

Rising Levels of Hate Speech & Online Toxicity During This Time of Crisis

After analyzing millions of websites, popular teen chat sites, and gaming platforms, AI-based startup Llight recorded a 900% increase in hate speech directed towards the Chinese and a 40% rise in online toxicity among teens and children

Summary of Findings:

- **900% increase in hate speech on Twitter directed towards China and the Chinese.**
- **200% increase in traffic to hate sites and specific posts against Asians.**
- **70% increase in hate between kids and teens during online chats.**
- **40% increase in toxicity on popular gaming platforms, such as Discord.**

Background

Highlight- Widespread closures enforced in response to the ongoing Covid-19 outbreak have confined most people to their homes and left them spending a lot more time online. The new reality of living entirely within four walls has made the western world entirely dependent on online platforms for communication, entertainment, work, and education. What does this mean for hate speech and online toxicity?

Intro- People are spending more and more time on social networks, communication apps, chat rooms and gaming services, and the problems endemic to these platforms – hate, abuse, toxicity and bullying – have become accentuated. **According to our data, much of this hate and abuse is being directed towards China and its population, as well as individuals of Asian origin in other parts of the world.** Meanwhile, whereas typically today's children and teenagers balance their social commitments between in-person and online-based settings, they now only interact with one another online. Our research reveals **a worrying rise in online toxicity and cyberbullying among children,** precisely when they are most reliant on digital platforms.

Study

Highlight- Llight searched for increases in hate speech, cyberbullying, and general online toxicity. Here's what we found.

Background of Study- While the move to Internet-only communication has yielded some positive results, notably the implementation of more creative ways to facilitate work meetings and online learning for school pupils, online interactions during this unprecedented period of extended

lockdown have grown more toxic. Many people lack the support networks upon which they might rely in regular circumstances, such as colleagues, teachers, therapists or friends, and their response to bullying, violence and hate speech becomes more extreme in a time of isolation. With a return to a regular routine unlikely to take place anytime soon, this problem is only set to intensify.

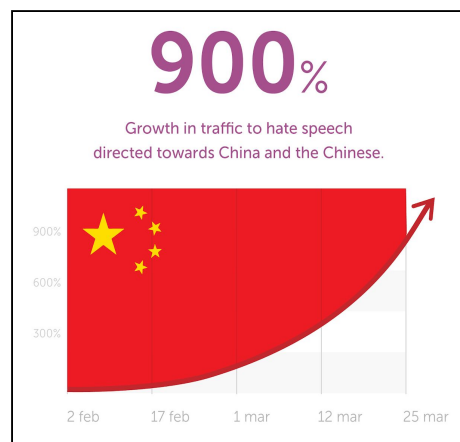
Study- To better understand the extent of this increase of online toxicity, Light conducted a study to unpick these phenomena and measure the scale at which hate speech and online toxicity is now prevalent. We view these issues as especially dangerous given the overall stress people are likely to face amidst the ongoing pandemic.

Light analyzed millions of websites, social networks, teen chatting forums, and gaming sites from December 2019 to today. We examined text alongside images, videos, and voice recordings to identify increases in hate speech, cyberbullying, and general online toxicity.

While social networks and leading online platforms have taken a number of steps in recent weeks to filter out online toxicity (TikTok appointed a [council of outside experts](#) to improve its moderation standards, Pinterest is [using AI](#) to promote wellbeing and combat misinformation), there are still numerous types of hateful content which tech leaders are not stamping out. Here's the content that is not being identified:

1) Widespread tweets containing hate speech, mostly against Asians

People are spending more and more time online, and so are being exposed to more and more hate speech and incitement. Instigators of hate are likely using the general feeling of uncertainty and tension to stir up discriminatory behavior, and, according to our data, racist abuse is being targeted most explicitly against Asians, including Asian Americans. Toxic tweets are using explicit language to accuse Asians of carrying the coronavirus and blaming people of Asian origin as a collective for spreading the virus.





With people having more time to spend online, more and more kids are being exposed to hate speech and incitement as well. Naturally, this derives in part from the adults who are usually responsible for creating and disseminating hateful content also having more time online – and by targeting kids their messages can be spread ever wider.



We also witnessed a shift in the use of terminology and search engines jargon surrounding the Coronavirus.

Original hashtags: #COVID—19, #coronavirus, #COVID19, #StayAtHome, #MinaredenDua

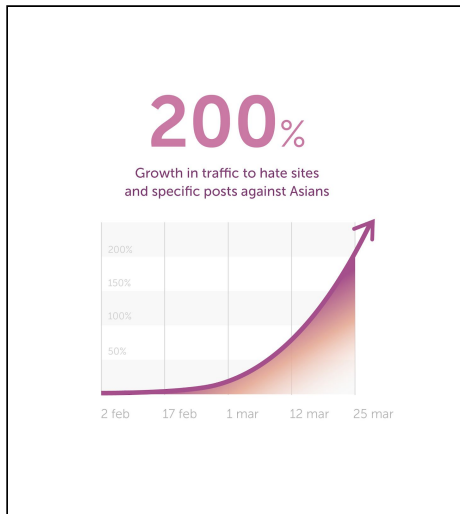
New hashtags: #chinaliedpeopledied, #Kungflu, #communistvirus, #whuanvirus, #chinesevirus

Conclusion:

We see a growth of 900% in hate speech on Twitter directed towards China and the Chinese



2) Growth in Internet traffic to prominent hate sites



With people staying home, a rise in Internet traffic is bound to appear. We all heard reports saying that Internet backbones are seeing major traffic. What people do not realize is that there is also a substantial rise in Internet traffic to sites promoting hate, with specific posts against people of asian descent.

We see a 200% growth in traffic to hate sites and specific posts against Asians.

Sample of a post and reply on a prominent site promoting hate:

Post: *“Chink, gook, slant, nip, zipper-head, squint, yellowman, coolie, slope -- it's all sooo confusing! They all look the same. They all eat rice!”*

Reply: *“Very true. However, we might have offended the occasional noodle nigger that visits this site if he thinks we're giving credit to the gooks for coronavirus. They're sensitive, you know.”*

Certain media outlets have also produced instigating materials that contribute to more hate speech.

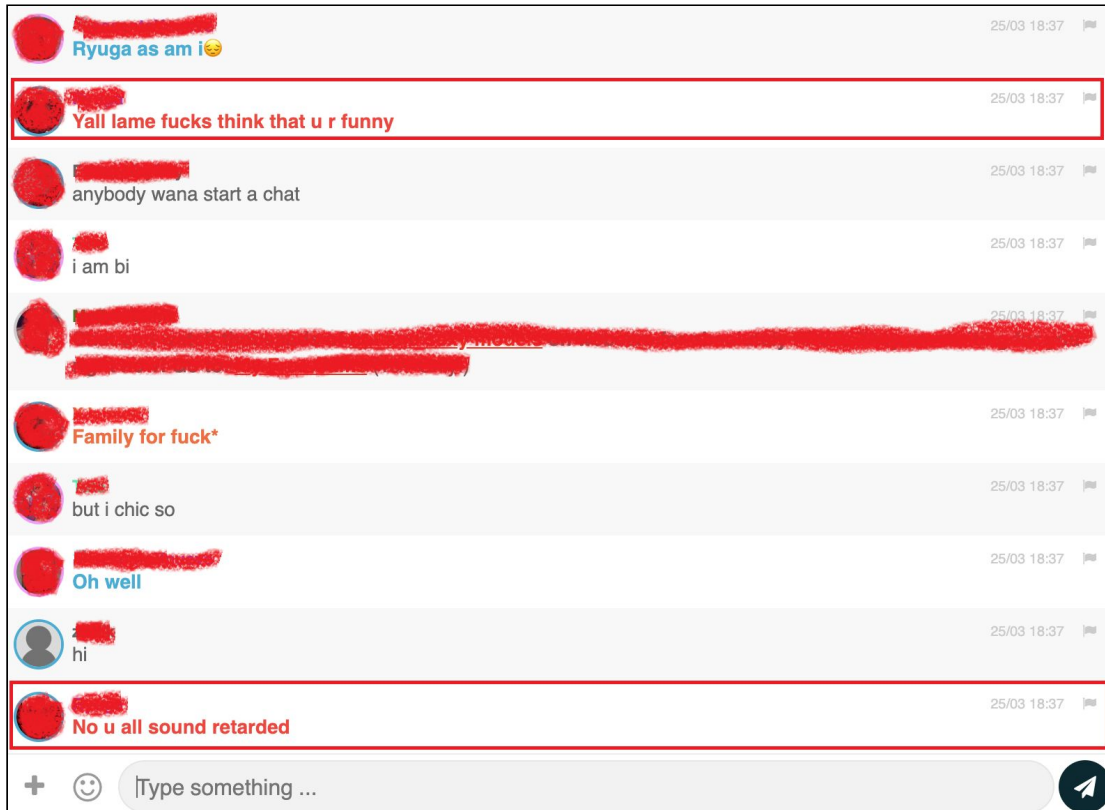
For example, Sky news Australia published a video titled [“China 'willfully inflicted coronavirus upon the world'”](#) . The video now has over 5K comments, the majority of them toxic and hateful.

Examples:

- “There is no longer any doubts regarding that evil authoritarian regime: trust and believe the Chinese communist party and you will die.”
- “Ban all Chinese imports, its all garbage anyway. Why contribute to a communist regime? it's supporting communism.”
- “They've infected the world. Ruined 100s of millions of lives.”
- “Put a huge corona virus tax on all Chinese imports to payback all of the folk that have fallen on hard times due to their feckless attitudes.”
- “Trade with the one who wants to kill you, is suicide.”

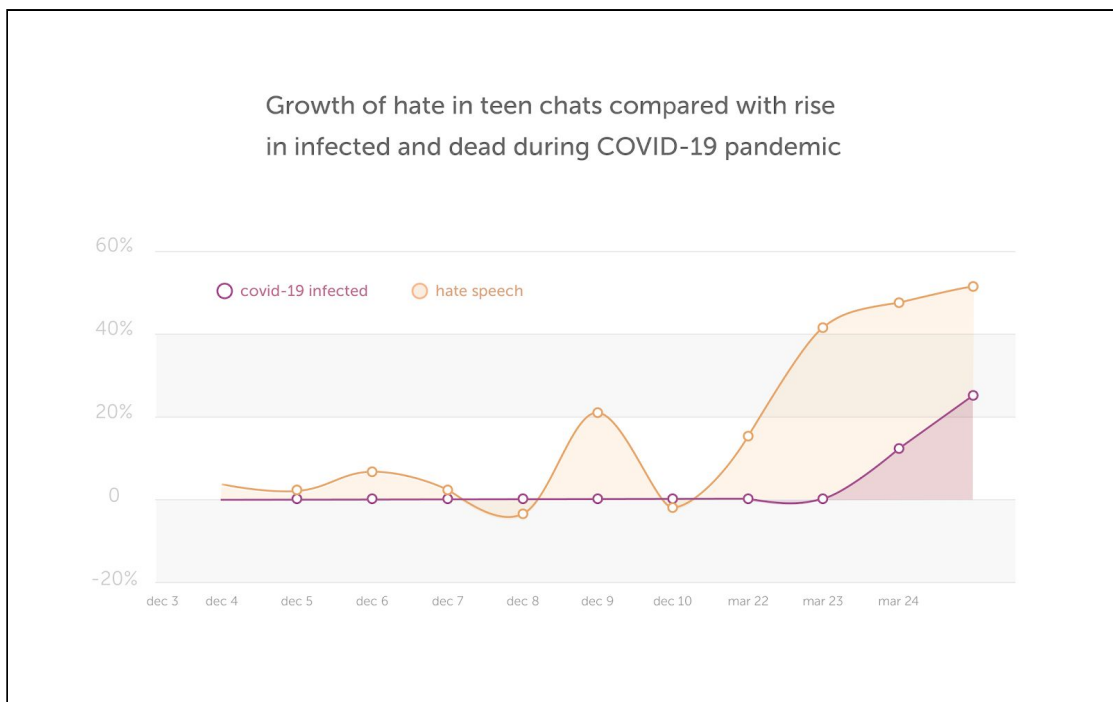
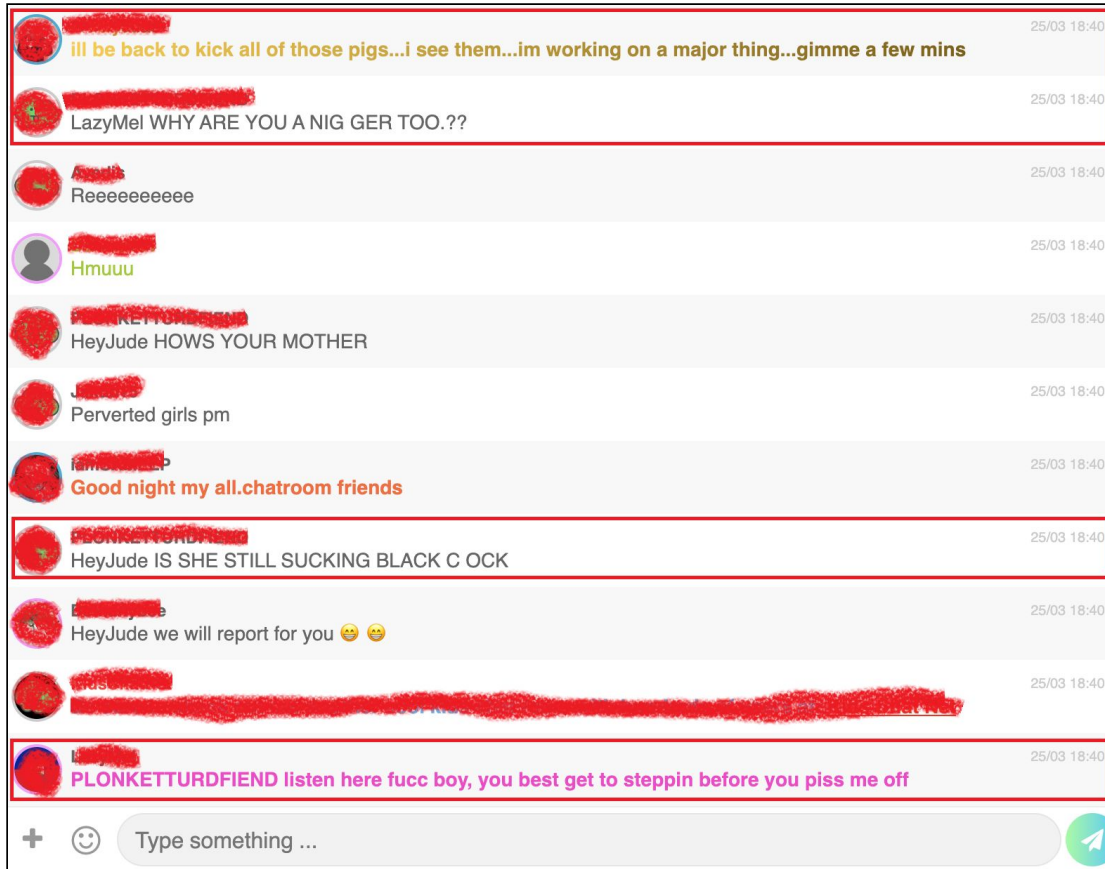
3) Growth in hate speech among teens and children

More children are utilizing online platforms during this period of quarantine to socialize. And as they've done so, there has been a notable increase in levels of bullying and abusive language among children. In fact, across communication channels on social media and popular chat forums, we have identified an 70% uptick in instances of hate speech between kids and teens.



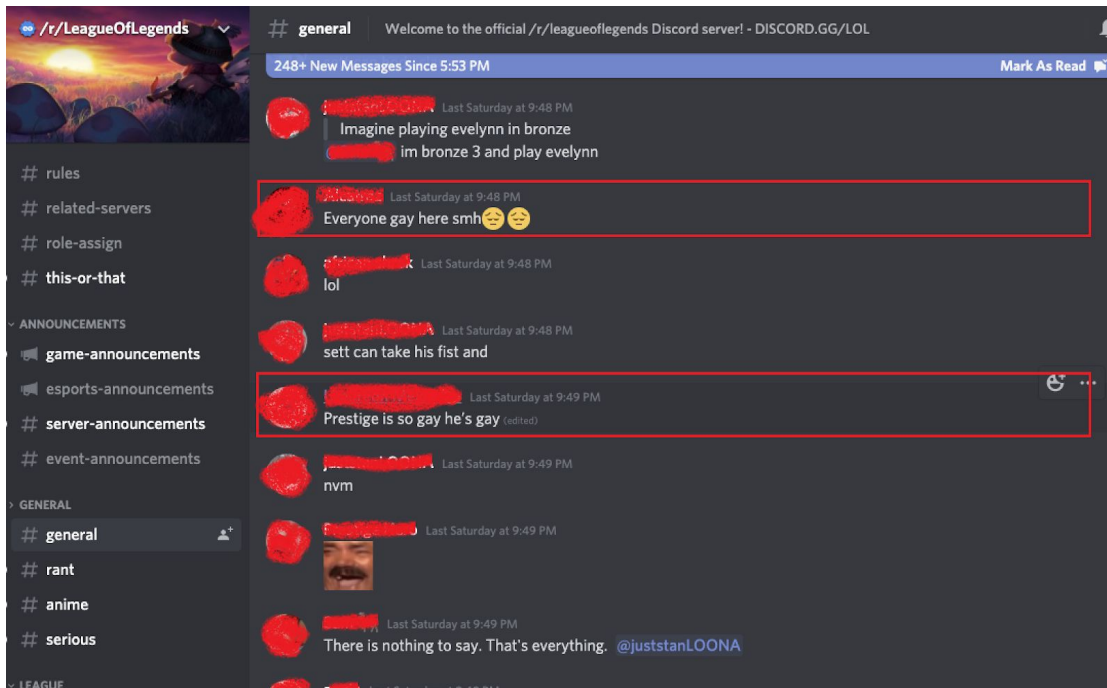
We witnessed nearly a 70% growth in hate speech between kids and teens during online chats.

Another example of an online chat room designed for teenagers and children shows how dominant toxicity has become.



4) Rise in online toxicity amongst online gamers

Discord has [long been associated](#) with toxic and abusive content, and since the beginning of 2019 we have uncovered a 40% increase in toxicity among gamers communicating using its platforms. We see this as a consequence of the amount of free time people – especially children – have in the current climate, leading to more time being spent playing video games.



We saw a 40% increase in toxicity on popular gaming platforms, such as Discord.

Solutions

Lght believes that the responsibility for stamping out online toxicity lies with big tech companies, as opposed to users themselves. When you buy a car, it's the manufacturer's job to ensure it's safe (seatbelts, proper brakes). The same logic applies for online service providers, who must recognize that their users include children of all ages. The time has come for these providers to own their accountability, not only their lines of code.

However, as online hate speech, cyberbullying and abuse have grown more and more threatening over the past decades, those tech giants have demonstrated their difficulties in ridding their platforms of harmful content, which is becoming even further exacerbated now in a time of crisis. It's no longer enough to sit back and ignore the problem or react to bad behavior after it's been seen and flagged by enough users. It's an issue that companies across the world need to address. We must call for a new safety standard to battle online toxicity; otherwise, the problem will only grow worse.

It will take time for tech companies to develop and embrace solutions that rid the internet of toxicity. We need state-of-the-art technology that can effectively quash cyber bullying, shaming, predatory behavior, hate speech, and self-harm. It's time for external third parties to step up and offer independent and objective APIs which can assist these leading platforms in tackling widespread issues.

About Lght

Founded in 2018 by veteran entrepreneurs Zohar Levkovitz, the current star of the Israeli edition of Shark Tank who previously founded and sold Amobee for over \$350M, and Ron Porat, a cyber entrepreneur that sold several companies to large organizations, [Lght](#) is the AI-based startup that detects and filters toxic online content to protect children. By building algorithms that can detect and predict toxic and abusive behaviors, Lght serves as a solution for social networks, search engines, gaming platforms, and hosting providers to identify and eradicate cyberbullying, harmful content, hate speech, and predatory behavior. Lght is located in Tel Aviv and San Francisco but its mission is global.