Hate Speech in Albania and Kosovo: Commonalities and Specificities in the Perception of Students in Both Countries

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Abstract

This study has a specific focus on the prevalence, social contexts and perceived impacts of hate speech in universities in Albania and Kosovo. It examines university students' attitudes, perceptions and experiences on hate speech. The study is based in a quantitative approach using a structured questionnaire administered to 202 students from different universities in Albania. The findings show that hate speech is widely encountered, especially in digital environments, with social media platforms identified as the main spaces of exposure. Ethnic, racial, political and sexual differences are at the heart of the wide spread and prevalence of this phenomenon. The results further reveal a strong gender dimension, as female students are perceived as the most affected group. In addition, respondents recognize the negative psychological and social consequences of hate speech, while also highlighting a gap between awareness and active intervention. Despite this awareness, the limited behavioral response suggests the presence of structural and cultural barriers that limit effective action. The study, by providing empirical evidence from the Albanian context, contributes to the existing literature and highlights the role of higher education institutions in addressing this phenomenon. It concludes that combating hate speech requires a multidimensional approach that integrates education, institutional accountability, and social awareness.

Keywords: ***Hate speech; university students; social media; gender dimension; digital communication; Albania***

1. Introduction

One of the phenomena that is both global and regional, as complex as it is challenging to recognize and treat, is hate speech. Today more than ever, hate speech is taking on alarming proportions and is spreading globally through online networks, violating all societies that have at their core the freedoms and rights of the various social groups. (Rodríguez, Gómez,

Bustos, 2025). Individuals are exploiting the space of online interaction by constructing a discourse that targets social groups. (Ibid). This is a complex, multidimensional phenomenon that has an impact on society. Benech and Waldron assess that this hostile language is directed at different races or ethnic groups, religious, and has now become a global concern. The phenomenon has taken the attention of researchers in fields such as sociology, justice, political science. (Benesch, 2014; Waldron, 2012). In fact, this speech may be proliferating. It can be disseminated further and faster, thanks to the Internet. (Benech, 2014: 3) According to Judit Bayer, today, it is seen as a phenomenon that poisons societies. (Bayer, 2020).

Hate speech, it is present in regions with a history of ongoing tensions due to old ethnic conflicts. In this logic, the article deals with hate speech, in the region, specifically Albania and Kosovo. Institutions in both countries, Audiovisual Media Authority (AMA) in Albania and in Kosovo are trying to limit hate speech considering it as a serious legal and ethical violation. In the AMA's 2023 annual report, the majority of complaints, or 59.5% of them, were about violations of human rights and communication ethics; 16.4% about violations of children's rights and their privacy. (AMA 2023).

Hate Speech Monitoring Report, 2025, surveys that in Kosovo between 2024-2025, there are a total of 114 incidents of hate. These incidents include targeted groups mostly. Monitoring Report, April–June 2025, Association of Journalists of Kosovo reveal that most broadcasts contain legitimate political criticism, but these often escalate into exclusionary or inflammatory rhetoric. (Monitoring Report, April–June 2025). Also, research shed light on gender hate speech, affecting women and girls. (Tokrri et al., 2026).

In this context, the paper analysis students' exposure, perceptions, and responses to hate speech, connected to their social contexts and behavioral implications.

The research is based on a quantitative approach using a structured questionnaire administered to 202 students from different universities in Albania. The findings show that hate speech is widely encountered, especially in digital environments, with social media platforms identified as the main spaces of exposure. Ethnic, racial, political and sexual differences are at the heart of the widespread and pervasive nature of this phenomenon. The results further reveal a strong gender dimension, as female students are perceived as the most affected group. In addition, respondents recognize the negative psychological and social consequences of hate speech, while also highlighting a gap between awareness and active intervention. Despite this awareness, the limited behavioral response suggests the presence of structural and cultural barriers that limit effective action. The study, by providing empirical evidence from the Albanian context, contributes to the existing literature and highlights the role of higher education institutions in addressing this phenomenon. It concludes that combating hate speech requires a multidimensional approach that integrates education, institutional accountability, and social awareness.

2. Literature Review

According to some scholars, hate speech it is often characterized as a, "speech act" that constitutes harm, aiming to "ambush, terrorize, wound, humiliate, and degrade". (Rodríguez- Gómez, & Rodríguez- Bustos, 2025).

The UN defines hate speech as "Any type of communication, whether oral or written, or behavior, that attacks or uses pejorative language in reference to a person or group-based ethnicity, nationality, race, color, ancestry, gender, or other forms of identity". United Nations, 2022: 4).

Studies show that digital hate's prevalence is considerable - and troubling: norms of subordination may overwhelm those of equality if hatred becomes an acceptable part of online discourse. (Citron & Norton, 2011: 6),

Based on Data Reportal's Digital 2023, the number of active social media user identities reached 4.80 billion in April 2023. This represents 60% of the global population. (April Global Statshot Report).

Forms of discrimination on the internet can also be spotted with cyberbullying and abusive language. (Fortuna & Nunes, 2018: 26).

In multicultural societies, the right to freedom of expression of thought, conscience and religion can become a source of problems, because these rights are connected to "democratic society".

Addressing the actors who can manage this risk, Judith Butler, suggests that the state actively produces the domain of publicly acceptable speech, demarcating the line between the domains of the speakable and the unspeakable. (Butler, 1997).

"The term "hate speech" covers all forms of expression, xenophobia, anti-Semitism or other forms of hatred based on intolerance, including: intolerance expressed hostility against minorities, migrants and people of immigrant origin." (The Committee of Ministers" Recommendation: 3). "Such statements should be publicly disavowed whenever they occur". (Bayer & Bárd, 2020: 44).

In this sense counter-speech strategies, which involve promoting alternative narratives to challenge hate speech, have also gained attention as effective non-censorial measures. (Ibid: 13).

Affirmatively, what hate speech legislation stands for is the dignity of equal citizenship (for all members of all groups), doing what it can to put a stop to group defamation when it threatens to undermine that status for a whole class of citizens. (Waldron, 2012: 64).

Despite the legal frameworks and barriers set up by EU institutions, but also national ones, in different regions, the phenomenon is not yet fully contained, on the contrary.

Hate speech and divisiveness are today a feature of two well-known contemporary scenarios: ethnic or religious leaders fighting for power by inciting their followers against each other. (Benesch, 2014: 4).

Monitoring hate speech in the Western Balkans shows that the phenomenon becomes very sensitive and present especially in certain periods of political tension. (Diversity Reporting Network, 2023).

Authors point out that hate narratives are almost considered normal in this region, as this language is also used by public officials and politicians, who are rarely held accountable and even less often institutionally prosecuted for their words. (Andušić, 2024: 9).

On the other hand, in this case, the media play a crucial role. Although criticize the hate speech many of them simply repeat these narratives without questioning them. Thus, the media becomes a carrier and transmitter of hate speech, especially when it comes to ethnic hatred. (Ibid: 9).

Considering legal provisions criminalizing the incitement of hatred, enforcement remains inconsistent (Stevanović, 2025). Kosovo, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina have legal frameworks addressing hate speech, but studies reveal a gap between law and practice, particularly in online contexts (OSCE Mission to Serbia, 2018).

Article 14 of the Constitution of Albania can directly relate to hate speech. (Albanian Contitution, 2018).

Albania has established several national institutions like The People's Advocate (the Ombudsman) for Protection from Discrimination based on EU standards. Despite legal protections, challenges remain in ensuring the full respect of existing laws, the independence of the judiciary, and in political discourse. (Gjipali, Beqiraj, Prendi, 2024: 2).

AMA Annual Report 2023 shows that in total, during the entire reporting period, the Complaints Council has reviewed 390 complaints, sent respectively: -89% - by individuals; -4.7% - by civil society; -3% - by law firms; -2% - by institutions; -1.3% - by commercial entities.

The complaints submitted had as their subject: -59.5% - violation of human rights and communication ethics; -16.4% - violation of children's rights, their privacy; -3.6% - commercial communications in audiovisual media; -13.3% - miscellaneous; -7.2% - outside the scope of AMA's activity, determined by Law No. 97/2013 on-the-Audiovisual-Media-in-the-Republic. (AMA Annual Report, 2023: 87).

In this line, international institutions like the UN, express their clear concern about Gender-Based Violence, calling it an urgent reality. For the experts, violence is rising at an alarming pace: "In Albania, 41% of women have faced online abuse. Every woman and girl deserve safety, dignity, and the freedom to live without violence in all parts of her life — online. It must guide our actions every single day." (UN Albania, 2025).

According to Albanian studies, the three groups most frequently targeted by hate speech and discriminatory discourse are gender (41%), ethnicity (38%), and sexual minorities (11%). (Sulçe, Spain, 2023).

The same picture offers another region's state. According to the monitoring period (January 2024 – June 2025) focused on narratives connected religious, ethnic, and gender divisions, it resulted that hate speech and disinformation in Kosovo were not static. They intensified in the run-up to specific events such as national holidays, anniversaries of war-related incidents, political tensions with Serbia, and ongoing debates over the role of religion in public life. (Konushevci, 2025: 9).

As many authors underline, language is thought of "mostly as agency-an act with consequences;' an extended doing, a performance with effects (Butler, 1997: 18).

Hate speech exposes a vulnerability to language, and it constitutes a real concern because of the fact that we are connected and dependent to each other on our society. (Ibid: 37).

By valuing the education of society and its irreplaceable value in confronting the phenomenon authors as Waldron underline, that we are embarked on a grand experiment of living. (Waldron, 2012: 7).

In this framework, beyond the measures related to legal steps that help limit the phenomenon, preventive policies related to the education of the new generation are always more and more valued.

With this aim, UNESCO, and UN Women have implemented in the region, programs aimed at youth engagement. (UNDP, 2021; UNESCO, 2021; UN Women Albania, 2021).

These comprehensive policies are considered crucial not only in improving indicators related to improving

coexistence, but also directly impact the preservation and consolidation of a liberal and democratic society.

The literature treats this phenomenon as a multidimensional phenomenon related to the spread of technologies, pluralistic societies, and cultural tensions.

Researchers and institutions emphasize the importance of the so-called counter speech as a possible means to confront and reduce hate speech without restricting freedom of expression.

Hate speech in the Western Balkans region (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia) has specific characteristics related to history, ethnic divisions, and political transitions, which is also reflected in hate speech and studies about it. Focusing on two countries such as Albania and Kosovo,

the findings suggest that in the media and public discourse, ethnicity, politics, and gender are the groups most targeted in examples of hate speech.

The findings suggest that online platforms are the main source of hate speech, especially in comments related to conflictual or political events.

The study in Albanian universities analyzed students' perceptions of this language within educational institutions, suggesting the need for policies and training that support a more respectful communication environment.

Beyond the analysis of the problem, there are also international efforts for prevention and awareness-raising:

Reports by UNDP, UNESCO, UN Women underline the importance of empowering young people against hate speech and promoting intercultural dialogue in online and offline environments.

Regarding legal aspects, national laws criminalize the incitement of intolerance, but there are challenges in their implementation, especially for online platforms.

However, there is a will for an interaction between the legal framework, civil society organizations and educational initiatives to confront the phenomenon.

The literature review notes that:

Most global studies focus on the global internet, and there is a need for more regionally specific studies in local languages.

3. Research Questions:

There are differences between Albanian and Kosovar students when it comes to their knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon of hate speech?

Are online platforms the most important space where this phenomenon occurs?

Which forms of hate speech are of concern to university students and what is the degree of spread in each country?

What is the impact of this phenomenon on the academic world?

How do students respond to hate speech?

How do students evaluate the reaction of institutions to hate speech?

3.1 Hypothesis

There is no a significant difference between students in Albania and Kosovo in terms of exposure to hate speech.

Online hate speech is reported more frequently than offline hate speech in both countries.

Students in Kosovo perceive hate speech as having a stronger negative impact on academic life than students in Albania.

Female students report higher exposure to gender-based hate speech than male students.

Responses are evolving: Globally, automated detection and large-scale content moderation exist; in the Balkans, civil society and youth programs play a crucial role due to limited technical infrastructure.

4. Methodology

The study is based on a quantitative survey administered to 202 university students from Albania. The questionnaire consisted of 26 structured questions, grouped into four main sections: Demographic characteristics; Exposure to hate speech; Attitudes and perceptions; Personal experiences and responses. The sample represents students in an academic background, and social contexts.

The sampling strategy was based on non-probability convenience sampling. While this approach allows access to diverse respondents and facilitates data collection, it limits the generalizability of the findings and requires cautious interpretation. Data were analyzed using descriptive methods, focusing on patterns of exposure, perception, and behavior related to hate speech. Ethical standards were strictly followed, ensuring anonymity, voluntary participation, and informed consent.

5. Results

5.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

According to the demographic structure, the majority of the participants are in the age group of 18-25 years and are young people with a high level of digital activity. The gender distribution of the sample is 83.7% female and 16.3% male. This reflects the recent trend in Albania where male students are the least in number.

The students are part of both study cycles and specifically, from Bachelor (44.1%) and Master (50%) programs which reflects a balanced participation.

Figure 4.1.1 shows that the sample consists of young, well-educated individuals, who are particularly relevant for the study of digital communication. These findings mainly reflect the opinions of young, educated individuals, who have a high level of exposure to digital media, which is mainly important when it comes to understanding hate speech on the Internet.

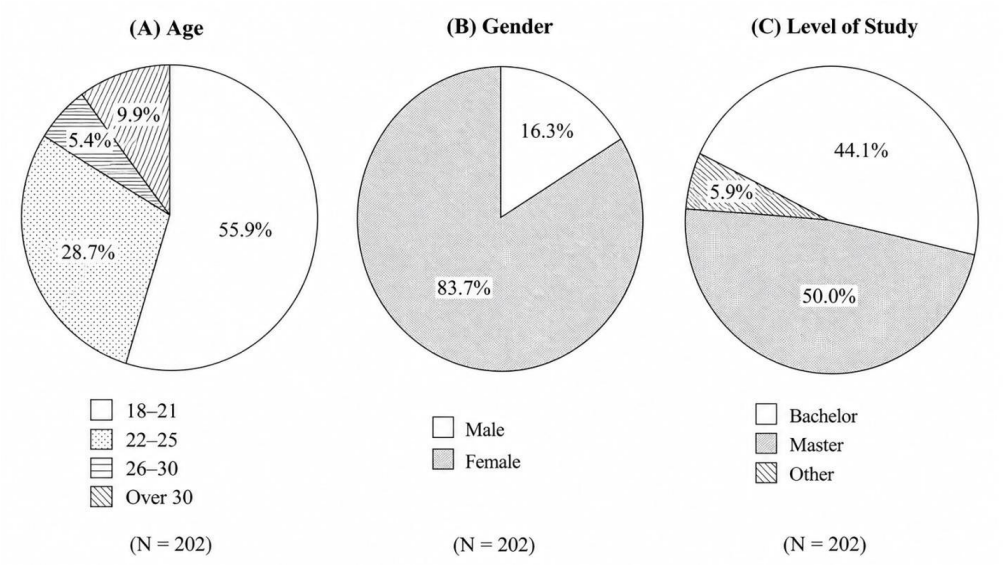


Figure 4.1.1. Age, gender and level of study distribution of respondents (Albania).
Source: Authors' survey data.

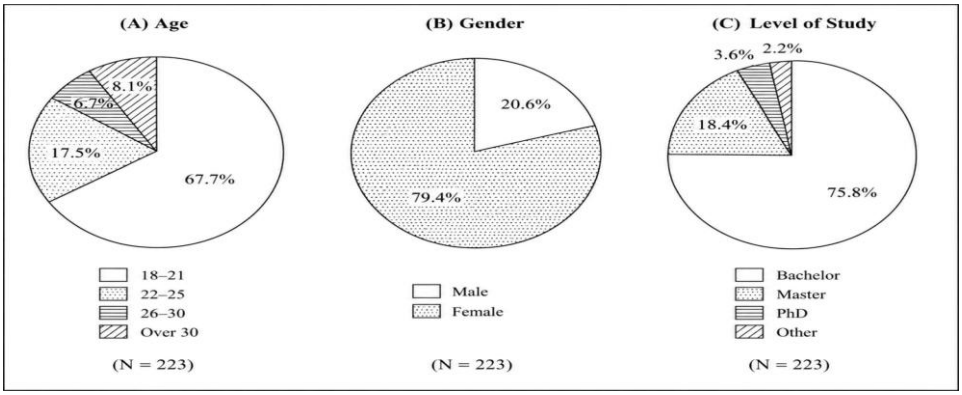


Figure 4.1.2: Age, gender and level of study distribution of respondents (Kosovo)
Source: Authors' survey data

According to figures 4.1.1 and 4.1.2, there are essentially no differences in the demographic profiles of Albania and Kosovo, which suggests that the cross-country analysis was based on its own research. The results of the two-language survey show that the majority of them are young people, in the age group of 18 to 25 years. From Kosovo, 6.7% of young people are between the ages of 18 and 21, while from Albania this age group corresponds to 55.9%. Thus, in Albania we see a more mature category of respondents with 28.7% aged 22-25, compared to 17.5% from Kosovo. The same applies to the gender samples, as women are the dominant group in both countries (83.7% in Albania and 79.4% in Kosovo). The samples show a slight difference in the level of study only in terms of education. Although Kosovo Albanians have 44.1% Bachelor's degrees and 50.0% Master's degrees, the majority of Kosovo residents' programs are at Bachelor's (75.8%) compared to Master's candidates (18.4%) and PhD candidates (3.6%).

5.2 Perceived Sources and Responsibility

As shown in Figure 4.2.1, a significant number of Albanians (68.3%) reported having heard hate speech from political figures, suggesting that the phenomenon is not limited to informal communication, but also includes formal public debate and discussion.

The majority see hate speech as unacceptable and call for strict measures to be implemented, but a minority see it as a normal phenomenon in the digital world.

46.5% consider the media and social platforms as the main sources of hate speech, while 44.1% believe that they are important but not sufficient.

These results indicate that there is a common perception among people that the media is essential to eliminate hate speech or at least to help reduce it.

Studies show that digital platforms are the main venue for the generation of hate speech, which reinforces the doubts expressed in the current literature regarding the importance of algorithmic communication and anonymity.

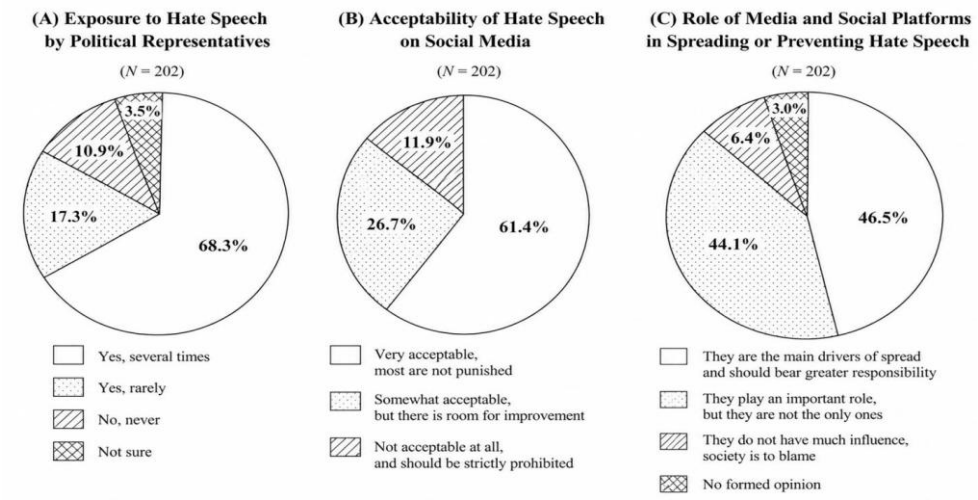


Figure 4.2.1: Exposure, acceptability of hate speech and the role of media (Albania)

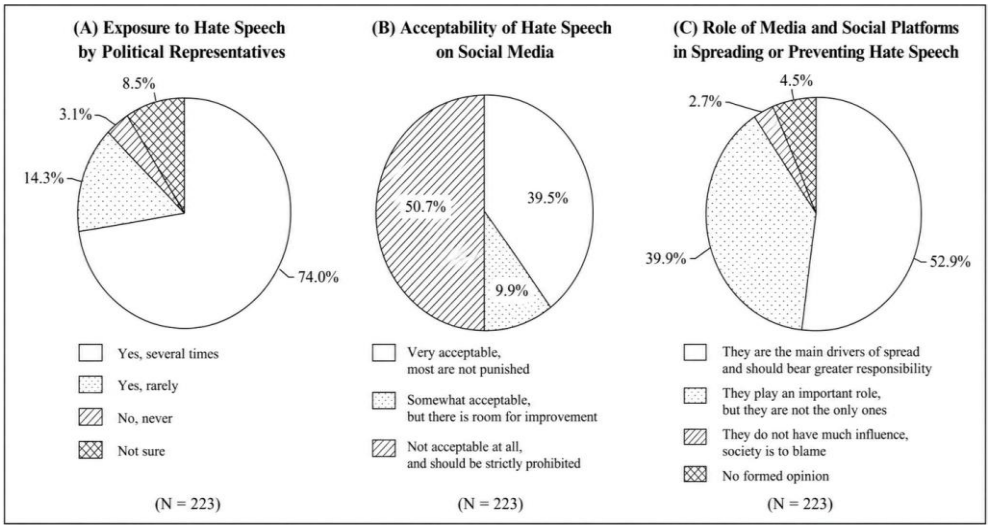


Figure 4.2.2: Exposure, acceptability of hate speech and the role of media (Kosovo)

The findings show that Albanian and Kosovar students have similar perceptions regarding the sources and responsibility for hate speech, as evidenced by Figures 4.2.1 and 4.2.2. In both countries, a significant majority of people reported having experienced hate speech from political candidates, with Kosovo (74.0%) having fewer incidents than Albania (68.3%). Respondents in both groups also attribute a central role to social media and digital platforms in the spread of hate speech. Albanians more often rate social media and platforms as a contributing factor, but not the only one (44.1% versus 39.9% in Kosovo). While a significant majority of Albanians (61.4%) consider hate speech to be completely unacceptable and believe that it should be strictly prohibited, this figure is lower in Kosovo (50.7%). In Kosovo, there is a large proportion of young people who see hate speech as an acceptable phenomenon, and this proportion is much higher than in Albania, where only 26.7% of respondents perceive it as acceptable.

5.3 Target Groups and Motivations

Respondents in Albania identify multiple groups as persistent targets of hate speech (Figure 4.3.1), including:
Women (51.5%); Minority groups and marginalized communities; Individuals from different socio-economic or religious backgrounds,
When analyzing the motivations behind hate speech:
67.8% attribute it to contempt; 26.2% to lack of education. A very small percentage see it as humor.

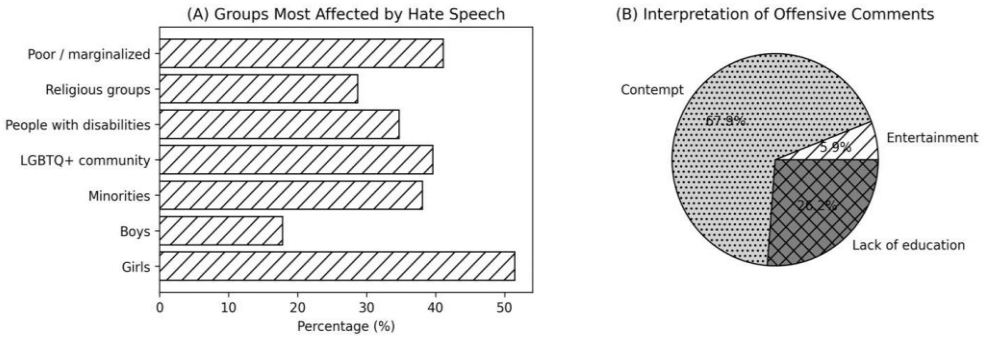


Figure 4.3.1: Frequent hate groups and interpretation of offensive comments (Albania)

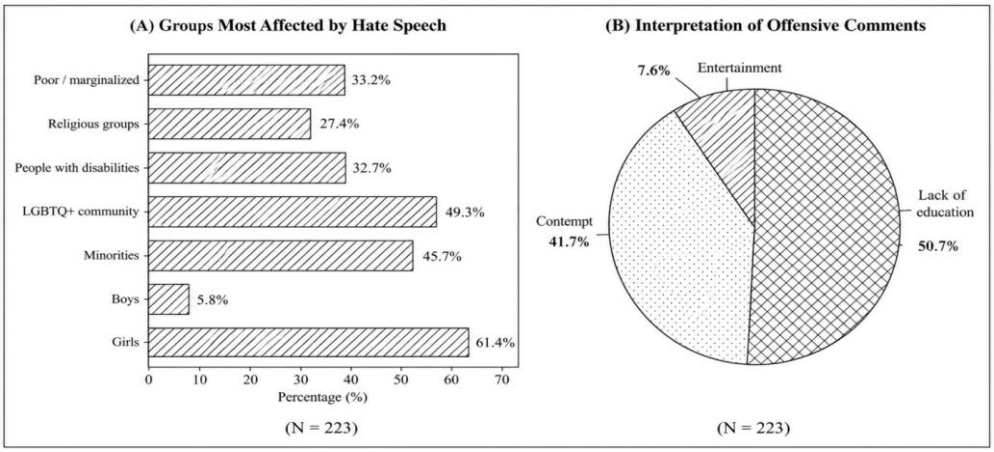


Figure 4.3.2: Frequent hate groups and interpretation of offensive comments (Kosovo)

Based on these findings, it appears that hate speech is a deliberate and harmful act, and not simply harmless or entertaining language. These statistics show that hate speech targets specific groups of individuals. It appears that hate speech is seen primarily as a deliberate and harmful act, and not as an accidental gesture, driven by structural and cultural factors. Figures 4.3.1 and 4.3.2 show considerable similarities between Albanian and Kosovar students in terms of the two groups most affected by hate speech, as well as the motivations for making offensive remarks. The majority of hate speech in both countries is believed to target women and other vulnerable social groups. Although female students are the most affected group in both samples, Kosovo has a higher percentage (61.4%) than Albania (51.5%). Equally important is the fact that minority groups and the LGBTQ+ community are consistently identified as particularly vulnerable groups who have faced social exclusion or discrimination. This stance suggests that hate speech primarily targets these groups with the aim of perpetuating harmful prejudices against them. The reasons behind the offensive remarks vary. The

majority of Albanians (67.8%) see hate speech as a manifestation of contempt, while this view is less common among Kosovar students (41.7%). However, Kosovar respondents are significantly more likely than Albanians (26.2%) to attribute hate speech to a lack of education (50.7%), suggesting that offensive behavior is more likely to be the result of insufficient awareness and education than deliberate hostility. A minority of students in both countries consider hate speech to be harmless or fun, while others (7.3%) in Albania and Kosovo think it is a form of social harassment. The results show that while Albanians and Kosovar students identify with similar "protective" groups, Albanian respondents tend to focus on intentional hostility, while Kosovar student respondents place more importance on educational and social factors in identifying hate speech. What are the main reasons for such attitudes and responses?

5.4 Confronting hate speech

The most important results are based on how free expression is perceived in different settings. A significant proportion of respondents, 88.1%, reported that they experience more freedom of expression in the physical world than in digital spaces. (Figure 4.4)
The Internet is seen as judgmental and confrontational; anonymity reduces the sense of responsibility; face-to-face meetings are considered more trustworthy. Furthermore, the idea that online anonymity encourages free expression is at odds with reality.

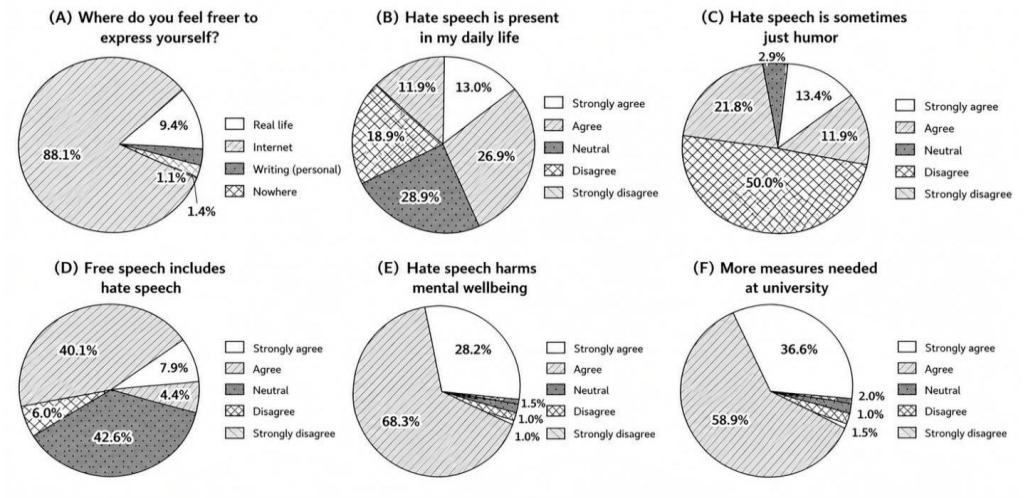


Figure 4.4 Overview of students' perceptions, attitudes, and experiences regarding hate speech (N = 202), including exposure, normalization, perceived impacts, and support for institutional interventions.

Detailed explanations are provided through qualitative responses. People who participate in online surveys often describe their environment as highly judgmental and prone to misinterpretation).

They emphasize that this environment is characterized by anonymity and lack of accountability;

While according to them, face-to-face interaction is linked to trust and enjoys greater emotional nuances.

Likewise, it is given the opportunity to react and provide immediate clarifications.

Likewise, it is characterized by higher levels of perceived safety.

These assessments contradict the widely held idea that digital anonymity contributes to greater freedom of speech. These perceptions suggest that online environments can hinder genuine expression, causing social tension and danger. However, the logical segment highlights the strong awareness of the harmful effects of hate speech.

Most people acknowledge the prevalence of hate speech in their daily lives (Figure 4.4/B) and share some views on the issue.

Almost 50% do not approve of the idea that hate speech can be classified as humor (Figure 4.4/C)

Those who believe that freedom of expression does not justify hate speech are the majority. (Figures Figure 4.4/D)

Most importantly: Mental health is negatively affected by hate speech, as reported by Figure 4.4/E and agreed by over 96% of respondents.

More than 95% of university respondents indicate that they prefer to implement stronger preventive measures (Figure 4.4/F).

Students are highly critical of hate speech and have a strong standard against it, as evidenced by the fact that the majority of respondents reject the idea that freedom of expression is the enforcement of laws against hate speech. This observation highlights an important distinction between freedom of speech in this study and harmful discourse.

5.5 Personal Experience and Behavioral Responses

The data reveal both direct and indirect experiences with hate speech (Figure 4.5.1):

19.3% report having been victims (Figure 4.5.1/A);

21.8% admit using similar language unintentionally (Figure 4.5.1/B);

A significant portion remains uncertain, indicating ambiguity in defining hate speech

Behavioral responses include:

Ignoring hate speech (44.1%) (Figure 4.5.1/C);

Criticizing the author (36.6%) (Figure 4.5.1/C);

Only 19.8% have received formal training on hate speech (Figure 4.5.1/D). The majority rely on informal sources such as media or personal experience.

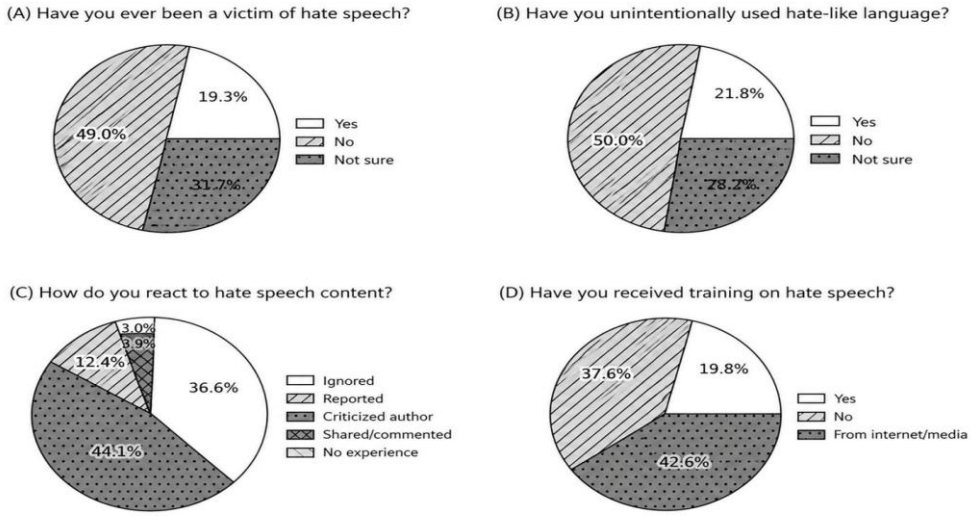


Figure 4.5.1: Overview of students' experiences, behaviors, and responses regarding hate speech, including victimization, self-reported use, reaction patterns, and exposure to training in Albania (N = 202).

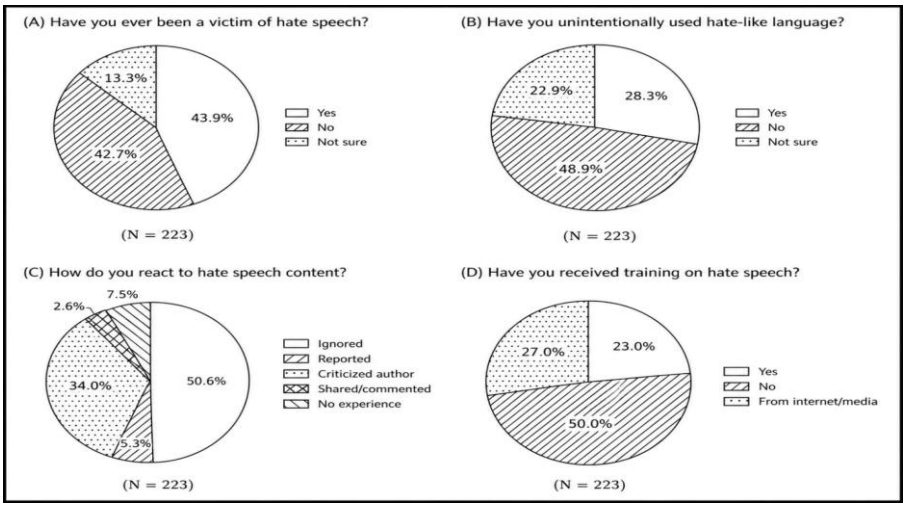


Figure 4.5.2: Overview of students' experiences, behaviors, and responses regarding hate speech, including victimization, self-reported use, reaction patterns, and exposure to training in Kosovo (N = 223).

The data show a lack of proactive engagement, which highlights the need for structured educational interventions. The difference between effective awareness and insufficient proactive engagement highlights a significant gap in the practical capacity of the intervention. Moreover, there is no discernible link between the two. More than 90% of participants indicate a willingness to engage in educational initiatives related to hate speech (definitely or probably).

The data, in line with the quantitative and qualitative evidence, support the conclusion that education or awareness is seen as key to combating hate speech. Figures 4.5.1 and 4.5.2 show, among other things, the similarity (quantitative but not significant) between the personal experiences and behavioral responses of university students in Albania-Kosovo. Direct exposure to hate speech is more common among students in Kosovo, with 43.9 percent of respondents reporting having experienced such behavior compared to 19.3 percent for Albanians. Why does this seem so unusual? Meanwhile, uncertainty is much lower in Kosovo (13.3%) than in Albania (31.7%), meaning that Kosovar students are generally more confident in identifying incidents of hate speech. Why? Although the number of respondents in Kosovo and Albania reported having used hate-like language incidentally differed, they also showed similar patterns. These differences are more pronounced in their behavioral responses to hate speech content. The percentage of Kosovar students who ignore hate content is 50.6%, while Albanian respondents are more likely to criticize the author (44.1% versus 34.0% in Kosovo). Although less frequent in Kosovo (5.3%) than in Albania (3.0%), reporting hate speech is still a relatively common issue in both countries. Finally, opinions about education and training also differ. Regarding hate speech, 50% of respondents in Kosovo have no formal training, while 37.6% have done so in Albania. The data shows that 42.2% of participants in Albania rely on information obtained from the internet or local media, while in Kosovo this figure is only 27%. Despite the acceptance of hate speech in both countries, Kosovar students have more personal experience with hate speech, but tend to passively ignore offensive content, while Albanian students are more likely to directly challenge hateful behavior. What is the reason for this trend?

5.6 Overall Synthesis of Results

The results revealed high levels of agreement on the harm and the necessity to take action. The answers to our questions show that hate speech is well-known and widespread in society (especially online) and deeply harmful. There is a big difference between recognizing the phenomenon and acting against it. There are passive people (e.g., not responding to the content) and a small number of participants who receive formal training. The development of educational programs, institutional policies and so-called digital governance structures is essential for contemporary Albanian society.

6. Discussion

Also, the results can be improved by comparing them to studies conducted in Kosovo (Canaj et al, 2025). The two studies both indicate that hate speech is prevalent among university students, particularly in the age of e-commerce. The majority of Albanians identify social media as their primary source of exposure, while around 68% of respondents in Kosovo report experiencing hate speech during online academic discussions (Canaj et al, 2025). This parallelism implies that digital platforms are fundamental structural agents of hate speech in the Western Balkans.

Targeted groups display convergence patterns in both contexts. Women are disproportionately targeted in the Albanian data, but according to the Kosovo study, both women and ethnic minorities are identified as major targets (Canaj et al, 2025). Hate speech is believed to reflect wider structural inequalities, such as gender hierarchies and ethnic divisions, with the Kosovo case being influenced by post-conflict dynamics. The gap between awareness and action is a significant parallel between the two studies. While Albanians are aware of hate speech's negative consequences, their behavior remains mostly inactive, and many students seem to overlook it. The report of high-level Kosovo students often lacks trust in institutional mechanisms, despite being heavily exposed (Canaj and al, 2025). The connection between passive responses and attitudes is influenced by both institutional and structural constraints.

In both cases, hate speech has significant psychological and social consequences. A significant proportion of participants in Albania recognize that it negatively affects their mental health, whereas students in Kosovo report stress, exclusion, and reduced involvement in school activities (Canaj et al, 2025). Despite the significance of contextual differences, these findings highlight the serious consequences that this trend has on education and public health. Although the Albanian case emphasizes the gender aspect and hate speech in online communication, the Kosovo study highlights democratic principles, ethnic tension after a conflict, and social dynamics after an event (Canaj et al, 2025). However: Why is this important? Overall, this comparison shows that hate speech is a regionally consistent phenomenon but is also influenced by specific socio-political contexts and requires multidimensional interventions.

The results show that hate speech is a common phenomenon among university students, particularly on the internet, but it is still generally discouraged. Why? This leads to the paradox of normalization and rejection, where repeated exposure does not necessarily lead to acceptance.

Hate speech has a significant impact on vulnerable groups, particularly women and minorities, reinforcing existing social inequalities. Beyond its role as an expression of personal identity, it also functions as a means of power and social reproduction.

The constant discrepancy between awareness and action is a significant finding. Students are aware of hate speech's negative consequences, but most remain passive and often ignore it. This behavior can be attributed to fear of confrontation, repeated exposure, and a lack of trust in institutional responses.

In general, hate speech appears to be an interlinked phenomenon that requires explanation beyond individual behavior.

7. Limitations of the Study

Despite its contributions, this paper has certain limitations, including its reliance on self-reported data and its focus on a student population.

Respondents are young, university-educated, which makes the scope of the judgment narrower and more elitist.

Participants are not representative of all students in Albania and Kosovo.

The large number of women who are more vulnerable and exposed to hate speech

Future research could build on these findings by expanding the sample to include academic staff and exploring the effectiveness of institutional interventions over time. Addressing these gaps is essential for developing effective interventions and fostering inclusive societies.

8. Conclusions

Hate speech represents a multifaceted challenge that transcends national boundaries and digital platforms. Globally, the literature emphasizes legal, ethical, and technological strategies to mitigate its effects, while regional studies, particularly in the Western Balkans, highlight the influence of historical, social, and political factors.

Effective responses require a combination of legislation, education, media literacy, and civil society initiatives.

The dynamics of this context, the impact of online discourse, and the development of robust monitoring and

intervention mechanisms remain crucial and require further study.

9. Recommendations

- Based on the findings, a comprehensive and multi-level approach is recommended:
- **Educational Integration.** Universities should incorporate structured programs on hate speech awareness and digital literacy, focusing on both theoretical understanding and practical skills such as reporting and responding to harmful content.
- **Strengthening Institutional Policies.** Institutions should act not only as regulators but also as promoters of inclusive and respectful environments.
- **Enhancing Digital Platform Accountability.** Given the central role of social media, stronger collaboration with digital platforms is needed to improve content moderation, ensure transparency, and limit algorithmic amplification of harmful content.
- **Encouraging Active Engagement**. Students should be empowered to move from passive observation to active intervention through awareness campaigns, peer initiatives, and training on safe and effective responses.
- **Continuous Monitoring.** Institutions should implement ongoing evaluation mechanisms, including surveys and feedback systems, to track trends and assess the effectiveness of interventions.
- Addressing hate speech requires a holistic and sustained approach that combines education, institutional responsibility, and digital governance. Only through such a multidimensional strategy can communication environments become not only free, but also respectful, inclusive, and socially responsible.

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