Fighting Online Hate and Disinformation

Policy Recommendations on Online Hate

Horrific events of the last century have demonstrated that words matter. Hateful and intentionally deceptive words can lead directly to violent actions targeting individuals and groups. We must be vigilant in identifying and exposing online hate and purposeful disinformation that has the potential to incite violence or promote injustice against ethnocultural, racial, religious and other identifiable groups. The rapid proliferation of social media and online communications has made this task more important than ever.

The task of combating online hate and disinformation is even more urgent in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. Numerous studies have pointed to the role of state-sponsored disinformation campaigns about the pandemic by regimes adversarial to Canada and democratic values, such as Russia.

The Ukrainian Canadian community has experienced increasing volumes of targeted online operations in the form of disinformation. This information warfare – as part of Russia's war on Ukraine – is intended to undermine our community by distorting historical truth, sowing division, and weakening support for democratic institutions.

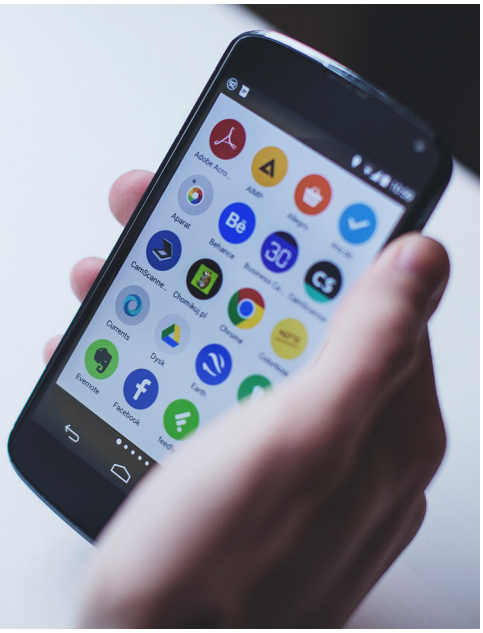
These campaigns reach far beyond the Ukrainian community. The 2019 Annual Report for the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians found that: "The Russian Federation engages in foreign interference activities across Canada's political system with the objective of influencing government decision-making and swaying public opinion. […] The nature and extent of Russia's foreign interference threat is significant as these activities form a key component of the broader national security threat posed by Russia."

Multiple think-tanks in Canada, the US and the EU have established that these malign influence

Our Recommendations

- Counter online hate and disinformation spread by adversarial regimes
- Remove RT, Sputnik and other Russian state broadcasters from Canadian airwaves
- Strengthen cyber security
- Hold social media platforms to account

operations are not specific to one platform, actor or targeted group. Information warfare is a global problem; its intent is to sow division within and between western democracies and alliances, subvert international institutions, and erode public trust and social cohesion. The UCC will continue to work with both Ukrainian and Canadian institutions, along with think tanks and other organizations working to fight disinformation, and to identify fake news and propaganda.



The Russian government carries out its media influence operations in myriad ways, including through state-controlled or state-sponsored media outlets that are freely available in Canada, both in traditional television and in online formats. Social media platforms, internet companies and the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission have proven either unable or unwilling to counter these threats.

The rapid proliferation of online hate and targeted disinformation needs to be addressed by today's policy-makers

Recommendations

Counter online hate and disinformation spread by adversarial regimes

The UCC believes that the issues of foreign state interference and disinformation and the issue of online hate are inextricably linked. The UCC is part of a broad coalition, the Canadian Coalition to End Online Hate, which submitted recommendations to the Government of Canada in May 2020.

Among the recommendations of the Coalition was for the Government to "review the role of, and develop a strategy for, combating online hate that is sponsored or supported by authoritarian governments, state broadcasters of authoritarian regimes and foreign organizations."

The Government of Canada has introduced legislation, Bill C-36, the aim of which is "to better protect Canadians from hate speech and online harms."

The UCC calls on the Government of Canada, in proposed legislation combatting online hate, to dedicate due focus to the role played in the dissemination of online hate, of regimes and governments adversarial to Canada and democratic values.

Remove RT, Sputnik and other Russian state broadcasters from Canadian airwaves

RT Sputnik and other Russian state television and online propaganda are serious threats to the integrity of impartial news programming in Canada. In 2020, Canada's NATO ally Latvia banned the channel RT. Latvia's regulator, Electronic Mass Media Council (NEPLP), found that RT is under the "effective control" of Dimitry Kiselev, who is under both EU and Canadian sanctions. NATO ally Lithuania followed suit a few months later, and banned RT from broadcasting in Lithuania. The CRTC has failed to take similar action and RT continues to broadcast in Canada.

The UCC calls on Canada to remove RT, Sputnik and other Russian state broadcasters from Canadian airwaves and online space.

Strengthen cyber security

A July 2021 report by the Communications Security Establishment of Canada found that, "From 2015 to 2020, we judge that the vast majority of cyber threat activity affecting democratic processes can be attributed to state-sponsored cyber threat actors. These actors target democratic processes in pursuit of their strategic objectives (i.e., political, economic, and geopolitical). Russia, China, and Iran are very likely responsible for most of the foreign state sponsored cyber threat activity against democratic processes worldwide."

The UCC calls on the Government of Canada to dedicate appropriate resources to countering cyber threat activity carried out by state-sponsored cyber threat actors and to respond strongly to cyber attacks on Canadian communications infrastructure.

Hold social media platforms to account

The UCC supports the development of legislative measures that would hold social media platforms to account for failing to remove hate speech and purposeful disinformation from their platforms.

The UCC calls on the Government of Canada to work swiftly to eliminate online hate from social media networks, including Russian disinformation campaigns that knowingly promulgate hatred against Ukraine and Ukrainians.

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