Social Research Call 2020
Selected projects

Title: Vigilant citizens against hate: How to counter bystander apathy and increase citizens' commitment against online hate speech?

Acronym: VigilHate

Project leader: Isabel R. Pinto

Host organisation: University of Porto, Portugal

Main purpose of the project: Bystanders' apathy to online hate speech contributes to legitimizing and perpetuating its occurrence. VigilHate aims to inspect determinants to stimulate citizens' moral self-regulation towards monitoring and reporting online hate speech. With VigilHate, we expect to contribute to a responsible social media usage concerned with the respect for human dignity.

Design/methodology/approach: VigilHate involves: the creation and validation of a scale measuring bystander attitudes facing online hate speech; a survey to comprehend bystanders' apathy facing online hate speech; an experiment testing the efficacy of 5 different mechanisms of stimulating moral self-regulation; a lab experiment testing how moral self-regulation actually increases bystanders' reporting.

Potential results: VigilHate will assess how pro-social behaviour determinants can be effective in stimulating bystanders' moral self-regulation and leading them to report online hate speech. Results shall be conceptualized as recommendations about additional strategies to combat online misbehaviour through empowering civil society about its responsibility in reporting and countering online hate speech.

Social relevance of the research: Governments' and social media corporations' efforts to detect and combat online hate speech seem insufficient so far, since the phenomenon appears to be growing. By failing to report online misbehaviour, bystanders indirectly contribute to legitimize and perpetuate its occurrence. Such passive behaviour represents, itself, a discriminatory practice against vulnerable groups.

Originality/value of the project: Prior programs to combat online hate speech focus their attention on the victims and/or on the offenders. Little, if any attention has been directed to bystanders. By examining determinants to stimulate citizens' moral self-regulation, VigilHate supports the perspective that all users are responsible to prevent and combat online hate speech.