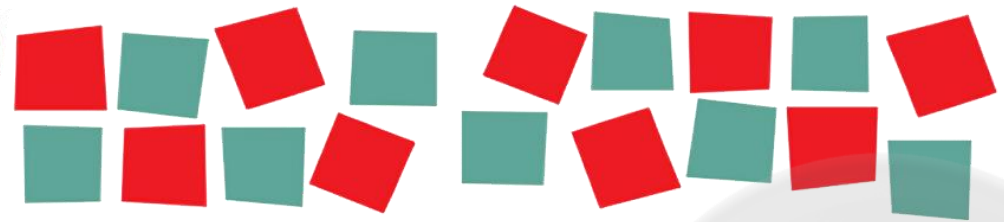ECREA 2024
Communication
& social (dis)order

An inquiry of audience's appraisals and reactions to cyberhate in news discussions on social media

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IRTIS, Masaryk University

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AdMe, University of Vienna

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CYBER PLUS⁺

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Co-funded by the European Union

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, YOUTH AND SPORTS

MUNI FSS

Interdisciplinary Research Team on Internet and Society

AdMe Research Group

Cyberhate and news discussions

- Online **hate speech** and **prejudiced content**

- Motivated by **intergroup bias** (prejudice and stereotypes) and targeting people due to their **group characteristics** or **group membership**

  (Council of Europe, 2022; Kansok-Dusche et al., 2023; Mondal et al., 2017)

- Often present on **social media** and in **news discussions**

  (Hawdon et al., 2015; Pöyhtäri, 2014; Reichelmann et al., 2020)

- The majority of young people encounter cyberhate as **exposed bystanders**

  (Bedrosova et al., 2022; Kardefelt Winther et al., 2023; Machackova et al., 2020)

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Bystanders' reactions

- Social media discussions provide exposed bystanders with **opportunities to react**

- **Reactions can affect the whole incident**
    - E.g., defending victims, joining hate, staying passive …

    (DeSmet et al., 2019)

- Passivity can be interpreted as **silent agreement** by the victims and perpetrators

- **Reinforcing** the hate and intergroup bias and spreading it vs. **challenging** it

    (Zapata et al., 2024)

What influences bystanders' reactions?

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Research gaps and study contributions

- Limited research on cyberhate bystanders (cf cyberbullying)

🔍 **Which factors affect different types of bystanders' reactions?**
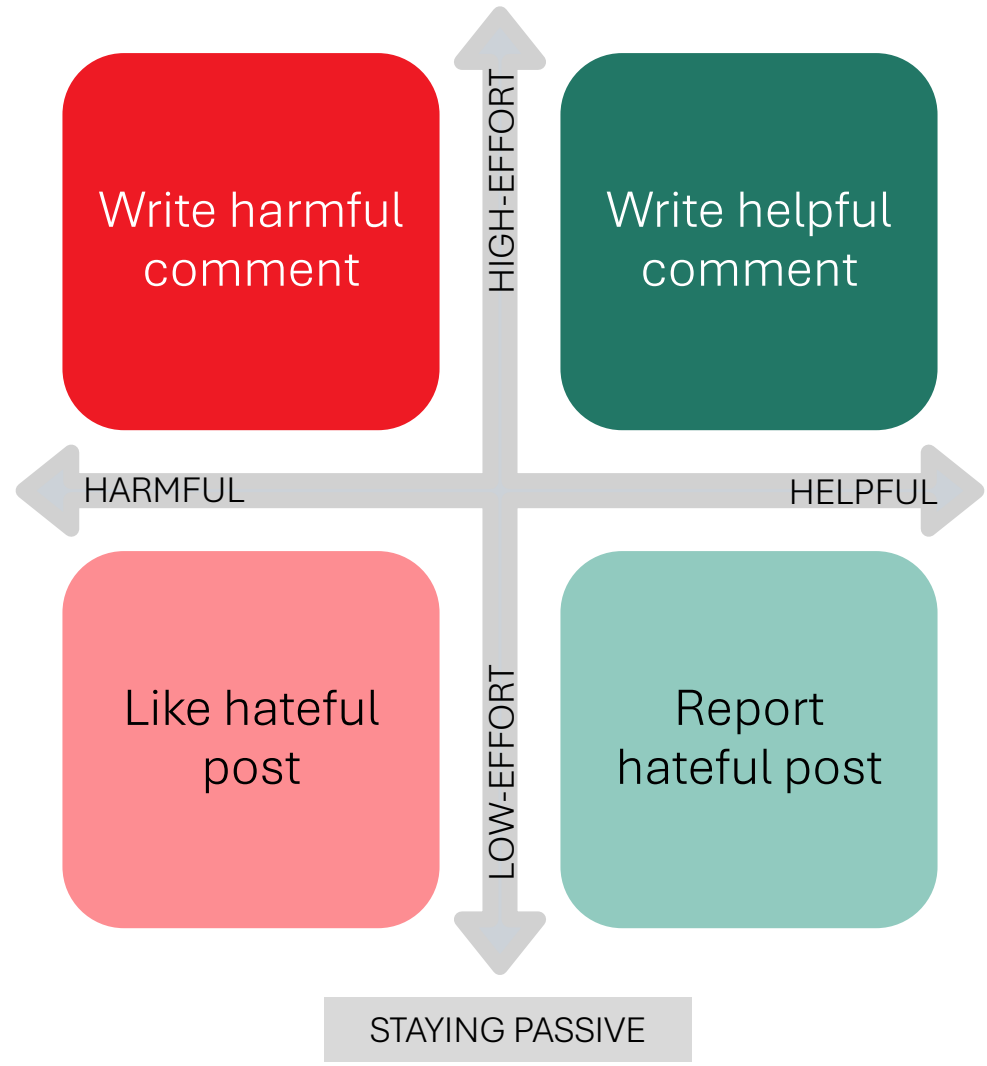
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Research gaps and study contributions

- Limited research on cyberhate bystanders (cf cyberbullying)

  🔍 **Which factors affect different types of bystanders' reactions?**

- Focus in cyberhate research on characteristics related to origin, religion, and sexuality

  🔍 **What about other group characteristics - weight and disability?**

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■ Varying levels of **entitativity**

A degree to which a group is seen as an ‚entity' with shared characteristics, goals and agency

People who are overweight
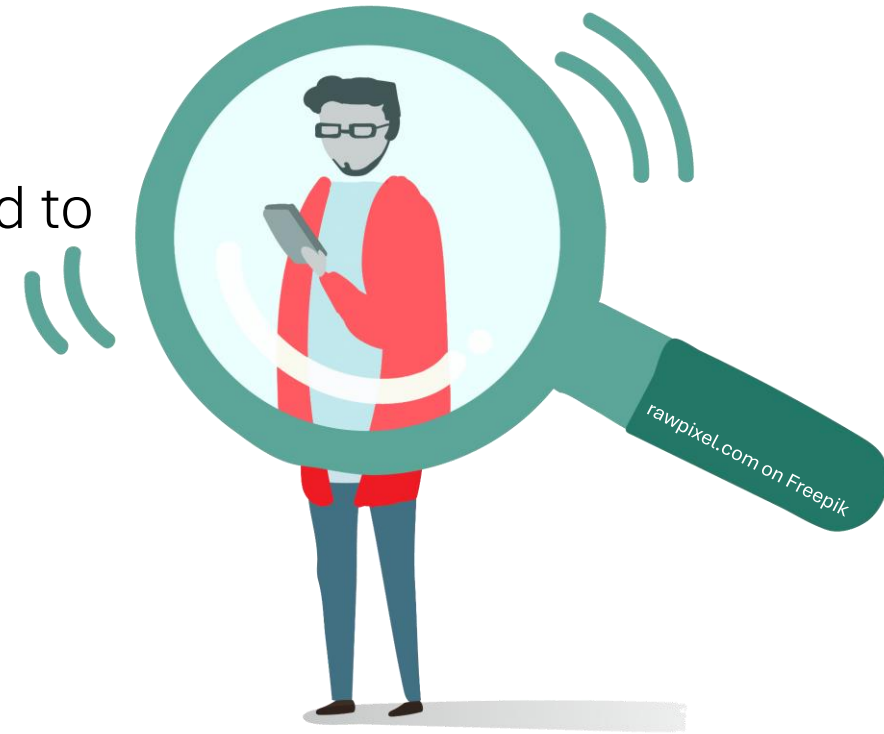
People with physical disabilities

Research gaps and study contributions

- Limited research on cyberhate bystanders (cf cyberbullying)

  🔍 **Which factors affect different types of bystanders' reactions?**

- Focus in cyberhate research on characteristics related to origin, religion, and sexuality

  🔍 **What about other group characteristics - weight and disability?**

- Lack of knowledge about bystanders' motivations and assessments of witnessed attacks

  🔍 **What motivates bystanders' active reactions or their passivity?**

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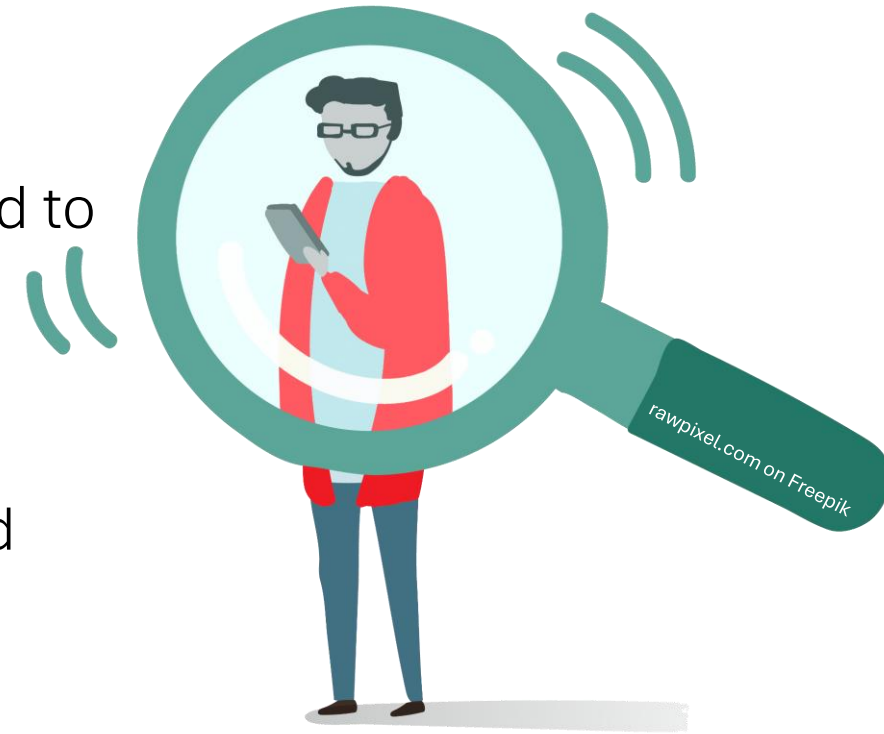
🔍 **Which factors affect bystanders' reactions?**

- Social identity theory: **negative out-group attitudes**

  (Cuddy et al., 2007; Tajfel & Turner, 1979)

- Negative out-group attitudes are connected to **perceived entitativity**

  (Agadullina & Lovakov, 2018; Campbell, 1958; Lickel et al., 2000)

- **Hate speech perception** vs. normalisation of hateful discourse online

  (Leonhard et al., 2018; Ortiz, 2021)

- **Personal victimisation experiences**

  (Domínguez-Hernnández et al., 2018)

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Methods

Online survey with open-ended questions
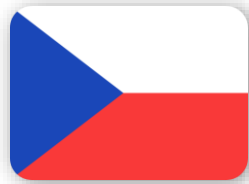
Czech Republic

July 2024

Regression analysis

+

Thematic analysis:
1 coder

(Clarke & Braun, 2006)

N = 1,030
51.5 % women

16-25 yo
M_{age} = 20.4
SD = 2.8

Measures – independent variables

Sets of questions about 2 groups

Outgroup attitudes
(Van Houtven et al., 2024)
4 items
Ω = .627 / .678

To what extent is it true that [GROUP] have the following characteristics?
Open; Tolerant; Friendly; Trustworthy

Perceived entitativity
(Denson et al., 2006)
6 items
Ω = .739 / .811

E.g., [GROUP] have common goals; share knowledge and information

Hate speech perception
1 item

To what extent would you consider negative posts or articles on social media about [GROUP] to be hate speech? By hate speech we mean attacks on specific groups (e.g. religious, sexual minorities).

Victimisation experience
1 item

How often in the last 6 months have you seen content like this on social media that attacked you... being overweight or plus-size / having a physical disability

Control variables
Gender

Age

Socioeconomic status

Frequency of online news consumption

Measures – dependent variables

Sets of questions about 2 groups

When I notice negative (mocking, insulting) articles/posts about [GROUP] on social media, I usually...

🟥 *... write a comment with something negative (e.g., making fun of, insulting) about [GROUP]*

🟥 *... like the post*

🟩 *... write a comment with something positive (e.g., defending, supporting) about [GROUP]*

🟩 *... report the post*

⬜ *... observe or stay out of it and not react in any way*
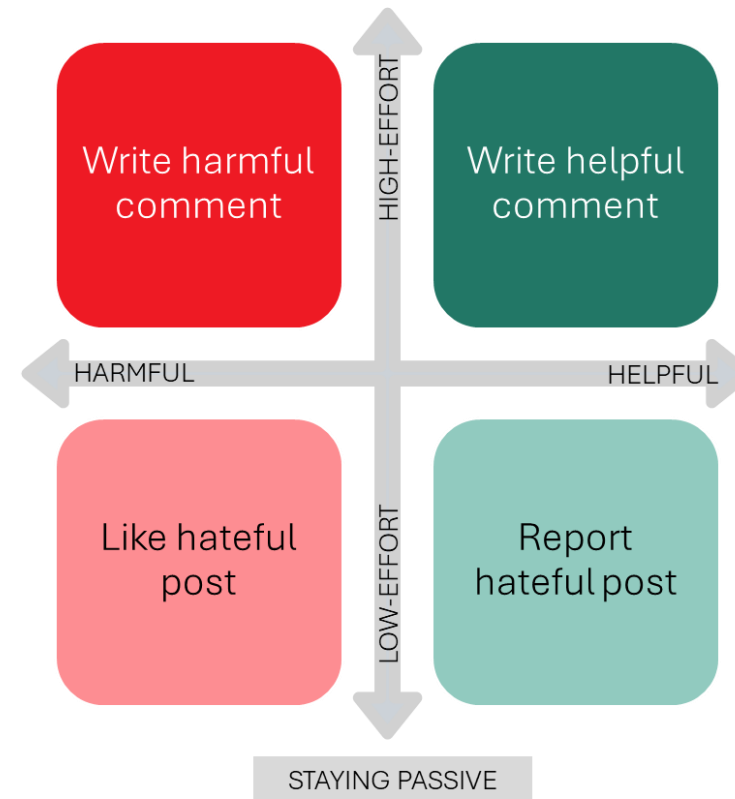
5-point scale
1 = *definitely not*
...
5 = *definitely yes*

Measures – open-ended questions

- **Focus on overweight people**

  - **Behavioural reactions**

  - **Hate speech perception**

storyset on Freepik

Results

Reactions to **articles and posts on social media** that say something **negative (mocking, insulting)** about different groups of people.

Behavioural reactions: cyberhate toward overweight people and people with physical disabilities

	Liking		Harmful comments		Helpful comments		Reporting		Doing nothing	
	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE
Negative outgroup attitudes	.060	.064	.066	.060	-.043	.070	-.062	.074	.057	.066
Perceived entitativity	.084*	.048	.081*	.045	**.121****	.053	.043	.056	.039	.049
Hate speech perception	-.081*	.045	**-.137***	.042	**.153*****	.049	**.250*****	.051	.003	.046
Cyberhate victimisation	**.206*****	.027	**.259***	.025	**.186*****	.030	**.177*****	.031	-.082*	.028
News consumption	-.088*	.027	**-.164*****	.025	**-.111****	.030	-.048	.031	.059	.027
Age	.017	.016	.085*	.015	.020	.017	.008	.018	-.016	.016
Gender (1 = female, 2 = male)	**.144*****	.089	**.181*****	.083	-.081*	.098	**-.127****	.102	-.010	.090
SES	.003	.054	-.030	.051	-.062	.060	.002	.062	-.019	.055
R²	0.089		0.165		0.102		0.137		0.014	

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Age	.099**	.015	.087**	.014	-.064	.017	-.021	.019	.023	.017
Gender (1 = female, 2 = male)	.073*	.084	**.134*****	.078	.001	.096	-.052	.105	-.062	.099
SES	-.031	.051	-.016	.048	-.053	.059	.014	.065	-.003	.060
R²	.208		.252		.073		.052		.019	

- **Doing nothing** as the most common reaction

*p < .05; **p < .01, *** p < .001

Behavioural reactions: cyberhate toward overweight people and people with physical disabilities

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- **Entitativity**
  … more helpful commenting

*p < .05; **p < .01, *** p < .001

Behavioural reactions: cyberhate toward overweight people and people with physical disabilities

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- **Hate speech perception**
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  …less harmful commenting

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Behavioural reactions: cyberhate toward overweight people and people with physical disabilities

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- **Cyberhate victimisation**
  … more helpful reactions
  … less harmful reactions

*p < .05; **p < .01, *** p < .001

Behavioural reactions: cyberhate toward overweight people and people with physical disabilities

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- **Online news consumption** … less high-effort reactions (harmful and helpful)

*p < .05; **p < .01, *** p < .001

Behavioural reactions: cyberhate toward overweight people and people with physical disabilities

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- **Men**
  … more harmful reactions (low-effort and high-effort)

- **Women**
  … more helpful reactions (low-effort)
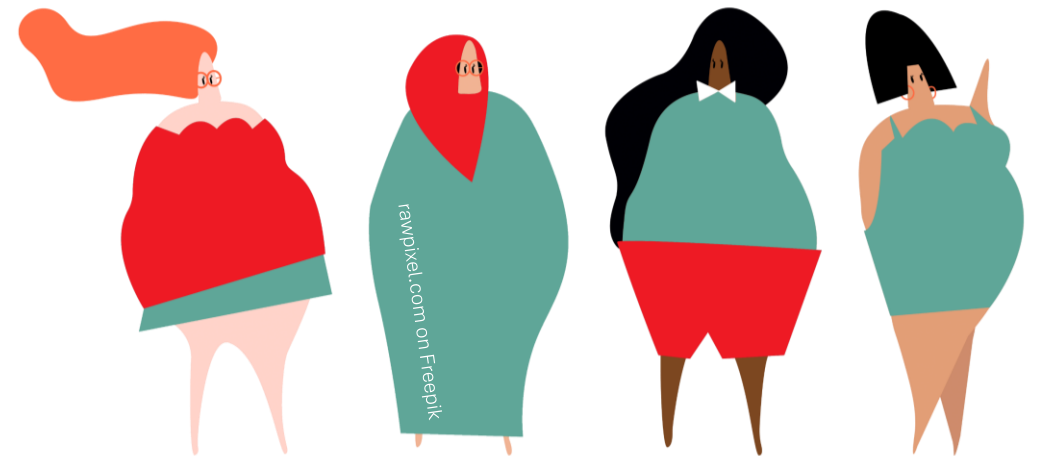
*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

# Open-ended questions

Reactions to cyberhate toward overweight people

- **Differentiation of overweight people**
  - Not / trying to lose weight
  - Laziness, lack of will
  - Genetics and health problems

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Reactions to cyberhate toward overweight people

Harmful reactions

- **Victim blaming**
- **Normalisation of obesity** is problematic (for individuals and society)
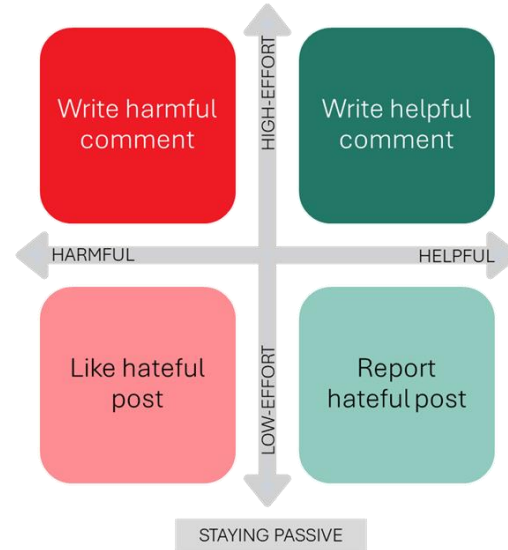
Helpful reactions

- **Ethical and moral values** (tolerance, equality, disapproval of hate)
- **Empathy**

> *Fat people are a* ***burden to health care,*** *obesity should* ***not be encouraged***.
> Man, 21 yo

Reactions to cyberhate toward overweight people

Harmful reactions

- **Victim blaming**
- **Normalisation of obesity** is problematic (for individuals and society)
- **Freedom of speech** on the internet

HIGH-EFFORT

Write harmful comment · Write helpful comment

HARMFUL · HELPFUL

LOW-EFFORT

Like hateful post · Report hateful post

STAYING PASSIVE
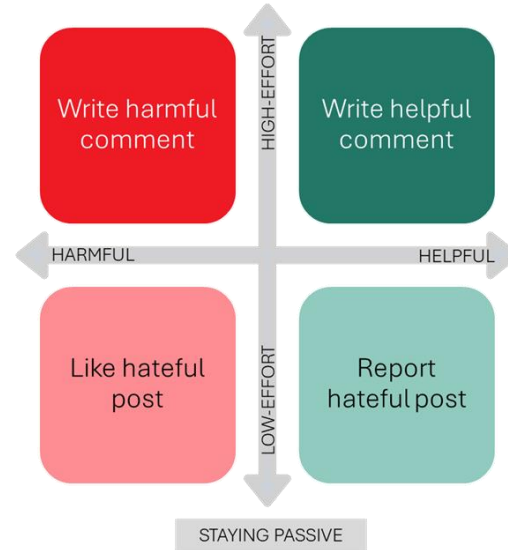
Helpful reactions

- **Ethical and moral values** (tolerance, equality, disapproval of hate)
- **Empathy**
- **Personal freedom** (appearance, life style)

*There is freedom and **freedom of speech on the internet,** let everyone write what they want.*

Man, 21 yo

Reactions to cyberhate toward overweight people

Harmful reactions

- **Victim blaming**

- **Normalisation of obesity** is problematic (for individuals and society)

- **Freedom of speech** on the internet

- **Personal experience** – „I lost weight"

- Harsh criticism can be **motivating**

> *Overweight people sometimes can't help it and some people try to do something about it, and **when they see such posts it can demotivate them**.*
>
> Woman, 21 yo

> *I was able to change my weight only thanks to these "reminders".*
>
> Man, 18 yo

Helpful reactions

- **Ethical and moral values** (tolerance, equality, disapproval of hate)

- **Empathy**

- **Personal freedom** (appearance, life style)

- **Personal experience** (respondent or close family/friends) – impact of hate on victims

- Hate and mocking are **demotivating**

Reactions to cyberhate toward overweight people

Passivity vs. **active reactions**

- **General passivity** on SNS
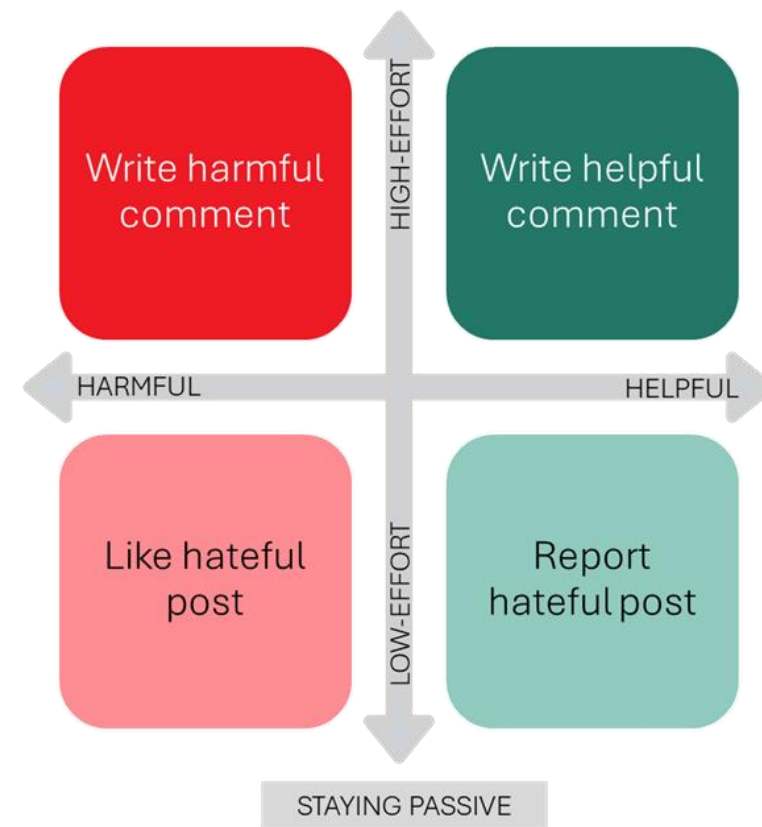
Reactions to cyberhate toward overweight people

Passivity vs. **active reactions**

- **General passivity** on SNS
- **Bulvarisation of (social) media** – the aim of posts is to incite reactions (including hate)
- **Fear of reaction**
  - Getting into conflict
  - Increasing reach of the hateful message
  - Further hateful reactions from others
  - Alghoritm
- **Desensitisation**
  - Hate is part of the (online) discourse
  - Reaction is pointless

*I'm not going to react to the post - **that's exactly the goal of the people who write it**, to make everyone more aware of the nonsense they write. I'm not going to **support the algorithm** in this - I'm not going to respond.*

Woman, 20 yo

*Responses to any posts with similar "catchy" and lame headlines would **unnecessarily overwhelm my social networks in the future**.*

Woman, 20 yo

Main conclusions and implications

- **Helpful behaviours**
  - Personal (victimisation) experiences
  - Empathy and second-hand experience
  - Values of tolerance, equality and diversity

- **Passivity as the most common response**
  - Fear of personal conflict / algorithms / inciting more reactions

Empathy training

Inclusion of „low-entitative" groups in discussions and education about tolerance, equality and diversity and about hate speech

Responsibility of users or SNS providers and moderators?

Cyberhate research on technological and platform affordances

Thank you for your attention!

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Co-funded by the European Union

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