

Gregory P. Perreault, **Digital Journalism and the Facilitation of Hate**, 2023, Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 132 pp., \$26.99 (paperback), \$61.99 (hardcover), \$24.29 (ebook).

Reviewed by
Jessica Roberts
Universidade Católica Portuguesa

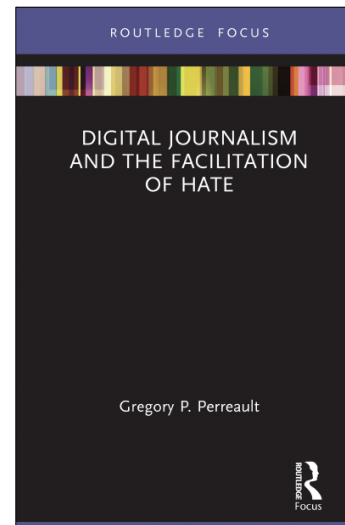
Journalists' role in spreading, platforming, or even promoting negative behaviors by reporting on them has worried professional journalists and media observers for decades. The concern that, for example, by reporting on school shooters or suicide, journalists will unintentionally encourage copycats, has caused journalists to adopt guidelines meant to protect the public without keeping them from learning about important issues. At the same time, journalists understand the importance of covering significant events and phenomena that their audiences need to know about.

In **Digital Journalism and the Facilitation of Hate**, Gregory P. Perreault explores how digital journalists can do what he calls "explaining . . . without elevating" (p. 11) hate groups. The book provides a thorough examination of the media strategies of hate groups and the practices of journalists, as well as the experiences of digital journalists covering hate groups. Perreault acknowledges the difficulty for journalists, not only in navigating this difficult terrain but in withstanding the personal attacks that often come as a result of this kind of reporting. The information here would be useful to aspiring journalists as well as media scholars interested in understanding how journalists report on hate groups.

The book is grounded in personal experiences and perspectives, including the author's experience watching the riot at the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021, as well as interviews with 142 digital journalists. The impetus for the book is the spread of messages and content promoting the ideologies of hate groups, which has found traction online, taking advantage of new media tools for reaching different groups, spreading content, and getting their messages to circulate in mainstream media. Specifically, this book focuses on why reporting on these groups is particularly challenging for journalists, given the constraints of their work, and the unique problem of also competing with these groups for attention in the online media environment and being subject to their vitriol in comment forums and on social media.

The introduction explores the research on hate speech in Europe and provides some historical context for the spread of White nationalist and White supremacist groups, as well as definitions for various terms used to talk about these hate groups united around racist ideologies. The author explains how journalists struggle to perform their role of informing the public and being a "watchdog" while avoiding legitimizing hate groups or creating a false equivalency between their views and those who oppose them, falling into the "objectivity trap." On top of this, he describes how many journalists struggle with terminology, lacking a clear understanding of the difference between terms like "racist language," "bigoted language," and "hate speech."

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The first chapter defines digital journalism and digital journalism studies, embracing a broad definition from Duffy and Ang (2019): "Digitization as it is embodied in journalism" (p. 378), which follows how digital journalists see their work, as the norm in contemporary journalism. In this chapter, Perreault also articulates why digital journalism, in particular, merits attention in terms of covering hate groups, given the success those groups have had in leveraging digital tools to spread their message. The second chapter addresses the problem of audience orientation in journalism and the challenges journalists face in attempting to reach and serve their audience but also in understanding who is in their audience, using analytics, as well as social media, and the way in which this problem is exacerbated in a digital context.

In the third chapter, the author examines the structural elements and motivations shaping journalism that create an advantage or at least a fertile ground for favorable coverage of hate groups. He also discusses the strategies of hate groups to circulate and mainstream their messages and ultimately bring more recruits to adopt their views, as well as journalistic role conception and how those roles influence journalists' coverage of all news, but hate groups in particular. Chapter 4 addresses the problem of defining hate groups, by looking into the Southern Poverty Law Center and other organizations, and the limitations of those organizations, both structurally and methodologically, that journalists have relied on to define hate groups. Perreault ultimately argues that journalists "need to be prepared to demonstrate leadership and make the research-based, bold choices in defining their sources" (p. 94).

The book concludes by suggesting that "the solution to covering hate in digital journalism resides in tactics that have been key to legacy journalism's normative success: slow, painstakingly careful reporting, comprehensive interviewing and adherence to institutional guidelines" (p. 100). Perreault also provides four specific guidelines to covering hate groups: turn off comments on stories related to hate groups, avoid live reporting of events related to hate groups, rely more heavily on official, authoritative sources, and remove storytelling from rallies and events, instead providing context for the events and actors, and the hate itself.

The book offers insights into the challenges of reporting in a digital environment and a politically polarized world, with rising authoritarian and extremist movements around the world. At its strongest, the book makes a clear connection between some of the values and practices most central to journalism (objectivity, "being first") and the more negative aspects of those values and practices when applied in a way that is too extreme or lacking a nuanced understanding (both-sidesism, churnalism). The author is also very adept at explaining the strategies of hate groups and highlighting specific examples of episodes that illustrate those strategies.

Another strength of the book is the data set: the author conducted interviews with 142 journalists. Despite this, at some points in the book, it is unclear whether the author is drawing from the interviews that were conducted for this book or previous research or both. Of course, this is partly a reflection of the author's strong research agenda, but the findings that were specific to the interviews conducted for this book could have been more clearly highlighted. And given the rich data set on which the book relies, the actual reporting of insights from journalists was surprisingly sparse. The reader is left wondering what the interviewed journalists think about many of the topics raised in the book. For example, in the discussion of the problems of defining terms like hate speech, in chapter 2, the responses

from digital journalists interviewed by the author would have offered great insight as to why and how they use different definitions.

The author offers a well-reported accounting of various incidents, activities, and initiatives of hate groups and how they were covered by journalists. However, the discussion of GamerGate in chapter 2, while very interesting, is not sufficiently tied to the present book, nor is the purpose of raising the episode entirely clear. The author also takes rather extensive detours into topics such as meta-journalistic discourse, journalistic role conception, and objectivity.

Few texts examine the topic of hate groups and journalists as directly as this book. *White Supremacy and the American Media*, edited by Sarah D. Nilsen and Sarah E. Turner (2022), addresses the same topic but focuses on media more broadly, with chapters on film, television, social media, and gaming. Talia Levin's (2020) book, *Culture Warlords: My Journey into the Dark Web of White Supremacy*, recounts the author's experiences exploring White supremacy groups online. For a more historical account of the relationship between journalists, White supremacists, and the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, there is *Journalism and Jim Crow: White Supremacy and the Black Struggle for a New America*, edited by Kathy Roberts Forde and Sid Bedingfield (2021). *The Communication of Hate*, by Michael Waltman and John Haas (2011), explores the nature and functions of hate more generally in American society, including an examination of the organized hate movement and the racist discourse that those movements use to recruit new members, promote their identities, and advocate ethnoviolence, as well as how politicians and media personalities manipulate hate. The book is more focused on hate speech and hate groups, rather than journalists and their role.

This book offers a thorough examination of the media strategies of hate groups and why reporting on these groups presents such a challenge to digital journalists, identifying the specific practices and role conceptions of journalists that make them susceptible to elevating rather than explaining hate groups. The author provides detailed examples of cases of journalists reporting on hate groups, and of hate groups generating media attention, using both to help journalists and scholars understand the relationships between digital media, journalists, and hate groups. He offers a few concrete suggestions to keep journalists safe and to avoid promoting hate groups, while doing the important work of reporting on the activities of organizations motivated by antipathy toward people for their identity and ultimately acknowledging that there is little these suggestions can do to address the root problem of hate itself.

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