

Networks of hate: Hate speech as an affective digital practice

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Hateful, misogynist and racist expressions have become mundane, even ordinary, part of digital communication. The growth of hateful discourse has shaped participation and dynamics of public debates across the globe (Govil and Baishya 2018; Matamoros-Fernandez 2017; Pöyhtäri et al. 2019; Sponholtz and Christofolletti 2018). Hate speech can no longer be seen only as a limited discursive practice produced and participated by marginal groups, or affecting only people in either disadvantaged or high societal positions. Instead, hate speech is a wide-reaching digital practice and phenomenon that shapes the foundations of deliberation, democracy and sense of solidarity in a society for us all, and also affects and alters the technologies we are using. (Daniels 2018; Horsti and Saresma 2020; Nikunen et al. 2021; Noble 2018; Udupa and Pohjonen 2019.)

From this starting point, we set out to analyse hate speech as a digital practice that is shaped and driven by a variety of emotions and affects (Ahmed 2004), engaging its producers in multiple ways and for varied reasons. We base our analysis on an on-going project titled *Networks of hate*. The aim of the project is to study Finnish producers and spreaders of hate speech, including their networks, online practices, and motives in order to better understand, which current cultures of communication and digital practices enable and maintain hate speech online, and how it could be countered. This presentation discusses some preliminary findings of the project, based on computer-assisted classification of hate speech from a large dataset of public on-line discourse in Finnish. Through a cluster analysis of the network of producers of hate speech, we identify groups of pseudonyms producing hate speech and describe differences in their thematic focus. These quantitative findings are complemented with observations from online ethnography, aiming to further analyse and understand various types of producers of online hate, especially their motives and online uses of hate speech. With our data we are able to describe the diversity of the phenomenon of hate speech and suggest some tools to make sense of it.

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