

Hateful YouTube: Characterizing the Social Video-hosting Platform BitChute

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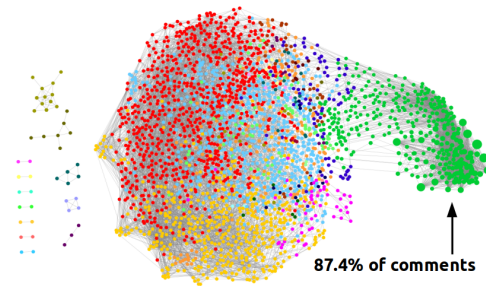
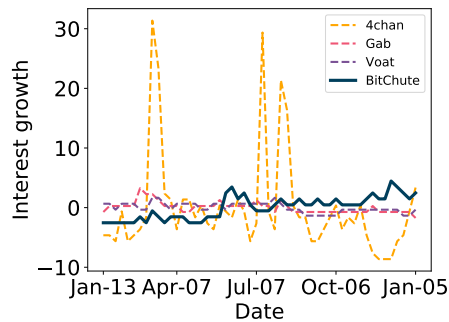
Extended Abstract

In recent years, the online media ecosystem has gained significant attention due to its role in false information spread, radicalizing ideological extremists, and perpetuating malicious hate speech. Due to these rising concerns, several social media platforms, including Twitter, YouTube, and Reddit, have begun efforts to mitigate both false information and hate speech through a variety of methods, including banning users, quarantining communities, and demonetizing content creators. This new approach on platforms that were once more lax in content moderation has led to the proliferation of many alternative social platforms, which harbor banned and demonetized content creators in the name of free speech. The discourse on these alternative platforms has motivated, incited, or has been connected to offline violence [1].

An under-explored platform in this space is BitChute, a social video-hosting platform launched as an alternative to YouTube. BitChute joins an ecosystem of alternative, low content moderation platforms, including Gab, Voat, Minds, and 4chan. Uniquely, BitChute is the first of these alternative platforms to focus on video content and is growing in popularity (Fig. 1a). If we want to address this increasing polarization in the media environment, an understanding of BitChute's discourse, types of content, and connections with the larger ecosystem are critical to developing such interventions. Hence, in this work we characterize the content and discourse on the platform.

To do our analysis, we construct a data set by collecting video metadata for every public video posted between June 28th and December 3rd 2019 on BitChute. For every video in the data set, we also collect every comment posted within the first week of the video's upload. We analyze videos, comments, and content producers with respect to activity, audience, topic, hate speech, and connections to mainstream social media. User activity on the platform follows a power law distribution, with few videos having most of the viewership and comments and most videos being uploaded by few users.

We find that the videos receiving the large majority of views and comments are predominantly about conservative news, politics, and conspiracies. Other video categories, including gaming, entertainment, music, and education, receive little engagement. Over 75% of comments contain at least one hate speech term as defined by Hatebase [2], and the hate terms and most frequently used phrases in comments are overwhelmingly antisemitic. The videos that received the most views include hateful social commentators, InfoWars, QAnon conspiracy



(a) Google Trends interest over time, where the mean is shifted to 0 for comparison. Interest in BitChute has steadily increased, while Gab and Voat have stagnated. Interest in 4chan spikes periodically when mentioned in mainstream media.

(b) Channel network where nodes represent channels and nodes are connected by an edge if they share commenters. Node size is the number of unique commenters on the channel and node color represents community membership.

theorists, and homophobic and islamophobic “satire”. Many of the power users, whose videos have received the most views and comments, have been banned from other social media platforms, forcing them to alternative sites like BitChute if they want to continue uploading.

BitChute content creators that have not been banned from mainstream platforms like YouTube frequently maintain a presence on both sites, providing a potential gateway for viewers to find more extreme content. These users either mirror their videos across both websites, which BitChute provides tools to facilitate, or post their more extreme content on BitChute and reference it in their comparatively tame YouTube channels.

To understand the relationships between channels, we construct a channel audience overlap network. In this network, channels are represented by nodes, and nodes are connected if they share at least 10% of unique commenters, with edges being weighted by the ratio of shared commenters. The resulting network structure reveals the existence a very prominent community of channels, depicted in green in Fig. 1b. This community contains 12% of the channels but receives 88% of all views, and 87.4% of all comments, in addition to holding 55% of the commenters and 67% of the videos on the platform. Over 54% of the comments in this community contain at least 1 hate speech term. Thus, despite only containing a small portion of the channels, this community is responsible for the vast majority of BitChute’s activity.

In conclusion, BitChute appears to be an increasingly popular video-sharing platform, especially for the dissemination of news and political content. As is common among fringe and alternative platforms, much of BitChute’s content is politically extreme and hateful. Our results suggest that BitChute has a higher rate of hate speech than Gab or 4chan and that the hate speech on BitChute is largely antisemitic. We find that only a handful of channels receive any engagement, and almost all of those channels contain conspiracies or hate speech. Lastly, we find several potential pathways to BitChute’s extreme content from mainstream platforms, including the presence of BitChute content producers on mainstream social media. Concerningly, BitChute contains a more diverse mix of content than Gab, including much more gaming and entertainment content, increasing the likelihood that an unradicalized individual may be incidentally exposed to more extreme views. This exposure is especially troubling given the large volume of hate speech and calls for violence present on BitChute.

References

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