

Spreading Hate Online: Reasons, Prevalence, Consequences

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60th EPRA Meeting – Limassol
October 25, 2024



collaborators



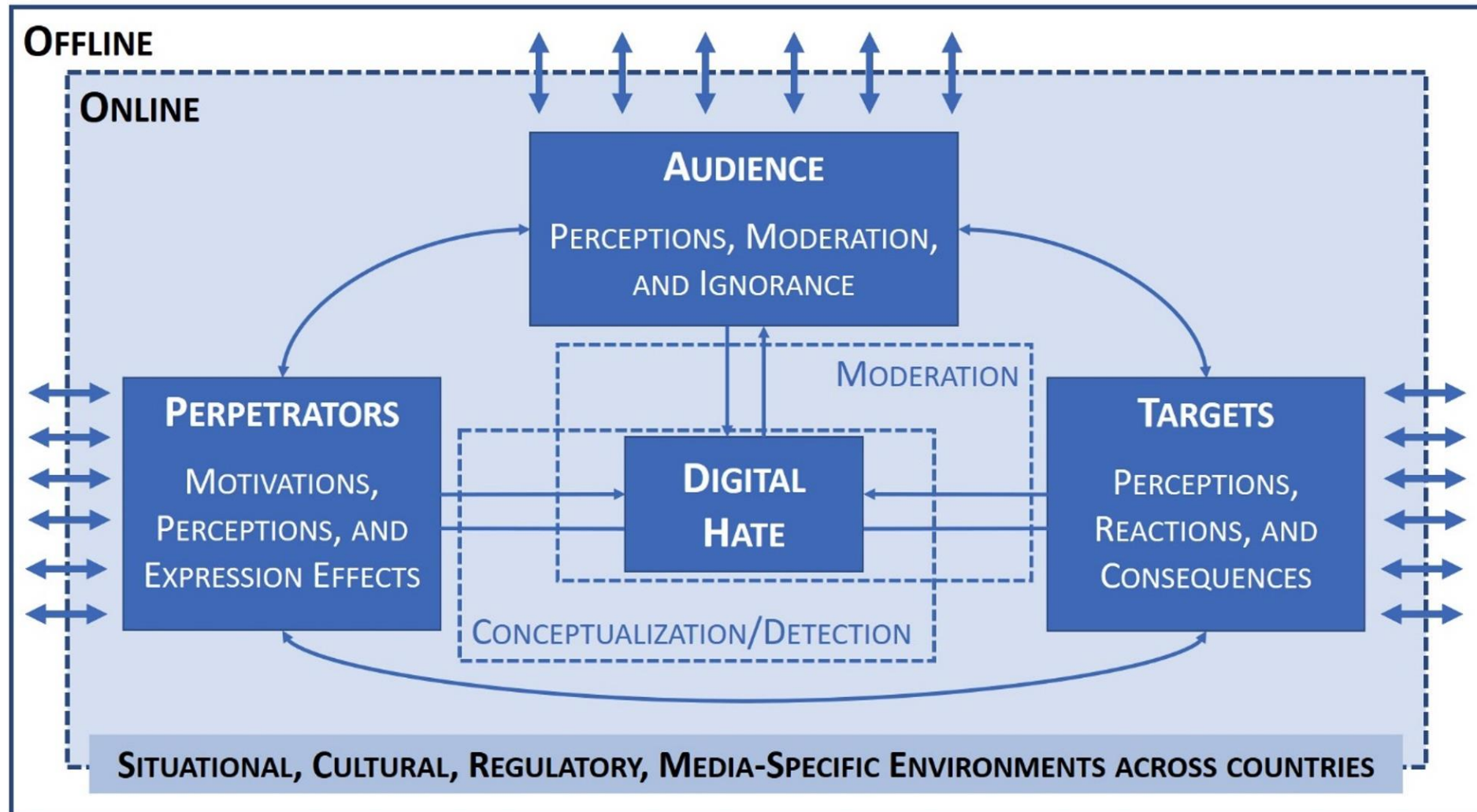
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Digital Hate: Perpetrators, Audiences, and (Dis)Empowered Targets



How often?

Why?

So what?



How often?

We all struggle with the same problems: **What is digital hate?**

Incivility

rude
coarse language
insults
personal offenses
vulgar language
capital letters
exclamation points
not intolerant
no threats of violence

Intolerance

excluding
intolerant
dehumanizing language
denying democratic rights
based on group attributes
denying public participation
based on group attributes
either coarse or calm in tone
no threats of violence

Violent and/or Illegal Content

...

...

(based on Rossini, 2022)

How often?

Prevalence of Incivility and Intolerance

| | Perpetration (Incivility OR Intolerance) ^a | | Perpetration (Incivility Only) ^b | Perpetration (Intolerance Only) ^c | Perpetration (Incivility AND Intolerance) ^d |
|----------------|---|--------------------|---|--|--|
| | yes <i>n</i> (%) | no <i>n</i> (%) | yes <i>n</i> (%) | yes <i>n</i> (%) | yes <i>n</i> (%) |
| Austria | 431 (42.0) | 595 (58.0) | 118 (11.52) | 89 (8.69) | 222 (21.68) |

Two-wave panel survey (2-month interval) within a general population sample in Austria, 2023;

Sample: $N_{W1} = 1520$, $N_{W2} = 1032$; only wave 2 is shown

How often?



Prevalence of Incivility and Intolerance

| | Perpetration (Incivility OR Intolerance) ^a | | Perpetration (Incivility Only) ^b | | Perpetration (Intolerance Only) ^c | | Perpetration (Incivility AND Intolerance) ^d | |
|----------------|--|--------------------|--|---------------------|---|---------------------|---|--|
| | yes <i>n</i> (%) | no <i>n</i> (%) | yes <i>n</i> (%) | yes <i>n</i> (%) | yes <i>n</i> (%) | yes <i>n</i> (%) | | |
| Austria | 432 (43.0) | 570 (56.7) | 88 (8.76) | 80 (7.96) | 264 (26.3) | | | |
| France | 451 (45.7) | 525 (53.2) | 69 (7.00) | 94 (9.53) | 286 (29.0) | | | |
| Hungary | 537 (50.6) | 515 (48.5) | 107 (10.10) | 111 (10.50) | 316 (29.8) | | | |
| Sweden | 417 (42.2) | 566 (57.3) | 82 (8.30) | 81 (8.20) | 254 (25.7) | | | |

Cross-Country Survey, general population sample in Austria, France, Hungary, Sweden, 2024; *N* = 4041

**...because I have an
antisocial personality**

**...because I dislike
social (out-)groups**

**...because I expect
approval from my
social environment**

Why???

**...because I was victimized
and continue the cycle**

**...because the
technology kind of
triggers me**



Why

Three Processes Make it Difficult

(1) Biased Perception:

We find that perpetrators do not perceive digital hate as digital hate, they perceive it as normal and appropriate language

Thus: They are not aware of the problem

This concerns all forms – legal or illegal – of digital hate, incivility, intolerance, threat & violence

But: How can we ask citizens to draw a line that we, as experts, cannot clearly draw?



Why

Three Processes Make it Difficult

(2) Moral Disengagement:

If they realize it, we find that people rationalize their spreading of hate, as for instance, by

- ...pointing to a greater moral purpose (i.e., values)
- ...framing the targets as deserving the hate due to their actions
- ...comparing hate to more extreme behaviors



Why

Three Processes Make it Difficult

(3) Polarization:

Increasing political polarization will

- ...decrease the acceptance of content moderation
- ...decrease the effectiveness of awareness and literacy trainings
- ...and lead to the emergence of alternative, unregulated opinion spaces, rabbit holes, and ultimately, more hate



So What?

Measures

Holding platforms accountable: *Not only to punish and deplatform users, but also to educate*

Comprehensive, balanced & transparent legislation: *Understandable to everybody and maintaining the freedom of speech*

Create trusted content moderation: *But still allowing fierce disagreement, negative statements, and diverse opinions*

Empower Users: *Without overgeneralizing, “top-down-teaching”, and further increasing polarization*



Thanks for your attention!

*Interested in
more
information or
joint projects,
please get in
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