeared relatively recently on the UK policy agendas. Current definitions of hate crime cover a wide spectrum of severity. In 2008, the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO¹) established the basis for the current definition used in England and Wales:

¹ Now known as the National Police Chiefs' Council

Any offence committed against a person or property which is motivated, in whole or in part by the offender's bias against a race, colour, religion, gender, disability, sexual orientation or ethnicity. It may also be where a person is targeted or selected because of their status, group characteristics or affiliation (Home Office, 2009).

In common with other forms of antisocial and potentially criminal behavior, actions that fall short of the threshold for criminal prosecution are typically classified as "incidents" rather than as offences. The definition for hate incidents in England and Wales is otherwise identical to that for hate offences.

As early as 1983, long before most people had accessed the web, the neo-Nazi publisher Dietz had established a computer bulletin board sharing racist, anti-Semitic, and Holocaust denial material (Berlett, 2001). Subsequent web access now has become simpler, cheaper, and ever more efficient (Perry, 2000). It is a more convenient way to find and promulgate information that promotes hatred than more traditional methods such as public meetings, handing out flyers at football matches, or producing newsletters. Further, information can be viewed, created, and distributed without compromising the anonymity of the authors (Gerstenfeld, et al., 2003). Anonymity, with an associated lack of accountability, encourages unconstrained commenting and may be important for legal reasons (Lee, 2006).

The Internet allows an individual to experience hate, view what people are saying, and potentially contribute to it. People may be able to find like-minded others in an online community that reinforces and potentially justifies their ideas, yet remain physically separated from communities of hate (Sutton, 2002). It also provides an opportunity for people's prejudices to rise to the surface and for them to vent their anger and frustrations (Iganski, Kielinger, & Paterson, 2005).

Despite continuing efforts by successive British Governments to tackle hate crime, it has been notoriously difficult to prosecute individuals for hate material posted online (Haralambous & Geach, 2009). "UK laws are written to make sure that people can speak and write, even offensive material, without being prosecuted for their views. Parliament has tried to define laws in a way that balances our freedom of expression with the right to be free from hate crime" (True Vision, 2013). At present, the law is only broken when hatred is incited or content threatens an individual or group of people based on their race, religion, sexual orientation, or disability. Illegal online material could include messages calling for racial or extremist violence--pages with pictures, videos or descriptions glorifying violence, or chat forums where people describe committing hate crimes (True Vision, 2013).

Several previous studies have explored how the Internet is used to promote extremist views. Schafer (2002) found that the majority of hate sites allowed communication among group members, and that many sites provided an opportunity for the groups to sell products and generate income. In a more in-depth analysis, Gerstenfeld, et al.

(2003) found that the Internet was being used by extremist groups to speak to an international audience, recruit new members, link with diverse extremist groups, and effectively control their image.

Since these studies were published, the introduction of user-generated content and 'Web 2.0,' including Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter, have increasingly blurred the border between online and offline worlds. Continuing advances toward being "online everywhere" may help to promulgate many positive values but the rapid expansion of online access has also allowed people to communicate hateful and extremist views to a large potential audience, instantly, with limited or no editorial control, behind a veil of anonymity.

Internet hate is no longer confined to dedicated hate sites or group sites for extremist organisations (Back, Keith, & Solomos, 1998). Hate content is increasingly found on social networking sites and may not be in the main body of a posting but could appear in the comments and responses to the initial item. This makes hate content difficult to track and harder to regulate. In the UK, there have been a number of incidents where hate content and local action have been promoted online. Monitoring sites such as True Vision and Tell MAMA (a site dedicated to documenting anti-Muslim prejudice and hate) have noted a marked increase in reports of online hate (True Voice, 2013). The Tell MAMA 2014 figures indicated that approximately two-thirds of all incidents reported to them were online (Littler & Feldman, 2015).

A typology of Internet-based hate crime should take into account the developments in online technology and consider the etiology of off-line/"real world" hate crime offending, and how this relates to hate incidents online. However, there is currently a limited understanding surrounding hate offenders, why particular people offend in particular circumstances, and the types of crime that they commit (Iganski, et al., 2011).

The wider literature on extremism and the conditions that promote inter-group conflict (Bar-Tal, 1998; Staub & Bar Tal, 2003; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) may provide insight for this typology. Sibbitt (1997) highlighted the difficulty in finding a typical race-hate perpetrator and many hate-crime offenders offend during their everyday, "ordinary" lives (Iganski, 2008). Hate offending is not always prompted by a particularly strong ideological conviction. Rather, offenders are expressing attitudes that lie beneath the surface of everyday cognitions for many people (Iganski, et al., 2005), and rise to the surface when an opportunity to vent their prejudices occurs. Brewer (1999) suggested that the desire to be accepted within one's own group is a stronger motivator to commit hate crime than hate directed at an out-group. Ray, Smith, and Wastell (2004) posited shame and envy as possible motivations for committing hate crime against members of an out-group perceived to have a greater social capital than their own. Finally, Beck (2000) suggested that negative interpretations of victim behavior, alongside the closed minds and rigid thinking commonly found within a collective culture, could be dangerous and promote hate.

When considering the motivations behind hate crime, the main typology in use was developed by McDevitt, et al., (2002). This expanded their 1993 typology by reanalyzing the original sample of police files (from between 1990 and 1991 in Boston, Massachusetts). Four distinct types of hate-crime offenders were identified: thrill seeking, retaliatory, defensive, and mission offenders. This typology has been influential in the investigation of hate-crime offences and in the management of people convicted for hate offences (Dixon, 2002). However, it tells us little about the boundaries between a criminal offence and a hate incident and how a person's behavior may develop or be influenced over time. The typology was also developed out of police files where offences online had not been encountered.

The typology of Internet-based hate crime put forward in the current paper suggests that those adding hate content online can be classified based both on their motivations and online behaviors. This typology was developed taking into account previous research into hate crime online and the growing body of literature on the motivations and management of prejudice and hate. It was developed in consultation with hate-crime professionals from a local authority, senior police, and the Ministry of Justice. It was further refined through closely supervised research and in an ongoing consultative process.

It should be noted that other negative online phenomena such as "trolling," cyberbullying, or the use of avatars to post malicious content anonymously, may present in similar ways to online hate content. While there may be some parallels among all of these occurrences, this study will seek to explore links between online hate incidents and offline hate crime in terms of etiology and will consider online hate as distinct from other negative online phenomena. In the following section, the typology will be outlined. This outline will identify the actions of four distinct groups of Internet users and the psychological processes postulated to affect those actions and potentiate their development in an individual. Following this, in partial test of this typology, the distinctions will be compared to online hate incidents relating to a specific borough of London during a specific time period.

Typology of Internet Hate Crime

The typology was developed independently of law-enforcement agencies as the first stage of this research. It was based on extant research into hate crime online and the motivations of prejudice and hate. This paper now outlines that typology, then turns to a test of the typology. This Internet hate-crime typology breaks down online hate offending and related activity into four distinct groups: Browsers, Commentators, Activists, and Leaders. An outline of the characteristics, motivations, and impact of each group will be provided along with the theoretical underpinnings of each.

Browser

A Browser views hate material online, but does not interact with the online community. Browsing covers a wide spectrum of behaviors, from accidental viewing of hate online to

deliberate searches for large amounts of hate material. Viewing hate online is not illegal; however, browsing is likely to make up a large proportion of the activity relating to hate material (Schafer, 2002). As such, it is important to consider the impact of browsing on those who engage in it as a separate construct within this typology. We note too, that people may browse hate material for a variety of purposes and not always intentionally.

Accidentally viewing hate messages online is unlikely to influence a non-prejudiced individual significantly. However, socialization is a dynamic process and the more hate content is seen, the more it will be viewed as acceptable and normal (Court, 2003). If hate content is viewed by those who are already prejudiced, it may have a more dramatic impact, encouraging further involvement with hate on or offline. Simple online searches are likely to find material to support Browsers' biased explanations for their own situation and extremist views. Further, as searches become more focused and search engines become ever more tailored to individual preferences (Pariser, 2009), the likelihood of viewing self-reinforcing information will increase whilst countervailing narratives will become ever more dissipated.

Commentator

A Commentator is an individual who, in addition to viewing hate content online, will post comments and engage with the online community. Commentators may or may not post hateful comments themselves, but they will show their support for extremist views by agreeing or disagreeing with other online content and adding to online commentary. Commenting/blogging and tweets can be posted instantly from anywhere, allowing for immediate reaction to events. Users are still able to comment by more traditional methods such as chat rooms on special interest sites and comment boards on many prominent news sites. Whilst they engage with the online community, Commentators are unlikely to be engaged with organized hate groups offline, nor are they likely to be involved in committing illegal hate offences.

In terms of earlier typologies, some Commentators may also be 'thrill seekers' (McDevitt, et al., 2002), with inappropriate comments being posted by an individual or groups to 'get a buzz' from the act. However, it is possible that other motivations covered within the earlier typology are also pertinent. For example, Internet comments may be a good way to retaliate against a perceived previous harm or slight, whether online or off-line. Levin and McDevitt (1993) describe how a single offline hate offence can lead to a series of follow up events. They describe a cycle of action and reaction that, when coupled with entrenched views and media comment, can be difficult to halt. Whether the original attack can be classified as a hate crime or not often becomes unimportant, as retaliatory incidents provide on-going fuel for future conflict. Online Commentators could be adding to the cycle of action and reaction highlighted by Levin (1999) by posting retaliatory comments.

It has been suggested that the harm caused by online comments is greater than equivalent offline acts. For example, Bocij and McFarlane (2003) noted in their work on online stalking that online incidents of 'cyber smearing' had greater implications than offline acts such as a poison pen letters or graffiti on a wall, as these could be more easily retracted or discarded. The potential audience for a comment posted on the Internet is far larger.

Activist

An Activist is an Internet user who adds overt hate content online and is more likely to be engaged with organized hate groups offline. Activists are more entrenched in their extremist prejudices and beliefs than Browsers or Commentators. They will be more likely to display cognitive distortions (Bar-Tal, 1998) such as denial, minimization, and dehumanization, which will themselves aid moral disengagement (Bandura, 1999). Also, emotion and shame may be important to understanding why Activists promulgate hate (Ray, et al., 2004). Activists may use the Internet to promote their views, as an organizational tool to plan offline activities, to network with other Activists, and to celebrate and relive hate incidents.

Here too, the proposed typology is less reliant on dividing people by their motivations and more according to their behaviors. In terms of the previous typology, activists could be motivated to act in retaliation to a perceived hate incident against their in-group or their motivations may make them closer to a "mission offender" (Levin & McDevitt, 1993). Others may be motivated to protect their community from what they perceive to be outsiders or intruders--outlined by Levin and McDevitt (1993) as "defensive offenders."

Activists are unlikely to have the same reserve as Commentators about committing hate actions in the real world, and therefore may respond to online hate incidents with a retaliatory incident offline or vice versa. Real-world activities may be initiated, developed, or planned online, and the ideology driving them forward can be reinforced virtually (Mann, Sutton, & Tuffin 2003). The Internet can be used as an organizational tool to confirm venues, attendance at events, and to co-ordinate people's movements.

Activists are likely to be affiliated with or to belong to specific extremist groups; being involved in a group helps to create a collective identity (Perry, 2000). The group can provide reassurance to both neophytes and acolytes that their views are acceptable, normal, or even commendable (Gerstenfeld, et al., 2003). As social divisions deepen, people's understanding of nuance and complexity of situations diminishes, and can give way to dichotomous reasoning (Castano, 2008). Alternatively, Activists may increasingly commit hate crimes as a way to appear more socially acceptable towards an in-group that considers committing hate crime desirable (Brewer, 1999).

Activists use the Internet to engage with other extremist groups. Despite a history of disjunction and infighting among extremist groups, differences in ideology or purpose

are often only minor (Perry, 2000). Gerstenfeld, et al. (2003) suggested that extremist groups are increasingly using the Internet to form a collective identity, providing links from one Website to another, which contains similar rhetoric and spleen, particularly when using peer-to-peer, social networking, and other sites to celebrate, promote, and re-live incidents. This provides content for sites which can again promote moral disengagement (Bar-Tal, 1998) and help to socialize individuals (Beck, 2000), promoting indifference towards victims and allowing others to experience and indulge in hate without being directly or physically involved (Marsh & Melville, 2009).

Leader

A Leader is the final category in this typology and they can be considered the most serious/engaged Internet hate user. They are also those most likely to clearly break the law through incitement. A Leader will use the Internet to support, organize, and promote his extremist ideology. Leaders will differ from Activists in their meticulous and substantive approach to the promotion of their hate views online. They will be at the forefront of developing Websites, storing large amounts of extremist material relating to their ideology, and organizing hate-related activities on and offline.

In 1995, Don Black created 'Stormfront.' This is now considered to have been the first major Internet hate site (Schafer, 2002). The site hosts themed discussion forums with numerous message boards as well as large amounts of white supremacist literature, an online shop, material designed for children, and extensive links to other racist organizations. This model has been adopted by numerous Websites since, with the addition of streamed broadcasts and use of YouTube (e.g. BNPTv).

Whilst only a small percentage of people posting online are Leaders, as with "mission offenders," they present the highest risk for serious repeat hate offending (Levin & McDevitt, 1993). Leaders become totally committed, making hatred their central focus (McDevitt, et al., 2002). Leaders take it upon themselves to deal with a perceived enemy or menace, without the need for any specific catalyzing event. Leaders, like "mission offenders," can be characterized as ideologues, and are the most likely to seek to recruit others to their viewpoint. They will post a large amount of content online in order to attract an audience and recruit Browsers, Commentators, and Activists.

Leaders internalize a hostile ideology. They are likely to post frequently and substantially. Some of this content may be extreme in nature and aimed at ardent supporters; other content will be designed to recruit others to their viewpoint. In order to engage with these individuals, sites developed by Leaders will often refrain from using extreme language and will aim to show their group in the best possible light. As Blazak (2001) and Gerstenfeld, et al. (2003) have noted, far-right organizations are much less likely to acknowledge their skin-head and swastika pasts as they move towards mainstream acceptance. Gerstenfeld, et al. (2003) found that around 20% of the sites analyzed in their content analysis of extremist Web sites contained language claiming that they did not hate anyone, yet would extol the virtues of being prepared against an out group

'enemy.' Mann, et al. (2003) also noted that some posters would soften their language and be more moderate when interacting with people new to their group.

Becoming Involved in Online Hatred

Users engaging in hate on the Internet could engage with the online world in several ways. Firstly, they may progress through the stages of this typology as their prejudices become more pronounced. Internet users may start out as Browsers and only view online content. However, as their prejudices develop by what they view, they may move on to become Commentators, Activists, or even Leaders, as they increasingly identify with an extremist ideology, and disengage from the moral significance of acting negatively towards a stigmatized group (Bandura, 1999), or come to believe that extreme negativity towards that group is the morally right belief (Haslam & Reicher, 2005). This gradual change would incrementally strengthen a sense of belonging to the in-group (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, Wetherell, 1987), clearly favoring that in-group and seeking its glorification, in part through denigration of an out-group (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Viewing hate online would allow individuals to re-interpret their perception of violent acts toward a stigmatized group; minimize and misconstrue negative effects of actions on victims; and eventually devalue, delegitimize, and dehumanize the victims (Bandura, 1999). An individual could engage with these processes exclusively online (Browsers, Commentators) or through a combination of online and offline activities (Activists, Leaders). Alternatively, it would also be possible for individuals with pre-existing beliefs developed offline, to access the Internet and express their extremist views immediately. Lastly, we note that people's life circumstances and the context in which they find themselves will also change; it is possible that external influences will mean that they lower their level of involvement or potentially even change their attitudes. There is nothing to say that moves through this typology are inevitable, inexorable, nor even linear.

Testing the Typology

To provide an initial test of the proposed typology outlined above, content analysis (Kracauer, 1993) and thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998) were used to evaluate a cross section of online hate material. It would have been unrealistic to conduct a comprehensive qualitative analysis of the whole Internet; therefore, manageable parameters were established for the search. These parameters included a specific offline geographical location that content should originate from or relate to, and a timeframe for the search. Content was identified that referred to, or was added by, individuals from a single London borough, and only content that was posted on the Internet between January 1 and August 1, 2011, was included in this study.

To provide some context, over 50% of the borough's population is made up of residents from minority ethnic groups, including White minority groups. White-British residents form the largest ethnic group. Asian or Asian-British residents account for a significant percentage, with the majority of these residents originating from India. The borough is

one of the most diverse boroughs in the country in terms of religion. Although the most prevalent religion is Christianity, it has an extremely high proportion of Hindu residents and an above-average number of Jewish residents. There are also an average number of Muslim residents for a London borough, and a small percentage of other religions including Sikhs, Buddhists, and Jains. The borough was ranked below the mid-point in the national ranking indices for deprivation in 2007². Crime levels are below average for a London borough and when looking specifically at hate crime, levels were representative of a typical London borough in the 12 months preceding April 2011 (Metropolitan Police Service, 2011).

Focusing on a specific geographical area allowed a cross section of online hate to be examined. Imposing tight parameters meant that the search could explore the nuances of hate online by searching for local issues and terminology that may be missed in a broader search, while also considering wider issues regarding online hate. Within these limits, a comprehensive search for online hate incidents was conducted. We were guided by stakeholder practitioners as to the best search engines and hate portals to begin with and from which to proceed further but have deliberately not named them here (see footnote below).

Ethics

This research was conducted in close consultation with the Hate Crimes lead of the Association of Chief Police Officers and with the Hate Crimes (response) Coordinator of the London Borough in which the work was conducted. It was also conducted in compliance with the University's computer-usage policy and gained Departmental ethical approval, which conforms to both statutory (Health and Care Professions Council) and professional body (British Psychological Society) requirements. Certain conditions were suggested and agreed to as part of the design and ethics processes. These are briefly mentioned here:

- To ensure complete anonymity and protection, all online searches were carried out using a computer with a masked Internet Protocol (IP) address that was Internet enabled but not part of a network.
- Website addresses of material found and analyzed were recorded and, where relevant, were passed on to the appropriate authorities but cannot be made public. To allow for some degree of data verification, we have mentioned as many websites as possible, that are (relatively) mainstream, e.g. YouTube, but we have not reported specific addresses.
- While conducting the online search, the first author was exposed to some disturbing online content. He attended regular de-briefing sessions with the second author in order to discuss the work and any especially troubling incidents or material uncovered. Had additional help been needed, relevant services were in place.

² All figures are taken from the borough's annual vitality report, which has not been referenced in order to protect confidentiality.

Procedure

A comprehensive search for Internet hate crime within the borough between January 1 and August 1, 2011, was conducted. In order to guide this search, a list of searchable content was devised that included: words and terminology, national and international hate sites regularly used by extremists³, and previous hate incidents within the borough. The list was devised with the assistance of the borough’s hate-crime coordinator, and a senior official at the Ministry of Justice who specializes in online hate crime. These search terms were combined with relevant geographical references and then entered into online search engines. Once the search began and hate incidents were identified, additional content was uncovered which was subsequently added to the search list.

A content analysis of the identified hate content revealed hate material which fit the parameters on 38 distinct Web pages. Within these Web pages, 135 independently added hate incidents were identified. These incidents ranged in scale from one-line messages responding to previous online comments, through to the registering of a new Internet site with a large amount of content.

Once the hate incidents were identified, a thematic analysis was conducted as outlined by Boyatzis (1998). This analysis used a theory-driven approach to identify superordinate themes, which were identified as the four stages of the initial typology: Browsers, Commentators, Activists, and Leaders. Hate incidents were then allocated to a superordinate group. Subordinate themes were subsequently identified within these superordinate themes and are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1

Superordinate and Subordinate Themes

Browser	Commentator	Activist	Leader
	Offence	Organising offline events	
	Defame other’s beliefs	Direction to hate material	
	Rationalise held beliefs	Threats of offline violence	
	Supporting those with similar views	Relive past events	

³ Again, these are not referenced here for ethical reasons.

Please note that, although no subordinate themes are identified distinctly for Leaders, the criteria were all demonstrated (see findings below). Additionally, it had been hoped to test for intentional and unintentional Browser activity; however, this was not possible within the scope of the current study, and thus these have not been included as subordinate themes.

When deciding what constituted an online hate incident, distinctions among distasteful, but legal free speech, hate incidents, and hate crimes could be fine ones. To provide consistency in identification of hate incidents, two independent raters were used to work with the first author in assessing threshold tests and considered whether posts met the ACPO (2005) definitions of a hate incident. These independent raters also assisted in checking reliability in classifying the material found within the types of online activity identified within the typology (the superordinate themes). The inter-rater reliability was analyzed via the Kappa statistic. A value of Kappa (Cohen, 1968) = 0.893 ($p < 0.01$). indicated that inter-rater reliability was significant for superordinate themes.

Findings and Discussion

The four superordinate themes (the categories identified in the original typology) will now be considered with the aid of online extracts. Emergent subordinate themes will also be discussed.

Browser

As Browsers by definition view hate online but do not interact with the online community, it was not possible to measure all the incidents of browsing within the parameters of this search. However, some evidence of a population of users who viewed hate material without engaging with the online community did emerge, and these observations support the notion of Browsers as a distinct group within this typology.

During the search for hate content, ten YouTube videos⁴ were identified which included footage of hate-related activities relevant to the borough. All of these videos related to a single event--a small protest against the expansion of a Mosque (in the relevant borough) led by the far right group the English Defence League (EDL), and a counter demonstration led by Unite Against Fascism. The videos included excerpts from news coverage about the demonstration, and the violent disturbances that followed, resulting in a number of arrests.

The YouTube videos had been viewed 365,489 times since they were placed online 26 months prior to the search frame. While some of these viewings could be attributed to Commentators, Activists, or Leaders, the sheer number of viewings suggests that there

⁴ Again, these videos are not referenced in order to protect the identity of the area.

is an additional large group viewing this content but not actively engaging with hate online (either to support or indeed to counter it).

Although the content of the videos posted on YouTube may be no more disturbing than the average nightly news broadcast, below the videos were large numbers of comments, many of which contained hate speech. The hate comments posted may expose Browsers to extremist views they had not previously considered, possibly normalizing hatred and prompting a change in an individual's world view (Sibbitt, 1997). The repeated viewings of the hate incident and comments may also encourage viewers to perceive events such as these as acceptable and normal (Court, 2003).

Commentator

The majority of online hate incidents identified within the parameters of this search, 118 (87%) were classified as having been added by Commentators. Comments were found on a wide variety of Web sites including open access social networks such as Facebook and Twitter, and content sharing sites such as YouTube, The Opinionator, and Live Leak. Hate content was also found on the Internet sites and message boards of local newspapers, as well as in chat rooms on well-known extremist or right-wing sites such as Stormfront and the EDL Website.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the focus of the search on a specific geographical location, Commentators were found to be responding primarily to posts about local matters. Issues seized upon by Commentators included: previous 'far right' protests, the proposed expansion of a local Mosque, unlabeled Halal food in schools (something happening nationally with quite extensive local and national news coverage), and the use of Sharia law in the UK. While hate comments were recorded that were directed at Blacks, Catholics, Jews, and homosexuals, the majority of the comments focused on Islam, and the perceived threat of Muslim extremism.

Four subordinate themes were identified within the broader superordinate category of Commentator: offense, defaming others' beliefs, rationalizing held beliefs, and supporting those with similar views.

Offense

Although the majority of comments aimed, in part, to cause offense, some were solely intended to do this. Offense could be aimed at a wider group or a specific user, as in Comment 1 where a Commentator responds to an inflammatory comment posted by a self-identified Muslim user:

Commentator 1: 'Fucken extremist muslims I don't care what you say. Words can't describe how much I hate you dirty ragged dirtbags.'⁵

Comments that respond to other online posts are likely to add to the cycle of action and reaction that fuels hate crime (Levin, 1999; Levin & McDevitt, 1993). Commentators that set out exclusively to cause offence could be identified as thrill seekers (McDevitt, et al., 2002).

Defaming Others' Beliefs

Other comments were aimed specifically at defaming the identity, beliefs, or religion of a particular group. These Commentators are likely to draw on hateful views or propaganda that is promoted elsewhere by more established groups. These views are then repeated by Commentators engaged with other Internet users.

Commentator 2: 'OK yer Killin ME !! Catholic state??
BAAAaaaaAaaAAaaaRRRF!! The Vatican is full of Vile, Greedy old disgusting PEDophiles. Why would you want them running society??
That's just fuckin stupid.'

Comments defaming the beliefs of others could be considered as retaliatory or thrill seeking in nature (Levin & McDevitt, 1993). They may also be an attempt to appear part of an extremist in-group, gain positive feedback for their extremist views, or to engage with others who share these views (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

Rationalize Held Beliefs

The third subordinate theme included comments that aim to go further and rationalize beliefs, explaining why the Commentator felt that his or her beliefs were worth expressing. In several cases, Commentators sought to project a more amicable tone--attempting to appear balanced and rational. Commentators sometimes included a disclaimer before going on to make a hate comment as in comment 3.

Commentator 3: 'I am not a racist but what I am is a patriot.
How many muslims go to other countires and slaughter people? mmm let me see, 9/11, 7/7, madrid, constantly in israel, bali, moscow (sic) celebrating death? mmm let me see, celebrations occurred all over the islamic world in 9/11, your prophet was a paedophile and this is why you lot act the way you do, because ultimately you know what that means for your religion - its regarded as sick.'

⁵ Please note that in reporting quotations, text has been pasted in exactly as found, the only change has been to unify the font used. Therefore, typographical errors (deliberate or otherwise) are as originally posted by the user.

In the proposed typology, the moderation of language and tone to appear reasonable (Blazak, 2001; Mann, et al., 2003) was discussed in relation to Activists and Leaders, who use this tactic in an attempt to mask their true beliefs and attract new individuals to an in-group. However, it became clear during the data collation and analysis that Commentators were also engaging in this practice. This may be an indication of Commentators being less ardent in their beliefs, not wanting to cause offence to others, and attempting to engage in online conversations as amicably as possible. Alternatively, and perhaps more realistically, there may be a trickle-down effect with the moderation of language and tone used by more established groups and Websites encouraging Commentators to moderate their tone (Mann, et al., 2003).

Supporting Those with Similar Views

These comments provided support to previous comments made, with which the person posting agreed. These types of comment were particularly common during arguments on sites open to the public. On sites that are open and easily viewable to the public, cycles of action and reaction that resulted in hate crime were common. As debates between groups became more heated, the original point of the post often became lost, and hate comments from one group fuelled more hate comments from other groups in a retaliatory cycle (also highlighted by Levin, 1999, as a feature of offline hate crime). Comments 4, 5, and 6 are responses to a post calling for all Muslims to return to live in Muslim countries:

Commentator 4 'right with you on this one fuckin Muslim Paki Cunts ...'

Commentator 5: 'Yes Yes Yes you are so right ...'

Commentator 6: 'Next time please throw Molotov cocktail at the sandniggers'

Comments such as those above are particularly important as they create a self-justifying community online, which helps promote and reaffirm negative perceptions of others and develops notions of inter-group conflict (Bar-Tal, 1998; Staub & Bar-Tal, 2003; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Similarly, negative feedback from out-group members is also likely to reaffirm negative perceptions of that out-group, and enhance the notions of conflict (Castano, Yzerbyt, Paladino, & Sacchi, 2002).

Activist

Within the parameters of this search, 16 (12%) of the materials were classified as being committed by Activists. As hypothesized in the original typology, a large proportion of the Activist-type comments identified were affiliated with--or used Websites of--groups that were dedicated to promoting extremism. The low number of Activists compared to Commentators, and the single Leader identified during the search, affirm the expectation that, as online actions become more severe, there is a lower incidence (McDevitt, et al., 2002).

During the thematic analysis, four subordinate themes were identified within the Activist category: organizing offline events, direction to hate material, threats of offline violence, and reliving past events.

Organizing Offline Events

Several Activists were found to be using the Internet as an organizational tool to engage with others sharing their views and to plan future events. Incidents were recorded of Activists attempting to organize a flash protest as well as supermarket leafleting. The quotes made by Activist 1 and 2 were taken from a string of posts discussing the dangers of radical Islam to the UK:

Activist 1:

Supermarket Leafleting

Hi all, I am up for doing this in the (location removed) area.

Give me the info, and I will get on with it!!!

Activist 2:

Send a private message.... And we can swap numbers.

Organizing offline events demonstrates the distinction between Activists and Commentators and supports the findings of Mann, et al. (2003) and Gerstenfeld, et al. (2003) that offline hate activities are being increasingly driven and underpinned by an ideology or tactics developed online.

Direction to Hate Material

Activists are more likely than Commentators to belong to extremist organizations that actively promote hate, and are more likely to want to promote that organization or set of beliefs to others. Activists were found promoting their thinking to others and encouraging them to engage with online or offline groups. Activist 3 was identified posting on YouTube in an online thread about an attack on a local Mosque, he/she was encouraging others involved in an online conversation, to join the EDL:

Activist 3: 'Yeah fuck that mate, You should come over and join the EDL, mate. You'd be welcome cos that's what we are about too. We don't want to be ruled or ruined by some primitive, scummy, violent religion.'

This quote is also consistent with the findings from Gerstenfeld, et al. (2003), in relation to inter-group collective identities.

Threat of Offline Violence

The threat of violence is another indication of an Activist displaying more entrenched prejudices and beliefs.

Activist 4 : 'ow a tough laptop muslim cunt has screamed his hate on YTB. I am shaking in my boots, Come to ...[address removed]... CUNT and we'll see how fucking tough you are. I will smash in yr racist CUNT FACE LIKE A BASEBALL GLOVE AND REMOVE YOUR LITTLE BALLS WITH A RUSTY BOTTLE TOP.'

As this search was conducted solely online, it is not clear how regularly Activists carry out threats of violence, nor to what extent violent acts described online are true. As with Commentators, the Internet may act as an insulator for Activists allowing them to exaggerate claims and make violent threats that they have no intention of carrying out. While it is unlikely that Activists carry out every threat of violence they make, there have, however, been examples of violent threats made online being carried out in real life, of which Anders Breivik's 2011 attacks are a striking example.

Reliving Past Events

Finally, once an offline hate incident has been carried out, Activists will use the Internet to celebrate, promote, and re-live that incident, allowing individuals to indulge in hate without being directly or physically involved. The quote below highlights how Activists can be highly motivated to act in retaliation to a perceived injustice toward their in-group (Levin & McDevitt, 1993).

Activist 7: 'Fact is Muslim people are generally weak. I was on the bus today, I sat next to this muslim guy (I know he was muslim, his name was Ahmed), he tried to create an argument with another passanger, for little reason. Ahmed thought he was all gangsta, and he even said, 'Do you know who I am", at this point I thought to myself, is this David Haye? He clearly thinks he is hard, so I looked at his arms. His arms must have been 11 inches, and he looks like he can only bench 20kg. He ran off before I could let him have it. HAHAA'

In the Activist category, there were several theoretical suggestions that were not supported within the material found for this search. Firstly, it was suggested that the role of emotion, in particular shame, may be important to understanding why Activists commit hate (Ray, et al, 2002). However, no discernible differences could be found in emotional content of posts made by Commentators, Activists, or Leaders. Secondly, no interaction was found among users who identified themselves as belonging to separate extremist groups, as suggested by Perry (2000). There is a possibility that interaction did take place but group membership was not advertised to observers.

Leader

One instance of online hate that could be categorized as having been created by a Leader was identified. This was a Website created for a far-right group operating within

the borough. The construction of the Website was credited by a single male known to local police for involvement in other hate-related activity.

This quote is from the home page of the Website. It provides an overview of the group's beliefs, which are primarily to reduce the number of immigrants coming to the UK and their subsequent influence on British culture, and to reverse the growth of Islam in the UK.

[Group Name Removed] London

'one for all all for one making a fairer UK for us'

'Say no to the Alien Culture change of our country'.

Virtual Head Office [Place Name Removed] London.

In the past we have had an open door policy for colonisers (soft touch Britain). Now they are taking over our cities our jobs our houses and our culture. What are we doing about this? nothing! My town is multicultural but not for long, it's in the process of being colonised by colonisers. (sic) the culture of Islam who pose a danger where ever they settle. They are only here to take our country over and turn and towns into a pakistan'

The content of the site included a number of the criteria for a Leader outlined in the original typology including: a detailed introduction and manifesto, a posting wall with regular updates of online and offline activities, photos of alleged victims of racial attacks, and a guestbook that visitors to the site could sign. The site also contained links and references to other hate groups (primarily the EDL) that the creator of the site identified as sharing a similar ideology.

Dedication and commitment to an extreme ideology were identified as key characteristics of a Leader within this typology. Consistent with this, during the search process, the Website underwent significant changes and both the graphics and content were updated. The site also contained information about offline activities that the creator of the site had been involved in over long periods of time (e.g., a campaign the Website was running to raise awareness of Halal meat being served in schools was started over 18 months previously).

Another criterion for a Leader was the ability to shed his or her overt extremist ideologies in favor of moderate views aiming to explain the ideology as rationally and reasonably as possible, thereby attracting new recruits (Blazak, 2001; Mann, et al., 2003). In certain sections of the site, the creator posted disclaimers such as:

'We are not racists, we don't care what colour or religion you are.'

During the time frame of this search, very little external activity was recorded on the site (several messages of support were posted on the guestbook). Despite this limited engagement, the implications of this site should not be underestimated. In the case of future community tensions or serious incidents of hate crime in the area, an established

and comprehensive site could become a focal point for support of extremist views and the promotion of hate within the area.

Discussion and Conclusions

This study aimed to gain a greater understanding of online hate crime and the motivations that drive individuals to use the Internet to engage in hate activities. A typology was devised that took into account existing theory and divided online hate consumers and producers into four superordinate themes: Browsers, Commentators, Activists, and Leaders. Each group was identified as being both distinct in their motivations and in the impact of their engagement with the online community.

Once devised, the theoretical typology was evaluated against online hate incidents originating from, or relating to, a single London borough. The Internet search uncovered a variety of hate incidents, from crude single-line comments, through to a glossy, in-depth hate site. Opinions ranged from the seemingly innocent and naïve to the violent and inflammatory, and users ranged from unaffiliated individuals to those directly promoting the work of an organization. The subsequent thematic analysis supported the division of the typology into the four categories (or superordinate themes). Subordinate themes were subsequently identified and further outlined the role of the Internet in hate-crime offending. Some additional observations may be pertinent when working to address online hatred.

Hate Speech Focused Primarily on Ongoing Arguments and Specific Targeted Prejudices

The data collection and online searches conducted for this study took place directly after the 2011 attacks of Anders Breivik in Norway. While there was a good deal of content devoted to Breivik and his actions on hate sites as well the wider Internet, this content did not appear to significantly filter through into active discussions on local issues (beyond the very occasional cursory reference). This is presumed to be because hate Commentators and Activists were adding content about the attacks in Norway on other forums, which related specifically to the issue. However, it was a surprise to the first author how little attention the attacks in Norway received on local hate forums, and the dedication and unswerving focus that posters showed to their on-going arguments and specific, targeted prejudices.

In an online environment, where individuals often perceive themselves as anonymous and insulated from harm, confrontation between those subscribing to differing ideologies was common, especially on open-access sites. Hate postings were often followed by other hate postings expressing a polar opposite extremist view, which only served to increase the ferocity of both arguments and further reduce the validity of either point of view.

Throughout this typology, the implication has been that individuals have been accessing information for anti-social or potentially criminal reasons. However, it became apparent that people are also accessing and responding to hate crime in a pro-social way at a variety of levels. Comments denouncing hate posts were identified on message boards and blogs, and more active users have developed sites devoted to tackling hatred. These range from sites focussed on specific events, such as <http://lovemusichateracism.com/>, to the site run by the anti-Fascist Magazine, *Searchlight* <http://www.searchlightmagazine.com/>. Sites such as this suggest that there is the potential for a parallel pro-social typology for those combating hate incidents online.

Interventions

The willingness of some users to tackle hate crime and confront extremists online raises the question of effective interventions, and the best way to combat online hate incidents. Some would suggest that simply ignoring hate content and pressuring Internet service providers to remove content as soon as possible could be the most effective option. Debra Lipstadt, an eminent Holocaust historian, initially refused to engage in debates with Holocaust deniers. She believed that, by sharing a stage with people with extremist views, and arguing against obvious untruths, she would only serve to give their views a false validity that they did not deserve (Lipstadt, 1993). This rationale could be applied to online hate crime. By engaging with those who are purporting hate, no matter how vociferous the debate and ridiculous their views, the fact that the debate is happening at all would cause others to perceive the views as legitimate and allow them to enter mainstream consciousness.

Alternatively, it is worth considering that the Internet can also be used to create and disseminate powerful counter narratives (e.g., Putzel, 2007). Additionally, contact hypothesis, first put forward by Allport (1954) would suggest that, in order to persuade people to reconsider their views about others, they need to have contact with that group, and it is only through getting to know individuals that stereotypes can be broken down. Contact hypothesis has had notable successes (Brown, 2000), and has been used to break down prejudice and stereotypes in offline groups (Ihlanfeldt & Scafidi, 2002). The Internet is a powerful tool that allows contact between individuals, and provides the opportunity for people to encounter one another who would otherwise not have done so (McKenna & Bargh, 1999). However, to be effective, contact must be used strategically.

Simply providing groups with an opportunity to interact online would not immediately facilitate a reduction in prejudice. Groups already have the opportunity to interact in many Internet chat rooms, and often do so with negative consequences. In order to use contact hypothesis to break down prejudice online, it would be necessary to adhere to the four criteria for better interaction and reduced prejudice identified by Allport (1954), which include equal status, working toward a common goal, acquaintance potential, and support of authorities or the law. If these four conditions could be made present in an

online environment, then prejudice and inter-group conflict online could begin to be reduced. Meta-analysis (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2000) concluded that not all conditions needed to be satisfied simultaneously for bias to be reduced, and highlighted major challenges including the practicality of arranging and monitoring contact between rival groups, the anxiety that contact may cause to participants, and struggles in generalizing contact from any one member of an out-group to that group as a whole. Hewstone and Swart (2011) suggested that:

The most effective form of contact, however, appears to involve both inter-group and interpersonal factors, as when cross-group friends provide optimal contact, while retaining their respective group memberships to promote generalization (see Brown & Hewstone, 2005). (Hewstone & Swart, 2011 p. 176)

They reiterate the importance of highlighting inter-group commonalities without minimizing inequalities. If a grievance is ignored, then disadvantaged groups may become more, not less, hostile.

Another recent online development may hamper attempts to engage individuals from different groups in meaningful interactions and that is the focused nature of online searches. Pariser, 2009 coined the notion of 'The Filter Bubble' to characterize the effect of search engines that increasingly tailor search results to each individual user's information preferences, ultimately narrowing and focusing the frame of reference. As search engines 'learn' about individuals' extremist views, they will provide searches that preference hate material, increasing the likelihood of further entrenchment. In order to combat this narrowing of search results and affirmation of beliefs, it may be necessary to safely but actively engage and challenge hatred online. Offline, when working with offenders convicted of extremist crimes, there are more focused interventions that may work to deconstruct their attitudes (see Iganski, et al., 2011). However these would not work as early stage preventions. For early intervention, the best hope may be through engaging with users on hate sites, posts, walls, and blogs--although the question remains as to whether an alternative point of view will be able to break into a hate user's cocooned online experience.

Limitations

Most obviously, this study was limited to hate incidents that fell within the strict parameters of the search. The sample size was small when compared to the volume of content available online, and the search was only conducted in one geographical area.

There were several additional limitations identified when reviewing the procedures for the Internet search. Searching for Browsers who viewed hate sites but did not add content was especially difficult. Many Internet sites did not advertise the number of hits received, which was the only way to know if people had been viewing the site without posting content. On sites that did display the number of hits received, it was impossible

to ascertain the Browsers' reasons for accessing hate content online, and many users who disagree with the hate content posted could be adding to these hits. It is possible that other interested parties monitoring hate crime and hate content will also be viewing online hate content regularly, and pushing up the number of overall viewings. It was also impossible to know how many unique users had viewed websites and how many hits were from repeat users (those returning to the site many times and recording a hit every time they did so).

One of the main distinctions between Commentators and Activists within the typology was the willingness of Activists to engage in offline hate incidents. This was identified in the analysis by the discussion of offline actions and the apparent willingness to engage in offline activities. It should be noted, however, that we could not verify whether people have actually committed offences or been involved in such incidents off-line. Relatedly, it should be noted that we did pass information to the relevant local authorities and police who followed up as appropriate but they were not able to pass back information that would have helped us to verify claims made.

Finally, due to the set parameters of this search, and the difficulty in identifying the same individual on different websites, it was not possible to identify posts by the same person, or to know whether individuals were veteran posters or adding content for the first time. This made it impossible to evaluate the development of extremist views through any individual's posts or to identify possible movement through the typology.

Future Research

While this study builds on the conclusions of the several previous content analyses investigating online hate crime, there are many questions that remain unexplored: Does regular viewing of online hate content convert individuals to extremist ideologies? How often are those who are not already engaged with extremist ideologies viewing hate content? What are the effects of this exposure on extremist ideologies? Does the unintentional viewing of hate content lead to intentional viewing?

Understanding the extent to which identified users engaged in offline activities would help further clarify sections of this typology and establish the extent to which users making specific threats of action are prepared to follow through and carry out those actions. This might assist law-enforcement agencies in deploying their resources effectively, and in tackling the most dangerous offenders.

There were several posts identified during the search that originated from individuals acting as monitors, who were attempting to combat hate material by expressing their own more reasonable views. These monitors denounced hate posts as offensive and inappropriate, and sought to be the 'voice of reason' in extremist conversations. While it was beyond the scope of this research to consider these monitors in detail, their role and the potential influence that they have on hate users is worth further attention.

A question highlighted by Gerstenfeld, et al. (2003) that remains partially unanswered pertains to the extent to which offline events change extremist views online or generate increased content. During this analysis, it was clear that offline events, such as the Halal meat in schools debate that erupted in the borough (and in other parts of the country), and the protests against the expansion of a local Mosque, did generate large amounts of hate material from Commentators, Activists, and Leaders. However was this online activity a direct result of these offline events? Or, as suggested in these findings, were these events used as an excuse to vent feelings of anger and frustration, which, if these events had not occurred would just have been voiced elsewhere in response to another thread?

For many people in the UK, the Internet is more than just a resource for information. It is a constant companion interwoven into their daily lives. With hate offending and extremists having an ever growing presence online, this study provides a timely insight into the psychological processes surrounding hate offending and the variety of ways that hate producers and consumers use the Internet.

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