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Dynamics of Cyber Hate in Social Media: A Comparative Analysis of Anti-Muslim Movements in the Czech Republic and Germany

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Abstract

In this paper, we address the issue of cyber hate in two selected cases of social movements from Central Europe, namely Pegida from Germany and Initiatives against Islam from the Czech Republic. Based on the Intergroup Contact Theory and previous research of cyber hate, we focus on the users of pages related to the above-mentioned movements on Facebook. For this purpose we use samples of user comments which are presented on the Facebook pages of the above-mentioned movements and we identify and measure the percentage of hateful comments, their targeting and trigger events by using a qualitative coding method. The research results show that in cyberspace, hate comments are more frequent in the case of the Czech Initiative against Islam. The targeting of these comments is very similar in both countries and we are able to classify immigrants and refugees, Muslims in general, governments in both countries, political elites (EU, USA), and people who are in favour of immigrants or refugees (most often from NGOs) as individual targets. Trigger events are linked across both countries and the largest cyber hate instigators are incidents in which refugees and immigrants are presented as perpetrators, as well as issues of asylum policy in general.

Keywords: Cyber hate, Online Hate Speech, Anti-Muslim movements, Czech Republic, Germany, Comparison, Social Media, Facebook, Analysis, Trigger Events.

Introduction

The “refugee crisis” and recent terrorist attacks in Europe are connected with the rise of anti-Muslim and anti-immigration movements around Europe. Online manifestations (Awan, 2014) and offline hate as well as anti-Muslim hate crimes are becoming more frequent (Awan, 2012). In this paper, we focus on cases of cyber hate in Germany and the Czech Republic connected with anti-refugees and anti-immigration protests. The issues of Islam, Muslims and the so-called “refugee crisis” are very topical in both countries and are

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shaping public discussions; however in many cases the discussions are limited to hateful comments, even including statements that we can already classify as hate crimes. Every new Islamic State (IS, ISIS) terrorist attack or militant activity is instrumentalized by anti-Muslim movement supporters to legitimize anti-Muslim attacks (online as well as offline) (Dodd & Williams, 2014).

This paper provides a contribution to the debate about the recognition and measurement of cyber hate in social media based on an explorative case study of anti-Muslim movements in the Czech Republic - represented by the Initiative against Islam (former Block against Islam)³ and in Germany - represented by Pegida.⁴ Though these two countries are in significantly different situations concerning refugees, the movements that oppose immigration have emerged in both countries. These movements use social media as platforms to plan their actions, discuss and link to each other. Based on Intergroup Contact Theory, which will be introduced shortly, the movements against immigrants are expected to differ, as citizens of both selected countries do not have equal opportunities to reduce their prejudices. While in Germany the citizens are often in contact with foreigners due to both the great numbers of refugees which have arrived in the country and to the historically greater migration from Muslim countries, the Czech Republic has significantly fewer.⁵ To verify our assumption that the extent of prejudices towards migrants differs in both countries, we will take a closer look at the expression of hate speech (in our case cyber hate) that is voiced on the pages of the movements as well as to trigger events and targets of hateful comments.

As mentioned, we base our research on Intergroup Contact Theory. The most influential hypothesis within this theory was developed in 1954 by Gordon Allport, who specified the critical situational conditions for intergroup contact to reduce prejudice (Allport, 1954, cited in Pettigrew, 1998). More specifically, Allport claimed that the positive effects of intergroup contact are based on four conditions. These are equal group status in a situation, common goals, intergroup cooperation and the support of the authorities, law or customs (Allport, 1954, cited in Pettigrew, 1998). Pettigrew (2006, p. 751) looked at over 500 earlier conducted studies in a large-scale study, which in parts had come to conflicting conclusions. Pettigrew's research confirmed that contact between groups helps to reduce prejudice, and that this was neither the result of a publication bias, nor of participant selection (Pettigrew, 2006, p. 766).

Some research (King & Sutton, 2013; Awan & Zempi, 2016) focuses on the problem of hate speech/cyber hate in terms of "trigger events". King and Sutton (2013, p. 888) pointed out that the dynamics of cyber hate is related to recent events and that cyber hate is often the result of events which incite retribution from one group to another. In our study, we try to identify these events through the connection between hate comments on Facebook and their framing, which we will identify via the context in which a statement was made.

³ Facebook profile: <https://www.facebook.com/iniciativaprotiislamu/> (in current time is not disposal)

⁴ Facebook profile: <https://www.facebook.com/pegidaevdresden/>

⁵ According to Eurostat, 25 applicants for asylum per 1 million inhabitants were registered in the 2nd quarter of 2016, while in Germany 2275 applicants for asylum per 1 million inhabitants were counted within the same time frame (Eurostat, 2016).

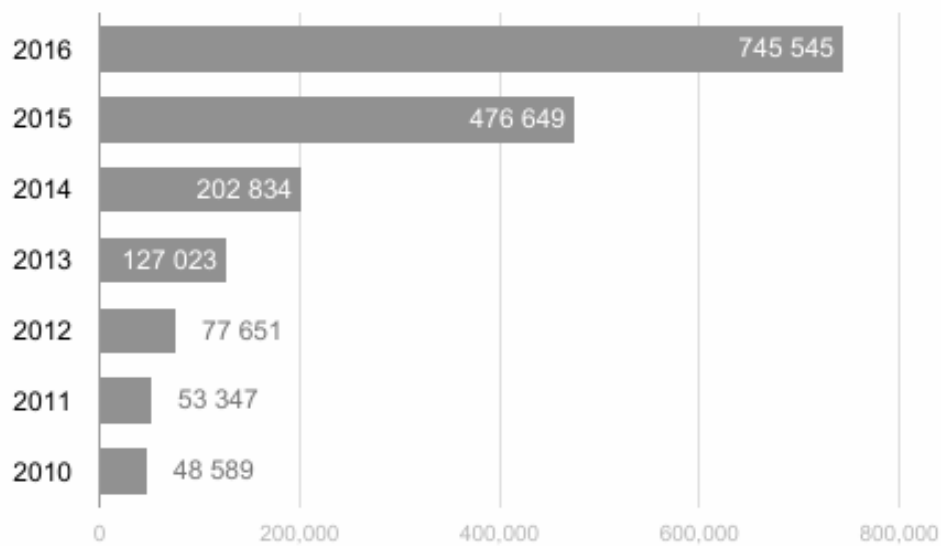
In this context, the research questions for our analysis are:

- *What percentage of hateful comments can be found on both pages?*
- *Who is the target of hateful comments?*
- *Which “trigger events” led to hateful comments on the pages of the movement?*

Based on Intergroup Contact Theory as well as the research of King and Sutton (2013), we expect the opposition towards foreigners to be lower in Germany than in the Czech Republic, as Germans are more likely to be in contact with foreigners and therefore have more opportunities to dismantle prejudice (compare trends of asylum requests in Figure 1 and Figure 2). This contact can also influence the character of cyber hate and the targets of hateful comments, as well as their trigger events – in Germany we can expect concentrated cyber hate around concrete events; in the Czech Republic on the other hand, we expect higher levels of abstraction in both targeting and trigger events.

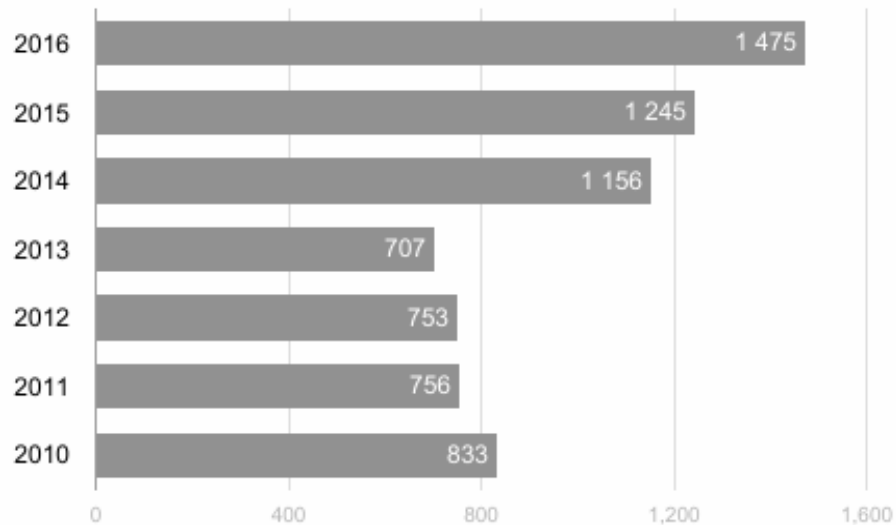
The trend of asylum requests in Germany has greatly increased in the last several years (see Figure 1) in comparison with the Czech Republic, where the increase has been more gradual. The refugees and immigrants in Germany are however not distributed evenly but concentrate in different cities and federal states. High percentages of refugees can be found in Hamburg, Hanover and Bremen as well as in the federal states of Nordrhein-Westfalen, Hessen and Niedersachsen (for more information please see Bundesagentur für Arbeit 2015).

Figure 1: Asylum requests in Germany 2010–2016



Based on data from the Statista (2017)

Figure 2: Asylum requests in Czech Republic 2010-2016



Based on data from the Czech Ministry of Interior (2016) and the Czech Statistical Office (2015)

Our research questions, in short, can clarify the situation connected with cyber hate and can be important for future monitoring and comparison of cyber hate tendencies, which can then be applied by NGOs, governments and other groups which attempt to face the issue of cyber hate. Movements like Pegida and Initiative against Islam use Facebook pages as information and communication channels to spread news and up-to-date information and thus they create an alternative source of information for their supporters. This can be crucial for the character of cyber hate, because the mentioned framing can generate narratives and assign meaning to particular events. The framework suggests what is controversial and what is essential for the actors (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989, p. 143).

Concept of Cyber Hate and Radicalization in Social Media

The spread of the internet to the masses has many benefits, but we can also see several challenges and one of them is online “cyber hate” (Chan & Ghose & Seamans, 2016, p. 381). This problem of cyber hate is in most cases connected with social media like Twitter, Facebook or YouTube (Gerstenfeld, 2013, Awan & Zempi, 2016). However, it is very unclear what can be labelled as “cyber hate” because there are many definitions within the academic, legal and political fields. For example, cyber hate was defined by the Anti-Defamation League as “any use of electronic communications technology to spread anti-Semitic, racist, bigoted, extremist or terrorist messages or information. To these, electronic communications technologies belongs the Internet as well as other computer- and cell phone-based information technologies)” (ADL, 2010, p. 1). In general, all definitions of cyber hate are based on the definition of hate speech or rather hate crime.

We can say that this includes actions or statements aimed at a target (person or group) because of their respective religion, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation etc. and statements calling for violence/persecution or verbally attacking the target (American Psychology Association, 1998; People in Need, 2016). In the concept of cyber hate, we have to focus on the aspect “cyber”, which is connected with spreading hate through modern technologies (technological devices, internet) (Awan & Blakemore, 2012).

This technological aspect, specifically in the form of social media platforms, is important because social media have some characteristics which support radicalization processes. Empirical research (for example Wang et al., 2015) has shown that the rate of mobilization on Facebook is significantly higher than by using email communication. Additionally, Facebook is also more effective for spreading ideologies and targeting potential supporters (Turner, 2013, p. 381). Notably, political actions and organizational capability have become much easier for smaller groups due to social media (Copsey, 2003; Van Aelst & Walgrave, 2002; Cammaerts, 2012). Social media also provide space for the creation of a collective identity, sharing similar opinions and mutual solidarity for a certain view of the world (della Porta & Mosca, 2006, p. 538). At the same time these media offer radical members of society the opportunity to find like-minded individuals and the subsequent discovery that their viewpoint is shared can be a big step in personal radicalization (Post, 2005). Getting back to our research, we will analyse the social media network Facebook (technological aspect) and we will focus on two categories of statements (normative aspect), which are verbal insults and inciting violence/threatening. The first category “verbal insults” includes comments that verbally attack another person or group with defamatory statements. The second category “inciting violence/threatening” includes comments that explicitly mention violent acts (killing, raping, physical attack etc.) which take the form of violent threats or calls for violence.

Context: Cases of Anti-Immigration and Anti-Muslim Movements and Cyber Hate in Germany and Czech Republic

a. Germany

Pegida is the German abbreviation for “Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the Occident” (*Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes*). The movement emerged at the end of 2014 in Dresden, Germany and it held, until roughly the end of 2015, demonstrations every Monday in Dresden. Since the end of 2015, the gatherings of the movement have not been as regular; however they have not stopped completely. As early as its emergence, the movement quickly spread to other German cities as well, with groups which either belonged directly to the original movement or at least had some connection with it. In addition to this local and national dimension, we can also see an international dimension (Schmidt, 2015, p. 17), as there were Pegida movements in other European countries and even in America. The American offshoot of Pegida had nearly 29,000 followers at the beginning of 2017 (Pegida USA), however, there were no reports about actual rallies conducted by this branch and e.g. Pegida Canada had to cancel a planned rally, as the protest against it was too strong (Lindeman, 2015). In other European countries, such as the Czech Republic, Norway and Denmark, rallies with few hundred participants took place, others as for example Belgium, Swiss and Austria reported Facebook groups with a lot of online supporters (Focus, 2015). The movement however did not gain the same influence as in Germany.

Mostly at the outset, Pegida attracted a lot of media and public attention. While Prime Minister Angela Merkel called the supporters of Pegida “people with hatred in their hearts” and appealed to the German citizens to not join the movement (Merkel, 2014, p. 2), Prof. Patzelt from the University of Dresden argued that the concerns of the demonstrators had to be taken seriously (Patzelt, 2015). Other researchers instead concentrated on the basic characteristics of the supporters of the movement; according to Geiges, Marg and Walter, the average age of the supporters of Pegida was 44, more than half of them were married and had children, a 75% majority was employed full time and 2/3 indicated their personal situation as good or very good. Politically, the demonstrators are clearly situated at the right; 47% confirmed to have voted in the last elections for the Alternative for Germany (Alternative für Deutschland, AfD), followed by 24.8% who voted for the Christian Democratic/Social Union (Christlich Demokratische/Soziale Union, CDU/CSU).⁶ Additionally, although 78% support democracy as a general idea, 77% were dissatisfied with democracy as it is conducted in Germany (all data according to Geiges, Marg & Walter, 2015, p. 66-70).

The political position of Pegida was characterized on the one hand by a strong opposition towards the government and its policies and on the other hand by a rejection of immigrants, refugees and foreigners. They were perceived as living at the cost of the German people, as threatening German culture and as not fitting in to Europe. Based on previous research by one of the authors, Pegida can clearly be classified as a populist right movement (Schmidt, 2015, p. 47-48).

Cyber hate in the German legal space can take different forms, for example offenses, defamation or threats, though most relevant in the context of Germany is incitement of the people (*Volksverhetzung*). Incitement of people in Germany is regulated in paragraph 130 of the German criminal code, which states that persons who incite, ask for violence or arbitrariness or harm the human dignity of people or groups based on their race, ethnicity or religion will be punished with imprisonment or a penalty (BDJ, 2016).

A well-known case of incitement of the people in direct connection with Pegida is the incitement case of the Pegida-leader Lutz Bachmann. Bachmann had, according to the charge, called immigrants “rubbish, cattle and scumbags” on Facebook. Bachmann was found guilty by the court and sentenced to pay a fine (Süddeutsche Zeitung, 2016). Another case was the extreme right-wing platform “Thiazi Forum”, where users could download music and National Socialism was glorified. The main operators were accused of incitement of the people in hundreds of cases and the head of the platform was sentenced to 3.5 years of imprisonment (Cruzcampo, 2015).

However, not only publicly known persons are facing the consequences of their hateful statements on the internet. People who are not in the public eye are also confronted with the consequences of their online behaviour (Sieckmeyer, 2015).

b. Czech Republic

In Czech Republic, several anti-immigration and anti-Islam organizations and parties have been founded. Block against Islam (later, Initiative against Islam) began to be politically active according to the German model in 2015. We can see the roots of this

⁶ To compare: the AfD had reached only 4.7% in the election for the House of Representatives 2013, the CDU/CSU reached 34.1% (Bundeswahlleiter 2015).

movement in the Facebook initiative "We don't want Islam in the Czech Republic" and the Initiative against Islam is presented as the "political superstructure" of the movement. The whole Initiative against Islam and the entire movement is strongly focused on the figure of Martin Konvička, the unrecognised leader of the anti-Islamic movement in the country. The movement brings together and connects a variety of people who consider Islam to be a global threat, this heterogeneity of people was revealed in early 2016 when the initiative was disbanded and renamed from the Bloc against Islam to the Initiative against Islam.

One of the most publicised cases of cyber hate is connected with the Initiative against Islam leader, Martin Konvička. He was accused of spreading hate against groups of citizens for religious reasons (§ 356 of Criminal Code), specifically because of the Facebook post: *"As the winners of the elections - dear Muslims, we will grind you into meat and bone meal..."* (iDnes 2015a, Aktuálně 2015). Recently, the court returned the case to the police for further investigation (iDnes 2016). In another case, a woman was accused of spreading a hoax on Facebook which contained information about a group of Muslim refugees killing farm animals in a nearby village (iDnes 2015b), but the court dismissed the case because of missing proof of intentional spreading of disinformation (Černý 2015).

In case of the Czech Republic, the issue of cyber hate is on the Czech Police's (2015) radar. It published a statement about the situation of rising cyber hate against refugees and Muslims and increased the number of investigated cases connected with this problem. We can also see the activity of the non-government sector which aims to disprove hoaxes, runs prevention programs, and provides legal assistance to victims etc. (People in need 2016, In Iustitia 2016). From a legal perspective, the problem of cyber hate is covered by several paragraphs (namely § 356, § 355, § 404) of the Criminal Code. These are primarily related to defamation of nation, race, ethnic or other group, incitement of hatred against another group or restriction of their rights and freedoms and the manifestation of sympathy for a movement aimed at suppressing human rights and freedoms.

Generally, we can see tendencies towards radicalization of society in both countries and the issue of cyber hate is becoming one of the problems in the integration of immigrants (see Federal Ministry of Justice and Consumer Protection 2015). This situation can capture populist movements or extremist political parties (from both sides of the political spectrum) which can escalate into the disintegration of society.

Methods of Research

We will analyse user comments in the social network Facebook and user activity on the Initiative against Islam and Pegida pages. The analysis will have several levels. First, we will focus on the percentage of hateful comments on both pages. Second, on the frequency of and trends in hateful commenting and finally on targeting and trigger events.

We used data mining of comments from the first half of 2016 (1. 1. 2016 to 31. 5. 2016) through the application program Netvizz (Rieder 2015). This period was chosen on the basis of research capability for analysis and we must take the same time period for each of the movements for the context research of trigger events and targets. In the case of the German group Pegida, 167,549 comments were made during this time period and in case of the smaller Initiative against Islam, there were 58,340 comments. This amount of comments cannot be analysed qualitatively, and for this reason we decided to use a sample which is connected with the probability character of the results. Individual text units (comments of users) are equal for our analysis. We used a random number generator

(Pegida sample = 383, Initiative against Islam sample = 382) to sample the comments. The sample size was chosen on the basis of a sample confidence level of 95% and a maximum margin of error of $\pm 5\%$. This means that with a probability of 95%, our information is $\pm 5\%$ from the values that we measured in the sample (see Krzanowski 2007, pp. 61-89). During the analysis, we found the confidence interval (or accuracy) of a proportion given a survey's sample size and results (percentage of hateful comments) for a chosen confidence level (ibid.).

The first part of our analysis will be a basic statistical description of the sample. In the subsequent deeper analysis, we use closed qualitative coding (viz Leavy, 2013, pp. 584-588, Saldaña, 2009) of comments by dichotomy values when comments are either in the category of cyber hate or not. The decision to classify comments into the cyber hate category during the coding depends on the characterization of cyber hate from the previous chapter. The basic principles are that comments must: “...include actions or statements aimed at a target (person or group) because of their respective religion, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation etc. and statements calling for violence/persecution or verbally attacking the target...” (see Chapter 2). On the second level of coding (cyber hate comments), we will also differentiate between the categories “verbal insults” and “inciting violence/threatening”. When both characteristics appear in one text unit, we apply the more severe category – that is, “violence inciting violence/threatening.”

For the next part of the analysis of targeting and trigger events of hateful comments, we use open coding of text units (user comments), but unlike in the first part we also work with Facebook posts (by Pegida and Initiative against Islam) which are connected to these comments for a better analysis of the context.

Finally, a possible distortion has to be taken into account. In the space of social media and the internet generally, the instability of information is a great problem for the research. Users can delete their content or modify it over time, and this generates changes which cannot be registered. This problem is especially connected with the measurement of the real number of hateful comments. When a page administrator, some third party or users themselves delete these comments, there is no option for backtracking.

Examples of Text Units and Coding⁷

“Shoot. Immediately!!!!” Cyber hate (1), Character (2), T: Immigrants/Refugees, Trig: Sexual attacks of German women by immigrants.

“Motherfuckers, do not let these vermin come” Cyber hate (1), Character (1), T: Immigrants/Refugees, Trig: Migrants blocking trains on the Greek border.

“Take shotgun 2 shots and 30 refugees dead ... Mission Completed!” Cyber hate (1), Character (2), T: Immigrants/Refugees, Trig: “A refugee took a several-month-old girl and threatened to throw her on the police”

⁷ Cyber hate = 0 (No), 1 (Yes), Character = 0 (No), 1 (verbal insults), 2 (Violent), T (targeting), Trig (trigger).

“You will hang next to Sobotka and other traitors of the nation!!!” Cyber hate (1), Character (2), T: Government, Trig: EU quotas for reallocation of refugees

Analysis and Results

1. Percentage and Frequency of Hateful Comments

First, we focus on the percentage of hateful comments on both pages. The analysis showed that in the Czech Republic, the page of Initiative against Islam reaches 15.99 % to 24.01 % of hateful comments (from this, verbal insults 9.63 % to 16.37 % and violent content 4.44 % to 9.56 %). This is more than twice as many when compared to the case of the German Pegida page (4.44 % to 9.56 % altogether, out of this, 2.82 % to 7.18 % verbal insults and 0.6 % to 3.4 % violent content).

Results: Percentage of Cyber Hate Comments*

	Pegida	Initiative against Islam
Texts units	167,549	58,340
Sample	383	382
Sample result		
<i>Cyber Hate Comments</i>	7 %	20 %
<i>Verbal</i>	5 %	13 %
<i>Violent</i>	2 %	7 %
Population results		
<i>Cyber Hate Comments</i>	4.44 % - 9.56 %	15.99 % - 24.01 %
<i>Verbal</i>	2.82 % - 7.18 %	9.63 % - 16.37 %
<i>Violent</i>	0.6 % - 3.4 %	4.44 % - 9.56 %

* Confidence level 95%, max margin of error $\pm 5\%$

This seems to confirm our assumption, as in the case of the Czech Initiative against Islam, the cyber hate rate is significantly higher than in the German movement Pegida. However, the result might be also caused by several factors – first, it is possible that in the case of the Czech Republic, the public consensus for cyber hate is more negligent and people more openly manifest hate. However, is also possible that control mechanisms like reporting comments by users and deleting inappropriate comments by Facebook work better in Germany and that law enforcement in this area is stronger. This hypothesis is supported by evidence on the negotiations between Facebook and the German government about the regulation of hateful comments (Faiola, 2016).

2. Targets of hateful comments

Cyber hate comments usually have at least one target objective – these targets are in most cases very closely determined by a corresponding post and its frame to which comments from users respond (see trigger events). If we move to the anti-immigration movement, we can divide the general targets of cyber hate attacks into several categories:

- Immigrants and refugees
- Muslims in general
- Governments of the given countries
- Political elites (EU, USA)
- “Supporters” or people who are in favour of immigrants or refugees
- Other (personal attacks between users, inability to determine the target etc.)

In the case of the Initiative against Islam, the most frequent target of attack are immigrants and refugees themselves (30.22% to 39.78% of cyber hate comments), however this targeting does not form a majority in the case of Germany (53.06% to 62.94%) so there is more space for other targeting issues in Czech Republic. This may be caused by the fact that in the Czech Republic there is practically no experience with extensive immigration and refugees⁸ and feelings of threat are mediated through the media and politics. Hate is not directed toward Czech immigrants or refugees, but to Muslims generally (21.61% to 30.39% in Initiative against Islam, 3.62% to 8.38% in Pegida).

Another target of cyber hate comments were the governments in both countries, but here we can see significant differences. In the case of Pegida, the comments (4.44% to 9.56%) targeted German policy or government. In the case of the Czech Initiative against Islam, comments focused on criticizing the government were more than double (11.42% to 18.58%), coupled with significant criticism of the political elites in Germany, the EU and the US, which are presented as organizers of migration (4.44% to 9.56%).

In both the German Pegida and the Czech Initiative against Islam, supporters of refugees and immigration are attacked, as are people who generally disagree with the opinions of these movements. For the Pegida, these types of comments constituted from 18.79% to 27.21% and in the Czech Republic from 9.63% to 16.37% of all cyber hate comments. In the Czech case, we often encounter attacks on so-called "Prague cafe" or "truth-loving" people, which are nicknames for those who are in favour of immigrants or are in opposition to this movement in general (representatives from the non-profit sector, public figures or the media).

⁸ The number of immigrants is very low and the Czech Republic is more of a transit country than a final destination (Ministry of Interior of the Czech Republic 2016).

Results: Targeting of Hateful Comments*

	Pegida	Initiative against Islam
Text units	167,549	58,340
Sample	383	382
Sample result		
<i>Immigrants/refugees</i>	58 %	35 %
<i>Muslims in general</i>	6 %	26 %
<i>Governments</i>	7 %	15 %
<i>Political elites</i>	-	7 %
<i>“Supporters”</i>	23 %	13 %
<i>Other</i>	6 %	4 %
Population results		
<i>Immigrants/refugees</i>	53.06% - 62.94%	30.22% - 39.78%
<i>Muslims in general</i>	3.62% - 8.38%	21.61% - 30.39%
<i>Governments</i>	4.44% - 9.56%	11.42% - 18.58%
<i>Political elites</i>	-	4.44% - 9.56%
<i>“Supporters”</i>	18.79% - 27.21%	9.63 % - 16.37 %
<i>Other</i>	3.62% - 8.38%	2.04% - 5.96%

* Confidence level 95%, max. margin of error $\pm 5\%$

Trigger Events: Spillover between Online and Offline

The last part of our research identifies trigger events that provide a background for the hate comments in the respective groups. Looking to trigger events we can gain further insights into how real events in the “offline world” influence the expression of hate in the virtual, online world. In the case of Pegida and Initiative against Islam, these trigger events can be roughly divided into 3 different groups:

- Reactions to crimes or attacks that occurred,
- Reactions to asylum politics which seemed wrong to the people active on the pages,
- Reactions to other specific events.

Initiative against Islam

TRIGGER1: CRIMES; ATTACKS; INCIDENTS

- Sexual attacks on German women by migrants
- Attacks/assaults by migrants against girls as discussed in the newspapers
- Suggestion to generally separate men and women in public swimming pools as a reaction to some incidents
- Crimes by migrants in Sweden
- Refugees crossing Macedonian borders
- Migrants blocking trains on the Greek border
- Sexual attacks of women and a young boy in pool by foreigners
- “Refugee took several-month-old girl and threatened to throw her on the police”
- Situation of immigrants in Calais

TRIGGER2: ASYLUM POLITICS

- Possible future immigration to the Czech Republic
- Arab countries not accepting refugees
- EU asylum politics generally
- German asylum politics
- Czech pro-refugee politics in the public space
- EU quotas for reallocation of refugees
- The requirement for better physical security of refugee camps
- Humanitarian aid to Turkey
- German asylum politics - Future Islamization will come from Germany
- Activities for integration of the Muslim minority in the Czech Republic (Lectures in schools, performing Muslims in the public space, cooperation with the government and the Muslim community)

TRIGGER3: OTHER SPECIFIC EVENTS

- Facebook cancelled official the Initiative’s page
- Non-specified cultural clash between Christianity and Islam
- Muslim converts in public space
- Problem of younger wives (less than 18) of immigrants
- Activity of USA in middle east (Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria)
- Indictment of Martin Konvička for his statements
- Ideological clash between the movement and the Minister of Justice
- Non-specified criticism of Turkish President Erdogan
- Discussion in France about Muslim women's clothing
- Call for resignation of the prime minister
- Demonstration against the government in Prague
- Defense of "freedom of speech"

Pegida

TRIGGER1: CRIMES; ATTACKS; INCIDENTS

- Attacks/assaults by migrants on girls as discussed in the newspapers
- Suggestion to generally separate men and women in public swimming pools as a reaction to some incidents
- Criminality and incidents in refugee camps in Greece
- Referring to violent non-Germans (no specific case named, though)
- Deadly attack by non-accepted asylum seeker against a woman in Austria
- Sexual assaults towards female police officers controlling immigrants in the asylum seeker houses
- Sexual attacks of German women by immigrants
- Newspaper report about attack of German boy by foreigners
- Attacks of German women by foreigners and how German men should react
- Danger that Muslims living in Germany will be radicalized through contact with the Salafists

TRIGGER2: ASYLUM POLITICS

- Criticizing Merkel for her approach and her political solo run
- Political call to end homogenous cultures
- Critical stand towards the immigration policy and ideas of German politicians
- Arrival of greater numbers of immigrants in Germany; call to close the borders
- Anti-discrimination law applied to the people arriving in Germany
- Discussion about bringing the immigrants back to their home countries
- High number of refugees expected until 2020
- Integration of Muslims into western societies
- High number of arriving immigrants; immigrants who had to be saved in the Mediterranean sea
- Report that immigrants are living off of German social aid

TRIGGER3: OTHER SPECIFIC EVENTS

- Gathering of Pegida in Dresden
- Suggestion to provide containers in which the immigrants can live
- Discussion on providing voting rights to people without German citizenship and conducting some "trial elections"
- Referendum in Switzerland on whether criminal immigrants should be deported
- New regulation for the Federal Armed Forces (German Army)
- Fences on public playgrounds in an area where many nationalities live together
- Information desk on the topic "Islam" in Dresden
- Relationship with Turkey; Turkey refusing to allow NATO ships to enter their waters

When we summarize trends in trigger events, we can again see the huge influence that the situation in Germany has on supporters of Czech Initiative against Islam. They are more focused on the European context and situation in Germany because of the lack of incidents and events in the Czech Republic.

(1) In the case of Pegida, the users who wrote the comments referred, for example, to particular cases of violent assaults by foreigners towards German women and sometimes also provided links to articles describing them. Primary attention is paid to the German events. It is in opposition to Czech Initiative against Islam users who are more focused on the situation abroad – in other European states. (2) The second group of trigger events is focused on asylum politics. Users of the Pegida page criticized the politics of the German government, addressed the high numbers of immigrants which are expected in the next years for Germany and requested to close the borders of the country to refugees. Users of the Czech Initiative against Islam are again more general and focus on the situation in the European Union as a whole and on Germany in particular. (3) In the last group of trigger events, the German Pegida users mostly referred to happenings in other countries and commented on them. Also, direct connections to the Pegida movement were made, for example, by referring to a gathering of the movement in Dresden. Czech users are more focused on the opponents of their movement, and one of the significant triggers is defending their ideological starting points against NGOs, the establishment or the media.

Discussion

During our research we tried to connect a large data analysis with qualitative methodology. We used a mixed methods approach and tried to find a way to measure the percentage of cyber hate in the social media space. We focused on the issue of cyber hate in two selected cases of social movements from Central Europe: the Pegida from Germany and the Initiative against Islam from the Czech Republic.

Our findings show that in first half of year 2016, the percentage of hateful comments by the Czech Initiative against Islam is higher than in the case of German Pegida. The targeting of these comments is very similar in both countries and we were able to classify the individual targets of immigrants and refugees, Muslims in general, governments in both countries, political elites (EU, USA) or people who are in favour of immigrants or refugees (most often from NGOs). When we compare Pegida and Initiative against Islam targets in more detail, we can see that the Czech Initiative against Islam is focused on the Muslim community in general and the situation Europe as a whole. The German Pegida, on the other hand, focused more on the situation in its own country (we can see the same trend with trigger events as well).

The differences between the movements in the Czech Republic and Germany might be caused by the lack of experience of Initiative against Islam and their sympathizers with refugees and immigrants and the need to seek out mobilization issues at higher levels of abstraction. This is best seen in percentages of cyber hate targeted at Muslims in general. The mobilization issues, i.e., trigger events, are the same across both countries and the largest cyber hate starters at the general level are the incidents in which refugees and immigrants are presented as perpetrators, as well as issues of asylum policy in general. In the Czech case, we can often see the adoption of many issues from Germany and mobilization based on “Germans triggers”, and we can support King and Sutton’s (2013) research on the mobilization and clustering of cyber hate around dominating events.

These results correspond to our expectations, which were based on the Intergroup Contact Theory. The citizens of the Czech Republic are less likely to be in contact with foreigners due to the significantly lower number of foreigners in the country. Compared to the Germans, the Czechs are therefore less likely to reduce their prejudices and stereotypes according to the Intergroup Contact Theory, which we assumed would also affect their expression of hate in cyberspace. Our research was able to confirm that, though we were looking at two movements with similar ideologies and goals, the expression of hate was significantly higher in the Czech Republic, while trigger events and targets of the hate-comments were comparable. Our analysis therefore suggests two new insights: Intergroup Contact Theory also applies to the online-behaviour of individuals and prejudice is an influential factor in the expression of cyber hate.

However, there are also some limitations for our research, as we did not have the ability to control for other factors that might possibly influence the results but were not the target of our analysis. Thus we cannot exclude other explanations for our findings that were not covered by the analysis. Other explanations for our results might, for example, be found in the different legislation in the Czech Republic and Germany, i.e. the more restrictive legislation in Germany might partly account for the fewer expressions of hate on Facebook (British Institute of Human Rights, 2012). Based on the more restrictive German legislation, activists might be more reluctant to openly voice cyber hate, as they might fear legal consequences. Also, it is possible that control mechanisms such as reporting and/or removing hate comments from social networks work better in Germany or that they are more restrictive than in the Czech Republic.

Future research could pick up on these limitations and control for the impact the mentioned factors have on expressions of cyber-hate. Also, the conducted research was only based on the case studies of two countries, more cases could be included into the analyses to verify our suggestions more broadly. Also, the interconnections of prejudices and the establishment of social movements related to those prejudices should be further researched, as countries selected for analysis are in fundamentally different situations which is also reflected in the amount of hate comments; however, in both countries very similar movements have emerged.

Such findings might practically influence the work of the authorities. In order to successfully combat cyber hate and prejudice, these phenomena first have to be understood, so that suitable measures can be created in the next step. The above-mentioned research and analyses contribute to this.

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