Hate groups find platform on the Internet

by Jasmine Gonzalez

Among the many conveniences the Internet offers, the promise of anonymity and the opportunity to connect with a seemingly endless community of strangers have attracted all sorts of "netizens," some far more extreme and dangerous in their motives than others.

Hate groups and individuals who share the same ideologies, in particular, have created a significant presence on the Internet in the form of everything from small, relatively unknown blogs, to Twitter accounts and Facebook pages amassing hundreds of thousands of followers.

The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) defines a hate group as "an organization that– based on its official statements or principles, the statements of its leaders, or its activities – has beliefs or practices that attack or malign an entire class of people, typically for their immutable characteristics."

While it may seem like these groups, along with competing political activists, have only been taking to the Internet to promote their messages and recruit supporters in the past few years, that has not necessarily been the case.

According to an article by ABC News, hate groups have been active on the Internet for decades, "even before most people even had Internet access in their homes."

Stormfront, the Internet's first major racial hate site, was officially established as a website in 1996 by

Hate groups are rapidly expanding their communities online, with as many as 10,000 hate sites now operating | **AP**

white supremacist and former Klu Klux Klan Grand Wizard Don Black. In a Jan. 13, 1998, interview on "Nightline," Black explained that he decided to build an Internet platform to reach people that otherwise would be difficult to involve using traditional, and very public, recruitment methods.

According to Mark Weitzman, the director of the task force against hate and terrorism at the Simon Wiesenthal Center, there are about 10,000 online hate sites globally, and the number is growing quickly.

Of course, that may only be a percentage of the number of sites, blogs, and accounts that are currently active. As the Wiesenthal Center's

Rick Eaton explained, "For many years we could track sites in the dozens or even hundreds; now it is impossible to find them all, much less keep track of them."

In the United States alone there are 917 documented hate groups, according to a 2016 data report from the SPLC. That number is down from a peak of 1,018 in 2011 but is expected to rise once official reports for 2017 are released.

"While the number of designated hate groups has steadily declined in the past few decades, their Internet presence has surged," according to the Washington Post.

This increase in Internet presence has coincided with the rise in

hate crimes, with the overwhelming majority of victims being targeted for their race, ethnicity, or ancestry, according to official FBI statistics.

As explained in an intelligence report by the SPLC, the reason for this growth is clear. "A few years ago, a Klansman needed to put out substantial effort and money to produce and distribute a shoddy pamphlet that might reach a few hundred people. Today, with a $500 computer and negligible other costs, that same Klansman can put up a [decently] produced website with a potential audience in the millions."

Despite this overwhelming increase in virtual presence, groups and individuals alike have begun

to experience the consequences of trying to promote their message through the web.

With the looming threat of being "doxxed" for publishing hateful content, or even having photos of oneself in questionable environments published without consent—as various Unite the Right rally protestors learned the hard way—many people are beginning to fear for their safety lest they be outed for their controversial beliefs and risk losing their jobs and homes, among other things.

According to another report by the SPLC, these threats have not proven to be enough to terminate the hate; Rather, they are simply forcing these groups to go underground, with certain groups merely ending public communication, not disbanding.

This shift to internet platforms has caused outrage, not only about the messages being spread, but also for the failure of major platforms to take any significant action against hate groups that use their services to promote hateful, and often violent, messages.

While the debate of free speech rages on in regards to this issue, it is undeniable that Internet platforms tend to promote and spread this hate in return for extreme financial gain.

As the New York Times explained, "these fringe groups saw an opportunity in the gap between the platforms' strained public dedication to discourse stewardship and their actual existence as profit-driven entities, free to do as they please."

This Is The Fake News Being Spread About The London Bridge Terror Attack *Buzzfeed*

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"Ireland is now officially accepting Trump refugees from America" *Winning Democrats*

BREAKING: Black Lives Matter Leader Kept 'Virtually All' Donations *Media Conservative*

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Fake news has real consequences

by Eleanor Kaplan

With the increasing prominence of online news—specifically that consumed through social media—the issue of fake news has come center stage.

Fake news has always been a reality; however, the speed and spread of news on the internet has exacerbated the problem.

According to The New York Times, algorithms used by some social media and news sites may direct readers to fake news stories in order to encourage longer visits to websites.

Often, fake news stories are the most eye-catching because they contain absurd material that lure viewers in. It is possible that when looking at a news source on a platform such as YouTube, the next videos recommended may be videos planted just to keep your attention and not ones relaying the real facts of an event.

New Trier librarian Linda Straube said "People will do things to get clicks, to get money." Sensational headlines and digitally-altered photos attract readers.

To counteract this, Straube said, "It's important to compare with other sources and see if other sources are even covering this 'amazing piece' of information." If a credible news source does not even mention this insane life-changing story, it is likely not true.

Questions about the morality of such algorithms were raised during the 2016 elections. According to The Guardian, these tactics falsely inflated concerns over Hillary Clinton's emails because scandals attract viewers. The more viewers, the more money the website makes.

Conspiracy videos are often considered the most compelling. This phenomenon was seen in 2016 with #pizzagate, one of the top-trending tags during election season that rumored a crime involving Hillary Clinton.

Many believe these algorithms greatly distracted from the candidates' policy agendas.

Additionally, when a person views an article from a certain source, the computer is then programmed to advertise and promote articles from that source again, hoping to attract more clicks. Instead of seeing a true array of relevant hits, you are guided toward more of the same.

"If you look at certain types of sources you will be sent to similar types of sources. This is often called filter bubble and will reinforce the same unconscious bias we all have by sending us to the same type of information," said Straube.

Headlines are often created to be click-bait and sometimes are not even linked to an actual story. While valid explanations may exist behind these sensational headlines, it's too easy to skim articles when online and miss the complete story.

Senior Eliza Tilson warns against this: "It's incredibly easy to form your opinion or judgement from

a single sentence."

Instead, she suggests that students "make time to read the articles they see and are interested in because scanning a headline and the first few paragraphs doesn't usually help anyone."

Although there are many pitfalls to avoid while looking at online news, junior Amelia Haag believes that consumers of news are capable of recognizing what is true or false.

"This audience has the ability to recognize fake news and quickly discredit it," said Haag.

She advises readers to "use multiple news sources on the same topic to unearth underlying political biases that have the potential to be harbored in even the most credible of news sources."

Double-checking URLs is another strategy to counteract fake news. Often, fake news sites will change a small part of the URL of a credible website, maybe by using a capital "i" instead of a lowercase "L." These subtle differences are meant

to make the reader believe that the website is credible.

The ease of retweeting a headline makes it possible for fake news to spread rapidly. Since online news occurs at such a fast pace, fake news articles can be blown out of proportion and spin out of control.

Straube said that although the topic of fake news has been an issue for a very long time, online news makes it more relevant.

"With news almost instantaneous all over the world, it's amplified the opportunity for something that's not true to be spread very quickly. It makes it more difficult to rescind the errors made."

By sharing news articles and headlines with followers without verifying them, careless readers may contribute to the problem of fake news.

As Straube said, "It's not just what social media brings to us, it's what we help social media spread."