

A 4-MONTH INTERVENTION STUDY IN COMBATING HATE SPEECH AND PROMOTING INCLUSIVITY AND TOLERANCE AMONG YOUTH FAN CLUBS IN ALBANIA.

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to obtain information (through the development of a questionnaire) and evaluate the effect (post vs pre) from the activities developed within the project **Fans Power: "Uniting for Respect"** regarding the hate speech of young people fans of two different teams (Tirana, Partizani). 41 young fans participated in this study, of which 26 were boys and 15 were girls. The project implementation (pre to post evaluation- 4 months' period) comprised various activities aimed at achieving its objectives. Referring to the responses of the fans after (post) completion of the developed activities, an improvement in the % of responses **related to prosocial behavior and a reduction of discriminatory language in both boys and girls can be observed in all questions.** Both boys and girls after the activities are willing to moderate discriminatory language in case of loss much more often than before the activities, from 19.4% (before) to 71.4% (after) the activities. Both boys and girls can manage their emotional state in relation to the opposing fans in case of victory *much more often* after the activities, from 25.8% before the activities to 57.1% after the activities. After the activities, the boys answered 57.1% *almost always* compared to 33.3% before the activities to the question of whether they are ready to be involved in joint activities with the fans of the opposing team. While girls answered this question 71.4% *often* compared to 15.4% before. To the question, would you be willing to promote positive behavior on social networks after the activities, the fans answered 71.4% *almost always* compared to 48.4% of the fans before the activities. The question is influenced by the reactions of the players in their behavior towards fans after the activities as boys and girls after the activities carried out a significant increase in the influence of the players compared to money is observed.

Key words: fan, football, fandom, hate speech

Introduction

Hate speech is prevalent in variety of social environments, including workplaces, professional sports, political debates and artistical expression (Tsene, L. (2023). The quick advancement of the modern technology such as social media platforms has made it

harder to understand this severe behaviour (Tsene, L. (2023). Despite the fact that this study field is already more than 20 years old, there are still a lots of unsolved problems and no clear solution (Duffy, 2003). Hate speech is defined as a attack toward a person or a group of persons, often there are targeting people who belong to a social minority.

According to United Nations, hate speech is characterized by offenses based on inherent traits, such as nationality, gender race, different teams in sports. Hate speech comes from a specific culture's norms and values as a communication act (Matamoros-Fernández & Farkas, 2021).

According to (Schwarzenegger & Wagner, 2018) haters use irony, sarcasm and satire. The study of (Ndahinda & Mugabe, 2022) reported that a deliberate approach to dehumanise opponents is to make comparison between victim and some kind of animals such as snakes, spiders, wasps, cockroaches... On social media the hate speech can in both ways, verbal (comments, posts, articles) and non-verbal (stickers, photos, emojis). It might be a simple insult or a physical extremation. According to (López-Paredes & Di Fátima, 2023) they stem from emotional outbursts to and go viral from one social platform to another. Thus, they impact both the society and the victim by damaging the democratic spaces for deliberation.

The purpose of this study is to obtain information (through the development of a questionnaire) and evaluate the effect (post vs pre) from the activities developed within the project **Fans Power: "Uniting for Respect"** regarding the hate speech of young people fans of two different teams (Tirana, Partizani). This study was carried out in the framework of the Fans Power project: "Uniting for Respect". The aim of this project is to increase social interaction, tolerance, fight against hate speech between fan clubs (Tirana, Partizani and more) of young people (16-26 yrs) through raising awareness, promoting diversity, inclusion and balance. gender in sport, engaging with their fan communities and sharing their positive experiences. This activity is organized within

the framework of the regional initiative of the United Nations "Youth for inclusiveness, equality and trust", which is implemented in Albania, Kosovo*, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and North Macedonia, with the financial support of the Peace Fund of Secretary General of the UN. In Albania, this initiative is implemented by UNDP and UNFPA.

"All references to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999)."

Methods

41 young fans participated in this study, of which 26 were boys and 15 were girls (table 1). The project implementation (pre to post evaluation- 4 months' period) comprised various activities aimed at achieving its objectives (December 2023- March 2024). These activities included social media screening, social gatherings, club visits, a two-day fan club event, and participation in a major sports event. Each activity was meticulously planned and executed to engage youth fans and promote positive values of cooperation and respect.

Main activities implemented in a 4 month period were: social media screening to identify hate speech among fan' clubs; social gathering and team building of different youth fan teams; visit in FK Tirana and Partizani homes/clubs; visit in the Albanian Football Federation and meeting with the former football player (captain of FC Tirana); exercising the learning – Derby Match Stadium- Tirana vs Partizani; fan camp with participation of fans from Tirana and Partizani sport teams (football) and dissemination of learning among youngsters to increase social interaction and tolerance among different youth fans

The method of educating (young) football fans through the socialization of two antagonistic groups is an approach that aims to reduce tensions and conflicts between different groups of fans by placing them in common situations where they can cooperate, communicate and learn to understand each other. This method is based on Allport's (1954) contact theory, which suggests that direct contact between groups in conflict can help reduce prejudice and hostility, as long as this contact occurs under appropriate conditions, such as equality, common goals and institutional support. Also in this project were being fulfilled 4 main conditions: equality, common purpose in the activities carried out, support and cooperation.

Results

Table 1

	Percent	
	pre	post
Almost always	22.6	21.4
Frequently	19.4	71.4
Sometimes	38.7	7.1
Rarely	3.2	0
Ever	16.1	0

Both in the case of boys and girls, the higher % has the answer sometimes. 44.4% in boys and 30.8% in girls. After the developed activities, an increase in the % of answers is observed both among girls with 85.7% and among boys 57.1%, as well as 0% of boys and girls answered rarely and never (table 2) .

Table 2

Gender	Percent
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Comparative results before and after (pre vs post) the activities developed with the young participants.

To the question, would you be willing to moderate the discriminatory language towards opposing fans in case of defeat, 22.6% of them answered almost always, 19.4% often, 38.7% sometimes, 3.2% rarely and 16.1% answered never. While after the developed activities the answers improved significantly. 21.4% of fans were willing to moderate discriminatory language towards opposing fans almost always, 71.4% of fans answered often, 7.1% answered sometimes and 0% answered rarely or never (table 1).

Would you be willing to moderate the discriminatory language towards the opposing fans in the event of a loss?

Would you be willing to moderate the discriminatory language towards the opposing fans in the event of a loss?

boy	Almost always	prey	Post
	Frequently	22.2	42.9
	Sometimes	22.2	57.1
	Ever	44.4	
	Total	11.1	
		100	
girl	Almost Always	23.1	
	Frequently	15.4	85.7
	Sometimes	30.8	14.3
	Rarely	7.7	
	Ever	23.1	
	Total	100	

To the question can you manage your emotional state in relation to the opposition fans in case of victory, the fans answered 45.2% almost always, 25.8% often and 29% sometimes. After the activities carried out, an increase in responses is often observed to 57.1% for the question of whether you can

manage your emotional state in relation to the opposing fans in case of victory (table 3).

Can you manage your emotional state in relation to the opposing fans in case of victory?

Table 3

	Percent	
	pre	post
Almost always	45.2	28.6
Frequently	25.8	57.1
Sometimes	29.0	14.3
Rarely	0	0
Ever	0	0

It is observed that both boys and girls answered rarely or never in any case. Both in the case of boys and in that of girls, an

increase in the % of frequent responses is observed (table 4).

Can you manage your emotional state in relation to the opposing fans in case of victory?

Table 4

Gender		Percent	
		prey	Post
boy	Almost always	44.4	14.3

	Frequently	27.8	71.4
	Sometimes	27.8	14.3
	Total	100	
girl	Almost always	46.2	42.9
	Frequently	23.1	42.9
	Sometimes	30.8	14.3
	Total	100	

33.3% of the boys and 23.1% of the girls answered almost always and 5.6% of the boys and 15.5% of the girls answered never. 58% of the fans were ready to be involved in activities with the fans of the opposing team almost always or often while few activities were carried out 57.1% of boys and 28.6% of girls answered almost always, 28.6% of boys

and 71.4% of girls I have answered often and 14.3% of boys have answered sometimes. It is noticed that both in girls and in boys after the activities, the answers are rarely and never 0% (table 5,6) .

Would you be willing to participate in joint activities with the fans of the opposing team?

Table 5

	Percent	
	pre	post
Almost always	29.0	42.9
Frequently	29.0	14.3
Sometimes	16.1	42.9
Rarely	16.1	0
Ever	9.7	0

Would you be willing to engage in joint activities with the fans of the opposing team?

Table 6

Gender		Percent	
		prey	Post
boy	Almost always	33.3	57.1
	Frequently	38.9	28.6
	Sometimes	22.2	14.3
	Ever	5.6	
	Total	100	
girl	Almost always	23.1	28.6
	Frequently	15.4	71.4
	Sometimes	7.7	

Rarely ever	38.5
Total	100

To the question would you be willing to promote prosocial behavior for opposing fans within your team's fanbase, 32.3% of fans answered almost always, 16.1% answered often, 48.4% answered sometimes, and only 3.2% answered rarely. Both in girls and in boys, an increase in responses is observed

almost always in 57.1% after the activities carried out from 38.9% of boys before the activities and 23.1% of girls before the activities carried out (table 7,8) .

Would you be willing to promote prosocial behavior for opposing fans within your team's fanbase?

Table 7

	Percent	
	pre	post
Almost always	32.3	35.7
Frequently	16.1	50.0
Sometimes	48.4	7.1
Rarely	3.2	7.1
Ever	32.3	35.7

Would you be willing to promote prosocial behavior for opposing fans within your team's fanbase?

Table 8

Gender		Percent	
		prey	Post
boy	Almost always	38.9	57.1
	Frequently	27.8	42.9
	Sometimes	33.3	
	Total	100	
Girl	Almost Always	23.1	57.1
	Sometimes	69.2	14.3
	Rarely	7.7	14.3
	Total	100	

To the question would you be willing to promote positive behavior and the elimination of discriminatory language for the opposing team/fans on your social networks, 48.4% of fans answered almost always, 16.1% answered often, 29% answered sometimes and only 6.5% of fans answered rarely. After the activities carried out, 71.4% of the fans answered almost always, 14.3% of the fans answered often and

14.3% of the fans answered sometimes. It is noted that 0% of the sample answered rarely or never after the activities carried out (table 9).

Would you be willing to promote positive behavior and the elimination of discriminatory language for the opposing team/fans on your social networks?

Table 9

	Percent	
	pre	post
Almost always	48.4	71.4
FREQUENTLY	16.1	14.3
SOMETIMES	29.0	14.3
Rarely	6.5	
Ever	48.4	

It is noticeable that in both boys' and girls' fandom there is never any answer. And the answer was almost always answered by 85.7% of boys and 57.1% of girls after the activities performed compared to 50% of boys and 46.2% of girls before the activities performed (table 10)

Would you be willing to promote positive behavior and the elimination of discriminatory language for the opposing team/fans on your social networks?

Table 10

Gender		Percent	
		pre	Post
boy	Almost always	50	85.7
	Frequently	22.2	14.3
	Sometimes	27.8	
	Total	100	
girl	Almost Always	46.2	57.1
	Frequently	7.7	28.6
	Sometimes	30.8	14.3
	Rarely	15.4	
	Total	100	

To the question are you influenced by the reactions of the players in your behavior towards the opposing fans, 45.2% of the fans asked answered sometimes, and 38.7% answered rarely. Almost always and often were in 6.5% of the answers. WHEREAS AFTER activities carried out 57.1% of fans have answered sometimes, 28.6% have answered rarely, 7.1% have answered often and never and 0% have answered almost

always. Both in boys and in girls before the activities carried out, the highest % of answers is observed in sometimes and rarely. While after the activities, boys have the highest % answer almost always and girls sometimes (table 11,12).

Are you influenced by the reactions of the players in your behavior towards the opposing fans?

Table 11

	Percent	
	pre	post
Almost always	6.5	
Frequently	6.5	7.1
Sometimes	45.2	57.1
Rarely	38.7	28.6
Ever	3.2	7.1

Are you influenced by the reactions of the players in your behavior towards the opposing fans?

Table 12

Gender		Percent	
		prey	Post
boy	Almost always	11.1	57.1
	Frequently	5.6	28.6
	Sometimes	44.4	14.3
	Rarely	38.9	
	Total	100	
girl	Frequently	7.7	14.3
	Sometimes	46.2	57.1
	Rarely	38.5	28.6
	Ever	7.7	
	Total	100	

To the question are you influenced by the reactions of sports clubs in your behavior towards opposing fans, 38.7% of fans

answered sometimes, 25.8% answered never, 16.1% answered almost always, 12.9% answered often and 6.5% answered rarely.

While after the activities carried out, 0% of fans answered almost always, 28.6% answered often, 42.9% answered sometimes, 14.3% answered rarely and 14.3% answered never (table 13).

Are you influenced by the reactions of sports clubs in your behavior towards opposing fans.

Table 13

	Percent	
	pre	post
Almost always	16.1	
Frequently	12.9	28.6
Sometimes	38.7	42.9
Rarely	6.5	14.3
Ever	25.8	14.3

Both boys and girls think in a higher % that the reactions of sports clubs sometimes influence the behavior towards opposing fans, while after the activities, the answer is often higher for boys and sometimes for girls (table 14).

Are you influenced by the reactions of sports clubs in your behavior towards opposing fans?

Table 14

Gender		Percent	
		pre	Post
boy	Almost always	16.7	28.6
	Frequently	22.2	42.9
	Sometimes	33.3	14.3
	Rarely	11.1	14.3
	Ever	16.7	
	Total	100	
Girl	Almost Always	15.4	28.6
	Sometimes	46.2	42.9
	Ever	38.5	14.3
	Total	100	

Discussion

Controlling the hate speech is not an easy task. In the study of (Amores et al., 2021) is

reported that haters use the freedom of expression to justify their words, behaviors or actions. Eventually, authoritarian states

additionally passed vague laws that censor the public sphere under the pretext of combating hate (Garbe, Selvik & Lemaire, 2023). According to (Müller & Schwarz, 2021) social media is shaping the hate speech even in the sport field because, these platforms are open to favor violent narratives (Brown, 2018). Thus, it is unclear how can we regulate the hate speech in sport without restricting the right to free speech. For this reason, the aim of this study is to obtain information (through the development of a questionnaire) and evaluate the effect (post vs pre) from the activities developed within the project **Fans Power: "Uniting for Respect"** regarding the hate speech of young people fans of two different teams (Tirana, Partizani).

According to (Gagliardone, 2019) online platformization has fostered old and new forms of abuse. On social media and in sports events social media is more complex and diverse, because it is spread at high speed in the whole world. This is just a brief description that undoubtedly highlights numerous theoretical gaps that need to be improved. The definition of the hate speech is 'promoting, violence, hatred and discrimination' against an individual or group of people (Kearns et al., 2023). Recently, it is increased the level of hate speech in sports, for instance the study of Zirin, 2021 has reported that the athletes have been subjected to racist abuse.

Referring to the responses of the fans after (post) completion of the developed activities, an improvement in the % of responses related to prosocial behavior and a reduction of discriminatory language in both boys and girls can be observed in all questions.

Both boys and girls after the activities are willing to moderate discriminatory language

in case of loss much more often than before the activities, from 19.4% (before) to 71.4% (after) the activities. Both boys and girls can manage their emotional state in relation to the opposing fans in case of victory much more often after the activities, from 25.8% before the activities to 57.1% after the activities. After the activities, the boys answered 57.1% almost always compared to 33.3% before the activities to the question of whether they are ready to be involved in joint activities with the fans of the opposing team. While girls answered this question 71.4% often compared to 15.4% before. To the question, would you be willing to promote positive behavior on social networks after the activities, the fans answered 71.4% almost always compared to 48.4% of the fans before the activities. The question is influenced by the reactions of the players in their behavior towards fans after the activities as boys and girls after the activities carried out a significant increase in the influence of the players compared to money is observed.

In conclusion

The project targeted direct beneficiaries such as youth fans, football clubs, and fan communities, as well as indirect beneficiaries including the broader society. The project successfully identified issues with hate speech among fandoms (especially those belonging to Partizani and Tirana football teams), increased social interaction between youth fan clubs, and highlighted the need for acceptance of differences demonstrating it during the activities with the participants and also during the "DERBI match" Partizani vs Tirana. The youth participants that represented both teams Tirana and Partizani, engaged in the activities influencing peers on positive interaction. Through education sessions, workshops, and peer-to-peer approaches, youth fans were empowered to

promote a culture of respect and inclusivity within their fan communities.

Youth fans had the opportunity to receive information and experiences from key individuals in various roles such as players, coaches, club executives, psychologists as well as sports journalists, thus appreciating a comprehensive overview firsthand on the dimensions and roles concerned about violence and hate speech.

The project "Fans Power: Uniting for Respect" made significant strides in combating hate speech and promoting inclusivity and tolerance among youth fan clubs in Albania. Through targeted activities and engagement with stakeholders, the project succeeded in fostering a culture of respect and cooperation within fan communities, contributing to a safer and more welcoming environment for all fans.

Recommendations

To sustain the positive outcomes of the project, continued efforts are needed to reinforce the values of respect and inclusivity within fan communities. This may involve ongoing education and awareness campaigns, as well as partnerships with relevant stakeholders to promote positive behavior and combat hate speech in sports environments. This project should also extend to clubs and other sports to increase social impact, tolerance, and combating hate speech by young fans of football clubs and other sports guided by the principles of Inclusion, Equality, and Trust.

We are convinced that such an initiative will have a positive impact for fans to have a more appropriate civic approach, away from hate speech, and with greater presence of women

and family members in stadiums/sports environments.

During the application of the method of educating young fans through the socialization of two antagonistic groups, at the beginning of the project, it was noticed the challenge of resistance and mistrust, which had positive changes during the further development of the project's activities.

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