

## CASE STUDIES

ONLINE ABUSE  
IN SPORTS Greater Manchester Police  
@gmpolice

#STATEMENT | GMP statement regarding a number of hate comments made online towards football players. We will continue to take all reports of this nature incredibly seriously.



Natural  
Language  
Processing



Network  
Analysis



Deep  
Learning

Football in particular and sports in general are bearing witness to increasing levels of online hate directed at their players, coaches and other public personalities. Whereas it is well known that emotions and passion can run very high amongst the fans and supporters of opposing teams, crossing over into hate speech and harassment territory is unacceptable.

## PROBLEM

A UK-based football organization reached out to us in March worried about the reported levels of online abuse and hate speech. Considering that social media platforms claim to do everything in their power to remove hateful messages expediently but, unfortunately, oftentimes those messages linger for months at a time, they were looking to understand what they could individually do to counter this phenomenon. With this in mind, they asked us to determine if there were any **identifiable dynamics in the dissemination of said hateful messages, on what websites/platforms they were most prolific and if there were particularly active users.**



## HOW WE HELPED

Through our data mining capabilities, we analyzed over **40,000 messages** related to football and sports and ascertained that **over 12% of them contained either hate speech or online abuse**, which constitutes an incredibly high percentage. The analysis was conducted applying our proprietary hate speech model, developed over 10 years of experience in research and innovation in this field.

Hate speech thrives on social media through covert tactics such as the weaponization of memes and use of fake identities to incite racist hatred.

**Hate speech** was present in  
**up to 20%**  
**of the comments some non-sport focused media outlets hosted.**

## SOLUTION

As far what types of websites showcased a higher concentration of this type of extreme messaging, it was interesting to find out that the comment sections of some **non-sport focused media** outlets like the Daily Mail or Daily Star **ranked at the top of that classification**, while in others like Guardiansport, extreme messages were present in as much as 20% of the comments they hosted.

**Male athletes** bore the brunt of the majority of hate messages, which were mainly characterized by **homophobic remarks and racial slurs**. Moreover, we Identified that hate speech thrives on social media through covert tactics such as the **weaponization of memes and use of fake identities to incite racist hatred**.

Time-wise, a correlation can be identified between a spike in the amount of messages and televised matches in which certain users felt the athletes' performance was lacking.

