

# Rights and limits of online participation (on social media) - ED

## Introduction to the lesson:

Freedom of speech is one of our fundamental rights and our ancestors have made considerable efforts to defend our views publicly and with impunity. However, human history is also linked to hatred and inappropriate behavior towards other people. Racism, xenophobia, homophobia, or misogyny are not new concepts; on the contrary, they are still present in our democratic societies. Therefore, the question is, "Should freedom of speech be limited?" "If so, to what extent?"

The digital age we are living in to some extent encourages hate speech even more than in the past, as it gives many people the feeling that they can express themselves anonymously with impunity. Decent discussion on social networks so often turns into hate speech, which is very dangerous and not only polarizes society in several ways but destroys the mental health of the victims. A healthy society therefore needs more empathetic members who can behave decently not only offline but also online, especially when online space has largely replaced personal and professional contacts, mainly during pandemics.

The digital environment can be a dangerous place and we can easily fall victim to bullies, fraudsters or pedophiles. Thanks to the course, you will become acquainted with modern threats of the online environment, and you will be able to avoid unpleasant situations in the future.

Most people know the basic rules of good behavior, the so-called etiquette, but we often forget that similar rules are required to follow in online communication too. The last part of the course is therefore devoted to the important rules of netiquette, i.e. decent behavior in digital communication. This will help you avoid many misunderstandings and maintain healthy interpersonal relationships.

## Topic 1: Freedom of speech vs. Rise of hate speech

One of the main pillars of a democratic society is freedom of expression, which is one of the fundamental human, civil and political freedoms. It took many centuries for our ancestors to win this right, which allows us to express our thoughts and attitudes freely and without fear of persecution, punishment or censorship. Freedom of speech thus means the opportunity to express our views in various forms, i.e. verbally but also non-verbally, for example through art (music, photography, painting, etc.). By verbal expression we mean the possibility to express our attitudes orally, in writing, in the media - e.g. in newspapers, radio, television, via the Internet, for example by writing your own blog, contributing to public debates, or on social media with public statuses or commenting on posts. But where are the boundaries and who regulates it? You will find the answers in the first presentation of this lesson.

Freedom of speech as we know it has come a long way today, and the first mentions of it can be found in ancient Greece or in the period of ancient Rome, where just a certain group of people had this form of privilege. World developments in this area came to a halt in the Middle Ages when any other opinion that differed from that of the Church and the Sovereign was punished. The turning point came again during the Enlightenment, which is associated with the

famous statement of Voltaire: *"I Disapprove of What You Say, But I Will Defend to the Death Your Right to Say It."*<sup>1</sup>

Many other philosophers and scholars have fought for freedom of speech, which we have finally won later in modern history. However, we cannot talk about universal law in the 21st century either, as its validity is limited almost exclusively to democratic political establishments, which can be found mostly in Western Europe, North America, Australia etc. Authoritarian or totalitarian state institutions limit and censor information that is inconsistent with their ideology or rhetoric. Probably the saddest world example is North Korea, where there is no independent civil society and criticism of the government is punished by imprisonment. Navi Pillay, The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, said that North Korea had "one of the worst –but least understood and reported - human rights situations in the world".<sup>2</sup> Hundreds of thousands of people are held in political prison camps, where they are denied basic human rights, forced to work, starved, tortured or even executed. An infamous European example is the Belarusian authoritarian regime of Alexander Lukashenko, who, according to available information, hijacked a plane aboard journalist Roman Protasevich, a critic of the regime who was arrested immediately after landing.<sup>3</sup>

Freedom of expression is therefore a privilege to be protected, and its importance is supported by the following arguments, written by Eric Barendt:

- 1) **The argument of truth** - it is based on the thesis that only open discussion can lead us to the truth, so we should be aware of that. The majority society or the ruling group may not be right, and it can be proved by the minority in the open discussion.
- 2) **The argument of self-realization** - each person has his/her own special expression, which makes him a specific individual, who thus develops personally and socially. This helps him/her to achieve happiness, and by denying such manifestations, it is possible to disrupt the mental health and development of individuals.
- 3) **The argument of political participation** - the opportunity to express their political preferences publicly gives politicians and voters the opportunity to broaden public debate, discuss important topics, which ultimately leads to a wider political representation of the views of individuals and minorities.
- 4) **Control and insurance against abuse of public power** – it is an important tool of control of public power, because without the possibility of expressing your disagreement with the functioning of the state, there would be abuse of power. In this sense, the media play an important role, bringing important information about events to the public daily, so they use the government and parliament in many of their decisions.<sup>4</sup>

Freedom of expression is governed by international and national law, with Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations in 1948 as the starting point. It recognizes in a very broad sense that freedom of expression is a fundamental human right: *„Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas*

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<sup>1</sup> Raphael Cohen-Almagor, (2005), *The Scope of Tolerance: Studies on the Costs of Free Expression and Freedom of the Press*, Routledge, 296 pages

<sup>2</sup> Amnesty International, (2013), *North Korea's human rights crisis*, Retrieved from: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2013/04/north-koreas-human-rights-crisis/>

<sup>3</sup> BBC, (2021), *Belarus plane: What we know and what we don't*, Retrieved from: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-57239521>

<sup>4</sup> BARENDT, Eric. M. *Freedom of speech*. 2nd ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005

*through any media and regardless of frontiers.*”<sup>5</sup> However, Article 29 (2) sets out the limitation of this right: „*In the exercise of his rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society*”<sup>6</sup> Although Article 19 of the Universal Declaration made freedom of expression a fundamental human right, many undemocratic or totalitarian regimes have signed the treaty. Therefore, it is rather an aspiration than the real state, which would be recognized by all states involved.

However, in some cases, we may limit freedom of expression as a universal right because it requires to respect for the rights and freedoms of other people, as well as morality and order, so we can say that **it is not an absolute right.**

Freedom of expression is also regulated by Article 10 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms: “*Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers.*”<sup>7</sup> Part of the article is also its limitation, which applies to possible restrictions or sanctions that are “*necessary in a democratic society, in the interests of national security, territorial integrity or public safety, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, for the protection of the reputation or rights of others, for preventing the disclosure of information received in confidence, or for maintaining the authority and impartiality of the judiciary.*”

Freedom of speech is closely linked to the term hate-speech, which has spread mainly through the rise of the Internet and its accessibility to the general masses. Hate speech against certain groups of the population is often not defined by national law. From an international perspective, the Council of Europe defined hate speech in 1997 as follows: „*For the purposes of the application of these principles, the term "hate speech" shall be understood as covering all forms of expression which spread, incite, promote or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, anti-Semitism or other forms of hatred based on intolerance, including: intolerance expressed by aggressive nationalism and ethnocentrism, discrimination and hostility against minorities, migrants and people of immigrant origin.*”<sup>8</sup>

These principles apply mainly to hate speech spread by the media.

The Council of Europe, through its European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, has issued a policy recommendation to combat hate speech online.

We encounter hate speech more and more often in the online space, and its intensity is constantly increasing. In the last decade, we have witnessed many crises, the largest of which is undoubtedly the Covid 19 pandemic. Hate speech against minorities is happening all over the world, and it is important to realize that a large part of the world's population now communicates on social networks, with up to a third of all people active on Facebook. Facebook is therefore becoming a place full of racism, misogyny or homophobia etc. Social networks give such people space, almost anonymously or under a false name, to spread hatred, conspiracies,

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<sup>5</sup> Universal Declaration of Human Rights, (1948), Retrieved from: <https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/udhr.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Universal Declaration of Human Rights, (1948), Retrieved from: <https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/udhr.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, (1950), Retrieved from: [https://www.eods.eu/library/CoE\\_European%20Convention%20for%20the%20Protection%20of%20Human%20Rights%20and%20Fundamental%20Freedoms\\_1950\\_EN.pdf](https://www.eods.eu/library/CoE_European%20Convention%20for%20the%20Protection%20of%20Human%20Rights%20and%20Fundamental%20Freedoms_1950_EN.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Council of Europe, (1997), Recommendation No. R (97) 20 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on “hate speech, Retrieved from: <https://rm.coe.int/1680505d5b>

fake news and promote their distorted impressions and information. A very negative trend in recent years has been the growing attacks on journalists, with social media becoming a ground for such speeches. In the history of the last decade, we would find several polarizing topics, the most outbreak of which was the migration crisis and, of course, the COVID-19 pandemic, which is associated with multiple conspiracies and especially the resistance of a large part of the world's population to vaccination.<sup>9</sup>

The pandemic has divided world society so fundamentally that in many countries we are witnessing a threat to the fundamental pillars of democracy.

### **Responsibility in the hands of social media**

The most widespread social media platforms in Europe and around the world are mainly Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Twitter, which are operated by US companies and whose content moderation principles are very similar. These platforms must comply with the internal law of the countries in which they operate and, in the case of the EU – also with European law. All these platforms have adopted a policy of banning posts that promote violence, have a sexual context, as well as posts that contain hate speech. Recently, they have also introduced rules to limit misinformation, for example by labeling state-run media accounts, verifying facts, or banning political advertising. How do these companies do it? They use artificial intelligence-based moderation software, with Facebook, Twitter and YouTube employing thousands of people to monitor following the rules. If a post that does not comply with the rules is detected, it is deleted. Despite well-established rules, many critics believe that companies do not enforce them consistently. The average user is daily exposed to hateful commentary, misleading content that spreads faster with a growing number of users. In addition, companies operating social networking platforms face criticism for not being motivated to take more rigorous action against hate speech or violence, because their business model is based on advertising and therefore needs to keep users online for as long as possible. It is a well-known fact that negative content is more attractive from the user's point of view, people invest more time by commenting or sharing it.<sup>10</sup>

### **What is the EU doing to stop the spread of hate and fake news?**

Several EU officials have long sought to open a debate on tightening European rules on the regulation of social media operators. Facebook is the most widespread platform in Europe, with European users accounting for about a quarter of the company's annual profit. The EU is currently preparing rules that will significantly tighten the demands on giants such as Facebook and Google. The new rules will require Facebook to conduct regular independent audits of how it handles harmful content. The European Union, as well as the United Kingdom, is preparing for major changes that will force Facebook to take legal responsibility for the content.

The EU wants to revise its access to Facebook and other social networks operating in the EU by the end of 2021 through a new law called the *Digital Services Act*. Under these rules,

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<sup>9</sup> Zachary Laub, (2019), Hate Speech on Social Media: Global Comparisons, IN Council on Foreign Policy, Retrieved from: <https://www.cfr.org/background/hate-speech-social-media-global-comparisons>

<sup>10</sup> Anshu Siripurapu and William Merrow, (2021), Social Media and Online Speech: How Should Countries Regulate Tech Giants?, IN Council on Foreign Policy, Retrieved from: <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/social-media-and-online-speech-how-should-countries-regulate-tech-giants>

companies will be required to delete illegal content immediately, otherwise they will face heavy fines.<sup>11</sup>

Despite the long-proclaimed commitments of social media to control and remove illegal content, it can be stated that Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram and TikTok eliminated fewer hate speech in 2021 than in 2020. Based on annual 6-week monitoring by European authorities it was found that companies such as Facebook, Google and others removed 62.5% of illegal content in 2021 - a decrease of almost ten percent compared to the previous year, when they measured a 71% removal rate.<sup>12</sup>

Although we do not know at the time of writing whether the new European law in this form will pass, one thing is certain - the EU is determined to fight against hate speech on social media, as it recognizes that platforms are not the authors of disinformation and hate posts, but allowed them to spread and grow.<sup>13</sup>

### **What can an individual and society do to stop the spread of hate-speech?**

We will not just stop the fight against hate speech by forcing social networks to delete illegal content - it is important that society sets up a mirror and tries to fight the online hate-speech from the bottom. What can we do about it?

1) *Strengthen education*

The fight against hate-speech begins at the individual level, meaning that each of us realizes that while freedom of speech is a fundamental human right, we cannot act aggressively online and spread hatred and unverified information as many people or unreliable conspiracy media do. The way is to educate the society about minorities - their traditions and problems, human rights, inclusion, and the diversity of our society. It is also important to strengthen cyberbullying education.

2) *Don't be quiet!*

When you witness hate speech on the Internet, do not look at it in silence, but you should try to respond to such posts and comments in a kind way and refute the distorted information with logical arguments.

3) *Report disputed content*

If you find illegal content on social media that attacks minorities or encourages hatred and violence, bullying a person or a group of people, please report it. Almost every responsible social media platform can make such a complaint. Indicate in it the specific reasons why you consider the contribution unacceptable.

4) *Raise awareness on this topic.*

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<sup>11</sup>Mark Scott, (2021), Why Facebook Is More Worried About Europe Than the U.S., IN Politico, Retrieved from: <https://www.politico.com/news/agenda/2021/11/02/facebook-europe-privacy-content-laws-518514>

<sup>12</sup>Mark Scott, (2021), Social media companies remove less hate speech in 2021, IN Politico, Retrieved from: <https://www.politico.eu/article/facebook-google-hate-speech-social-media-european-commission-transparency/>

<sup>13</sup>Diana Wallis. (2021), Digital Services Act: a media exemption would open a loophole for disinformation, IN Euractiv, Retrieved from: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/digital/opinion/digital-services-act-a-media-exemption-would-open-a-loophole-for-disinformation/>

Talk to your loved ones about hate speech and its consequences for society. Try to explain things to them that they may understand less (especially the older generation, who tends to trust everything they read on social media). You can also run a social media campaign on this topic that will have a bigger reach.

- 5) *Report the worst cases of hate speech* on the Internet to organizations that are actively involved in this topic. They are either international or national ones and you can easily find them because they mostly have names such as "No Hate Speech Movement", "Stop Hate" etc. They will most likely solve the problem with the competent authorities or advise you on what you can do.<sup>14</sup>

## Topic 2: Modern threats of the digital age

Online hate speech goes hand in hand with cyberbullying, which is being encountered by an increasing number of younger Internet users. Today's digital age, when part of the daily reality of children and teenagers is happening on the Internet, got even worse during the Covid-19 pandemic. Uncontrolled video game playing is also very dangerous, which does not contribute to the child's healthy mental development. In recent years, children's gambling addiction has begun to appear, secretly investing their parents' money in buying a lottery, thanks to which they can get tools for their favorite game. However, in connection with our topic, it is important to take a closer look at the negative phenomenon of today - cyberbullying, whose manifestations may be hidden at first and the child usually admits to his parents or teachers that he/she is a victim only when it is too late. It is therefore important that youth workers have sufficient knowledge of this topic and can prevent it.

### *What is cyber-bullying?*

The Cyberbullying Research Center formally defines it as: “*willful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices*”<sup>15</sup> The definition covers all the most important elements, which are:

**Will:** It is the deliberate behavior of an individual or a group of people

**Repeated:** It is repetitive behavior, so it is not a one-time act

**Harm:** The bully must feel that he/she has been harmed

**Cell phones / Computers and other electronic devices:** Cyberbullying takes place through such devices.

### *What does cyberbullying look like?*

It can take different forms:

- it can be a repeated ridicule of a person via emails or text messages
- publishing various videos and photos of the victim who does not like it because, for example, showing him/her in a delicate situation
- hurtful comments on social media

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<sup>14</sup> The Leadership Conference Education Fund, Online Hate Speech is Pervasive. Here's How to Start Combating it. Retrieved from: <https://civilrights.org/edfund/resource/combat-online-hate-speech/>

<sup>15</sup> Cyberbullying Research Center, What is Cyberbullying?, Retrieved from: <https://cyberbullying.org/what-is-cyberbullying>

- different types of threats
- disclosure of false information / rumors about the person<sup>16</sup>
- impersonating someone and sending obscene messages to others on their behalf

### ***What are the consequences of cyberbullying?***

Online bullying is often even more dangerous than physical one (eg in a classroom) because, for example, posting a picture / video of the victim on social media can be seen by thousands of people and even if it's deleted, someone could download it in the meantime and the person will suffer ridicule, humiliation and shame for a long time. Thus, the bullied person may feel that there is no escape for it. Thus, the effects of online bullying can last a long time and can affect a person in different ways:

- *Mentally* - feeling upset, embarrassed, angry. It can cause depression, which in the worst cases can end tragically - even by suicide.
- *Emotionally* - feeling ashamed and losing interest in the things the person likes
- *Physically* - bullying can cause sleep disorders, tiredness, stomach pain or other pain.<sup>17</sup>

### ***What other forms of inappropriate behavior do young people experience online?***

***Cyber-Grooming*** – It is an increasingly widespread phenomenon – it means establishing an emotional bond and intimacy with the child for the purpose of later physical or sexual abuse. In extreme cases, it can lead to sexual trafficking or child labor. Approaching a child online is often very easy - some attackers usually join a chat room where children meet, others start playing video games with them and start online communication there.<sup>18</sup> The essential difference between classic sexual harassment and cyber-grooming is that cyber-grooming involves repeated activity, abuse of trust and the creation of a specific relationship between the victim and the cyber-groomer. According to statistics, the most frequent victims of such predators are young girls, which may be explained by the fact that they are growing up a bit earlier than boys and are also more trusting and willing to trust strangers and share with them their private affairs. Cyber-groomers take advantage of their victims who are many times happy for the attention and affection they are getting. In the teenage age youngsters start discovering sexuality and they are very curious about such topics. Statistics also show that cyber-groomers are usually adult men looking for young girls. Risk factors that make it easier to become a victim of such predators are low self-esteem, loneliness, family problems or self-harming tendencies.<sup>19</sup>

***Cyber-mobbing***- It is basically cyberbullying, but the difference is that there are more bullies. In most cases, these are online attacks, intimidation or blaming of the victim. This is a very dangerous situation, as the victim may find himself/herself in a situation where the whole world

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<sup>16</sup> Cyberbullying Research Center, What is Cyberbullying?, Retrieved from: <https://cyberbullying.org/what-is-cyberbullying>

<sup>17</sup> UNICEF, Cyberbullying: What is it and how to stop, Retrieved from: <https://www.unicef.org/end-violence/how-to-stop-cyberbullying#2>

<sup>18</sup> Daniel Bennett, (2020), What Is Cyber Grooming and How to Protect Children?, IN TechAcute, Retrieved from: <https://techacute.com/what-is-cyber-grooming/>

<sup>19</sup> Sebastian Wachs, Karsten D. Wolf and Ching-Ching Pan, (2012), Cybergrooming: Risk factors, coping strategies and associations with cyberbullying, *Psicothema* 2012. Vol. 24, no 4, pp. 628-633, Retrieved from: <http://www.psicothema.com/pdf/4064.pdf>

seems to have conspired against him/her and has no one to help him/her. It is also sometimes difficult to identify the initiator of such attacks, the person may be hidden behind others who attack. It is extremely important for parents and youth workers to be aware of this phenomenon and to be able to help the young person before it is too late. Experience from abroad proves that cyber-grooming can result in the suicide of victims.<sup>20</sup>

**Cyber-stalking-** This is a very dangerous form of cyberbullying, in which the victim is harassed or persecuted, e.g. via social media, e-mail, private messages, or discussion forums. The anonymity of the Internet gives cyber-stalkers the opportunity to persecute victims often and without being punished for a long time or never.<sup>21</sup> It is a deliberate, methodical, and repeated action of the attacker. The attacks do not stop even if the victim expresses his disagreement and asks the cyber-stalker to leave her/him alone. The content with which the victim is confronted often evokes a feeling of fear or anxiety. Cyber-stalkers use a variety of tactics and techniques. They are often very resourceful and creative and constantly come up with new ways to harass the victim and achieve their goals. These forms of cyber-stalking are the most common:

- Posting offensive and annoying comments
- Joining the same groups and forums as the target
- Regular sending of threatening or obscene messages
- Spamming the victim with messages or emails
- Tagging the victim on a regular basis in various social media posts, even if they have nothing to do with her /him and are not friends
- Commenting and liking everything the target shares
- Creating fake profiles on social media in order to track the target
- Hack into the target's personal account
- Make false posts to embarrass the victim
- Hack into the victim's cell phone or computer and watch or record him/her via webcam
- Sending unwanted gifts
- Repeatedly send target a picture with sexual content
- Install the tracking device on the victim's device<sup>22</sup>

All of the above forms of bullying are really widespread and many times this may be happening right in front of our eyes. Because a person feels ashamed, very often does not tell anyone about bullying. His/her mental state can be getting worse and worse, so whenever we notice online bullying, let's take an interest in a person, tell it to his/her friends or relatives and defend him/her so he/she doesn't feel alone. Alternatively, report bullying to the social network or the school principal/his or her supervisor at work if it is an adult. So let's pay attention to others and watch the changes in their behavior - this may be the result of cyberbullying. However, in the case of cyber-grooming, the victim does not realize that they are being abused, so in this case, it is necessary to educate young people and be interested in how they spend their free time on the Internet, especially when it comes to our children.

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<sup>20</sup> STOMP Out Bullying, Cyber-Mobbing: A New Form of Cyberbullying Affecting Teens, Retrieved from: <https://www.stompoutbullying.org/blog/cyber-mobbing>

<sup>21</sup> Sherri Gordon, (2021), What Is Cyberstalking?, IN Verywellmind, Retrieved from: <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-cyberstalking-5181466>

<sup>22</sup> Sherri Gordon, (2021), What Is Cyberstalking?, IN Verywellmind, Retrieved from: <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-cyberstalking-5181466>



*What steps should a youth worker take to prevent cyberbullying and its various forms?*

- Mental health disorders have become more frequent in recent years, so it is important to educate young people and explain the threats they face on the Internet - i.e. to open a dialogue on bullying, to point out various unfortunate examples.
- Have an individual approach to each young person and when you see changes in behavior, have a confidential conversation and find out what is happening.
- If you discover that a child / young person is a victim of cyberbullying, consider recommending a visit to a mental health professional.
- Encourage young people, if they become the target of cyberbullying, to keep all the evidence and bring it to the parents / teachers or to a supervisor at work.
- To lead young people not to have a chat with such a person or try to do a revenge - it will only make the situation worse. The only way is to block the person, report to social media, in case of threat of injury report to the police.<sup>23</sup>

### **Topic 3: Netiquette**

Most of us spend a few hours a day on the Internet and use social media not only to communicate with friends but also with business partners, or to contribute to discussions under posts in various groups or fan pages. We have already said that we should avoid and fight against the spread of hate-speech. But have you ever wondered what the consequences a normal conversation (not hatred) can have for your reputation or good interpersonal and working relationships? Many social network users are often unaware that the digital environment requires the same etiquette principles as offline space. We are talking about the principles of good behavior in the online space, which we call netiquette.

It is a term created by joining the words 'etiquette' and 'net'. While social etiquette has developed over the centuries and adapted to time and culture, digital etiquette is still relatively new. Adherence to netiquette rules can be very helpful in several ways. It might seem that it is just less educated people or the older generation who have not yet had experience with online communication and they do not know how to behave. However, this is not true, because even many educated public officials or other kind of exposed people often do not know how to communicate well on social networks. Many times we witness aggressive and offensive communication, which causes just negative emotion from the conversation. The problem with communicating through social media is the distortion and uncertainty of how the person really meant the written thing. Personal contact and human facial expressions can reveal a lot in this sense, and we miss this in online communication. Therefore, it is most important to pay attention to the way of communication in the digital environment. Failure to comply with the principles of netiquette can negatively affect our lives in several areas. In addition, the digital footprint remains on servers and can catch up with us, for example - to prevent you from getting the job of your dreams.

So how should we not behave on the Internet? The easiest way will be to show a few negative examples of what this should definitely not look like:

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<sup>23</sup> ConnectSafely, (2011), Tips to Help Stop Cyberbullying from ConnectSafely.org, Retrieved from: [https://www.connectsafely.org/pdfs/tips\\_cyberbullying.pdf](https://www.connectsafely.org/pdfs/tips_cyberbullying.pdf)

- **Inappropriate jokes** - it is extremely inappropriate to make jokes that part of society may not understand, especially jokes that could offend someone.
- **Communication without proofreading** - it often happens that we make a few typos that can completely change the context of the whole message, it can even be offensive to someone. Autocorrection can also be dangerous in this sense.
- **Spamming other people** - It's not always easy to get attention when you want to reach an individual, a group of people, a company, or a community with a certain thing. This can lead to an attempt to send a series of similar messages. Social networks are particularly sensitive to this behavior and may temporarily restrict your services or exclude you.
- **Catfishing** - impersonating someone else, whether by misusing a person's photos or by falsifying your identity. This is a particularly serious behavior, especially dangerous for children who are at risk of being abused by cyber-groomer. Many public figures use fake profiles to provoke passionate debate.
- **Arguing with people** - this is a very widespread phenomenon, where debaters argue over various social media posts, in the worst cases they even wish death or other unpleasant things to others. It is very easy to let yourself be controlled by negative emotions and be mean to someone else just because they have the opposite opinion. It is important to realize that no one is perfect, to be wrong is human and, above all, everyone has a right to their opinion. Vulgar behavior can result in denied access to the social network.
- **Not giving others space to express themselves** - it is important to keep in mind that everyone has a right to their opinion and can also be wrong. Even if we do not agree with the views of others, we must give them space to express themselves.
- **Using capital letters** - it can happen that if we want to draw attention to some information or opinion, we can slip to write everything in capital letters. While it may be effective, it can arouse negative emotion in others as it reminds of shouting.
- **Sharing other people's private information** - not respecting the privacy of others is a great violation of netiquette. Even if they share this information themselves, you should not share it without their consent and authentication. So do not share any information, photos or videos without the consent of the person concerned. It can damage their reputation and cause them lifelong trauma and embarrassment.
- **Not including context** - Especially if you are commenting on a message thread, it is a good idea to mention the previous information you are commenting on, as this can be confusing for others.
- **Ignoring people who ask for help** - if it happens that someone contacts you directly with a request for help, you should help them, or at least try to refer them to another person / institution that can help them.<sup>24</sup>

*On the margin of the above bad examples of netiquette, we can summarize the basic rules of netiquette as follows:*

- **Remember the Human**- the online environment can give the feeling of anonymity, but it is not real. It is important to keep in mind that there is a human being behind every message and comment on a social network, and we can hurt him/her with negative or offensive words. It is always easier to write something negative than to tell someone in

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<sup>24</sup> The Cybersmile Foundation, (2021), Examples of bad Etiquette, Retrieved from: <https://www.cybersmile.org/what-we-do/advice-help/netiquette/examples-of-bad-netiquette>

the eyes. However, on the Internet, we should treat other people in the same way as we do in real life. This is the so-called Golden rule of netiquette.

- **Don't react immediately in anger** and think carefully about the meaning and consequences of the message / comment it might have - when we don't see a person's facial expression, we often don't understand the true meaning of what he/she wrote. It must have happened to you many times that you first understood something completely differently than it was meant to be. Therefore, do not act rashly and do not go into conflict without thinking more deeply about what is written and how it is meant. After all, it could also be a typo or autocorrection.
- **Be yourself** - treat others well, communicate on your behalf, and don't hide behind fake profiles from which you write hateful comments and messages. Keep in mind that you may also encounter fraud or cyber-bullier in the online space, so be careful.
- **Avoid misunderstandings**- A written word can confuse and sometimes it is difficult to tell if you are serious, whether it is a joke, sarcasm or reality. Therefore, it is advisable to use emoticons that express your emotions in online communication.<sup>25</sup>
- **Take care of the grammar** - typos and poor grammar make a bad impression on the authors and may even cause you problems in your future work, for example. Be careful and check the posts / messages before you send it.
- **Consider your email address** - Mail communication is considered a formal online communication, so you should not only choose a formal language, but also consider the address as such. Avoid using nicknames, slang, and consider creating two e-mail addresses for personal and business purposes.
- **Try to respond as quickly as possible** - When you receive an email or message on social networks, it is polite to respond as quickly as possible. If you do not have time for the email now, it is good to write to the recipient that you saw the email and you will deal with it a bit later. People may be afraid that the email was not delivered or fell into spam. This can be a very important message though.
- **Avoid conflicts** - Don't get involved in quarrels and conflicts, it won't make , you may hurt others and cause you to be denied access to social media. Also, never share abusive content.
- **Respect diversity** - each person is different, comes from a different social or cultural background, has a different level of knowledge and skills and can have a different opinion on the matter. You must respect that and give others space to express themselves politely. We can learn from each other and not push others to follow our own opinion.<sup>26</sup>

## Using netiquette in a work environment

Using netiquette greatly reduces the chances of misunderstanding or quarreling with others. Bad netiquette, on the other hand, can do a lot of damage to personal and professional life and, importantly, can have lasting consequences. This can be especially dangerous in business relationships and at school. Not using netiquette can cause several unpleasant situations in the work environment, such as - creating tension and misunderstanding, undermining teamwork, spreading false information about a team member. This can lead to inefficient work in the whole company, as healthy collegial relationships are the key to success. The work environment has

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<sup>25</sup> The Cybersmile Foundation, (2021), Examples of good Netiquette, Retrieved from:

[https://www.cybersmile.org/advice-help/category/examples-of-good-netiquette?fbclid=IwAR1LfqX8OsgJXxT7yyemzq\\_krOVuh\\_GsRiaWeF6fT5a2x\\_tU9\\_f4o9laiX0](https://www.cybersmile.org/advice-help/category/examples-of-good-netiquette?fbclid=IwAR1LfqX8OsgJXxT7yyemzq_krOVuh_GsRiaWeF6fT5a2x_tU9_f4o9laiX0)

<sup>26</sup> Jessica Cole, (2016), Are You Teaching Good Netiquette?, Arizona State University, Retrieved from: <https://teachonline.asu.edu/2016/04/teaching-good-netiquette/>

a huge impact on our mental health - when we have unhealthy relationships at work and at school, it can negatively affect our mental attitudes and relationships with family and friends. A healthy balance between online and offline communication can also be a solution. Be forgiving of your colleagues, forgive them for the mistakes they make in the online space, because making a mistake is human. Making fun of someone in cyberspace only leads to a deterioration in personal relationships and can cause shame, even depression. Be aware that online communication will stay even if you delete it, it will be stored on the operator's servers forever and may eventually be used against you - you may lose your job or the communication may be used as evidence against you in court.<sup>27</sup>

## **Main assignment – exercise**

In previous parts of the course, you had the task of identifying people or groups of people who are victims of hate-speech, cyber-bullying, cyber-grooming, cyber-stalking, or cyber-mobbing. Choose one of these cases, which according to your previous analysis is the most widespread in your country in the social media environment.

We often see that society is not sufficiently educated and that hate speech or bullying could prevent a better awareness of related topics.

Try to formulate your own plan of how you can contribute to improving the situation in the selected category of inappropriate behavior on social media. Design the exact steps, tools, and resources you will need to accomplish this project. Don't be afraid to think bigger and set more challenging goals.

Then consider the actual implementation of your plan. Our tip: if you need financial resources to implement the plan, ask a youth organization focused on education in your city for help. It will help you choose a suitable project scheme.

## **Resources**

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