

Digital Hate and the infrastructures of communicative capital

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ABOUT CARE

The Center for Culture-centered Approach to Research and Evaluation (CARE) at Massey University, Aotearoa New Zealand, is a global hub for communication research that uses participatory and culture-centered methodologies to develop community-driven communication solutions to health and wellbeing. Through experiments in methods of radical democracy anchored in community ownership and community voice, the Center collaborates with communities, community organizers, community researchers, advocates, and activists to imagine and develop sustainable practices for prevention, health care organizing, food and agriculture, worker organizing, migrant and refugee rights, indigenous rights, rights of the poor, and economic transformation.

Mohan J. Dutta is the Director of CARE and author of books such as *Neoliberal Health Organizing*, *Communicating Health*, and *Voices of Resistance*.

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Communicative capital, the consolidation of communicative infrastructures to drive profiteering, forms the face of twenty-first century neoliberalism. From Facebook to Amazon, digital communication is one of the most profitable sites of capitalist expansion.

Communicative capital is intertwined with financial and technological capital, drawing on the global networks of finance and simultaneously creating new sites and spaces for financialization.

Communicative capital works through the commercialization of human participation on digital platforms, turning likes, shares, and comments into profitable resources.

Of the wide array of human emotions on digital platforms that drive profiteering, hate is a powerful resource that draws in viewers, propels shares, and creates networks of flow. Hate has the potential of generating large profits because of its virality.

Digital hate

When hate goes viral, it propels the economic infrastructures of hate groups, hate-based political parties, and digital corporations.

Digital hate, the commercialization of hate into a profitable commodity on digital platforms, drives both profiteering on the digital platforms as well as the political agendas of parties and hate groups that thrive on hate.

After all, the capacity to aggregate big data, turn big data into effective segmentation strategies, and develop targeted campaigns create vastly new market opportunities for the makers of hate. The monetization of hate is integral to generating profits for communicative capital.

In India, the emergence of the far-right forces of hate organized under the umbrella of Hindutva has been fuelled by digital media, accompanied by 24X7 television channels catalysing hate. The architectures of twitter, WhatsApp and Facebook, support these affective qualities of hate, monetizing them into revenues.

Manufactured images, made up stories, and invented facts drive the hate industry, both on the screens of television and on the digital application screens on our devices.

Facebook policy and hate

The recent revelation by Facebook employees that the Senior Policy advisor of Facebook India Ms. Ankhi Das had exerted pressure so that Facebook would not take down right-wing hate sites attached to the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) makes visible this deep embedding of hate politics in the nodes and networks of communicative capitalism. A Wall Street Journal report notes that Facebook had ignored its hate speech policy and allowed anti-Muslim posts on its platform to avoid ruining its relationship with the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

That Ms. Das had offered Facebook's business interests as the reason for not taking down the hate sites speaks directly to the complicity of communicative capitalism in the politics of hate. Where site traffic is a business, hate is a powerful register for turbocharging the return-on-investments.

While on one hand Facebook India refused to take down hate speech by BJP leaders, it took down 14 of the 44 pages of 'rivals' that BJP had flagged. The requests were made by the BJP IT cell chief Amit Malviya to Facebook India Public Policy executives Ankhi Das and Shivnath Thukral.

Some of the pages that BJP requested to take down included the official account of Bhim Army, a vocal critic of the BJP, the satire site “We Hate BJP”, and a page called “The Truth of Gujarat” that shares mostly Alt News fact checks. Two of the pages that were actually taken down were in support of the journalists Ravish Kumar and Vinod Dua who have been systematically targeted by the forces of the Hindu right.

Moreover, Facebook reinstated 17 pages of the Hindu Right on the request of the BJP. The BJP IT cell requested Facebook to monetize two right-leaning news websites — The Chaupal and OpIndia, letting them receive ad revenue for their content.

Drawing on the Wall Street Journal report, the Delhi Assembly’s peace and harmony committee that is probing the Delhi riots noted that Facebook had a key role in escalating the violence, leaving 53 dead and over 400 injured.

According to a *Buzzfeed* report, in the backdrop of protests against India’s draconian Citizenship Amendment Act that is explicitly crafted to disenfranchise India’s Muslim Minorities, Das had shared a post on her Facebook page which called Muslims in India a “degenerate community” for whom “nothing except purity of religion and implementation of Shariah matter”.

Politics of hate

Moreover, in an internal page for Facebook employees, Ms. Das had explicitly posted support for the right-wing political party Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) that has risen to power through the politics of hate. This reveals the specific interplays of hate politics and communicative capital.

In a post after the 2014 elections on a site for Facebook employees in India, Ms. Das noted, “It’s taken thirty years of grassroots work to rid India of state socialism finally.”

In a separate post, referring to the Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s campaign, she stated, “We lit a fire to his social media campaign and the rest is of course history.”

The statements made by Ms. Das depict the deep interplays between the neoliberal desires of communicative capital and the politics of hate. The active support offered by Ms. Das to the Hindutva forces are intertwined with her strategic intent of deploying her role as a Facebook policy advisor to dismantle state socialism. Facebook was strategically deployed to establishing the politics of hate.

Ironically, in a conference titled “Tackling insurgent ideologies 2.0,” Das states, “we have zero tolerance to

(sic) terrorism and terrorist content online.” Aligning Facebook policy toward hate with the Christchurch call in the backdrop of the Islamophobic White supremacist attack on a mosque in New Zealand, Das cites specific Islamic examples of terrorist organizations such as Hizbul Mujahadeen and Al Qaeda. As an exemplar of communicative inversion, in her operationalization of terrorist organizations, Das fails to note the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and Bajrang Dal, two of many examples of terrorist organizations that are linked to the Hindutva agenda of the ruling BJP, and to the organizing of terror through the support of state structures.

In the ideology of communicative capital, the redistributive structures of state socialism are impediments to the free market fantasy that drives neoliberal transformations. The seductions of change offered by Modi are fundamentally embodied in a vacuous ideology that thrives on the circulation of the narratives of self-help and individual responsibility to enable capitalist consolidation.

The political impetus for supporting the politics of hate is therefore directly intertwined with the ideological seductions of the free market mantra that drive communicative capital. This linkage between the politics of hate and the neoliberal ideology of communicative capital operates seamlessly, seeing the politics of hate

as integral to manufacturing a crisis that works through the destruction of the fundamental values of socialism, secularism, and democracy written into the Indian constitution.

Communicative capital thrives on catalysing this destruction of the very idea of India so it can install its infrastructures of capitalist extraction, rife with hate and co-opted institutions and organizations across the nation organized to serve the politics of hate.