

EDITORIAL

New Alphabets of Hate

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(published: 12/9/2026)

DOI

<https://doi.org/10.20368/1971-8829/1136474>

CITE AS

Moriggi, S., De Biase, L., Pasta, S., Rivoltella, P.C., & Vezzali, L. (2026). New Alphabets of Hate [Editorial]. *Journal of e-Learning and Knowledge Society*, 22(1), I-IV.
<https://doi.org/10.20368/1971-8829/1136474>

Hate speech in the digital context has earned a place of primary importance in the cultural and political analysis of a world that communicates through social media. Not because social media uncovered some unprecedented forms of violence and division that did

not exist before the first quarter of the twenty-first century, but because they have amplified the issue to such an extent as to prompt scholars to examine it more deeply. The point is that, with the advent of generative artificial intelligence, the significance of this dimension of social life may grow still further and take on features that are even harder to grasp. And this is not primarily for strictly technical reasons: research on the subject, aided in part by the close study of hate speech, is defining in a potentially surprising way the relationship between the violence of the discourse that can find a home in social networks and the evolution of the media ecosystem.

The research reported in this issue of the *Journal of e-Learning and Knowledge Society* finds, in fact, that the apparent correlation between the growth of online violence and the development of social media is connected to explanations that lie, logically, further upstream of both phenomena.

It is precisely this upstream question that the scenario essay opening the issue sets out to answer. Luca De Biase shows how hatred, while remaining in its origins a singular and irreducible phenomenon – freely echoing Tolstoy, every story of hate is different from every other – is converted, through the digital infrastructures across which it circulates, into a synthetic and standardized phenomenon that tends to converge on a single expressive form: violence. The essay proposes a taxonomy of the relational structures through which hatred has historically propagated – from the “one-to-one” relationship of domestic violence, to the “one-to-many” transmission typical of totalitarian propaganda, to the “many-to-many” form of social media, and to the still largely unexplored “many-to-one” form of conversational artificial intelligence, capable of simulating all the other structures and thereby making the boundary between personal dialogue and industrially produced hate speech increasingly permeable (De Biase, 2026). It is this interpretive framework – the idea that infrastructures do not generate hatred but constitute its operational environment, amplifying its reach and, to some extent, even its alphabets – that offers the key for reading the eleven contributions that follow.

This issue opens with this scenario essay and then brings together eleven contributions, organized in two sections: three invited papers, which introduce the theme with a broad and situated perspective, and eight research articles, selected through the issue’s dedicated call, which convey its scope along four interconnected thematic axes.

A first axis concerns the very genealogy of the categories through which we name hatred: while the study of politically motivated hate speech in the Albanian language proposes reading it as a structured repertoire of “alphabets” – symbols, metaphors, and recurring linguistic patterns that recombine to convey and normalize hostility (Marteta, 2026) – a historical-conceptual analysis reconstructs how, within platform moderation practices, the legal-political category of “hate speech” is progressively giving way to the more technical and scalable category of “toxicity,” with the risk of a depoliticization of discriminatory harm (Bortone & Pasta, 2026). Alongside this conceptual genealogy sits an empirical case study that carries the notion of an “alphabet of hate” beyond the English-language, high-resource contexts in which it has mostly been developed so far: a mixed computational and

discourse-analytic study of a 4,200-item corpus collected from digital academic spaces in Eastern Indonesia identifies five local linguistic strategies – ranging from ethnic euphemism to ironic praise and dehumanizing metaphor – and shows that implicit, euphemistic hate speech systematically outnumbers explicit hate speech, at a ratio of roughly 1.5 to 1, a finding that reinforces the decolonial argument that the very categories used to analyze hate speech require renegotiation outside the Western contexts in which they originated (Naatonis et al., 2026).

A second axis concerns the ambivalent role of generative artificial intelligence in processes of discrimination and of countering hatred. Two experimental studies conducted in Turkey and the United States show that the same discriminatory conduct is perceived as less threatening when carried out by an AI system rather than by a person: a perceptual bias that risks normalizing algorithmic discrimination precisely because it is judged less severe (Akay et al., 2026). Conversely, a systematic review of AI-generated counterspeech shows that the effectiveness of these tools depends on remaining within a logic of human-machine collaboration, rather than one of the latter substituting for the former (Cosola et al., 2026). These findings confirm, at an experimental scale, the ambivalence of the “many-to-one” structure described in the opening essay, where the degree of alignment built into language models becomes itself a factor that can either contain or amplify the algorithmic production of hatred (De Biase, 2026).

A third axis concerns the role of digital infrastructures in mediating public discourse: a computational analysis of Instagram posts and comments on migration shows that securitized frames in journalistic discourse are associated with more polarized emotional reactions and with higher rates of hate speech, compared with humanitarian or ethical-religious frames (Ludovico et al., 2026).

A fourth axis, finally, concerns educational responses to these phenomena. Among the invited papers, the proposal of “hate literacy” as a core civic competence redefines literacy about hate speech not as prevention or self-defense, but as a practice of critical reading capable of making explicit the hidden curriculum of platforms – an argument that engages closely with the critique of the vocabulary of “toxicity” put forward in the first axis (Pireddu, 2026); while the pedagogical experience of infant-toddler centers and preschools in Reggio Emilia shows how attention to relationships and environments, from the very earliest years of life, constitutes a first and decisive cultural safeguard (Cagliari, 2026). Among the call articles, the practices explored range from art and art education as devices of

resonance capable of defusing hatred (Panciroli & Rivoltella, 2026) to the digital literacy and resilience programs developed in schools in Kerala (Joseph et al., 2026).

Closing this survey of contributions, the third invited paper shifts the gaze from discourse to the image of extreme violence: an analysis of the work of the Forensic Architecture collective shows how the very technological infrastructures – artificial intelligence, satellite imagery, platforms – that amplify the visibility and emotional charge of online hatred can, conversely, anesthetize the perception of state violence, rendering it invisible even amid its media overexposure (Guerri, 2026). If the alphabets of hate feed on algorithmic hypervisibility, the invisibility of the most extreme violence is its reverse side: two outcomes of the same, never neutral, political character of the technologies of vision.

The new alphabets of hate can therefore be sought in the intersection between the social and personal suffering that leads people to hate – fueling violence, verbal and often physical – and the growing power of digital infrastructures, with their incentive systems, their interfaces, and their recommendation algorithms, which tend to disproportionately amplify whatever generates the strongest emotional engagement, hatred included. These are “alphabets,” rather than simple languages, because what we are dealing with is an unstable system of signs – slang, memes, allusions, implicit codes – capable of continuously recombining itself so as to remain legible to those who use it while eluding those who should recognize and moderate it. Generative artificial intelligence, referenced at the outset, is today its most radical expression: it makes it possible to produce, at scale, ever-new variants of the same hate speech, continuously shifting the target of detection systems and reproducing, in synthetic form, the same combinatorial logic that makes these alphabets so difficult to pin down and to counter.

Education is an integral part of any strategy for preparing against and countering the various forms that online violence takes from time to time. It cannot, however, confine itself to countering discrimination and violence directed at specific categories of people: it must reach a more sophisticated level. It must be conceived, first and foremost, for the contribution it can make to developing strategic competencies such as the capacity to identify alternatives to dominant narratives and to critically read any form of prejudice. Ultimately, this places at the center of the analysis the new context of power and socio-economic polarization – a context that fuels the distance between people and loneliness, and that makes possible disrespectful behavior toward others, or worse.

Hate speech literacy must evolve in step with the new alphabets of hate: it must be developed to strengthen the defenses of individuals and communities against the potential violence fueled by discourse that develops and spreads online, and it must also broaden its aims. It cannot remain neutral toward technologies, and even less so toward the system of power that defines the conditions shaping their development.

The construction of new educational environments is decisive for creating alternative spaces in which to develop more conscious approaches to hate speech and to nurture people’s sense of agency, preventing online violence from rendering them passive. After all, this construction is vital for an independent education oriented toward liberating people’s creative forces and toward defining a critical position with respect to the current media context. It is in this shift – from education as individual defense to education as a lever for transforming the context of power – that the broader stakes of this issue can be grasped. The historical moment we are living through sends a clear signal: we are moving from regarding digitalization as a synonym for modernization to situating technologies within the social and political dynamics that also interpret them as tools for mass manipulation. It is in this light that the response to the alphabets of hate becomes, first and foremost, an architectural question: even more than content regulation, it calls for the (re)design of information ecosystems that are less oligopolistic, more interoperable, and better able to safeguard the diversity of voices, including the weakest ones.

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