

# Hate speech on social media - consumption, reaction and response

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**Abstract**—Hate speech is one of the most discussed topic online and offline. According to the Law Commission of India, hate speech is an attempt to provoke hatred directed towards a group of people who can be identified by their ethnicity, gender, race, or other indicators. The Supreme Court of India has remarked that the only purpose of hate speech is to create enmity for a specific group. With rapid increase in the number of social media users, social media has proven to be a popular medium of communication, resulting in exponential increase of spread of hate speech.

Despite laws in place, there is still a rise in hate speech and related content on social media. The rising enmity between various groups due to presence and consumption of hate speech-related content threatens the society and has real life consequences.

There is a growing need to analyse the consumption, reaction and response to hate speech and related content on various social media platforms like WhatsApp, YouTube, Meta, Instagram, Snapchat, Telegram and X. Through quantitative analysis, this study will identify consumption pattern of hate speech-related content among various age groups in India and their reaction to it.

**Key words**—Freedom of expression, Hate speech, India, Reasonable restrictions and Social media

## I. INTRODUCTION

Hate speech is one of the most discussed things in this online/offline world. Till date, there is no universal definition of hate speech under international human rights law. The definition of hate speech is still under construction. Hate speech is prejudiced, adverse and detrimental content which is targeted at a person or a group of people because of a few of their real or existing traits (Farhana, S., 2022). Hate speech is outlined as a wide range of expressions that are meant to promote, stimulate, or in any other ways justify hatred, violence, or discrimination against an

individual or a group. (European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, 2023)

Article 19 (1) of the Indian Constitution provides freedom of speech and expression and Article 19 (2) lays down the reasonable restrictions. India provides laws to tackle those who deliberately intend to outrage or promote enmity on the ground of religion, race, language or insulting religious feelings or promoting hatred between classes. Law Commission of India considers hate speech as an attempt to provoke hatred which is directed mainly towards a group of people who can be identified by their ethnicity, gender, race, or other indicators. Despite laws in place, there is still a rise in hate speech and related content on social media. The rising enmity between various groups due to presence and consumption of hate speech-related contents is a threat to the society and has real life consequences.

The SC, while hearing various cases time-to-time, has interpreted hate speech in its own way. For e.g., in *Amish Devgan v. Union of India* (2020), the SC remarked that the only purpose of hate speech is to create enmity for a specific group.

Greater internet penetration in India has resulted in vast and rapid increase in the number of social media users. Undoubtedly social media has proven to be one of popular medium of communication, resulting in exponential increase of spread of hate speech. It has been reported that there is an increase of 82 percent (from 38,600 to 53,200) in hate speech related content on Facebook in April 2022 as compared to March 2022. Similarly, Instagram detected and acted on 77, 000 violence and incitement related materials in April 2022 as compared to 41, 300 in March 2022 (Standard, B., 2022, June 1). According to data by Reuters, WhatsApp banned 2.4 million Indian accounts in June 2022 which was spreading fake news and hate speech

in India as well as in other parts of the world. (Reuters., 2022, September 2). During the third quarter of 2024, Facebook removed 6.4 million pieces of hate speech content, down from 7.2 million in the previous quarter. Between April and June 2021, the social network removed a record number of over 31 million pieces of hate speech (Statista, 2025)

*Need of the study:* The amount of hate speech which is consumed by its users is unparalleled. Hate speech inflicts harm, lowers the grade and intimidates the target groups and brings insensitivity towards them. (Mirchandani et al., 2018). There have been various instances in India where hate speech has led to communal violence or deterioration of law and order situation. There is a growing need to analyse the content, reaction and response to hate speech and related content on various social media platforms like WhatsApp, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Telegram and Twitter.

*Objectives of the study:*

To find out:

1. Prominent source of hate speech on social media in India.
2. The most targeted group through hate speech.
3. The reaction and response after encountering hate speech.

*Theoretical perspective:* Theoretical perspective is a structural framework or explanation which helps to connect the researcher to the existing knowledge through guidance by relevant theory. In this case, uses and gratification theory by Elihu Katz helps to know how active social media users utilize hate speech on social media to reinforce certain values and ideologies. Harold Lasswell's Magic Bullet theory seeks to explain how people react to the presence of hate speech on social media and who filters the content and brings it to the people.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Laraib Farhat (2022) investigated how India's right-wing group with the help of IT cells, have evolved online platforms like Twitter, Facebook, GitHub and WhatsApp into hate spaces. Drawing conclusions from various incidents like online auctioning of Indian Muslim Women, like journalists Rana Ayyub and Ismat Ara, on 'Bulli Bai' app, the author remarked that Muslim women were sexualized on the basis of their

religion and it created a negative public opinion against Muslim women.

Dar and Shaigjri (2021) discuss the reasons for increase in hate speech on social media in India. According to the authors, the two major reasons for hate speech in India are, firstly, individuals have been instilled to believe that a certain section of people are second class citizens and thus cannot have similar rights as them. Second, their adherence to specific philosophy did not want people of different sections the right to co-exist in a peaceful way.

According to a study by Sajlan (2021), Facebook has become a new means where caste-based hate speech is being circulated. The study remarked that more than one-tenth of the posts on Facebook used caste-based slurs to vilify Dalits by using terms like manual scavenging and other anti-Ambedkar messages.

## III. METHODOLOGY

Quantitative survey method was used to collect data for the present research in the month of November 2024. For the ease of collecting data, a google form of pretested structured questions were used. 80 respondents were selected through non-probability sampling.

## IV. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

According to Table I, the majority of the respondents (70%) are female and 30 percent are male. The sample did not have any respondents belonging to other genders. As per Table II, 53.8 percent belong to the age group of 20-30 years of age, 27.5 percent are from the 41-59 age group, 15 percent are from the age group of 13-19 years and only 3 percent are from the age group 31-40. None of the respondents belong to the age group of 60 and above.

Table III shows that the majority (83.8%) are following Hinduism, followed by atheism (5%), Christianity, Sikhism and Agnostic (2.5% each), and Islam and Jainism (1.2 % each). Table IV talks about the caste composition of the respondents and majority of the respondents (82.5%) are from general category, 15 percent are from OBC and 1.2 percent each are from SC and ST category.

As per Table V, majority of the respondents are undergraduates (66.3%), followed by postgraduates (25%) and PUC (2.5%). 6.2 percent of the respondents have various other educational qualification (diploma and job oriented courses).

Table VI gives the occupational details of the respondents. 56.3 percent are students. Private employees constitute 18.8 percent of the respondents, 12.5 percent self-employed and 3.8 percent are government employees. An equal percentage of 2.5 percent are involved in business and internships. However, 1.2 percent of the respondents are not employed. Table VII depicts that all the respondents (100%) use social media.

According to table VIII all the respondents (100%) use WhatsApp, more than two-thirds (73.8%) have an YouTube account, 68 percent have Instagram accounts, 65 percent of the respondents have Facebook accounts and 63.7 percent of them have LinkedIn profiles. Twitter is used by 60 percent of the respondents, Snapchat by 57.5 percent of the respondents, while Telegram is used by half (50%) of the respondents.

Table IX depicts that a great majority of the respondents (95%) actively use WhatsApp. More than two-thirds (68.8%) of the respondents actively use Instagram and 61.3 percent of them actively use YouTube. More than one-third (36.3%) actively use Snapchat, 30 percent of the respondents actively use LinkedIn, 26.3 percent of them actively use Twitter, one-fourth (25%) actively use Facebook and only 8.8 percent actively use Telegram.

As per table X, almost one-third (30%) of the respondents spend 1-2 hours on social media every day. The same percentage (30%) of the respondents use social media for 2-3 hours every day. While more than one-fourth (26.2%) of the respondents use social media for more than three hours a day, only 13.8 percent of the respondents use social media for less than an hour every day.

According to table XI, a great majority of 83.8 percent of the respondents use social media for entertainment purposes, 82.5 percent use social media to stay updated with news and current events, almost three-fourth (72.5%) of them use it for keeping it touch with family members/friends/others, 43.8 percent of them use to just fill-up their leisure time, while one-fourth (25%) of them use it for exchanging views.

According to table XII, more than two-thirds (77.5%) of the respondents define hate speech as giving provocative statements regarding religion, giving provocative statements regarding cast, giving provocative statements regarding culture like language, food-habits etc., giving provocative

statements regarding sexual orientation and giving provocative statements regarding ones' nationality. However, 27.5 percent of them define hate speech as saying things that are the offensive and not backed by any information and are unnecessarily harsh and vindictive, more than one-fourth (26.3%) of them define it as giving provocative statements regarding religion, 20 percent of them define it as giving provocative statements regarding caste, 17.5 percent of them define it as giving provocative statements regarding ones' nationality and 15 percent of them define it as giving provocative statements regarding sexual orientation.

According to table XIII, more than half (58.8%) of the respondents came across hate speech more often on Instagram, 46.3 percent of them came across hate more often on YouTube, 43.8 percent of them came across hate more often on Twitter, more than one-thirds (37.5%) of them came across hate more often on WhatsApp, 33.8 percent of them came across hate more often on Facebook and 1.3 percent from each of them came across hate more often on Snapchat, LinkedIn and Telegram.

Table XIV shows that 61.3 percent of the respondents came across content of hate speech on social media 1-5 times in the past month, 16.2 percent of the respondents came across content of hate speech on social media more than 10 times in the past month, 15 percent of the respondents came across content of hate speech on social media 6-10 times in the past month, while 7.5 percent of the respondents never come across any content of hate speech on social media in the past month. Apart from this, 3.75 percent of respondents did not come across hate speech on social media and 3.75 percent are not familiar with the term hate speech.

According to table XV, more than one fourth (26%) of the respondents were targeted on the basis of their gender (11.3%), 10 percent were targeted on the components of their culture like language, food-habits. 8.8 percent were targeted on the basis of their religion, 7.5 percent were targeted on the basis of their dressing style, 6.3 percent were targeted on the basis of their nationality and 2.5 percent were targeted on the basis of their caste.

As per the table XVI, half of the respondents (50%) opine that fan pages of political parties on social media spread most hate speech, 45 percent expressed that individual accounts (not verified) spread most hate

speech online, 43.8 percent say that social media accounts each of politicians and fan page of individual politicians spread most hate speech online, 40 percent are of the opinion that fake accounts spread most hate speech online, 37.5 percent say that social media accounts from fan page of celebrities spread most hate speech online, 31.3 percent say that meme pages (they spread a lot of fake news, hate speech and negativity in the name of "meme page") spread most hate speech online.

28.7 percent say that social media accounts of celebrities spread most hate speech online, 21.3 percent opine that individual accounts (verified) spread most hate speech, 20 percent say that social media accounts each from official accounts of political parties or from WhatsApp group (family/friends) spread most hate speech, 18.8 percent say that social media accounts of fan page of lawmakers (MP/MLA/MLC) spread most hate speech and 12.5 percent say that social media accounts each of individual lawmakers (MP/MLA/MLC), WhatsApp group (political parties or affiliated) and news channels' Instagram spread most hate speech.

According to Table XVII, two thirds (66.3%) opine that Muslims are the most targeted group of hate speech on social media, more than half (53.8%) of the respondents opine that women are the most targeted group of hate speech on social media and 48.8 percent opine that people of the LGBTQ+ community are the most targeted group by hate speech on social media. 37.5 percent of the respondents opine that politicians are the most targeted group of hate speech on social media and 36.3 percent of the respondents opine that people from SC community are the most targeted victim group of hate speech on social media. 28.7 percent find Hindus to be the most targeted group of hate speech on social media, followed by people from ST community (27.5%) and people from OBCs community (22.5%) are the most targeted group of hate speech on social media.

18.8 percent of the respondents opine that religious leaders are the most targeted ones with hate speech on social media, followed by Sikhs (13.8%), upper caste people or general category people (11.3%) or Christians (11.3%) are the most targeted group of hate speech on social media and 3.8 percent of the respondents opine that Jains or Buddhists are the most targeted group of hate speech on social media.

As per the Table XVIII, more than half (58.8%) of the respondents respond by reading/viewing the content of hate speech on social media, 47.5 percent of them check the hate speech for facts, 27.5 percent of the respondents respond by reporting it or by blocking the person who shares the content of hate speech on social media, one-fourth (25%) of the respondents exit the particular group which shares the content of hate speech on social media, 12.5 percent of the respondents respond by un-following and calling out them on social media, 6.3 percent of the respondents read/view and forward it or like it after reading/viewing when they come across hate speech on social media and a mere 1.3 percent of the respondents forward it without reading/viewing.

## V. CONCLUSION

The study highlights the presence of hate speech on all social media platform, and Muslims and women being the most targeted group. The study outlined that most of the hate speech-related content comes from political parties, politicians or their fan pages. Almost half of the respondents opined that people from LGBTQ+ are one of the most affected groups due to hate speech on social media. It can be concluded that now people are more aware of the injustice done to LGBTQ+ by ignoring their existence and refusal to address their issues. This acknowledgement is a good sign for the country and its people. Though majority have a good understanding of hate speech, more than half of the respondents did not fact check. Without active involvement of the users, tackling hate speech becomes difficult. However, the best way to reduce the content related to hate speech on social media is through awareness programmes or by making strict laws.

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## TABLES

Table I: Gender composition of the respondents

Sl. No	Gender	Frequency	Percentage
1	Female	56	70
2	Male	24	30
3	Others	0	0
	Total	80	100

Table II: Age Groups of the respondents

Sl. No	Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
1	20-30	43	53.8
2	41-59	22	27.5
3	13-19	12	15
4	31-40	3	3.7
5	60 and above	0	0
	Total	80	100

Table III: Religion of the respondents

Sl. No	Religion	Frequency	Percentage
1	Hinduism	67	83.8
2	Atheist	4	5
3	Christianity	2	2.5
4	Sikhism	2	2.5
5	Agnostic	2	2.5
6	Jainism	1	1.2
7	Islam	1	1.2
8	Others	1	1.2
9	Buddhism	0	0
	Total	80	100

Table IV: Caste

Sl. No	Caste	Frequency	Percentage
1	General	66	82.5
2	OBC	12	15
3	SC	1	1.2
4	ST	1	1.2
	Total	80	100

Table V: Education

Sl. No	Education	Frequency	Percentage
1	UG	53	66.3
2	PG	20	25
3	PUC (10+2)	2	2.5
4	School (I to X)	0	0
5	Others	5	6.2
	Total	80	100

Table VI: Occupation

Sl. No	Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
1	Student	45	56.3
2	Private employee	15	18.8
3	Self-employed	10	12.5
4	Govt employee	3	3.8
5	Business	2	2.5
6	Internship	2	2.5
7	Not employed	1	1.2
8	Others	2	2.4
	Total	80	100

Table VII: Social media usage

Sl. No	Type	Frequency	Percentage
1	Yes	80	100
2	No	0	0
	Total	80	100

Table VIII: Existing social media accounts.

Sl. No	Social Media Platform	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
1	WhatsApp	80	100
2	YouTube	59	73.8
3	Instagram	68	68
4	Facebook	52	65
5	LinkedIn	51	63.7
6	Twitter	48	60
7	Snapchat	46	57.5
8	Telegram	40	50

Table IX: Active usage of social media

Sl. No	Social Media	Frequency	Percentage
1	WhatsApp	76	95
2	Instagram	55	68.8
3	YouTube	49	61.3
4	Snapchat	29	36.3
5	LinkedIn	24	30
6	Twitter	21	26.3
7	Facebook	20	25
8	Telegram	7	8.8

Table X: Time spent by the respondents on social media.

Sl. No	Time spent	Frequency	Percentage
1	1-2 hours	24	30
2	2-3 hours	24	30
3	More than 3 hours	21	26.2
4	Less than one hour	11	13.8
	Total	80	100

Table XI: Purpose of using social media

Sl.	Purpose	Frequency	Percentage
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No			
1	Entertainment	67	83.8
2	To stay updated with news and current events	66	82.5
3	Keeping in touch with family members/friends/others	58	72.5
4	Just to fill-up leisure time	35	43.8
5	Exchanging views	20	25
6	Others	8	10.2

Table XII: How people define hate speech

Sl. No	Definition	Frequency	Percentage
1	Saying things that are the offensive and not backed by any information and are unnecessarily harsh and vindictive	22	27.5
2	Giving provocative statements regarding religion	21	26.3
3	Giving provocative statements regarding caste	16	20
4	Giving provocative statements regarding ones' nationality	14	17.5
5	Giving provocative statements regarding sexual orientation	12	15
6	Giving provocative statements regarding culture	11	13.8

	like language, food-habits etc.		
7	All of the above	62	77.5
8	Others	9	11.3

Table XIII: Social media(s) on which people have you come across hate speech more often

Sl. No	Social Media	Frequency	Percentage
1	Instagram	47	58.8
2	YouTube	37	46.3
3	Twitter	35	43.8
4	WhatsApp	30	37.5
5	Facebook	27	33.8
6	Snapchat	1	1.3
7	LinkedIn	1	1.3
8	Telegram	1	1.3

Table XIV: Exposure to hate speech on social media in the past one month

Sl. No	Number of times	Frequency	Percentage
1	1-5 times	49	61.3
2	More than 10 times	13	16.2
3	6-10 times	12	15
4	Have never come across	6	7.5
	Total	80	100

Table XV: Targeted aspects of the Identity

Sl. No	Options	Frequency	Percentage
1	Gender	9	11.3
2	Culture	8	10
3	Religion	7	8.8
4	Dressing style	6	7.5
5	Nationality	5	6.3
6	Caste	2	2.5
7	Other	2	2.6

Table XVI: Sources of hate speech

Sl. No	Type of accounts	F	Percentage
1	Fan page of political	40	50

	parties		
2	Individual accounts (not verified)	36	45
3	Politicians	35	43.8
4	Fan page of politicians	35	43.8
5	Fake accounts	32	40
6	Fan page of celebrities	30	37.5
7	Meme pages	25	31.3
8	Celebrities	23	28.7
9	Individual verified	17	21.3
10	Official political accounts	16	20
11	WhatsApp groups	16	20
12	Fan page of lawmakers	15	18.8
13	Lawmakers (MP/MLA/MLC)	10	12.5
14	WhatsApp group (political parties or affiliated)	10	12.5
15	News channels' Instagram	10	12.5
16	Others	5	6.4

Table XVII: Targets of hate speech

Sl. No	Options	Frequency	Percentage
1	Muslims	53	66.3
2	Women	43	53.8
3	LGBTQ+ community	39	48.8
4	Politicians	30	37.5
5	SC	29	36.3
6	Hindus	23	28.7
7	ST	22	27.5
8	OBCs	18	22.5
9	Religious leaders	15	18.8
10	Sikhs	11	13.8
11	Upper caste people	9	11.3
12	General category people	9	11.3
13	Christians	9	11.3
14	Jains	3	3.8
15	Buddhists	3	3.8
16	Others	5	6.5

Table XVIII: Reaction &amp; response to hate speech

Sl. No	Options	F	Percentage
1	Read/View	47	58.8
2	Fact check	38	47.5
3	Report it	22	27.5
4	Blocked the person	22	27.5
5	Exited particular group	20	25
6	Un-follow and call out	10	12.5
7	Read/view and forward it	5	6.3
8	Like it after reading/viewing	5	6.3
9	Forward it without reading/viewing	1	1.3
10	Like it without reading/viewing	0	0
11	Others	7	9.1

#### AUTHOR'S SHORT PROFILE

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