

Hate Communities in Cyber Space

The expansion and diversification of internet services have brought about online discussion groups to connect with each other and form social networks to exchange communication and other types of relationships. The communicators are common people employing their time for interconnecting in the cyber world for intercommunication. Being in a public activity- purposeful and interactive-thus a part of internet is recreated by them as cyber sphere where opinions are expressed and new ones are made. The technology of internet has provided opportunities to shrink spaces and get in touch with each other without moving places. How they put, what they express, whatsoever - their ideas, views, and emotions connect them with each other beyond all preset limits and conventional norms of behaving. It is a free world in pretty real sense when it is a cyber world. People who inter-communicate on this plane are evolving into an open society accessible to everybody. The participants are from all walks of life representing a cross section of members almost from all countries. Then there are hi-tech service providers to facilitate virtual participation.

In order to gauge the not so benign expressions of the frequent cyber visitors, we selected some samples of activity of discussion groups thriving on internet services that were formed or have developed to express hate. Using Immersion Method to participate and study, two of us joined a couple of discussion groups, which centred on hate, and established ourselves as regular members.

Over time, we found out that some of these communications were fruitful, entertaining, and informative and on occasions provided and sought cooperation too. Routine and normal cyber facts of human interaction appeared to be without any pathology. This however was not all that happened to keep the discussions going. The study observed 'threads' of the members of hate communities and followed the designs and patterns of their 'narratives' that weaved the hatred. Samples of threads and entailing messages were chosen on the basis of their commonality, novelty of hate idea or expression and frequency of exchanges between the haters and those being hated.

The most revealing fact was that there was not much to account for the innocuousness about the people who frequently were engaged into raising issues, joining issues, issuing rejoinders on a singular central point of discussion in cyber sphere – hate. We further found out that the online groups' discussions actively centred on blame game, abuses and at times indulged into extreme forms of holding out threats. In intent and purpose, the group evolved into a hate community (a communal being) for expressing hatred against individuals, groups, communities and even nations. They have been found out to be spreading hatred against religions, ideologies, cultures and peoples not merely as 'gossip' but quoted texts and modern media sources to substantiate their narratives as 'facts'. But everything happened in cyber space.

Internet circulates people's opinions instantly and turns on more ways to communicate reactions globally enabling with safe mode of exchanges between remote and disparate populations. Be it personal or private opinions, pro or anti ideas that are assembled online with new found boardroom wisdom to communicate hatred

and strong dislikes, they are no longer restricted to acquaintances but involve majority people who are or might be unknown to one and another as real beings although their presence is observed and felt because of their pushed on viewpoint. In many cases the real pushers could be hiding behind pseudonyms as we suspected during our participation. The practice was so much easy for anyone to publish mind material through online discussion groups and succeeded to catch wide attention without involving any significant expenditure.

The great divide is getting wider between entities of 'we', those who are cyber followers of the 'thread' and thus start or evolve into a Hate Community and the 'others', those being hated tooth and nail as they adhere to a different religion, ethnicity, politics, nation state even gender or the colour of skin to cite the most glaring exemplars. Although religious stereotypes and prejudices topped the list in our observation but alarm bell started ringing when we found out 'fundamentalism', 'extremism' and 'fascism' and even Nazism gradually occupying significant space in cyber sphere. Interestingly the oxymoron phenomenon happened that showed the formation of the community was due to the technological (opportunity) addition of some people only to initiate and/or reinforce the divisions with many others. The wings of internet are thus now used to fly high and low to search the prey.

As if to add insult to injury the internet further provides raw material in the form of news and events and its search engines supply other information which the community members processed to produce more hate.

Different countries have different levels of tolerance corresponding to laws of the respective lands but in the cyber space the laws are ignored as the online hateful posts have unrestricted flow. But in some countries judicial cases have been filed in courts against such 'unlawful' hatred much out of mark from reality and truth.

How the community sustains? How do the people convert into digital haters and spread hate with electric speed? Who is being hated?

There is free recruitment (joining) policy but continuity is exclusively on the basis of like-mindedness of members. Some of the profiles are checked and verifications made. Anything could be expressed but the moderator of the discussion group keeps a close watch on the utterances, modifies, and brings everything to fall in line with the hate thread. Whosoever deflects or pushes 'the rationality' or any alternative rationalization is finally, after few warnings, ex-communicated. In fact the person was put on unknowingly; some might be smart enough to know the policy, on probation before getting the permanent membership. Another action that has been seen is haters keep a watch on other communities so that the hated might not start discussing opposing views online somewhere else. If that is done they try either to overpower the hated/defenders by arguments and hate speech or to ban such discussions recouring to tools already present in discussion/networking websites. They also invite others with similar outlook to counter the later and as an spontaneous reaction others also start actions against the hated.

The community depends on common targets to be hated by all and of course for the target every member is allowed to innovate, supply new facts from media, history or otherwise and strengthen the argument of the thread but the common and minimum denominator is to maintain hatred through posts. Personal experiences could be quoted in messages. This is not a game where a neutral referee audits between two

parties and declares the winner but rather a monotonous long drawn, repetitive mongering goes on and on where all WMDs are thrown in the open space (cyber). A sample of message contents, analysed by us, showed 'holier than thou' attitude, 'the others are responsible for our sufferings', 'the history was rewritten to malign our people' kind of messages building up a thread of hate.

The people, who harboured hate, released their emotion through internet services against the hated who were outta there if not in the group and got applauds. The messages gained momentum and became collective consciousness where finally the alternate arguments were weeded away as profane. In cyber world the fate was predictable. The people not known to be practising crime fell in line to distribute the seeds of hatred in a cyber reality where they thrived as hate community, free from counter-insurgencies. Among the hate communities in cyber space, the job satisfaction or the sense of achievement is unique for the victorious. To hate is an end unto itself: "I exist to hate and the happiness that I derive is the victory. We are a group in the cyber world because we share a combination of hate arguments, accusations, abuses, hues and cries, blames pulp fiction against a set of common targets so much required that so naturally makes us a legitimate authority because we are a community almost divine!" Is the hate community packaging evilness lurking in the hearts of loads of people from student to office goers, housewives to online callers, hiding their real identity, betraying emotions spinning hate or there are professionals involved to brainwash gullible? Individually or in one-to-one interaction, these people could be quite ordinary with balanced self having no ambition to be bad or to personally harm somebody. It would be outrageous to call them an infantry on war. Their like-mindedness or more truly their 'dislike'-mindedness becomes a base of exciting identity when they are sensitized as belonging to the community. Hate spinning, so far understood to be airing pent-up feelings, prejudices, stereotypes, heard or felt experiences, is now a virtual power exercise to target others' religions, faiths, ethnicity, identity, belief systems, legends, heroes and prophets, skin, gender, ideology, and scientific temper. In the cyber sphere, the progress of social sphere is also annihilated through the hate version of critical construct.

Key Terms:

Although an *online community* can be referred to as a group of people who may or may not communicate via the internet for example a newsgroup where a discussion about a particular subject is written to a central internet site and then from there is distributed to the members. Most of the members subscribe to such newsgroups through their emails and then it depends on them whether they respond to it or not making it a comparatively slow process of interaction at times. In general terms it can be used to refer to social groups interacting through the internet. Different online communities have different levels of interaction and participation and this ranges from electronic mailing lists which are generally found to be informational or adding comments to a blog or message Here primarily we have studied online communities where messages can be read in real time as soon as they are submitted to the community and then can invite instant reaction from readers.

A *discussion board* is also known by other names such as discussion forum, online group, and online forum is a term used to refer to any virtual bulletin board where users can share and discuss information and ideas. Many websites offer such forums where a member or user can leave messages and also can expect responses to his/her messages.

A *thread* is a term used for a collection of posts on a particular topic. It starts with the submission of an initial message by a member and then reciprocal messages by others. The set of all the responses in a newsgroup, mailing list or discussion board, starting from an initial post is referred as an online thread.

In most of the cultures *evil* refers to describe thoughts and actions that bring a certain harm (directly or indirectly) from a single entity to multiple entities like affecting situation or masses. It can be seen as creating chaos or nuisance in peaceful and constructive activities of life. Evil can take many forms to cause harm to an individual or a group and can be best represented in the human society in the form of hatred. Evil when coupled with hatred tries to express itself. In the present scenario Internet has developed as a cheaper means of not only freedom of expression of evil ideas but also its propagation. Whatever form an evil thought can take, be it jealousy, violence, terrorism, international relations etc., and the hatred it represents, internet is the only modern medium where it can travel and accessed freely among the hate-mongers and the hated all over the world. It has become all the more easy to express evil views by the presence of numerous discussion groups that develop into hate communities although not necessarily they were formed for this purpose.

What is *hate community*? Whose text or narrative constructs such words, language which is abusive, involves deceptive reasoning to influence others and to add new recruits to ones own prejudices or beliefs against an individual or a group and that necessarily intends harm directly or indirectly or verbal. Expresses anger, cursing, swearing, emotionally charged statements, most of the times subjective, outcry of war, offence and defence. Most populated hate community is religious. The hiatus between religion and hate is a strange relation which is computer mediated. Hate community is formed not only for the purpose to diminish the hated but also to propagate beliefs and get new recruits to generate a stronger solidarity. One of its main purpose is perpetuation. The discussion that starts as implicit hate gradually takes the form of verbally expressing as much hate as possible like abuses etc.

By Dr. Manjeet Chaturvedi*, Ishan ** and Ishita ***

* Professor of Sociology,
Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, India
Email: manjeetchaturvedi@yahoo.com

** 3rd year student, Integrated B.Tech. (Honours) and M.Tech. in Biotechnology and Biochemical Engineering, Indian Institute Of Technology, Kharagpur, India
Email: ishan_iitkgp@yahoo.com

*** Educational Advisor, Robert Kennedy College, Zurich, Switzerland
Email: ishita@rkc.edu

