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## The Changing Face of Online Hate

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# THE CHANGING FACE OF ONLINE HATE<sup>1</sup>

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Keipi, T., Näsi, M., Oksanen, A., & Räsänen, P. (2017). *Online hate and harmful content: Cross-national perspectives*. New York: Routledge. ISBN 9781138645066 (hb), 143 pages

The Internet has brought us many opportunities, including access to information, interaction with others, expression of attitudes, self-presentation, participation in public life, and the production and distribution of media content. It offers more potential than the previous conceptions of less-engaged, traditional media (see e.g., Alasuutari 1999). However, as the authors point out in this book, there is also a negative side to the story – there are new opportunities for the production and dissemination of hateful and harmful content. The main aim of the book *Online hate and harmful content: Cross-national perspectives* is to provide a comparison of experience with hateful and harmful content and to discuss theoretical tools that explain the currently changing online environment and the transition from Web 2.0 to Web 3.0.

In the book, this transition is mainly associated with a greater accumulation of information about users and their online behaviour, and its possession by different actors, such as other Internet users and companies. The authors provide a tool to understand hate in this online environment by developing the

Identity Bubble Reinforcement (IBR) model. The model combines theoretical frameworks that conceptualize two features of the new online world. Firstly, there is user identity-driven consumption which means that there is more opportunity to find and produce harmful content and locate like-minded users. Secondly, the environmental reaction refers to externally controlled identity reinforcement. Our past online behaviour determines the content and people we encounter online, simultaneously reinforcing our attitudes and opinions and filtering us away from opposing views.

When developing the IBR model, the authors draw on a rich array of theories from social psychology and criminology, which are described and discussed in the first part of the book. Firstly, the authors examine the Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and the Social Identity Model of Deindividuation Effects (Lea & Spears, 1991) from the field of social psychology, both of which focus on identity development and group interactions. Secondly, the Lifestyle-Exposure Theory (Hindelang, Gottfredson, & Garofalo, 1978) and the Routine Activity Theory (Cohen & Felson, 1979) are both from the field of criminology and both deal with problematic and criminal behaviour and the risks of victimisation. These theories were developed to understand interactions in the offline environment, or the older and different online environment than what we now know; yet they are still commonly used in current research about the Internet.

The authors of the book justifiably point to the need for a new tool to

help understand different online contexts and introduce the IBR model that is better suited for the Web 3.0 environment. It explores online hate and harmful content from the perspective of the online identity and attitude reinforcement, and the so-called 'filter bubbles' caused by users' previous behaviour and consumption patterns. What people have done online before affects what they are offered to do now and who they meet. This specific reinforcement of attitudes in the online world is the model's new contribution to the current theories of online victimisation and it is successfully applied to experience with hateful and harmful content. The chapters dealing with the theoretical foundations of the IBR model are extremely helpful for understanding the identity formation and inter-group interactions in the online (often anonymous) environment.

Another strong point of the book is the overview of hate and harmful content online, and the empirical data that the authors provide to support their main claims about the Web 3.0 environment. The book briefly deals with the history of online hate and shows how opportunities for spreading hateful ideologies have changed over the past few years. The current situation and the prevalence of hateful content are illustrated by the data for online hate exposure in four countries. The data comes from a cross-sectional survey of young people aged 15 to 30 that took place in 2013 and 2014 in Germany, Finland, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The cross-national differences are considered

and discussed. The data about exposure to other types of harmful content (e.g. promoting self-injury, suicide, eating disorders, showing violent images or images of death) are also included. As the authors show, and as was explained by the IBR model, various types of negative online experiences are connected. More interestingly, they also illustrate that the experience with online hateful content specifically, and harm advocating content to a less significant degree, is becoming an important part of the mainstream and everyday online experience for young people. For example, they show that about 43% of young people aged 15-30 were exposed to online hate in the past three months and 56%<sup>2</sup> of them were exposed accidentally. This indicates that seeing something hateful online is not simply relevant to a specific group of interested users or restricted to extremist fora or websites. On the contrary, it concerns a substantial portion of young people, including children, because it is being circulated on popular online platforms, such as Facebook and YouTube (p. 64).

A weaker point of the book is its vague distinction among three types of online victimisation – online hate, online harassment, and online crime. The experience of an online hate victim and an online crime victim can differ substantially. Unfortunately, this is not adequately reflected upon, nor are clear examples provided. The distinction among different types of online aggression and victimisation is often blurred in other research as well (see e.g.,

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2 These are averaged percentages for the four countries' percentages listed by the authors (pp. 62-63).

Peterson & Densley, 2017). The potential of the book — to contribute to a better definition and clarification — is, unfortunately, not fully realised. As the book might serve as an introductory text for interested students and scholars, more clarification should be provided.

Additionally, not enough space is given to the fact that online hate and harmful content experience might vary among different age groups, especially between adolescents and adults, who are both combined in the authors' sample. Differentiating among age groups would have added a richer dimension and provided a more complex overview of the current situation. This is especially true concerning the impact of online hate and harmful content on its victims, which is only briefly touched upon in the book. Another step could have been taken here and possible solutions to the problem of online hate and harm could have been discussed or proposed. This theme is largely missing in the book, even though it would have been an interesting subject for both academic readers and for intervention and policy. A clearer picture about the experience of and the harm for younger Internet users in contrast to adult Internet users might be a useful source for developing intervention strategies and educational programmes for children and adolescents who are learning how to navigate the online environment and who are developing their media and digital literacy skills. Presenting a definition of online hate in relation to other types of online harassment and online crime would sharpen the tools for relevant actors in combatting this phenomenon, which is

entering the everyday experience on the Internet.

Overall, the book is an interesting contribution to the topic of online hateful and harmful content on multiple levels. Firstly, it provides rich empirical data to support its argument of increasing negative experiences with content from the Internet and it shows the negative impacts. Secondly, it provides cross-country comparisons and considerations. Thirdly, it presents the reader, in a very understandable and coherent manner, the major theoretical tools for understanding this type of negative phenomena. And, lastly, it reconsiders the topic in the new online context. However, though the format of the book allows the authors to be more specific in their claims about different types of experiences and different groups of Internet users in their sample, they have unfortunately not done so in a satisfying manner. It would also be fruitful to devote more space to the definitions of diverse online victimisation.

Nevertheless, the authors successfully fulfil their promises. The book follows up on other articles written by the authors in the field of negative online content and experience, and it provides an impressive cohesion for their findings and theoretical considerations. The language and the comprehensive presentation of both empirical data and theories makes it an approachable text for students and scholars who are not yet familiar with the study of online hate and harmful content, as well as an interesting read for more seasoned scholars.

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## POLAND: BETWEEN HYBRID MEDIA SYSTEM AND THE POLITICIZED MEDIA SYSTEM

ANDREJ SKOLKAY

Dobek-Ostrowska, B. (2019). *Polish Media System in a Comparative Perspective. Media in Politics, Politics in Media*. Berlin: Peter Lang. ISBN 978-3-631-77568-4, 288 pages.

Professor Bogusława Dobek-Ostrowska, renowned Polish expert in media comparative studies, has published a book in English *Polish Media System in a Comparative Perspective. Media in Politics, Politics in Media*. This book is translated and updated version of the first Polish edition under almost identical title (*Polski system medialny na rozdrożu. Media w polityce, polityka w mediach*), published in Wrocław in 2011.

The book should be of great interest to scholars in the EU. Obviously, Poland is an important political actor, currently facing attempts of the Law and Justice lead coalition to transform society from by and large liberal one into a more conservative outlook. These attempts should sooner or later affect the media system too. Indeed, there are reports about biased public service media (PSM) reporting that have become a mouthpiece of governmental propaganda. This propaganda aspect was very much visible during election campaign before the Parliamentary elections in October 2019 (Organization for Security and