

The read and write web allows cost-free production of content and the social web offers easy ways to exchange information within networks. This can lead to an impressive exchange of ideas and new forms of collaboration to make the world a better place. But it also opens a whole new dimension to exploit the Internet for sinister ends: disseminating hatred, extremism and discrimination.

Hate groups

One example is represented by [hate groups](#), which make intensive use of Web 2.0 applications to establish their presence on the Internet to campaign and attract supporters. The topics, which can be grouped as racism, fanaticism or extremism, vary widely. Their [strategies more than often overlap](#), e.g. Pseudo-Science, Historical Revisionism, Misinformation or Hate Symbols.

The phenomenon is not new, as [Chip Berlet points out in his paper](#): “When Hate Went Online”. As early as 1984 small computer bulletin board systems were used to spread racism. But through the social web these messages can be spread virally much easier and to a wider audience using online platforms such as Youtube, Myspace or Facebook.

In a [study dated May 2009, the Wiesenthal Center](#) identified some 10,000 hate-related websites, games and other internet postings. According to their study 30% of new postings on Facebook have an extremist connotation.

Social network websites “provide opportunities for people to react to social issues of all kinds in new and creative ways. Some of those will be troubling, because social networking sites seem to evade existing structures of control and regulation” ([Christine Hine in Wired](#)). New groups, supporting whichever kind of issue or cause, can be quickly created to win followers by online propaganda. The [Guardian writes](#), “The net is reducing the cost of complaining to zero and allowing waves of outrage to crash through cyberspace.

When these groups cannot maintain their space on popular social networking sites, or are simply shut down, they build their own spaces. “At the other extreme are niche networks, less well-known than Facebook, that unite the sort of

extremists whose activities are restricted by many governments but hard to regulate when they go global" ([Economist](#)). These spaces often act as echo chambers, where " [ideas or beliefs are amplified or reinforced by transmission inside such a space](#) ". Co-existing groups of related opinions are the result. They connect with each other but not with people having different perspectives.

Cyber Bullying

Another challenge to the social web is [cyber bullying](#) , which usually happens when " [the Internet, cell phones or other devices are used to send or post text or images intended to hurt or embarrass an individual](#) ".

Harassing happens mostly through emails, chatting or videos shot by mobile phones. Cyber bullying is in use amongst youngsters to stigmatize or harass a person. Recently, [a teenage girl in the United Kingdom was the first to be jailed for cyber bullying](#) . The girl posted death threats over Facebook. According to [CyberBullying.us "33 percent of youth have been victimized by online bullying](#) " in the USA.

Therefore, public pressure on Google or Facebook is rising for example to protect children from cyber bullying. Recently, [a court, in Italy, found Google managers guilty of allowing the publishing of a bullying video on YouTube](#) . The problem is that companies behind social network sites cannot police all uploads and rely on their users to report misuse.

The dilemma is that tighter control would hinder the open culture of the social web, which made it so successful and dynamic in the first place. Also important to notice are the many positive cases for [digital activism](#) , for example in the field of human rights.

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