

**Troll the Troll: Final Campaign Summary**

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## **Social Background**

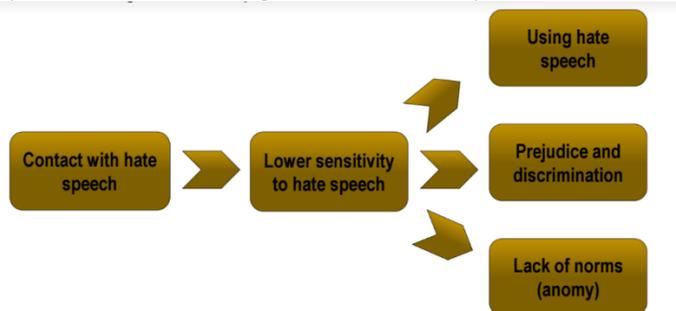
Poland's relation to immigration has been strained at the best of times, but since 2015 the tendency of Poles to vehemently oppose immigrants – and Muslims in particular – has increased exponentially. More precisely, according to Prof. Górak Sosnowska, 47.1% of Poles believe there are too many Muslims in the country and a further 61.5% believe that Islam is a religion of intolerance.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps surprisingly, the youth has been at the forefront of this phenomenon. The causes behind this propensity range from socio-economic stress on Polish society, to a conservative patriotic identity.

Internet usage in Poland is higher than the EU average (78% of Poles use the Internet daily<sup>2</sup>), and 19% of people tolerate hate speech against Muslims online<sup>3</sup>. With these facts in mind, it became evident that any effort to tackle the anti-refugee sentiment would have to focus on the online dimension.

## **Issue Identification**

Our concern for the effects of hate speech comes from the research of Prof. Bilewicz, who tracks the desensitization to prejudice and discrimination that hate speech causes (see Graphic 1.0).

Graphic 1.0: Desensitising Effects of Hate Speech



Being disproportionately exposed to hate speech, young people show a worrying propensity towards normalizing and accepting violent and offensive language online (see Graphic 1.1).

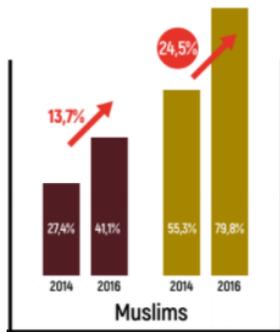
Graphic 1.1: Frequency of Hate Speech on the Internet (Youths signified by yellow columns)<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Górak Sosnowska, HiA presentation 2017

<sup>2</sup> Eurostat 2016: Being young in Europe today - digital world

<sup>3</sup> Milosz Hodun, HiA presentation 2017

<sup>4</sup> Michał Bilewicz, HiA presentation 2017



This does not only show that the number of those who share hate speech is growing, but that those who encounter it are becoming increasingly complacent about its implications.

### **Solution**

One of the leading thinkers on countering hate speech online, Susan Benesch, argues that “you should engage with the trolls, in part because it may be the most successful path to countering dangerous speech”<sup>5</sup>. Her research on case studies ranging from Myanmar and the US, to Kenya, has shown that firstly, not all internet users who use inflammatory language would consider themselves trolls, and secondly that engaging with them directly decreases such incidents far more substantially than banning or removing them. This was also proven to be the case in the gaming community.

The above realization, combined with the limited scope of legal regulation, the low-priority status of online hate speech for prosecutors and internet service providers, and the lack of specialists in the topic all lead to the conclusion that internet users need to tackle anti-refugee trolls head on. They must become the trolls. They must #TrollTheTroll (see picture 1.2).

Picture 1.2: Promotional Meme<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> “... My Heart’s in Accra”, *Susan Benesch on dangerous speech and counterspeech*, accessed on: <https://tinyurl.com/y9n35dkm>, last accessed 13/06/2017

<sup>6</sup> Promotional Meme, Troll the Troll campaign, 2017



### **Campaign Idea**

*Troll the Troll's* mission is to combat online hate speech in a way that welcomes multiple people to the fight to have meaningful impact. Our strategy for this is divided into two parts, outreach and anti-hatespeech tactics. Our outreach is designed in a way that does not polarize viewers in any different political direction. Memes and humor make up a vast part of our content, meaning that an informal dialogue is established with page users. The vocabulary we use in our media avoids buzzwords that would dramatically reveal an agenda. An example of this is our use of the word 'hate' instead of 'hate speech'. Whereas 'hate speech' can be interpreted as rhetoric of leftist ideology, 'hate' is commonly associated with online phenomena such as 'haters'. Our intent is to attract as many people as possible to avoid being trapped in a liberal echo chamber. The second part is tactics to combat hate speech. Our research shows that the issue with hate speech is that it normalizes sentiments of hatred towards vulnerable minority groups, thereby encouraging and inciting violence towards them. Our tactics seek to dispute the hate, instead of hiding it via flagging or reporting. By spamming, arguing illogically and

essentially trolling, we make the fight against these issues very visible so that words of hate towards minorities do not dominate the discourse.

### **Implementation Plan**

Implementation features a Facebook page disseminating our media. A mascot, Mati the Troll, compliments this Facebook page. This allows us to fight online hate using Mati the Troll, but advertise his exploits on the main page. We have an instance of trolling each day that we post. This post includes hateful comments that Mati the Troll counters using memes and classic ‘troll arguments’. This gives viewers the opportunity to connect with something consistent on the page. In future, we will publish a video that we will boost using some of our budget. In addition to this, we may expand our social media outreach to include twitter and Instagram.

### **Results**

To date, 1,354 people have engaged with our page. We have achieved 124 likes. Additionally, the Facebook page devoted solely to our mascot, Mati the Troll, achieved an added more outreach.

**Graphic 1.3: Reach of Facebook Posts from Troll the Troll page<sup>7</sup>**

Published	Post	Type	Targeting	Reach	Engagement
20/06/2017 12:07	 And now a word from our sponsors! None of our posts			136 	15 7 
19/06/2017 20:09	 Go Mati! Our professional troll has struck again!			245 	71 9 
18/06/2017 22:22	 One of our MVTs (Most Valuable Trolls) paid a visit to the Daily Mail			194 	78 8 
18/06/2017 15:11	 Our team working tirelessly at producing the Troll the Troll			499 	81 13 
17/06/2017 13:00	 #Challengeaccepted			280 	21 9 

### **Evaluation and Final Summary**

<sup>7</sup> Troll the Troll campaign page, 2017

Our time with Troll the Troll has been successful in terms of engaging internet culture with a social campaign. Monday, June 12<sup>th</sup> we launched our Facebook page and have since been posting a vast quantity of content meant to raise awareness of online hate, and attract people to our page. Our initial content included memes to introduce the concept of our campaign. There is an album of photos on Troll the Troll which, when played chronologically, explains Troll the Troll's mission in a fun and coherent way. Examples from this album are below:<sup>8</sup>



Since one goal of the campaign was to normalize a fight against hateful comments, we proceeded to create memes to argue with specific instances of hate speech online. For example, we scouted various websites, Facebook pages, and online news sites for anti-refugee comments. Through replying to these comments with memes (examples below) we were able to produce the intended affect: an emotional rise out of our targets. We succeeded in provoking the desired response nearly half a dozen times, enough to deduce whether it was an effective tactic. The reasoning behind getting this rise is that provoking an emotional response destabilizes the credibility of the original commenter, weakening the logic of their hateful comments to any external reader. The use of a meme also transports it to an absurd, carefree level. A digital bystander would see that opposition can be as simple as posting a meme.

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<sup>8</sup> Both images: Troll the Troll campaign, 2017

Great!!! We don't want a woman in rags. The Christian in muslimolandach are afraid too. But they're not just scared. They're being raped, forced to accept a pedophile's ideology, to married goats, etc. Muslimki are in Europe treated like a lady. The and should be finished. There's reciprocity. Get out of here. Or baptism or woooooonnn!

Automatically Translated

Like · Reply · 21 · 12 hrs

 Do chrztu zmusic nie wolno to nic nie da bracie . Nie podoba siw wyjedz prosta zasada

To be baptized is not allowed, brother. Don't like in leave simple rule

Automatically Translated

Like · Reply · 8 hrs

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Translate All Comments

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 Translated from Polish

Mati the Troll something for you!

See Original

Like · Reply · 42 mins

 **Mati the Troll** From Mati, with love.



Like · Reply · Commented on by Jack Brisson [?] · Just now

The Polish-English language barrier proved difficult at first, but we soon developed a system to translate our memes into Polish and we were able to implement the memes on several pages in Polish as well as English.

As an intended final thrust for viewership, we filmed a video which stresses the tone and humor of Troll the Troll rather than focusing on graphs and facts. Hopefully this will encourage more moderate ‘Digital Bystanders’ to take action, as the video takes the form of a light-hearted, non-threatening ad. The video is pending release. Picture below, video production:



The core takeaway from Troll the Troll's campaign thus far, is that online hate speech can be combated in a way that is attractive to moderate internet users, but needs to be marketed in the right way. 1,774 people have engaged with our page and 124 have liked it. The campaign has teetered on staying in a liberal echo chamber, being shared and liked mainly by activists. However, the content appeals to internet culture rather than strictly activist culture and we consider that a success.