Identifying the Face of Hate

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ABSTRACT
Previous research by Borgeson and Valeri (2004) suggests that individuals may not recognize the intolerance of hate web sites. The present study examines the impact of content-warning notices on both an individual's ability to detect the intolerance of a hate site and the specific target of a hate site.

Hate groups have been online since the early 1980s (Borgeson and Fraleigh, 2004). Because the Internet provides an inexpensive, unregulated, and easily accessible platform for their views, the number of hate web sites is growing. In 1999 the Anti-Defamation League, a New York based group that fights anti-Semitism and bigotry, reported that between 300 and 1,000 of the 8 million sites on the World Wide Web were hate sites (“Downloading Hate,” 1999). Conlin and Prasso (2002) reported that after the September 11 destruction of the World Trade Center the number of hate sites had doubled to about 2000. Much of this increase is accounted for by the proliferation of anti-Arab and anti-Muslim sites. Experts are increasingly concerned that the rise of hate in cyberspace and on the airwaves will cause people to become more tolerant and accepting of messages once considered unacceptable and extreme (Marquand, 1998). Research in attitude change and persuasion suggests that this is a legitimate concern (Hovland, Lumsdaine, and Sheffield, 1949; McGuire, 1968; Petty and Cacioppo, 1986; Sherif and Hovland, 1961).

According to the information processing model (McGuire, 1968), in order for attitude change to occur an individual must attend to a message, comprehend the message, yield to the message, retain the attitude, and then behave in a manner consistent with the attitude. With the growing number of hate sites it becomes increasingly likely that, even unintentionally, an individual will be exposed to and attend to a hate web site. An example of how an individual might inadvertently stumble onto a hate web site was described in a National Public Radio broadcast of 13 April 2003 about the search engine Google. The broadcast discussed the fact that if an individual conducted a search using Google on the word Jew the first site listed in the results was an anti-Semitic web site Jew
Watch. Much of the controversy surrounding the Google results list was that many individuals would click on the top site listed without realizing that Jew Watch is an anti-Semitic web site and that, even after clicking on the web site, the individual may not immediately realize that the web page was anti-Semitic. Although Google initially defended its results list they later changed the results so that the first site listed, Offensive Search Results by Google, explained their site rankings and instructed people searching for information on Jewish people to enter Judaism or Jewish people as their search terms (Karr, R., 2004).

Research by Borgeson and Valeri (2004) suggests that people may not recognize the intolerant nature of web sites such as Jew Watch. They examined the impact of three web site design strategies on participants’ ability to recognize intolerance: (1) an in your face approach, (2) a soft-sell approach, and (3) a misleading approach. With the in your face approach, it is clear that the source of the message is a hate group and the hatred and intolerance of the message is blatant. However, the in your face approach will have very limited appeal because overt endorsements of prejudice have decreased during the past eighty years [Leslie, Constantine, and Fiske, 2003 (as cited in Fiske, 2004)]. Moreover, non-minorities have become more tolerant and understanding of racial issues (Bobo, 2001). As a consequence, it is likely that a message so blatant in its hate will not result in the desired attitude change.

In contrast to the in your face approach, web sites using the soft-sell employ a more subtle strategy, using milder rhetoric and making both the source and message bias more ambiguous. As compared to the in your face approach, the soft-sell may be a more effective means for a hate group to deliver its message because the information is less likely to be rejected immediately. Finally, web sites that use the misleading approach attempt to create a rational and newsworthy tone and present information as if it were unbiased and factual. In this case, it may not be immediately apparent to the user that the source of the message is a hate group or that the information is unequivocally false. Consequently, the user may spend some time viewing the web site before discerning its true nature and only then be able to factor this information into his or her evaluation of the site. As discussed by Borgeson and Valeri (2004), people may come to view the false information as factual if, over time, they dissociate the information presented from the source of the information (Hovland, Lumsdaine, and Sheffield, 1949).

In the experiment referred to above, students viewed one of three web sites and rated the intolerance of the web site. The three web sites were identical except for the title of the page: Jew Watch (soft-sell), News Watch (misleading), or Jews are Taking over the World (in your face). The content of each page was
identical and taken from the actual web site Jew Watch. Results revealed that participants rated Jews are Taking over the World as significantly more intolerant than either Jew Watch or News Watch. In fact, during the debriefing participants frequently reported that they knew little about Judaism and assumed that because a site stated that it was “a not-for-profit library for private study, scholarship, or research” then it must be educational. These findings suggest that participants were not systematically processing the content of the web site. Instead they were basing their ratings of intolerance on cues from the site’s title and the description of the site as a not-for-profit library. Apparently, people may not recognize that some of the more ambiguously named or misleading hate web sites are actually promoting hate. One possible consequence is that people may attend to the message and become more tolerant of the position advocated.

As noted, concern is increasing about the prevalence of hate on the web and the impact of hate web sites on the public. A common concern is that the hate web sites provide a forum for hate groups to disseminate their message, promote hate, and encourage harmful action.

At least four strategies are available to combat the effects of hate on the Internet. One is to place legal restrictions on hate mongering to protect minority groups. A second is to fight hate by confronting it rather than censoring it. A third is either to require or promote a web site content notice or rating system. And a fourth course of action, or perhaps inaction, is to do nothing.

The first strategy, to place legal restrictions on hate mongering, views the promotion of hate as discrimination. It assumes that anti-hate propaganda laws are necessary to curtail the spread of hate and to protect minority groups from harm (Nemes, 2002). This position is consistent with several International Human Rights guidelines that promote the prohibition of hate propaganda, hate activities, and organized hate groups. These guidelines have been endorsed by several nations (but not by the United States). In fact, several countries prohibit hate speech on the Internet and have prosecuted violators (Nemes, 2002).

The strategy of enacting laws that prohibit hate propaganda and hate web sites is rejected by some groups and organizations because they believe that it violates freedom of speech. It is argued that the principles of free speech take precedence over all other rights and freedoms because they are necessary for democracy (Becker, Byers, and Jipson, 2000). Proponents of this view argue that more speech, rather than censorship, is the best solution (Goldborough, 2001; Nemes, 2002) and propose that the web can serve as an equally powerful tool for anti-hate groups to promote cultural tolerance and respect for all people (Downloading Hate, 1999). To counter hate on the web, organizations such as the Anti-Defamation League have launched their own sites (Scott and Krass, 1996)
and have created filtering software such as Hate Filter, Net Nanny, and CYBER sitter. These allow private individuals to exercise discretion and block access to Internet sites that promote hatred (Kessler, 1998; Sheppard, 1999).

The third position promotes the development of a web site rating system. Because regulating the web is very difficult, a voluntary system might offer the most feasible solution. Policy makers could work with Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to develop a code of conduct. The ISPs could then require subscribers to the sites they host to adhere to the code of conduct, part of which could include posting a content notice. The web rating system could be modeled after the movie rating system and require information about the source of the site and its content. In the past, some hate web sites such as twelvearynannations.com have provided "content notices" that identify the message source, Aryan Nations, and intended audience, White Race.

The remainder of this paper reports on research designed to expand upon the authors' work by exploring the third course of action, the impact of a content notice on individuals' evaluations of a web site. As in the previous study, individuals viewed one of three web pages: Jews are Taking over the World, Jew Watch, or News Watch, and rated the intolerance of the web page. In the present study, members of the experimental group of subjects were shown a content notice prior to viewing the site and members of the control group were not shown a notice. To make the experience as realistic as possible, an actual content notice was used in the study. This was reproduced from the January 2004 web page of twelvearynannations.com

The subjects' general ratings of intolerance were examined. In addition, we sought to determine the individuals' ability to recognize the specific target of hate, i.e., the anti-Semitic nature of the web site. It was hypothesized that the content notice would affect the subjects' ratings of intolerance. As in the earlier study, it was predicted that without the content notice individuals would rate the web page using the in your face approach, Jews are Taking Over the World as (1) significantly more intolerant and (2) significantly more anti-Semitic than either of the other two sites. In the present study, we also predicted that, when preceded by the content notice, both Jew Watch and News Watch would be rated as (1) significantly more intolerant and (2) significantly more anti-Semitic than those same web pages without the content notice.

RESEARCH METHODS
Participants and Design

One hundred seventy-three undergraduates participated in our experiment examining individuals' ability to recognize anti-Semitism. The study design was
a 3 web-site (In your face, Soft-sell, or Misleading) times 2 “Whites-Only”-notice (present vs. absent). Participants were randomly assigned to view one of three web sites. The format and content of the three web sites were identical except for the name of the page which reflected the three different type of hate represented on the Internet. The content used for the three pages was taken from a real web site, Jew Watch. Participants viewed the web site either preceded or not preceded by a content notice.

Procedure

At the start of the experiment, participants were informed that they would see a web page and be asked for their opinions about the page. Next, consent forms were completed and then participants viewed one of the three web sites, some with and others without the notice. After viewing the page, participants completed the items comprising the dependent measures. To measure recognition of intolerance, participants rated the web site and the information contained on the site on five 5-point semantic differential scales (educational-uneducational, true-untrue, balanced argument-unbalanced argument, open minded-closed minded, tolerant of others-intolerant of others). Participants’ responses to these five highly correlated scales (Alpha = 0.80) were totaled and used as an indication of the participant’s ability to recognize intolerance. Higher scores indicate a greater ability to recognize intolerance and hate.
In order to explore participants’ thoughts about the web site, they next completed a thought-listing task in which they were asked to list their thoughts about the web page and indicate whether the thought expressed something positive, negative, or neutral about the page. Finally, in order to measure participants’ ability to recognize the specific target of the hate -- that the web pages were anti-Semitic, we used three 7-point scales. With these scales, participants were asked to indicate the extent to which the information in the links provided should be categorized as pro- or anti-Jewish, pro- or anti-Arab, and pro- or anti-American. On the scales, 1 indicated that the participant thought the information would be completely anti-Jewish, anti-Arab, or anti-American and 7 indicated that the participant thought the information would be completely pro-Jewish, pro-Arab, or pro-American. Anti-pro Arab and anti-pro American items were selected because of changes following the events of September 11, 2001. For example, there has been a significant increase in the number of anti-Arab and anti-Muslim web sites as well as an increase in pro-American sentiment within the United States.
RESULTS

A two-way analysis (3 x 2) of variance was conducted on all dependent measures. Planned contrasts were conducted where appropriate. For the dependent measure of intolerance recognition, a significant main effect for web site emerged with $F (2, 167) = 8.95, p < .01$ (degrees of freedom shown in parentheses following “F” and “t”). Consistent with predictions, participants rated the Jews are Taking over the World site as significantly more intolerant ($\bar{x} = 20.77, s = 3.77$) than either Jew Watch ($\bar{x} = 18.26, s = 4.33$), $t (116) = 3.36, p < .01$ or News Watch ($\bar{x} = 18.69, s = 4.41$), $t (118) = 2.78, p < .01$. Participants did not distinguish between the intolerance of Jew Watch and News Watch: $t (106) = 0.51, p > .05$. There was also a significant main effect for notice: $F (1, 167) = 42.28, p < .01$. Consistent with predictions, participants rated the web pages preceded by the Whites Only notice as being significantly more intolerant ($\bar{x} = 21.30, s = 3.19$) than web pages without the notice ($\bar{x} = 17.32, s = 4.19$).

These main effects were qualified by a significant interaction: $F (2, 167) = 8.31, p < .01$. All cell sizes, means, and standard deviations are reported in Table 1 below.

Table 1 Intolerance ratings, 3 sites two conditions

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<th>Website</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jews Take over World</td>
<td>Jew Watch</td>
<td>News Watch</td>
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<tr>
<td>Notice</td>
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<td>30</td>
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<tr>
<td>No Notice</td>
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For both Jew Watch and News Watch, participants rated the sites as significantly more intolerant in the notice-present versus notice-absent conditions, Jew Watch: $t (51) = 6.13, p < .01$, News Watch $t (53) = 4.63, p < .01$. Participants responses to Jews are Taking over the World were not impacted by the presence of the notice: $t (63) = 0.59, p > .05$. Consistent with predictions, in the no notice condition, participants who viewed Jews are Taking over the World rated the site as significantly more intolerant than participants who were exposed to either Jew Watch: $t (62) = 5.38, p < .01$ or News Watch: $t (55) = 4.41, p < .01$. Also consistent with predictions, in the notice-present condition, participants did not differ in their intolerance rating for the three sites ($p > .05$). Taken together, these findings suggest that because participants were able to recognize the
intolerance of the web page *Jews are Taking over the World*, their ratings were not impacted by the *Whites Only* notice. However, because the intolerance of the web pages *Jew Watch* and *News Watch* was less readily identified, the presence of the "Whites Only" notice significantly impacted participants’ ratings of intolerance such that these pages accompanied by the notice were viewed as significantly more intolerant than those same pages without the notice and as intolerant as the web page *Jews are Taking over the World*.

In order to examine whether participants were able to recognize the specific target of hate participants’ response to the question regarding the extent to which the information in the links provided would be pro- or anti-Jewish, pro- or anti-American, and pro- or anti-Arab were examined. As mentioned previously it was predicted that the notice would not impact either the pro- or anti-American ratings or the pro- or anti-Arab ratings. However, it was predicted that the content notice would affect the pro- or anti-Jewish ratings. Specifically it was predicted that when preceded by the content notice both *Jew Watch* and *News Watch* would be rated as significantly more anti-Jewish than those same web pages without the notice.

Results revealed a significant main effect for web-page: $F (2, 165) = 4.74, p < .05$. Participants rated the *Jews taking over the world* site as significantly more anti-Jewish ($\bar{x} = 2.25, s = 1.55$) than either *Jew Watch* ($\bar{x} = 3.11, s = 2.04$), $t (115) = 2.63, p = .01$ or *News Watch* ($\bar{x} = 3.16, s = 1.94$), $t (116) = 2.88, p < .01$. Participants did not differ in their ratings of the anti-Jewish nature of *Jew Watch* and *News Watch*: $t (105) = 0.51, p > .05$. There was also a significant main effect for notice: $F (1, 165) = 5.10, p < .05$. Consistent with predictions participants rated the web pages preceded by the "Whites Only" notice ($\bar{x} = 2.53, s = 1.81$) as significantly more anti-Jewish than web pages viewed without the "Whites Only" notice ($\bar{x} = 3.07, s = 1.81$), $t (169) = 1.88, p < .05$. These main effects were qualified by a significant interaction $F (2, 165) = 3.90, p < .05$. All cell sizes, means, and standard deviations are reported in Table 2.

Planned contrasts revealed that the *Whites Only* notice had a significant impact on participants’ ratings of *Jew Watch*. In the *Whites Only* notice-present condition participants rated *Jew Watch* as significantly more anti-Jewish than in the notice-absent condition $t (51) = 3.37, p < .01$. Contrary to predictions the notice did not impact participants ratings of the anti-Jewish nature of *News Watch*: $t (52) = 0.19, p = .85$. Also, the notice did not impact participants’ ratings of *Jews are Taking over the World*: $t (62) = 0.11, p = .91$. 

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Table 2. Pro- or Anti-Jewish Ratings

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<th>Website</th>
<th>Jews Take Over World</th>
<th>Jew Watch</th>
<th>News Watch</th>
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<td>Notice</td>
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<td>2.20</td>
<td>1.61</td>
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<tr>
<td>No Notice</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>2.28</td>
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In the notice-absent condition, participants rated *Jews are Taking over the World* as significantly more anti-Jewish than either *Jew Watch*: \( t (61) = 3.81, p < .01 \) or *News Watch*: \( t (54) = 2.16, p < .05 \). Participants who viewed *Jew Watch* and *News Watch* did not differ significantly from each other in their ratings of the anti-Jewish nature of the page: \( t (49) = 1.32, p > .05 \).

In the *Whites Only* notice-present condition, participants did not distinguish between the anti-Jewish nature of *Jews are Taking over the World* and *Jew Watch*: \( t (52) = .07, p > .10 \). However, participants rated both *Jews are Taking over the World*: \( t (60) = 1.94, p = .06 \) and *Jew Watch*: \( t (54) = 1.77, p = .08 \) as more anti-Jewish than *News Watch*.

We sought to examine further the participants’ ability to recognize the target of hate. Thus, we examined the participants’ responses to the question regarding the extent to which the information in the links provided would be pro- or anti-American. There were no significant effects for web page: \( F (2, 166) = 0.31, p > .05 \), or for the notice condition: \( F (1, 166) = 0.09, p > .05 \), or for the interaction: \( F (2, 166) = 0.85 p > .05 \). We also examined the participants’ responses to the question regarding the extent to which the information in the links provided would be pro- or anti-Arab. There were no significant effects for web page: \( F (2, 164) = 1.63, p > .05 \), or for the notice condition: \( F (1, 164) = 3.42, p > .05 \), or for the interaction: \( F (2, 164) = 2.27, p > .05 \). Taken together, these finding suggest that the notice serves to alert participants to the anti-Semitic content of *Jew Watch* but not *News Watch*.

Finally, the participants’ thoughts about the web sites were analyzed in two ways. (1) We compared the percentage of negative thoughts to total thoughts. (2) We compared the percentage of positive thoughts to total thoughts. For percentage of negative thoughts to total thoughts, there was a significant effect for the notice condition: \( F (1, 135) = 5.40, p < .05 \). That is, the percentage of negative thoughts was significantly greater in the notice-present condition (\( \bar{x} = 80.83, s = 30.47 \)) than in the notice-absent condition (\( \bar{x} = 68.62, s = 38.70 \)). There were no significant effects for web page: \( F (2, 135) = 0.64, p > .05 \), or for the interaction: \( F (2, 135) = 1.71 p > .05 \). For percentage of positive thoughts to
total thoughts, there was a marginally significant effect for notice: $F(1, 135) = 3.12, p = .08$. That is, the percentage of positive thoughts was smaller in the notice-present condition ($\bar{x} = 6.3, s = 17.33$) than in the notice-absent condition ($\bar{x} = 12.86, s = 25.91$). There were no significant effects for web page: $F(2, 135) = 0.10, p > .10$, or for the interaction: $F(2, 135) = 0.80, p > .10$.

**DISCUSSION**

The above results replicate and extend the findings of Borgeson and Valeri (2004). Consistent with our earlier work, in the notice-absent condition Jews are Taking over the World was rated as significantly more intolerant than either Jew Watch or News Watch. This suggests that people have a more difficult time identifying the intolerance of hate web sites using either a soft sell or a misleading approach. Both of these approaches are less blatant in their hate.

The results further demonstrate that content notices impact individuals’ perceptions of web pages. The results of the thought listings demonstrate that when a web page is preceded by a content notice that alerts people to the fact that the message source is a hate group, individuals’ thoughts about the web page are more negative. In addition, the intolerance ratings suggest that hate web pages in which the hate is made more ambiguous through the use of either a soft sell approach or a misleading approach are rated as significantly more intolerant when preceded by a content notice.

However, the results regarding participants’ ability to recognize the specific target of the hate message are less clear cut. Somewhat surprising, in the misleading approach of News Watch, individuals were not as successful at recognizing the specific target of the hate. When participants were asked to rate the web pages for the extent to which they were pro- or anti-Jewish, in the notice-absent condition, participants rated Jews Are Taking over the World as significantly more anti-Jewish than either Jew Watch or News Watch. In the notice-present condition, participants rated both Jews Are Taking over the World and Jew Watch as more anti Jewish than News Watch. The presence of the content notice clearly alerted viewers to the anti-Jewish nature of Jew Watch but not News Watch. Specifically, Jew Watch was rated as significantly more anti-Jewish when it was preceded by the content notice than when it was not. However, presence of the content notice did not significantly impact participants’ pro- or anti-Jewish ratings of News Watch.

Taken together, these results suggest that individuals are less likely to recognize the intolerance of hate sites using either a misleading or soft-sell approach. Furthermore, although content notices do facilitate an individuals’
ability to recognize a hate site as intolerant, they may not alert people to the
target of the hate. In this case, a notice that is both clearly prejudicial ("Whites
Only") and from a known hate group ("Aryan Nation") alerts people to the
intolerant nature of the web site. Consequently, individuals’ thoughts about the
web site are more negative. However, when it preceded a misleading web page,
the notice did not clearly alert people to the specific target of hate.

The implications of this research are complex. As mentioned above, hate
groups are using the Internet to get their opinions into the mainstream. It is
possible that people may accept hate sites that do not have content notices and
that use either the soft-sell or misleading approach as legitimate sources of
information. They would then become more accepting of the positions advocated.
The current study demonstrates that content notices can affect an individual’s
ability to recognize the intolerance of a hate site. However, the focus of the
research is limited to a content notice that refers to the intended message
recipient and the message source. This information alone was not sufficient to
alert people to the anti-Jewish nature of a hate web page that uses a misleading
approach. Further research is needed to examine the content notice requirements
that would be necessary and sufficient to alert people to the intended target of
hate.

POLICY OPTIONS

At the beginning of this article we identified four courses of action available
to policymakers and the public. These are: (1) to place legal restrictions on hate,
(2) to fight hate by confronting it, (3) to require or promote a web site content
notice or rating system, and (4) to do nothing. Because of the unregulated nature
of the Internet, the second course of action, to confront hate, is perhaps the
easiest to implement. People or groups opposed to hate can and have created web
pages that promote tolerance and respect for all. Additionally, individuals and
institutions can purchase filtering software that allows individuals to exercise
discretion and decide what is or is not appropriate or desirable.

Eliminating hate from the Internet, either by placing legal restrictions on hate
or instituting a content rating system, may be a problematic course to follow. The
difficulty lies in the international scope of the Internet and the cooperation it
would require. International Human Rights guidelines that promote the
prohibition of hate propaganda, hate activities, and organized hate groups have
been endorsed by several, but not all, nations. Nothing short of world wide
support for enacting and enforcing hate crime laws would be necessary for the
web to be hate free.
Similarly, a rating system would require world wide corporate agreement. In the past, citizen groups and parent groups have been successful at lobbying for the creation of movie, music, and television rating systems. Perhaps these or similar groups could persuade Internet service providers to establish a code of conduct that subscribers must adhere to, part of which could include content notice requirements. However, the difficulty with this approach, as with the legal remedy, is that the Internet is international and all companies would have to buy into establishing and implementing a code of conduct.

The fourth approach, doing nothing to combat on-line hate, may be the most troubling to contemplate. However, it appears that hate mongers rarely cite information on the Internet as the reason for joining a hate group Borgeson (2004).

The main focus of this study was to examine the impact of content notices on a person’s ability to recognize intolerance and the target of intolerance. We have not examined the impact of these sites on an individual’s beliefs or behaviors. Further research is needed to pursue these questions. It would also be of interest to know how individual differences in such variables as Internet savvy and tolerance affect an individual’s ability to recognize hate.¹

NOTES

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¹ Consider, for example, a research design that includes three groups: (1) People who are or have been the target of a hate message aimed at a group(s) to which they belong. (2) People who are or have been the target of hate messages not specifically aimed at a group(s) to which they belong. (3) People who have not been the targets of hatred. The researcher would then measure the extent to which each of the groups can identify subtle messages of hate.

REFERENCES

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