

# Abstract Details

**Session title:** Journalism and audience interactions

**Session type:** Parallel Session

**Section / TWG / Network:** Journalism Studies

## Abstract title:

Offensive speech against journalists on French social media

## Biography

Arnaud Mercier is PhD in political science at the Institut d'études Politiques of Paris, Professor of information and political communication at the university Paris 2 – Assas. He conducts researches on journalism, digital journalism, social media in electoral context and political communication.

Laura Amigo is a PhD Candidate at the Academy of Journalism and Media (AJM) of the University of Neuchâtel, Switzerland. Her research focuses on the relationships between news media and audiences, editorial strategies and local journalism. She recently was a scientific collaborator for the LINC international research project on the links between regional media and their audiences in French-speaking Europe. She teaches Communications at the University of Lille, France, and has previous professional experience in the communication field.

L. Amigo<sup>1</sup>, M. Arnaud<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup>University of Neuchatel, AJM, Neuchatel, Switzerland.

<sup>2</sup>Pantheon-Assas University, Carism, Paris, France.

The internet can constitute a common space for bonding and creating cohesiveness based on users interests and interactions ; hence, contributing to develop a sense of community, understood as networks of interpersonal ties that provide sociability, support, information, a sense of belonging, and social identity. These communities can be built "through opposition to other groups, and through angry, persistent messages of hate that discourage dissenting points of view" (Bostdorff, 2004: 340).

Immediacy, anonymity, "expansion" of content (Siapera & *alii*, 2018) afforded by social media, favor emotional speech and an understanding of the world through the prism of emotion. Platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, can turn into a *wild web* (Mercier, 2018), that is spaces suitable to the expression of messages that go beyond the democratic criticism of how news media work to simply convey hatred. "The Internet has become the latest technology to be exploited by extremists and hatermongers" (Levin, 2002). Cyberhate speech is broadly defined as offensive language targeting a person or a group. It aims to dehumanize, degrade, harass and to foment violence against them (Cohen-Almagor, 2011: 1-2). For instance, on Twitter, the harshest French critics of journalists built up an *ad hoc* vocabulary that takes the form of an insult, mixing news media, the press and journalists with scatological, sexual and disparaging references (Mercier & Amigo, 2021).

In order to study hate speech targeting the news sector, we automatically collected 13'582 tweets containing at least one of the most frequently used terms ("merdias", "pressetitué", "journalopes") of this made-up vocabulary posted between June and September 2017. On Facebook, we gathered violent messages against the media from the four most popular groups of the French "*Gilets jaunes*" movement during the winter of 2018-2019.

Based on these two corpuses we aim to identify the figures of detestation and rejection of journalistic work, and we sought to determine to which extent these online messages contribute to the conformation of a virtual community based on "journalist phobia". Finally, we shed light on explanatory factors of these virulent messages, in the current context of citizens' mistrust of the journalistic field, that has grown to the point of becoming a "great misunderstanding" (Charon, 2007) and a "crisis of faith in journalism" (Zuckerman, 2017).

- Bostdorff, D. (2004). The Internet rhetoric of the Ku Klux Klan. *Communication Studies*, 55 (2), 340-361.
- Charon, J.-M. (2007). *Les journalistes et leur public: le grand malentendu*. Paris: Clemi/Vuibert/INA.
- Cohen-Almagor R. (2011). Fighting Hate and Bigotry on the Internet. *Policy and Internet*, 3(3), 1-26.
- Levin, B. (2002). Cyberhate: A Legal and Historical Analysis of Extremists' Use of Computer Networks in America. *American Behavioural Scientist*, 45(6), 958-88.
- Mercier, A., Amigo L. (2021) « Tweets injurieux et haineux contre les journalistes et les « merdias », *Mots*, 125, p. 73-90.
- Mercier, A. (April 20, 2018). L'ensauvagement du web. *TheConversation France*.
- Siapera, E., Moreo, E., Zhou, J. (2018). *HateTrack. Tracking and Monitoring Racist Speech Online*. Project Final Report.
- Zuckerman, E. (2017). *Mistrust, efficacy and the new civics: Understanding the deep roots of the crisis of faith in journalism*. The Aspen Institute.