

Hate speech: characteristics and determinants. A study of the Polish population.

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Abstract

Hate speech, an extreme form of derogatory language, is increasingly prevalent in contemporary social discourse, particularly online. This study examined the emotional characteristics of hate speech and its psychological determinants in a sample of 200 Polish adults (98 women, 102 men; age range 18-78 years). Participants described emotional reactions to seven photographs depicting various social groups and completed measures of personality traits. Hate speech use was operationalized as utterances on minority groups expressing anger combined with at least one additional negative emotion (fear, contempt or disgust). Our study confirmed that anger and contempt are key emotions that constitute hate speech. The anger expressed by the participants correlated positively with dogmatism, as did contempt, which was also correlated with intolerance, political views, authoritarianism, an orientation to social dominance, anxiety as a trait, the need for cognitive closure, and an external locus of control. These findings are consistent with the literature on the determinants of hate speech, although our attempts to profile hate speech users through intergroup comparisons did not yield satisfactory results. The social groups particularly affected by hateful comments in Poland were Catholic clergy (anger + contempt), opponents of abortion (anger + contempt) and people with obesity (contempt + disgust). In future research, it would be useful to pay particular attention to these social groups in the context of their negative evaluation and its psychological determinants.