

DOI [https://doi.org/10.32689/2523-4625-2026-1\(81\)-1](https://doi.org/10.32689/2523-4625-2026-1(81)-1)
UDC 316.647.5:[316.472.4:004.738.5]-054.57(=214.58)

HATEFUL COMMENTS IN THE SOCIAL NETWORKS (CYBERHATE) AGAINST ROMA. HOW TO FIGHT IT?

Michal Vaľko, Zuzana Budayová

Abstract. *In the 21st century, along with technological development, social problems in the social networks have also significantly expanded, especially the phenomenon of cybernetics on social networks. Despite the absence of accurate statistics on the use of social networks by the Roma community in Slovakia, their presence in the online environment can be assumed. The study focuses on manifestations of cyberhate against Roma on the social network Facebook.*

Research using qualitative analysis of comments from the social network Facebook. Four selected Slovak media contributions related to the Roma community were analyzed. The comments were anonymized, linguistically edited and examined in terms of the occurrence of dehumanizing, stereotypical and segregating expressions.

The analysis showed a high incidence of hate speech against Roma, including dehumanization, stereotyping and calls for violence. Cyberhate often intertwined with criticism of social policy and contained expressive and even satirical language. In addition, there were also isolated comments that appeared to be a more balanced view or pointed to systemic causes of discrimination.

The findings point to the need for systematic prevention of cyberhate, which includes an educational campaign, the development of critical thinking and intervention programs for different age groups, not only youth. It is important to expand the population to include the adult population and improve research on the demographic characteristics of social media users. Effectively combating cyberhate requires educational preparation, online intervention and a better understanding of users' behavior in the digital space.

Key words: *Roma communities, Cyberhate, Social networks, Prevention, Intervention.*

1. Introduction. The era of the 21st century brought with it a large number of revolutions in science, but also a large number of social problems, especially in virtual cyberspace, and therefore on social networks. Due to the increased use of the Internet and the related excessive use of social networks, Roma communities have also been affected by this phenomenon. Unfortunately, we could not find any statistics that show the usage of social networks by the Roma community in Slovakia. For this reason, we cannot say whether there is a clear number of Roma who spends time in cyberspace and to whom the research could relate directly is visible. We can only assume that with the visible usage of social networks by Roma (with the help of civic associations, defending their community against cyberhate), a certain number of Roma are also found on social networks.

Cyberhate is often inadequately distinguished from hate speech behavior (i.e., hateful comments in real life). Fortuna and Nunes (2018) define hate speech as a type of communication that attacks or incites violence against certain groups based on certain characteristics. These characteristics are then identified as: appearance, religion, origin, and national or ethnic affiliation, or sexual orientation.

The difference between category of the hate speech and cyber hate is exceeding the real to the

virtual. The definition of cyberhate is given by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL). The ADL is an organization that deals with the issue of combating antisemitism. The ADL defines cyberhate as: "Any use of electronic communications technologies to disseminate anti-Semitism, racism, extremism, or terrorism, or information. These electronic communication technologies include the Internet." Thus, we can conclude that cyberhate is such behavior that allows hateful comments to be made by using ICT to target an individual. A more specific definition is offered by Johnson et al. (2019), who define cyberhate as a type of speech on the Internet that aims to attack individuals or groups of individuals based on their race, religion, or sexual orientation.

Gagliadorne et al. (2015) state that online or cyberhate has become more complicated due to the influence of social networks, and the only control is a direct warning of the problem of hateful comments. As a result platforms decide whether to remove this content or keep it. In our study, we focus only on a narrow part of cyberhate, which is social networks with an emphasis on a particular social network, Facebook.

A social network Facebook defines cyberhate: "as direct attacks on people – not attacks on concepts or institutions – based on a protected characteristic: race, ethnicity, nationality, disability, religious beliefs, caste, sexual orientation, gender,

gender identity and serious illness. ¹ Subsequent attacks are defined as dehumanizing remarks, harmful stereotypes, statements of inferiority, segregation or swearing words and phrases, or rejection.

Quandt and Went (2016) subsequently define that groups they identified as cyberhate groups, describing their groups as an enlightenment community that exposed a social imbalance or danger to a specific section of society. Examples include Roma, migrants, refugees, Muslims, and other groups.

From the above, we can conclude that cyberhate is manifested by hateful comments, possibly photos, videos, or other phenomena on the Internet. The purpose of cyberhate is racism, anti-Semitism, extremism, but also anti-gypsism. Cyberhate can manifest itself in form of dehumanization, stereotypes, segregation, and swearing words or phrases. For the purposes of the study, we will only use comments that we identify in some way as dehumanizing, stereotyping, or segregating on the social network, Facebook.

2. Methodology. As an example of cyberhate, we used the social network Facebook, which is recommended by Cox and Susol (2020), and state that hateful comments against Roma were spread on that social network. On the social network, we identified several cyberhate comments against Roma. Specifically, we have selected four articles that relate to the Roma community and Roma in Slovakia. The first of these was an article of the Topky web portal, which reported on the murder of a nurse in Michalovce. The second example we give was published on the Facebook post of the Startitup portal, the article refers to the Roma protests the politician, Marián Kotleba. The third example is a post by SME daily, which posted a link to the podcast Doomed to Failure on its Facebook page. The fourth example was published by the web portal Refresher on Facebook and refers to Pope Francis' visit to Slovakia.

As part of the qualitative research, we used comments from the social network, Facebook. Regarding of gender, we identified both male and female (based on a profile picture) users and the authors of the comments were at different age ranges, which, unfortunately, cannot be accurately identified.

For the examples presented, we used the masculine gender to increase anonymity. For the names, we used the initials of the user. We have grammatically edited the comments. For photos, we have blurred the profile photos as well as the names of the users.

¹ TRANSPARENCY CENTER. Nenávistné prejavy. [Hate speech]. online. Available at: https://transparency.fb.com/sk-sk/policies/community-standards/hate-speech/?source=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.facebook.com%2Fcommunitystandards%2Fhate_speech

Analyzing Facebook Comments

The first example is the comments, which we identified under the article about the murder of a nurse in Michalovce. In addition to the article, we found 251 comments.² The article was published by the Topky portal on January 2, 2023.

Among the examples that we have identified in the article in mentioned article are:

User J. S.: " *What kind of Roma is this gypsy*"

User G.M.: " *Death for death, head down*"

User M. K.: " *Tie a tree to the forest so that the foxes eat it alive, the gypsy idiot*"

User M. M. B.: " *A slow death for that dog!!!* 😞 " (annotated transcription)

User L. B.: " *If I owned a gun according to the law, that is, a firearms license, and at that moment I was in that place, I would shoot him in the head and immediately call the police, I would like to know how I would turn out, but the idiot would already be dead*"

User R. Č.: " *For a junkie, she had to die for a few crowns! Electric chair him*"

Significant is the fact that it is in this case that the Roma are also expressed negatively. However, it should be added that this hate speech is not directly conceived towards the Roma. In these comments, we have identified cyberhate, namely: dehumanizing, stereotypical behaviour as well as statements about subordination.

The second example is the publication of information from the Startitup portal, which talks about a possible Roma protest against the political party of Marian Kotleba. The article is from January 9, 2023. The above commentary hides stereotypes, a superior perception of one's race, and segregation.

User Y. Sz.: " *Excellent! All his life he does not work, he takes over social benefits, the disabled pensioner has already been born and they have run out of patience! When will the patience of most of the population run out and stop encouraging them to do nothing and feed them? That white population must get out of their way when they roll down the streets, not the other way around!*"

The third example we identified talks about a post by an SME newspaper that shared their podcast (Doomed to Failure, Odsúdení na neúspech in Slovak) with a specific title: *They also experience racism in interviews. Why does the Roma not work? (Rasizmus začínajú aj pri pohovoroch. Prečo Rómovia nepracujú?)*.

User 1: You are not Roma or excluded community, you don't even know what you are talking about.

User 2: It's true, I am working, I have hygiene habits, my behaviour is polite and my parents aren't siblings...

² Our source: We identified these commentaries on 17th January 2023.

User 3: It's true, that it's easy to talk, but you don't choose your parents.

User 4: It's true, but normal person is capable of change and in the majority, it's working. So, there is no problem.

User 5: wtf??? You, majority

User L.M. responded to the above comments: "They are siblings because, according to the Bible, we come from two people. The first people were the Roma Romulus and Remus."

User A.B. under the post stated: "Paper boat, let everyone down the Danube, we have no demeanor "retired," we have been paying our taxes on them for a long time, non-eaters, this also applies to politicians !!!"

User P.C. stated: "Who is to blame for the fact that no one wants them? We? It's up to people and employers to blame for how people and employers look at them."

We identified the last, **fourth example** in a post by the web portal Refresher. The article concerns Pope Francis and his visit to Luník IX on the occasion of his visit to Slovakia in 2021. There are more than 2 thousand comments under the post. What is important is our observation, based on the very definition of cyberhate, namely that the comments are a synthesis of hate speech against Roma (because of Lunik IX) and hate speech against the Church as well, as against Pope Francis himself.

User 1: How many times does it help them. It helps, and for a week there was garbage again. The radiators broke off and were sold to a pawn-

shop. Why does someone help us, normal people? I also have three children and I must work hard to give them...

User 2: Maybe fewer dreams because they, the rats, hatch and live because of our taxes, and he (Pope Francis), the old tomcat, should take them to the Vatican if he is wise.

User 4: That's right, it's true.

User 5: Perfect, perfectly written!!! There are idiots here. Our child died. For a year of effort. Because I must work on paying off our mortgage and on our child. And they? He has everything, he takes everything, so many children, dirty...

User M.F. stated in the comments section, "Poverty? Let him come and see sometime in Tesco, Kaufland and see the overcrowded shopping carts that they have and let him come every 4 years to see Luník how they build new flats for them every time when we have such overcrowded baskets or when someone builds flats for free to them."

User R.J. stated, "Let him take them with him and there will be peace... It's easy for him to say... This is a scum that will not do in life, it just sucks the state out of our taxes."

User M.K. stated, "Let him come there in 2 weeks to see what it will look like there! All demolished!!! Let the workers do nonstop and let the scum rot at home and wait for social benefits!!!! Oh, I don't write anything anymore, because the pressure rises when I see this!!!!"

Significant considering cyberhate was offered by Cox and Susol (2020), who report that cyber-

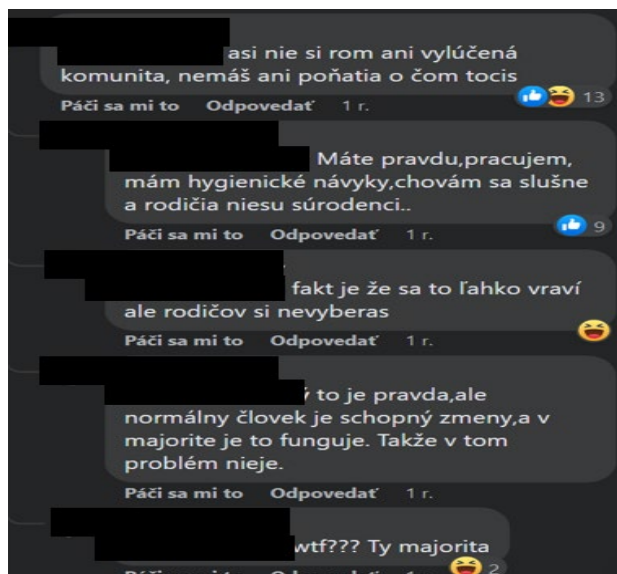


Fig. 1 comments under the Doomed to failure podcast post

Source: own processing based on Facebook profile of SME newspaper. [Transcription:]



Fig. 2 part of the comments below the post regarding the visit of Pope Francis to Luník IX

Source: own processing according to the Facebook post of Refresher web portal. [Transcription:]

hate was concentrated on irresponsible Slovaks and Roma without hygiene during the coronavirus pandemic. *"The Roma were portrayed as parasites, rats, various insects, and animals. Many of the comments contained calls for violence, shootings, evictions, the turning of their children by the state or the razing of settlements to the ground."* (Cox and Susol, 2020, p. 29)

We agree with the definition of Cox and Susol, but we could add that the users use ostentatious and satirical language. From this, we can conclude that the users are not satisfied with the social policy towards the Roma. Furthermore, it can be concluded that users refer to high social benefits, hygiene habits, indecent behavior, as well as parents. In addition to the above, users report "overfilled shopping carts", which is related to excessive shopping. In the Facebook comments, we also identified swear words about the Roma community that match those categorized by Cox and Susol.

Also noteworthy is the occasional contradicted of the virtual population, such as user P.C. stated: *"Who is to blame for the fact that no one wants them? We? It's up to people and employers to blame for how people and employers look at them."*

How to fight against cyberhate

We assume that prevention is the basis for combating prejudice and hate speech against Roma both online and in real life.

Orosova (in Ludvigh Cintulová et al., 2022) lists five prevention strategies. She divides the prevention strategy into:

- 1) Dissemination of information and awareness-raising campaigns.
- 2) Promotion of critical thinking and awareness of prevention of sociopathological phenomena.
- 3) Active learning and non-formal learning.
- 4) Storytelling, using stories from life and model situations to explain the effects of a particular phenomenon on a person's mental and physical health, or social events.
- 5) Prevention programs.

Ludvigh Cintulová et al. (2022) subsequently state that the school provides primary prevention in the prevention of risky behaviors on the Internet. However, we must recall that we have not found any intervention program that popularizes the subject of hate speech about cyberhate. At the same time, we assume that the Internet and social networks are not only used by students, but also by workers and pensioners. We assume that there is no prevention of the usage of social networks in this sphere. The reason for the need to prevent workers is because of increasing digital skills.

Bedrosova et al. (2022) state that both cyberhate and cyberbullying of adolescents are related

to factors such as: older age, time spent online, and exposure to potentially harmful content on the internet. Unfortunately, we were unable to find other types of data describing cyberhate and cyberbullying among adults.

In terms of prevention and internment Win-disch et al. (2020) state that the intervention should be mainly through formal online training courses, or through an anti-cyberhate campaign, which should lead to a learned distinction and understanding of what hate is. At the same time, they want to address prevention mainly through campaigns that would aim to build collective behavior through constructive criticism of the person who hates. Other intervention programs include marking potential hate speech behavior or directing individuals to more credible sources. At the same time, however, we want to add that this intervention should not only apply to adolescents in primary or secondary schools. Due to the transformation of the world from real to digital, adults and older people have also moved to social networks. The problem is that this sphere does not have part of the intervention. Therefore, we are proposing that the issue of intervention and prevention against cyberviolence should also be moved to the border of working people and pensioners.

In addition to the issue of prevention, we recommend a qualitative analysis to find out the number, and gender, demographic distribution of digital residents (users of social networks) and analyze their activity on social networks, including how they interact with Roma or other specific groups of people. Based on the data found, we would then have a better chance of targeting and motivating a specific group of Internet users and educating them about cyberhate and cybercriminality.

3. Conclusion. The main objective of our research was to analyze hateful comments on social media against Roma. We used the social network Facebook, where we identified four examples from 2021-2023. As part of our quantitative analysis, we identified: dehumanizing, stereotypical comments as well as swearing, sarcasm, and ostentatious sarcastic jokes that are directly aimed at swearing and stereotyping. Paradoxically, we have also identified comments that would have an adversarial formulation.

We believe that we have primary intervention should be a means of combating cyberhate. At the same time, however, we assume that without more qualitative research in the social sciences describing the issue of cybercrime from the point of view of social issues, there will be only a weak effort to develop intervention and prevention programs in the fight against cybercrime will be possible.

Acknowledgement. I would like to especially acknowledge doc. PhDr. Mgr. Zuzana Budayová, PhD., M.Ed. for an opportunity to publish this article in the scientific journal. It is my pleasure for me, as a master student have an opportunity to start publishing scientific articles.

References:

1. Anti-Defamation League. (2010). *Responding To Cyberhate-Toolkit for Action*. online. [cit. 2023-01-17]. Available at: <<https://www.adl.org/resources/tools-and-strategies/responding-cyberhate>>. New York: Anti-Defamation League.
2. BEDROSOVA, M. et al. (2022). The relation between the cyberhate and cyberbullying experiences of adolescents in the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia. *Computers in Human Behaviour*. Vol. 126, 2022. Available at: doi:10.1016/j.chb.2021.107013
3. LUDVIGH CINTULOVÁ, L., BUDAYOVÁ, Z., BREDOVÁ, S. (2022). *Sociálna prevencia a príprava sociálnych pracovníkov v oblasti prevencie*. [Social prevention and training of social workers in the field of prevention]. Bratislava: Vysoká škola zdravotníctva a sociálnej práce sv. Alžbety, s. r. o. ISBN 9788081322457.
4. COX, A., SUSOL, M. (2020). *Kríza COVID-19 a prejavy nenávisťi – Medzinárodný report (Estónsko, Poľsko, Rumunsko, Slovensko a Španielsko)*. [Crisis of COVID-19 and hate speech – International report (Estonia, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Spain)]. online. [2023-01-20]. Available at: <https://digiq.sk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/covid-and-hate-speech_SK1.pdf>
5. FORTUNA, P., NUNES, S. (2018). *A Survey on Automatic Detection of Hate Speech in Text*. ACM Computing Surveys. Vol. 51, 4. (1-30). online. Available at: doi.org/10.1145/3232676.
6. GAGLIARDONE, I. et al. (2015). *Countering online hate speech*. Paris: UNESCO Publishing. ISBN 9789231001055
7. JOHNSON, N. F., et al. (2019). *Hidden resilience and adaptive dynamics of the global online hate ecology*. Nature. (261-265). Available at: doi: 10.1038/s41586-019-1494-7.
8. OROSOVÁ, O. (2003). *Prevencia – pomoc – rovesníci alebo „Preventívne nie nepoškodí“*. [Prevention – help – peers or "Preventive does not harm"] In BUDAYOVÁ, Z. et al. (2022). *Sociálna prevencia a príprava sociálnych pracovníkov v oblasti prevencie*. [Social prevention and training of social workers in the field of prevention]. Bratislava: Vysoká škola zdravotníctva a sociálnej práce sv. Alžbety, s. r. o. ISBN 9788081322457.
9. TRANSPARENCY CENTER. *Nenávisťné prejavy*. [Hate speech]. online. Available at: https://transparency.fb.com/sk-sk/policies/community-standards/hate-speech/?source=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.facebook.com%2Fcommunitystandards%2Fhate_speech
10. QUANDT, T., FESTL, R. (2016). Cyberhate. *The international encyclopedia of media effects*. (1-8)
11. WINDISCH, S., WIEDLITZKA, Š., OLAGHERE, A. (2020). *PROTOCOL: Online Interventions for Reducing Hate Speech and Cyberhate: A Systematic Review*. Campbell Systematic Review. Available at: doi:10.1002/cl2.1133

CONTACT

Michal Vaľko
Master Student
Catholic university in Ružomberok,
Faculty of Theology, Theological Institute

doc. PhDr. Mgr. Zuzana Budayová, PhD., M.Ed.
Catholic university in Ružomberok,
Faculty of Theology, Theological Institute
ORCID: 0000-0002-6171-3384

Дата надходження статті: 04.04.2026

Дата надходження виправленої версії статті: 16.04.2026

Дата прийняття статті: 20.04.2026

Дата публікації статті: 09.06.2026