



Coimisiún na hÉireann um Chearta
an Duine agus Comhionannas
Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission

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Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission

Ireland's **national equality body** and **national human rights institution** (dual mandate)

Protect and promote human rights and equality in Ireland and build a culture of respect for human rights, equality and intercultural understanding in the state.

Independent from government institutionally and in practice, with functions and legal powers defined in statute.



Commission of **15 human rights and equality experts**, appointed by President Michael D. Higgins following an open competition – accounting directly to the Irish Parliament

IHREC's Policy and Research Team



Research Programme:

- Partnership with Irish academy and research community, including with Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) and Irish Research Council (IRC)
- Support and funding of innovative research initiatives which contribute to evidence base on human rights and equality issues
- Hate Track project identified and supported through co-funding partnership with **Irish Research Council**, on the theme of interculturalism



Hate Track

Tracking And Monitoring Racist Speech Online

Eugenia Siapera, Elena Moreo, Jiang Zhou



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IRISH RESEARCH COUNCIL
An Chomhairle um Thaighde in Éirinn

DCU School of Communications, Institute for Future Media and Journalism (IFMJ), Anti-Bullying Centre (ABC), and Insight Centre for Computer Analytics, School of Computing.



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Policy Context for support of Hate Track



- Significant socio-legal academic work on current state of Irish legislative and policy approach to hate crime, including hate speech and expression
- Extensive calls for reform of hate crime and speech legislation in Ireland by lawyers, academics and civil society
- Data gap: poor systems for recording of hate incidents by State
- Increasing role of social media in propagating or amplifying racism and other toxic discourses and wider concerns about the quality of the **digital public sphere**.

Hate Track Aims



- Develop a methodological tool for the identification, collection, and tracking of 'racist' material on public Facebook and Twitter pages in Ireland.
- Generate preliminary dataset of material over three months.
- Identify, and better understand, the range of 'racist' discourse circulating online of Ireland.

Multi-disciplinary approach

Combining social scientific, qualitative methodology with computer science.



- Does not rely on legal definitions of hate speech, as per other initiatives (demos, hatemeter). Instead, social scientists conducted qualitative analysis through interviews with NGOs, stakeholders, academics, journalists to explore experiences and understanding of this discourse.
- This qualitative research fed into a manually collected corpus of online materials from Facebook and Twitter – 600 ‘racist’ and 600 ‘neutral’ forming a ‘ground truth’ to train the Hate track algorithm

How Hate Track Works



- Hate Track algorithm used 'ground truth' to scrape and classify larger dataset of 6000+ entries
- Researchers conducted manual review for accuracy and rating (irony etc). Machine learning then honed accuracy
- Deep neural network technique: Long Short-Term Memory
- Classification accuracy of 75%



| Jobs | | | | | |
|--------------------------|----|---------------|-------------------------|----------|---------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | id | status | created | type | query |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 44 | complete d | 2017-11-30 17:25:1 3 | keywords | cyrus christie |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 43 | complete d | 2017-11-16 15:45:1 6 | comments | 137576076262825_168977... |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 42 | complete d | 2017-11-15 16:24:3 3 | account | @MohamedPorcine |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 41 | complete d | 2017-11-15 14:53:4 0 | account | @irelandaboveall |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 40 | complete d | 2017-11-15 14:48:2 7 | keywords | ragheads |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 39 | complete d | 2017-10-27 13:47:0 9 | keywords | cuck |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 38 | complete d | 2017-10-26 15:50:4 6 | comments | 45441411157_1015515614... |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 37 | complete d | 2017-10-26 15:30:0 8 | comments | 137576076262825_166532... |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 36 | complete d | 2017-10-26 15:17:5 9 | comments | 101837350443339_106933... |

Operation

Choose a method

Choose a method

Twitter scraping

Facebook scraping



Racially Loaded Toxic Content

high probability low probability

< 1 >

| <input type="checkbox"/> | score ⬆️⬆️ | text | like ⬆️⬆️ | share ⬆️⬆️ |
|--------------------------|---------------|--|-----------|------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 1.00 | Tommy is routinely called racist for saying it how it abso lutely is...you won't see the MSM calling out Muslim rap e gangs and other cultural enrichment until after they h ave happened ..Tommy is just fighting for a west that's free of Islamists | 16 | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 1.00 | Conservatives, Trump supporters, anyone considered rig ht getting censored but yet dont see any of the left wing nutcases anti white racist virtue signalling nutjobs gettin g censored. People can call for Trump to be beheaded g ets thousands of RTs one person mentions islam after a n Islamic terrorist attack he gets banned. | 6 | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 0.73 | Mans a cunt. Should have his head removed from his bo dy, nevermind the blue tick from his Twitter | 14 | |

Operation

Set As: Select

reserve selections ☐ OFF

Save

Discourse Analysis



- Dataset was used to analyse and better understand dynamics of the range of racist discourse circulating online in Ireland, including:
 - Racially loaded reportaires used
 - Communities targeted
 - Types of poster

N.B.

Some important clarifications and caveats



- Approach of study mindful of live discussion re censorship and freedom of expression
- Focus: co-articulation of racism with social media.
- A tool for collection and classification. Monitoring and diagnosis, not flagging or removal.
- Experimental in approach, and limited in what it examines. Facebook and Twitter, while enjoying wide use in Ireland, cannot be viewed as reflective of wider currents of opinion and discourse in the digital public sphere.

Terminology

‘Racially loaded toxic content’



- Defining content as ‘racist’ is difficult
- Guided by informants in qualitative interviews, decision to use term “**Racially loaded toxic contents**” to capture content characterised by varying degrees of toxicity.
- Contents that **convey messages that entrench polarisation; justify the exclusion, stigmatisation, and subjugation of particular groups; and reinforce exclusivist notions of national belonging and identity.**

Racially Loaded Content Online

Trends and reportaires

- Crude racism and coded racism:
 - Insults and profanity vs 'race neutral' coded language of values, ethnicity, appeals to common sense
- Banal/ common sense racism - widespread
- Discourse coalesces around notion of Irishness, and narrow articulations of Irishness: #WeAreIrish
- Debatability of racism – 'oversensitive', 'culture of victimhood'



Racially Loaded Content Online

Trends and reportoirs (Cont'd)



- Clear patterns of **shared language between international far-right racism and toxic discourse in Irish digital public sphere.** (globalism, white genocide, etc)
- Feed on fake news, bogus stats, dishonest framings of news events
- Identitarian ideologies – linked to narrow notion of Irishness. Presented as neutral, pseudoscientific.
- Debatability of racism – ‘oversensitive’, ‘culture of victimhood’

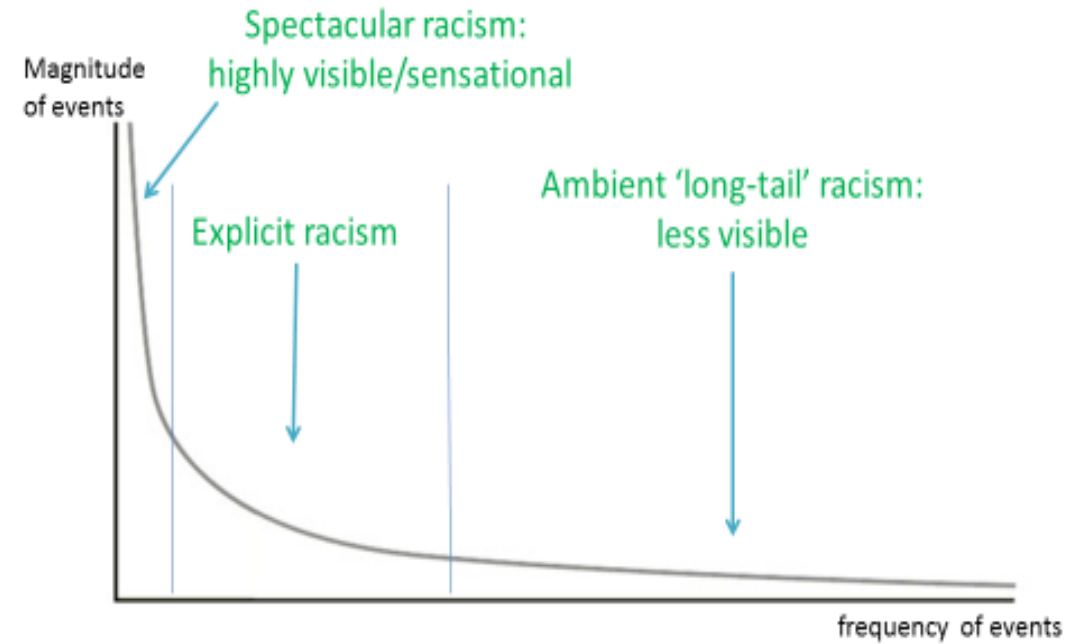
Racially Loaded Content Online

Trends and reportaires (Cont'd)

- Expressions of racism online are regularly punctuated with misogynist, homophobic and transphobic discourse.
- Social media affordances and tropes lend themselves to plastic and coded expression of toxic content. EG: visual memes, ironic use hashtags such as #religionofpeace ; #refugeeswelcome
- Feeds into 'long tail' of received, banal 'ambient' racism (Sharma, 2017).



Modelling Web Racism:
power law distribution



Trigger events and the Role of the Media



- Traditional media outlets' Facebook and Twitter accounts play important roll in channelling racially toxic content
- EG: Trigger events: Dundalk murder story; recent Irish Presidential Election
- Traditional/ mainstream media's approach to framing news stores has impact on likely discourse

Communities targeted



- **Refugees and immigrants:**
 - Access to welfare/ moral deservedness/ good v bad immigrant
- **Islamophobia:**
 - clash of civilisation narratives/ disgust/ libel of sexual predation
- **Anti-Traveller** and Anti-Roma racism
- **Anti-Semitism** – age old tropes re globalisation, ‘hidden hand’ etc
- **Anti-black** racism: dehumanising, libel of sexual predation
- **Mixed race/** second generation Irish

Who is posting?



- 'Shitposters' / and trolls
- Cultural racism. Focus on diversity, Islam, migrants, all seemingly responsible for the cultural and ethnic genocide of 'Irish natives'. Language of Plantatin – peculiar to Ireland.
- Identitarians: Separated from the above category as they are part of organised racist groups, forging links with right-wing groups in the UK and elsewhere and pursuing a certain political agenda
- Contrarian/libertarian posters: Use a more sophisticated language (especially dark irony). Alpha-male rhetoric, and have a clear and ugly misogynist streak. Media savvy, and sometimes media personalities.
- Everyday, casual, or banal racism. This broad category encapsulates a wide range of online utterances against migrants, multiculturalism, diversity, Islam, women. Rarely make reference to 'race' or use demeaning and offensive language but still routinise racialising meaning.

Next?



- DCU Researchers: exploring application to online toxic discourses on misogyny, homophobia and transphobia.
- IHREC: fostering a more respectful digital public sphere— further exploration as part of new strategic plan.
- 28 November in Dublin: *A More Social Media* - www.ihrec.ie



- Democracies rely on a healthy public sphere, which is open to all, and which enables people to present, deliberate and exchange views on matters of interest, thereby formulating an opinion’
(Habermas, *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 1991)



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