

Social media sites face heavy hate speech fines

17th March, 2017



Social media websites in Germany could be in for fines of up to 50 million euros (\$54 million) for removing illegal content too slowly. The German government has decided to crack down on the darker

side of online content, including hate speech, slander, fake news and other illegal material. Under the proposed new law, the likes of Facebook and Twitter would be given seven days to delete content flagged as illegal, or incur a heavy financial penalty. Any content deemed to be "clearly criminal" would have to be removed within 24 hours. Germany's justice minister Heiko Maas quoted research which suggested Twitter deletes only one per cent of the hate speech it is told about by users, and Facebook, 39 per cent.

Mr Maas said the new fines and regulations were necessary due to heightening concern over the influence social media is having in shaping public opinion. He said: "The biggest problem is that the social networks do not take the complaints of their own users seriously enough." He added that voluntary efforts to tackle the problem were not working, saying: "Too few comments are deleted, and they're not being deleted quickly enough." Mr Maas said all social media companies would be required to set up a complaints team that must be operational 24/7. A digital trade organization feared that removing content within 24 hours from sites that handle more than one billion posts per day was "utterly impossible".

Sources: bbc.com / dw.com / techcrunch.com

Writing

There is no such thing as free speech while there is hate speech. Discuss.

Chat

Talk about these words from the article.

social media / illegal content / the darker side / hate speech / fake news / criminal / fines / regulations / public opinion / complaints / voluntary / team / one billion posts

True / False

- a) Social media sites in Germany could get \$54 million hate speech fines. T / F
- b) Sites will have seven days to delete material flagged as hate speech. T / F
- c) Sites will have 24 hours to delete clearly criminal hate speech. T / F
- d) Twitter deletes 30% of posts its users flag as being hate speech. T / F
- e) There is growing concern over the influence of social media. T / F
- f) A justice minister said social media sites take complaints seriously. T / F
- g) The minister said voluntary efforts to tackle the problem worked well. T / F
- h) An organization said sites could easily monitor one billion posts a day. T / F

Synonym Match

(The words in **bold** are from the news article.)

- | | |
|-----------------------|----------------|
| 1. removing | a. growing |
| 2. crack down | b. considered |
| 3. fake | c. cited |
| 4. deemed | d. totally |
| 5. quoted | e. deleting |
| 6. regulations | f. determining |
| 7. heightening | g. get tough |
| 8. shaping | h. establish |
| 9. set up | i. rules |
| 10. utterly | j. hoax |

Discussion – Student A

- a) What do you think about what you read?
- b) Is hate speech part of free speech?
- c) How is social media influencing public opinion?
- d) To what degree is online content controlling our lives?
- e) How worried are you about online safety?
- f) What advice do you have for social media sites?
- g) How can a site monitor a billion posts a day?
- h) What questions would you like to ask bosses of social media sites?

Phrase Match

- | | |
|---|-----------------------------|
| 1. websites in Germany could be in for fines of | a. shaping public opinion |
| 2. crack down on the darker | b. financial penalty |
| 3. incur a heavy | c. minister |
| 4. content deemed | d. side of online content |
| 5. justice | e. own users seriously |
| 6. necessary due | f. 24/7 |
| 7. the influence social media is having in | g. up to 50 million euros |
| 8. take the complaints of their | h. impossible |
| 9. be operational | i. to heightening concern |
| 10. utterly | j. to be "clearly criminal" |

Discussion – Student B

- What do you think of Germany's proposed new law?
- What are the dangers of hate speech?
- How can we better deal with hate speech?
- What do you think of people who post hate speech?
- What responsibility do social media sites have to delete hate speech?
- How difficult is it to decide what is hate speech?
- Has anyone ever posted something about you that you didn't like?
- What three adjectives best describe those who post hate speech?

Spelling

- removing illegal content
- hate speech, slander, fake news...
- the proposed new law
- incur a heavy financial penalty
- content deemed to be "clearly criminal"
- Maas quoted research which suggested...
- the new fines and regulations
- the influence social media is having
- voluntary efforts
- set up a complaints team
- be operational 24/7
- utterly impossible

Answers – Synonym Match

1. e	2. g	3. j	4. b	5. c
6. i	7. a	8. f	9. h	10. d

Role Play

Role A – Racist Attacks

You think racist attacks are the worst form of hate speech. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them how to tackle their forms of hate speech. Also, tell the others which of these is the easiest to combat (and why): body shaming, homophobia or slander of individuals.

Role B – Body Shaming

You think body shaming is the worst form of hate speech. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them how to tackle their forms of hate speech. Also, tell the others which of these is the easiest to combat (and why): racist attacks, homophobia or slander of individuals.

Role C – Homophobia

You think homophobia is the worst form of hate speech. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them how to tackle their forms of hate speech. Also, tell the others which of these is the easiest to combat (and why): body shaming, racist attacks or slander of individuals.

Role D – Slander of Individuals

You think slander of individuals is the worst form of hate speech. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them how to tackle their forms of hate speech. Also, tell the others which of these is the easiest to combat (and why): body shaming, homophobia or racist attacks.

Speaking – Hate Speech

Rank these with your partner. Put the worst kinds of hate speech at the top. Change partners often and share your rankings.

- | | |
|--------------------------|------------------|
| • homophobia | • racist attacks |
| • Holocaust denial | • body shaming |
| • criticism of a nation | • sexist attacks |
| • slander of individuals | • religious hate |

Answers – True False

a	T	b	T	c	T	d	F	e	T	f	F	g	F	h	F
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Answers to Phrase Match and Spelling are in the text.