

The promotion of hate speech: From a media and journalism perspective

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Abstract

This work presents the key ideas of the 13 works that make up the special issue, "The Role of News Media in Promoting Hate Speech," exploring the mechanisms by which hate speech spreads in media-related environments. The objective of this collection of studies is. The authors

of these works, hailing from Spain, the United States, India, Portugal, and Norway, have contributed to establishing an approach to the central issue from diverse perspectives, including a legal perspective and addressing elements associated with journalistic practice and the dissemination of hate speech in current digital communication scenarios and help to exacerbate the polarization and prejudice in the public opinion of our current societies.

Keywords: Hate speech; social media; Journalist; Digital media; mass media.

We are in a hybrid communication system where social media platforms significantly influence traditional communication channels. This context is characterized by the prevalence of communication strategies and novel communication scenarios (e.g., tweets, comments, and others) rooted in emotions, personal beliefs, and the diminution of objective or verifiable information regarding specific topics (Matamoros-Fernández and Farkas 2021). As journalism and news media continue to evolve, they must adapt to the digital landscape by honing their skills in digital areas, utilizing innovative storytelling techniques, fostering strong communication with their audience, and establishing positive relationships with users of their content (Strukov 2020). On digital media platforms such as the web and social media sites such as TikTok, X (before Twitter), Instagram, and Facebook, disseminating negative expressions, prejudices, and stereotypes is a growing concern. It is crucial to interpret and analyze the impact of these exchanges between key actors in social normalization without engaging in argumentation (Walsh, 2020). The significance of examining the factors and other influential aspects that impact and shape journalism and the media's role in moderating debates cannot be overstated (Waisbord 2019). In addition, its influence on public opinion through its practices in

digital scenarios and the detection of content favouring the viralization of hate speech in society.

“The Role of News Media in Promoting Hate Speech” is the title of this special issue. Its purpose is to enhance understanding of the propagation of hate speech in contexts related to news media by examining various cases, mechanisms, and theoretical perspectives that shed light on the role of journalism in this phenomenon. Furthermore, this special issue seeks to explore the implications of these mechanisms and perspectives for journalistic practice, particularly in detecting and addressing hate speech through digital media.

We begin the special issue with the paper "Assessing the Prevalence and Predictors of Incivility in Online News Comments Across Six Countries" (Salgado et al., 2023), which focuses on identifying the factors that contribute to uncivil discourse in reader comments on newspaper websites regarding immigration and unemployment in six nations: Portugal, Spain, Chile, Brazil, the United States, and the United Kingdom. The study adopts a conceptual stance wherein it is postulated that comments posted by users of digital journalistic media can influence how news readers perceive the news topic or the news story itself. Given the potential impact of reader comments on shaping public perception and the credibility of news outlets, it is crucial to consider the implications of allowing such comments on news articles. Publishing reader comments may generate a cascade effect that influences the news and media outlet's perceived credibility. The data collected and analyzed in this research, consisting of 2,510,419 comments from 12 digital news media over one year (July 2019 to June 2020) in the countries studied (e.g. Público (Portugal), El País (Spain), The Mirror (United Kingdom), Folha de São Paulo (Brazil), La Nación (Chile), and New York Times (United States of America)) indicate a marked increase in impolite expressions used by readers of the media in their comments. This is particularly evident in the context of comments on immigration. Furthermore, messages containing more

populist ideas or speeches, as the authors perceive, tend to exhibit greater incivility and negatively impact the media's credibility as purveyors of accurate information.

The paper entitled "The Devil's in the Details: How Countries' Defamation Laws Can (and Can't) Combat Hate Speech" (Carlson and Terry 2023) presents a comparative legal analysis of the defamation laws in Brazil, Germany and the United States, to address the issue of hate speech in the media. This analysis focuses on how defamation laws, as a legal concept, are addressed within the different civil legal frameworks of the countries in question and how these laws can provide a resource for the defence of an individual's reputation against false information published in the media. The study provides an overview of the existence of hate speech in media discourse and summarizes the general legal framework for combating hate speech. Additionally, it highlights the role of social media companies in determining the effectiveness of the laws studied in the current communication scenarios in Brazil, Germany, and the United States. Furthermore, the paper proposes expanding current defamation laws to allow individuals to prove the identification element that is the basis of the complaint in cases where hateful statements are made to large groups with common identity characteristics.

A further comparative study relevant to the current discussion is "Promoting Hate Speech by Dehumanizing Metaphors of Immigration" (Gonçalves, 2023). This study focuses on the prevalence of dehumanizing metaphors applied to immigration in public discourse and their impact on the spread of expressions of hate towards this particular social group. The author conducted a comparative analysis of news articles about immigrants and refugees published by Brazilian and British media outlets between 2016 and 2018. The study is based on the concept that metaphors and stereotypes play a significant role in the proliferation of accusations against members of this group and are part of a broader strategy of disseminating ideological discourse

through news media. The research utilizes a qualitative-quantitative approach, analyzing 194 news articles from Brazilian and British publications, including *Estado de S. Paulo*, *O Globo*, *The Times*, and *The Sun*. The analysis reveals a dissemination pattern of negative metaphors towards immigrants and refugees in Brazil and the UK despite the countries' different cultural, historical, and migratory contexts. This pattern of representation serves to dehumanize immigrants and refugees, portraying them as "others" while citizens and host countries are framed as "us" imbued with positive attributes. In turn, this contributes to the promotion of racism and xenophobia through newspaper discourse. It is important to note that this strategy is not aimed at directly attacking the members of the group analyzed in the study but rather through a discursive construction aimed at dehumanizing them through the use of metaphors that compare them to natural phenomena, parasites, or persecuted animals, while national citizens of the host countries are portrayed in a superior manner.

The paper "Becoming a Target: Journalists' Perspectives on Anti-Press Discourse and Experiences with Hate Speech" (Markov and Đorđević, 2023) provides valuable insights into the characteristics and implications of hate speech directed towards the press. Through a qualitative approach, Serbia was utilized as a case study to examine various forms of hostility towards journalism and the media, including harassment, discursive violence, and mob censorship. This type of criticism of journalism, which is protected under the right to freedom of expression, is not solely limited to questioning the quality of performance and work carried out by professionals in the communication sector but often involves the instrumentalization of such criticism by individuals and social actors to promote anti-press speeches loaded with hostile emotions. The proposed case study analyzed through in-depth semi-structured interviews, aims to better understand journalists' considerations regarding the proliferation of expressions of hate

towards them and the psychological and professional consequences that such professionals face when targeted by such speech. Additionally, the study seeks to identify the strategies journalists use to combat this form of expression. The data provided insight into a scenario where journalists are confronted with an increasingly uncivil environment that impacts their professional work. This is due to the growing trend of ad hominem and intersectoral attacks based on expressions of hate, which contribute to the current discourse surrounding journalism.

Moreover, journalists report experiencing a heightened sense of attack due to their professional status and effectiveness in performing their duties. These attacks, which primarily originate from social censorship rather than ordinary citizens, are perceived as significant sources of hatred towards journalists. However, they are considered less dangerous than those who engage in censorship.

The special issue continues with "Journalists are prepared for critical situations...but we are not prepared for this": Empirical and Structural" (Sampaio-Diaz et al., 2023), where online harassment against female journalists is discussed by exploring self-reported incidents, their effects, and trust in safety mechanisms. The study, focused on the Portuguese context, examines the "normalization" of hostility towards journalists throughout their professional practice, which varies according to gender. The authors propose that this scenario is related to the patriarchal white supremacist system, structural prejudices, and inequalities present in contemporary societies, which amplify their dehumanizing effects that also affect journalists. Based on qualitative exploratory research, the authors interviewed a sample of female journalists in Portugal who recognized an increase in digital violence received and a rise in feelings of vulnerability and lack of support against comments with expressions of hate directed at them. The interviewees also acknowledged the need to change current culture and new practices to

ensure a safe working environment.

The paper titled "Digital Scarlet Letter on Journalists: Weaponized Harassment against Journalists in South Korea" (Lee and Park 2023) provides an analysis of the experiences of a Korean journalist who faced online harassment and identifies the factors that contributed to this form of harassment or violence. This issue is of utmost importance in ensuring press freedom, and it remains relevant in South Korea, given the current digital information landscape and increasing incidents of harassment against journalists. Based on qualitative exploratory research, this paper incorporates in-depth interviews with South Korean journalists, highlighting their perception of the triggering factors of violence directed at them, including growing social distrust of traditional media, growing digital visibility of journalists, and harassment received, particularly by women journalists in this country. These factors influence self-censorship and silence voluntarily exercised by journalists and the psychological stress generated during their professional work.

"Coping with Hate: Exploring Indian Journalists' Responses to Online Harassment" by Bhat (2023) offers insight into the perception of Indian journalists towards the harassment they receive while working, along with the strategies used to deal with expressions of digital hate. The study is based on the political scenario of India, where right-wing political parties use digital armies to harass journalists who cover news or topics that conflict with their Hindu nationalist ideology. This research utilizes a qualitative methodology involving in-depth interviews with 24 journalists in the country to understand how they cope with hate messages. Journalists tend to disconnect socially as a form of self-protection but also form alliances with professional institutions to combat the harmful effects of social media and current digital scenarios. Rural journalists in India face a more critical situation of digital violence and lack the institutional

frameworks, resources, and laws to address the violence they receive.

The purpose of this special issue was to examine the part played by the news media in the spread of hate speech through studies that approached the topic from a variety of viewpoints and geographical settings. One such work is the paper "Sports journalists and Readers: Journalism and user Incivility" (Bonaut, Vicent-Ibañez and Paz-Rebollo 2023), which examines the impact of sports journalism style on uncivil conversations. The study focuses on digital sports press in Spain, taking the Marca, AS and Mundo Deportivo web portals as case studies. It uses a conceptual approach that characterizes digital journalism by emotions, polarization, speculation, and interactivity, influenced by the rise of extreme right-wing populist movements and the spiral of settlement and confrontation in Spain. This has permeated the sports scene and other social scenes, promoting racist, homophobic, and misogynistic attitudes in physical environments. The study analyzed over 3,000k messages (including published news and associated comments), revealing that controversy is commonly used to promote reader participation and a highly polarized scenario that fosters uncivil conversations. Humour and irony are used to camouflage insults in these conversations.

In the article titled "Hate speech on Twitter: Vox in the Catalan parliamentary elections" (Berdón-Prieto et al., 2023), the authors examine the political discourse of the Vox party in Spain prior to the use of Twitter. The study focuses on a case study of the electoral campaign for the Catalan Parliament in Spain and the role played by the far-right party Vox in promoting confrontation that exceeds the limits admitted in the current democratic debate. The research adopts a conceptual approach in which the Vox party, like other parties with similar ideological orientations, applies populist communication strategies on social networks to connect with its followers and potential voters directly. This was performed without the control of traditional

media. Additionally, the study highlights the prominent role played by social networks such as Twitter in supporting the ideological goals of this type of political party. The results of the analysis, which were conducted on 7,517 messages published by Vox during the period taken as a case study, confirm the role of promoters of social polarization and the viralization of hate expressions by this type of political parties through the communicative advantages offered by digital scenarios like Twitter. This favours an anti-social and anti-democratic communicative and discursive scenario and the need to rethink the role of journalists and the media in the fight against the predominance of this type of strategy through current digital communication spaces.

Another different perspective is presented to us in "Overcoming hate: Jewish minority voices' strategies for participating in the news media" by Hanshuus (2023). The paper provides a unique perspective on the motivations and experiences of Norwegian Jews who have participated in the news media as Jews. The study is rooted in ensuring the adequate representation of diverse social groups within the public opinion debate on the proper functioning of democracy. Despite the challenges and risks associated with media participation, rewards for social representation make it worthwhile. The research is based on a conceptual framework that includes the examination of minority groups' experiences with hate promotion, often directed towards them, in current digital environments and the role of the news media in the exclusion and inclusion of these groups in society through various forms of representation. Through in-depth interviews with 15 individuals from the Jewish community in Norway, a high level of motivation is evident in raising awareness of the various forms of antisemitic and general hatred directed towards their group and other minorities in the country. As a result, they view their media participation as a social commitment to promote processes of social inclusion by generating more debate scenarios that help recognize and combat the presence of anti-Semitic hate speech in Norwegian society.

The paper "Challenging Politicians on Race in Interviews: Social Dominance Orientation, Perceived Journalistic Credibility, Bias, and Appropriateness" (Len-Ríos and Neumann 2023) examines the communication rules that the audience perceives after a journalist interviews a politician on race-related housing policies in the United States. The work analyzes the topic using a variety of conceptual approaches to understand the role journalists can play as verifiers of the messages that politicians disseminate during media interviews. This is based on the American press's spotty record of covering racial equity issues in the news as well as the prejudices and factors that affect the surveillance role of journalists in national political systems and the application of press freedom. Through a randomized post-test experimental study of 148 citizens, the work reveals that the audience perceives the non-confrontational approach many journalists take towards a politician's racial views as appropriate. As a result, while journalists are expected to challenge politicians in their communication rules, the audience perceives it inappropriate to use this strategy when contextualizing racial inequalities with historical facts. As pointed out in this work, it is imperative to consider the audience's orientation towards the social domain when examining how journalists' work on a particular topic affects their perception of political credibility and the promotion of communicative rhetoric that may incite hate expressions based on racial factors in the United States. Failure to do so may limit the impact of journalistic challenges in shaping public opinion.

In "Analysing the news coverage of 'pet regret' in the UK through the framework of Nonviolent" (Garrisi 2023) shifts the focus of the debate on the role of news media in promoting hate speech to the content analysis applied to the phenomenon of 'pet regret' in the UK. The case examines how the news media's coverage of this phenomenon, which refers to individuals who regretted buying a pet during the COVID-19 pandemic, perpetuates rhetoric based on morality

and promotes communicative violence by labelling individuals with judgments. The content analysis of news published in British digital newspapers between March 2020 and May 2023 indicates that the media utilizes modal verbs, lexicons based on emotion, and words associated with imminent danger to create a confrontational and polarizing communicative scenario, contributing to the promotion of binary news languages and divisions in public opinion. This, in turn, may facilitate the dissemination of hate speech and the stigmatization of minority groups.

Finally, in the paper titled "The constructive role of the media in hate speech controversies: the Valtònyc and Hasél cases" (Labiano, Azurmendi and Novoa-Jaso, 2023), an analysis is presented on the capacity of digital platforms in promoting social conflicts related to the existing legal framework in the fight against expressions of hate, specifically in Spain. The study examines the contrast between social position and the current legal framework concerning the expression of hate in the country, as seen in the case of the sentence received by the rappers Valtònyc and Pablo Hasél for their derogatory lyrics against the Spanish royal family and political figures. In addition to the legal perspective, the work also focuses on the role of conflict and drama in generating interest in journalistic content from both the media and social media. This scenario provides the necessary conditions for the debate between freedom of expression and the protection of other rights, such as defence against hate speech directed towards individuals or groups, but also contributes to the increase in polarization and social conflict. Based on a content analysis of 1,570,927 messages published on social media platforms, it is crucial to remain informed about cases or topics marked by conflict and polarization. In a context where knowledge about the legal framework related to the fight against hate expressions is abundant in this country, the rise of messages that utilize hate expressions and promote polarization may be more prevalent. Journalists and the media play a significant role as

mediators between users and news content, focusing on providing context and meaning for the events they access. To the extent that "constructive journalism" is promoted, this approach can help foster more constructive and informed discourse.

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