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EDITORIAL

Violence, Hate Speech, and Gender Bias: Challenges to an Inclusive Digital Environment

Max Römer-Pieretti [1], **Beatriz Esteban-Ramiro [2]**, and **Agrivalca Canelón Silva [3]**

[1] Communications and Design Faculty, Camilo José Cela University, Spain
[2] Department of Labour Law and Social Work, University of Castilla-La Mancha, Spain
[3] Institute for Communication and Information Research, Andrés Bello Catholic University, Venezuela

Correspondence: Beatriz Esteban-Ramiro (beatriz.esteban@uclm.es)

Abstract

This thematic issue examines the complex and current intersection between violence, hate speech, and gender bias in digital environments. It explores how digital spaces (encompassing social networks, news platforms, and online multiplayer games) can both perpetuate and challenge systemic inequalities. Contributions present diverse methodologies, including longitudinal analyses, qualitative studies, and systematic reviews, to uncover the mechanisms underlying digital violence and exclusion. This issue highlights the urgency of addressing digital exclusion to safeguard democratic values and social cohesion. It aims to inspire new research and inform policies that build more inclusive and equitable digital environments, laying the groundwork for future social science research and practice.

Keywords

digital environment; equality; gender; hate speech; inclusion; misogyny; multiplayer online games; social media; videogames; violence

1. Introduction

Coordinating this issue has been an extraordinary and rewarding challenge. Why a challenge? Because this issue is born out of the synergy between two projects. In addition, the inclusion of research from other parts of the world and the international peer-review process have reinforced the validity and relevance of our collective research efforts.

Research articles such as those that underpin this issue are validated by their ability to engage in dialogue with scholars from around the world who advance the social sciences. This dialogue enriches our understanding and strengthens the impact of the research presented. The thematic focus of this issue owes much to the following two research initiatives:

1. HATEMEDIA: Taxonomy, Presence, and Intensity of Hate Speech in Digital Environments Linked to the Spanish Professional News Media (PID2020–114584GB-I00), funded by the Ministry of Science and Innovation. This project aims to analyze how hate speech spreads within digital environments associated with professional news media and to enhance the detection and monitoring of such expressions in Spain.

2. 32 BITS: Androcentrism, Hate Speech, and Gender Bias through Online Video Games in Castilla-La Mancha (SBPLY/21/180501/000262), funded by the Junta de Comunidades de Castilla-La Mancha and co-financed by the European Union–Feder. This project explores manifestations of hate, violence, and sexism within multiplayer online gaming environments, as well as the personal and social consequences of these phenomena in Spain.

The digital transformation of society has reshaped human interaction, offering unprecedented opportunities for connection, expression, and collaboration. However, these same online spaces have also become arenas where violence, hate speech, and gender bias proliferate, undermining the potential for inclusivity and equality in the digital world. This thematic issue of *Social Inclusion* seeks to examine the dynamics of these challenges, their societal impacts, and potential pathways toward more inclusive digital environments.

The urgency of addressing digital violence and exclusion stems from their pervasive and growing nature. High-profile cases of online harassment, coordinated hate campaigns, and algorithmic bias have sparked public and scholarly debates about the ethical responsibilities of digital platforms and the adequacy of existing regulatory frameworks. In a world where digital tools increasingly mediate social interactions, such phenomena not only harm individuals but also deepen systemic inequalities, marginalizing already vulnerable populations. By exploring these issues, this thematic issue contributes to the mission of *Social Inclusion* by interrogating the barriers to equitable participation in the digital age.

The proliferation of the Internet, ICTs, and social media has dramatically transformed communication in contemporary societies. As Piñeiro-Otero and Martínez-Rolán (2021) suggest, the collective perception of the public sphere is evolving, influencing how relationships are established and reshaping processes of social inclusion and exclusion. Similarly, Paz et al. (2021) highlight key factors driving the spread of hate speech, including the mediums used, the topics addressed, and the settings of online discussions. These changes carry significant social repercussions, endangering values essential to social cohesion by fostering hate speech that exacerbates tensions and incites violence.

Digital violence, harassment, and hate speech have permeated various online spaces, including social media, digital platforms, and massively multiplayer online games (MMOs). As this thematic issue reveals, online interactions in these environments reflect broader societal dynamics of inclusion and exclusion. The thematic focus is particularly concerned with the impacts of digital environments on adolescents, and young adults, but also in the general population, emphasizing the prevalence of hate speech, harassment,

and violence shaped by identity-based and gender biases. At the same time, the issue seeks to explore countermeasures that can help mitigate these phenomena, fostering a more inclusive society informed by gender-sensitive and intersectional perspectives.

As highlighted by recent literature, combating hate is a multifaceted challenge. It requires the promotion of narratives that support democratic values and respect for diversity. The integration of these principles is vital to advancing towards a more inclusive digital society. Authors such as Castells (2006) and Fuchs (2021) emphasize the role of communication networks and the political economy of platforms in shaping online behaviors and interactions. These insights underline the need for a critical examination of the structural and cultural conditions that enable digital exclusion and violence.

2. Contributions

The articles in this thematic issue provide a comprehensive exploration of the challenges posed by violence, hate speech, and gender bias in digital environments. Tello Díaz and Martínez-Valerio (2025) begin by analyzing hate speech directed at Penélope Cruz on the social media platform X. Their study highlights the predominance of ideological hate and misogyny, revealing how stereotypes and prejudices question her intellect and professional success.

Building on this analysis, Antolínez-Merchán et al. (2025) investigate gender biases among Spanish youth using data from the World Values Survey: The study identifies media exposure and sociocultural values as key predictors of gender prejudice.

Arce-García et al. (2025) examine nearly half a million messages targeting the Spanish Meteorological Agency (AEMET), uncovering how conspiracy theories and anti-intellectualism fuel hate speech that undermines trust in scientific institutions. Römer-Pieretti et al. (2025) complement these findings by employing a semiotic approach to explore hate discourse in user comments on Spanish news media platforms. Their work highlights the influence of political radicalisation and international events, such as Joe Biden's inauguration, on digital debates.

Rodríguez-Peral et al. (2025) contribute by reviewing academic research on hate speech on Twitter, identifying theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches while pointing out gaps for future inquiry. On the other hand, Baider (2025) adopts a critical discourse perspective to analyze transphobic argumentation and counterspeech. By identifying frames such as the medical and misfit frames, the author provides actionable insights into addressing extreme speech and fostering respectful digital dialogue.

Ignazzi et al. (2025) map the prevalence of misogynistic discourse within the manosphere. Using advanced natural language processing, the authors uncover how this network influences offline behaviors and reinforces harmful gender stereotypes. Moreno-López and Argüello-Gutiérrez (2025) expand on this by conducting a systematic review of online hate speech in online video games, and their synthesis underscores the diverse forms of cyberhate present in these environments and the pressing need for inclusive interventions.

Finally, Esteban-Ramiro et al. (2025) zoom in on MMOs, where they document how androcentric norms perpetuate gender-based violence. Their qualitative analysis reveals the harassment faced by female gamers and the broader implications for societal norms.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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About the Authors

Max Römer-Pieretti is a full professor and researcher at Universidad Camilo José Cela, where he is the research coordinator of the Faculty of Communication and Design. His research interests include semiotics, politics, and hate studies. With more than 35 years of teaching and research experience, his teaching background includes undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral classes.

Beatriz Esteban-Ramiro holds a PhD in law from the University of Castilla-La Mancha. She is part of the teaching and research staff at the University of Castilla-La Mancha, the Department of Labour Law and Social Work, and is assistant professor PHD in social work at the Faculty of Social Sciences and Information Technologies. She is a member of the GIEPS: Inclusion, Equity and Social Policy research group. Her lines of research focus on online violence, gender, and hate speech, as well as social inequalities.

Agrivalca Canelón Silva holds a PhD in organizational communication by the Universidad de Málaga and is an associate researcher at the Institute for Communication and Information Research of the Andrés Bello Catholic University (IDICI-UCAB). Agrivalc's research interests include corporate communications and public relations, government communication and public diplomacy, sustainability and social innovation, and migration and diasporas.