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ANNA SARKISYAN

FROM EUROPEAN VALUES TO
GROWING CLIMATE OF
INTOLERANCE:
HOW CONTEMPORARY ONLINE
MEDIA IN GEORGIA INFLUENCES
HATE SPEECH

Abstract

The current research “From European values to growing climate of intolerance: How contemporary online media in Georgia influences hate speech” analyses the effects of hate speech in Georgia.

This study explores how social media is fuelling the rise of hate speech among Georgians and how Georgian law addresses these issues by theoretical and quantitative analysis.

Since the appearance of social media hate speech has become rapidly growing challenge. In this context, vulnerable groups/minorities are at the greatest risk of being target. The absence of effective mechanisms for implementing the antidiscrimination law makes the regulation ineffective; as well as the law does not articulate about the formation of a special examiner body, which could enforce measures on those citizens who break the law.

Hate speech/aggressive behaviour on ethno-religious groups spread through online media platforms can have negative effect on the belief and value system in Georgia.

Continuously raising number of hate content left unrestricted in media shows that existing regulations in Georgia cannot yet guarantee the protection from hate speech in social media.

INTRODUCTION

Hate speech on social media has become real challenge nowadays. Hate speech and cyber racism on social media platforms and websites hosting racist content have negative impact on the society. All the above mentioned factors raise importance of this topic.

As I have observed during years of working in the sphere of media in Georgia, social media platforms often serve as an open space where citizens openly express their feelings or serve to encourage racial, religious, sexual discrimination by publishing fake news and catchy scandalous titles that are almost not related to the actual topic. On the other side, anonymity in social media and impunity are the major factors in prevention of hate speech waves. Migration of people and relocation of the population has always been a common practice in the world due to important historic events and likewise Georgia has never been a mono-ethnic country. With its neighbouring nations Georgia has long-term relations at the political-cultural as well as at the economic level, and regarding the migration of people. From a historic point of view, it is difficult to determine specific dates, number of people and exact places regarding the establishment of certain ethnic groups in the territory of modern Georgia, as far as different sources offer different data. However, from the perspective of this research, it is significant to emphasise the fact that many ethnic groups have lived in Georgia since ancient times.

Based on the 2014 General Population Census in Georgia (Geostat 2016) the ethnic composition was as follows (5 largest minority group, in thousands):

Number of total population – 3,713

Ethnic Georgians are 86.8%

- Azeris – 233.0 or 6.3%
- Armenians – 168.1 or 4.5%
- Russians – 26.5 or 0.7%
- Ossetians – 14.4 or 0.4%
- Yazidis – 12.2 or 0.3%

It is noteworthy to mention, that until 1999 ethnicity was indicated on Georgian identity cards. After the 1999 amendment of the legislation the above stated statistics are based on self-identification. (Reisner 2010)

From the perspective of religion we have the following picture (5 largest minority group, in thousands):

83.4% of the population of Georgia are Orthodox Christians

- Muslims – 398.7 or 10.7%
- Armenian Apostolic – 109.0 or 2.9%
- Catholics – 19.2 or 0.5%
- Jehovah's Witnesses – 12.4 or 0.3%
- Yazidis – 8.6 or 0.2%

This paper focuses on hate speech towards all kinds of minorities including ethnic and religious communities. Despite the fact that different ethnic groups have always been present in the country, they were always vulnerable groups and their number decreased through the time. For centuries ethnic minorities suffered from inequality.

The process of integration of non-dominant ethnic and religious minorities has further weakened in recent years. In the context of the mobilisation and radicalisation of ultra-right groups, there have been severe cases of violence and discrimination on the grounds of ethnic identity. (EMC Report 2017)

Hate speech is not new; however, it had been barely codified before 1945. Hate speech is often equated with all kinds of negative expressions, offensive, defamatory, discrediting expressions. In fact, there is a big difference between them. Since every country has a unique context, it is difficult to define and perceive universally what hate speech is. The latest United Nations Organisation's definition is the widest accepted: *"The Strategy and Plan of Action define hate speech as any communication in speech, writing or behaviour that attacks or uses pejorative or discriminatory language concerning a person or a group based on who they are, in other words, based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, colour, descent, gender or other identity factor."* (UN Strategy 2019). Hate speech is defined by the Cambridge Dictionary as "public speech that expresses hate or encourages violence towards a person or group based on something such as race, religion, sex, or sexual orientation." Hate speech is "usually thought

to include communications of animosity or disparagement of an individual or a group on account of a group characteristic such as race, colour, national origin, sex, disability, religion, or sexual orientation.”

Hate speech is violent language. It contains:

1. Devaluation, attacks, insults, hatred,
2. Insulting and defaming groups of people, i.e. group-focused misanthropy. These include racism, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, homophobia, transphobia, and sexism,
3. Direct or indirect incitement to violence, (self-) justice, compulsion to act,
4. But this also includes when people are denied equal value and equal rights – in the worst case, the right to live (more often: to live in a given country). (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.)

In this paper hate speech is referred as terms, phrases, and expressions reinforce a negative attitude toward any person or group of people. (Qartia 2019)

In this view, I would like to emphasise the impact that media exposure can have on both the individual and societal level. For the current work, it is sufficient to point out that as a result of increased rate of using smart technology from early childhood increases media consumption that has effect on the perceptions an individual develops about other groups. (Gottschalk 2019, 22)

The negative stereotypes characterised within the online media amplifies the media effect experienced by minority users. (Hoffman 2018)

It should be noted that the negative impact of the Georgian media on various ethnic groups is not a new phenomenon. In 2011, a non-governmental organisation, the “Assembly of Armenians in Tbilisi,” accused media representatives of promoting hate speech, saying that recently in some media outlets and on the internet, there have been frequent incidents of hate speech. (Tarkhnishvili 2011)

Talks about the rise of Islamophobia in the media have been relevant since September 11, 2001, although the problem has become particularly acute since the recent rise of the most powerful terrorist group, ISIS. Media commentators point out that Islamophobia has several key features in the news: (Kupreishvili 2015)

- Stereotypical attitude – searching for Islamic traces behind all terrorist acts;
- Improper terminology
- Generalisation of specific radical actions. For example, perceiving all Muslims as a potential threat, considering Islam as a violent religion, and so on.

Based on the above, policy and attention to online media outlets focusing on ethnic and religious minorities exposed to multiple forms of vulnerability and discrimination must be ensured and this is in fact the focus of the present research.

Problem definition

The main problem in the focus of the current research is poor national policies and not exercising the “Law of Georgia on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination.” The second problem in the focus of the research is the rhetoric of media and impunity in social media. Implementation of minority protection mechanisms are not directly connected to the field of social media since it is not the mechanism that must regulate it.

Georgia has been the member of the Council of Europe since 1999. Ever since, the country has been implementing recommendations on human rights and democracy to raise awareness of policies and initiatives and adjust practices, legislation, and bylaws to the Council of Europe standards. (Council of Europe – Georgia, n.d)

Georgia is also aspiring for EU membership, hence the European Union and Georgia enjoy a very close and positive relationship. The EU, in the framework of European Union External Action Service (EEAS), supports peace and stability in Georgia as well as programmes of political and economic reforms targeting social and economic development. The main achievements during the last decade were entered into force the EU-Georgia Association Agreement (July 2016) which strives for political association and economic integration between the EU and Georgia. Another achievement of Georgia is entrance into a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA), and Georgian citizens have benefitted from visa free travel to the Schengen area since 28 March 2017. As well as the EU is Georgia’s largest trading partner and provides over €100 million to Georgia annually in technical and financial assistance. (EEAS 2018)

Objectives of the research

The current research has five main objectives:

- To analyse the increasing importance of the protection of people belonging to vulnerable ethno-religious groups/others;
- To analyse the impact or potential impact of hate speech in online and social media;
- To analyse the national policies and main legal acts and framework in Georgia in the protection of ethno-religious groups in social media;
- To analyse hate speech in the light of the legal frameworks;
- To elaborate possible future outcomes on enhancement of national mechanisms for protection of rights of ethno-religious groups in the sphere of online media and social media.

Research questions

The aim of the research paper is to identify gaps regarding the fulfilment of rights of vulnerable groups and to answer to the following questions:

1. How do media messages impact the behaviour of social media users of Georgia? How social media is fuelling the rise of nationalism and hate speech among Georgians?
2. Do the existing national policies have a positive or negative impact on the situation in regards with hate speech?
3. How the Law of Georgia on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination is being exercised in the field of social media regarding hate speech?

Hypothesis

The present paper identifies two hypotheses to explain new trends in online hate speech and the effectiveness of legal instruments created to combat verbal violence online:

1. Hate speech/aggressive behaviour spread through online media platforms on ethno-religious groups have a negative effect on the belief and value system in Georgia.
2. Continuously raising number of hate content left unrestricted in media shows that existing regulations in Georgia cannot yet guarantee the protection from hate speech in social media.

Research novelty

In the context of Georgia, the research is among the first to raise the issue of the necessity to look into online media sphere not as separate independent source of information flow, but as, contemporary media influencing raise of nationalism, which should be taken into account while elaborating state policies, strategies and regulations. The research analyses online media outlets, behaviour/reaction of social media users, as well as influence of online media on triggering hate speech and increase of nationalism. The novelty of this thesis is in the questionnaire, which data had been collected from Georgian citizens of different origin (including the target group of this research). In the questionnaire interviewees (i.e. the ones who are affected by hate speech and members of the majority ethnic group) gave feedback directly and anonymously. Such data collection was not conducted previously on the topic of hate speech in social media in Georgia.

Research methodology

The current study is conducted through key social research methods: qualitative research methods that allows to uncover the causal connection between news flow and triggering any form of discrimination, hate, promotion of stereotypes and xenophobia. In the research quantitative research method is also used to get feedback from the target group regarding the possible individual or societal effect of content supporting hate.

Firstly, the relevant data collection and text analysis of selected online media platforms. Chosen media outlets represent the results of research of the Media Development Foundation, which are listed in the third chapter of the paper. By this part of the research it will be able to understand which media outlets mostly spread hate content, what the main message is and who the target groups are.

Secondly, for the purpose of the legal case analysis, national policies and legal acts of Georgia aiming to guarantee rights of others are analysed. Research of the legal framework will allow to find gaps to understand whether it is possible to exercise the existing law and what are the reasons of barriers.

Thirdly, on the basis of Microsoft research “Detection of Aggressive Behaviour on Social Media” analysing the feedback of people who might be effected by hate content in media which is being spread by Facebook. Quantitative analysis will be carried out through the use of interview conducted with target groups.

The scientific and practical value

In the first-place research outcomes can be used by scholars and practitioners of minority rights, media researchers for understanding the problem – crossing hate speech and online media influence in Georgia.

Secondly, the research outcomes can be used by other researchers, policy-makers and policy advocates (minority organisations, international partners, state bodies) to find out about the current media influence, minority rights protection in Georgia, the effectiveness of the legislative framework with regard to elimination of any kind of discrimination.

Thirdly, the developed questionnaire and outcomes of data analysis are unique in the sense that there are no previously conducted researches focusing on the effect of article titles and comments on social media users. The questionnaire and analysis of its data along with the method used can set a direction of further researches on the behaviour of active social media users.

The research paper is composed of the following sections:

- Content with the indication of the chapters and corresponding pages;
- List of acronyms which are used in the current research;
- List of key terms definition;
- Abstract which gives a brief overview of the paper and its findings;
- Introduction which provides background information about the topic, literature review, problem definition, objectives of the research, research questions, aims, research novelty and methodology, as well as academic and practical value of the research;

- Main body which consists of 3 chapters:
 - Chapter One consists of one subchapter and includes an analysis of the importance of the media and protection of vulnerable groups in the modern world, why it is important to pay additional attention to specific impact of hate speech in the human rights sphere in Georgia. Also, will be analysed regulations regarding cyber space.
 - Chapter Two consists of one subchapter and provides an analysis of the legal framework for addressing “hate speech” in Georgia providing analysis of the main Georgian policies and laws, as well as analysis of the relevant recommendations given to the state by the European Union.
 - Chapter Three identifies Georgian experience of aggressive behaviour in media outlets through social media platforms analysed according to the Microsoft research “Detection of Aggressive Behaviour on Social Media” which was published in 2017. (Kumar et al. 2017)
- Conclusion which presents the main findings and recommendations of the research;
- Bibliography page, which provides the full list of resources used for carrying out the current study.

Literature review and statements

The issue of the necessity to pay separate attention to the online media influence on the triggering of hate speech belonging to different ethnic and religious groups, emerged relatively recently with the popularisation of digital platform dominance. For this reason, there is a relatively small amount of academic research in this field.

Among the consulted sources there could be found general information regarding the importance of different minority groups as taking into account to more efficiently and productively protect the rights of ethnic and religious minorities, as well as internet-based media impact of hate speech.

Below discussed analysis of literature can be divided into two main groups. Firstly, the sources of which authors discuss theoretical analysis about the influence of hate. Secondly, the main group of literature review focuses its narrative on providing statistics of hate content worldwide.

The first group of the review that covers theoretical analysis underline the role of internet, impact of online hate and violence against others as well as it includes statements that can be valuable adding to above mentioned literature.

According to the latest available study by Jakubowicz (2017), hate speech on the internet, based on ethnic differences overwhelmed the capacity of states or civil society to limit its spread and impact. According to Jakubowicz, Facebook faces boycotts by advertisers and financial risks, since major brands associating their marketing to sites associated with terrorist, racist, homophobic, sexist and radical messages. (Jakubowicz 2017, 42) In the article the author articulates *“How the internet does its racism thing”* and says that, *“a few interventions*

implemented against the use of the internet for the popularisation of terrorist violence in internet have not been overwhelmingly successful." Since migration crisis in Europe racism has become more prominent issue. In 2016 during the United States presidential elections, has been revealed the multiple layers of conflict around race and values was discussed by national and transnational social movements. (Jakubowicz 2017, 44)

Radical behaviour on the internet is overviewed by Canada's Centre for Digital and Media Literacy. To discuss impact of "online hate" the Centre for Digital and Media Literacy studied three main impacts of it. The article highlights radicalisation as the significant harm caused to the target group. Further the author explains the term which refers to the process when someone believes that violence against others is justified in protection of their own group, most cases it is the dominant part of society. At the same time, it is worth to mention even within a hate group, only a minor amount of people may be radicalised to the level where they are prepared and ready to promote and take actions of violent acts. (MediaSmarts, n.d.)

In the article of The Independent (Batchelor 2018) the author brings comments of United Nations expert who warned that, considerable rise in the number of social platforms hosting racist content is permitting all ultra-right groups to circulate hate speech and inflame violence in society, Tendayi Achiume special rapporteur of the United Nations (UN) warned. Achiume further added that "growing climate of intolerance" is a result of proliferation of far-right movement websites. (Trinidade, n.d.)

To avoid the naturalisation of racism which is type of the hate speech UN Human rights Council raises the issue of dissemination of hateful discourses.

Luiz Valério P. Trindade (2018) summarised UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, Mutuma Ruteere's report, according to which the United Nations Human Rights Council is warning that *"The dissemination of hateful discourses in the online environment can lead people towards their naturalization and acceptance as something normal. In other words, if hate speech becomes the 'new normal', we can gradually witness online intolerance eventually becoming tolerable and an enduring component of the social landscape."* (Ruteere 2014)

Gagliardone et al. (2015) cites in UNESCO Series on Internet Freedom's volume "Countering Online Hate Speech" the Chief Executive Officer of the Online Hate Prevention Institute, Andre Oboler who viewed hate content from a little different angle. Oboler underlines the importance of the length hate containing content stays available, he notes that *"The longer the content stays available, the more damage it can inflict on the victims and empower the perpetrators. If you remove the content at an early stage you can limit the exposure. This is just like cleaning litter, it doesn't stop people from littering but if you do not take care of the problem it just piles up and further exacerbates."* (Gagliardone et al., 2015, 13)

The second group of literature consists of analyses using statistical data predominantly. Apart from the researches targeting country-specific issues – which are not part of the focus of this literature review – a considerable amount of studies focus on collection of international cases and word frequency or textual analyses.

Trinidad (2018) argues by analysing 506 editions of five international newspapers by word frequency, the news coverage of hate speech has increased considerably. The relevance of this finding is that his picture suggests the emergence of a sort of new “world order” within the past fifteen years where hate speech has become part of the current digital landscape. Secondly, it also reveals that recent major political events may have contributed towards the exacerbation of public discourses and extremist political views culminating in the dissemination of hate speech on social media platforms. (Trinidad, 2018)

Kassia E. Kulaszewicz’s (2015) research conclusion of “Racism and the Media: A Textual Analysis addresses as “identifier” word “black” and “white”. The researcher concludes that average, “black” is used three times more in news reporting than “white”. The over-usage of the word “black” becomes a racial micro aggression because it can condition the mind to associate the word with negative connotation. (Kulaszewicz 2015, 2)

Likewise, a recent UN research has referred to the numbers and statistics. The UN dedicated a research to analyse the situation regarding the countering of online hate speech, for the aims of research was used data of the HateBase, which is a web-based application collecting cases of hate speech online. According to the statistics, the worldwide majority of cases of hate speech target individuals based on ethnicity and nationality as well as incitements to hatred focusing on religious groups and class have also been the target. (HateBase, n.d.)

It is obvious that media can easily encourage hate speech, promote stereotypes, unless we take care of each case and do not think about the angle of coverage or the terminology we use when working on sensitive issues.

The literature used in this thesis is an example of how online hate speech in general can affect people and is discussed how to counter with it. Also which are the main identifier words for hate in different media in various countries that is leading to generalisation of whole group in negative context. Hence in the context of Georgia cannot be found such researches or academic work. For the public the above cited literature and excerpts are the easiest accessible sources that are on display in international online media and semi-scientific social science data bases. Since the thesis is focusing on the hate from the angle of online media users, it is significant to observe available explanations, researches and scientific opinions on online hate speech that is available for the mentioned target group.

CHAPTER 1 – Vulnerable groups in online media: how hate speech impacts human rights – the case of Georgia

Impacts of hate speech on human rights

Nowadays mass media is inseparable and unique part of the modern society. Its development has accompanied with variety of changes, it has been magnified, its complexity of involvement changed, technological transformation, shift in income and standards of life.

One might agree or disagree regarding the importance and level of influence of the mass media, as being a major factor in the development and dissemination of social concepts in modern societies. Hence it is argued that the mass media plays the role of a “tool” as something more forceful and more flexible than anything in previous existence in terms of shaping peoples’ minds to certain state of understanding. (Deragon 2008)

Talking about the importance of the mass media it is worth to discuss why someone chooses certain source of information. In the theory of Uses and Gratifications (UGT) the main purpose is to draw attention to the widely used model in social sciences study of media influence. UGT focuses on “what do people do with media?” while the other media effect theories question “what does media do to people?” (Ruggiero 2000, 26)

The UGT argues that source of audience’s accomplishment of needs are generalised in four details (Katz et al. 1973):

- *Diversion* – a way of runaway or emotional release from casual tensions.
- *Personal Relationships* – companionships via television personalities and characters and sociability through interaction about television with other people.
- *Personal Identity* – the ability to compare viewers’ life with persons and situations within programmes, and hence explore personal problems and outlook.
- *Surveillance* – to receive information about what is happening in the world.

The idea that the media is an overpowering force influencing readers and audiences through the content for their desires, can be questioned by opponents with the notion that every person is free in choice of source. This means that the audience can confront being controlled since an individual always has the option of reading the certain news agency or watching a TV programme. On the contrary of this idea I would add that by leaving the option of choice to people solely and by making them responsible for choice without providing diversity, we can lift the responsibility from mass media to produce quality content focused on the actuality of the issue rather than become a source of triggering xenophobia and hate towards the others. Today each of us has wide choice of not only choosing the source of information but also choosing the type of media.

Media broadly refers to wide range of means of information supply system. Media – such as TV, radio, print, outdoor and internet – are instruments to publicise the message flow. Before the outbreak of internet, print media, radio and television news stories were the primary source people used to obtain information. (Hallin 2016)

In 21st century news outlets face the dilemma of moving resources from printed version to internet outlet to try to reach out and attract new readers and viewers since engagement of people with internet is rising day by day. Over the 20th century, information flow channels changed incredibly rapidly, the desire for newspapers gradually transformed into radio which then got modified into TV broadcast. Each shift rendered the prior form of media slightly more antiquated hence people are always tent to obtain news as fast as possible which triggers usage of any new technology that permits them to do so. The internet, social media and many online social media platforms not only make ability to deliver message to the public in real time, but

now anyone can participate in and have immediate access to variety of sources. (News outlets and the internet, n.d.)

Regrettably by the appearance of online media, the quality of journalism has suffered a lot. The main reason of poor quality is the advantage of it, and that is – being quick in delivering.

In the past, before presenting story to public, journalists and reporters would carefully research and fact-check which is important in regards to ensure accountability. Now in the race of distributing news stories as fast as possible to do not be overtaken by competitors the quality is undermined. (News outlets and the internet, n.d.)

Through the time shift of media considers changes in some key elements of it. The speed of spread of the internet gave potential to grow the number of media outlets, correspondingly media grew to another level of influence. This influence is depicted by the term fourth estate.

Fourth Estate is one of the most used term to describe the press and have been extensively used to emphasise acknowledgment of press influence. The term “fourth estate” refers to the press and news media in its direct and indirect ability to shape the issues of the day. In the roots of the term is European concept of the three estates of the realm – the clergy, the nobility and the commoners. Similarly, in democratic countries traditionally power is divided between the main three pillars: legislature, executive and judiciary. Nowadays the term of “fourth estate” is used as a collective noun including all types of journalism and journalists, which symbolises the media as a segment of society that has an indirect but central role in influencing the political system, life in the country and societal changes equally as three pillars do. In this regards Oscar Wilde wrote that the press had become the “only estate” that had “eaten up the other three.” (Dutton 2009)

As was pointed out in the previous paragraph to this subchapter, press has the crucial role in shaping daily agenda as well as actuality of certain issues. In this regard with considering technological changes of the recent decade and significant influence of internet we should now turn to the theme of New Media. Despite the fact that term New Media accumulates social media, blogs, video games and online news outlets, we will focus on the last, online news outlets, nonetheless it is important to acknowledge that in this regard social media is inseparable part and channel of news outlets to the public and this is the fact that gives them a power as the forth pillar. What differs the New Media from old is not only the place or gadget that they read from, but the ability of interactivity and incorporation of two-way communication and this is exactly what this paper will research further. (Neese 2016)

As the focus of this study is to analyse growing climate of intolerance and how contemporary New Media in Georgia influences on hate speech, further research will focus on why is it important to pay attention on hate speech and what can be possible effect of it. It is now well-established that New Media can impair to vast aspects of society and hate speech is one of the variables in this research.

International and legal definitions

Inasmuch as core subject of my study is “hate speech”, first question that needs to be asked, is – what is international definition of hate speech?

In the definitions the term, “hate speech” encompasses and has come to be used to refer to disparage a person on the basis of claimed membership of certain ethnicity, race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, age, disabilities and others. (Encyclopaedia Britannica)

In the several definitions of verbal depictions that have been proposed, main characteristics of “hate speech” involve epithets and slurs, promote evil-intentioned stereotypes, and speech intending to simulate hatred or violence against a group. It is necessary here to clarify that hate speech can also be composed of nonverbal depictions and figures such as the Nazi swastika, however even pornography might be considered as hate speech by a variety of individuals and groups.

Another example of what is meant by hate speech gives Merriam-Webster (Merriam-Webster Dictionary), which has its valuable adding, it underlines that hate speech is forbidden at schools. According to definition of Merriam-Webster, it is speech that is intended to insult, offend, or intimidate a person because of some trait.

Thus far, is defined what is meant by “hate speech” according to the most commonly accepted definitions by encyclopaedias (Britannica, Merriam-Webster and Cambridge Dictionary) and international organisations (United Nations, Council of Europe). However, the legal system has serious drawback since to date there has been no agreement on what is international legal definition of hate speech, and the characterisation of what is “hateful” is controversial and disputed. The papers and monographs cited in the literature review do not use the certain internationally used definition of hate speech, but either focus of hate in general or follow their own understanding of hate speech. This is the reason why I decided to use in my paper the most objective available definitions of hate speech.

To answer the question why it is important to be protected from hate speech we must answer the question: what are the causes of hate speech?

American scholar Charles Lawrence persuades us that the feeling of highly offensive term referring in a derogatory manner and being called “nigger,” “spic,” “jap,” or “kike” is like receiving a slap in the face. Considering a two-way communication feature of New Media any expression is being delivered to wide audience in a very short period of time, hence serving with a negative mind-set. In online space (Keen and Georgescu 2016) users say things, frequently without properly weighing them up and without considering the harm that words may cause. It is not rare when exactly that words used in social media spread offence to individuals and different groups and in better case authors regret or perhaps even retract their words.

Words that hurt vulnerable groups of society is serious problem and can constitute a violation of human rights.

Online hate speech (Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.) is no less serious than the disconnected form of hate, vice versa, it has characteristic of spreading worldwide in a limited or short time, and thus it can be assumed that cyber hate is more challenging. Hate speech is dangerous not only because it creates unhealthy atmosphere in wide society, but also because it can lead to serious human rights violations such as;

- Psychological harm to its victims;
- Physical harm (when it incites violence);
- Undermining the social equality of its victims;

Difficulties arise also, when oppressive regimes are attempting to try to prevent and control the circulation of information. It is fine example of misuse of social media aimed control the people and used as leverage to bypass totalitarian control. At the times when online media shapes agenda of offline life, in the same manner, cyber hate through New Media is a significant conductive factor to the development of offline world, inciting further racial, ethnic, religious tension and other forms of discrimination and abuse. The probability for hate to be spread quickly in the virtual world increases its potential damage. Human race as citizens and people of all ages, create online manners of behaviour that through the time becomes “acceptable” norm, alike in offline life. Through internet people communicate as quickly as possible, and through numerous applications, including for example social media and even online games, and very often also anonymously. Online hate can be expressed in various ways – through videos, photos and amongst forms of expression greater impact on conscious and subconscious attitudes have visual or multimedia content.

Online hate in majority of cases is being directed at groups that tend to be already vulnerable in some way. Who may have specific vulnerabilities? Vulnerable groups are often called also risk groups, they experience a higher risk of poverty and social exclusion, than the general majority.

Ethnic minorities, religious minorities, migrants, asylum seekers, disabled people, the homeless, children and women those struggling with abuse and get isolated, they often face difficulties that can lead to long term problems such as further social exclusion, low degree of education, marginalisation from the labour market: unemployment or underemployment. (Encyclopaedia Britannica 2016)

“The impact is sometimes even fatal, as in cyberbullying, which has led to suicides in a number of reported cases. Hate speech also threatens the safety and self-confidence of anyone identifying with the targets of hate speech. It is necessary here to underline that online activity grows day by day and it shapes features of modern society, but it should not be seen as a realm where ordinary rules of human rights and behaviour applies.” (Keen and Georgescu 2016)

Talking about the activities occurring in cyberspace there is increasing concern regarding two main aspects of it. First particular concern is regulations regarding cyberspace, yet another main disadvantage is possibly of being anonymous and unpunished regardless of type of expression of user or the level of offence and aggression.

Cyberspace is young and so are regulations

Today virtual reality is in many ways less advanced and young than that of the physical world and so are the laws, regulations and norms which narrate to what is generally considered as acceptable or unacceptable, therefore activities in cyber space should be viewed through the same spectrum of general human values that guide us in our real life activity such as same legislation used in offline world: in particular, it needs to be regulated by existing human rights laws. (Keen and Georgescu 2016)

Hate speech online, or cyber hate is propagated and amplified by underestimating its devastating effects on people, and by two myths about online social interaction: impunity and anonymity. Anything done online can ultimately be traced to its author or agent; it depends how far law enforcement is willing to go. The impression, however, that one can post or re-post hate speech content without leaving a trail makes it easier to express hate speech than if the perpetrator knows that their name will be accessible to everyone. Together with anonymity comes the feeling of impunity: the agents of hate speech may be aware that their actions are illegal, unfair or immoral, but they are convinced that nothing will happen to them. Impunity is also a myth, because hate speech can indeed give reasons for prosecution in many member states. Both myths of anonymity and impunity need to be addressed and also demystified. (Keen and Georgescu 2016, 152)

The characteristics of hate speech are following:

- Online hate speech may affect larger numbers of people and be more inflammatory or potentially more damaging than offline hate speech;
- Differences in the degree of hate expressed makes a difference to our response;
- An appropriate response to hate speech should not restrict freedom of expression, but it will attempt to address the damage it causes (or is likely to cause);

Some expressions of hate are more extreme, use more abusive words, and perhaps even call for action by others. At the other end of the spectrum there are mild insults or broad generalisations which show particular groups or individuals in a bad light (and may be false). (Keen and Georgescu 2016, 152)

We can classify hate speech in following large groups:

In the following box we can see increasingly abusive or threatening hate speech.



Picture 1. Increasingly abusive or threatening hate speech. (Keen and Georgescu 2016, 151)

As we notice above some groups, may be more fragile than others with respect to certain criticisms. One of the reasons behind this may be the way they are generally represented by the media, or it may be because they are less able to defend themselves. A slur against Muslims, for example, is likely to be far more damaging in a country where the overwhelming majority is non-Muslim; Christians may feel more threatened where they are in the minority.

The following case illustrates how the same articulation applied to different vulnerable groups may have a very different impact.



Picture 2. Articulation applied to different vulnerable groups. (Keen and Georgescu 2016, 152)

In the second box the particular expression is likely to be far more damaging since the context of the second example generalises view of whole ethnic/religious group.

While discussing certain case, it is also important to take into account other factors such as the existing tensions or prejudices, the authority, position and influence of the person responsible for the expression, and so on.



Picture 3. Position and influence of the person responsible for the expression. (Keen and Georgescu 2016, 153)

The actual or probable impact of hate on individuals, groups, or society as a whole is one of the most important considerations when analysing expression of hate, and in weighing up our response. For example, if a child, that is considered as a member of a vulnerable group almost in all societies, is seriously stressed by comments that others claim to be making in a “friendly” way, the actual suffering will probably be more important rather than allowing those others to “express their personal opinions.”

When talking about hate speech, freedom of expression cannot be disregarded, because the line between hate speech and freedom of speech has become so subtle. Despite the fact that free speech is a key value, human dignity, social harmony, equality, freedom to live without

harassment and intimidation, mutual respect, and protection of one's good name and reputation are also central to the good life and have right to be protected. Online hate speech consists of more than merely "words." Making the freedom of expression an excuse for "crossing own limit" of the freedom delivered by a group of radical minds but has also been extended to the mainstream media, which is now providing space for such content. Media have to realise that no corporate interest can justify content that propagates hatred. Skills and attitudes which will be needed if the internet is to reflect a human rights culture.

The case of Georgia from legal perspective

It is well established that hate speech can impair different groups of society and influence equality in a negative way, however we have to differentiate hate speech or online aggression from the hate crime, meaning that hate crime can include as well physical offence and crime.

We should underline here that hate speech is not criminalised under Georgian law. However, under the law of majority of European countries, hate crime is a crime committed because of race, skin colour, religion, national or ethnic origin, a person with a disability, gender, sexual orientation, or the gender identity of another person. Such actions must be considered as aggravating circumstances. (Tartarashvili and Pirtskhalaishvili 2017)

During the discussion of hate crime would be valuable to cast a look on the existing analysis regarding the "Crime committed by hate motivation, hate speech and discrimination in Georgia: Public mood and awareness" research.

According to the mentioned research of non-profit research centre CRRC-Georgia (2018) the number of people who find hate-motivated crime problematic (35%) is less than the number of people who do not perceive hate speech as such (45%). To the question of which group members of Georgia become victims of hate crimes more often in Georgia, the most common answer was "LGBT people." After LGBT community, religious minorities were named – groups that are mainly settled in the regions as a result of migration and groups that have historically been living in the Caucasus.

According to CRRC-Georgia, one of the greatest issues that explains impotency of the Georgian legislation regarding the hate speech and hate crime is that on the Law of Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination was adopted to meet the requirements of the Association Agreement (75%). Relatively few people think that the law was passed to eliminate all forms of discrimination (67%). According to the mentioned research respondents of the last question were people who are familiar with the law. (CRRC-Georgia 2018, 41) One of the types of hate crime that I am going to elaborate in this thesis is verbal abuse. Oral abuse, threats are common and highly unpleasant for minority groups. In the following chapter we will further analyse hate speech in the light of the legal frameworks.

Influence of collective memory on hate in Georgia

Hate in most of the cases is targeting the *others*, those who are not the majority of certain society or do not fit in widely accepted norms. As above stated, this can include race, skin colour, religion, ethnic origin, or the gender identity of another person. Collective memory or shared pool of memories is one of the characteristics of co-existing nations such as multi-ethnic Georgia.

Different groups living in the territory of Georgia share collective memories coming from even pre-Soviet period, they share associations about the group that is significantly connected with the certain identity. Efforts by national media to “spin”, or shape the public interpretation of events, are examined from the perspective of collective memory. According to Wertsch and Karumidze, top-down analyses of such efforts are essential aspects of how shared national narratives shape collective interpretation and memory. (Wertsch and Karumidze 2009)

The narrative template at issue in the case of emergence of hate speech in Georgia can be summarized as “struggle for maintaining the territorial integrity of Georgia,” which includes following elements:

1. The separatism in Abkhazia in the beginning of the 1990s with the support of Russia and treason of Armenians.
2. Losing of the territory of Adjara and Turkification of the region.
3. Georgia is invaded by Russia, a powerful enemy during the August War.
4. Separatist aspiration of Armenians in Javakheti led by “enemy of Georgian statehood” Vahagn Chakhalyan.
5. Border dispute over Davit Gareji and the unacceptable agreement over ongoing demarcation.

These elements are reflected generally in the titles of online written media contents and comments and in particularly in those cited in this thesis and were referred in the questionnaire conducted by the author. (See Chapter 3)

The narrative template mentioned above follows only Georgian characteristics, hence there are parallel narrative templates from point of view of other ethnic groups living on territory of Georgia.

After identifying the motives, forms and sources of online hate speech, it is necessary to analyse how hate speech is delivered through the internet and by which agents it can reach to the target group.

For a better understanding of how online hate speech is delivered, the following subchapter will discuss the internet accessibility and main channels of receiving online information in Georgia.

Georgia at the breach. Usage of internet and ICT in the Caucasian country

Georgia is one of the few Caucasian countries that enjoy freedom of expression and freedom of information as enshrined in its 1995 Constitutional deed. The Law on Electronic Communications 1514 of June 6, 2005 further developed the scope of Information and Communication technologies and the usage of internet. However, despite this appropriate political and legal framework, Georgia presents a *digital breach* in terms of access to the internet boosted by economic, administrative, ethnic, and even geographical factors.

Four divides

Internet emerged in Georgia in 1994 as in most developed countries and its development is also parallel to countries in Western Europe or the United States with dial up technologies in 1997, DSL from 2002, and fibre from 2006, especially in the area of the capital Tbilisi. Connecting networks, though, have followed a different path that has political, ethnic, technological, economic, and geographical branches. Technologically speaking, 90% of the territory of Georgia is nowadays covered by 2G, 3G, and LTE networks. That is a high indicator of ICT, and internet usage. (CRRC-Georgia 2015) According to the Global Stats (StatCounter, n.d.) the most sold mobile devices during last one year in Georgia are Samsung (43.19%) and on the second place is iPhone (20.97%) those are high profile. (The Financial, n.d.) The other half of subscribers has internet connection either in 3G or LTE which clearly reduces the chances of internet use while you are away from home, from work, library or a centre where there is an internet connection and a device such as a computer or a tablet. The internet connection either through DSL or Fibre is not usually very expensive due to the high competitiveness of the sector. Prices in Tbilisi average 50 GEL/month (15–17 USD) which is pretty affordable to the medium citizen. Fibre connections are usually more expensive. (Braun 2019)

In poorer regions outside Tbilisi, internet connection can be pricy not only for the economic conditions of the people but also for the lack of infrastructure development that restricts connectivity to regions such as Racha Lechkumi where fibre connection is non-existent. (CRRC-Georgia 2015) And here is where we introduce the geographical cleavage which is related to the aforementioned economic one.

Overall, voice surpasses data usage in all administrative regions averaging data only 20%. That means that while in Tbilisi connectivity is 100% in all networks Wi-Fi, 2G, 3G, and LTE, the more we travel the country the more difficult it is to find internet users in any type of device, therefore, the more the country is disconnected from the World Wide Web. (CRRC-Georgia 2015) A last branch is the political-ethnic one which divides the country in pro-western Georgians and pro-Russian ones and defines the setting of likes and preferences of the Georgian people. For example, Facebook is the favourite social media in the country by far reaching up to 63.57% followed at a distance by Pinterest 23.21%, YouTube 6.94%, Twitter 2.52%, or Instagram 1.35%. On the Russian side, VKontakte claims a marginal 0.5% of share in Georgia. (StatCounter, n.d.) According to the Caucasus Barometer annual household survey, frequency of internet usage shows that 57% is using internet every day, 28% never uses, 8% at

least once in a week, 4% less often, 1% at least once in a month and 1% doesn't know what internet is. (CRRC-Georgia, n.d., a)

The analysis is that the more connected people in Georgia are the ones in the Tbilisi region who are, in turn, more pro-Western and use all these social media from the United States, whereas, the more pro-Russian are the least connected and the most spread especially over the poorer, barely connected regions of the country.

Main sources of information in today's Georgia

Despite all said, findings show that television is still today used as the main source of information in Georgia with 88% of the share while the internet is the main source of information for 5% of the population. (CRRC-Georgia, n.d., b)

The total amount of television sets in Georgia is over 2.5 million, which turns out to be over 500 every 1,000 people. In contrast, the total amount of internet subscribers is 23,000 which turn out to be over 4.6 users every 1,000 people. These data clearly show that Georgia has still a long way to complete the digital transition. (Davis, n.d.) On the other hand, findings show that when choosing reliable information sources, Georgians prefer Georgian-speaking media either in internet, television or radio. According to "All you can read magazine", the top general information online portals in Georgia are *ambebi.ge*, *intermedia.ge*, and *interpress news.ge*. (All You Can Read, n.d.) The first can be read in Georgian and Russian only, the second is written in Georgian, and the third can be read in Georgian and English. Internet implementation in the Caucasian country has been similar to other developed countries in Western Europe and the United States in terms of legal framework that enshrined the freedom of expression and prohibition of censorship as well as the freedom of enterprise to invest in information and communication technologies in Georgia. Nonetheless, infrastructure development and economic conditions in the country have influenced the use of it.

Nowadays, Georgia is at a digital breach boosted by at least 4 divides: economic, social, political-ethnic, and geographical.

These four divides keep the *digital breach* of Georgia open and justifies the reason why still a great majority rely on television rather than internet as far as information is concerned.

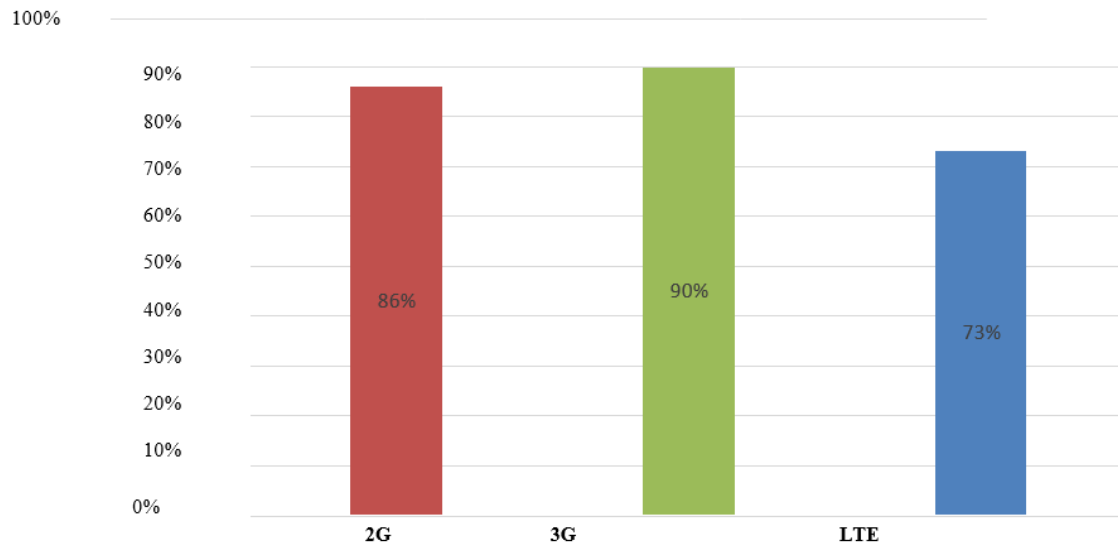


Figure 1 shows the percentage of the territory covered by a mobile-cellular network, for each type of technology: 2G and 3G networks cover approximately 90% territory of Georgia, while LTE covers a smaller percentage. (CRRC, 2015)

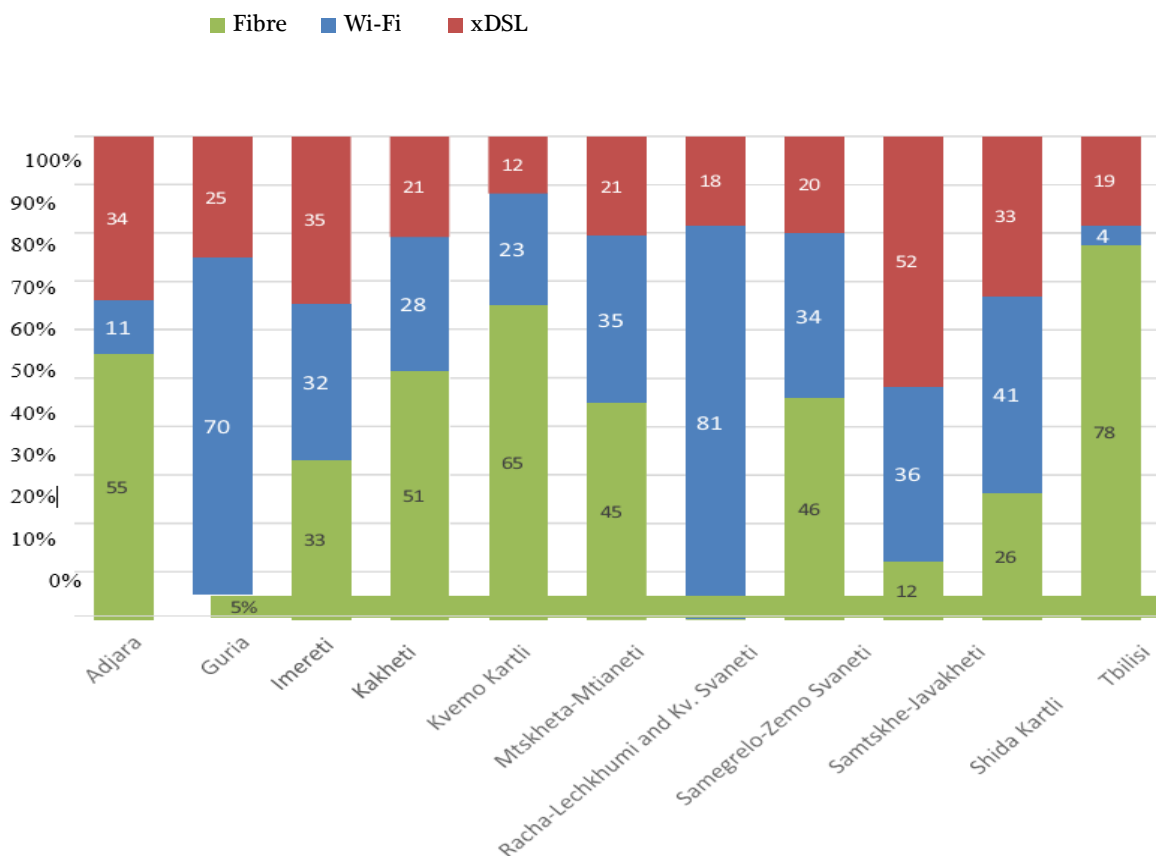


Figure 2: Number of fixed broadband active subscriptions in the regions of Georgia. (CRRC, 2015)

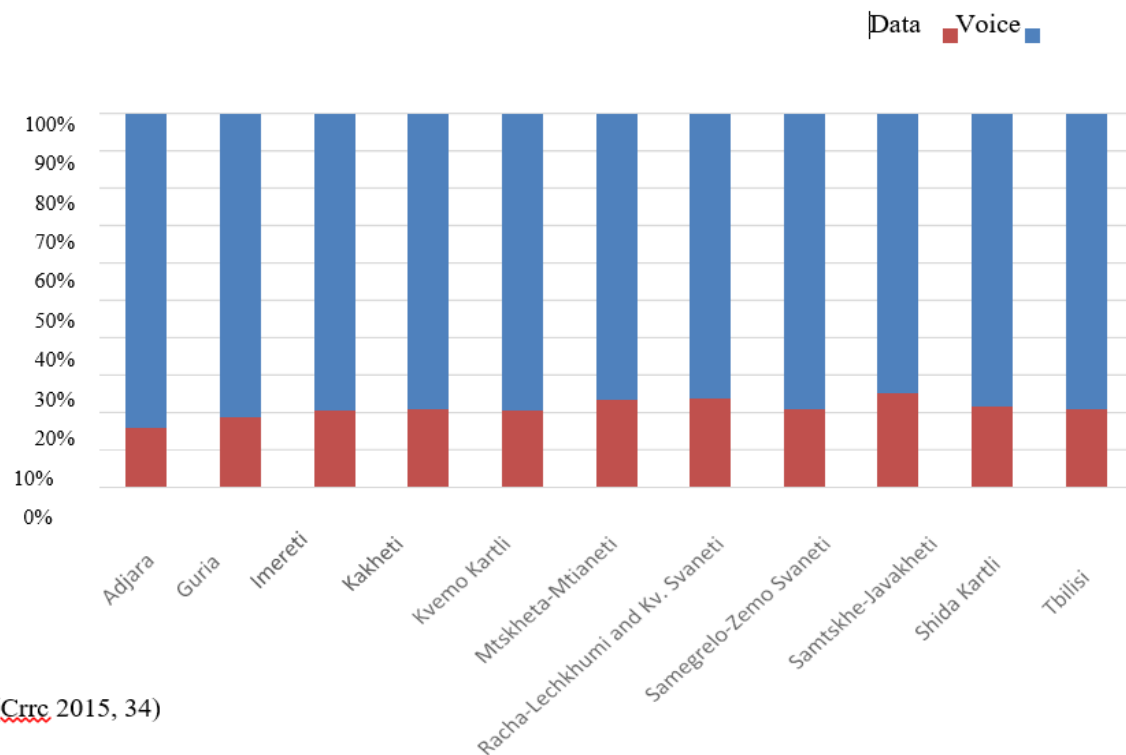


Figure 3: Number of subscriptions for each administrative region by type of event (voice and data). (CRRRC, 2015)

As a conclusion of this chapter we can say that mass media – which is inseparable part of modern society – influences audiences by the content. Through the time, move from printed version to internet outlet helped media to reach out more readers since engagement of people with internet is rising day by day. This influence of media is depicted by the term of the fourth estate.

Incorporation of two-way communication raised issues of hate speech. As various studies showed, most often hate is towards those who are already vulnerable in some way. What makes issue of online hate to be addressed is cyberspace which is young and so are the regulations. To refer to the situation in Georgia hate speech is not criminalised under Georgian law. Hence Facebook is favourite social media in Georgia from where Georgians get most of the information and news and thus it is biggest platform for spread of hate speech. To give deeper analysis, perception of hate will be analysed in the following chapter in general and why and how the Law of Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination was adopted in Georgia.

CHAPTER 2 – Analysis of the legal framework for addressing hate speech in Georgia

In some societies, hate speech is used as a tool to promote specific political agenda that are subject to be bought by the citizens whether it is economic, social, or political interest.

The state is not the only entity capable of spreading hate and persuading people into hatred actions through speech. On the contrary, factual powers like the media or religious organisations can also disseminate the seed of hate in societies.

Since 1945, open, democratic societies have been progressively aligning with the United Nations charter and the 1948 human rights declaration to make their communities and nations more civilised where fundamental freedoms are not biased but fully transposed into their new constitutional deeds.

Nevertheless, the act of acknowledging certain rights and freedoms not always ensured its full implementation, and that is when regional international bodies such as the Council of Europe or the European Human Rights Court came into play.

These bodies produce a “prestige effect” that makes sovereign countries change legal and even constitutional arrangements to become full members.

Such is the case of Georgia, a former Soviet republic. Its brand new 1995 Constitution was impeccably aligned with open and democratic values. (Constitution of Georgia, 1995)

The third president of Georgia Mikheil Saakashvili, came to government by a pro-Western change of power. After the 2008 Russia-Georgian war, the country left Russian organisations such as the Commonwealth of Independent States and showed its desire to get closer to international organisations of the West. (Saakashvili 2018, 181)

Such a geopolitical shift made the country hold tight to European standards regarding human rights and the recommendations by the Council of Europe to address sensitive issues such as hate speech and hate crime.

The political measures and reforms undertaken by Georgia were to pass a controversial law concerning discrimination and the strengthening of the people’s defender institution (ombudsman).

The main controversy of the new Law comes, in my view, from a clash with the 1995 Constitution concerning the difficult match between fundamental freedoms of speech consecrated in Article 17 as well as freedom of media specified in Articles 17.1 and 17. (Constitution of Georgia, 1995)

The Apostolic Autocephalous Church of Georgia, which constitutional condition rendered it so far nearly “untouchable” opposed to the new law because of Article 3 that estates that all organisations are treated equally without exception. (Law of Georgia on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination, 2014)

Furthermore, pro-Russian media outlets and ethno-nationalistic journalists opposed to some parts of the law (related to “sexual orientation”) since they and their media partners are those that more often use hate speech (Transparency International 2014) to downplay an adversary or to launch general fallacies and fake news.

Freedom of expression vs. hate speech

Freedom of expression is an exceptionally great concept. It is regarded as an intrinsic quality of being human. However, while some consider it absolute, others think that some restrictions must be imposed to avoid hate speech.

In most countries, hate speech is not codified in favour of freedom of expression and opinion, while in a few such as Canada, Australia or Germany, certain constitutional provisions attempt to codify the instances when freedom of speech is restricted to avoid hate speech and hate crime.

In the European Union, anti-discrimination laws and hate speech regulation are introduced in civil codes of European Union member states through the transposition of EU legislation such as directives. The EU anti-discrimination law passed in 2000 has impacted national legislation in this matter. (Council Directive 2000)

Hate speech handling has been a concern for major European nations since the turn of the century due to the rise of extremist groups that wage anti-democratic and sectarian-exclusive statements addressed to other nationals by their ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation.

Germany is the best example of how a nation can balance freedom of expression against hate speech. The European country passed legislation that vetoed hate speech and hate writings. One example is how it handles holocaust deniers' statements or any Nazi apology with up to 5 years in prison. (Sauerbrey 2017) Another example is the measure which threatens with jail anyone in France who denies Armenian genocide committed by Ottoman Turks. (France24, 2012) But unfortunately in Georgia there is no recording of such an incident.

Hate speech is prosecuted as far as it can be proven that it motivates and exacerbates individuals' and groups' participation in committing a crime against minorities.

In Georgia, the Constitution of 1995 defines freedom of speech in Articles 17 and 17.1 that shields the protection of this inalienable right. However, Article 17.5 vaguely opens the door to some restriction in the right of certain circumstances developed by the 2014 law on eliminating all forms of discrimination.

Curiously, neither the 1995 Constitution nor the 2014 law on eliminating all forms of discrimination openly refer to the concept of "hate speech." The controversial definition and the difficulty of setting a broadly accepted criterion might be behind this fact.

Hate speech as defined by international bodies: the United Nations, the Council of Europe, and the European Court of Human rights.

UN addressing hate speech

In the context of this paper, the term "hate speech" is understood as any kind of communication in speech, writing or behaviour, which attacks or uses discriminatory language with reference to a person or a group on the basis of who they are, in other words,

based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, colour, descent, gender or other identity factor. This is often established in, and originates intolerance and hatred and, in specific scope, can be humiliating and separating. (Dieng 2019)

Rather than forbidding hate speech as such, international law prohibits the instigation to discrimination, hostility and violence. Hate speech that does not pass the step of incitement is not something that international law demands states to prohibit. But the major problem to underline is that even when hate speech is not prohibited, it may cause damage.

The influence of hate speech is crossing large number of existing United Nations areas of operations, these are: human rights protection; prevention of atrocity crime; preventing and countering terrorism and the underlying spread of violent extremism and counterterrorism; preventing and addressing gender-based violence; enhancing protection of civilians; refugee protection; the fight against all forms of racism and discrimination; protection of minorities; sustaining peace; and engaging women, children and youth.

Across the globe, we are facing a disturbing and increasing flow of xenophobia, racism and intolerance – as well as waves of anti-Semitism, anti-Muslim hatred and persecution of Christians and cultural heritage identified by religion or ethnicity. Social media and forms of news media and communication are being utilised as stages for fanaticism. Public discussion is being weaponised for gain of political points with triggering rhetoric that stamps and degrades minorities, migrants, refugees, women and any so-called “other”.

Hate speech is a threat to democratic values and stability of democratic regimes, states and peace. As a matter of fundamental principle, the United Nations states that it must resist hate speech at its roots. Silence can trigger intolerance, become a signal to violence and threaten tolerance. As UN calls, states should aim to act before a situation escalates to a level when the vulnerable become victims.

UN considers tackling hate speech as a crucial issue to ensure positive development across the United Nations agenda by supporting to prevent armed conflicts, atrocity crimes and terrorism, end all kinds of violence including more vulnerable groups such as women and other severe violations of human rights, and facilitate peaceful, inclusive and just societies.

As already discussed in this paper addressing hate speech does not mean restricting or banning freedom of speech. UN underlines that all measures taken by the organisation aims keeping hate speech from increasing into something more dangerous and threatening, more precisely instigation to discrimination, hostility and violence. (UN Strategy 2019)

Engaging with new and traditional media – the UN system (UN Strategy 2019) should establish and strengthen partnerships with new and traditional media to address hate speech narratives and promote the values of tolerance, non-discrimination, pluralism, and freedom of opinion and expression and same should refer to New Media.

Using technology – UN entities should keep up with technological innovation and encourage more research on the relationship between the misuse of the internet and social media for spreading hate speech and the factors that drive individuals towards violence. UN entities

should also engage private sector actors, including social media companies, on steps they can take to support UN principles and action to address and counter hate speech, encouraging partnerships between government, industry and civil society.

The existing synergies within international organisations elevate them to a prestigious level recognised as referees or guidance when coping with phenomena like *hate speech* and its complexities.

In addition, the Council of Europe and the European Court of Human Rights to which Georgia is a full member understand that *“hate speech is a term used to describe broad discourse that is extremely negative and constitutes a threat to social peace. According to the Committee of Ministers, hate speech covers all forms of expressions that spread, incite, promote or justify racial hatred, Xenophobia, anti-Semitism, or other forms of hatred based on intolerance.”* (Council of Europe – Hate Speech, n.d.)

Despite this guidance, very few countries have a fully developed code to determine what hate speech is and what it is not.

Instead, most European countries legislate hate crimes, which are the direct consequence of hate speech. Legislation concerning only the consequences and overseeing the roots renders states helpless in prevention measures.

Georgia is no exception since its 2014 law on the elimination of all forms of discrimination does not define hate speech; instead, it only provides a series of preventive measures to tackle discrimination.

The process of the adaptation of the Law of Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination

The 2014 law strengthened the People’s Defender Office on the elimination of all forms of discrimination. Thereon, the people’s defender has gained executive and attorney’s powers to monitor, and upgrade cases to regular courts when it deems that an offense has occurred according to the aforementioned Law.

Hate speech in Georgia, broadly speaking, works to strengthen national sentiments by enhancing Russia and the Russian culture in opposition to Turkey. Turkophobia, according to facts and figures, is the main way to discriminating against the stranger. (Kunchulia 2020) I find it important as well to emphasise the role of Georgian Orthodox Church in the process of discussions of the Law. In 2014 when the Law of Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination was in the agenda of being discussed in the parliament of Georgia, Catholicos-Patriarch of All Georgia and the spiritual leader of the Georgian Orthodox Church Ilia II had its unusual role in the process of adaptation, hence Catholicos-Patriarch of Georgia could contribute by its opinion since, according to the research of NDI, in 2014 Georgian Patriarch Ilia II led the top-ranked people in Georgia by 96%. (Kunchulia 2020)

Since the beginning of the 4th century of the Common Era, Georgia has been a Christian country, being one of the first Christian societies in the world. Since the Cristian era Church had crucial role in forming of the Georgian identity. That is why the Church of Georgia is

considered a pillar of the modern Georgian nation and, consequently, why it is carefully heard and attended, constituting a backbone power in the country. (Tolerance and Diversity Institute n.d.)

Georgia according to chosen path of foreign policy was and still is in the process of harmonising legal environment with EU. According to the agreement between EU-Georgia the adaptation of the anti-discrimination law could help in moving ahead with visa liberalisation. After debates with the Orthodox Church, on the law on the elimination of all forms of discrimination and related sub-bills was passed with 115 votes to one, as it moved towards signing an association agreement with the European Union. (Sakellaraki 2014)

From the Orthodox Church's and Patriarch's Ilia II point of view there was a strong opposition to the anti-discrimination bill. The Patriarchate even called on the Parliament to postpone adoption of the anti-discrimination law. Together with radical orthodox groups they insist on removing "sexual orientation" from non-exhaustive list of prohibited grounds of discrimination. After passing the law, the Patriarchate of Georgia has declared that he cannot agree with "the new version of anti-discrimination draft law" either. According to the Patriarchate's statement, negative elements of the draft law initially submitted to parliament were obvious. (Tabula 2014)

Contrary to the Patriarchate, the President commented *"I hope that the society will be better informed and better shown that it will not be affected by the adoption of this law, but on the contrary, we become a better society, because the oppression of others will be prohibited and so it has been so far by the constitution of Georgia, but this law will help us unite. During the past twenty years, we were accustomed to dividing each other into some groups according to some signs thus making ourselves a group too, instead of trying to form a whole society. This is what should be moved into a peaceful regime to move forward."* (Agenda 2014)

However, according to the Human Rights House Foundation, organisations have raised criticism about the suggested bill because of absence of effective mechanism of implementation.

As stated by the non-governmental sector the anti-discrimination law has been examined as "ineffective", as they consider the new law did not articulate about the formation of a special examiner body, which could enforce fines on those citizens who break the law. (Sakellaraki 2014)

In the above established set of conditions, the NGO sector appealed for a bill that would not only fugitate discrimination on the document on the paper, but would also impose banning of all forms of discrimination de facto. Changes set in Article 2 touches on term of "public moral" whose illustration is more complex set side by side to the past legal definitions of the idea. During the debates members of parliament were determined on their demand about giving the mechanisms to Public Defender stronger power so there is faster process of sending the case to the court. (Sakellaraki 2014)

Despite the growing practice of the courts and the Public Defender in discrimination cases, in 2017 no relevant changes were introduced to create effective mechanisms for the

implementation of anti-discrimination legislation and for strengthening the Public Defender as the equality body. Legislation still does not envisage certain forms of discrimination and the mechanisms of protection against thereof, including through the court. The lack of effective institutional and procedural instruments hinders the process of implementation of positive changes for ensuring equality in the State.

Another backbone power is formed by political parties and institutions or public organisations. Currently, the ruling party is Georgian Dream, a centre-right political party that aims to get away from Russian influence and get closer to the West. (Georgian Dream n.d)

On the other hand, we can find the pro-Russia parties that aim to steer to Russia and get away from the European and North American influence. These parties appeal to the *Volksgeist* of the Georgian nation. They focus on epic stories placed in a time when Georgia was free of Turk and Muslim invaders and free of the perverted values and the Western moral.

Factual powers like the media are loudspeakers of political parties and the Church. They are divided along the same ideological lines as mentioned above: pro-Western/pro-Russian trends and the Church. However there might be actors that do not follow the mentioned dichotomy.

The civil society is another factual power formed by all non-governmental organisations. For instance, the Media Development Foundation (MDF) is a Georgian NGO whose report is used here to illustrate independent research on hate speech.

According to the MDF report, xenophobic statements are the most common way to call for discrimination. The groups and individuals that express xenophobic declarations are the political parties and their aligned media groups, especially the pro-Russian, ethnocentric ones. The messages that they send are about estranging the stranger on the grounds of race, skin colour, language, culture, or religion. This last feature is also used by the clergy. The ethno-religious group that is the most targeted is the Turkish, conforming what is known as Turkophobia.

Homophobia is the second way to call for discrimination in Georgia. Parties and the clergy alike repress local LBGT (lesbian, bisexual, gay, and transsexual) groups and formulate the argument that their existence is a threat to Christian values and traditional Georgian family. According to them, they exist because of influence coming from the West: the Church and their related media are involved in the bulk of discrimination and hatred messages based on homophobic grounds. (Sakellaraki 2014)

Examples of discriminatory content found on different grounds include media titles such as “American billionaires bring ‘revolutionary’ blacks and gays to corporate boards”, (Gachechiladze 2020) “Dangerous farce – who and why is trying to cover up the crimes of the Armenian priest?” (Naskidashvili 2014) “Unexpected information Sad and dangerous information that is being spread at the moment how Turkey is trying to join (to Torkey) Adjara.” (Timesnews 2020)

Finally, hate speech can come in the form of pejorative statements, or fake news. These are fallacious stories aimed at harming the reputation of groups and individuals.

Report of the people's defender of Georgia on hate speech

Ever since the introduction of the 2014 law on the elimination of all forms of discrimination, the people's defender of Georgia's powers have been strengthened and is the reliable public power to monitor, report, and prosecute all types of discrimination, including hate speech.

Under Article 6 of the above-mentioned Law, the public defender of Georgia figure is explicitly commended "the monitoring of issues regarding the elimination of discrimination and ensuring equality." This article endows the figure of the people's defender in human rights issues as the Constitution of Georgia in Article 35 already estates.

Even though neither the Constitution nor the 2014 law depicts the hate speech concept, we can find at least 9 actual addresses in the *Special Report of the Public Defender of Georgia on Combating and Preventing Discrimination and the State of Equality 2019*. (Ombudsman 2020)

The 335 pages report refers to hate speech when addressing issues like tightening its regulation in media and parliamentary proposals on broadcasting in pages 175 and 179; regarding electoral rights in page 234; it also refers to the social polarity around Russia-West issues that "serves as a ground for a wider spread of the hate speech."

According to the report, the people's defender main concern is to stop hate speech in society by regulating the media, promoting the *fair play* in electoral campaigns, and de-polarising passionate debates that confront extremes such as the Western-Russian debate.

It is worth noting that the people's defender explains in the report that the legislative proposal submitted to the Georgian Parliament and the amendments proposed to the broadcasting law is designed "to approximate Georgian legislation to the 2010/13/EU Audiovisual Media Services directive" (Directive 2010)

Georgia is not a member of the European Union; therefore, it is not obliged to transpose European legislation into Georgian legislation; However, it is just one prove that Georgia compulsively seeks homologation to its European pairs.

It is no coincidence that Georgia is one of the most advanced countries in human rights, democracy, economic freedom, and the Rule of Law of the Caucasus. The country has been progressively moving towards the European Union and recognising and implementing its legal system of European Law, which is a remarkable example.

The geopolitical context in the development and spread of hate speech

Georgia is like other countries in the region, in the "crossroads" between the West (the European Union, the United States, and NATO) on the one hand, and the Russian geopolitical power on the other hand.

The most open, democratic countries in the region are continuously tilting on one side or the other due to direct influence. Georgia is no exception.

The pro-Western forces in Georgia are those around the ruling party Georgian Dream and current president Salomé Zourabichvili, determined to further alignment with the West in terms of social, economic, and political structures.

Georgia became the 41st member of the Council of Europe in 1999. Ever since, the country has been implementing recommendations on human rights and democracy to raise awareness of policies and initiatives and adjust practices, legislation, and bylaws to the Council of Europe standards. The first action plan agreed between the Council of Europe and Georgia was the 2013–2015, in which the international body proposed to better monitor human rights in terms of discrimination. (Council of Europe – Georgia, n.d)

This fact was achieved through the Constitutional reinforcement that the 2014 law on the elimination of all forms of discrimination brought about.

The latest action plan was the *2016–2019 Action Plan for Georgia* that posed specific recommendations on discrimination and hate speech for the media, electoral campaigns, and national groups and ethnicities. This plan encompassed a project called “*fighting discrimination, hate crimes, and hate speech in Georgia*.” (Council of Europe – Fighting Discrimination, n.d.)

The project started in February 2018, and it will still be running until December 2021. Its main objective is to empower national minorities to make full use of their rights and participate in the Georgian society “by providing:

- Expertise in the legislative review of the criminal, civil and administrative legislative framework regarding anti-discrimination, hate crime, and hate speech in line with the recommendations of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance and other Council of Europe standards;
- Support in setting up a mechanism for data collection covering discrimination, hate crime and hate speech;
- Training of professionals and exchange of practices on anti-discrimination, hate speech and hate crime policies and relevant Council of Europe standards and case law of the European Court for Human Rights to ensure their effective implementation;
- Raise awareness about human rights and anti-discrimination policy and their importance for securing democracy, peace, and prosperity in the Georgian society.”

The first outcomes of this project were published in Georgian news agency Agenda reporting several findings (Agenda 2018) such as:

- “56 per cent of people think diversity is positive for the country. However, 36 percent of the people think diversity is negative, saying that ‘it threatens our culture and traditions.’”
- “Attitudes towards religious minorities, migrants from countries outside Europe and LGBT people are generally more negative,” the study says.
- “People think LGBT people are the most common victims of hate crime and hate speech.

- The next most common group was Jehovah's Witnesses and migrants from outside Europe," the survey revealed.

The Council of Europe in Georgia claims that "in general, people are only moderately informed about the Georgian legislation against discrimination, hate crime, and hate speech."

"23 per cent of the population reported they were aware of the Law on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination," the study reports.

The study reflects data collected through a nationally representative survey, in-depth interviews, and focus groups from June 2018 to September 2018.

Furthermore, there is constant Russian interference. The current relations between Russia and Georgia are tense despite several attempts of normalisation after the 2008 war. Russia has been undermining Georgia's interests since its tilt towards the West at the beginning of the century.

Examples are the 2006 Russian ban on Georgian wines, the Georgian-Russian spying row that involved the detention and deportation by Georgia of Russian spies, the Russian response in the form of economic sanctions. In 2007, Georgia filed an interstate lawsuit against Russia over the cases of violation of the European Convention for the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the course of the deportation on Georgian citizens, and the support mentioned above to Abkhazia and Ossetia rebels and later occupation of these Georgian territories.

The latest clash has been about the Georgian capital protests, Tbilisi, against the government's guest that made a statement from the Georgian Parliament. According to a CNBC article, hate speech delivered by one of the country's top journalists calling Putin a "stinking invader" and a "dog" could play against the country's alignment with the West. (Ellyatt 2019)

According to Agathe Demarais, global forecasting director of The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), *"keeping the situation tense, but also de facto frozen with only occasional flare-ups, serves Russia's strategic interests well. This issue places Russia on the world scene, and undermines Georgia's efforts to become closer to the EU and NATO,"* she said to the CNBC. (Ellyatt 2019)

Furthermore, the tireless work of political parties such as the Alliance of Patriots, Georgian Troop, Free Georgia, and Democratic Movement-United Georgia, as well as media outlets such as Georgia and the World, Sakinformi, Asaval-Dasavali, Alia, and Obieqtivi TV, has presented an erosion process of the ruling party Georgian Dream by inflating the public opinion with hate speech and fake news.

Georgia is a South-Caucasian country at the merging the Russian sphere of influence and the West (European Union, United States) sphere of influence.

Ever since the promulgation of its democratic Constitution in 1995, Georgia has progressively moved away from Russian influence by adopting national policies of homologation with the West in quite a proactive manner.

The regime's desire to join the European Union made the country quickly move from 2010 in adjusting legislation to the Council of Europe and the European Court of Human Rights standards.

Since the international organisation has been closely working with Georgia to adopt and implement measures in specific human rights-related issues, the debate of hate crimes and hate speech has been at stake.

Two "action plans" for Georgia were implemented: the first (2013–2015) resulted in the passing of the 2014 law on the elimination of all forms of discrimination that circumscribed and developed certain constitutional provisions on discrimination and strengthened the powers of the people's defender of Georgia. The second plan (2016–2019) consisted of tracing the sources of hate crime and discrimination, being hate speech the most important. The monitoring, the development, and the outcomes of this plan are still on; however, we can get some findings from civil society, an independent report issued by the Georgia-based organisation The Media Development Foundation in conjunction with The United Nations Association of Georgia on hate speech in Georgia (2018).

In qualitative terms, it is good to have the United Nations Association of Georgia involved since it will cast some light on the UN definition of hate speech and the implementation in this study in Georgia.

The report casts some light in terms of the extension of the hate speech in Georgia and considers xenophobia and homophobia the most significant forms of discrimination.

The report concludes that the most usual way to deliver hate speech is through the media, the politicians and the clergy. In terms of the evolution of hate speech in the country, findings show a moderate decline from 2016 to 2018, perhaps attributed to the deterrence policy of the people's defender of Georgia. (Gogoladze 2018)

A parallel report issued by the Council of Europe and the public authorities of Georgia within the second action plan called "fighting discrimination, hate crimes, and hate speech in Georgia" cast similar findings.

Finally, some reputed experts add that Russia pressures Georgia in every step that it takes towards the West through the pro-Russian media outlets and political parties that use and abuse the democratic system and the freedom of speech to try to de-stabilise the country through hate speech and fake news. Externally, Russia takes every opportunity to make Georgia look bad in terms of human rights, freedom of speech, or hate speech.

As a conclusion of this chapter we can say that the geopolitical shift of Georgia made the country hold tight to European standards regarding human rights which includes issues such as hate speech.

Referring to the international experience in most of the states hate speech is not codified in favour of freedom of expression, at the same time in Georgia nor in the 1995 constitution, or 2014 law on elimination of all forms of discrimination openly refers to the concept of "hate

speech”, although there is urgent need to address misuse of the internet and social media for spreading hate speech and factors that drive individuals towards violence.

Georgian legislation, likewise many European countries, concerns only the consequences and overseeing the roots. This renders it helpless in prevention measures, also Georgian antidiscrimination law does not define hate speech, and instead it provides a series of preventive measures to tackle discrimination.

In the process of adaptation of the law Georgian church had its role which is unique in terms of the influence which served as a strong opposition and according to their request “sexual orientation” had to be removed from non-exhaustive list of prohibited grounds of discrimination.

After adaptation of the law, various organisations have raised criticism and examined the law as “ineffective” because of absence of formation of special examiner body which could enforce fines on those who break the law.

For the purpose of the further research in the last chapter will be own research aiming to address aggressive behaviours of Georgian users on social media and will be identified to what it can lead if the law will not be possible exercise further.

CHAPTER 3 – Detection of aggressive behaviour on social media and analysis

In this research to identify Georgian experience of common dimension of aggressive behaviour in media outlets through social media platforms will be used methodology that identifies and classifies aggressive behaviour, in other words hate speech.

Since over the past decades, there has been a dramatic increase in usage of New Media hence interaction over the web has increased, largest software producer company Microsoft conducted a research aiming to develop a prototype that could automatically tell ratified linguistic behaviour from unrated ones on the online platforms, especially social media and news. (Kumar et al. 2017)

The research “Detection of Aggressive Behaviour on Social Media” conducted for almost 3 years, identified 4 main different classifiers:

- Aggressive vs Non Aggressive;
- Covert, Overt and Non Aggressive;
- Curse Abuse vs Not curse Abuse;
- Types of threat – Non-threatening, Physical threat, Sexual threat, Identity threat.

Researchers detected following verbal aggressive behaviour effect through social media:

- Damaging the social identity of the victim;
- Lowers the status of prestige;
- Upsets social equilibrium and harmony;
- Can lead to extreme behaviour including suicides and murders;

Aggression Typology

Two basic levels of verbal aggression, based on how it is expressed

- *Overt Aggression:*
 - Direct attack against victim (involves use of commands, directives and specific kinds of lexical items);
- *Covert Aggression*
 - Indirect attack against the victim (often packaged as (insincere) polite expression (through the use of conventionalised polite structures));
 - Includes sarcasm and satirical attacks;
- *Identity Threat/ Aggression*
 - Threats to one or more of the identities of the victim;
 - It includes aggression directed at social groups, communities, etc. that the victim belongs to.
- *Non-threatening Aggression*
 - Aggression against individual traits and choices like colour of the house, choice of food (non-communal);
 - Includes most instances of personal insults, cyberbullying, etc.

Identity aggression itself can be divided into 6 different categories depending which aspect of the identity is being attacked:

1. Gender aggression

- Attacks the victim because of/by referring to her/his gender (including homophobic and transgender attacks);
- Attack against the victim owing to not fulfilling gender roles assigned to them or fulfilling the roles assigned to another gender.

2. Geographic aggression

- Aggression aimed at the victim referring to one's place of birth/origin/living;
- Geographical in this case could imply a small area like a locality to the whole of the Earth and everything in between which one's identity is attached with.

3. Political aggression

- Aggression directed against the victim for her/his presumed/actual affinity;
- Aggression against the political group/community itself;
- Aggression and abuse are often correlated but neither entails the other;

4. Castes Aggression

- Aggression aimed at the caste of the victim;

5. Communal aggression

- Aggression against the real/presumed religious affiliation/identity of the victim;

6. Racial aggression

- Aggression on account of the skin colour and ethnic origin of the victim. (Kumar et al. 2017)

Hate speech in Georgia: Facts and figures

To analyse the scope of hate speech in Georgia as defined by leading international organisations, I have used an independent report issued by Georgian NGO Media Development Foundation in conjunction with the United Nations Association of Georgia that balances the current hate speech situation in the Caucasian nation. (However, it is an important qualifier for the data collected and presented by both NGOs, that they are close to the former ruling party “United National Movement” and therefore highly critical of the new “Georgian Dream” government.)

The 2018 report was based on high scale research on the public mediated statements of representatives such as politicians, clergies, journalists, and non-governmental organisations. (Gogoladze 2019)

The study consisted of whether their public statements were susceptible to accounting as declarations of hate towards groups and individuals. The findings were divided into quantitative and qualitative.

Quantitative data were raw figures that cast some light on the actual architecture of hate speech in the country and came out with invaluable conclusions:

1. 1814 statements (comments, posts etc.) were considered discriminatory statements in the period from 1 January 2018 to 31 December 2018 in the monitored media outlets.
2. 44.1% were considered xenophobic, considering xenophobia as the hate and discrimination against the strangers.
3. 40.4% were explicitly considered homophobic-oriented, considering homophobia as the hate or discrimination against sexual diversity, including LGBT (lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgender).
4. 8.5% were considered religious discrimination.
5. 7% were considered racist and hatred statements.

Quantitative data also reflects the number of times that each type of statement was said and by whom (Gogoladze 2019, 10):

1. *Media* was responsible for 241 xenophobic messages during the period, 310 of a homophobic nature, 51 times regarding religious discrimination, 11 times raw hate speech, and 36 racist declarations.
2. *Politicians* were responsible for 231 xenophobic statements, 96 homophobic ones, 35 concerning religious discrimination, 18 times raw hate speech, and 4 racist arguments.
3. *Public organisations* were responsible for 116 xenophobic communications, 143 homophobic declarations, 15 pronouncements on religious discrimination, 14 hate speech, and 1 racist statement.
4. *The clergy* was held responsible for 12 xenophobic edicts, 67 homophobic, 19 discriminating against other religions, 4 bold hate speech, and 2 racists.

5. *In general, civil society* was responsible for 202 xenophobic statements, 116 homophobic declarations, 34 calls to religious discrimination, 25 hate speech arguments, and 11 racist comments.

Sources those spread hate speech are identical to those of previous years: hate speech was most frequently used by journalists and authors of online edition *Georgia and World*, it is followed by newspaper *Asaval-Dasavali*, Journalists of *Obieqtivi TV*, the channel having close links to the *Georgia and World Asaval-Dasavali Journalists of Obieqtivi TV*, the channel having close links to the *Alliance of Patriots* party.

Representatives of another pro-Kremlin news agency, *Sakinformi*, made as well such statements, while journalists of *Alia* newspaper which pursues ethno-nationalistic editorial policy and Journalists of *Rezonansi* newspaper made less discriminatory statements than media outlets mentioned above.

In the biannual MDF report for 2016–2018:

Xenophobic statements have more than quadrupled with a peak in 2017 and a slight decrease in 2018, going from 238 in 2016 to 948 in 2017 and 802 in 2018.

Homophobic declarations have doubled from 454 in 2016 to 2017 and have remained steady year on year from 731 in 2017 to 732 in 2018.

Religious discrimination had also doubled from 71 in 2016 to 140 in 2017 and up to 154 in 2018.

However, hate speech has slightly declined year on year from 90 in 2016 to 86 in 2017 and 72 in 2018.

Racist arguments had gone up from 15 in 2016 to 20 in 2017 to 54 in 2018.

In general, the increase of discrimination and hate speech is more acute from 2016 to 2017, but the year's growth ratio diminishes in 3 instances from 2017 to 2018. That could be caused by the increasing number of cases elevated to regular courts. The increase might be related to pre-election campaigns for mobilising potential voters, hence timing is a very strong indicator for that, i.e. parliamentary elections in October 2016 and local elections early in 2018.

According to the latest research of MDF reflecting statistics of 2019 the main source of hate speech was Media (33.7%). (Gogoladze 2019)

The media sources of hate speech are identical to previous years:

Unlike to the previous analysis here will be analysed only online media outlets according to the level of hate speech.

Hate speech was most often reproduced by journalists and authors of *“Georgia and the World”* (საქართველო და მსოფლიო), the next outlet is *“Sakinformi”* (საქინფორმი). The number of hate speech is also high in the news agency *“Marshalpress”* (მარშალპრესი). (Gogoladze 2020, 17)

The internet portal *Marshal Press* appeared in the media space on February 18, 2015.

Marshallpress.ge after November 24, 2015 is owned by Luka Antidze (51%), among the owners along with Otar Stepanishvili (49%), who is a former journalist.

At the Marshall Press Club mainly pro-Russian and anti-Western politicians hold press conferences. (Myth Detector, n.d.)

According to the Ukrainian-registered web portals slovo.net.ua and wikileaks-ua.livejournal.com, Marshall Press published secret telephone recordings of the former President of Georgia and the Governor of Odessa Mikheil Saakashvili, the authenticity and legality of which are not indicated by the media. (Media Meter – Marshalpress, n.d.)

The founder of “Georgia and the World” and its online publication www.Geworld.ge is Historical Heritage Ltd., which has belonged to Tara Gagnidze since its establishment. “Historical Heritage” was registered in the Public Register on January 28, 2009. According to a study by Damoukidebloba.com “Russian Influence on Georgian NGOs and the Media”, the initiative to establish a “historical heritage” was welcomed by Russian President Dmitry Medvedev. Alexander Chachia, a political scientist, has been a member of the Historical Heritage Public Council, the founding organisation of Geworld.ge. Alexander Chachia later was awarded the Order by Russian President Dmitry Medvedev in July 2008 for “Contribution to the Friendship and Cooperation with the Russian Federation.” It is an interesting fact that the editor-in-chief of Geworld.ge Irakli Todua, is also a member of the board of the “Creative Union of Georgian Journalists.” (Media Meter – Geworld, n.d.)

Editors of such publications as Asaval-Dasavali, GeorgianTimes, Akhali Sakartvelo and others those are included in the lists of researches as the media outlets who spread the most hate are united in the same Creative Union. (Media Meter – Geworld, n.d.) “Sakinformi” Ltd is owned by Arno Khidirbegishvili, the editor of the publication. “Sakinformi” was a state agency during the Soviet period. The agency called “Sakinformi” has been revived since 2010. It fabricates information based on Russian sources (Regnum, RT, Warfiles, Nakanune, Rossiyskaya Gazeta and others). According to the source, Sakinform’s domain is registered in the name of Taras Gagnidze, the head of the pro-Russian organisation “Historical Heritage”, which also owns Geworld.ge. (Media Meter – Sakinformi, n.d.)

Research of hate content effecting aggressive behaviour on Georgian citizens

As stated earlier in the paper, the novelty of this research is to provide data regarding feedback of people who might be effected by hate content in media which is being spread by the tool of two-way communication, through social media.

This research aims to answer the question how media titles and comments of Georgian users of Facebook – the most used social media in Georgia – (StatCounter, n.d.) can impact on readers belief in accordance with the previously described theory of Detection of Aggressive Behaviour on Social Media.

For the purpose of the research I collected data from Georgian citizens of different origin, including the target group of this research those are also target group for hate content.

In the questionnaire interviewees (i.e. the ones who are effected by hate speech and members of the majority ethnic group) gave feedback directly and anonymously regarding the titles that can contain hate message or can be classified as aggressive behaviour.

Such data collection that would include two-way response was not conducted previously on the topic of hate speech in social media against minorities in Georgia.

To achieve the set goal and to answer the research question (see research question 1.) a quantitative research was conducted by using questionnaire. During a three-week period in October 2020 interviewees were able to answer the questions of questionnaire on the online platform of Google Forms.

The questionnaire was spread among and delivered to the target groups by using different Facebook groups. To gather feedback from the Azerbaijani community the questionnaire was spread in the social media groups of Azerbaijani students, Azerbaijani library, and groups of city Marneuli where most of the population is ethnically Azerbaijani. (Osepashvili 2013, 11–12) To gather feedback of Armenian origin Georgian citizens, the questionnaire was spread through personal contacts and groups of Armenian community of Georgia on Facebook. To receive feedback from the rest of the target group the questionnaire was shared through the page of a non-governmental organisation Georgian Association for Cultural Relations.

In terms of cause-and-effect relationship was identified following variables: feedback of people (dependant variable) who might be affected by hate content and hate comments (independent variable).

To gain an in-depth understanding of the specific context of research, primary data was used which is original information that I collected for the purposes of answering my research question by using the survey. The research carries descriptive character and data was collected about the study subject without intervening.

It is noteworthy to mention two main challenges regarding the process of data collection: the first and main problem was the language barrier for ethnic minorities. Based on the existing research data of Center for Social Sciences, the problem of language exists in both communities, though it is perceived as more authentic with Georgia's Azerbaijanis rather than the Armenian minority, since Armenians represent 7.6% of Tbilisi's population, while Azerbaijanis only 1%; besides this Armenians have long history of living in Tbilisi and they are well-integrated. (Osepashvili 2013, 11–12)

Another challenge that has emerged during the data collection was that my questionnaire was not allowed to be published (spread) within some Azerbaijani groups. Hence, as a result there are less Azerbaijani participants than Armenian. Although there is no sufficient number of Azerbaijani respondents in order to provide a fully valid data, during the data collection it was possible to get involved respondents from the other ethnic minority group (Armenians), providing equal ratio of ethnic Georgians and non-Georgians. In this sense collected data shall be analysed with the emphasis of minority and majority relations.

The questionnaire was composed of two main parts. The first part referred to the titles of articles/news and the second part referred to the comments written by Georgian Facebook users. The selection of the article titles in the questionnaire are based on the latest study of media where were discussed ethno-religious groups of Georgia (for the additional information regarding hate speech I consulted also data regarding LGBT community). All these groups are the targets of hate in the following narrative (Gogoladze 2020):

- Anti-Armenian statements mostly have a nature of Armenian origin individuals mentioned in a negative context. (By the raising of the issue of occupied territories of Georgia the role of Bagramyan Battalion is being raised by presenting it as a power supported to the separation of Abkhazia).
- Anti-Turkish statements can be grouped with anti-Muslim statements, these are used in the context of invaders (more mosques in Batumi and the economic role of Turkey).
- Homophobic discrimination in Georgia is related to threat to the Christian and traditional Georgian family values.
- Anti-Russian sentiments are brought in the context of occupation of Georgian territories, as a confronting power to the West and North Atlantic integration.
- Anti-Azerbaijani comments mainly refer to the issue of occupation as well as recent spread of the pandemic Covid-19 issue. (Azerbaijan is trying to occupy Georgian territories such as David-Gareji monastery, while solving issues of demarcation between the two countries).

According to the above-mentioned data in questionnaire were presented following titles from Georgian online media outlets.

Title 1. "Unprecedented attempt to falsify history by Armenian so-called scholars." (Totadze 2014)

Title 2. "Turkish expansion – 900 pupils and 30 Muslim boarding schools in Adjara." (Geomediapress 2019)

Title 3. "An unholy LGBT flag flies over St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican." (Mkheidze 2020)

Title 4. "Co-believer Russia seizes Georgian lands on Easter Eve." (My video 2020)

Title 5. "Nobody expected this, the biggest scandal, people infected with a dangerous virus were transferred from Azerbaijan to Georgia?!" (Time News 2020)

Interviewees were asked to answer the following question in regards with each title: "How does following title effect the reader?"

Likewise, to the titles, comments were grouped by the same categories. Each category included three comments. For the collection of data was used social media platform Facebook.

Category N1 – anti-Armenian comments

- 1.1 “From today I am the greatest enemy of Armenians, it is a friend, a buddy, I don’t care, if the person is Armenian I fu...ed his mother.”
- 1.2 “Armenian breed must be cut, more than betrayal, what they did in Georgia...”
- 1.3 “One day you will be responsible for everything that the Armenians committed in Abkhazia, what the Turks did to you, the same is waiting for you in Georgia.”

Category N2 – anti-Turkish, anti-Muslim comments

- 2.1 “Fu..k off to Turkey and build a mosque there, they will wash us away.”
- 2.2 “I see well how suddenly an ordinary Muslim can be transformed into a radical extremist and terrorist.”
- 2.3 “Turkish occupiers, their place is not in the Caucasus.”

Category N3 – homophobic comments

- 3.1 “I have f...ed throat of those who support the LGBT, because they themselves are gays and lesbians.”
- 3.2 “The right thing will be that things of LGBT people will burnt.”
- 3.3 “Georgia was killed/destroyed by these gays (using “pederast” as an offensive expression towards LGBT).”

Category N4 – anti-Russian comments

- 4.1 “I wonder if we have a higher percentage of our so-called neighbours in Georgia or Georgians are more in the so-called neighbour country to earn money.”
- 4.2 “Burn Russian flags.”
- 4.3 “A good Russian lies under the soil.”

Category N5 – Anti-Azerbaijani comments

- 5.1 “Do Azerbaijanis who work in most shops have contact with Marneuli (Region where first Covid-19 was spread)? I have a panic when I think I can get Corona from them.”
- 5.2 “Azerbaijanis brought the virus to Georgia.”
- 5.3 “Predators are considered as friends.”

Interviewees were asked to answer the following question in regards with each comment: “How does following comment effect the reader?”

As for the option of answers, interviewees had five categories of verbal aggressive behaviour effect through social media, out of which they had to choose only one answer.

Categories of answers:

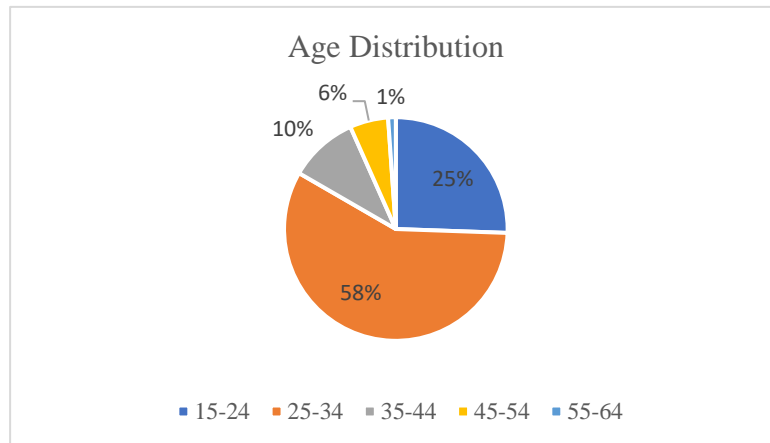
- Damaging the social identity of the victim;
- Lowers the status of prestige;
- Upsets social equilibrium and harmony;
- Can lead to extreme behaviour including suicides and murders;
- Does not effect

Analysis of data

Based on the data gained from 100 Georgian citizens we can identify main dimensions and certain differences between different ethnic group perceptions regarding the effect of verbal aggressive behaviour through social media against minorities.

Age category of interviewees varies as shown in the graph, though majority of them (58%) are in the age group of 25–34, the second biggest group is the age category of 15–24.

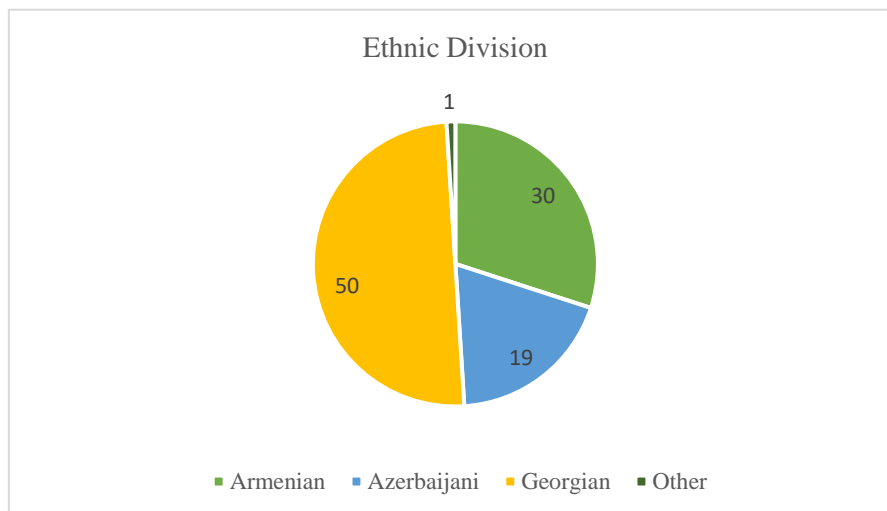
82% of respondents live in urban areas while only 18% represents rural areas. Majority of participants live in Tbilisi (71%) and 29% of participants live outside of the capital.



Graph 4: Age distribution of the respondents (58 respondents are between 25-34, 25 respondents are between 15-24, 10 respondents are between 35-44, 6 respondents are between 45-54 and only 1 respondent is in the age category 55-64).

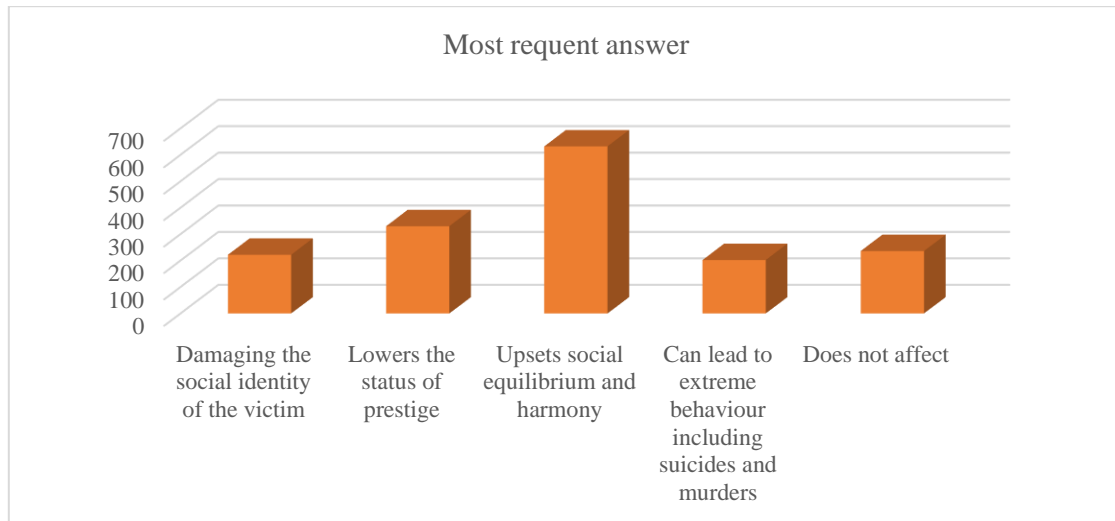
Ethnic differences often explain substantial different pattern and approach to certain question. Here we consulted questionnaire with the main ethnic minority groups, out of 100 participants 50% is ethnically Georgian, 30% Armenian and 19% Azerbaijani.

Before getting into answers according to ethnic characteristic we will review the most frequent answer according to the 100% of respondents.



Graph 5: Ethnic division of the respondents

According to Graph 5 the most frequent answer (most clicked answer) of the whole questionnaire, including all the nationalities, age groups, the mentioned content upsets social equilibrium and harmony (632 answers). The rest of the categories have less gap between each other, for instance 303 clicks were given to the category which lowers the status of prestige. According to 236 answers such content does not affect reader, 222 clicks told us that such content can damage the social identity of the victim and least amount of respondents thought that such content can lead to extreme behaviour including suicides and murders.



Graph 6: Frequency of total answers

Regarding the answers of participants grouped by the ethnic characteristic we find following main differences:

For the anti-Armenian Title 1, Armenians (16) accepted this as upsetting social equilibrium and harmony while Azerbaijanis (14) thought it lowers the status of prestige, at the same time opinion of Georgian interviewees were divided into the mentioned two categories 50%-50% (22-22).

Differences in opinion can be found also in regards with the anti-Russian Title 4, here majority of Azerbaijanis (13) find that it lowers the status of prestige while Armenians (10) think it upsets social equilibrium and harmony, but the perception of ethnic Georgians got divided into two groups where some part (19) believes that it can upset social equilibrium and harmony or this title can lead to extreme behaviour including suicide and murder (15).

In case of the rest three Titles, opinions were not differing from each other.

In the analysis of social media comments, we can see major difference in approach of ethnic groups where it is sharing two different opinions in case of the anti-Turkish Comment 2.1. In this regard Armenians (18) and Georgians (29) share opinion that the mentioned comment can upset social equilibrium and harmony while majority of Azerbaijani (10) respondents think that it can lead to extreme behaviour including suicides and murders, also none of Azerbaijanis think that it does not affect while small number of Georgians (6) think it does not affect to reader.

For the Category N3 Comment 3.1 regarding LGBT community, we again can see slight difference in opinions of communities, Armenian and Georgian participants share opinion that the comment can upset social equilibrium and harmony while some of Azerbaijanis think it does not affect (4) or it is damaging the social identity the victim. Also some of Armenians (5) and Georgians (17) think it can lead to extreme behaviour including suicides and murders. We can observe same dimension in case of other comments regarding LGBT community.

While analysing the results of Category N4 we can again observe difference in the answers of ethnic groups. For instance, for the Anti-Russian comment 4.2 most of the Armenians (13) think it upsets social equilibrium and harmony while majority of Georgians (18) think it does not have affect, in case of Azerbaijani (13) respondents majority thinks it lowers the status of prestige.

In the category of anti-Azeri Comment 5.3, no Azerbaijani thinks that mentioned comment cannot have affect, while according to data of ethnic Armenians it either does not affect (11) or it upsets social equilibrium and harmony as majority of Georgians (30) think as well.

In case of the rest of the comments no major difference is found.

As a result of the analysis of the collected data, we can assume that in some issues – such as the LGBT community – Armenians and Georgians share same views, while when it comes to anti-Russian comments we can find difference in opinions of Georgians and Armenians.

Difference in opinion can be explained by the fact of different collective memories as the theory of narrative templates discuss. More specifically after the dissolution of the USSR Armenians and Georgians have different memory connected to Russia. Georgia had territorial issues where Russia played crucial role, as well as the last escalation between countries led to the 5-day August War in 2008. This last creates memory of young Georgians those are the most active users of social media. While Armenia and Azerbaijan did not have hostile relations with Russia as Georgia.

The difference between Azerbaijani approach and the approach of Armenians and Georgians regarding anti-Turkish comments and titles can be as well explained by belief of common Turkic identity and shared values.

Despite the differences stated above, significantly large amount of responses – regardless of ethnicity or any other characteristics – agreed upon that mentioned comments and titles concerned the upsetting of social equilibrium and harmony.

It is noteworthy to mention that in case of the title and more specifically in the comments that were used in the questionnaire it can be seen that those content reflect the elements of the narrative templates that were previously mentioned in the Chapter one.

CONCLUSIONS

The research presented was primarily devoted to analysing the growing climate of intolerance and how contemporary online media in Georgia influences hate speech.

First step was analysing the importance of the media and protection of vulnerable groups, why it is important to pay attention to specific impact of hate speech in the human rights sphere in Georgia.

To this end this paper studied the existing literature, international and national standards in the field of hate speech, as well as the situation of cyber space. As a next step analysed legal framework addressing “hate speech” in Georgia and recommendation in the process of law harmonisation with EU. The other stage of the paper was to research aggressive behaviour on social media.

The research pursued several objectives the results of which can be found below.

One of the objectives of this paper was to analyse the increasing importance of the protection of people belonging to vulnerable ethno-religious groups. As the result of the study, it can be concluded that:

- Online hate in majority of the cases is targeting groups that tend to be already vulnerable in some way. It is important to understand that words that hurt vulnerable groups of the society is as much serious as it can give rise to violation of human rights; however it is relevant to mention that the same articulation applied to different vulnerable groups may have a very different impact.
- Policy-wise, attention is crucial to online media outlets focusing on ethnic and religious minorities since these groups are exposed to multiple forms of discrimination.

Another objective of the research was to analyse the impact or the potential impact of hate speech on social and online media. The research analysis showed that:

- The main impact of hate is radicalisation that harms the target group.
- Depending on a way of expressing hate, it can have different impact, the most negative impact is being caused by visual or multimedia content.
- Depending on the timeframe hate content stays available, it can have different impacts: the longer it stays, the worse is the impact.
- The dominant part of the society uses hate speech against others and justifies it in protection of their own group.
- Cyberbullying (cyber hate), can lead to suicides.
- Hate speech affects self-confidence of anyone identifying with the targets of hate speech.
- Hate speech is one of the factors that shapes features of modern society.
- Negative impact of Georgian media on various ethnic groups is not a new phenomenon.
- The analysis conclude that the most usual way in Georgia to deliver hate speech is through the media.

The third objective was to analyse national policies and main legal acts and framework in Georgia in the protection of ethno-religious groups in social media. As the result of the analysis, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- Georgia has progressively moved away from Russian influence by adopting national policies of homologation with the West. Georgia's desire to join the European Union made the country quickly move from 2010 in adjusting legislation to the Council of Europe and the European Court of Human Rights standards.
- Two action plans for Georgia were implemented (2013–2015) resulted in the passing of the 2014 law on the elimination of all forms of discrimination. The second plan (2016–2019 consisted of tracing the sources of hate crime and discrimination, (being hate speech the most important) the monitoring, the development, and the outcomes of this plan are still on.
- The antidiscrimination law does not have effective mechanism of implementation.
- The main aim of adaptation of the anti-discrimination law was to help in moving forward with visa liberalisation process. It also moved Georgia towards signing an association agreement with the European Union.
- Anti-discrimination law has been examined as “ineffective”, as the law did not articulate about the formation of a special examiner body, which could enforce fines on those citizens who break the law.

The last objective to address in this paper was the own research regarding how media titles and comments of Georgian Facebook users can impact on readers belief in accordance with the theory of Detection of Aggressive Behaviour on Social Media. The outcomes showed that Georgian online media spreads content that triggers hate and aggressive behaviour which leads to upsetting of social equilibrium and harmony. Content of online media platforms have a negative effect on the belief and value system on minority groups of Georgia. Among many other factors collective memory is one of the elements that shapes hate speech/aggressive behaviour.

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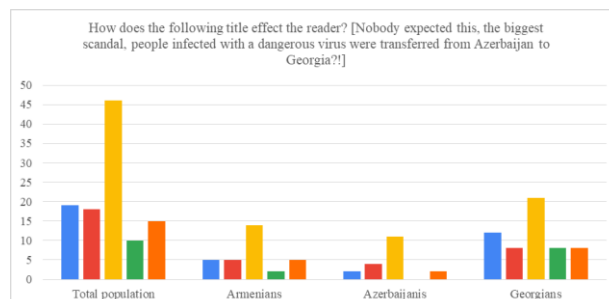
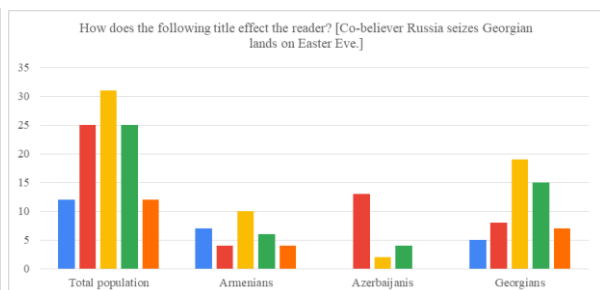
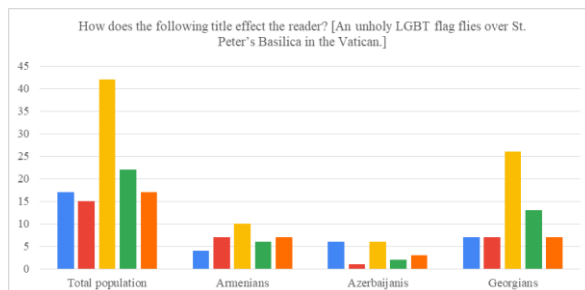
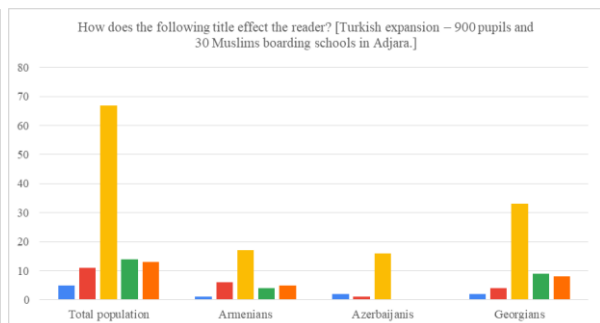
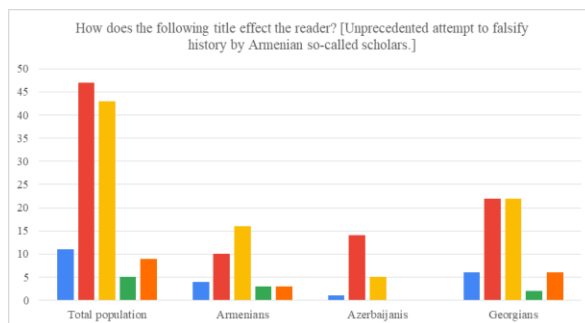
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ANNEXES

Annex I.

Number of responses by total number and ethnic groups in the questionnaire (Article/news titles)

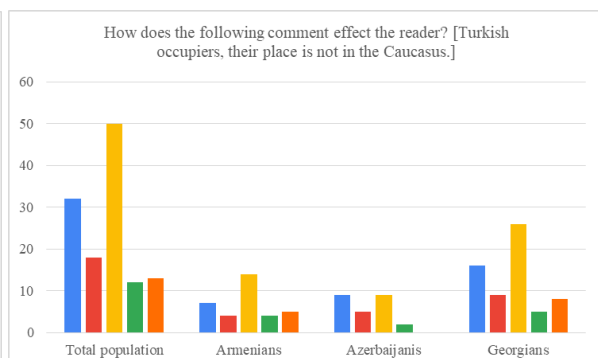
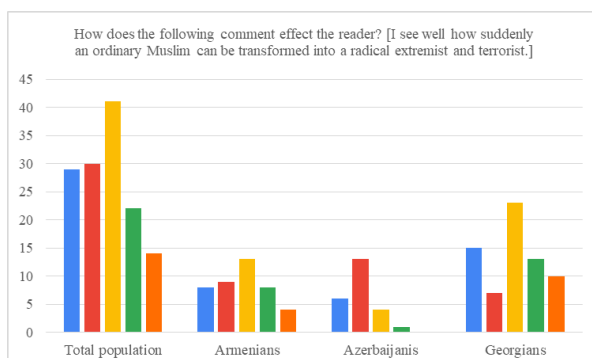
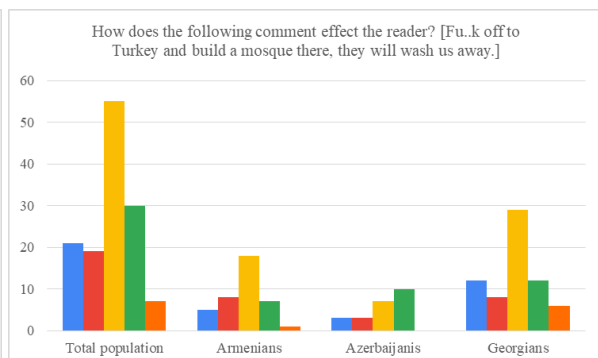
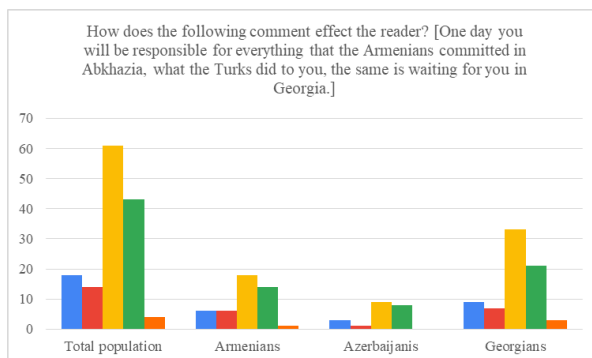
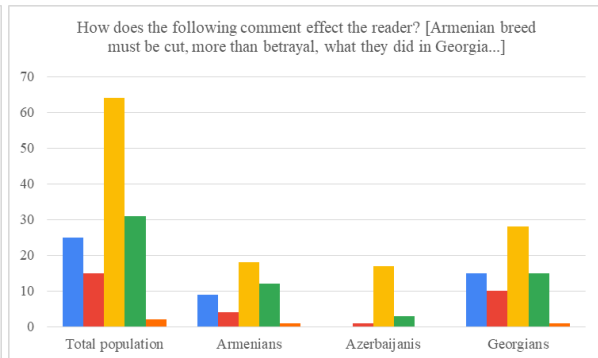
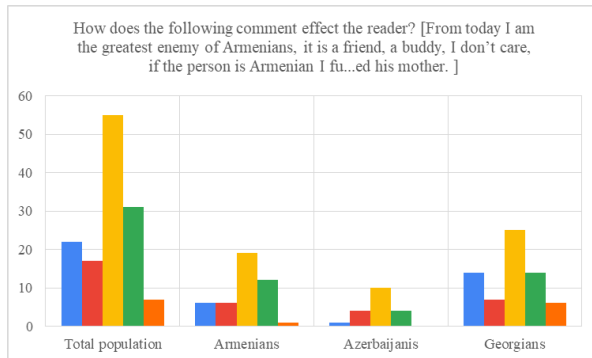
- Damaging the social identity of the victim
- Lowers the status of prestige
- Upsets social equilibrium and harmony
- Can lead to extreme behaviour including suicides and murders
- Does not affect

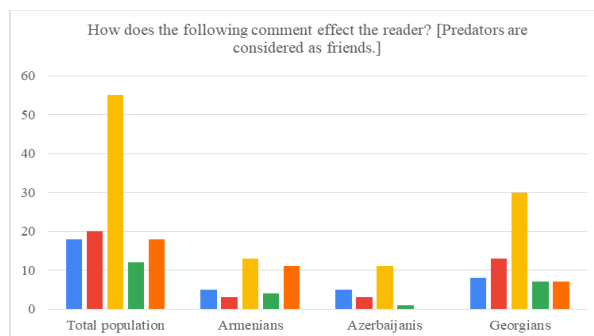
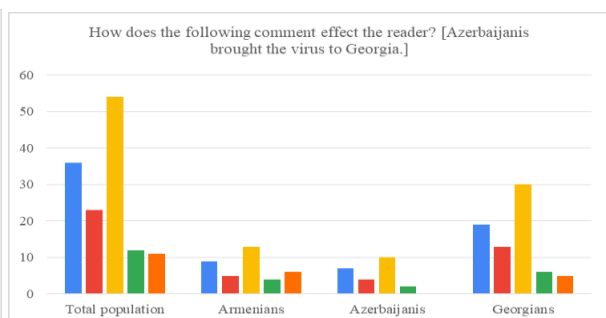
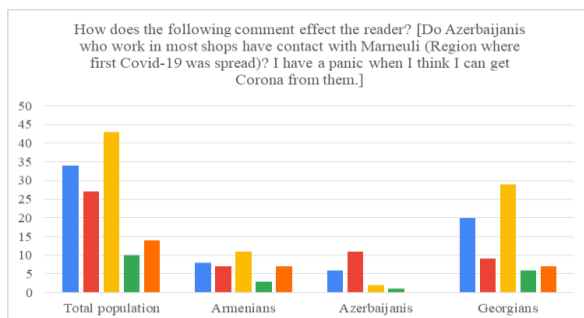
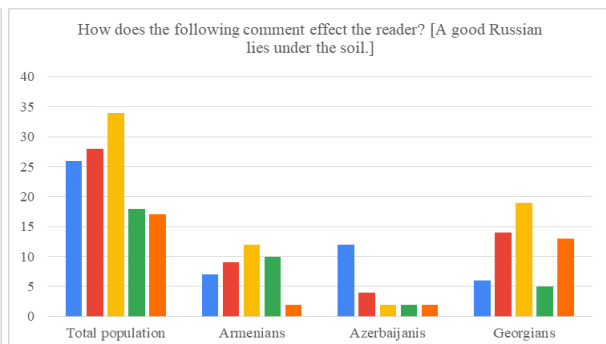
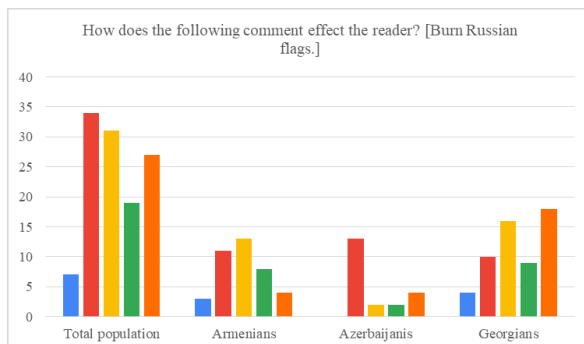
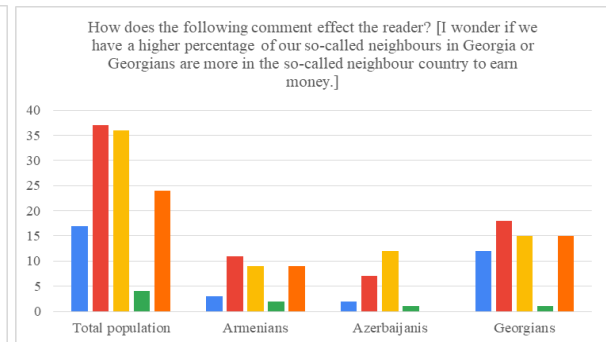
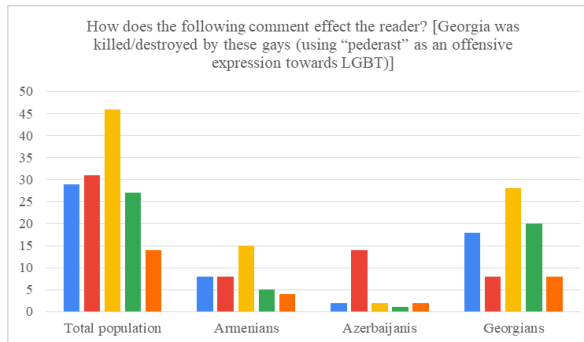
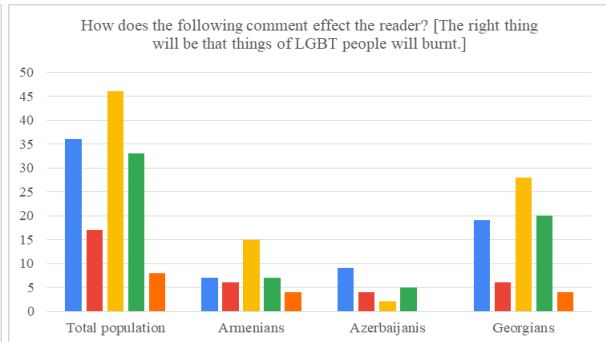
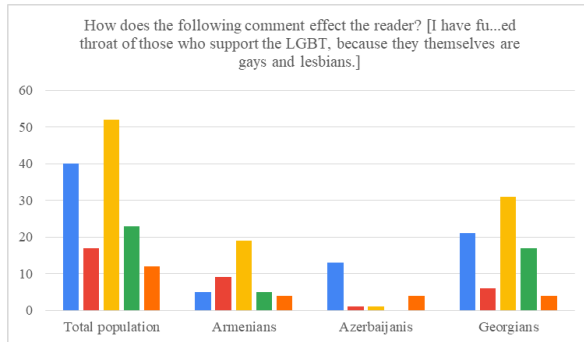


Annex II.

Number of responses by total number and ethnic groups in the questionnaire (Comments)

- Damaging the social identity of the victim
- Lowers the status of prestige
- Upsets social equilibrium and harmony
- Can lead to extreme behaviour including suicides and murders
- Does not affect





Annex III.

Questionnaire

Survey: From European values to the growing environment of intolerance: How does modern online media affect in hate speech in Georgia.

The survey is confidential and the identification data you provide will not be disclosed. The questionnaire is part of a master's thesis on hate speech against minorities in Georgian online media. The questionnaire lists 5 topics published in the Georgian online media, and comments addressed to minority groups. Questionnaire answers will be further grouped on the basis of Microsoft Aggressive Behaviour Research.

1. Date of Birth (day/month/year)
2. Where do you live?
 - Kakheti
 - Shida Kartli
 - Kvemo Kartli
 - Imereti
 - Guria
 - Samegrelo and Kvemo Svaneti
 - Mtskheta-Mtianeti
 - Ajara
 - Tbilisi
3. Type of settlement
 - region (village or town)
 - centre (city)
4. Ethnicity
 - Georgian
 - Azerbaijani
 - Armenian
 - Turk
 - Russian
 - Other
5. Gender
 - Male
 - Female
 - Other
6. How does the following title effect the reader? [Unprecedented attempt to falsify history by Armenian so-called scholars.]
 - Damaging the social identity of the victim
 - Lowers the status of prestige
 - Upsets social equilibrium and harmony
 - Can lead to extreme behaviour including suicides and murders
 - Does not affect

7. How does the following title effect the reader? [Turkish expansion – 900 pupils and 30 Muslims boarding schools in Adjara.]
 - Damaging the social identity of the victim
 - Lowers the status of prestige
 - Upsets social equilibrium and harmony
 - Can lead to extreme behaviour including suicides and murders
 - Does not affect
8. How does the following title effect the reader? [An unholy LGBT flag flies over St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican.]
 - Damaging the social identity of the victim
 - Lowers the status of prestige
 - Upsets social equilibrium and harmony
 - Can lead to extreme behaviour including suicides and murders
 - Does not affect
9. How does the following title effect the reader? [Co-believer Russia seizes Georgian lands on Easter Eve.]
 - Damaging the social identity of the victim
 - Lowers the status of prestige
 - Upsets social equilibrium and harmony
 - Can lead to extreme behaviour including suicides and murders
 - Does not affect
10. How does the following title effect the reader? [Nobody expected this, the biggest scandal, people infected with a dangerous virus were transferred from Azerbaijan to Georgia?!]
 - Damaging the social identity of the victim
 - Lowers the status of prestige
 - Upsets social equilibrium and harmony
 - Can lead to extreme behaviour including suicides and murders
 - Does not affect
11. How does the following comment effect the reader? [From today I am the greatest enemy of Armenians, it is a friend, a buddy, I don't care, if the person is Armenian I fu...ed his mother.]
 - Damaging the social identity of the victim
 - Lowers the status of prestige
 - Upsets social equilibrium and harmony
 - Can lead to extreme behaviour including suicides and murders
 - Does not affect
12. How does the following comment effect the reader? [Armenian breed must be cut, more than betrayal, what they did in Georgia...]
 - Damaging the social identity of the victim
 - Lowers the status of prestige
 - Upsets social equilibrium and harmony
 - Can lead to extreme behaviour including suicides and murders
 - Does not affect

13. How does the following comment effect the reader? [One day you will be responsible for everything that the Armenians committed in Abkhazia, what the Turks did to you, the same is waiting for you in Georgia.]
 - Damaging the social identity of the victim
 - Lowers the status of prestige
 - Upsets social equilibrium and harmony
 - Can lead to extreme behaviour including suicides and murders
 - Does not affect
14. How does the following comment effect the reader? [Fu..k off to Turkey and build a mosque there, they will wash us away.]
 - Damaging the social identity of the victim
 - Lowers the status of prestige
 - Upsets social equilibrium and harmony
 - Can lead to extreme behaviour including suicides and murders
 - Does not affect
15. How does the following comment effect the reader? [I see well how suddenly an ordinary Muslim can be transformed into a radical extremist and terrorist.]
 - Damaging the social identity of the victim
 - Lowers the status of prestige
 - Upsets social equilibrium and harmony
 - Can lead to extreme behaviour including suicides and murders
 - Does not affect
16. How does the following comment effect the reader? [Turkish occupiers, their place is not in the Caucasus.]
 - Damaging the social identity of the victim
 - Lowers the status of prestige
 - Upsets social equilibrium and harmony
 - Can lead to extreme behaviour including suicides and murders
 - Does not affect
17. How does the following comment effect the reader? [I have fu...ed throat of those who support the LGBT, because they themselves are gays and lesbians.]
 - Damaging the social identity of the victim
 - Lowers the status of prestige
 - Upsets social equilibrium and harmony
 - Can lead to extreme behaviour including suicides and murders
 - Does not affect
18. How does the following comment effect the reader? [The right thing will be that things of LGBT people will burnt.]
 - Damaging the social identity of the victim
 - Lowers the status of prestige
 - Upsets social equilibrium and harmony
 - Can lead to extreme behaviour including suicides and murders
 - Does not affect

19. How does the following comment effect the reader? [Georgia was killed/destroyed by these gays (using “pederast” as an offensive expression towards LGBT)]
 - Damaging the social identity of the victim
 - Lowers the status of prestige
 - Upsets social equilibrium and harmony
 - Can lead to extreme behaviour including suicides and murders
 - Does not affect
20. How does the following comment effect the reader? [I wonder if we have a higher percentage of our so-called neighbours in Georgia or Georgians are more in the so-called neighbour country to earn money.]
 - Damaging the social identity of the victim
 - Lowers the status of prestige
 - Upsets social equilibrium and harmony
 - Can lead to extreme behaviour including suicides and murders
 - Does not affect
21. How does the following comment effect the reader? [Burn Russian flags.]
 - Damaging the social identity of the victim
 - Lowers the status of prestige
 - Upsets social equilibrium and harmony
 - Can lead to extreme behaviour including suicides and murders
 - Does not affect
22. How does the following comment effect the reader? [A good Russian lies under the soil.]
 - Damaging the social identity of the victim
 - Lowers the status of prestige
 - Upsets social equilibrium and harmony
 - Can lead to extreme behaviour including suicides and murders
 - Does not affect
23. How does the following comment effect the reader? [Do Azerbaijanis who work in most shops have contact with Marneuli (Region where first Covid-19 was spread)? I have a panic when I think I can get Corona from them.]
 - Damaging the social identity of the victim
 - Lowers the status of prestige
 - Upsets social equilibrium and harmony
 - Can lead to extreme behaviour including suicides and murders
 - Does not affect
24. How does the following comment effect the reader? [Azerbaijanis brought the virus to Georgia.]
 - Damaging the social identity of the victim
 - Lowers the status of prestige
 - Upsets social equilibrium and harmony
 - Can lead to extreme behaviour including suicides and murders
 - Does not affect

25. How does the following comment effect the reader? [Predators are considered as friends.]

- Damaging the social identity of the victim
- Lowers the status of prestige
- Upsets social equilibrium and harmony
- Can lead to extreme behaviour including suicides and murders
- Does not affect



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