

Conference

“Hate Speech in Digital & Social Media”

Amman – Jordan

26 – 27 of April 2016

Media and the Emergence of a New Form of Hatred: A General Background

The practice of spreading hatred through the media goes back to the early days of mass media. Politicians used this tactic in their conflicts and wars, as demonstrated in the two world wars during which political, religious, national or socio-cultural considerations were used to stir hatred and counter incitement.

Such practices spread widely in the Balkans in the nineties of the last century, when the media was used to mobilize the masses and prompt resentment during the war itself, its aftermath and at election time. An even graver example is the unscrupulous performance of local media outlets in Rwanda, that is said to have brought on a genocide that qualifies as one of history’s worst hate wars ever claiming an excess of 800.000 lives.

A broad, global discussion was conducted about the role media outlets play in producing hate speech, and the role media outlets play in transmitting the calls for hatred political leaders voice, and whether the two roles can be distinguished. During the early stages of media reform, the line separating professionals from amateurs is blurred. This is when hate speech becomes a way to attract the public to media outlets, leading some of them to follow that path, or even to seek it out. The presence of hate speech has dramatically increased over the last two decades due to communication technology, and the emergence of digital and social media. These tools have increased the number of participants in the communication process, and in the volume of information, ideas, attitudes and emotions that media outlets turn out in exchange for increasing the volume of interaction between them and the users.

With the onset of Arab revolutions in 2011, the media contributed to the dissemination of incitement and hate speech. Social media, specifically, spilled additional oil on the fire. A variety of factors contributed to enflaming hate speech, making the new media environment in the Arab world a favorable one for this phenomenon.



The most important of these factors is represented in the political changes taking place in the Arab world. This is a complex transformation process involving overlapping political, cultural and historical factors as well as economic and social ones. It is a long process encompassing many actors with conflicting interests, that are difficult to bring together by means of peaceful tools. Furthermore, on the one side, this transformation has come at a time when extremist groups employing new technologies to urge people to hate and commit murder and genocide are flourishing. On the other hand, issues related to media development in the Arab world regarding media freedom and independence, pluralism and professionalism are still unresolved.

As a result of the emergence of said new technologies, individuals and groups that are not state affiliated, and subscribe to extremist ideologies are now able to use digital tools and social media to craft attitudes and beliefs, and to incite violence on a global scale. The subversive use of media spearheaded by extremist groups can be best seen in Arab communities where it has been employed to spread venomous political and cultural ideas, and to provoke hatred and violence.

Extremist groups also use digital and social media tools to recruit youth to their cause, taking advantage of ignorance, intolerance and divisions within communities. They also exploit these tools to spread violence and civil war, and to reduce opportunities for achieving concord. These tools are similarly invested in spreading hatred against religious and ethnic minorities, and the danger of employing them against migrants and refugees is on the rise.

In 2013, the United Nations launched the Rabat Plan of Action “on the prohibition of advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence.” That being said, the most important steps taken by the civil society and the media was to set up the Arab alliance against hate speech.

In the same regard, the most notable organizations advocating for freedom of expression adopted the “Camden Principles on Freedom of Expression and Equality”. Put together by experts from different cultures, these principles call on all countries to adopt legislation prohibiting calls for hatred on national, ethnic, religious or cultural bases, which translate into incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence.



The Camden Principles clarified that the word "hate" refers to strong and irrational feelings of contempt and hostility towards the target group. The Principles further explained that positive promotion of identity (advocating for it or calling to represent it) does not constitute hate speech, whereas publically expressing contempt for the identities of others may constitute an invitation to hatred, and generate hostile feelings. Amid the prevalent anxiety and chaos, we all need to be more aware so as not to reach a point where freedom of expression is confiscated in order to curtail the proliferation of hatred. We should equally be wary not to allow hate speech to spew its poison everywhere in the name of freedom of expression.

On the premise that democratic transition is the guarantee to eliminate all forms of violent incitement, media tools, specifically social media tools in the Arab world, need to develop a new perspective that limits the possibility of hatred infiltrating it. This can only be achieved through self-regulation and increased capacity building, while at the same time acknowledging that dealing with social media in an effective manner is linked to the ability of disseminating digital media literacy.

Conference Objectives

1. Provide a platform for dialogue and exchange of experiences between experts and media professionals about the reality of hate speech in the Arab media, in particular digital and social media.
2. Recognize the reality and implications of hate speech in the content produced by Arab users on social media networks.
3. Identify the sequence of hate speech and its influencing factors on social media.
4. Call for the development of digital media literacy curricula to curb the spread of hate in Arab content on digital media networks.



Conference Themes

- First:** Hate speech and the Arab media in the post Arab revolution phase.
- Second:** Themes and characteristics of hatred on digital and social media in the Arab world.
- Third:** Content and hate speech produced by the Arab public: political, cultural and economic factors.
- Fourth:** The role of digital media literacy in reducing hate speech.
- Fifth:** A new form of hatred: case studies from the Arab world.
- Sixth:** Ethics and professional rules in the face of hate speech: going back to basics.
- Seventh:** Legislative and regulatory frameworks to curb hate speech.

Instructions for Participants

- Those interested in participating are required to submit a synopsis of their paper to the Jordan Media Institute (JMI) for review no later than 28 of March 2016.
- Participants will receive an answer from JMI concerning their paper within a week from the date of submission.
- Conference languages: Arabic and English.
- The venue for the conference will be in Amman.
- The organizers will arrange for and cover room and board costs for participants from other governorates and abroad.
- Once reviewed, research papers will be published in a book.