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Review: *A Space for Hate: The White Power Movement's Adaptation into Cyberspace* by Adam G. Klein

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A Space for Hate: The White Power Movement's Adaptation into Cyberspace by Adam G. Klein. Duluth, MN: Litwin Books, LLC, 2009. 217 pp. ISBN 978-1-936117-07-9.

Cyberspace has been touted as a democratic sphere of communication where anyone with a computer and an Internet connection can access information and share ideas with millions of users across the globe. The efficiency with which ideas can travel on the interconnected information superhighway allows the ideas posted in cyberspace to extend beyond the walls of blogs and news feeds. Users who strive for cultural and political change can translate ideas posted online into “real-world” actions. Supporters of using cyberspace platforms for political liberalization contend that revolutions can occur one tweet at a time.

However, while much of the discourse surrounding cyberspace has focused on the perceived political and cultural benefits of disseminating information to the masses efficiently, *A Space for Hate: The White Power Movement's Adaptation into Cyberspace* focuses on the “darker” facets of information transmission and utilization of Internet communication technologies. Specifically, Klein examines how the decentralized and non-traceable nature of cyberspace activity has fostered a new home for hate groups. Klein argues that the democratic nature of cyberspace has led to a “huge resurgence” of hate groups, particularly the white power movement, that are successfully spreading framed messages of fear and blame throughout the unfiltered realm of cyberspace in order to incite racially motivated and violent “real-world” events, such as uprisings, protests, and rallies (p. 5).

Through an examination of 26 hate-based websites maintained by members of the white power movement, including Neo-Nazis, White Nationalists, and Holocaust Deniers, Klein conducted a qualitative study using frame analysis to expose how organizations use Internet trends to transmit racist ideologies online. The websites represented a “cross-section of white power activity on the Internet” and were selected based on size, affiliation, and the representation of modern Internet trends (p. 92). The examination of the websites is mainly conducted using the analysis of two media frames, the “information” frame and the “uprising” frame, and the discussion is largely limited to homepages and forums. The conclusions drawn from the frame analysis is further supported by theories, such as an “information laundering” theory which is described by Klein as the use of credible websites, such as Google and Wikipedia, to funnel users to white power domains.

Beginning with the “information” frame analysis, Klein introduces the tactics used by white power organizations to present racist messages as objective truths and facts. In an attempt to lend credibility to their websites, white power organizations utilize website informational features that can easily be recognized by their target audience, the college-educated members of the net-generation who are accustomed to using online research tools to seek information. Two

particularly interesting informational features discussed were “scholarly signifiers” and “mainstreaming.” According to the statistics provided by Klein, 58% of the websites analyzed used scholarly signifiers, such as loose university affiliations and articles written by authors with Ph.D. credentials, to legitimize hate-filled messages with false academic achievements that would appeal to a college-educated audience. Additionally, white power websites further preyed on college students by borrowing content from the mainstream websites accessed daily for news and popular culture, including YouTube, CNN, and Wikipedia. An alarming 80% of the websites examined provided direct links to stories hosted on these mainstream websites that were related to crimes committed by ethnic and racial minorities. When grouped together and legitimized through mainstream websites, these stories provided a skewed narrative of the dangers presented by non-whites. Overall, Klein’s examination of the websites did successfully identify seven reoccurring racist themes or “facts” that were made possible using informational features, including the dangerous idea that “Black people are a deadly threat to White Americans” (p. 134).

The passing of white power discourse as unbiased information is key to convincing White Americans that they face immediate danger at the hands of ethnic and racial minorities. In his analysis of the use of an “uprising” frame, Klein argues that visitors are more likely to commit racial rebellion in their local communities once the websites convinced them that minorities are a deadly threat. The white power movement exploits feelings of fear, anger, and mistrust by structuring the websites with interactive features that allow members to share hate-filled messages. Klein explores the manipulative use of interactive website features through an investigation of public forums and online community bulletins. These interactive features allow members to post hostile messages in the language of white power culture; the messages in turn provoke other members to respond with their own messages in a snowball effect that eventually leads to calls for violent uprisings against ethnic and racial minorities. Although Klein convincingly exposes how the binary discourse of the white power movement leads to message escalation online, little evidence was presented in the work that proves a connection between the violent calls for action shared online and the propensity for them to become real-life violent acts.

While the “information” and “uprising” frame analysis persuasively uncovered the recruiting techniques shared by the white power movement websites, the presentation of supporting data to establish that the websites are reaching and actually influencing their target audience was limited. Klein provides traffic data and uses the number of visits to the sites to create rankings for the websites under investigation. Presumably, the sites with the most traffic are reaching the largest audience and should be considered the most dangerous. However, the traffic statistics do not reveal information about the users of the websites. The most important questions remain largely unanswered: Who are the visitors? What is their age group? Are the visitors really members of the net-

generation who are blindly following links to the Ku Klux Klan website? Or are the visitors mainly users who were actively seeking information related to the white power movement and found the websites through direct keyword searches? Klein provides data on the specific “information” and “social networking” offerings for each website, and the evidence he offers reveals that the majority of the websites are utilizing the same recruiting techniques; still, neither the traffic rankings nor the frame analysis establishes a strong link between Internet activity and acts of real-life violence. Overall, the work lacks user data that delineates the net-generation as the users of the websites and only establishes a weak link between Internet activity and real-life violence using anecdotal narratives. Nonetheless, the weaknesses of the work do not demonstrate that users are merely visiting the site for escapism; the strong traffic rankings presented by Klein’s research should not be dismissed. Instead, a deeper analysis of user and traffic data, including the number of return visits and a more detailed analysis of the referral sites, would strengthen the argument that the net-generation is at-risk and that violent attacks on minorities will increase if the online binary discourse of the white power movement continues to go unchecked.

Despite the limited amount of supporting data, the work provides a valuable examination of the dangers of unregulated information transmission in the decentralized and democratic sphere of cyberspace. Klein successfully revealed how the discourse of the White Power Movement is no longer localized to the streets where protests occur; instead, hate groups are spreading their messages to much larger audiences and eliciting action world-wide through an international network of members who communicate using Internet technologies. By and large, Klein has successfully shown through his examination of the 26 websites that the insidious nature of the messages transmitted by these websites will lead to a higher tolerance for hate speech among the masses if hosting networks do not become more accountable for the information they help publish and, most importantly, if the millions of Internet users continue to uncritically use online sources of “information.”

Reviewer

Patricia Garcia is a PhD student in the UCLA Graduate School of Education and Information Studies. Her interests include information access, archival theory, and social media. She is particularly interested in how social media can be used to increase public access to cultural records at archival institutions.