



After Sex, Cancer, etc. Here Comes HATE

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Hello secret readers!

You clicked in record numbers last month when we reported that the new magic way for Internet gurus (read publicists and journalists) to attract audiences was to use those "magnetic" words – fat, green, cancer, sex, secret, etc. – in their introductions or headlines (TDN Aug 11, 2008).

Well, here is the next stage: "Hatred"

While you were clicking, more sinister forces – militants, terrorists, social refuse, reactionaries and even young people, etc. – were working on stoking hatred between countries, races, religions, ethnic groups and individuals.

Sometimes they work alone to build "e-hatred." Other times, the cyber zealots work on behalf of their governments for propaganda, sabotage, territorial claims and historical symbols.

A study published last May by the Simon Wiesenthal Center, a Jewish Human Rights group, found a 30 percent increase last year in the number of sites that foment hatred and violence.

It found around 8,000 well-equipped sites that do this. Not just those hacking contests between Turks and Armenians or Serbs and Albanians or American or European sites that are pro-Tibet and were defaced, smashed by China this summer during the Olympics.

Examples for hatred

-- There are "suicide bomber" games that pit a contestant against a generic Muslim (U.S.A.)

-- There is "Border Patrol," another shooting gallery game that invites you to zap illegal Mexican immigrants crossing the border (U.S.A.)

-- There are hardline Russian nationalists using blogs to raise funds for documentaries to present the Soviet Communist record in good light and discredit such ventures as a Latvian documentary that compares Communism to fascism (Russia).

-- Neo-Nazis in Germany are trying to intimidate left-wing politicians and activists by publishing their names, photos and addresses on Web sites often accompanied by threats. (Germany, State of Hesse)

One Web site in Germany mocks the sister of an anti-Nazi activist for frequently spending her holidays in Turkey. Another one publishes details of the love life of their victims or insults members of their families.

-- Slovak nationalists display a map of Europe without Hungary (Slovakia).

-- Anti-Roma (gypsies) poster competitions flourish (Hungary and Italy).

-- Some campaigns emigrate from medium to medium using fresh layers of falsehood. Blog posts and mobile phone messages give signals for attacks against minorities during crises (Kenya and Russia).

-- Hatebook (an actual name) allows you to upload blackmail material or publish lies, get the latest gossip from your enemies and friends, use videos on your hate profile, get hate points from disturbing people who live, study or work around you.

-- Carrefour, the French retail chain with more than 100 stores in China, became a hate target for protests, boycotts and Internet attacks because France gave an unruly welcome to the Olympic torch, with the Frenchmen trying to snatch the flame from a Chinese. (China)

All this fits in with a whole new world of bits, where the growing view is that "opinionated news" is becoming more popular, especially among the young. Fox TV is the market leader for that among U.S. cable networks, so CNN is growing more opinionated.

In a recent report, the U.K.'s media regulator OFCOM suggested impartiality may now be seen by young people and ethnic minorities as repellent and may contribute to disengagement.

So now, the days are gone when people argued if Freddie Mercury, the rock star, was Iranian, Parsi or Azerbaijani or whether humus was part of Israeli cuisine. Now those arguments have moved to the famous mainstream site, Wikipedia. Instead, now the battle has moved to "social networks" that make it easier to publish hate material and use maps and video sharing. You can join "Belgium does not exist" on Facebook or "Abkhazia is not Georgia," "I hate Pakistan" or "Kosovo is Serbia."

There are some notable exceptions: Groups have been formed to promote friendship between Turkey and Greece or Palestinians and Israelis.

Finally last week, the people and the politicians decided to start to fight back. The video sharing service YouTube banned submissions that involved "inciting others to violence" following criticism from conservative U.S. Senator Joseph Lieberman that the site was too open to terrorist groups disseminating militant propaganda.

Earlier in 2008, YouTube videos with al-Qaeda (and affiliated groups) logos had been removed. But the company resisted taking down a whole sector dedicated to graphic violence and speech.

Furthermore, since the volume of videos uploaded are equivalent to hundreds of thousands everyday, the company had to rely on users to flag videos that violate community guidelines rather than monitor it itself.

Inciting to violence

In any case, YouTube and Google have announced they will be removing such videos "inciting others to violence" depicting such events as attacks on U.S. soldiers and Afghanistan and other material considered on a case by case basis.

So the argument about "civil rights" (free speech) versus demands to crack down on terrorism is tilting in the restrictive direction now.

"We review our content guidelines a few times a year and we take the communities' input seriously," said a YouTube spokesman.

But this is not always easy. Neo-Nazi sites that appear to be located in Nuremberg, for example, and sell Nazi memorabilia or post photos of anti-Nazi demonstrators are actually located in the United States, not Germany.

So dear readers, while you continue to click on those magic key words (secret: sex with fat green people causes cancer), please do your bit (or bite) to discourage the new waves of hatred wafting through the web. Just do not click on any anything that is e-hatred.

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