

Universidad de Huelva

Departamento de Pedagogía



Representations of Islam on TikTok: media education as a tool to mitigate islamophobia

Memoria para optar al grado de doctora
presentada por:

Sabina Civila de Dios

Fecha de lectura: 5 de julio de 2024

Bajo la dirección del doctor:

Ignacio Aguaded Gómez

Huelva, 2024



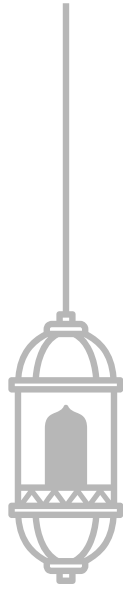
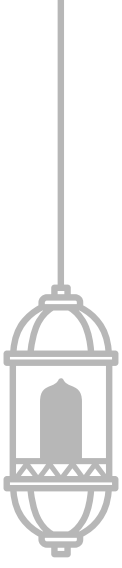
REPRESENTATIONS OF ISLAM ON TIKTOK: MEDIA EDUCATION AS A TOOL TO MITIGATE ISLAMOPHOBIA

TESIS DOCTORAL
SABINA CIVILA

Director:
José Ignacio Aguaded Gómez



Universidad
de Huelva



**REPRESENTACIONES DEL ISLAM EN TIKTOK:
LA EDUCOMUNICACIÓN COMO HERRAMIENTA PARA
MITIGAR LA ISLAMOFOBIA**

**REPRESENTATIONS OF ISLAM ON TIKTOK:
MEDIA EDUCATION AS A TOOL TO MITIGATE
ISLAMOPHOBIA**

Tesis doctoral por compendio de publicaciones para optar al grado de doctora por la Universidad de Huelva (España) en la línea de educomunicación y alfabetización mediática del Programa de Doctorado Interuniversitario en Comunicación.

SABINA CIVILA

Director:

Ignacio Aguaded

Este trabajo se ha elaborado en el marco de ayudas para contratos predoctorales para la formación de doctores/as 2019, con el apoyo del Proyecto I+D+I (2019-2021), titulado «Youtubers e intagrammers: La competencia mediática en los prosumidores emergentes», con clave RTI2018-093303-B-I00, financiado por el Ministerio de Ciencia, Innovación y Universidades de España y el Fondo Europeo de Desarrollo Regional (Feder).

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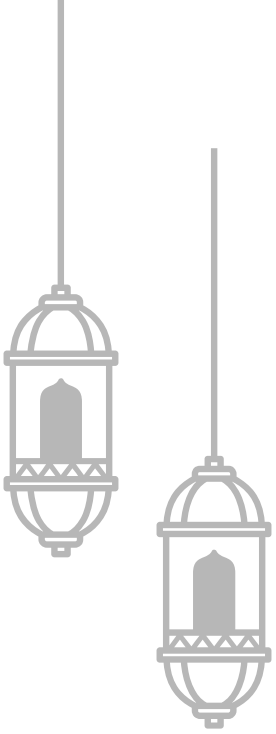


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A mi familia, a las *FoquisGordis* y a todas las personas que me han acompañado en este camino.

Gracias por creer en mí.

AGRADECIMIENTOS

Aún recuerdo el día que decidí matricularme en el Programa de Doctorado y empezar esta aventura, de nada más y nada menos que cinco años. En principio serían tres, pero tuve la gran fortuna de ser beneficiaria de un contrato FPI en la convocatoria de 2019 por el Ministerio de Ciencia e Innovación. Durante estos años he pasado por muchas etapas, en las que siempre debo agradecer a mi familia y amigas el apoyo incondicional.

Han sido unos años de mucho esfuerzo, dedicación y aprendizaje aunque también este camino ha estado lleno de momentos bonitos que siempre estarán en mi corazón y en mis recuerdos. Huelva es un lugar lleno de luz, de buena gente y de una gastronomía espectacular.

Gracias a mis padres por todo el esfuerzo realizado para que yo haya llegado hasta aquí y esté hoy escribiendo estas líneas. Sois un gran ejemplo. A mi hermano, por albondigüear en todas las salsas. A mis tí@s y a toda mi familia, que aunque seamos poquitos somos de gran corazón♥. A mi abuela, porque más sabe el diablo por viejo que por diablo. Sin ellos nada de esto hubiera sido posible y la alegría que me han intentado robar hubiera sido definitivamente robada. Gracias por escucharme y apoyarme a lo largo del camino.

También agradecer a mis amigas, mis *Foquis*, por haberme hecho reír en momentos difíciles y estar ahí desde el principio al fin. Ha sido un camino largo, en el que se han preocupado y sufrido casi tanto como yo. Crecer de vuestra mano me ha hecho sin duda ser la persona que soy hoy; libre, valiente y luchadora.

A Rahhal por haberme abierto la ventana a un nuevo mundo, por valorarme y enseñarme muchas cosas a lo largo del camino. Sin ti, haber sido FPI no hubiera sido imposible. Gracias por tanto✨.

A Macarena por ser como una madre para mi, por acompañarme en todas las etapas, por ayudarme a crecer y comprender el mundo adulto. Por su cariño y los consejos.

En especial y con mucho amor quiero agradecer a Daniela Jaramillo-Dent por su energía, sus ganas, las comilonas, las horas de investigación y todos los congresos-viajes compartidos. A Antonella Di Cintio por todas las horas de conversación, las risas y sus ánimos para continuar. Habéis sido un pilar fundamental en esta investigación. Gracias por ser familia.

A Mónica Bonilla del Río por sus consejos, sus ratos dedicados, las risas y los TikToks. Gracias, amiga, por acompañarme en este viaje. Espero que estés a mi lado por muchos años más. **No Ni Ná.** A Arantxa Vizcaíno, por esta vivencia que siempre nos unirá y todo el conocimiento aportado a lo largo de esta Tesis Doctoral.

A Belén Pérez, por ser un ejemplo de valentía, fortaleza y dedicación. Gracias por ser brillante y traspasarme luz.

A todas mis amigas, que han aparecido en etapas diferentes de mi vida y me han sacado una sonrisa en momentos difíciles. Gracias por escucharme y darme vuestros mejores consejos: Inma Benítez, Paula Gavira, Sandra Infantes, Marina Prieto, Manoli, Laura Pacheco, María Toscano, Pryscila, Teresa Naranjo y Elisabeth Rojas. Sois fundamentales.

Gracias a todas/os los investigadores del Grupo Ágora por haber aportado su granito de arena en este camino y en la investigación. Por las risas de los viajes, por las fechas de entrega compartidas, por la ilusión y las ganas puesta en cada paso. Gracias por haberme enseñado tanto. Gracias por los consejos y la esperanza depositada en mí. Agradecer en especial a Amor Pérez-Rodríguez, Ángel Hernando, Paloma Contreras, Patricia de Casas, Barbara Castillo-Abdul, Luis Miguel Romero-Rodríguez, Mariló Guzmán, Ana Duarte-Hueros, Iván Sánchez, Rosa García, Begoña Mora, Odiel Estrada y Dieter Cancell.

Por último, que no menos importante, agradecer a Ignacio Aguaded el respaldo en esta investigación, la transmisión de su conocimiento y su ayuda en el desarrollo de la Tesis Doctoral.

Mis más sinceros agradecimientos a todas las personas mencionadas, han sido unos años muy bonitos en los que he aprendido a ser investigadora, docente y una gran profesional. Sin todas y cada una de ustedes esto no hubiera sido posible.

PUBLICATIONS

Note: This research is made up of a total of 8 publications (3 JCR, 3 Scopus y 2 ESCI). All have been published. Two of the articles presented have been awarded by the "International Communication Association" and by "The Washington Academy".

Paradigm changes and new challenges for Media Education: Review and science mapping (2000-2021)

Aguaded, Ignacio; Civila, Sabina & Vizcaíno-Verdú, Arantxa. (2022). Paradigm changes and new challenges for media education: Review and science mapping (2000-2021). *Profesional de la información*, 31(6), e310606. <https://doi.org/10.3145/epi.2022.nov.06>

#Mixedcouples on TikTok: Performative Hybridization and Identity in the Face of Discrimination (Awarded by the International Communication Association)

Civila, Sabina., & Jaramillo-Dent, Daniela. (2022). #Mixedcouples on TikTok: Performative Hybridization and Identity in the Face of Discrimination. *Social media and Society*, 8(3). <https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051221122464>

Social Media and Otherness: The Case of #Islamterrorism on Tiktok

Civila, Sabina., Bonilla-del-Río, Mónica., & Aguaded, Ignacio. (2023). Social Media and Otherness: The Case of #Islamterrorism on Tiktok. *Politics and Governance*, 11(2), Pages X–X. <https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v11i2.6299>

The demonization of Islam through social media: A case study of #StopIslam in Instagram (Awarded by The Washington Academy)

Civila, Sabina., Romero-Rodríguez, Luis Miguel., Civila-Salas, Amparo. (2020). The demonization of Islam through social media: A case study of #StopIslam in Instagram. *Publications*, 8(4), 52. <https://doi.org/10.3390/publications8040052>

Otherness as a form of intersubjective social exclusion: Conceptual discussion from the current communicative scenario

Romero-Rodríguez, Luis Miguel., Civila, Sabina., & Aguaded, Ignacio. (2020). Otherness as a form of intersubjective social exclusion: Conceptual discussion from the current communicative scenario. *Journal of Information, Communication and Ethics in Society*, 19(1). <https://doi.org/10.1108/jices-11-2019-0130>



Symbolic-discursive violence and new media: Grounded theory from an epistemological perspective

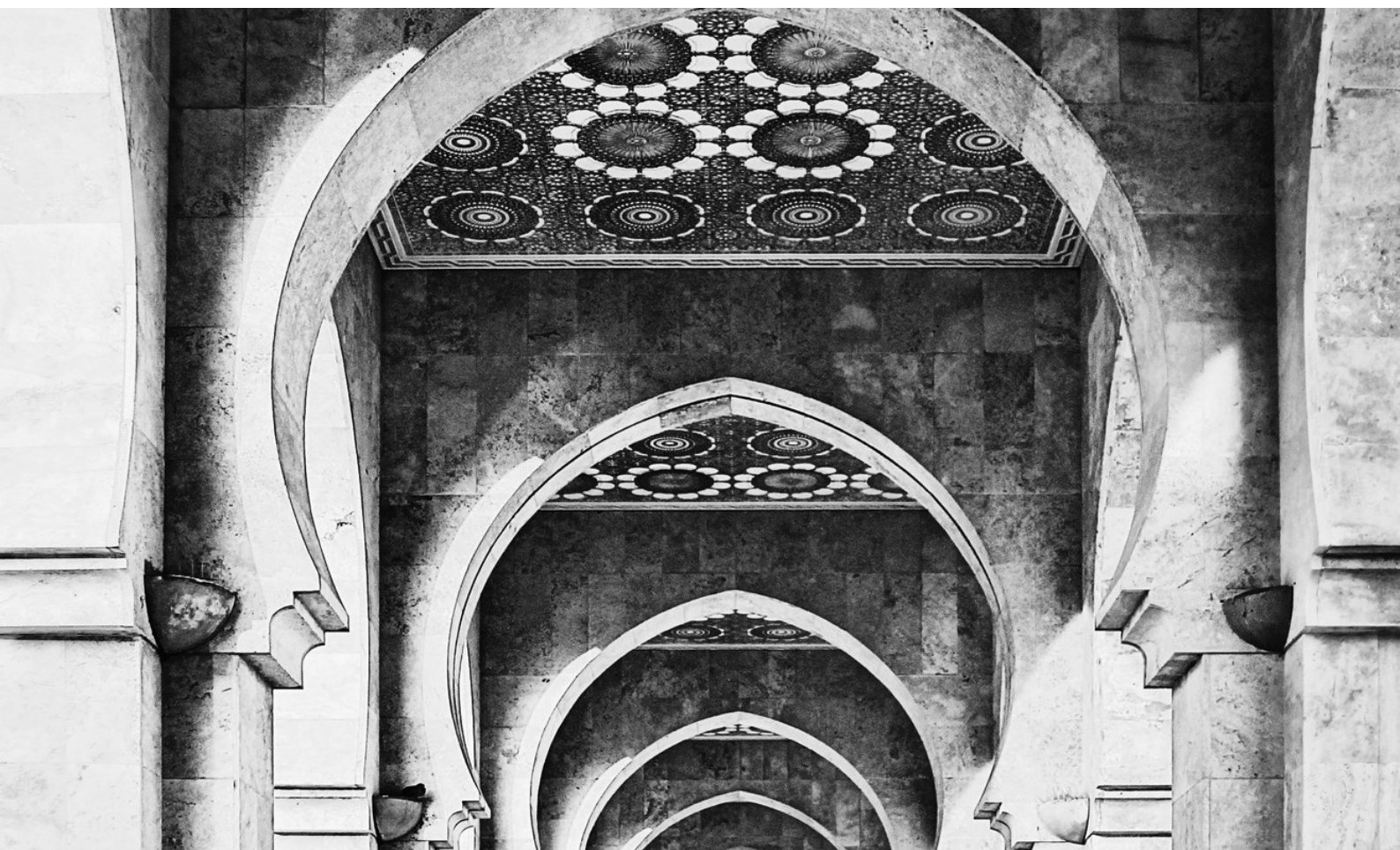
Civila, Sabina., Romero-Rodríguez, Luis Miguel., & Aguaded, Ignacio. (2021). Symbolic-discursive violence and new media: grounded theory from an epistemological perspective. *Catalan journal of communication & cultural studies*, 13(1), 43-61. https://doi.org/10.1386/cjcs_00038_1

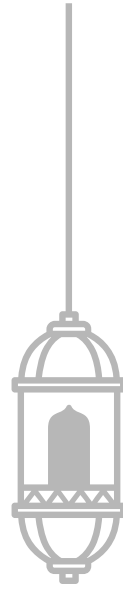
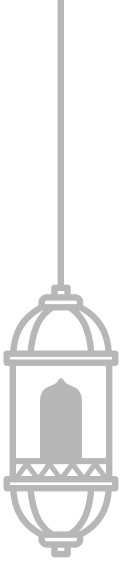
Competencia mediática contra el odio, la violencia discursiva y la confrontación: Análisis documental y de teoría fundamentada

Civila, Sabina., Romero-Rodríguez, Luis Miguel & Aguaded, Ignacio. (2020). Competencia mediática contra el odio, la violencia discursiva y la confrontación: Análisis documental y de teoría fundamentada. *Temas de comunicación*, 41, 92-109.

Language as a creator of realities and public opinion: Critical analysis in the context of the current media ecosystem

Civila, Sabina., Romero-Rodríguez, Luis Miguel & Aguaded, Ignacio. (2020). Language as a creator of realities and public opinion: Critical analysis in the context of the current media ecosystem. *Flascoandes*, 67. <https://doi.org/10.17141/iconos.67.2020.3942>





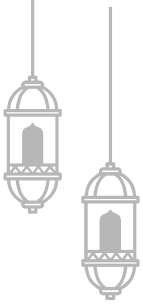


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ABSTRACT

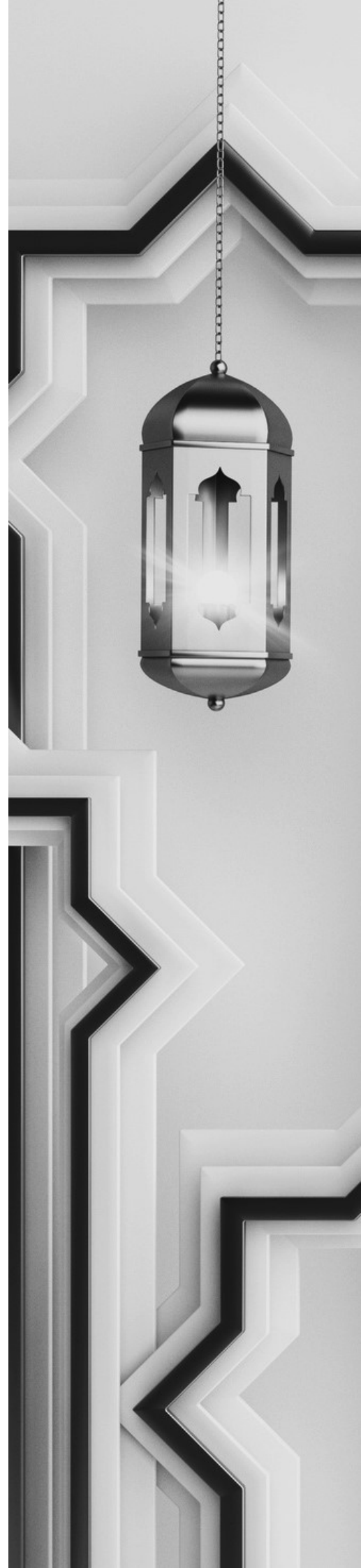
This research focuses on analyzing the content creation practices carried out by the Muslim community in relation to discriminatory narratives that are present on social media, promoted both by traditional western media and by users. Social media offers expression environments that promote the experience of minority groups. In this sense, we should understand how these counter narratives are constructed and disseminated and how minorities take measures to counteract the hegemonic discourses. In this context, media education is considered a relevant tool for empowering members of the Muslim community to share their own narratives and perspectives, enabling them to counter western stereotypes and misinformation. As well as promoting more accurate and diverse representation of the Muslim community on social media. For this purpose, I analyze the affordances of TikTok, including the way in which content is presented and the interaction options. The aim is to understand how they influence the consumption and representation of Islam. Methodologically, I conduct (1) a qualitative literature review to understand the relevance of media education in the context of the representation of the Muslim community on social media; (2) a multimodal qualitative content analysis of 308 TikTok videos, and (3) a total of 10 interviews to extend the understanding of the phenomenon. The results highlight the significance of media education in helping Muslim people deal with discriminatory messages online. According to the data obtained, the strategies currently used on social media promote what we have called *online hate cycle*.

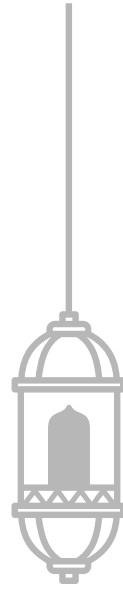
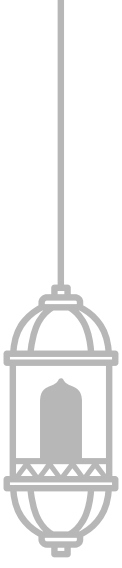
Keywords: Islamophobia, social media, Media Literacy, TikTok, hate speech.

Resumen

La presente investigación se centra en analizar las prácticas de creación de contenido llevadas a cabo por la comunidad musulmana en relación con las narrativas discriminatorias presentes en las redes sociales, promovidas tanto por los medios tradicionales occidentales como por los usuarios. Las redes sociales ofrecen entornos de expresión que promueven la experiencia de los grupos minoritarios. En este sentido, debemos entender cómo se construyen y difunden estas contranarrativas y cómo las minorías toman medidas para contrarrestar los discursos hegemónicos. En este contexto, la educación en medios se considera una herramienta relevante para empoderar a los miembros de la comunidad musulmana y compartan sus propias narrativas y perspectivas, permitiéndoles contrarrestar los estereotipos y la desinformación. Además de promover una representación más precisa y diversa de la comunidad musulmana en las redes sociales. Para ello, se analizan las *affordances* de TikTok, incluida la forma en que se presenta el contenido y las opciones de interacción. El objetivo es comprender cómo estas influyen en el consumo y la representación del islam. Metodológicamente, se realizó (1) una revisión cualitativa de la literatura para comprender la relevancia de la educación en medios en el contexto de la representación de la comunidad musulmana en las redes sociales; (2) un análisis de contenido cualitativo multimodal de 308 videos de TikTok, y (3) un total de 10 entrevistas para ampliar la comprensión del fenómeno. Los resultados destacan la importancia de la educación en medios para ayudar a la comunidad musulmana a lidiar con los mensajes discriminatorios en línea. Según los datos obtenidos, las estrategias que se utilizan actualmente en las redes sociales fomentan lo que hemos denominado *el ciclo del odio online*.

Palabras claves: Islamofobia, Redes Sociales, Alfabetización Mediática, TikTok, discurso de odio.







1. General Introduction



1.1. CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

As a predoctoral fellow, my doctoral research has been part of an ongoing R+D+i project funded by the State Research Agency of the Spanish Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) (<https://bit.ly/3NpQumv>). As part of the #Yougramers project, my doctoral research has focused on exploring the ways in which social media has transformed communication practices, particularly with regard to the hybridization of production and consumption. Through collaboration with an international group of researchers, we explored the social media practices of various minority groups, including migrants, disabled individuals, and other communities. Our goal was to better understand how these groups use social media to express themselves, build communities, and overcome barriers to social inclusion. By investigating these practices, we aim to provide insights into how social media can be harnessed to promote social justice and inclusion while also identifying potential risks and challenges that must be addressed to ensure that all users can participate fully and equitably in online communities. Consequently, my research has focused on the experiences of Muslim community in their use of social media affordances.

My personal motivations played a significant role in driving my research focus on the Muslim community in the Western world. As someone whose partner practices Islam, I have had the opportunity to witness the struggles that many Muslims face in navigating Western societies. This sparked my curiosity to better understand the challenges and obstacles faced by this community, including discrimination, prejudice, and stereotyping.

Furthermore, I am acutely aware of the incomplete and often distorted portrayal of Islam in the media and in wider society. This prompted me to engage in research that offers a more nuanced and respectful understanding of the Muslim community. By delving into their practices of content creation on social media, I hope to shed light on the ways in which Muslims are challenging and resisting discriminatory practices, and how they use social media to promote their own narratives and perspectives.

Ultimately, my research is driven by a desire to contribute to a more just and equitable society, in which all individuals, regardless of their background or beliefs, are able to participate fully and without fear of discrimination or prejudice. Through my work, I hope to offer insights into the experiences of the Muslim community, and how social media can be used as a tool for resistance and empowerment.

Over the years, I have come to realize that my position in society has inherent privileges and advantages that are not afforded to everyone. Through my research, I have become more aware of the ways in which my whiteness and status as a member of the dominant group have contributed to systemic oppression and discrimination against marginalized communities, including the Muslim community.

This deconstruction process has been challenging but necessary, as it has forced me to confront my own limitations and biases. As someone who benefits from the status quo, it is important that I acknowledge the harm that has been done to marginalized groups and work towards being an ally in the struggle for a more just and equitable society.

As an ally to the Muslim community, I recognize that my role is to listen, learn, and take action in support of their struggles. This means working to amplify their voices, challenging islamophobia and other forms of discrimination, and promoting a vision of society in which all individuals are treated with dignity and respect, regardless of their background or beliefs.

Studies conducted during the last two decades have provided evidence that Western Media have focused on the representation of Islam as monolithic, sexist, homogeneous, fanatical, and terrorist (Korteweg, 2008; Ewart, 2012; Ibrahim, 2010; Civila et al., 2020), resulting in demonization, stereotyping, and negative feelings toward the Muslim community (Akbarzadeh & Smith, 2005). Consequently, in the last few years, the rejection of muslims has increased (Bourekba, 2018).

This situation, beyond the social attitude itself against people who profess Islam, generates “the image of the enemy”, a belief of certain groups that their security and values are threatened by another group, leading to the possibility of violence and destruction (Luostarinen, 1989). Because of the western narratives towards people who profess Islam, the term islamophobia came out which according to Bourekba (2018), is a phenomenon distinguished by displays of hatred and hostility practicing acts of discrimination, violence, or exclusion towards people or institutions based on their belonging to and professing Islam.

Despite the development of social media, which has revolutionized the way people interact and build their opinions (Martinez, 2011), it is evident that prejudices and stereotypes about Muslims persist in the digital environment. In recent years, social alarms have increased the ability of these media to increase and propagate islamophobic discourse (Miró, 2016). However, these platforms also offer minorities the opportunity to express themselves, build their identities, and break stereotypes (Rettberg, 2018). Accordingly, this work explores the content creation practices carried out by the Muslim community in relation to the discriminatory narratives that are present on Tik Tok.

Since the mid-2000s, social media has become fashionable and a place that everyone wants to be. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram generate content and keep people on it for many hours. The term “social media” makes one think whether not all media are social in some way. This depends on how social media is understood (Fuchs, 2014). In the present study, social media is understood, according to Fuchs (2017), under the community and communication criteria. Social media is considered a social structure composed of a set of users related to certain criteria. Moreover, it allows the generation of new narratives, identity building, business opportunities, revolutionizing social development, and consolidating existing relationships in the offline world to build new links (Pérez-Escoda & Garcia-Ruiz, 2019). It encompasses all forms of communication that support and complement traditional forms of media but are not considered part of the media itself.

With the development of social media, communication has become more interactive. Users can generate social media content by becoming prosumers and modifying their traditional communication schemes (Castells, 2013). The discourse of mainstream media merges in social media with the content that users generate about a media event that shapes how people understand the world and social issues (Smith et al., 2020).

Consequently, the current media ecosystem offers social intercommunication, which has affected how societies are built, social relations, and the concept of “we” and “they”. The concept of «we» (with integrative subjective characteristics) and «they» (separated from our conception of unity) offers apparent tranquility and favors our belonging to the group as opposed to the opposite group (López, 2015). Otherness thus facilitates the creation of an isolated concept of the experience of a «we» that also helps to define one’s existence more precisely and, in some cases, creates the symbolic framework of «who I am» or «who we are» (Guzmán-Useche, 2018).

In the case of social media, the conceptions created about people who do not belong to the dominant group through the deprivation of identity are shaped by media and users influencing their relations with the rest of society, which is exteriorized in the platforms through specific resources, such as the use of affordances and multimodal languages.

Considering this, social media affordances have implications on sensemaking processes while amplifying strategies and opportunities to distribute new narratives (Smith et al., 2020). However, affordances can also limit content. Social media platforms do not allow content that goes against their guidelines, and a wide range of words, hashtags, and images are banned or classified as sensitive (Fox & McEwan, 2019). In this sense, affordances can be shaped through users’ behaviors and interactions with the platform and between them. That is, the way users combine affordances with their narratives, contributes to creating patterns of digital behavior among members of a group (Khazraee & Novak’s, 2018).

In this research, we understand affordances as tools offered by the platform that enable users to build their own identities, communities, and social relations (Wellman, 2001). Platform affordances are also involved in the construction of a social imaginary and allow us to understand how certain issues are represented (McVeigh-Schultz & Baym, 2015). In this context, social media has emerged as a space of opportunity and risk to face discrimination and othering.

In the light of this, media education is particularly important because negative stereotypes and misinformation about Islam and Muslims are prevalent on social media. Islamophobia can lead to negative attitudes and discrimination towards the Muslim community. Through media education, individuals can recognize and challenge these stereotypes and misinformation, and gain a more accurate and nuanced understanding of the Muslim community (Civila et al., 2020). Additionally, media literacy can also be used to empower members of the Muslim community to share their own narratives and perspectives, enabling them to counter stereotypes and misinformation and promote more accurate and diverse representations of the Muslim community on social media (Civila et al., 2023).

Within this context, we analyze the affordances of TikTok, including the way content is presented and the interaction options, to see how they affect the consumption and representation of Islam and the muslim community. TikTok has been growing and has become one of the most popular social media platforms in the world, shaping engaged communities that respond to the affordances of the app (Zhao & Wagner, 2022). TikTok allows users to share short videos (although the option to create videos lasting up to ten minutes was added in March 2022), which can be edited in the app itself by adding filters, effects, or stickers. The innovations offered by this platform, in terms of content distribution and discovery, have established it as one of the most highly valued platforms. That is why we focused our research on this platform.

As a multidisciplinary researcher, I have participated in various projects and collaborations that have allowed me to expand my knowledge and skills beyond my doctoral research. Working as a research fellow in the #Yougramers project and collaborating with the *Ágora* Research Group (<http://www.uhu.es/agora/>) has provided me with valuable insights into the world of social media influencers, as well as the broader field of communication and Internet studies. Additionally, my role as a technical assistant in the journal 'Comunicar' has given me the opportunity to contribute to the academic community and stay up-to-date with the latest research in this field. Through my dissertation, which consists of three thematic published papers and five complementary pieces, I aim to make a significant contribution to the understanding of the representation of the islam on Tik Tok. You can find further information about my publications and field of research in the following link: <https://sabina-civila.owlstown.net/>

1.1. CONTEXTO DEL ESTUDIO

Como contratada predoctoral FPI, mi investigación ha sido parte de un proyecto de I+D+i financiado por la Agencia Estatal de Investigación del Ministerio de Ciencia, Innovación y Universidades de España y el Fondo Europeo de Desarrollo Regional (FEDER) (<https://bit.ly/3NpQumv>). Como parte del proyecto #Yougramers, mi investigación doctoral se ha centrado en explorar las formas en que las redes sociales han transformado las prácticas de comunicación, especialmente en lo que respecta a la hibridación de la producción y el consumo. A través de la colaboración con un grupo internacional de investigadores e investigadoras, se han explorado las prácticas de redes sociales de varios grupos minoritarios, incluidos migrantes, personas discapacitadas y otras comunidades. El objetivo era comprender cómo estos grupos utilizan las redes sociales para expresarse, construir comunidades y superar barreras para la inclusión social. Al investigar estas prácticas, se busca ofrecer conocimientos sobre cómo las redes sociales pueden ser aprovechadas para promover la justicia social y la inclusión, al tiempo que identificamos los posibles riesgos y desafíos que deben abordarse para garantizar que todos los usuarios puedan participar plenamente y de manera equitativa en las comunidades en línea. En consecuencia, mi investigación se ha centrado en las experiencias que tiene la comunidad musulmana cuando aprovechan las funcionalidades de las plataformas, más concretamente TikTok.

Cabe destacar que mis motivaciones personales jugaron un papel importante en dirigir mi enfoque de investigación hacia la comunidad musulmana en el mundo occidental. Como alguien cuya pareja practica el Islam, he tenido la oportunidad de presenciar las luchas que muchos musulmanes y musulmanas enfrentan en las sociedades occidentales. Lo que despertó mi curiosidad por comprender los desafíos y obstáculos que enfrenta esta comunidad, incluidos la discriminación, los prejuicios y los estereotipos.

Además, soy consciente de la representación incompleta y a menudo distorsionada del Islam en los medios de comunicación y en la sociedad en general. Lo que también me motivó a involucrarme en una investigación que ofrece una comprensión más matizada y respetuosa de la comunidad musulmana. Al adentrarme en sus prácticas de creación de contenido en las redes sociales, se espera arrojar luz sobre las formas en que los musulmanes y musulmanas desafían y resisten las prácticas discriminatorias, y cómo utilizan las redes sociales para promover sus propias narrativas y perspectivas.

En última instancia, la investigación está impulsada por el deseo de contribuir a una sociedad más justa y equitativa, en la que todos los individuos, independientemente de su origen o creencias, puedan participar plenamente y sin temor a la discriminación o los prejuicios. A través de mi trabajo, se espera ofrecer conocimientos sobre las experiencias de la comunidad musulmana y cómo las redes sociales pueden ser utilizadas como herramienta de resistencia y empoderamiento.

A lo largo de la investigación, he comprendido que mi posición en la sociedad conlleva privilegios y ventajas inherentes que no se otorgan a todos y todas. Por tanto, me he vuelto más consciente de las formas en que mi blanquitud y mi condición de miembro del grupo dominante han contribuido a la opresión sistémica y la discriminación contra comunidades marginadas, incluida la comunidad musulmana.

Este proceso de deconstrucción ha sido desafiante pero necesario, ya que me ha obligado a enfrentar mis propias limitaciones y prejuicios. Como alguien que se beneficia del *statu quo*, es importante que reconozca el daño que se ha hecho a grupos marginados y trabaje para ser una aliada en la lucha por una sociedad más justa y equitativa. Como aliada de la comunidad musulmana, reconozco que mi papel es escuchar, aprender y tomar medidas en apoyo de sus luchas. Esto significa trabajar para amplificar sus voces, desafiar la islamofobia y otras formas de discriminación, y promover una visión de la sociedad en la que todos los individuos sean tratados con dignidad y respeto, independientemente de su origen o creencias.

Estudios realizados durante las últimas dos décadas han proporcionado evidencia de que los medios occidentales se han centrado en la representación del Islam como monolítico, sexista, homogéneo, fanático y terrorista (Korteweg, 2008; Ewart, 2012; Ibrahim, 2010; Civila et al., 2020), lo que ha resultado en la demonización, la estereotipación y los sentimientos negativos hacia la comunidad musulmana (Akbarzadeh y Smith, 2005). En consecuencia, en los últimos años, el rechazo hacia los musulmanes ha aumentado (Bourekba, 2018).

Esta situación, más allá de la actitud social contra las personas que profesan el Islam, genera "*the image of the enemy*", una creencia de ciertos grupos de que su seguridad y valores están amenazados por otro grupo, lo que conduce a la posibilidad de violencia y destrucción (Luostarinen, 1989). Debido a las narrativas occidentales hacia las personas que profesan el Islam, surgió el término islamofobia que, según Bourekba (2018), es un fenómeno caracterizado por manifestaciones de odio y hostilidad que practican actos de discriminación, violencia o exclusión hacia personas o instituciones basadas en su pertenencia y profesión del Islam.

A pesar del desarrollo de las redes sociales, que ha revolucionado la forma en que las personas interactúan y construyen sus opiniones (Martinez, 2011), es evidente que los prejuicios y estereotipos sobre los y las musulmanes persisten en el entorno digital. En los últimos años, las alarmas sociales han aumentado la capacidad de estos medios para aumentar y propagar el discurso islamóforo (Miró, 2016). Sin embargo, estas plataformas también ofrecen a las minorías la oportunidad de expresarse, construir sus identidades y romper estereotipos (Rettberg, 2018). En consecuencia, este trabajo explora las prácticas de creación de contenido realizadas por la comunidad musulmana en relación con las narrativas discriminatorias presentes en TikTok.

Desde mediados de los 2000, las redes sociales están de moda y son un lugar al que todos quieren pertenecer. Plataformas como Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, TikTok e Instagram generan contenido y mantienen a las personas en ellas durante muchas horas. El término «redes sociales» hace pensar si todos los medios son sociales de alguna manera. Esto depende de cómo se entiendan las redes sociales (Fuchs, 2014). En el presente estudio, las redes sociales se entienden, según Fuchs (2017), bajo los criterios de comunidad y comunicación. Se considera a las redes sociales como una estructura social compuesta por un conjunto de usuarios relacionados con ciertos criterios. Y que además, permite la generación de nuevas narrativas, la construcción de identidades, oportunidades comerciales, revoluciona el desarrollo social y consolida las relaciones existentes en el mundo offline para construir nuevos vínculos (Pérez-Escoda & Garcia-Ruiz, 2019). Abarca todas las formas de comunicación que apoyan y complementan las formas tradicionales de medios pero no se consideran parte de los medios en sí mismos.

Con el desarrollo de las redes sociales, la comunicación se ha vuelto más interactiva. Los usuarios pueden generar contenidos, convertirse en prosumidores y modificar sus esquemas tradicionales de comunicación (Castells, 2013). El discurso de los medios principales se fusiona en las redes sociales con el contenido que los usuarios generan sobre un evento mediático que da forma a cómo las personas comprenden el mundo y los problemas sociales (Smith et al., 2020).

Consecuentemente, el ecosistema mediático actual ofrece una intercomunicación social, que ha afectado cómo se construyen las sociedades, las relaciones sociales y el concepto de «nosotros» y «ellos». El concepto de «nosotros» (con características subjetivas integradoras) y «ellos» (separados de nuestra concepción de unidad) ofrece una tranquilidad aparente y favorece nuestra pertenencia al grupo en oposición al grupo contrario (López, 2015). La alteridad facilita así la creación de un concepto aislado de la experiencia de un «nosotros» que también ayuda a definir con más precisión la propia existencia y, en algunos casos, crea el marco simbólico de «quién soy» o «quiénes somos» (Guzmán-Useche, 2018).

En el caso de las redes sociales, las concepciones creadas sobre las personas que no pertenecen al grupo dominante a través de la privación de identidad son moldeadas por los medios y los usuarios influyendo en sus relaciones con el resto de la sociedad, lo cual se exterioriza en las plataformas a través de recursos específicos, como el uso de *affordances* y lenguajes multimodales.

Considerando esto, las *affordances* de las redes sociales tienen implicaciones en los procesos de construcción de significado al tiempo que amplifican estrategias y oportunidades para distribuir nuevas narrativas (Smith et al., 2020). Sin embargo, las *affordances* también pueden limitar el contenido.

Las plataformas de redes sociales no permiten contenido que vaya en contra de sus pautas, y una amplia gama de palabras, hashtags e imágenes están prohibidas o clasificadas como sensibles (Fox & McEwan, 2019). En este sentido, las *affordances* pueden ser moldeadas a través de los comportamientos de los usuarios y las interacciones con la plataforma y entre ellos. Es decir, la forma en que los usuarios combinan las *affordances* con sus narrativas contribuye a crear patrones de comportamiento digital entre los miembros de un grupo (Khazraee & Novak, 2018).

En esta investigación, se entienden las *affordances* como herramientas ofrecidas por la plataforma que permiten a los usuarios construir sus propias identidades, comunidades y relaciones sociales (Wellman, 2001). Las *affordances* de la plataforma también están involucradas en la construcción de un imaginario social y nos permiten entender cómo se representan ciertos temas (McVeigh-Schultz y Baym, 2015). En este contexto, las redes sociales han surgido como un espacio de oportunidad y riesgo para enfrentar la discriminación y la alterización.

A la luz de esto, la educación mediática es particularmente importante para combatir los estereotipos negativos y la desinformación sobre el Islam y los musulmanes que prevalece en las redes sociales. La islamofobia puede llevar a actitudes negativas y discriminación hacia la comunidad musulmana. Por tanto, a través de la educación mediática, las personas pueden reconocer y desafiar estos estereotipos y desinformación, y obtener una comprensión más precisa y matizada de la comunidad musulmana (Civila et al., 2020). Además, la alfabetización mediática también puede ser utilizada para empoderar a los miembros de la comunidad musulmana para compartir sus propias narrativas y perspectivas, permitiéndoles contrarrestar estereotipos y desinformación y promover representaciones más precisas y diversas de la comunidad en las redes sociales (Civila et al., 2023).

Dentro de este contexto, analizamos las *affordances* de TikTok, incluida la forma en que se presenta el contenido y las opciones de interacción, para ver cómo afectan al consumo y la representación del Islam a la comunidad musulmana. TikTok ha ido creciendo y se ha convertido en una de las plataformas de redes sociales más populares del mundo, dando forma a comunidades comprometidas que responden a las *affordances* de la aplicación (Zhao y Wagner, 2022). TikTok permite a los usuarios compartir videos cortos (aunque la opción de crear videos de hasta diez minutos se agregó en marzo de 2022), que pueden ser editados en la propia aplicación agregando filtros, efectos o stickers. Las innovaciones ofrecidas por esta plataforma, en términos de distribución y descubrimiento de contenido, la han establecido como una de las plataformas más valoradas. Es por eso que centramos nuestra investigación en esta plataforma.

Como investigadora multidisciplinaria, he participado en diversos proyectos y colaboraciones que me han permitido ampliar mis conocimientos y habilidades más allá de mi investigación doctoral. Trabajar como becaria de investigación en el proyecto #Yougramers y colaborar con el Grupo de Investigación Ágora (<http://www.uhu.es/agora/>) me ha proporcionado valiosas ideas sobre el mundo de los influenciadores en redes sociales, así como en el campo más amplio de estudios de comunicación e Internet. Además, mi papel como asistente técnica en la revista 'Comunicar' me ha dado la oportunidad de contribuir a la comunidad académica y mantenerme al día con las últimas investigaciones en este campo. A través de mi tesis, que consta de tres artículos temáticos publicados y cinco piezas complementarias, mi objetivo es realizar una contribución significativa a la comprensión de la representación del Islam en TikTok. Puede encontrar más información sobre mis publicaciones y campo de investigación en el siguiente enlace: <https://sabina-civila.owlstown.net/>





1.2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1.2.1. WEST MEDIA AND THE FRAMING OF ISLAM

In the field of communication, framing is based on how social problems are presented in the media and which ideas are spread (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). Thus, it is the process through which people and societies create conceptions of reality (Tan et al., 2021). Framing refers to the construction of narratives with specific intentions, emphasizing certain aspects of the story and omitting or obscuring others; affecting how audiences perceive social reality (Entman, 1993). The development of social media has modified the way framing is understood and how media shapes people's thoughts (Bucher & Helmond, 2018).

Studies conducted during the last two decades have provided evidence that West Media has focused on the representation of Islam as monolithic, sexist, homogeneous, fanatical, and terrorist (Korteweg, 2008; Ewart, 2012; Ibrahim, 2010; Civila et al., 2020), resulting in demonization, stereotyping, and negative feelings toward the Muslim community (Akbarzadeh & Smith, 2005). The process of demonization through the media is mainly carried out by portraying Muslims as executors of criminal acts, but never as victims, in addition to showing them as disrespectful people who have difficulties integrating. According to Carrion and Ali (2018), some of the malpractices that encourage the demonization of Islam are sensational and exaggerated headlines, excessive use of false science (i.e., use of unreasonable statistical figures, misuse of Arabic vocabulary and concepts, disinformation, through the use of few sources and no verification of facts, excessive use of generalizations, a sexist portrayal of Muslims, instrumentalization of Islam, and use of references to Islam as a military ideology).

The construction of this imaginary about Muslim people in the West occurred centuries ago as a consequence of colonization (Said, 1978), which has caused discrimination and exclusion of Muslim people (FRA, 2017; Adelman & Verkuyten, 2020). The approach portrayed in the media has a direct impact on how the general public views Muslims as a whole and Islam as a religion. Prior studies have demonstrated that the media's portrayal of Muslims, which is characterized by negative, is eminently disproportionately strong globally compared to the attention paid to adherents of other religions (Rahman, 2022).

This way of presenting information on Islam is encouraging hate speech, as well as Islamophobia, which inevitably triggers a social alert. According to Sahagún (2018), the identification of negative values with Islam and the people who practice this religion is the most severe expression of Islamophobia.

In this study, as mentioned before, Islamophobia is understood according to Bourekba (2018), who describes it as a phenomenon distinguished by displays of hatred and hostility practicing acts of discrimination, violence, or exclusion towards people or institutions based on their belonging to and professing Islam.

In this context, where Islamophobic discourses are spread, crimes against muslims have increased in recent years in Spain (Bayrakli & Hafez, 2022). Therefore, the creation of observatories and organizations that work to reverse the reductionist and demonizing tendency of the media's treatment of Muslims has emerged (Ethical Journalism Network, 2019), as well as, individual counter discourses on social media.

The rise of social media platforms has provided space for Muslim individuals and communities to challenge these narratives and perspectives (Civila & Jaramillo-Dent, 2022). Currently, the discourse on mainstream media depends not only on the frames of the information, but also on the participation and interaction of users and the affordances of the platforms (Civila et al., 2024). Therefore, the construction of the social imaginary depends not only on media, but also on content creators, users, and platform affordances.

Framing on each social media platform is affected by its specific affordances (Hermida & Mellado, 2020). Each social media platform offers different affordances to shape reality and influences how the audience perceives information (Yarchi et al., 2021). For the purposes of this research, we consider the social constructivist functions of affordances as tools offered by the platform that enable users to build their own identities, communities, and social relationships (Wellman, 2001). In this sense, affordances can be shaped through users' behaviors and interactions with the platform and between them. That is, the way in which the users combine affordances with their narratives, contribute to creating a meaning in the social and cultural context (McVeigh-Schultz & Baim, 2015).



1.2.2.COUNTERING MISCONCEPTIONS: MUSLIMS VOICES ON SOCIAL MEDIA

The impact of new media has changed the way people communicate, live, work, and think. We are constantly connecting and exchanging information (Bonilla-del-Rio & Aguaded, 2018). Social media platforms, as well as research on this topic, are growing every day. The advent of social media has provided an alternative space for marginalized communities to present their own perspectives and challenge dominant narratives. The use of social media platforms has allowed for the creation and dissemination of counter-narratives that challenge the stereotypes perpetuated by mainstream media (Tufekci, 2018). Therefore, there are studies that show the dangers and damage caused by social media to society (Matamoros-Fernandez & Farkas, 2021), and others that support the opportunities offered by their use (Jaramillo-Dent et al., 2022; Civila & Jaramillo-Dent, 2022).

Regarding the former, people express their emotions and thoughts through social media, and as a result, countless comments play with the stereotypical portrayals of various groups, which helps normalize negative attitudes such as racism, xenophobia, and transphobia (Chovanec, 2021). Although the platform policies have attempted to reduce it, the expansion of hate speech, false news, and hoaxes has become apparent in the post-truth era and is unquestionably becoming a phenomenon (Bourgonje, et al., 2018). Individuals who use social media to spread this type of message employ various strategies to persuade others who are uninterested in the subject, gradually and covertly adding hate. They employ appealing content, such as popular songs, memes, games, and other affordances that support the hegemonic discourse, in order to reach a larger audience and spread hatred (Wachs, et al., 2021). The ways in which these meanings are constructed can establish otherness, emphasizing the differences between communities (Orkin & Joubin, 2019). Furthermore, islamophobic content has been found to bypass moderation policies on social media (Civila et al., 2020), leading to the demonization of islam and social conflict. This is the reason why it is important to know how islamophobic discourses are built and how muslims face discriminatory and hate speech, keeping in mind their identity.

When examining the role of social media in the representation of Islam, it is important to consider the theory of otherness, which views "otherness" as a form of social exclusion and symbolic violence perpetuated through media constructions of reality. This theory places particular emphasis on the ethics and aesthetics of language and how they contribute to the materialization of identity differences. The concept of otherness has been constantly reformulated in response to the changing landscape of multicultural societies, globalization, and the rise of social networks. Scholars such as Rozuel (2014), Romero-Rodriguez et al. (2021), and Jaramillo-Dent and Rodriguez-Pérez (2021) have all explored this concept, highlighting the ways in which it has been used to understand the representation of minority groups, including Muslims, in the media.

By examining the role of otherness in shaping media representations of Islam on social media, we can gain a better understanding of how these platforms perpetuate or challenge negative stereotypes, and contribute to the wider discourse surrounding Muslim identity in contemporary society. During the research, this term is used to refer to the restrictive and dehumanizing treatment that is instrumentalized from the media and political discursive podium and established in public opinion to materialize a symbolic division between us (Westerns) and the "others" (Muslims).

Regarding opportunities, the emergence of new media, and especially the increasing development of tools derived from social media, has revealed that there is a new digital universe of opinion that can be a tool to combat these threats and make their culture and identity visible (Lai et al., 2020). Social media have contributed to democratizing information, generating a two-way communication process that significantly changes participation, since they become a virtual space where citizens can expose issues not included in traditional media and freely express their opinions (Alonso, 2016). Nowadays, social media offers a space for minorities to express themselves (Echchaibi, 2013), thus reflecting how Muslim people fight against discourses issued by traditional media, which are considered to be hegemonic.

Thus, we identify a generation of Muslim individuals in the West who are publicly committed to negotiating their religious values with modern societies and altering Western narratives by promoting the relationship between Islam and modernity (Echchaibi, 2013; Göle, 2002). Through this engagement, we observe profiles on blogs and social media, whose mission is to challenge the representation of Islam in mainstream media, such as the Muslimah Media Watch or Yallah blog (Echchaibi, 2013; Evolvi, 2017). It is also remarkable the emergence of movements such as #Noenminombre (#Notinmyname in English) or #MuslimsareNOTterrorist following the waves of attacks that occurred in Europe during 2016–2018.

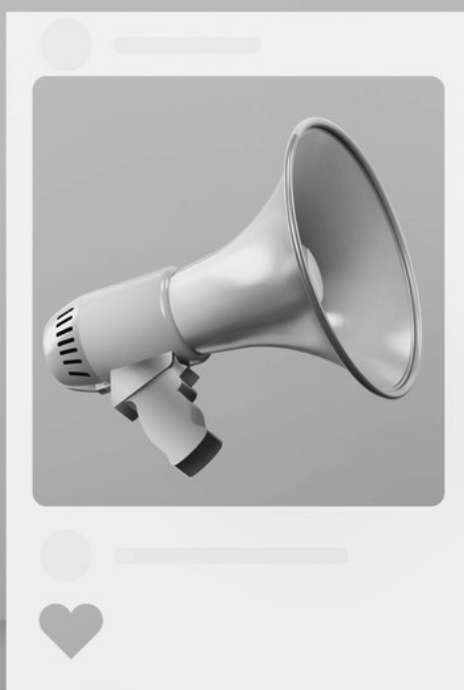
Tik Tok, in particular, has become a popular platform for Muslim individuals and communities to share their experiences and perspectives, and to challenge the negative stereotypes often associated with Islam and Muslims (Zaid et al., 2022). Tik Tok has also been found to be an effective tool in promoting inclusivity and diversity. A study by the Pew Research Center found that TikTok users are more likely to be exposed to diverse perspectives and ideas than users of other social media platforms (Abidin, 2021). Additionally, Tufekci (2018) praised the platform's algorithm for promoting diversity and inclusivity by displaying content from a diverse pool of creators, irrespective of their follower count. However, the New York Times conducted a study in 2021, revealing that TikTok's algorithm prioritizes content from creators who fit the conventional beauty standards of being white, thin, and attractive (Karizat, 2021). Therefore, while social media platforms have the potential to challenge negative stereotypes and enhance inclusivity, it is crucial to recognize that they are not immune to their own biases and limitations.

It is important to consider critical perspectives on the possibilities of social media representation for significant social changes. For instance, sociologist Herman Gray (2013) argues that the current proliferation of minority identities on social media signals the increased visibility of these groups, but no real recognition.

The celebration of diversity, he continues, is framed in a neoliberal framework rather than in an actual recognition of the struggles and structural issues suffered by individuals within minority groups. Therefore, according to Gray (2013), social media fails to offer space for these groups to challenge existing domination structures.

Furthermore, some authors have argued that identity is shaped by the beliefs and discourses that surround individuals. For instance, Weber and Mitchell (2008) argued that young people's online identities comprise both their own self-perception and that of their followers and viewers. In relation to Islamic identity construction, Meer (2014) suggests that Muslim self-consciousness develop around islamophobic beliefs and discourse.

In the light of this, media literacy can be used to recognize and challenge harmful stereotypes and misinformation in the media. This can include analyzing the language used to describe Muslim individuals and communities, identifying and challenging the sources of information, and recognizing the ways in which the media can shape public perceptions and attitudes. By developing media literacy skills, individuals can become better equipped to understand and critique the ways in which Islamophobia is perpetuated on social media, and to take action to counter these discourses and create new ones.



1.2.3. Media Literacy as a Tool to Mitigate Islamophobia

As previously stated, despite the fact that social media allows for the creation of alternative narratives to those that are dominant, some studies have found that counter-narratives are based on hate speech. Therefore, media literacy education is essential, as it allows minority groups to take action to counter these discourses and create new ones (Civila et al., 2020). Media literacy refers to providing the necessary skills for intelligent and responsible use of the Internet and other devices. According to Brown (2014), through media education, people acquire the ability to access technologies safely, search the Internet for information through verified and official platforms, protect their personal data, use social media responsibly and know that there are fake profiles, and understand copyright and content sharing. Media literacy is the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and communicate information and ideas through various forms of media.

The acquisition of this knowledge allows people to develop critical thinking about the media and apply social criticism to their educational experience (Kellner & Gooyang, 2010). Once digital knowledge is developed, it can be said that a person is digitally competent, and according to various studies, it would help reduce discrimination and social injustice, as they would have a greater understanding of how meanings are constructed through social media (Hobbs & Jenses, 2009). In addition, different projects carried out in classrooms, such as that carried out by Erstad et al. (2021), demonstrate that when media education tools are applied, students reflect on how to be socially active, opposing stereotypes, discrimination or violence. Therefore, teaching the good use of digital media can not only prevent discrimination but also turn users into agents of social change, facing the media responsibly and effectively (Kumari, 2020).

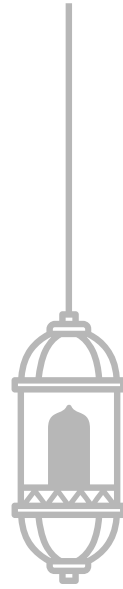
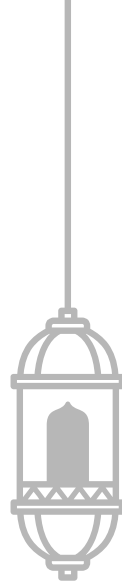
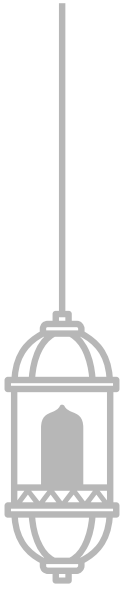
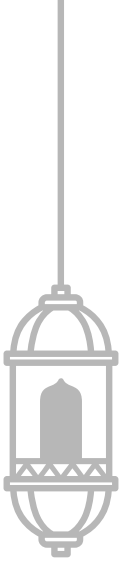
When discussing islamophobia in relation to educommunication, it is important to understand the connection between the ethics of speech and media literacy. Islamophobia is a serious problem in today's society as it can lead to violence and social exclusion. By connecting the ethics of speech and media literacy, islamophobia can be prevented from spreading and promoting values such as transparency, plurality, and equality in dignity (Barbas, 2012). Additionally, by teaching people to be self-critical, we can empower them to identify and reject hates against muslims (Moeller, 2009). In this way, we can work towards a more inclusive and equitable society, where everyone is treated with dignity and respect.

Hence, the connection between media literacy and the ethics of speech is important because it allows us to address the problem of islamophobia in society. By promoting media literacy, minorities can be empowered to identify and reject speech (Civila et al., 2020).

In this context, media literacy is considered a relevant tool for empowering members of the Muslim community to share their own narratives and perspectives, enabling them to counter stereotypes and misinformation, and promote more accurate and diverse representations of the Muslim community on social media (Civila et al., 2023).

In this research, we understand media literacy as important for critically evaluating and understanding social media messages, including those related to Islam and Muslims. For this reason, a literature review of the terms “media education” and its evolution over the last 20 years has been carried out. This allows us to have a wider perspective of the importance of media literacy to access, participate, create, re-signify, and interpret media messages as proactive digital citizens (Shinta et al., 2019; Fardiah et al., 2020; Arik, Arik, 2021).







2. AIM AND SCOPE



2. AIM AND SCOPE

2.1. SCOPE OF THE RESEARCH

As previously explained, this dissertation is part of an ongoing R+D+i project funded by the State Research Agency of The Spanish Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities. This project is within the field of Media Literacy and focuses on exploring the new ways of communication in which production and consumption are hybridized. Thus, this research is carried out under one of the main objectives of this project #Yougrammers.

- *To analyze the modes of communication, typologies, and profiles, as well as innovation, dissemination, and participation of representative leaders in transmedia contexts.*

In this project, I was part of a subgroup devoted to minorities and people at risk of social exclusion. According to Campbell and Evolvi (2020, p. 8), minority groups include those who are stigmatized by society; for example, Muslim people living in non-Muslim countries. Therefore, in the present study, Muslim people -as represented in Western- are considered to belong to a minority group. Hence, the **research question** that supports this research is: **How do Muslim creators confront the dominant representations of Islam on Tik Tok?**

This question is particularly important, given the increasing prevalence of social media in shaping public opinion and the need for minorities to have a platform to share their own perspectives and narratives. To answer this question, specific objectives were set up that led us to understand the studied phenomenon with more precision and depth:

Objective 1: To understand the role of media literacy in mitigating islamophobia.

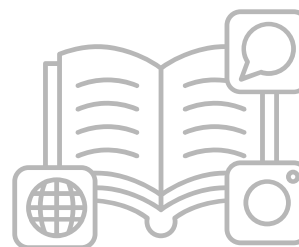
Objective 2: To explore how the affordances of TikTok enable muslims to represent islam.

Objective 3: To identify the discourse strategies used by muslim community to confront dominant representations of islam.

By achieving these objectives, we can build a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomena under study. When setting objectives for a research project, it is important to consider the broader context of the research field. This includes understanding the current state of knowledge in the field as well as the key research questions that are currently being addressed. Considering this broader context, we have published three thematic articles whose objectives are aligned with the overall goals of this research and contribute to the advancement of knowledge in a meaningful way.



2.2. ARTICLES OF THE DISSERTATION



2.2.1. NEW CHALLENGES FOR media education

The present article aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the state of research on media literacy, particularly in relation to the challenges it faces in contemporary society regarding the digital and ethical–critical (self-) management of individual and collective representations. To achieve the first goal of this dissertation, the article focuses on conducting a literature review on media literacy. By analyzing existing scholarship on the subject, this study aims to deepen our understanding of media literacy and to clarify the research focus. Moreover, this study also seeks to contribute to the advancement of knowledge by revealing the progress made in the field of media literacy and identifying the areas that have received the most attention from scholars. By examining which aspects of media literacy have been studied so far, this study sheds light on the current state of research related to media literacy and representations on social media. In particular, this study aims to highlight the potential of media literacy in mitigating the negative effects of the representation of Islam on social media.

Paradigm changes and new challenges for media education: Review and science mapping (2000-2021)

Ignacio Aguaded; Sabina Civila; Arantxa Vizcaino-Verdú

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Recommended citation:
 Aguaded, Ignacio; Civila, Sabina; Vizcaino-Verdú, Arantxa (2022). "Paradigm changes and new challenges for media education: Review and science mapping (2000-2021)". *Profesional de la Información*, v. 31, n. 6, e310606.
<https://doi.org/10.3145/eipi.2022.nov.06>

Article received on May 9th 2022
 Approved on June 16th 2022



Ignacio Aguaded
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0229-1118>
 Universidad de Huelva
 Departamento de Educación
 Campus de El Carmen
 Avda. Tres de Marzo, s/n
 21071 Huelva, Spain
 aguaded@uhu.es



Sabina Civila
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6059-9893>
 Universidad de Huelva
 Departamento de Educación
 Campus de El Carmen
 Avda. Tres de Marzo, s/n
 21071 Huelva, Spain
 sebi.civila@deedu.uhu.es



Arantxa Vizcaino-Verdú
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9399-2077>
 Universidad de Huelva
 Departamento de Pedagogía
 Av. de las Fuerzas Armadas, s/n
 21007 Huelva, Spain
 arantxa.vizcaino@deedu.uhu.es

Abstract

Information, communication, and digitalization technologies have driven the unlimited access to knowledge, thereby promoting creativity, economic and cultural development, and the emergence of a global world at breakneck speed over recent decades. Across its multiple dynamics, this digital revolution has opened new educational opportunities that are closely connected to emerging technologies and, recently, to artificial intelligence. These advances have had an unexpected impact on people's lives, altering the values of society and our understanding of the role of education and the modern school in this scenario of global communication. In this context, media education arises from the clear influence of electronic devices and digital technology on society. The aim of this study is to review our understanding of the scientific relevance of the terms "media education" and "edurocommunication" during the last two decades to describe its evolution on the basis of its terms, locations, thematic stages, and methodological approaches using a systematic quantitative–qualitative review of 596 articles collected from the Web of Science between 2000 and 2021. The results suggest that such scientific interest can be divided into two stages, viz. reflections on media education in its terminological diversity (2000–2012) and measurement, implementation, training, and edurocommunication digitization in terms of technological–digital development (2013–2021). We conclude that studies in this transdisciplinary field, which have historically been spread across North and South America, Europe, North Africa, and the North/South East Asia–Pacific region, have broadened their perspective from early criticism of media education to consider the "globalization" of media education, directing interest toward the cultural digitization of the Global South, algorithmic literacy, and the digital and ethical–critical (self-)management of individual and collective identity.

Keywords

Media education; Educommunication; Media literacy; Media competency; Scientific mapping; Social media; ICT; Globalization; Digital culture; Digital literacy; Review article.

e310606

Profesional de la Información, 2022, v. 31, n. 6 e-ISSN: 1699-2407 1



2.2.2. IDENTITY IN THE FACE OF DISCRIMINATION

The present study offers a case analysis of the phenomenon of mixed couples and the representations of Islam on TikTok. The research sheds light on the preferred self-representations of mixed couples, as well as the discursive strategies employed by content creators on TikTok toward Muslims. This article allows for an exploration of the unique ways in which Muslims, as members of mixed couples, use the affordances of this platform within the context of their respective communities of creators, societal structures, and extant cultural, national, and religious disparities. Additionally, the analysis considers the responses of surrounding communities to these self-representations as evidenced through the couples' content. As these couples view Islam as a crucial aspect of their relationship, the study also examines how TikTok's affordances are utilized to engage with prevailing perceptions of "otherness" in both societies. It is important to note that this research has received the Top Student Paper Award issued by the Intercultural Communication Division of The International Communication Association (ICA) in 2022.

Article

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#Mixedcouples on TikTok: Performative Hybridization and Identity in the Face of Discrimination

Sabina Civila¹ and Daniela Jaramillo-Dent²

Social Media + Society
 July-September 2022, 1-14
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 DOI: 10.1177/20564965221123464
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Abstract

Spanish-Moroccan mixed couples exemplify a case of cultural hybridization that reflects the colonial past between these two countries. In this context, social media is a space of opportunity and risk to face discrimination and othering. In this article, we draw upon postcolonial theory and Internet studies to consider TikTok affordances as tools that are relevant to understand how cultural, national, and religious identities are shaped and presented in digital spaces. In this sense, this study constitutes the first exploratory analysis of Moroccan-Spanish mixed couples' (self)representations and identity construction as reflected by their TikTok content. The memetic and intersectional aspects of the mixed-couple identity emerge as central in the convergent nature of the platform and their lived experiences. Through an initial analysis of 8,653 TikTok videos, we identified 6 creator accounts with more than 10K followers to conduct a deeper multimodal content and discourse analysis of 146 videos. This enabled us to explore how these creators portray their hybrid identity through short, vertical videos harnessing TikTok's vernaculars and affordances. The results enable us to propose the concept of performative hybridization, which involves discursive markers within these couples' TikTok content that reflect a fluid integration of two cultures, while the pervading visual and narrative components reflect the dominance of one set of identity traits over the other. In this case, Moroccan culture is more prevalent.

Keywords

mixed couples, TikTok, cultural hybridization, affordances, social media, Islamophobia

Introduction

This study explores Moroccan-Spanish mixed couples' (self) representations and hybridized identity constructions by creating content on TikTok. We delve into the ways in which they harness the unique affordances of this platform within its communities of creators, larger societal structures, and existing cultural, national, and religious differences. The article derives from a qualitative, multimodal content analysis of TikTok videos created by six *tiktokers* who are part of a mixed couple with a following of more than 10K. The analysis draws upon postcolonial theory situated in platform and Internet studies that are applicable to the TikTok context and is centered on two analytical dimensions: (1) uses of TikTok affordances for identity building and representation and (2) uses of TikTok affordances to respond and interact with existing colonial beliefs about them.

Since 2008, the Moroccan community has expanded in Spain and according to the Spanish Statistical Office (2020) it is the largest foreign community in this European country.

Moreover, research suggests that there is an important relationship between immigration and a higher number of mixed couples (Rodríguez-García et al., 2021). Romantic relationships between Spanish and Moroccan individuals reflect structural changes that emerged in the times of the Spanish Protectorate (Maseo-Dieste, 2012) but continue to expand in contemporary society due to increased immigration—and forms of coupling—that reflect cultural hybridization and the increased availability of communication technologies (Steingress, 2012).

In this context of migratory flows and centuries-old colonial relationships, TikTok emerges as one of the most

¹Universidad de Huelva, Spain

²Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam, The Netherlands

Corresponding Author:

Sabina Civila, Universidad de Huelva, Avda. de las Fuerzas Armadas s/n, 21071 Huelva, Spain.
 Email: sabicivila@gmail.com
 Twitter: @Scivila

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2.2.3. #ISLAMTERRORISM ON TIKTOK

The present study addresses the second and third objectives of this dissertation by analyzing the discourse of the Muslim community in response to the representation of Islam in mainstream media as being associated with terrorism. Specifically, the article investigates the use of TikTok as a platform for Muslims to engage with these discourses, and examines how they use the affordances of TikTok to question and challenge the prevailing narratives. By examining the content produced by Muslim TikTok creators, we seek to evaluate the potential of this platform as a tool for fostering dialogue and generating bidirectional discourse on issues related to religion, politics, culture, and society.

Through a comprehensive analysis of the discourses present in Muslim TikTok content, we aim to shed light on the ways in which Muslim creators use this platform to challenge hegemonic representations of Islam and to offer alternative perspectives on this religion and its associated cultural practices.

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Politics and Governance (ISSN: 2183-2463)
2023, Volume 11, Issue 2, Pages X-X
<https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v11i2.6299>

Article

Social Media and Otherness: The Case of #Islamterrorism on TikTok

Sabina Civila *, Mónica Bonilla-del-Río, and Ignacio Aguaded

Department of Education, Huelva University, Spain

* Corresponding author (sabi.civila@dedu.uhu.es)

Submitted: 21 October 2022 | Accepted: 26 December 2022 | Published: in press

Abstract

Social media and their participatory characteristics promote the construction of meanings that differ from those emitted by mainstream media outlets, becoming a tool that enables a reconfiguration of the dominant discourses. TikTok offers unique possibilities to confront the neoliberal imaginary and open a space for debate, incorporating political viewpoints and establishing itself as a new communication scenario. Regarding news about jihadism, many researchers have observed that those who practice Islam are classified as a monolithic entity, and this entire religious group is generalized as a threat to modern societies. The main objective of our research is thus to know the discourses used on TikTok to respond to the binomial Islam = terrorism spread by mainstream media and the affordances of this platform used to challenge this misconception. Using the snowball method, a multimodal analysis was conducted by identifying TikTok videos with the hashtags #yihadista, #yihad, and #islamterrorismo (in its English and Spanish versions) to explore the uses of the TikTok platform. The resulting selection criteria included: (a) content related to mainstream media discourses on jihadism, (b) discussion of a topic related to Islam and terrorism, and (c) where the content creator declares him/herself to be a Muslim. In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted to provide an enhanced understanding of how the media promote the need to generate a counter-narrative on TikTok. The results reveal that discourses from Muslims that combat Islam = terrorism discourses are constructed within the spiral of the dominant narrative, thus visualizing the negative discourses about Islam.

Keywords

Islam; media; prosumers; religion; social media; TikTok

Issue

This article is part of the issue "Hate Speech, Demonization, Polarization, and Political Social Responsibility" edited by Luis M. Romero-Rodríguez (Rey Juan Carlos University), Pedro Cuesta-Valiño (University of Alcañiz), and Bárbara Castillo-Abdul (Rey Juan Carlos University).

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1. Introduction

This article analyzes the discourses of the Muslim community in relation to the messages transmitted in mainstream media about Islam and its association with the concept of terrorism. Specifically, we evaluate in depth their use of TikTok as a platform to respond to these discourses and how they take advantage of the affordances offered by this platform to question them and share their viewpoints. In this sense, we understand mainstream media as conventional news sources (newspaper, television, radio) that "are trapped within entrenched norms and values that predispose a certain perspec-

tive of the world" (Jean-Kenix, 2011, p. 2). In addition, mainstream media are considered credible, serious, and influential, so they could have a strong effect on viewers (Gondwe & Bhowmik, 2022). We thus explore the potential of TikTok as a medium that favors expression and allows bidirectional discourses, thereby opening a debate on religious, political, cultural, and social issues. This goes beyond approaches where the audience simply consumes information passively from the main agents (political leaders and mainstream media), turning them into prosumers who generate content and participate in conversations through TikTok. Using a qualitative approach, we carry out a multimodal content

Politics and Governance, 2023, Volume 11, Issue 2, Pages X-X

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3. METHODOLOGY



3. METHODOLOGY

In terms of methodology, to answer the research question, we employed a literature review (3.1), multimodal content analysis (3.2), and interviews (3.3). The multimodal analysis approach allows us to analyze various modes of communication on social media, such as visual, textual, and interactive, to interpret both verbal and nonverbal data (Dicks, 2019; Korhonen, 2010). This method enables us to explore how the Muslim community uses TikTok's affordances to confront the dominant representations of Islam in Tik Tok. By analyzing the content produced by the Muslim community on TikTok, we can gain insights into the ways in which they use the platform to amplify their voices and promote a more diverse and nuanced understanding of their religion.

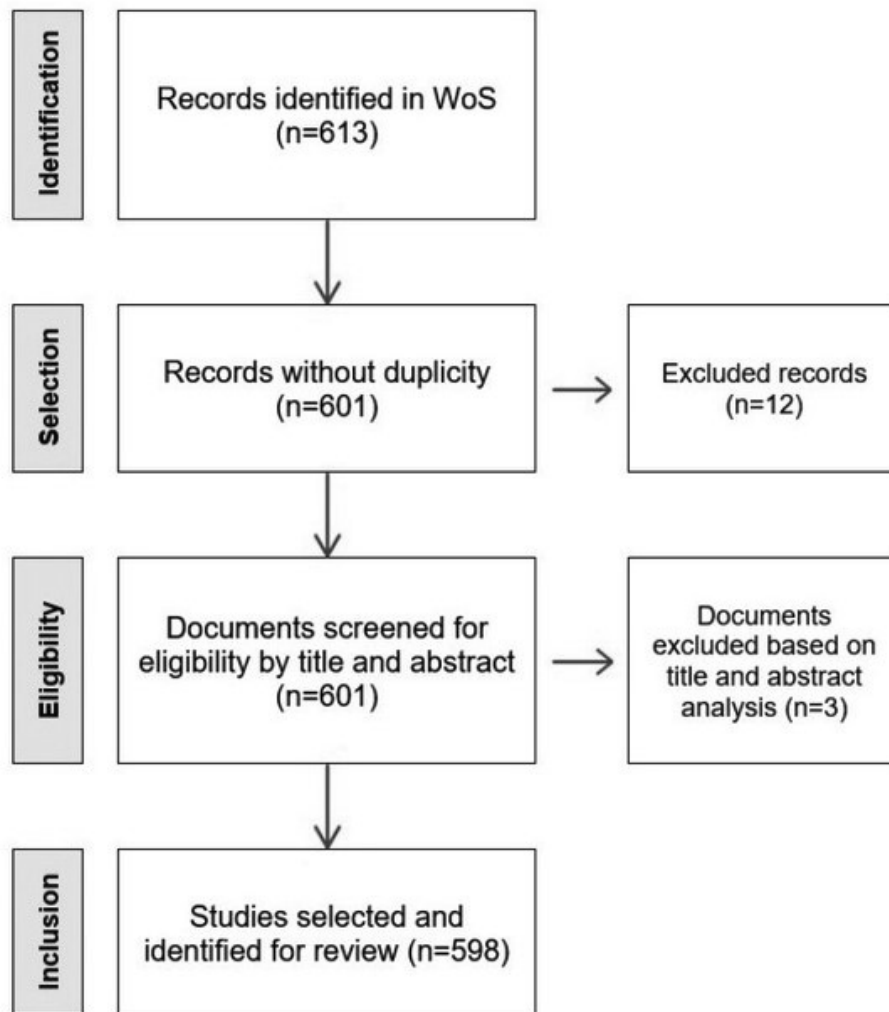
3.1. SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

This dissertation includes a systematic review and the use of a science mapping method from a quantitative–qualitative perspective (meta-ethnography). Meta-ethnography, defined as synthesis and discussion with respect to research on a specific subject of specialization (Noblit; Hare, 1988), allows a broadening of the interpretations of preexisting original studies to create a theoretical–visual argument about the state of research on media literacy, particularly in relation to the challenges it faces in contemporary society regarding the digital and ethical–critical (self-) management of individual and collective representations. Likewise, science mapping, that is, the process of visualizing potentially significant patterns and trends in a scientific question (Chen, 2017), enables the identification of components, dynamics, and structures with respect to geographical scenarios, subject trends, and methodological frameworks.

3.1.1. SELECTION PROCEDURE

We conducted a systematic review of the data using Prisma standards, focusing on the interdisciplinary field of communication and education. We limited our search to the Core Collection of the Web of Science database to ensure high-quality indexation criteria and an international perspective. We used a set of specific terms and criteria to filter the initial search results, which resulted in 598 studies. We filtered out duplicate records using RefWorks, and applied the Spider strategy to define the eligibility criteria for qualitative analysis. The final criteria were the sample, phenomenon of interest, analysis design, evaluation, and type of research. The resulting studies show the evolution of media education in response to new technological advances and challenges in digital culture. See Figure 1 for the selection process.

Figure 1. Diagram of the selection process



3.1.2. Data analysis

The data from the literature review were complex and diverse; therefore we used both quantitative and qualitative analyses to interpret it. The quantitative analysis provided a broad view of the concepts related to media education, whereas the qualitative analysis allowed a deeper analysis of the themes, methods, and populations in media education. We used WordCounter to analyze the article titles and identify relevant concepts for quantitative analysis. For qualitative analysis, we used the Spider scheme to code the selected articles. To visualize the trends and issues in media education over the last two decades, we employed network analysis and visualization software such as VOSviewer 1.6.18 and Gephi 0.9.

3.2. MULTIMODAL CONTENT ANALYSIS

To conduct the analysis, we employed the analysis framework introduced by Braun et al. (2016), a widely used approach in earlier studies on TikTok (Herrick et al., 2021; Civila and Jaramillo-de-Dent, 2022). Multimodal content analysis is a rigorous method according to Braun et al. (2016), which enables the detection of patterns, understanding their significance, and working in a multidisciplinary setting.

3.2.1. SAMPLE

To select a representative sample for our study, we created a Tik Tok account for each article to prevent algorithmic contamination and ensure unbiased results. Additionally, we employed a modified version of the virtual snowball sampling method (Baltar & Brunet, 2012), which enabled the identification of the content created by hard-to-reach populations. Our data collection spanned from April 19, 2021 to September 25, 2022.

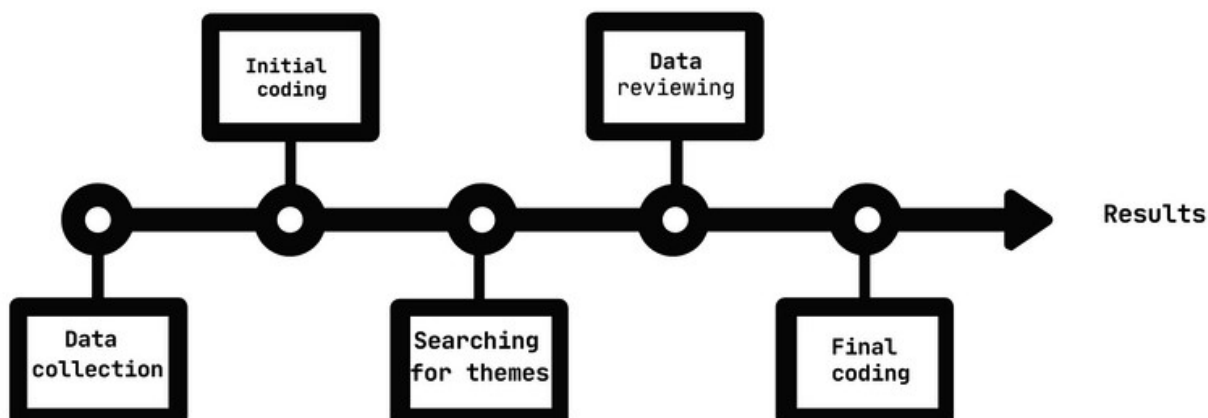
To identify relevant content for each case study, we employed a systematic approach, identifying relevant hashtags and filtering out irrelevant or unrelated content. Throughout our research, we viewed 11,200 videos, carefully reviewing each video at least three times to determine if it met our selection criteria. Through this rigorous process, we ultimately selected a final sample of 308 videos that were most relevant to our research objectives.

3.2.2. CODEBOOK AND DATA ANALYSIS

The six phases of multimodal content analysis proposed by Braun et al. (2016) were adopted in this study to ensure a rigorous analysis process. The analysis was a thorough six-step process, as shown in Figure 2, which provided a comprehensive understanding of the data. The first phase, data collection, involved selecting a sample and downloading all posts from Tik Tok for analysis. The videos were downloaded using Musicallydown (<https://musicallydown.com/>). In the second phase, we generated initial codes by preparing the data and categorizing the posts based on literature review and objectives.

The third phase involved searching for themes by grouping codes to identify patterns and themes in the data. During the fourth phase, we conducted a thorough review of all codes identified in the previous phase to eliminate irrelevant codes and adjust those that were not being used consistently or needed a better definition. In the fifth phase, we define the final codebook, which includes both theoretically derived codes and codes derived using an inductive approach (Awan, 2016; Civila & Jaramillo-Dent, 2022). Finally, in the sixth phase, we interpreted the themes based on our research questions and objectives to gain a comprehensive understanding of the data.

Figure 2. Steps of the methodological process

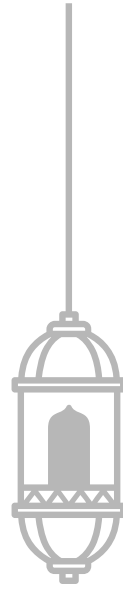
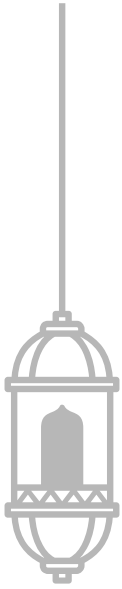
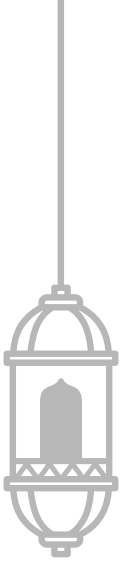


3.2.3 .ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The data from the literature review was complex and diverse, so we used both quantitative and qualitative analysis to interpret it. The quantitative analysis provided a broad view of the concepts related to media education, while the qualitative analysis allowed a deeper analysis of the themes, methods, and populations in media education. We used WordCounter to analyze article titles and identify relevant concepts for the quantitative analysis. For qualitative analysis, we used the Spider scheme to code the selected articles. To visualize the trends and issues in media education over the last two decades, we employed network analysis and visualization software such as VOSviewer 1.6.18 and Gephi 0.9.

3.3. INTERVIEWS

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in June and July 2022 to gain a deeper understanding of the subject under investigation. The interviews focused on two main topics: the use of certain terms and the stigmatization of Muslims. To ensure a diverse sample, seven journalists were chosen from local, national, and international media outlets. This number of participants was determined to be sufficient, as no new information was being gathered, and thematic saturation was reached (Guest et al., 2020). The data collection process involved several steps: (a) conducting interviews based on previous research related to the subject, (b) selecting and contacting journalists with expertise in the area, (c) obtaining permission to use and transcribe the interviews for research purposes, (d) summarizing and transcribing the interviews to extract the most important data related to the research objective, and (e) analyzing the data using Atlas.ti 8.





4. THEMATIC ARTICLES

4. THEMATIC ARTICLES

Paradigm changes and new challenges for Media Education: Review and science mapping (2000-2021)

Aguaded, Ignacio; Civila, Sabina & Vizcaíno-Verdú, Arantxa

Profesional de la información, 2022, 31(6), e310606

<https://doi.org/10.3145/eipi.2022.nov.06>

JCR-JIF
Q1

Information, communication, and digitalization technologies have driven the unlimited access to knowledge, thereby promoting creativity, economic and cultural development, and the emergence of a global world at breakneck speed over recent decades. Across its multiple dynamics, this digital revolution has opened new educational opportunities that are closely connected to emerging technologies and, recently, to artificial intelligence. These advances have had an unexpected impact on people's lives, altering the values of society and our understanding of the role of education and the modern school in this scenario of global communication. In this context, media education arises from the clear influence of electronic devices and digital technology on society. The aim of this study is to review our understanding of the scientific relevance of the terms "media education" and "educommunication" during the last two decades to describe its evolution on the basis of its terms, locations, thematic stages, and methodological approaches using a systematic quantitative–qualitative review of 598 articles collected from the Web of Science between 2000 and 2021. The results suggest that such scientific interest can be divided into two stages, viz. reflections on media education in its terminological diversity (2000–2012) and measurement, implementation, training, and educommunicative digitization in terms of technological–digital development (2013–2021). We conclude that studies in this transdisciplinary field, which have historically been spread across North and South America, Europe, North Africa, and the North/South East Asia–Pacific region, have broadened their perspective from early criticism of media education to consider the "glocalization" of media education, directing interest toward the cultural digitization of the Global South, algorithmic literacy, and the digital and ethical–critical (self-)management of individual and collective identity.

READ FULL ARTICLE IN ANNEX 1.



#Mixedcouples on TikTok: Performative Hybridization and Identity in the Face of Discrimination

Civila, Sabina., & Jaramillo-Dent, Daniela. (2022).

Social media and Society, 2022, 8(3).

<https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051221122464>

JCR-JIF
Q1

Spanish-Moroccan mixed couples exemplify a case of cultural hybridization that reflects the colonial past between these two countries. In this context, social media is a space of opportunity and risk to face discrimination and othering. In this article, we draw upon postcolonial theory and Internet studies to consider TikTok affordances as tools that are relevant to understand how cultural, national, and religious identities are shaped and presented in digital spaces. In this sense, this study constitutes the first exploratory analysis of Moroccan-Spanish mixed couples' (self)representations and identity construction as reflected by their TikTok content. The memetic and intersectional aspects of the mixed-couple identity emerge as central in the convergent nature of the platform and their lived experiences. Through an initial analysis of 8,653 TikTok videos, we identified 6 creator accounts with more than 10K followers to conduct a deeper multimodal content and discourse analysis of 146 videos. This enabled us to explore how these creators portray their hybrid identity through short, vertical videos harnessing TikTok's vernaculars and affordances. The results enable us to propose the concept of performative hybridization, which involves discursive markers within these couples' TikTok content that reflect a fluid integration of two cultures, while the pervading visual and narrative components reflect the dominance of one set of identity traits over the other. In this case, Moroccan culture is more prevalent.

READ FULL ARTICLE IN ANNEX 2.



Social Media and Otherness: The Case of #Islamterrorism on Tiktok

Civila, Sabina., Bonilla-del-Río, Mónica., & Aguaded, Ignacio.

Politics and Governance, 2023, 11(2), Pages X–X.

<https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v11i2.6299>

JCR-JIF
Q1

Social media and their participatory characteristics promote the construction of meanings that differ from those emitted by mainstream media outlets, becoming a tool that enables a reconfiguration of the dominant discourses. TikTok offers unique possibilities to confront the neoliberal imaginary and open a space for debate, incorporating political viewpoints and establishing itself as a new communication scenario. Regarding news about jihadism, many researchers have observed that those who practice Islam are classified as a monolithic entity, and this entire religious group is generalized as a threat to modern societies. The main objective of our research is thus to know the discourses used on TikTok to respond to the binomial Islam = terrorism spread by mainstream media and the affordances of this platform used to challenge this misconception. Using the snowball method, a multimodal analysis was conducted by identifying TikTok videos with the hashtags #yihadista, #yihad, and #islamterrorismo (in its English and Spanish versions) to explore the uses of the TikTok platform. The resulting selection criteria included: (a) content related to mainstream media discourses on jihadism, (b) discussion of a topic related to Islam and terrorism, and (c) where the content creator declares him/herself to be a Muslim. In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted to provide an enhanced understanding of how the media promote the need to generate a counter-narrative on TikTok. The results reveal that discourses from Muslims that combat Islam = terrorism discourses are constructed within the spiral of the dominant narrative, thus visualizing the negative discourses about Islam.

Read FULL article in Annex 3.



5. COMPLEMENTARY ARTICLES

5. COMPLEMENTARY ARTICLES

The results achieved in the present study are the outcome of a collective and continuous effort in the field of research and development (R&D), specifically within the framework of the #Yougrammers project. In the context of this project, several complementary investigations have been conducted in collaboration with other members of the Ágora Research Group, which has led to a deeper understanding and knowledge of the subject under study. The findings of this research are a consequence of a set of articles, including three JCR, three Scopus, and two ESCI, which provide a broader perspective to comprehend how Muslim Tik Tok creators confront the hegemonic representation of Islam.



The demonization of Islam through social media: A case study of #StopIslam in Instagram (Awarded by The Washington Academy)

SCOPUS Q2 | Civila, Sabina., Romero-Rodríguez, Luis Miguel., & Civila-Salas, Amparo. *Publications*, 2020, 8(4), 52.

<https://doi.org/10.3390/publications8040052>

This article studies the process of demonization, its consequences, and how social media contribute to the formalization of its axiology. The demonization of societies aims to create social subjects that fit into the idea of the “other” by exposing them to compulsory invisibility. This research’s main objective was to examine how demonization is used as a weapon of oppression to devalue specific individuals through the hashtag #StopIslam and Instagram’s role in this process. The methodology used for this purpose has consisted of an empirical and quantitative analysis of the most recent (1 January 2020–31 July 2020) posts on Instagram with #StopIslam, analyzing the images and the content. The study has determined how, through social media manipulation, erroneous ideas are transmitted that prevent the Islamic collective’s integration, especially in European countries. The conclusions will reflect hate speech and how the Islamic world’s demonization results in the Muslim community’s stigmatization, racism, and Islamophobia. Although there are different articles related to demonization and hate speech, there are not many scientific resources that explain these variables on Instagram and how it affects the inclusion of the Muslim community in Europe, significantly when the time spent on the Internet is growing.

Keywords: Instagram, demonization, hate speech, arab world, Islamophobia, social media.

Otherness as a form of intersubjective social exclusion: Conceptual discussion from the current communicative scenario

SCOPUS Q2| Romero-Rodríguez, Luis Miguel., Civila, Sabina., & Aguaded, Ignacio.
Journal of Information, Communication and Ethics in Society, 2020, 19(1).
<https://doi.org/10.1108/jices-11-2019-0130>

Purpose—This study aims to review the theory based on «otherness» as a form of social exclusion and symbolic violence from the constructions of realities of the media, with particular emphasis on the ethics and aesthetics of language and its role in materializing identity differences. **Design/methodology/approach**—A search for specific criteria and boolean algorithms is carried out in Web of Science and Scopus on «otherness» [AND] «social exclusion», to then submit the emerging results to a co-occurrence matrix by citations with VOSViewer v. 1.6.13. From the relation tree of the most cited documents [min = 7] of the downloaded articles, a critical/analytical reading is made. **Findings**—«Otherness» is reviewed to a greater extent from a Western perspective, and more specifically, from a Eurocentric one. This implies that the study of «otherness» is not sufficiently analyzed by Asian or African authors, who are excluded from the analysis. In this sense, «otherness» is understood as a theoretical construct and as any symbolic construction of the other (phenotypically, but also in ideology, values and customs), but which carries a load of stereotypes that can become polarization, demonization, ergo and violence. **Originality/value**—Revisiting «otherness» as an informative construct becomes imperative in light of the emergence of extremist groups and xenophobic parties, as well as separatist policies such as Brexit or the Catalan split in Spain. Few articles contribute to elaborating a complete conceptual construct on «otherness» as an epistemological cate.

Keywords: Media, Language, Stereotypes, Demonization, Polarization, Discursive violence, Collective imaginary.

Symbolic-discursive violence and new media: Grounded theory from an epistemological perspective

SCOPUS Q2| Civila, Sabina., Romero-Rodríguez, Luis Miguel., & Aguaded, Ignacio.
Catalan journal of communication & cultural studies, 2021, 13(1), 43-61.
https://doi.org/10.1386/cjcs_00038_1

The following research studies, from a theoretical perspective, the different forms of symbolic and discursive violence and the transmission of hate speech through new media. The main objective is to understand the consequences of symbolic violence through language and how this affects freedom of expression. Reflective and critical argumentation is highlighted through an exploratory analysis carried out by a literature review, where it is determined that the confrontational narrative used by the media contributes to the dehumanization, demonization and polarization of specific collectives.

Keywords: discursive violence, e-hate speech, freedom of expression, language, new media, paradox tolerance.

Competencia mediática contra el odio, la violencia discursiva y la confrontación: Análisis documental y de teoría fundamentada

ESCI-JIF| Civila, Sabina., Romero-Rodríguez, Luis Miguel., & Aguaded, Ignacio.
Temas de comunicación, 2020, 41, 92-109.

This work explores different concepts and epistemologies of the importance of media and information education and how the current media ecology and media-relational dynamics have modified the pragmatics and applicability of this phenomenon. The study methodology is based on a critical review of scientific literature founded on a selective screening of the documents emerging from the primary databases (WoS and Scopus). It is concluded that with Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), the information landscape is changing, with the media having more considerable influence on the public due to their ubiquitous presence and their maximization of reach by prosumers, making education and media literacy fundamental as a critical element of ideology and values of information consumption.

Keywords: Media, media literacy, information literacy, public opinion.

Language as a creator of realities and public opinion: Critical analysis in the context of the current media ecosystem

ESCI-JIF| Civila, Sabina., Romero-Rodríguez, Luis Miguel., & Aguaded, Ignacio.
Flascoandes, 2020, 67.

<https://doi.org/10.17141/iconos.67.2020.3942>

This article analyzes how the media constructs social reality through language. Social reality is revised as a discursive construct based on the anthropic principle of information and on Watzlawick's axiom that, "it is impossible not to communicate". The main objective is to analyze how the concept of "public opinion" has evolved with the development of Information and Communications Technologies (ICT). To this end, a critical review of scientific literature has been carried out, mapping the WoS and Scopus databases, and determining, through a literature review, how the new definitions of public opinion are formed. This increases the understanding of the media ecosystem and the interactions of individuals at the digital communication level. The main conclusion of this study highlights how public opinion is no longer created unidirectionally and monopolistically through conventional media, but with the interaction and participation of the "prosumer audience" within social networks. However, this does not mean the role of the media in social control has been completely lost through strategies such as framing and priming. Indeed, new informative vices, such as fake news, have emerged from this interactive construction of realities.

Keywords: Language, media, public opinion, social reality, social media, ICT.

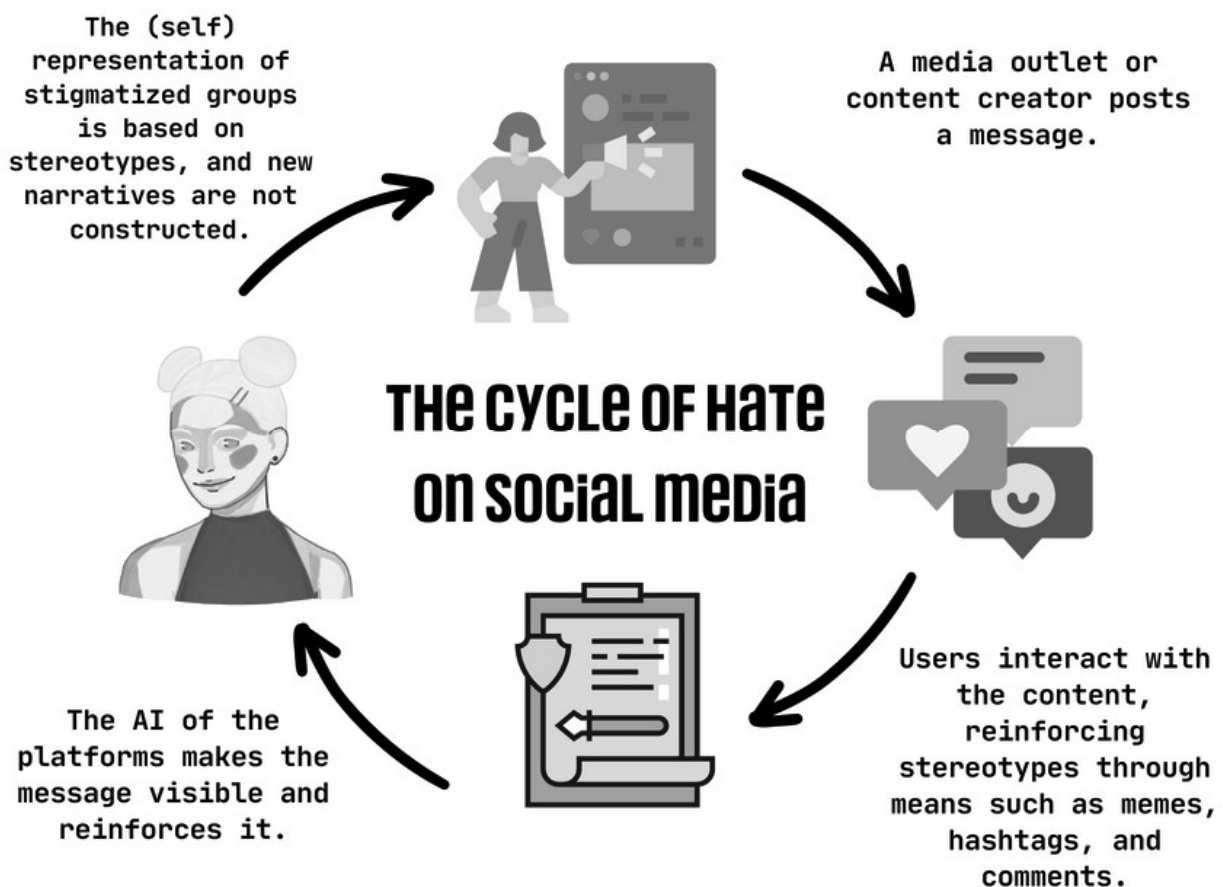


6. CONCLUSIONS

6.1. CONCLUSIONS

After studying for more than three years how Muslim content creators face the hegemonic representation of Islam on TikTok, it becomes evident that there is a necessary transformation of the narratives linked to minority groups in digital spaces. Even when these groups aim to counteract hate speech towards them, they are still framed within dominant narratives that privilege negative discourse towards such groups. This phenomenon, which hinders the construction of decolonizing narratives, is called the "hate cycle on social media" (Figure 3). This cycle refers to a repetitive pattern of behavior in which minority groups engage in hegemonic discourses, making them visible and reinforcing the dominant discourse. As a consequence, a spiral of verbal violence can be generated, which can provoke and reinforce hatred towards certain groups, in this case, towards Muslim individuals.

Figure 3. Hate cycle on social media



This highlights the clear need for media literacy for all citizens, especially digital content creators, to break down hegemonic narratives and combat hate speech on social media. We can observe an evolution in the virtual space from an initial conception, when the Internet was considered a space of freedom, dialogue, and empowerment in communication terms, towards a space that is often toxic and harmful to public debate. Hence, learning how to correctly use it is a fundamental measure.

After answering the research question (RQ), it is important to reflect on each of the specific objectives of the investigation. This will provide a deeper understanding of the overall research findings and allow for a more comprehensive analysis of the research outcomes

O1. To understand the role of media literacy in mitigating islamophobia

The analysis of media literacy studies reveals the crucial role of education in the construction of identity. In particular, social media has opened the door to the analysis of individual and/or collective (self) representation, the prosumption of information and news (including fake news, dysinfodemic and, hate speech), and the transformation and dissemination of heterogeneous and emerging languages that change the way we understand language today (E.g. emojis, memes, interactions). The appearance of new forms of communication, such as emojis and memes, has given rise to new hypotheses regarding the role of media literacy in vulnerable communities. The pervasive influence of digitization has transformed the way we think and highlights the importance of understanding and raising awareness of identity construction on social media. Therefore, it is crucial to consider the impact of media literacy on the decolonization of the Internet and creation of new scenarios.

Thus, media literacy is essential for promoting critical and responsible engagement with digital media and ensuring that individuals and communities are not marginalized or stigmatized in the digital age. Furthermore, future media education plans must address these challenges to ensure that individuals and communities fully participate in the digital age and shape their own identities.

It concludes by emphasizing the need for more research on the specific ways in which media literacy influences identity construction, especially for marginalized communities, and how media literacy can be used to promote conscious, ethical, and judicious criteria for the production and media consumption.

O2. To explore how the affordances of TikTok enable muslims to represent islam

Our analysis suggests that these TikTok creators use the platform's affordances to highlight the discrimination they face from Western societies and foster social empowerment (Vizcaíno-Verdú & Aguaded, 2022).

Through their content, they express their experiences of otherness and challenge harmful stereotypes, whereas the main narrative and visual elements in their content often involve hate speech and dominant narratives that perpetuate division. This highlights the divide between "us" and "them" and the difficulties they face in trying to challenge existing societal norms. The aspects of their identities that they choose to emphasize using the affordances of TikTok are particularly relevant, given the rejection they face from Western societies.

Furthermore, their overwhelming use of answer-comment affordance reflects their need to respond and clarify the merits of their religion and its teachings (Mosemghvdlshvili & Jansz, 2012). However, the comments they selected to respond to often perpetuate static and unchangeable orientalist notions, suggesting that the fluidity of change and diversity must meet the standards of the dominant culture. Therefore, although TikTok enables these minority creators to become visible and influential within the platform and use their voice through the unique connective and mimetic nature of TikTok (Abidin, 2021; Zulli & Zulli, 2020), the way they navigate the platform does not necessarily empower them, but instead provides visibility of the discrimination they experience.

The role of gender is also noteworthy in the answer-comment used by these creators. Sexism, and more specifically, islamophobic sexism, become key topics within answer-comment uses, suggesting that ideas about gender in Western cultures are highlighted and placed at the forefront of the mediated identity-construction process.

As a result, it seems that the affordances of the platform have an impact on the construction of otherness, while TikTok potentially fails to provide space for these groups to confront established mechanisms of domination.

O3. To identify the discourse strategies used by muslim community to confront dominant representations of islam

To understand how the discourse strategies used by the Muslim community challenge misconceptions, we analyzed the TikTok content created by this community. Our analysis revealed TikTok as an environment in which Muslim minorities can challenge the prevailing misconceptions. In this sense, it appears that Muslim minorities need to motivate discourses in a way that penetrates society, thus promoting social change and challenging misconceptions. This platform allows them to generate discourses that make their culture visible and seek recognition (Abidin, 2021). However, discourses used to address the stereotypes and misconceptions about Islam spread by Western societies have not succeeded in constructing an alternative narrative, as evidenced by Hamid et al. (2022).

Instead, the discourses used to address stereotypes made negative misconceptions about Islam and Muslims more visible. Thus, instead of constructing new discourses, the arguments used to challenge mainstream Western narratives and take part in political debates are based on negative narratives. Furthermore, the reconfiguration of the dominant discourse on TikTok is constructed within the spiral of the prevailing narrative.

Despite this, the messages posted by this collective on TikTok have the potential to destabilize Western narratives and promote the relationship between Islam and modernity (Göle, 2002), as suggested by the journalists interviewed. As El-Haj and Bonet (2011) argue, the discourses deployed on TikTok reflect the pressure and need to constantly challenge power structures and seek recognition. Thus, while the discourse strategies used by the Muslim community on TikTok may not entirely challenge misconceptions, they represent an important effort to value what is considered contrary and promote social change.



6.2. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH INTERESTS

The present study faces several limitations that are important to consider when interpreting the obtained results. These limitations can affect the generalization of the findings and the complete understanding of the studied phenomenon.

One of the main limitations of this study is the sample and platform. While the sample provides answers to our research questions, it is important to acknowledge that the TikTok algorithm may limit the results shown based on our location and search term (Jaramillo-Dent et al., 2022). Additionally, our study focuses on only one platform, which could be expanded in future research. Therefore, we suggest that further research include interviews with users to gain a better understanding of how they represent themselves in social media spaces.

Secondly, it is important to note that this study has been conducted solely from a qualitative approach. While qualitative methods provide a deep and detailed understanding of the studied phenomena, they also have inherent limitations. The findings are based on the interpretation of participants and the researcher, which implies that they may be influenced by individual perspectives. Furthermore, by not utilizing quantitative methods, statistical inferences cannot be made about the general population. Therefore, a future line of research could involve adding a quantitative analysis to complement and expand upon the findings obtained regarding this phenomenon.

Another significant limitation of this study is the researcher's cultural background and Western perspective. Cultural attitudes, values, and beliefs can influence data interpretation and how research questions are addressed. Important aspects may have been overlooked or certain topics may have been emphasized more due to this specific cultural perspective. For a more comprehensive and balanced understanding of the studied phenomenon, it would be necessary to incorporate diverse cultural perspectives and voices from different contexts.

Finally, the study has a solely theoretical focus, and potential strategies to prevent the "cycle of hate" on social media are not addressed. As such, future research must explore the role of media education in shaping the ethical and critical management of individual and collective identities in the digital age.

6.3. KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

The knowledge derived from a doctoral thesis can significantly impact society, allowing academic knowledge to benefit society socially. Therefore, to materialize the results of this doctoral thesis, we developed the course "Media Literacy for New Languages." This course targets vulnerable populations, emphasizing critical understanding, management, and application of new communication languages. We contacted the non-profit organization "Huelva Acoge," established in 1991 with the goal of facilitating migrant integration and promoting an intercultural, diverse, and inclusive society.

The course adopts an interdisciplinary approach, integrating the theoretical perspectives and empirical findings presented in the thesis to empower vulnerable groups to navigate and effectively participate in a constantly evolving media environment. The course occurred during the academic period 2023/2024 in various communal settings, such as shelters for international protection seekers and shelters for victims of gender-based violence. Additionally, to ensure this action was not limited to a local context, we shared the course contents on a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) platform and with other associations at the national level.

Considering the highly specific and varied profiles of participants in terms of their media knowledge, we adapted the course content to their individual needs. In general, we structured three levels of content as follows:

(1) Low level: Designed for individuals lacking knowledge of digital media use, with a focus on acquiring basic skills such as mouse and keyboard handling, screen navigation, and content searching.

(2) Medium level: Aimed at individuals with some previous knowledge but not yet familiar with digital technologies. This level delved into application installation, reflection on digital security, and understanding discourse on social media.

(3) High level: Geared towards individuals with previous media competence but needing a deeper understanding of new communication languages. This level focuses on analyzing hate speech and using effective and secure tools to combat it.

This graduated approach allowed us to address the individual needs of participants and provide them with personalized media literacy education, thereby applying the results of this doctoral thesis.

6.1. CONCLUSIONES

Después de estudiar durante más de tres años cómo los creadores de contenido musulmanes enfrentan la representación hegemónica del Islam en TikTok, se hace evidente que hay una transformación necesaria de las narrativas vinculadas a los grupos minoritarios en espacios digitales. Incluso cuando estos grupos buscan contrarrestar el discurso de odio hacia ellos, todavía están enmarcados dentro de narrativas dominantes que privilegian el discurso negativo hacia tales grupos. Este fenómeno, que obstaculiza la construcción de narrativas decolonizadoras, se ha denominado como el "ciclo de odio en las redes sociales" (Figura 3). Este ciclo se refiere a un patrón repetitivo de comportamiento en el que los grupos minoritarios participan en discursos hegemónicos, haciéndolos visibles y reforzando el discurso dominante. Como consecuencia, puede generarse una espiral de violencia verbal, que puede provocar y reforzar el odio hacia ciertos grupos, en este caso, hacia los individuos musulmanes.

Figura 3. Ciclo del odio en las redes sociales



Esto destaca la clara necesidad de educación mediática para todos los ciudadanos, especialmente para los creadores de contenido digital, cuyo contenido tiene la finalidad de dismantelar las narrativas hegemónicas y combatir el discurso de odio en las redes sociales. Podemos observar una evolución en el espacio virtual desde una concepción inicial, cuando Internet era considerado un espacio de libertad, diálogo y empoderamiento en términos de comunicación, hacia un espacio que a menudo es tóxico y perjudicial para el debate público. Por lo tanto, aprender a utilizarlo correctamente es una medida fundamental.

Después de responder a la pregunta de investigación (RQ), es importante reflexionar sobre cada uno de los objetivos específicos de la presente tesis doctoral. Esto proporcionará una comprensión más profunda de los hallazgos generales de la investigación y permitirá un análisis más completo de los resultados.

O1. Comprender el papel de la alfabetización mediática en la mitigación de la islamofobia

El análisis de los estudios de educación mediática revela el papel crucial de la educación en la construcción de la identidad. En particular, las redes sociales han abierto la puerta al análisis de la representación individual y/o colectiva (auto) y la producción de información y noticias (incluidas las noticias falsas, la desinformación y el discurso de odio), y la transformación y difusión de lenguajes heterogéneos y emergentes que cambian la forma en que entendemos el lenguaje hoy en día (por ejemplo, emojis, memes, interacciones). La aparición de nuevas formas de comunicación, como emojis y memes, ha dado lugar a nuevas hipótesis sobre el papel de la alfabetización mediática en comunidades vulnerables. La influencia omnipresente de la digitalización ha transformado la forma en que pensamos y destaca la importancia de comprender y concienciar sobre la construcción de identidad en las redes sociales. Por lo tanto, es crucial considerar el impacto de la educación mediática en la descolonización de Internet y la creación de nuevos escenarios.

Por lo tanto, se considera la educación mediática esencial para promover el compromiso crítico y responsable con los medios digitales y asegurar que los individuos y las comunidades no sean marginados o estigmatizados en la era digital. Además, los futuros planes de educación mediática deben abordar estos desafíos para garantizar que los individuos y las comunidades participen plenamente en la era digital y moldeen sus propias identidades.

Se concluye enfatizando la necesidad de más investigación sobre las formas específicas en que la educación mediática influye en la construcción de la identidad, especialmente para las comunidades marginadas, y cómo puede ser utilizada para promover criterios conscientes, éticos y prudentes para la producción y el consumo de medios.

O2. Explorar cómo las *affordances* de TikTok permiten a los musulmanes representar el islam

El resultado de nuestro análisis sugiere que estos creadores de TikTok utilizan las funcionalidades que ofrece la plataforma para resaltar la discriminación que enfrentan de las sociedades occidentales y fomentar el empoderamiento social (Vizcaíno-Verdú & Aguaded, 2022). A través de su contenido, expresan sus experiencias de alteridad y desafían los estereotipos dañinos, aunque los elementos narrativos y visuales principales de su contenido involucran el discursos de odio y las narrativas dominantes que perpetúan la división. Esto provoca que se resalte la división entre «nosotros» y «ellos» , así como, un aumento de las dificultades que enfrentan al desafiar las normas sociales existentes.

Los aspectos de su identidad, como pertenecientes a una comunidad minoritaria en occidente, que deciden destacar en su contenido son particularmente relevantes, para entender como utilizan las *affordances* para (auto) representarse. Por ejemplo, el uso de la función de respuesta a comentarios refleja su necesidad de responder y aclarar los méritos de su religión y sus enseñanzas (Mosemghvdlishvili & Jansz, 2012). Sin embargo, los comentarios que eligen responder a menudo perpetúan nociones orientalistas estáticas e inalterables, sugiriendo que la fluidez del cambio y la diversidad deben cumplir con los estándares de la cultura dominante. Por lo tanto, aunque TikTok permite que estos creadores minoritarios se vuelvan visibles e influyentes dentro de la plataforma y utilicen su voz a través de la naturaleza única conectiva y mimética de TikTok (Abidin, 2021; Zulli & Zulli, 2020), la forma en que navegan por la plataforma no necesariamente los empodera, sino que les proporciona visibilidad de la discriminación que experimentan pero no reconocimiento como comunidad.

El papel del género también es notable en las respuestas a comentarios utilizadas por estos creadores. El sexismo, y más específicamente, el sexismo islamofóbico, se convierten en temas clave dentro de los usos de respuestas a comentarios, lo que sugiere que las ideas sobre género en las culturas occidentales son resaltadas y colocadas en primer plano del proceso de construcción de identidad mediada.

Como resultado, parece que las funcionalidades de la plataforma tienen un impacto en la construcción de la alteridad, mientras que TikTok potencialmente falla en proporcionar espacio para que estos grupos confronten los mecanismos establecidos de dominación.

O3. Identificar las estrategias discursivas utilizadas por la comunidad musulmana para enfrentar las representaciones dominantes del islam

Para entender cómo las estrategias discursivas utilizadas por la comunidad musulmana desafían los conceptos erróneos, analizamos el contenido de TikTok creado por esta comunidad. Nuestro análisis reveló a TikTok como un entorno en el cual las minorías musulmanas pueden desafiar los conceptos erróneos predominantes. En este sentido, parece que las minorías musulmanas necesitan motivar discursos de manera que penetren en la sociedad, promoviendo así el cambio social y desafiando los conceptos erróneos. Esta plataforma les permite generar discursos que hacen visible su cultura y buscar reconocimiento (Abidin, 2021). Sin embargo, los discursos utilizados para abordar los estereotipos y conceptos erróneos sobre el Islam difundidos por las sociedades occidentales no han logrado construir una narrativa alternativa, como lo demuestra Hamid et al. (2022).

En cambio, los discursos utilizados para abordar estereotipos hicieron más visibles los conceptos erróneos negativos sobre el Islam y los musulmanes. Por lo tanto, en lugar de construir nuevos discursos, los argumentos utilizados para desafiar las narrativas occidentales predominantes y participar en debates políticos se basan en narrativas negativas. Además, la reconfiguración del discurso dominante en TikTok se construye dentro de la espiral de la narrativa predominante.

A pesar de esto, los mensajes publicados por este colectivo en TikTok tienen el potencial de desestabilizar las narrativas occidentales y promover la relación entre el Islam y la modernidad (Göle, 2002), como sugieren los periodistas entrevistados. Según argumentan El-Haj y Bonet (2011), los discursos desplegados en TikTok reflejan la presión y la necesidad de desafiar constantemente las estructuras de poder y buscar reconocimiento. Por lo tanto, aunque las estrategias discursivas utilizadas por la comunidad musulmana en TikTok pueden no desafiar completamente los conceptos erróneos, representan un esfuerzo importante para valorar lo que se considera contrario y promover el cambio social.

6.2. LIMITACIONES AND FUTURAS Lineas de investigación

El presente estudio enfrenta varias limitaciones que son importantes considerar al interpretar los resultados obtenidos. Estas limitaciones pueden afectar la generalización de los hallazgos y la comprensión completa del fenómeno estudiado.

En primer lugar, una de las principales limitaciones de este estudio es la muestra y la plataforma. Si bien la muestra proporciona respuestas a nuestras preguntas de investigación, es importante reconocer que el algoritmo de TikTok puede limitar los resultados mostrados según nuestra ubicación y términos de búsqueda (Jaramillo-Dent et al., 2022). Además, nuestro estudio se centra en una sola plataforma, por lo tanto, se sugiere que futuras investigaciones incluyan entrevistas con usuarios para obtener una mejor comprensión de cómo se representan como colectivo en TikTok.

En segundo lugar, es importante señalar que este estudio se ha llevado a cabo únicamente desde un enfoque cualitativo. Si bien los métodos cualitativos proporcionan una comprensión profunda y detallada de los fenómenos estudiados, también tienen limitaciones inherentes. Los hallazgos se basan en la interpretación de los participantes y del investigador, lo que implica que pueden estar influenciados por perspectivas individuales. Además, al no utilizar métodos cuantitativos, no se pueden realizar inferencias estadísticas sobre la población general. Por lo tanto, una línea futura de investigación podría implicar agregar un análisis cuantitativo para complementar y expandir los hallazgos obtenidos respecto a este fenómeno.

Otra limitación significativa de este estudio es el trasfondo cultural del investigador y la perspectiva occidental. Las actitudes culturales, valores y creencias pueden influir en la interpretación de datos y en cómo se abordan las preguntas de investigación. Aspectos importantes pueden haber sido pasados por alto o ciertos temas pueden haber sido enfatizados más debido a esta perspectiva cultural específica. Para una comprensión más completa y equilibrada del fenómeno estudiado, sería necesario incorporar perspectivas culturales diversas y voces de diferentes contextos.

Finalmente, el estudio tiene un enfoque únicamente teórico, y no se abordan estrategias potenciales para prevenir el "ciclo de odio" en las redes sociales. Como tal, futuras investigaciones deben explorar el papel de la educación mediática en la formación del manejo ético y crítico de identidades individuales y colectivas en la era digital.

6.3. TRANSFERENCIA DEL CONOCIMIENTO

El conocimiento derivado de una tesis doctoral puede tener un impacto significativo en la sociedad, permitiendo que el conocimiento académico beneficie a la población. Por lo tanto, para materializar los resultados de esta tesis doctoral, desarrollamos el curso "Alfabetización Mediática para Nuevos Lenguajes". Este curso está dirigido a poblaciones vulnerables, enfatizando la comprensión crítica, gestión y aplicación de nuevos lenguajes de comunicación. Nos pusimos en contacto con la organización sin fines de lucro "Huelva Acoge", establecida en 1991 con el objetivo de facilitar la integración de migrantes y promover una sociedad intercultural, diversa e inclusiva.

El curso adopta un enfoque interdisciplinario, integrando las perspectivas teóricas y los hallazgos empíricos presentados en la tesis para empoderar a grupos vulnerables en la navegación y participación efectiva en los medios. El curso se llevó a cabo durante el período académico 2023/2024 en diversos entornos comunitarios, como pisos de protección oficial para solicitantes de protección internacional y víctimas de violencia de género. Además, para asegurar que esta acción no se limitara a un contexto local, compartimos el contenido del curso en una plataforma de Curso Masivo Abierto en Línea (MOOC) y con otras asociaciones a nivel nacional.

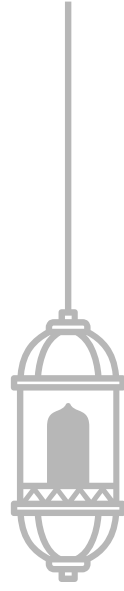
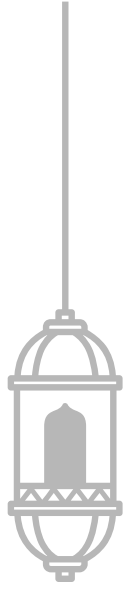
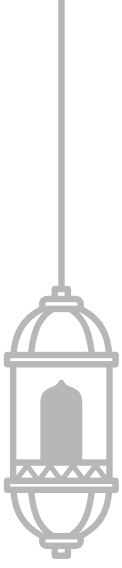
Considerando los perfiles altamente específicos y variados de los participantes, en términos de su conocimiento de los medios de comunicación, adaptamos el contenido del curso a sus necesidades individuales. En general, estructuramos tres niveles de contenido de la siguiente manera:

(1) Nivel bajo: Diseñado para individuos que carecen de conocimientos sobre el uso de medios digitales, con un enfoque en adquirir habilidades básicas como el manejo del mouse y el teclado, la navegación por pantalla y la búsqueda de contenido.

(2) Nivel medio: Dirigido a personas con cierto conocimiento previo pero aún no familiarizadas con las tecnologías digitales. Este nivel profundizó en la instalación de aplicaciones, la reflexión sobre la seguridad digital y la comprensión del discurso en las redes sociales.

(3) Nivel alto: Dirigido a individuos con competencia mediática previa pero que necesitan una comprensión más profunda de los nuevos lenguajes de comunicación. Este nivel se centra en analizar el discurso de odio y utilizar herramientas efectivas y seguras para combatirlo.

Este enfoque graduado nos permitió abordar las necesidades individuales de los participantes y proporcionarles educación personalizada en alfabetización mediática, aplicando así los resultados de esta tesis doctoral.





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7. REFERENCES

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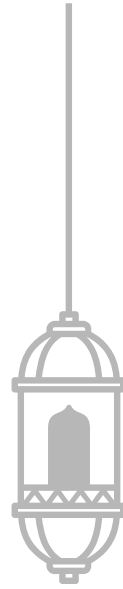
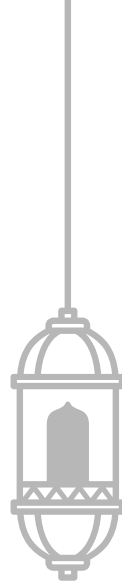
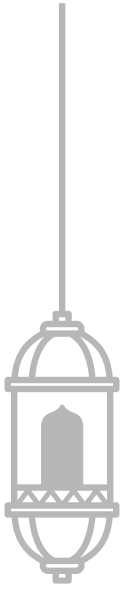
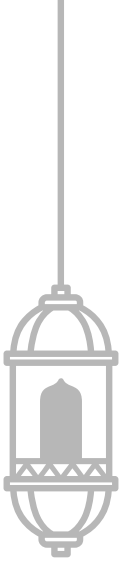
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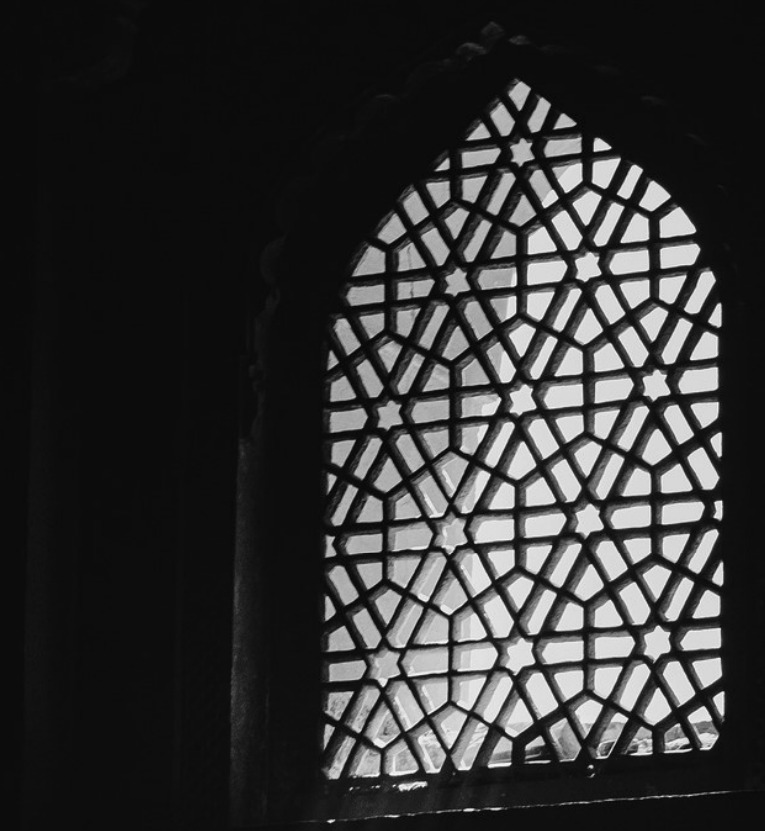
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8. Annexes



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Annex 1

Paradigm changes and new challenges for media education: Review and science mapping (2000-2021)

Ignacio Aguaded; Sabina Civila; Arantxa Vizcaíno-Verdú

Nota: Este artículo puede leerse en español en:
<https://revista.profesionaldelainformacion.com/index.php/EPI/article/view/86988>

Recommended citation:

Aguaded, Ignacio; Civila, Sabina; Vizcaíno-Verdú, Arantxa (2022). "Paradigm changes and new challenges for media education: Review and science mapping (2000-2021)". *Profesional de la información*, v. 31, n. 6, e310606.
<https://doi.org/10.3145/epi.2022.nov.06>

Article received on May 9th 2022
Approved on June 16th 2022



Ignacio Aguaded ✉
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0229-1118>
Universidad de Huelva
Departamento de Educación
Campus de El Carmen
Avda. Tres de Marzo, s/n
21071 Huelva, Spain
aguaded@uhu.es



Sabina Civila
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6059-9893>
Universidad de Huelva
Departamento de Educación
Campus de El Carmen
Avda. Tres de Marzo, s/n
21071 Huelva, Spain
sabi.civila@dedu.uhu.es



Arantxa Vizcaíno-Verdú
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9399-2077>
Universidad de Huelva
Departamento de Pedagogía
Av. de las Fuerzas Armadas, s/n
21007 Huelva, Spain
arantxa.vizcaino@dedu.uhu.es

Abstract

Information, communication, and digitalization technologies have driven the unlimited access to knowledge, thereby promoting creativity, economic and cultural development, and the emergence of a global world at breakneck speed over recent decades. Across its multiple dynamics, this digital revolution has opened new educational opportunities that are closely connected to emerging technologies and, recently, to artificial intelligence. These advances have had an unexpected impact on people's lives, altering the values of society and our understanding of the role of education and the modern school in this scenario of global communication. In this context, media education arises from the clear influence of electronic devices and digital technology on society. The aim of this study is to review our understanding of the scientific relevance of the terms "media education" and "educommunication" during the last two decades to describe its evolution on the basis of its terms, locations, thematic stages, and methodological approaches using a systematic quantitative–qualitative review of 598 articles collected from the *Web of Science* between 2000 and 2021. The results suggest that such scientific interest can be divided into two stages, viz. reflections on media education in its terminological diversity (2000–2012) and measurement, implementation, training, and educommunicative digitization in terms of technological–digital development (2013–2021). We conclude that studies in this transdisciplinary field, which have historically been spread across North and South America, Europe, North Africa, and the North/South East Asia–Pacific region, have broadened their perspective from early criticism of media education to consider the "glocalization" of media education, directing interest toward the cultural digitization of the Global South, algorithmic literacy, and the digital and ethical–critical (self-)management of individual and collective identity.

Keywords

Media education; Educommunication; Media literacy; Media competency; Scientific mapping; Social media; ICT; Glocalization; Digital culture; Digital literacy; Review article.

Funding

This work was supported by de *Euro-American Research Network (Alfamed)*, under Grant R+D+i project (2019-2021), entitled “Youtubers and intagrammers: Media competition in emerging prosumers”, with code RTI2018-093303-B-I00, financed by the *Spanish Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities* and the *European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)*, and the R+D-i Project (2020-2022), entitled “Instagrammers and youtubers for the transmedia empowerment of Andalusian citizens. The media competence of instatubers”, with code P18-RT-756, financed by the *Andalusian Regional Government* in the 2018 call (*Andalusian Research, Development and Innovation Plan, 2020*) and the *European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)*.

1. Introduction

In the 1960s, digital technology was viewed through a utopian perspective as a revolutionary movement by and for the people. Technology was conceived as a means of enabling unlimited access to global knowledge, creativity promotion, local business development in a broad context, and the reemergence of democracy, which resulted in what **Buckingham** (2020) defined “digital capitalism.” This cross-cultural approach led to new active and participatory educational practices focused on learning as a consequence of global trends related to artificial intelligence or aerospace technology. However, owing to the Covid-19 pandemic, digitalization intensified in all fields of life (work, education, industry, and society, among others), leading to emerging concerns about participation in the online world, beyond the preliminary research on equity and the impact of media education on development, democracy, and human rights (**Martínez-Bravo et al.**, 2021).

Currently, the concept of media education is conceptualized as a personal development process involving the media for the promotion of critical thinking, perception, interpretation, analysis, and judgment of media messages as well as for digitalized modes of self-expression (**García-Matilla**, 2022). In this sense, media education is considered the result of this process in which individuals are actively encouraged to develop competencies in the communication and information fields (**Fedorov**, 2008). Moreover, the study of media education has also been explored in Ibero-American contexts, where the combination of education and communication has become a transdisciplinary field known as “educommunication,” in which individuals assume a more proactive and critical role regarding the media (**Lotero-Echeverri et al.**, 2019). In this context, we have noted two unique traits that differ from the research preconceptions of the Global North. Firstly, one finds educommunication as liberation of the oppressed, the development of the critical perspective, and the meaningfulness of dialog (**Freire**, 2005). Secondly, one observes the emergence of environments that prioritize technological, media, and digital inequality and precariousness (**Mateus et al.**, 2022). As pointed out by **Bermejo-Berros** (2021), these two concepts are both compatible and necessary for their dialectical integration and epistemological conceptualization insofar as “media education” and “educommunication” combine to define the relevance of communication in education.

Considering these theoretical–practical proposals, schools are currently enhancing their programs through literacy initiatives to enhance digital inclusion in society as a utopian support for media education curricula (**Poyntz et al.**, 2021), to promote the dissemination of new cross- and transmedia strategies (**Jenkins et al.**, 2013). According to **Buckingham** (2020), this democratic–digital vision remains far from promoting informed discussion and debate, as social media contribute to the development of a digital world that is controlled by a few corporations that are responsible only to their own shareholders. Thus, the problem we face in terms of research is a digital paradigm change that has revolutionized the foundation of society and, consequently of education, in which it becomes imperative to analyze the social reality beyond didactics, considering the interdependent and current aspects of media education (**Gómez-Galán**, 2020). In other words, we must understand media education from the Global North and South as a strategy oriented toward the analysis of consumption, ideological demystification, and the verification of the truth in the light of changing and dynamic challenges that reflect marginal perspectives and result in new demands for the development of media competencies (**Nichols; LeBlanc**, 2020).

Starting from this framework, the present study delves into studies directed toward the analysis of the impact of “media communication” and “educommunication” at the scientific level through a systematic review. Recent studies using this method have considered analyses of this phenomenon with regard to disinformation or multiliteracy (**Valverde-Berrosco et al.**, 2022), “fake news” in the light of the new challenges of creative production and consumption (**Kim et al.**, 2021), the risks of democracy as a result of fake news and big data (**Ottónicar et al.**, 2021), and the specific impact of digital literacy on education (**George-Reyes; Avello-Martínez**, 2021), among others. However, literature lacks an evolutionary analysis of the educommunicative object itself with the aim of understanding the corresponding intercultural perspectives during the last two decades. We thus attempted to identify works on media education from the English speaking–Western perspective (in English) as well as the Ibero-American view (in Spanish), with the following specific objectives: (a) to explore the main scientific concepts in media education, (b) to map the geographical zones that are interested in media education from a scientific perspective, (c) to distinguish the thematic stages in the scientific literature in this transdisciplinary area, and (d) to identify their methodological approaches.

2. Literature review

2.1. Historical evolution of the concept: media education

The concept of “media education” has been given numerous definitions over the years, always responding to the specific needs of context and traditions. In line with this permanent technological diversity and the rhythm of the emergence of new media, an extensive theoretical–conceptual debate has been generated, diversifying the global concept of knowledge, its objectives, and the implementation of media education plans in education environments (McDougall, 2013). Officially, the term “education for communication” was introduced for the first time in 1982 by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (*Unesco*) as a way of integrating media into all levels of education as well as promoting research (Avello-Martínez *et al.*, 2013). This proposal was reviewed at the *Unesco* summits in 2005 and 2007, followed by the launch in 2006 of the curriculum *Media literacy: a kit for teachers, students, parents and professionals* (Frau-Meigs, 2006), aimed at the implementation of media literacy in the curricula of secondary school teachers. Considering this proposition, in the early twentieth century, “media literacy” was defined as the reflective ability of audiences to understand and select the media and to produce their own content (Alvermann; Hagood, 2000). In other words, this concept was understood as a way of analyzing the media to promote critical thinking regarding the messages received –and perceived– by people (Cheung, 2004).

Media education continued to evolve as new technological advances occurred, addressing concerns and challenges associated with digital culture (Acerbi, 2019). Some of the more widespread scientific terms have been: “media education,” which refers to the development of individuals’ competencies for understanding and using communication media in a more critical and conscious way (Fedorov, 2008); (2) “digital literacy,” a term introduced by Gilbster (1997) for the development of the information society, which refers to the ability to interpret and technologically use digital technology and its resources; and (3) “information literacy” , which refers to the ability to identify, analyze, and evaluate information in its different formats (Buitrago *et al.*, 2017). Meanwhile, in 2011, an update of the *Unesco* curriculum was presented, *Media and information literacy: curriculum for teachers* (Wilson *et al.*, 2011); “media education” became “media and information literacy” (MIL), and the perspective and implications of this methodology were expanded to the education scenario. Afterwards, the Alfamed Research Network on Media Competencies for Citizens, from the Euro-American area, introduced the *Alfamed curriculum for teacher training in media literacy* (Aguaded *et al.*, 2020) with a multicultural and plural perspective that broadened the previous approaches, adapting it to the post-pandemic challenges in the third decade of the twenty-first century. This document was ratified, at the same time, by the *Unesco Media and information literacy curriculum for educators and learners* (Grizzle *et al.*, 2021), which incorporated, along with educators, students as a central element in the media–digital learning process.

As a result of this terminological plurality, other projects and research studies have proposed concepts such as “new media literacies” (Jenkins *et al.*, 2009), “multiple literacies” (Bergomás, 2010), and “transmedia literacy” (Scolari *et al.*, 2018), contributing to the debate on the convergence between the areas of communication and education. Despite this variety of concepts, the present study departs from the concept of “media education” with respect to how it addresses, from a broad scientific perspective, the idea of reading and writing, comprehension, and critical use of communication, technological, and digital media (Aguaded; Guerra-Liaño, 2012; Buitrago *et al.*, 2017; García-Matilla, 2022).

2.2. New scenarios for cybercitizens

With the massive and compulsive presence of the internet, social networks, and multiple electronic devices, the role of the media has become a central axis of global(ized) society. As pointed out above, these advances result in unprecedented situations that generate new meanings, having an overwhelming impact on the population (Mason; Metzger, 2012). In fact, following the worldwide Covid-19 crisis, the post-pandemic society has challenged the idyllic vision of digital globalization in the sense of an ingenious and positive view of technology as the facilitator of communication and the personal, professional, and educational activities of individuals (Abolfathi *et al.*, 2022). However, the growth in consumption has been exponential, with the use of social networks peaking in 2022 according to the *Digital 2022 global overview report (DGO Report, 2022)*, such that platforms such as *YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and TikTok* have gained 13.5 new users per second, being the preferred type of media (95.7%) for the consumption of information, content creation, digital self-representation, and social interaction by young adults (Xiao *et al.*, 2021).

Many studies have demonstrated that the ways in which we express ourselves, become informed, communicate, and understand everyday life vary as new technological–digital functionalities appear. These social processes affect the structure and the way in which media education is implemented today (Abolfathi *et al.*, 2022), creating new challenges to the role of the prosumer (production and consumption of media and digital content) (Toffler, 1980), which result in new self-representations, constructions, and management of the digital identity as well as emergent narratives and (un)awareness of citizens’ perspectives (Feher, 2019); That is, digital platforms, social networks, and the actions they enable have shaped the way in which citizens participate in society since the advent of the internet era (Buckingham, 2007). Its broad use and consumption have become embedded in everyday life, with resources such as hashtags,

“ Schools are enhancing their programs with literacy initiatives for the digital inclusion of the society as a utopian support for media education curricula ”

likes, and comments providing multiple options for taking part in social activities (Chen *et al.*, 2011), and thereby the manner in which we learn and teach (Tejada-Fernández; Pozos-Pérez, 2018). Therefore, in an environment of abundant data and information exchange, the need arises to understand the inner workings and influence of these platforms, for the construction of competent cybercitizens (Aguaded; Vizcaíno-Verdú, 2020).

Media education continued to evolve as new technological advances appeared, addressing concerns and challenges associated with digital culture

Various studies have demonstrated that to intervene democratically in these complex digital scenarios, knowledge and development of a series of competencies that facilitate the analysis of messages are fundamental, beyond the technical features, concerned with heterogeneity and the intent of sociocultural meanings (Mezquita-Romero *et al.*, 2022). Additionally, media education implementation projects have shown that when specific educommunicative processes are applied, citizens develop their socio-proactive capacity, encouraging them to think critically about possible stereotypes, discriminations, or violence (Erstad *et al.*, 2021). Thus, media education promotes not only participation but also the construction of cybercitizens as agents of social change through the responsible use and consumption of communication media, technologies, and platforms (Kumari, 2020). As a result, the present study intends to present the historical–geographical evolution of educommunicative interests during the last two decades and to understand their sociohumanistic trends.

3. Method

The present study included a systematic review and the use of a science mapping method from a quantitative–qualitative perspective (meta-ethnography). Meta-ethnography, defined as synthesis and discussion with respect to research about a specific subject of specialization (Noblit; Hare, 1988), allows a broadening of the interpretations of preexisting original studies to create a theoretical–visual argument about the scientific evaluation of media education over the last 20 years from 2000 to 2021. Likewise, science mapping, that is, the process of visualizing potentially significant patterns and trends about a scientific question (Chen, 2017), enables the identification of components, dynamics, and structures with respect to geographical scenarios, subject trends, and methodological frameworks.

3.1. Search and selection procedure

The search, selection, and synthesis of the data was performed through a systematic review according to the *Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (Prisma)* standards (Moher *et al.*, 2015). As we consider an interdisciplinary portmanteau between “communication” and “education,” with a broad range of data and an extensive history over the last two decades, the search was limited exclusively to the most well-recognized international database: the Core Collection of the *Web of Science*. The data obtained were thus guaranteed to have an international perspective, with documents supported by high-quality indexation criteria, thus avoiding the potential errors in similar results obtained from other platforms.

Regarding the procedure, the search was narrowed down to a limited set of terms (in Spanish and English): “alfabetización mediática,” “media education,” “educomunicación,” “educommunication,” “educación mediática,” and “media education,” adopting the following strategy: “[term]” AND [2000 to 2021] AND [Title] AND [Article] AND [Spanish / English] AND [Education Educational Research / Communication].” The initial search obtained a total of 613 scientific articles within the areas of Education and Communication during the last two decades.

Next, duplicate records were filtered out by using the *RefWorks* bibliography manager. This process included a double screening: (1) an automatic process using the manager software, and (2) a manual process on the basis of qualitative reading by the authors. For the latter, the *Spider* (sample, phenomenon of interest, design, evaluation, research type) strategy was applied (Methley *et al.*, 2014) to define the eligibility criteria for the qualitative analysis. The final criteria applied were (a) sample (international, regardless of date or geographical zone), (b) phenomenon of interest (media education as the main axis of the object of study), (c) analysis design (cross-sectional, longitudinal, or experimental), (d) evaluation (perceptions and conclusions about the impact of media education), and (e) type of research (qualitative and/or quantitative). This resulted in 598 studies (Fig. 1).

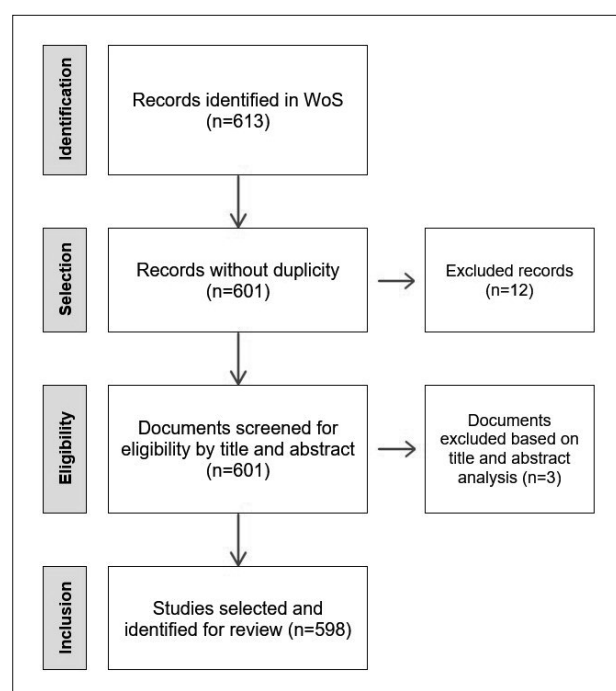


Figure 1. Flow diagram of the selection process

tion.” In contrast, during the second phase (2013–2021), a proliferation of studies was observed related to technological–digital development and its implication in society (Figure 3).

The first few years (2000–2003) revealed studies dedicated to theoretical reflections on the concept of media education and the importance of recognizing media as an influential element in society, left over from previous communication theories. As the years passed, it was observed how media education changed worldwide to include African, Asian, and Latin American countries, in agreement with *Unesco* recommendations on its implementation in school curricula and teacher training on the critical use of media and social networks (Avello-Martínez *et al.*, 2013).

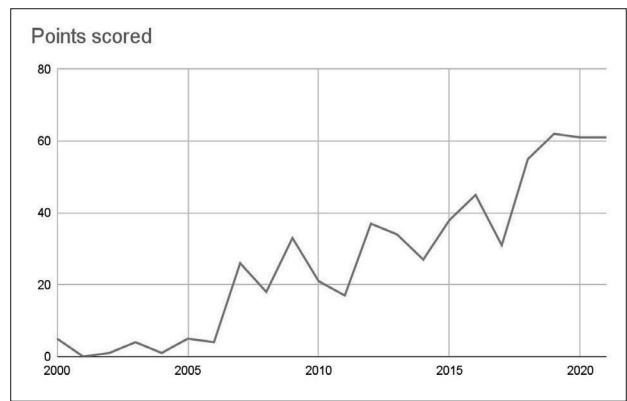


Figure 3. Evolution of the number of studies in media education

With the passage of time, the sample broadened in terms of both reach and number (Scharrer, 2005; Gruba, 2006; Austin *et al.*, 2007; Pinkleton *et al.*, 2008; Primack *et al.*, 2014). However, in many countries, scientific concerns about media education were scarce, especially in Southern Africa, some Latin American countries, or western Asia (Figure 4). Studies on media education were particularly prevalent in North and South America, Europe, Northern Africa, and the North and South East Asia–Pacific region.

According to the data obtained, three representative population segments were observed: (1) students, encompassing different age groups, for which activities were proposed both inside and outside the classroom for the development of technological–digital media competencies (Pinkleton *et al.*, 2008; Byrne, 2009; Cheung, 2010; Medina-Cambrón *et al.*, 2015); (2) educators, focusing on training for the implementation of technological, digital, and audiovisual resources in different education environments (Belova; Eilks, 2016; Wang *et al.*, 2018); (3) families and older individuals, focusing on the integration and inclusion of the different generations involved in information and communication processes (Tsvetkova, 2019). This classification supports what Jaakkola (2020) considers to be a limitation in the study of media education, in that the samples were homogeneous with respect to the worldwide community. In this line, media education, according to Abolfathi *et al.* (2022), would have to be understood in all areas and collectives from a “glocal” (both



Figure 4. Geographic map of studies on media education from 2000 to 2021. See an interactive evolution at: <https://view.genial.ly/6267ffbf4d958600180afc19>

global and local) point of view (Hemer; Tufte, 2005), considering the evolutionary and constant impact of technology, the media, social networks, and information in the lives of individuals (Xiao *et al.*, 2021).

4.3. Thematic evolution of media education in science

As a result of the media education activities conducted by the *Unesco*, the publication of different curricula for the training of educators and students (Wilson *et al.*, 2011; Aguaded *et al.*, 2020; Grizzle *et al.*, 2021), and the consolidation of social networks, researchers have reformulated the concept over the last two decades, following emerging social phenomena that have led to preferred lines of research. As shown in Figure 5, among the hundreds of studies analyzed, five stages could be identified: (1) conceptualization, which includes studies on terminologies and reflections on media as an educational venue; (2) implementation, which includes the analysis of media legislation, the surge and challenges of technological advances, and new media representations of audiences; (3) formative, which possesses new scenarios regarding participative culture, education 2.0, and the conceptual debate on previously introduced terminology; (4) measurement, which analyzes the opportunities and consequences of media education according to the digital gap and identity; and (5) digitalization, which mainly studies the impact of social networks, the presumption of information, and the shaping of digital identity.

The following evolutionary stages can be defined:

Conceptualization stage (2000–2005)

In this period, media education started to be conceived at the conceptual level through reflective studies. Research studies explored diverse terms from different perspectives and disciplines (Alvermann; Hagood, 2000), while also trying to clarify and unify their social necessity (Gutiérrez-Martín; Tyner, 2012). During this stage, the term was explored within different political and social contexts without consensus on its definition, with the discussion progressively expanding according to temporal and geographical needs (Buckingham, 2003).

Implementation stage (2005–2010)

This stage resulted from the launch of the first *Unesco* curriculum (Wilson *et al.*, 2011), in which studies were planned, centered on the application of media education in the different phases of education (from early childhood to university). Studies were mainly experimental in character with a quantitative approach, focusing on classroom experiences and the practical exploration of media activities with pedagogic aims. Studies during this period present evidence that a higher level of media competency related to media education led to greater critical awareness of media use and consumption (Cheung, 2009; Operti, 2009; Nam, 2010).

Formative stage (2011–2015)

During this stage, it was observed that, despite institutional efforts made on curricular and legislation issues, citizens had difficulties and deficiencies in learning about media, due to a lack of training of teachers (Cabero; Liano, 2011). Thus, studies focused on the media competencies of professors to improve and effectively implement quality criteria to ensure effective student learning. During this period, the importance of media education for citizen participation was underlined, with the emergence of some of the first studies on social networks (Faiola *et al.*, 2010). However, the focus

In these complex digital scenarios, the knowledge and development of a series of competencies that facilitate the analysis of messages are fundamental, beyond the technical features, concerned with heterogeneity and the intent of the sociocultural meanings

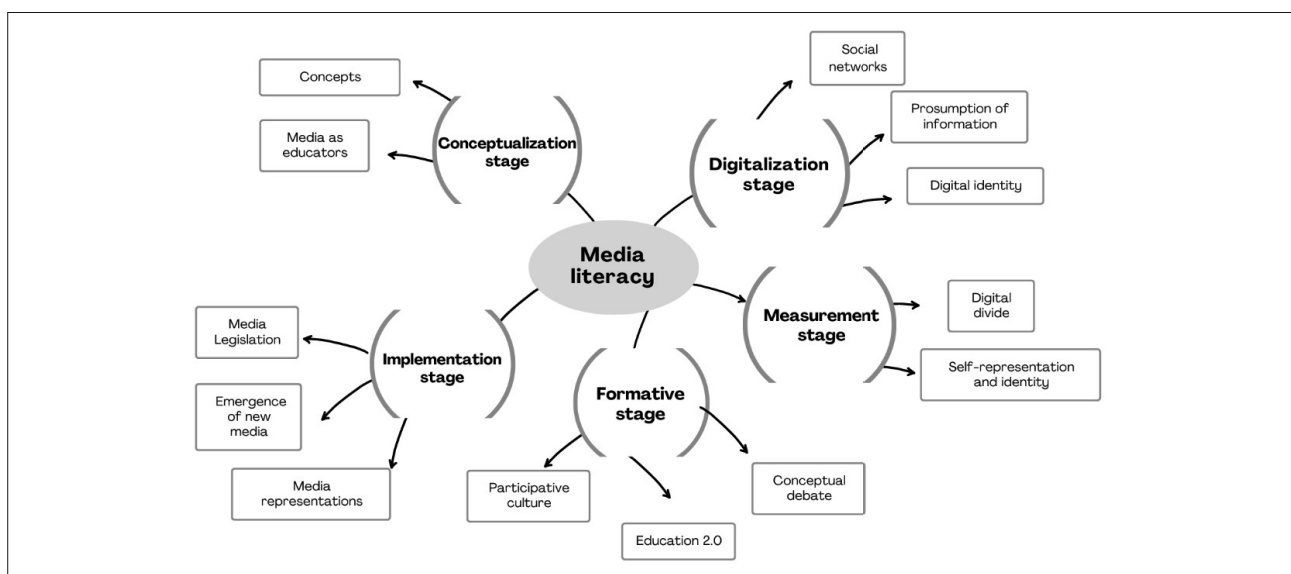


Figure 5. Advances of media education in stages and sub-themes

of media education remained almost intact, addressing the challenges associated with accessing, reading, evaluating, reflecting on, and creating media content (Medina-Cambrón; Ballano-Macías, 2015). Likewise, this period also saw the emergence of studies with small samples that considered population segments complementary to the profile of professors or students, such as older individuals (Santibáñez-Velilla, 2013; Abad-Alcala, 2014), vulnerable and/or traditionally marginalized collectives, and groups at risk of social exclusion (Franco-Álvarez; Martul, 2013).

“The data showed some trends and concerns about media education studies, among which we observed phenomena associated with fake news, interethnic tolerance, or the pandemic due to Covid-19”

Measurement stage (2016–2018)

Studies during this period demonstrated that the implementation of educommunicative methodologies had not been successful, focusing on measuring the level of media education of citizens as well as the development of new formal and informal teaching–learning formulas (Xiao et al., 2021). We identified studies with approaches directed toward the training of users and audiences (Moekotte et al., 2017; Dezuanni, 2018), and works oriented toward the analysis of media texts and understanding the mechanisms of online content creation (Buitrago et al., 2017).

Digitalization stage (2019–2022)

In this last phase, the transformation of the media and the access to information enabled the analysis of consumption and distribution of information, data, and news (disinfomedia, fake news, and information saturation, among others) (Acerbi, 2019; Abolfathi et al. 2022) as well as the habits of vertiginous digital consumption, platforms, algorithms, and the monetizing and diversification of data (Poyntz et al., 2021; Nichols; LeBlanc, 2020). In this last stage, studies defined media education as the capacity to access, participate in, create, redefine, and interpret media messages as proactive citizens (Shinta et al., 2019; Fardiah et al., 2020; Arik; Arik, 2021).

4.4. Analysis design and types of studies

Having identified the themes of scientific interest, the preferred research designs of media education studies were analyzed by network analysis (Figure 6). During the conceptualization stage, most of the works were reflective, aiming to apply literature reviews and trials to address the concepts that explained the needs of society in terms of media (Buckingham, 2007). In turn, during the implementation and formative stages, the studies became more quantitative, mainly quasi-experimental or experimental, regarding the reduction to practice as well as the verification of the effects of educommunicative training, and the evaluation of the programs designed and executed through questionnaires, experimental groups, etc. (Cabero and Liano, 2011; Abad-Alcala, 2014; Tully; Vraga, 2017). In the last stage analyzed, that of digitalization, the analyses were eminently qualitative, including in-depth interviews, discussion groups, documental and/or bibliometric analysis, or ethnography, as well as emerging techniques such as digital ethnography, the digital analysis of content, and the analysis of social networks, among others (Shinta et al., 2019; Fardiah et al., 2020; Arik; Arik, 2021).

“It is especially worth mentioning how “digitalization” has become the cultural *modus operandi* of modern civilization”

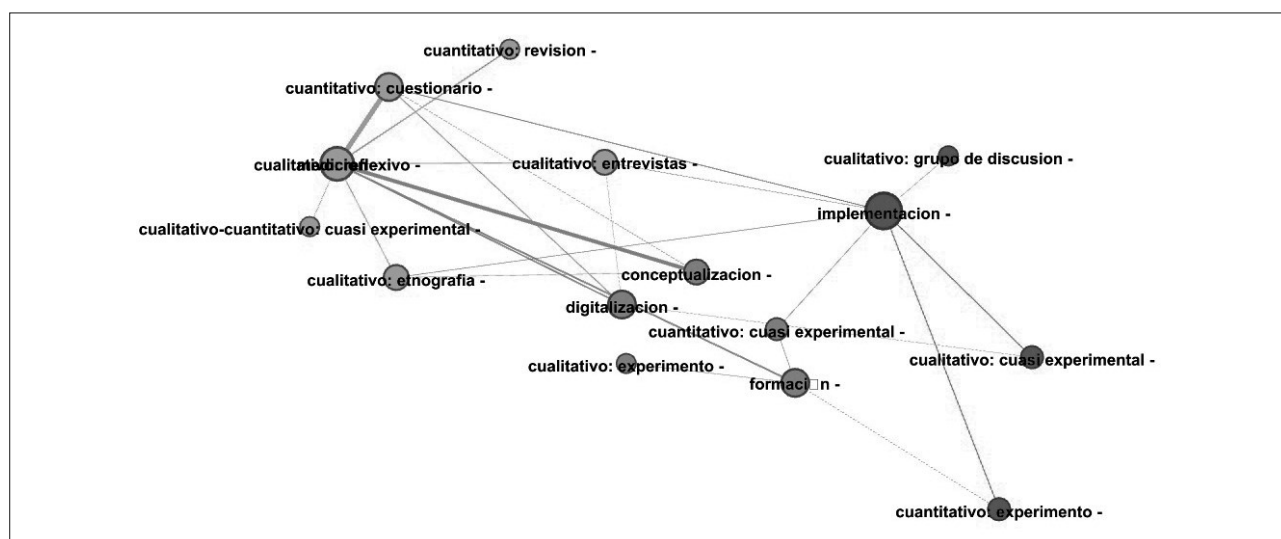


Figure 6. Network of research approaches according to the stage of the education studies of the media analyzed

5. Conclusions, limitations, and outlook

The results of this historical–evolutionary analysis of studies on media education reveal that, for many decades, this research tradition has been conditioned by the highly universal uses and effects of technological–digital advances of devices and media. Therefore, it is especially worth mentioning how “digitalization” has become the cultural *modus operandi* of modern civilization. Everything revolves around digitalization, the sacred totem of modern civilization. Indeed, these platforms have changed the way in which we conceive the media, either owing to their beneficial use, with critical and responsible ideas, or the self-expression of the “digital I.” This is why future media education plans highlight the challenges regarding our capacity to understand the codes and languages of the internet in algorithmic and datafied terms, as well as the development of competencies for the prosumption of creative content that exploits human communication according to conscientious, ethical, and judicious criteria.

Despite the introduction of international mapping that builds the road towards “glocalization”, the population segments were fundamentally homogenous

As observed in this work, despite the introduction of international mapping that builds the road towards “glocalization,” the population segments were fundamentally homogeneous, until the last digital stage, when concern for minorities and the Global South can be observed. In particular, social networks open the way to analysis of individual and/or collective (self-)representation, prosumption of information and news (fake news, disinfodemia, hate speech, etc.), and the transformation and dissemination of heterogeneous and emerging languages that modify the way we understand language today (emojis, memes, interactions, etc.). These trends have resulted in the development of new hypotheses regarding the role of educommunication for the educator and the student, which are repeatedly adapted to processes that, as of today, extend over just 24 hours, at most, through an Instagram story.

In the face of the great number of new ways in which society can be analyzed in educommunicative terms, as well as the relentless and continuous advance of information technologies, communication, and digitalization, we admit that this study was limited to a description of studies collected from a single database, i.e. the *Web of Science*. This decision was not trivial, as our approach to the phenomenon of media education resulted in a very large number of works whose extension to other document platforms (or in temporal terms) would have resulted in an untenably large quantitative–qualitative sample. This review thus provides a starting point for future studies on the deficiencies and resulting scientific challenges for agents of educommunicative change, as an agent of digital “glocalization,” media education “in” and “for” the Global South, algorithm and data literacy, and digital (self)- and ethical–critical management of individual and collective identities.

We start from a review that forecasts future studies on the deficiencies and consequent scientific challenges for agents of educommunicative change, as an agent of digital “glocalization”, media education “in” and “for” the global south, algorithm and data literacy, and digital (self)- and ethical-critical management of individual and collective identities

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Annex 2

#Mixedcouples on TikTok: Performative Hybridization and Identity in the Face of Discrimination

Social Media + Society
July-September 2022: 1–14
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DOI: 10.1177/20563051221122464
journals.sagepub.com/home/sms


Sabina Civila¹  and Daniela Jaramillo-Dent² 

Abstract

Spanish-Moroccan mixed couples exemplify a case of cultural hybridization that reflects the colonial past between these two countries. In this context, social media is a space of opportunity and risk to face discrimination and othering. In this article, we draw upon postcolonial theory and Internet studies to consider TikTok affordances as tools that are relevant to understand how cultural, national, and religious identities are shaped and presented in digital spaces. In this sense, this study constitutes the first exploratory analysis of Moroccan-Spanish mixed couples' (self)representations and identity construction as reflected by their TikTok content. The memetic and intersectional aspects of the mixed-couple identity emerge as central in the convergent nature of the platform and their lived experiences. Through an initial analysis of 8,653 TikTok videos, we identified 6 creator accounts with more than 10K followers to conduct a deeper multimodal content and discourse analysis of 146 videos. This enabled us to explore how these creators portray their hybrid identity through short, vertical videos harnessing TikTok's vernaculars and affordances. The results enable us to propose the concept of *performative hybridization*, which involves discursive markers within these couples' TikTok content that reflect a fluid integration of two cultures, while the pervading visual and narrative components reflect the dominance of one set of identity traits over the other. In this case, Moroccan culture is more prevalent.

Keywords

mixed couples, TikTok, cultural hybridization, affordances, social media, Islamophobia

Introduction

This study explores Moroccan-Spanish mixed couples' (self) representations and hybridized identity constructions by creating content on TikTok. We delve into the ways in which they harness the unique affordances of this platform within its communities of creators, larger societal structures, and existing cultural, national, and religious differences. The article derives from a qualitative, multimodal content analysis of TikTok videos created by six *tiktokers* who are part of a mixed couple with a following of more than 10K. The analysis draws upon postcolonial theory situated in platform and Internet studies that are applicable to the TikTok context and is centered on two analytical dimensions: (1) uses of TikTok affordances for identity building and representation and (2) uses of TikTok affordances to respond and interact with existing colonial beliefs about them.

Since 2008, the Moroccan community has expanded in Spain and according to the Spanish Statistical Office (2020) it is the largest foreign community in this European country.

Moreover, research suggests that there is an important relationship between immigration and a higher number of mixed couples (Rodríguez-García et al., 2021). Romantic relationships between Spanish and Moroccan individuals reflect structural changes that emerged in the times of the Spanish Protectorate (Mateo-Dieste, 2012) but continue to expand in contemporary society due to increased immigration—and forms of coupling—that reflect cultural hybridization and the increased availability of communication technologies (Steingress, 2012).

In this context of migratory flows and centuries-old colonial relationships, TikTok emerges as one of the most

¹Universidad de Huelva, Spain

²Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam, The Netherlands

Corresponding Author:

Sabina Civila, Universidad de Huelva, Avda. de las Fuerzas Armadas s/n, 21071 Huelva, Spain.

Email: sabivivila@gmail.com

Twitter: @Scivila



downloaded apps in Spain (Statista, 2022). This platform has become synonymous with contemporary digital cultures as a space that goes beyond representation to shape the ways in which creators connect to each other through uniquely connective affordances that promote imitation (Zulli & Zulli, 2020). We consider Khazraee and Novak's (2018) description of two types of affordances: for discourse and for performance.

Considering these theoretical underpinnings, two research questions guide this study: (RQ1) How are TikTok affordances used by mixed couples to construct and represent their identity? (RQ2) How do mixed couples use TikTok affordances to face colonial discriminatory narratives? Through this analysis, we expand current understandings of the broader implications of social media in the construction and representation of postcolonial relationships between Spaniards and Moroccans, as well as their possibilities to resignify their hybrid identities through the creation of TikTok content, in this case within a mixed couple. The analysis also considers the reactions they receive from their surrounding communities as evidenced in their content.

We begin by positioning current debates about Moroccan-Spanish cultural differences, cultural hybridization, and social media such as TikTok as relevant for the analysis of identity construction and expression. We then describe the methodology used and report on the findings. The results enable us to propose the concept of *performative hybridization* which involves discursive markers within these couples' TikTok content that reflect a fluid integration of two cultures, while the pervading visual and narrative components reflect the dominance of one set of identity traits over the other, in this case Moroccan culture is more prevalent.

Cultural Hybridization and Mixed Couples

Anthropologist Néstor García-Canclini (2005, p. XXV) defined cultural hybridization as the set of "sociocultural processes in which discrete structures or practices, previously existing in separate form, are combined to generate new structures, objects, and practices."

García-Canclini (2005) goes on to suggest that identity should not be understood by separating individual traits but by gaining a deeper understanding of the mixing processes that give way to said identities and their implications, which expand future possibilities of modifying culture and politics. He also emphasizes the power clashes that exist in these hybridization processes. Thus, our study considers the concept of hybridity as key for the analysis of mixed couples as fluid and changing relationships in a context that still features colonial beliefs and structures such as Spain. Following this conceptualization of hybrid cultures, we take a social constructivist approach to identity as one that is built through a constant negotiation with one's context (Hall, 2019). Internet studies scholar Theresa Senft (2013) has explained

how identity is constructed through a set of behaviors and actions taken within digital spaces.

Bhabha (2004) expands on these ideas of identity and hybridity by describing a "third space" where cultural symbols and meanings become less fixed, more ambivalent, and contradictory. He goes beyond social constructionist ideas of identity to include the encounter of diverse cultures and identities in this "third space." This occurs in a process where subjects who are different construct and negotiate their subjectivities in this ambivalent space. Bhabha argues that this "third space" has the potential to enable empowering forms of cultural hybridity.

Within mixed couples, the representation of White femininity as the ideal is also significant. As sociologist Kumiko Nemoto (2009) explains, "white women are viewed as the possessors of ideal femininity" (p. 107). This quote reflects the racial dimensions intersecting with ideals of morality and perfection within contemporary conceptualizations of White femininity. These beliefs limit the ability of mixed couples that involve a White woman to be accepted and recognized in a (mostly) White society such as Spain. Nemoto (2009) goes on to cite gender theorist Judith Butler to connect this view of White womanhood with the notion of their role as "guardians of European civility" (p. 107). Although Nemoto's work describes relationships between North American women and Asian men, the view of White women as the protectors of traditionally European values and societies can be applied to the case of Moroccan-Spanish couples.

Moreover, anthropologist Josep Mateo-Dieste (2012) describes that at the time of the Spanish Protectorate in Morocco, the main type of mixed relationship was between Moroccan men and Spanish women. He goes on to describe how these couples were persecuted in the decade of the 1940s for being a danger to Spanish domination in Morocco. Today, Moroccan-Spanish mixed couples are still rejected because they counter contemporary colonial structures that continue to shape the construction and representation of subjects (Young, 2016). Therefore, the mediated presence of mixed couples—such as the sample of creators analyzed in the present study—constitutes a challenge to Orientalist perceptions of Eastern cultures as inferior, degenerate, and unchangeable (Said, 2003).

Considering the various considerations related to identity and discrimination, Al Areqi (2016) argues that people who are part of a hybridization process—such as mixed couples—often face negativity from both cultures, as both are considered the "other" by engaging in such a romantic relationship (Rodríguez-García et al., 2021). Gilroy (2004) explains that this is due to the perceived "civilizational betrayal" represented by their hybridity, which requires a sort of cleansing to maintain the idea—by the hegemonic group—of an unattainable "pure culture." The same author argues that the cosmopolitan ideals—of diverse groups coexisting within modern societies—fail because inclusion is conditional on a set of social rules that foster new forms of colonialism and

reinstate the discursive and practical aspects of colonial hegemony.

The colonial past between these countries impacts the discourses and the messages these creators receive, and it could be considered a contemporary form of colonial domination (Gilroy, 2004). In this study, postcolonial theory is understood on the basis of Said (1994) and Hall (1996) who describe how culture is key in the negotiation, perpetuation, and reproduction of power relations. According to sociologist Stuart Hall (1995), identities are built based on the differences and similarities that one has with the “others” which serve to locate and question certain dominant notions.

Hence, we argue that TikTok is a relevant case study to explore these postcolonial interactions, representations, and narratives. We suggest that TikTok becomes a space where these processes of hybridization and negotiation of the couple’s identity develop through specific narratives and (self) representations that are also shaped by the platform and its available affordances.

The Role of TikTok in Postcolonial Identity Construction

The self-representative practices of mixed couples on social media are relevant to understand how cultural, national, and religious identities are shaped and presented in digital spaces. However, it is important to consider critical perspectives about the possibilities of social media representations for significant social change. For instance, sociologist Herman Gray (2013) argues that the current proliferation of minority identities on social media signal the increased visibility of these groups but no real recognition. The celebration of diversity, he continues, is framed in a neoliberal framework rather than an actual recognition of the struggles and structural issues suffered by individuals within minority groups. This is why, according to Gray, social media fails to offer a space for these groups to challenge existing structures of domination.

Furthermore, some authors have argued that identity is shaped in relation to the beliefs and discourses that surround individuals. For instance, Weber and Mitchell (2008) argue that young people’s online identities comprise both their own self-perception and that of their followers and viewers. In relation to Islamic identity construction, Meer (2014) suggests that Muslim self-consciousness is developed around islamophobic beliefs and discourses.

Within postcolonial theory, islamophobia refers at its simplest to the various manifestations of discrimination toward Islam and Muslims (Awan, 2016). It goes beyond religion to include other identity traits such as ethnicity, race, nationality, and culture that are traditionally connected to Muslim identity (Meer, 2014). For the purposes of the present study, we consider Imran Awan’s (2016) five walls of Islamophobic hate in his analysis of Facebook: (1) the understanding of Muslims as terrorists, (2) the interpretation of Muslims as

rapists, (3) the conception of Niqab/hijab as a threat, (4) the view of Muslims against “us,” and (5) support for deportation. Islamophobic content has been found to bypass moderation policies on social media (Civila et al., 2020), leading to polarization and social conflict.

Researchers have explored the motivations of Muslim creators to generate YouTube videos and found that their main drive was to promote the merits of their religion and its teachings, including the use of the hijab as a choice rather than an oppressive practice while also contesting other negative content about Islamic communities (Mosemghvdlishvili & Jansz, 2012). Additional research has been done on YouTube to unveil how racist ideas are challenged by interracial couples. Their results show that the member of the stigmatized group tends to justify their motivations to be in a mixed couple more than the person who is a member of the non-stigmatized group within the couple (Sobande, 2019).

Recent research has explored female Muslims and the hijab as a form of digitally mediated representation of empowered femininity, choice, and entrepreneurship on Instagram (Baulch & Pramiyanti, 2018); the analysis of the hijab as a clothing item that becomes central to their identity, modesty, and fashion style through Instagram posts (Boy et al., 2018); researchers have also used a post digital feminist approach to understand Arab women’s empowerment and agency through their uses of Instagram (Hurley, 2021); while other scholars have found the ways in which Islamic views of modesty and faith have adapted to digital spaces and attention economies (Kavakci & Kraeplin, 2017).

In the next section, we explore the specificities of TikTok as a relevant platform to explore mixed couples and their (self)representative practices of content creation.

TikTok in the Social Media Ecosystem

TikTok is a social media platform that evolved from Musical.ly, its predecessor, through the purchase of the former by ByteDance in 2017 and the merger of both apps (Ghosh & Yang, 2021) it has grown to be the seventh social media platform in terms of users with 689 million monthly active users (Mohsin, 2020). Moreover, TikTok was the most downloaded App during 2020 in Spain (8.4 M) (Mena-Roa, 2020) and has grown 25% in 2021 (IAB, 2021).

The concept of affordances is central to our analysis due to the uniqueness of this platform. In this sense, TikTok offers an expanded set of affordances that allow an individual or group to connect to other creators, communities, and the algorithmic feed, such as the reuse and imitation affordances described by Jaramillo-Dent et al. (2022). For the purposes of this article, we consider the social constructivist functions of affordances as tools offered by the platform that enable users to build their own identities, communities, and social relations (Wellman, 2001). In this sense, affordances can be shaped through users’ behaviors and interactions with the platform and between them. That is, the way in which the

users combine affordances with their narratives contribute to creating patterns of digital behavior among members of a group (Khazraee & Novak, 2018). In this case, user interactions with TikTok's design and structure contribute to generating and increasing the visibility of their identities (Jaramillo-Dent et al., 2022). Platform affordances are also involved in the construction of a social imaginary and their analysis allows us to understand how certain issues are represented (McVeigh-Schultz & Baym, 2015).

For our purposes, we consider Khazraee and Novak's (2018) description of two types of affordances: some of which are used for discourse and others used for performance. The former refers to those tools that allow identity and collective discourse, sharing personal stories and promoting the negotiation of meaning. The latter encloses those that allow discourse to be spread through the staging and performance of identity using creative elements beyond the narrative. These enable us to identify cultural forms such as symbols and clothing. These affordances help highlight the role of textual versus visual aspects of the content to build a hybrid identity and reach larger audiences.

TikTok comprises vertical videos that can last from 15 s to 3 min, and it features an algorithmic *for you* feed that provides unprecedented virality possibilities for specific videos, leading to video-based popularity rather than profile-based celebrity (Abidin, 2021). TikTok has been identified as a structurally mimetic social media platform, due to the ways in which it promotes imitation and the reuse of creative affordances, as well as configurations that make mimesis easy within the content creation process (Zulli & Zulli, 2020). Audio is a relevant affordance within TikTok, since it enables the classification of content, making videos searchable using the audio track (Abidin, 2021).

In the current research, we examine how Spanish-Moroccan *tiktokers*, who are part of a mixed couple, discuss their experiences using TikTok affordances (for discourse and performance). In this process, we delve into the nuances and specificities of these couples and how they self-represent and build their own identity while facing diverse reactions and interactions from other *tiktokers* and followers.

Method

Sample

A research profile was created, and we used a modified version of the virtual snowball sampling method (Baltar & Brunet, 2012) which helps identify content created by hard-to-reach populations.

The search was conducted between 19 April 2021 and 10 May 2021, by identifying TikTok videos using the hashtags #mixedcouples and #SpainandMorocco in their Spanish and English versions. We then identified other hashtags of interest that appeared together with these and found other

relevant videos. We viewed a total of 8,653 videos and found 6 profiles from creators that self-identified as being part of a Spanish-Moroccan mixed couple with more than 10K followers, which is the threshold at which TikTok begins paying creators (TikTok, 2021). These accounts comprised a total of 1,369 videos. We watched all the videos in each profile three times to identify content that fit the following criteria: (1) discussed cultural aspects or topics related to the identity and integration of the members of the couple and (2) had more than 30K views. The final sample comprised a total of 146 videos from 6 accounts (20/25 from each account).

Although romantic relationships between Moroccans and Spaniards statistically feature a slightly higher prevalence of male/Moroccan and female/Spaniard than the opposite (Rodríguez-García et al., 2021), it is noteworthy that the totality of profiles identified in this study feature a Moroccan male and a Spanish female. We were unable to find profiles that featured the opposite relationship. Moreover, most females in these pairs express their thoughts on conversion to Islam. While some of them are undecided, others are in different stages of conversion. This may have to do with the perception that religious endogamy will ensure increased acceptance in the family of the Islamic partner in Spain (Tarré, 2019).

All the videos were downloaded and analyzed using ATLAS.ti 8. The positionality of the authors is relevant since one of them is part of a Spanish-Moroccan mixed couple and the second author is an immigrant in Spain. So, these specific vital experiences have a role in the analytical process (Table 1).

Codebook Development

The hybrid codebook includes theoretically derived codes related to Islamophobia (Awan, 2016; Civila et al., 2020), and codes derived through an inductive approach carrying out iterative rounds of coding to identify themes of interest derived from the data itself, namely those related to cultural aspects, specific identity narratives, and TikTok affordances. The code groups used in the present analysis are included in Table 2.

Table 2 also includes a column entitled *affordances* which reflects additional coding rounds that occurred later, where we classified the coded content into two types of affordances, following Khazraee and Novak's (2018) conceptualization of affordances for discourse and for performance.

To respond to the research questions, a multimodal analysis was carried out to understand how meanings are constructed on TikTok by these creators. Multimodal analysis allows interpreting both verbal and nonverbal data and exploring different representative modes (Dicks, 2019). Multimodal analysis combines all forms of communication on TikTok including visual, textual, interactive, and other modes (Korhonen, 2010).

Table 1. Sample Information.

User ID	Likes	Following	Followers	First video	Total of videos	Married
ID 01	579.2K	51	33.6K	24 May 2020	182	Yes
ID 02	788.9K	36	64.9K	5 October 2020	119	No
ID 03	273.4K	17	14.7K	19 May 2020	47	No
ID 04	7M	126	349.3K	2 November 2016	525	No
ID 05	1.9M	76	169.8K	11 April 2020	83	Yes
ID 06	24.7M	37	958.3K	22 May 2020	413	No

Source. Created by the authors.

Table 2. Code Groups.

Affordances	Code group	Description
Discursive	FUNC caption	This code group relates to the caption within the video and the discourse within these captions
Discursive	FUNC embedded text	This function appears as visual text on the video and is used to emphasize and describe the main ideas within the video
Performative	AUDIO music (inst)	This code group points to the specific uses and characteristics of audio tracks. These are used to connect videos and trends. In this case instrumental music
Performative	AUDIO music (lyrics)	Same as above but music with lyrics
Discursive	AUDIO oral	Same as above but oral statements
Performative	EMOJI	This code group labels the types and uses of emojis
Performative	HASH	This code group identifies uses of hashtags
Performative	VIS CULT	This code group identifies cultural elements that are present visually in the video
Performative	PLOT CULT	This code group labels content that features a narrative related to the culture of one or both creators
Discursive	LANG	This group relates to the language(s) used
Performative	ISLAMPH	This code group points out to content that mentions or responds to Islamophobic beliefs, narratives, or comments

The data were classified in an iterative process of analysis. In the first round, the affordances used by this group were considered and in the following rounds, the specific functions of these affordances—including those for discourse and performance—in relation to the phenomena of analysis are outlined.

Ethical Considerations

In the present study, the researchers have gone through a critical and reflective process of decision-making to make sure the data collection, storage, and analysis was conducted with the utmost care for the creators involved considering their privacy and the ownership of such data (Metcalf & Crawford, 2016). Also, to the extent possible, the content and profiles have been anonymized due to the implications of utilizing social media content without the user's consent (Boyd & Crawford, 2012).

Results

It is important to note that platform affordances are not experienced in isolation, but within digital contexts and among particular users. Users give these tools specific functions,

enabling new ways of representing, speaking, combining communication forms, and building communities. Thus, the results are classified according to the research questions: (RQ1) the uses of affordances by mixed couples on TikTok to construct and represent their identity; and (RQ2) the uses of TikTok affordances to negotiate and face colonial discriminatory narratives.

Uses of TikTok Affordances by Mixed Couples for Identity: Conceptualizing Performative Hybridization

The most relevant affordances deployed by mixed couples on TikTok include audio, vernacular visual, hashtags, emojis, and *answer-comment*. In this section, we will delve into the use of some of these affordances to establish these couples' individual and collective identities as illustrated by their TikTok content. This will enable us to better understand their navigation of the TikTok space through content creation for (self)representation and expression.

The reuse of existing popular music tracks in combination with vernacular visual affordances (Gibbs et al., 2015; McVeigh-Schultz & Baym, 2015) and relevant visibility and identity hashtags¹ enable mixed couples to integrate their

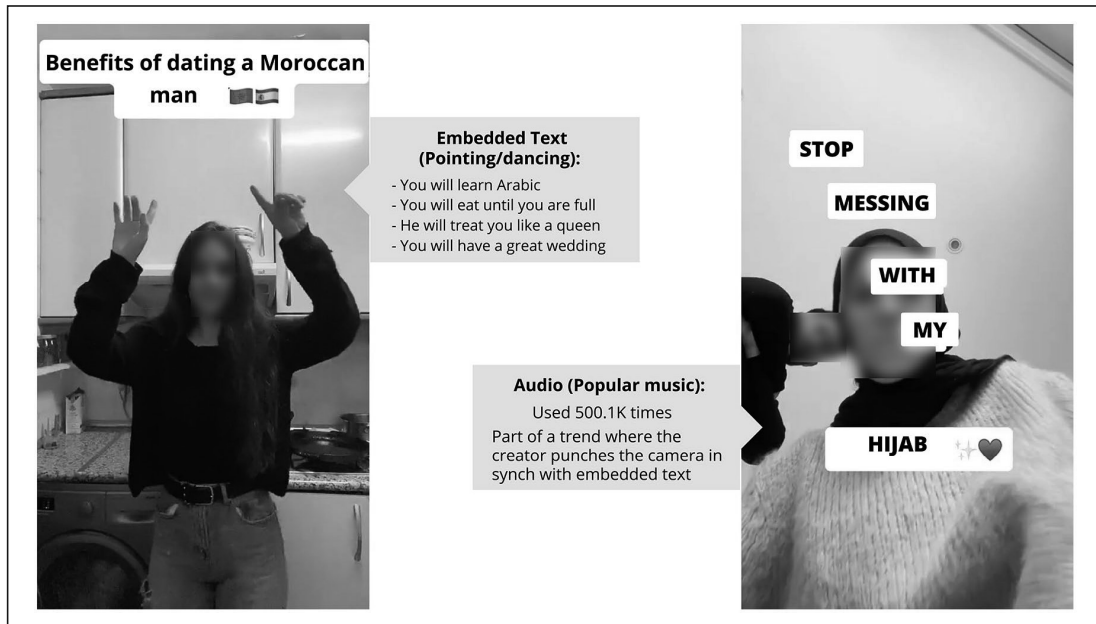


Figure 1. Use of popular audio tracks and visual vernaculars.

identity-related claims to more extended TikTok challenges. Although the use of popular tracks and specific hashtags may contribute to increasing their visibility (Jaramillo-Dent et al., 2022), according to Gray (2013) visibility does not equate to recognition. For instance, Figure 1 reflects the use of trending audio within videos of (self)representation. In one case, the creator discursively defends the hijab. In another case, the creator delineates the Moroccan cultural aspects that make her mixed relationship better.

On the surface, these creators reflect pride about their own cultural hybridization process by deploying discourse affordances (Khazraee & Novak, 2018) such as embedded text and oral statements. Arguably, through their use of vernacular TikTok affordances for visibility—such as trending music and visibility hashtags—they are commodifying their performed hybridity to present an imaginary of the mixed couple as an ideal of inclusion and integration. In reality, the Muslim aspects of the couple’s identity dominate the narrative. This reflects Gray’s (2013) argument that the forms of diversity represented on social media follow neoliberal models prioritizing certain aspects of minority identities due to their popularity and marketability. In the case of these creators, the emphasis on certain identity traits—through their deployment alongside specific TikTok affordances—may help them increase their viewership or follower count.

Figures 2 and 3 illustrate the convergence of affordances for discourse and performance among these creators (Khazraee & Novak, 2018). Textual and oral aspects of the content provide insights about the cultural hybridization process. We observe a mutual interest to learn the language, and pride about the combined customs, beliefs, and traditions of

the couple, as well as a positive perspective of the convergent nature of the mixed couple (Figure 2).

Meanwhile, these videos reflect an identity that constantly adapts within the romantic relationship, and they suggest that discourse affordances—what is said and written in text—reflect a process of hybridization. Meanwhile, the performative affordances—visual and multimodal—show mainly Moroccan cultural aspects (clothes, food, religion, emojis, hashtags) (Figure 3). This leads us to argue that creators within the mixed couple deploy a sort of *performative hybridization*.

This concept refers to the staged presentation of a mixing process between members of a mixed couple where there are discursive markers that suggest a fluid integration of two cultures and the pervading visual and narrative components reflect the dominance of one set of identity traits over the other.

It is possible to argue that performative hybridization occurs in a digital version of Bhabha’s (2004) proposed “third space” offered by TikTok as a platform for self-expression. Among the mixed couples studied, we see the discursive existence of both identities through oral and written narratives—affordances for discourse such as embedded text, captions, and oral audio—illustrated by the videos in Figure 2. Moreover, the visual embodiment of culture reflects mostly Moroccan cultural symbols as portrayed in Figure 3. Therefore, the hybridization expressed by these couples is performative, since the multimodal narrative is positioned on one cultural pole—Moroccan—while there are discursive markers that describe an intermediate reality located “in between,” as Bhabha (2004) proposed.

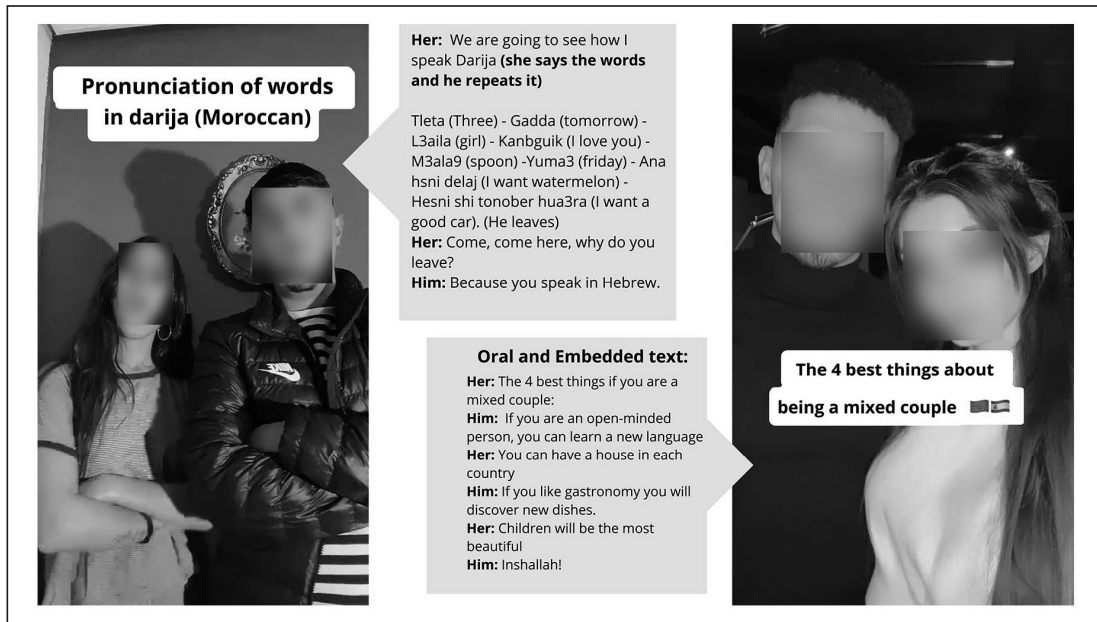


Figure 2. Use of textual and oral aspects to show cultural hybridization process.



Figure 3. Example of Moroccan cultural elements visually present on TikTok.

The use of other TikTok affordances such as emojis and hashtags illustrates the multimodal nature of *performative hybridization* on this platform. Creators often use emojis in an attempt to pair identity with culture multimodally, through religious/cultural emojis such as the mosque, a woman wearing a hijab, or the blessing icon. Figure 4 presents the different emojis used by these creators that are relevant to their (self)representation as individuals and as

members of a couple. These icons also reflect the prevalence of Moroccan culture and Islam in these couples' identities.

It is important to note that although the main character in the video is the woman—White, Spanish, European—in this case the main cultural aspects that are present in the videos are those of the male—who in all cases is Moroccan. But it would be equally problematic if the opposite happened. In this sense, *performative hybridization* can happen when

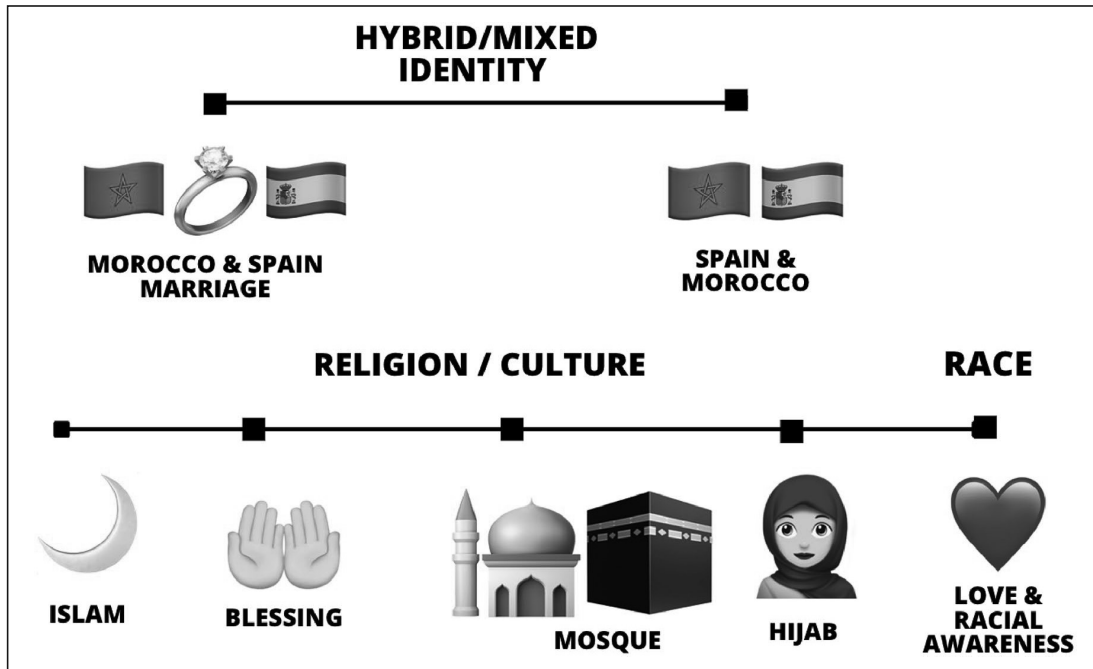


Figure 4. Relevant emojis used by mixed couples on TikTok.

either the traditionally hegemonic or the traditionally marginalized member of the couple replaces most of their identity traits by those of the other, which far from reflecting a hybridization process reflects new forms of domination.

In this case, the female within the mixed couple expresses her choice through the integration of different cultural and religious markers from her partner, while blurring her own “whiteness.” This could respond to the pluralism proposed by third-wave feminism, which supports women’s freedom of choice, even if these choices sometimes fall into patterns that may be seen as oppressive or anti-feminist (Snyder-Hall, 2010). According to this argument, the integration of Moroccan culture within the woman’s portrayed identity can be seen as a form of self-determination. This is reflected in Figure 1, when female creators defend their choice to wear a hijab, and in Figure 5, where the different versions of Muslim femininity and their explanations are portrayed. This female integration of Muslim/Moroccan culture props up traditional hegemonic gender systems due to the female submitting to her male counterpart. However, this female portrayal of Muslimhood and Moroccan culture counters traditional colonial structures that suggest that the colonized attempt to take the colonizer’s identity traits in processes of hybridization (Bhabha, 2004; Gilroy, 2004). In this case, she (White, Spanish, European) takes his (Moroccan, Muslim, African) identity traits. Our proposal of *performative hybridization* stands because Moroccan/Spanish cultures don’t coexist, but one displaces the other within these couples.

In this case, our results are different from those of Nemoto (2009), who argues that mixed couples between White

females in the United States and Asian men serve to prop up the social capital and position of the male through his adaptation to the dominant culture. In this case, we see that it is her who adapts to his culture, suggesting that depending on the national context (US vs Spain) and the race/nationality of the minority member of the couple (Asian/Moroccan) the experiences of identity building and hybridization processes among mixed couples may change.

Moreover, it is possible to argue that she is experiencing an identity crisis where she is ambivalent about the aspects of Moroccan culture she will incorporate, in what Bhabha (2004) calls “unhomeliness” or uncertain cross-cultural initiation. In our data, we observe this cross-cultural initiation when female creators perform their own version of Muslim femininity which includes (1) ambivalence about the hijab (appearing with and without the hijab); (2) reflections on their individual stage in the conversion process, from undecided to convert; (3) appropriation of the partner’s cultural traits in detriment of her own; and (4) absence of identity traits unrelated to the romantic relationship. As we can see in the examples of video themes by some of the female creators listed below and Figure 5:

- “Someday Inshallah I will wear the hijab”;
- “My first time in the mosque (daily vlog of her experience)”;
- “Video reciting Surat *Al Fatiha* in Arabic.”

Two of the analyzed *tiktokers* published a recording of their *shahada*² showing that they have already officially converted to Islam. In terms of TikTok affordances, in one of the

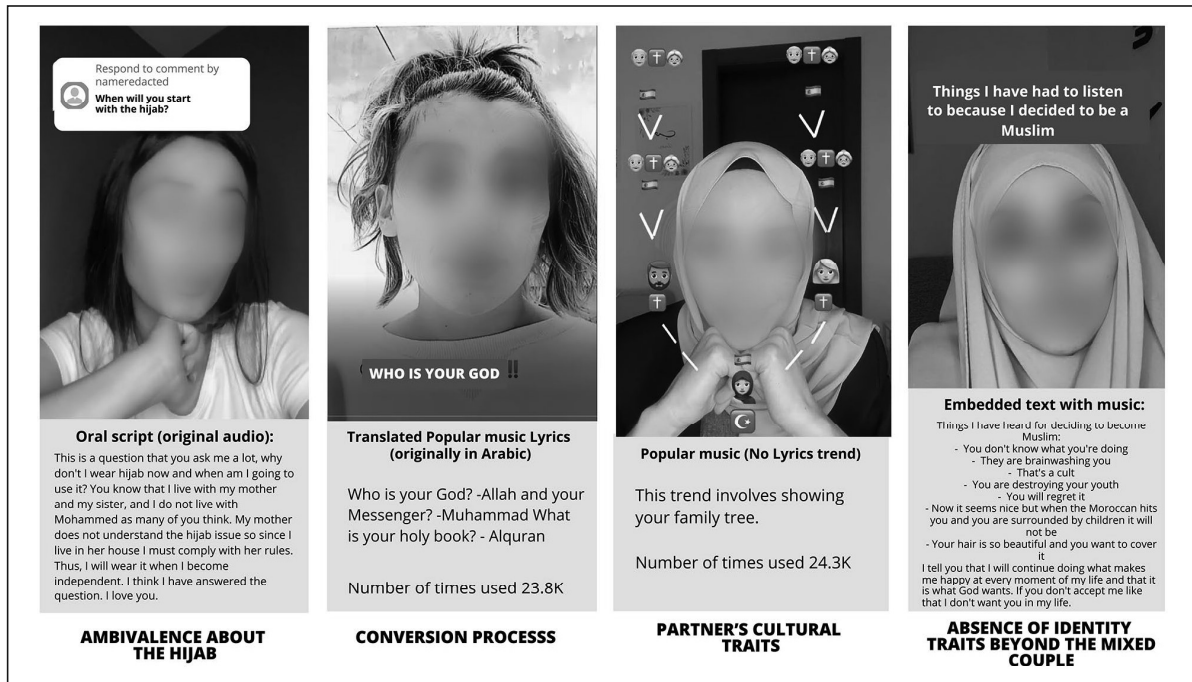


Figure 5. Women performing their version of femininity.

videos she uses the *answer-comment* affordance to explain that they have indeed converted to Islam. In the other they use embedded text to facilitate understanding of the shahada rite for non-Arabic speakers. The inclusion of the shahada in their TikTok content reflects the importance they give to this event in their lives as part of their conversion to Islam and to their partner’s religion. This is, in many cases, a social requirement for them to be accepted into their partner’s family and for the advancement of the relationship (Allievi, 2006). Thus, it also reflects the dominance of Islam in the couple’s identity (Figure 6).

In the next section, we will analyze the role of TikTok in challenging discriminatory content that reflects colonial beliefs in the face of their romantic relationship.

Mixed Couples’ Use of TikTok Affordances to Negotiate and Face Colonial Discriminatory Narratives: Recognition of Discrimination

The most used TikTok affordance for discourse deployed to negotiate and face discrimination is *answer-comment*. This feature enables a *tiktoker* to create a video around a comment received on a previous video. This affordance enables these minority creators to counter discriminatory discourses through the unique connective and mimetic nature of the platform (Abidin, 2021; Zulli & Zulli, 2020). Although other platforms such as Instagram have integrated this affordance, it has really become part of TikTok’s logics and grammars.

According to our analysis, the presence of rejection and attacks toward the mixed couple in the form of TikTok comments supports Gilroy’s (2004) argument that hybridity is seen as a civilizational betrayal. According to the colonial past of these two nations, in our data we see that both, the Moroccan and the Spanish communities, express their rejection toward this relationship. While their comment feed features many kinds of comments including support and recognition of their value as a couple, as can be seen in the examples below, these creators rarely respond to positive messages.

- “I love your husband’s humor, you see how often we get carried away by gossip, keep it up you guys are great . . . by the way where do you live?”
- “Brave. Simple. Concise. No need to explain much more.”
- “I’m not Muslim, but I think it’s very nice that you share your experiences in this new stage of your life, regardless of your religion.”

It is noteworthy that the mixed couples analyzed overwhelmingly choose to feature and respond to negative comments that criticize them. Below we detail the types of messages they chose to respond to using the *answer-comment* affordance.

- Islamophobic: These remarks relate to religion and are based on the rejection and the stereotyping of

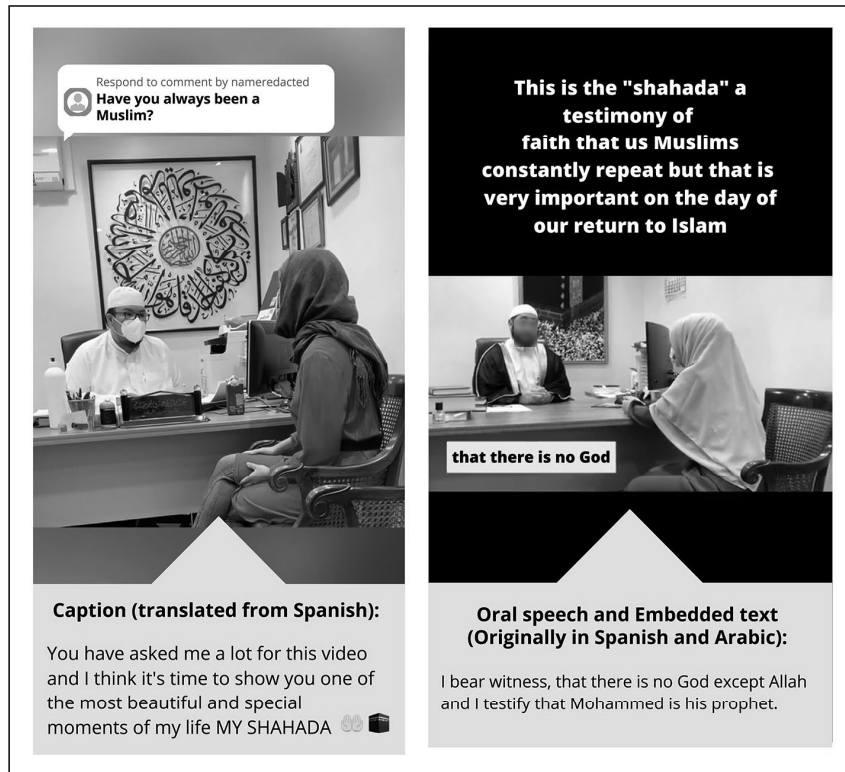


Figure 6. Screenshots from women's shahada.

Islam as violent as well as a generalization of the group. Some users express discrimination toward these couples because what they represent in terms of culture and religion is seen as old fashioned and strict. They are judged as a possible threat to the advancement of modern societies. It is worth noting how the prevalence of responses to islamophobic comments supports Meer's (2014) argument that Muslim consciousness—understood as their self-perception within the different aspects of their Muslim identity—is built around Islamophobia and other forms of discrimination.

- “If it flies it's Superman, if it climbs it's Spiderman, if it explodes it's Muslim.”
- “You are going to convert to Jihad”
- **Haram/halal frontier:** This narrative shows how the Halal-Haram³ ratio of the analyzed couples is questioned. Allievi's (2006) explanation of the importance of this haram/halal divide among Muslim converts and established Muslims is relevant. In this case, followers police whether the creators lifestyle corresponds to Islamic principles. Below are some examples of the Haram/Halal messages that were featured by these creators using the *answer-comment* affordance:

- “A Muslim is born, not made. It's like if I want to become a Latina, you can't renounce who you are.”
- “What I see on the table is salami and minced meat. I don't care about the minced meat, but what about the salami? I don't judge you, but then you upload videos.”

- **Sexist:** This type of content refers to cultural prejudices related to Moroccan men's treatment of women. We also detected contempt and humiliation related to Islamic feminine values presented in videos. This behavior is reflected by attacks on women for wearing hijab or for wanting to use it in the future. Although they reinforced that wearing hijab among Muslim women is seen as a sign of empowerment by the hijabi (Baulch & Pramiyanti, 2018). Below are some examples of the sexist messages that were featured by these creators using the *answer-comment* affordance (Figure 7):

- “I hope you get along well with the other wives.”
- “Your boy lets you go around wearing lipstick?”

Messages questioning whether the couple is haram/halal and sexist messages vilifying a woman's decision-making process to use the hijab illustrate that followers across both cultures castigate the woman's cultural ambivalence. This can

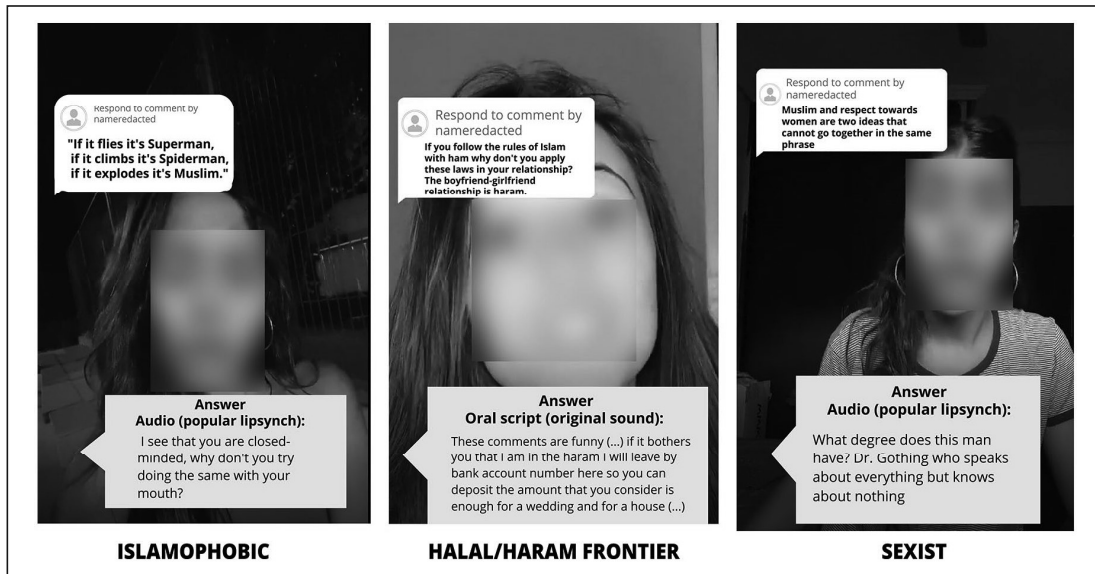


Figure 7. Screenshots including examples of messages the creators choose and their answers.

be seen in content reflecting her adoption of the Muslim religion and related identities, supporting our previous argument that her state of *unhomeliness* or uncertain cross-cultural initiation (Bhabha, 2004) leads to rejection by both the Spanish and Moroccan communities.

At first sight, the selection of these discriminatory messages may suggest an attempt to fight stereotypes and counteract discriminatory discourses; but if we delve deeper, we can observe how the selection of these messages constitutes a key aspect in their identity-construction process that is based on a contemporary form of colonial domination. According to Gray (2013) by prioritizing such messages they may be perpetuating certain forms of stigmatization by widening the gap between Spanish and Moroccan societies. In Internet studies, the relationship between the expectations of viewers as determinant in the characteristics of the content produced and identity markers displayed by content creators has also been well established (Hearn & Schoenhoff, 2016). In this case, we see the convergence of digitally mediated social pressure to conform to certain expectations and creators' use of discriminatory content to present specific versions of what it means to be a mixed Moroccan-Spanish couple.

It is possible to argue that the narrative practices by mixed couples on TikTok, built around three types of comments, emerge in response to the static and unchangeable nature of orientalist notions (Said, 2003). The interactions between followers and creators as reflected in the described uses of the *answer-comment* affordance suggest that judgmental followers attempt to push these creators toward one cultural pole or the other (either Spanish/European/Western or Moroccan/Muslim/Eastern). In these exchanges, change processes and fluidity are penalized, in line with Gilroy's (2004)

assertion that modern societies will attempt to maintain an impossibly "pure" culture. Recognition of hybridity (Gray, 2013) becomes difficult due to the need to align with one of the two cultures and push these creators to move toward more homogeneous cultural forms within the cycle of hybridization (Brian Stross as cited by García-Canclini, 2005). Although, on the surface, TikTok's affordances seem to provide opportunities to dismantle colonial beliefs, we observe that the way these users combine the affordance with their narrative provides visibility and recognition to discrimination, orientalism, and Islamophobia, rather than their value as a couple and the benefits of cultural hybridization.

Conclusion

The exploration of TikTok content created by mixed couples unveils interesting details about their preferred (self)representations and the aspects of their identities that they choose to emphasize and keep private. It is important to note that this analysis provides only a glimpse of the experience of mixed couples in Spain, but it points to some key aspects that Spanish-Moroccan couples consider important in their identity-construction process. The ambivalent notions of cultural hybridity are especially interesting, as well as the way in which this hybridization takes the form of audiovisual interactive TikTok content.

In this sense, in relation to our first research question (RQ1), our analysis suggests that these creators use TikTok affordances to stage and make visible what we have called their *performative hybridization*. In these contents, they orally and textually describe hybridization as the ideal while the main narrative and visual plots in their content suggest the dominance of Moroccan culture and Islam. This reflects

the divide between these two societies and the difficulties they face in attempting to challenge existing societal norms. The aspects of their identities that they choose to emphasize in their content are relevant, considering the rejection they face from both cultures and societies.

Moreover, their overwhelming use of the *answer-comment* affordance reflects their need to respond and clarify the merits of their religion and its teachings (Mosemghvdlishvili & Jansz, 2012). On the contrary, the comments selected to be answered emerge in response to static and unchangeable orientalist notions, suggesting that the fluidity of change in their purported hybridization process is penalized in society, pushing them to one of the two cultures.

In this way, answering the second research question (RQ2), the analysis suggests that TikTok enables these minority creators to become visible and influential within the platform and use their own voice through the unique connective and mimetic nature of TikTok (Abidin, 2021; Zulli & Zulli, 2020). However, the way in which these content creators navigate TikTok, far from empowering them, provides visibility and recognition to the discrimination in the messages they choose to highlight.

The role of gender is also noteworthy within *answer-comment* uses by these creators. In this sense, sexism and, more specifically, islamophobic sexism, become key topics within *answer-comment* uses by these creators, suggesting that ideas about gender in Moroccan and Spanish cultures are highlighted and placed at the forefront of their mediated identity-construction process. The emphasis these women place on religion as the main identity-related aspect in their adaptation suggests that it is also the one that needs more explanation and justification. This leads to a performance of their own forms of Muslim femininity as explained previously.

This exploratory study has limitations related to the size of the sample and the fact that it focuses on one platform (TikTok) and creators who have achieved a significant following (excluding those who have less followers). This provides a limited perspective on the Moroccan-Spanish experience but one that is relevant to current digital opportunities offered by social media platforms such as TikTok. Future lines of research could explore the perceptions of followers who consume this content and the effects of such narratives on their opinions about these individuals and couples. Future research could also delve into the reasons why most mixed couple accounts with a large number of followers are comprised of a Moroccan male and a Spanish female to understand the cultural and societal motivations for this.


Declaration of Conflicting Interests


The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

ORCID iDs

Sabina Civila  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6059-9893>

Daniela Jaramillo-Dent  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8372-0107>

Notes

1. The visibility hashtags used by these creators include #Viral, #Foryou, #TikTok, #FyP, and #Goviral. Identity-related hashtags include #Hijab; #Islam; #hijabista; #conversa #mixedcouples, and #Spanish-Morocco.
2. Shahada refers to the public declaration of faith by Muslims (Allievi, 2006).
3. Halal refers to behaviors that are permissible according to Islam and haram refers to those which are impermissible. The decision of whether something is permissible is often a matter of interpretation that occurs within the Muslim community, the family, or the couple itself (Allievi, 2006).

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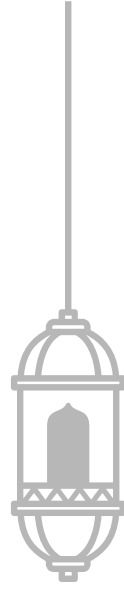
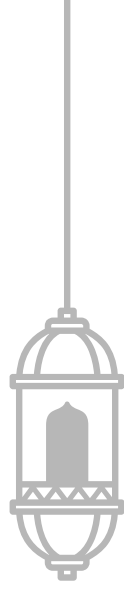
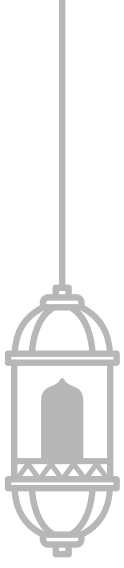
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Author Biographies

Sabina Civila (University of Huelva) is a Doctoral Candidate in Communication at the University of Huelva (Spain). Her research is focused on Social Media, Digital Cultural and Social exclusion online. Her current work explores how social media contributes to transmit ideas that prevent the integration of minorities.

Daniela Jaramillo-Dent (Erasmus University Rotterdam and University of Huelva) is a Doctoral Candidate in Communication at Erasmus University Rotterdam (The Netherlands) and University of Huelva (Spain). Her research lies at the intersection of Internet Research and Cultural Studies. Her current work focuses on the mediated (self)representations of immigrants and other marginalized groups on social media platforms.





Annex 3

Article

Social Media and Otherness: The Case of #Islamterrorism on TikTok

Sabina Civila *, Mónica Bonilla-del-Río, and Ignacio Aguaded

Department of Education, Huelva University, Spain

* Corresponding author (sabi.civila@dedu.uhu.es)

Submitted: 21 October 2022 | Accepted: 26 December 2022 | Published: 17 May 2023

Abstract

Social media and their participatory characteristics promote the construction of meanings that differ from those emitted by mainstream media outlets, becoming a tool that enables a reconfiguration of the dominant discourses. TikTok offers unique possibilities to confront the neoliberal imaginary and open a space for debate, incorporating political viewpoints and establishing itself as a new communication scenario. Regarding news about jihadism, many researchers have observed that those who practice Islam are classified as a monolithic entity, and this entire religious group is generalized as a threat to modern societies. The main objective of our research is thus to know the discourses used on TikTok to respond to the binomial Islam = terrorism spread by mainstream media and the affordances of this platform used to challenge this misconception. Using the snowball method, a multimodal analysis was conducted by identifying TikTok videos with the hashtags #yihadista, #yihad, and #islamterrorismo (in its English and Spanish versions) to explore the uses of the TikTok platform. The resulting selection criteria included: (a) content related to mainstream media discourses on jihadism, (b) discussion of a topic related to Islam and terrorism, and (c) where the content creator declares him/herself to be a Muslim. In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted to provide an enhanced understanding of how the media promote the need to generate a counter-narrative on TikTok. The results reveal that discourses from Muslims that combat Islam = terrorism discourses are constructed within the spiral of the dominant narrative, thus visualizing the negative discourses about Islam.

Keywords

Islam; media; prosumers; religion; social media; TikTok

Issue

This article is part of the issue “Hate Speech, Demonization, Polarization, and Political Social Responsibility” edited by Luis M. Romero-Rodríguez (Rey Juan Carlos University), Pedro Cuesta-Valiño (University of Alcalá), and Bárbara Castillo-Abdul (Rey Juan Carlos University).

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1. Introduction

This article analyzes the discourses of the Muslim community in relation to the messages transmitted in mainstream media about Islam and its association with the concept of terrorism. Specifically, we evaluate in depth their use of TikTok as a platform to respond to these discourses and how they take advantage of the affordances offered by this platform to question them and share their viewpoints. In this sense, we understand mainstream media as conventional news sources (newspaper, television, radio) that “are trapped within entrenched norms and values that predispose a certain perspec-

tive of the world” (Jean-Kenix, 2011, p. 2). In addition, mainstream media are considered credible, serious, and influential, so they could have a strong effect on viewers (Gondwe & Bhowmik, 2022). We thus explore the potential of TikTok as a medium that favors expression and allows bidirectional discourses, thereby opening a debate on religious, political, cultural, and social issues. This goes beyond approaches where the audience simply consumes information passively from the main agents (political leaders and mainstream media), turning them into prosumers who generate content and participate in conversations through TikTok. Using a qualitative approach, we carry out a multimodal content

analysis of TikTok videos shared by Muslims that specifically address discussions on topics related to Islam, terrorism, and jihadism. We also conducted semistructured interviews with subject-expert journalists, thus providing an enhanced understanding of the phenomenon.

Currently, Islam is the first-most widely practiced religion in the world with approximately 1.6 billion followers (Statistics and Data, 2022), which means that one out of four people in the world is Muslim (Merino, 2020). The representation of this religion in the media can directly influence the public's perception of and attitudes toward Muslims as a group as well as Islam as a religion (Akbarzadeh & Smith, 2005). In this regard, previous studies have shown that the representation of Muslims in the media has an eminently negative focus. The Muslim community is often typecast as a terrorist group and as a threat to democratic systems and freedom of expression (Rahman, 2022).

Against this backdrop in which popular media culture has linked Islam to a negative representation in the West (Farooqui & Kaushik, 2022), social media have become a space that allows Muslims to counter such negative discourse regarding their religion and consolidate their identity and self-image (Deroo & Mohamud, 2022). Indeed, these platforms offer an opportunity for users to create their own content, which implies a greater diversity of media representations. Therefore, citizens have more information and viewpoints to better understand personal experiences and social events surrounding a given phenomenon. Given the narrative possibilities offered by social media, in this research we focus on TikTok, whose popularity has increased exponentially in recent years, becoming the most downloaded app worldwide (Sensor Tower, 2022).

We intend to understand how the Muslim community thrives on TikTok following two research questions:

RQ1: What are the discourses used by the Muslim community to respond to the binomial Islam = terrorism on TikTok?

RQ2: How are TikTok affordances used to challenge misconceptions spread by mainstream media?

Through this analysis, we contribute to understanding how the Muslim community uses TikTok to express themselves and to challenge misconceptions. According to Pearce et al. (2020), knowing how people express themselves on social media helps to design better social media communication experiences.

To address this approach the theoretical background includes discussion about the representation of Muslims in Western mainstream media, Islam on social media, and the TikTok affordances offered to challenge misconceptions. We then specified the methodology used and present the findings. The results enable us to identify the discourses used on TikTok to respond to the binomial Islam = terrorism. And, to understand the needs and con-

cerns of the Muslim community about this phenomenon. Furthermore, it provides a wider view of how they thrive and represent themselves in social media spaces.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. *The Representation of Muslims in Western Mainstream Media*

The relationship between the West and Islam has been categorized as conflictive by many researchers over the years (Canclini, 2004; Miles, 1989; Said, 1978). The expansion of the West results in the generation of an antagonistic dichotomy between the West and East, which maintains that the culture of Islam is not compatible with European values and is presented as a threat (Said, 1978). According to Miles (1989), there are two clear examples of this polarization: first, the definition of "others" as "blacks" and "savages," which results in situations of exclusion, since Westerners are considered white, logical, delicate, and virtuous (Donald, 1992); and secondly, culture, where the European representation of the Islamic world is associated with terrorism and barbarism. To achieve the aims of the current work, otherness is understood as a discursive process where the "other" is represented as a stranger (Iqbal, 2020), relating Islam to terrorism through the news frames of mainstream media.

According to Casteleiro-Ruiz-de-Azcarate (2015), the frames used to present terrorism-related news are full of clichés and simplifications, contributing to the identification of religion with terrorism and driving a state of ignorance about Islam and its nature (Villepin, 2003). Studies conducted during the last two decades have provided evidence that such news framing has focused on the representation of Islam as monolithic, sexist, homogeneous, fanatical, and terrorist (Civita et al., 2020; Ewart, 2012; Ibrahim, 2010; Korteweg, 2008). This results in demonization, stereotyping, and negative feelings toward the Muslim community (Akbarzadeh & Smith, 2005).

Along the same vein, in his book *Orientalism*, Edward Said argues that there is a particular discourse in Europe that promotes the differences between the familiar (Europe, the West, or "us") and the foreign (the East or the "others"; Said, 1978, p. 19). These discourses are promoted by the mainstream media, limiting Islam to a series of misconceptions that do not represent reality and that polarize societies (Poole, 2002). Brown and Levison (1987), as well as Lee and Pinker (2010), state that broadcasters use ambiguity, indirect discourses, and other strategies to inform, especially when the topic is about the "other," and even substantiate statements with personal experiences (Galasin'ska & Galasin'ski, 2003; Giglietto & Lee, 2017). However, most of the news is written from a non-Muslim perspective. Such coverage does not illustrate what Muslims consider about this phenomenon (Gabsi, 2015), but rather adopts a Western perspective.

When these negative discourses promoted by the media relate Islam and terrorism, they can be labeled as “Islamophobia” (Poole, 2002). The term has been discussed by many scholars but is too broad to provide a tight definition. According to Ross (2014), Islamophobia constitutes an understanding of Islam as a threat to Western societies and intolerance to those who practice this religion. Meanwhile, Acim (2019) defines Islamophobia as the representation of Muslims as “others.” As well as the prohibition of Islam cultural elements in the West, such as the hijab in France or the construction of mosques in Switzerland.

Nowadays, social media offer a space for minorities to express themselves (Echchaibi, 2013), thus reflecting how Muslim people fight against the discourses issued by mainstream media, which are considered to be hegemonic. Following many studies demonstrating how Western media demonize Islam by relating it with terrorism (Ahmed & Matthes, 2017), we focus on determining how the Muslim community challenges such discourses on TikTok. Thus, we contribute to understanding how the Muslim community uses this platform to express themselves and challenge misconceptions spread by the media.

2.2. (De)Construction of Islam on Social Media

Social media have changed how we communicate by allowing people to create their own content. It is not only communication unidirectional, but users can participate in media debates and adopt positions in relation to their contexts, thus challenging dominant discourses (Jaramillo-Dent et al., 2022). The Internet and thereby social media offer the opportunity to represent the diverse identities that are present in the contemporary world as well as the autonomy to share beliefs and values with other users (Campbell & Evolvi, 2020). This helps minority groups express themselves, breaking misconceptions associated with their group and challenging hate speech (Gómez-García et al., 2021). According to Campbell and Evolvi (2020, p. 8), minority groups include those who are stigmatized by society, for example, Muslim people living in non-Muslim countries. Therefore, in the present article, Muslim people as represented in Western media are considered to belong to a minority group.

Minorities, in different contexts, are forced to challenge the discrimination they suffer from the dominant culture, which limits their opportunities to relate to and participate in some mainstream conversations. However, social media can be a tool to combat these threats and make their culture and identity visible (Abidin, 2021). We thus identify a generation of Muslim individuals in the West who are publicly committed to negotiating their religious values with modern societies and altering Western narratives by promoting the relationship between Islam and modernity (Echchaibi, 2013; Göle, 2002). Through this engagement, we observe pro-

files on blogs and social media whose mission is to challenge the representation of Islam in mainstream media, such as the Muslimah Media Watch or Yallah blog (Echchaibi, 2013; Evolvi, 2017). It is also remarkable the emergence of movements such as #Noenminombre (#Notinmyname in English) or #MuslimsareNOTterrorist following the waves of attacks that occurred in Europe during 2016–2018.

Studies related to “digital religion,” a discipline that emerges from the combination of religion and Internet studies (Campbell, 2017), have examined how Islam is represented by Muslims on social media, claiming generally that they respond to dominant narratives and associations aimed at their collective (Echchaibi, 2013; Evolvi, 2017; Looy, 2015; Wheeler, 2014). This supports previous research finding that Muslim creators often create content to refute misconceptions about their religion (Mosemghvdlishvili & Jansz, 2012). Accordingly, some authors, such as El-Haj and Bonet (2011), question whether Muslim people represent themselves in social media exclusively in relation to controversies about their religion or, in contrast, for their own interests.

In this case, in line with Hoover and Echchaibi (2014), social media would act as a “third space,” a term that arises in relation to evolving media discourses and that has been used in studies on digital religion. This third space refers to a hybrid space that offers new forms for the reconstruction, expression, and questioning of religion, as well as new possibilities for the construction of meanings: It describes an alternative space to the dominant ones. In this study, hybridization occurs between the discourses broadcasted by the mainstream media and those shared by TikTok users. This theory is thus applied to understand the discursive practices used on TikTok to challenge misconceptions about Islam, as previously applied to analyze aspects concerning Islam in Facebook groups (Al-Rawi, 2016; Illman & Sjö, 2015), memes (Aguilar et al., 2017), and other social media (Bahfen, 2018).

According to Mirra et al. (2018), young people today engage critically with the media and challenge misconceptions about Islam. Therefore, digital contexts can modify the perception of reality and generate conversations outside mainstream narratives. In this case, we focus on TikTok, the most downloaded app, with 188 million downloads during the first half of 2022 (Statista, 2022).

2.3. TikTok as a Tool to Challenge Mainstream Media Discourses

Since its inception, TikTok has been growing and has now become one of the most popular social media in the world, shaping engaged communities that respond to the app’s affordances (Zhao & Wagner, 2022). In our research, we consider the affordances of TikTok as tools offered by this social media platform (audios, challenges, trends, hashtags, filters, virality, etc.) that allow users to

express themselves creatively (Kaye et al., 2021). TikTok confers power and opportunities for expression to users who acquire the role of the sender, which favors mass self-communication (Castells, 2013) and bi-directionality in the messages issued by conventional media. This social media platform is becoming a space for debate, incorporating a political viewpoint, and establishing itself as a new communication scenario (Cervi & Marín-Lladó, 2021). Users can thereby actively participate in social and political debates, taking advantage of TikTok's affordances and its particularities.

TikTok allows users to share short videos (although the option to create videos lasting up to ten minutes has been added in March 2022), which can be edited in the app itself adding filters, effects, or stickers. The innovations offered by this platform in terms of content distribution and discovery have established it as one of the most highly valued platforms. It includes recommendation algorithms aimed at the interests of the users themselves and its famous "For You" page which attracts and retains users (Zhao & Wagner, 2022). According to Vijay and Gekker (2021) and Literat et al. (2022), TikTok's affordances additionally favor content that responds to mainstream media and encourage users to interact with other videos (through options such as "green screen," "paste from," or video responses to comments from other accounts). Previous studies have shown that TikTok users employ the affordances offered by this platform to question media representations of "others" in the news, criticize the media framework, and expand narratives by offering new viewpoints (Literat et al., 2022). In this sense, TikTok becomes an environment for self-expression and sense-making of others and otherness (Schellewald, 2021).

This convergence between traditional and emerging media leads to a new media ecology in which communication is no longer the exclusive remit of classical actors (parties, political leaders, and the media); rather, social media break into the discussion, significantly influencing social mobilization and facilitating the democratization of dialog thanks to their interactivity and immediacy (Islas, 2015; Piñeiro-Otero & Martínez-Rolán, 2020). According to Şot (2022), users take advantage of TikTok's technological and practical features to create content that is tailored to their audience to generate an intimate and safe space for both them and their followers.

3. Method

3.1. Sample and Inclusion Criteria

The present analysis, conducted during May and September 2022, provides a case study with a qualitative design, mainly adopting two methods: (a) a multimodal content analysis that aims to explore the intersection between misconceptions of Islam in mainstream media and discourses on TikTok; and (b) interviews, a qualitative analysis technique with an exploratory and explanatory

nature whose purpose is to understand the studied phenomenon in depth (Hernández-Sampieri et al., 2014).

For sample selection, a new TikTok profile was created, to avoid algorithmic contamination and obtain objective results. Once the account had been opened, we applied the snowball method, a qualitative data collection technique to reach difficult-to-access samples (Naderifar et al., 2017), and the sample was identified. To achieve this, the hashtags #yihadist, #yihad, and #islamterrorismo were searched for in the "explore" section of the app (in its English and Spanish versions), applying the filters "last 6 months" and ordering by "relevance." A total of 2,546 videos were then viewed and those that met the following criteria were selected: (a) content related to the discourses of mainstream media about jihadism, (b) discussion topics related to Islam and terrorism, and (c) where the content creator declared him/herself to be Muslim. The final sample comprised 62 videos. The files were downloaded by using the SnapTik app and collated in Excel using the video description and the numbers of likes, comments, and views. Finally, the data were analyzed using Atlas.ti 8, which allows qualitative analysis (Figure 1).

The data were examined utilizing a multimodal approach, which allows for the comprehension of both verbal and nonverbal data as well as the exploration of several representative modes (Dicks, 2019). TikTok's audiovisual, textual, interactive, and the way these modes are combined are all included in the multimodal analysis (Korhonen, 2010). Iterative analysis was used to categorize the data developing a codebook. In the first round, we analyzed the discourses spread by the Muslim community. Then, we related the affordances (audios, challenges, trends, hashtags, filters, virality, etc.) of TikTok with their discussion.

Moreover, to understand the content created by Muslim users on TikTok and how the media participates in the construction of the Islam = terrorism binomial in more depth, semistructured interviews were conducted during June and July 2022. Two main themes were addressed in the interviews: the use of terms and the stigmatization of Muslims. To obtain a diverse sample, seven journalists (who preferred to remain anonymous) were selected from different local, national, and international media outlets (Table 1). This number of journalists was selected because it was found that no new information was being collected thereafter, thus reaching what is known as thematic saturation (Guest et al., 2020). The following process was applied for data collection: (a) The interview was carried out according to previous research related to the object of study; (b) journalists with expertise in the subject were selected and contacted online to schedule an interview; (c) permission was requested to use the interviews for research purposes and their transcription; (d) the interviews were transcribed and summarized to identify the most important and relevant data obtained in terms of the object of study; (e) data analysis was performed by using Atlas.ti 8.

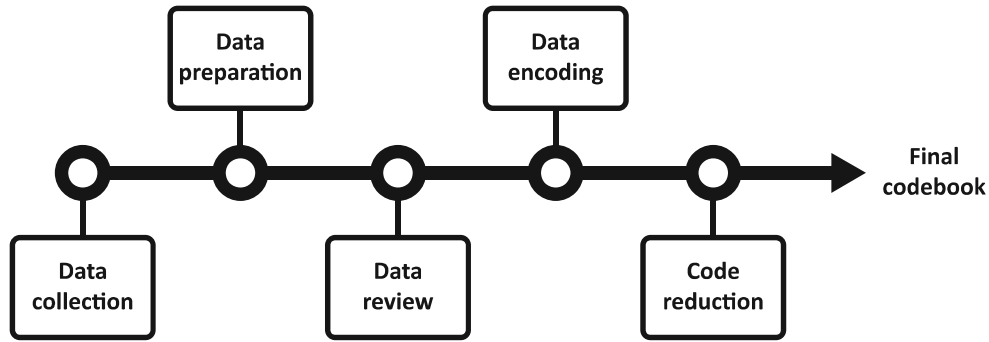


Figure 1. Data analysis procedure.

3.2. Codebook and Data Analysis

The data analysis was carried out using inductive-iterative reasoning, to identify the topics of interest for the current research. This approach enabled findings to be extracted from the data and allowed us to increase our knowledge about the subject (Vives-Varela & Hamui-Sutton, 2021). Three rounds of analysis were carried out, yielding a total of 30 codes. Finally, a total of seven of these were considered relevant to answer the research questions these codes are now presented in Table 2.

3.3. Ethical Considerations

Any reference to private persons or companies has been removed from the examples and images in this article,

both to protect their identities and to avoid copyright infringement (Boyd & Crawford, 2012).

4. Results and Discussion

The results are described according to the research questions presented above. We also describe the conversations with journalists, which enable us to delve into the construction of this meaning and the understanding of the discourses created by Muslim users on TikTok.

4.1. Discourses Used by the Muslim Community to Respond to the Binomial Islam = Terrorism

The most relevant discourses propagated by the Muslim community about the Islam = terrorism binomial include

Table 1. Interviewees’ characteristics.

Name	Nationality	Type of media outlet
EN1	Argentinean	International
EN2	Spanish	National
EN3	Moroccan	National
EN4	Spanish	International
EN5	Italian	International
EN6	Spanish	Local
EN7	Spanish	National

Table 2. Codebook for content analysis.

Codebook	Definition
DIS	This code helps us to classify the discourses used to challenge the idea that Islam = terrorism.
OTHER	This code helps us to identify them versus us discourses (otherness).
OPIN	This code describes the opinion of users regarding the news published by mainstream media.
STOP	This code allows us to identify discourses against islamophobia.
AFFOR	This code helps us to analyze the affordances used to challenge misconceptions spread by mainstream media.
STRA	This code allows us to classify content creation strategies to respond to the binomial Islam = terrorism.
LANG	This code describes the use of multimodal elements such as captions, hashtags, icons, gifs, etc.

the explanation of their religion, its terminology, and the dismantling of dominant discourses. Thus, we identify two main issues: the simplistic presentation of Islam and the representation of Muslims in the Western media. Following Echchaibi (2013), it is thus observed how the possibilities offered by social media platforms promote the desire of modern participants to subvert the mainstream discourses and become actively involved in political discourses. The formation of unconventional discourses related to religion on TikTok by this collective shows, according to Hoover and Echchaibi (2014), that digital platforms act as a third space that allows the negotiation of the values of Islam in contemporary societies and a deconstruction of the established social imaginaries regarding this religion. The third space becomes a place where not only can religious practices be exercised but also alternatives to the hegemonic narratives can be constructed. This locates the present study in the fourth wave of digital religion, which emphasizes the political and social aspects of research on religions (Campbell & Evolvi, 2020).

As stated by Jaramillo-Dent et al. (2022) in their research on the creative practices of migrant TikTokers, content creation enables minorities to express themselves and construct alternative meanings to the prevailing conversations. In the case of TikTok, its affordances offer a space to develop involvement and engagement in politics, helping users to mobilize (Cervi & Marín-Lladó, 2021; Galpin, 2022) and generating new forms of expression that enable the social empowerment of the Muslim community. Moreover, presenting such discourses on TikTok amplifies a narrative that lacks visibility in other spaces (Echchaibi, 2013). The present analysis revealed four main types of discourses that are used to challenge social-political conceptions about Islam: (a) explanatory, (b) controversial, (c) demystifying, and (d) performative.

Firstly, we identified content aimed at explaining and deepening knowledge of what Islam is and clarifying different concepts that sometimes are used indifferently (Ahmed & Matthes, 2017). These concepts are Arab, Muslim, Islamic, Islamist, and jihad(ist). Owing to the relationship between jihad and terrorism, there is an ongoing desire to explain the meaning of the word “jihad,” whose translation would actually be “effort.” However, two strands can be detected. The first defends that the word “jihad” indeed means “effort,” despite the appropriation of the term by the ISIS terrorist group. On the other hand, other TikTokers accept this appropriation and, when explaining concepts, argue that jihad is indeed related to terrorism. This disparity of opinions indicates that, contrary to its presentation in mainstream media (Ahmed & Matthes, 2017), the Muslim community is not a monolithic entity. However, according to Campbell and Evolvi (2020), such disparate contributions on social media can lead to a misrepresentation of identities rather than to social change, despite the appearance of a collective purpose, in this case, to convey that Islam is a religion of peace.

The journalists’ responses reveal the need to take advantage of this third space to raise awareness of these different terms, which could break the misconceptions about Islam (Pearce et al., 2020). According to the interviews conducted, content creators thus need to explain them and improve their understanding by the majority. According to Romero-Rodríguez et al. (2021), knowledge of those considered to be different avoids falling into the traps of stereotyping and polarization. From the interviews:

IN2: In a society of immediate consumption, the traditional media tends to draw a broad picture and tell things in general terms, without differentiating between terms.

IN4: When writing, in order to avoid repetition, we sometimes use terms as synonyms whereas, actually, they have their own nuances and differences.

Secondly, the discourse classified as controversial refers to those publications aimed at questioning mainstream media. This content is focused on expressing opposition to news frames, highlighting how mainstream media use terrorist attacks to drive the concept that Islam is a threat to Western values. Moreover, as part of this type of discourse, TikTokers aim to raise awareness among the majority population that the mainstream media are politically biased sources (Jean-Kenix, 2011; Poole, 2002). These discourses agree with Ahmed and Matthes (2017), who support that western media demonize Islam by relating it to terrorism. Despite numerous studies (Casteleiro-Ruiz-de-Azcarate, 2015; Miles, 1989; Said, 1978) have demonstrated that news frames applied to Islam are stigmatizing, our data evidence how this is currently undergoing a process of change and improving the representation of Islam in the media. From the interviews:

IN3: I am aware, both due to the changes made in the media I work and in which other colleagues work, that work is being done to not link Islam with a political and military ideology in a generalized way. More and more specialized journalists in newsrooms and international organizations are reviewing news of this nature.

IN4: The change is growing, and although a Muslim is rarely the protagonist of a positive news story, the activism of the collective on social media is promoting change in the traditional media.

These responses related to representation in the media reveal how the pressure exerted by this minority group on social media is shaping the hierarchies of power and diminishing the weight of the media in public opinion as observed by Echchaibi (2013) and Evolvi (2017). Platforms such as TikTok facilitate the dissemination of

minority opinions and challenge hegemonic discourses (Literat et al., 2022), allowing them to make their culture and identity visible (Abidin, 2021).

Furthermore, the demystifying discourse, which refers to content focused on emphasizing the positive aspects of Islam, promotes not only visibility but recognition. We observed how the creator demystifies the religion and encourages its recognition by relating Islam to love and peace, thus seeking common ground with “them.” However, according to Gray (2013), this need not necessarily promote real recognition, as it may be a neoliberal technique to celebrate diversity rather than a recognition of the structural problems associated with Islam.

In the videos focused on demystifying the symbols of Islam, it is mainly argued that they are not terrorists, and that the Muslim community is the main victim of the terrorism that is classified as jihadist. This is evidence that they’re committed to negotiating their religious values with modern societies and altering Western narratives by promoting the relationship between Islam and modernity (Göle, 2002). Interaction with the dominant culture and common ground is sought to reduce polarized discourse, which, in accordance with Vizcaíno-Verdú and Aguaded (2022), enhances opportunities to build new social relationships and reinforce recognition. On the other hand, according to the analysis conducted by Hamid et al. (2022), for messages to have an impact they must transmit new narratives, construct discourses on what we have in common, and not focus on differences (them versus us), to enable a feeling of identification in the audience and promote real recognition. The results obtained from the interviews show the pressure they suffer to create demystifying discourses and promote action to make their voice heard. From the interviews:

IN5: In investigative reporting on jihadist terrorism, they wheel out Muslim people from the neighborhood to make themselves look good, but the main message is still “beware that a neighbor may be a potential terrorist.”

IN6: The voice of the Muslim collective only appears in the media when there is a terrorist attack.

IN7: The media generates ignorance about Islam since we often work under the dictates of political groups.

Finally, we identify the performative discourse which refers to those narratives constructed through mimesis helping users express themselves creatively and connect with their collective (Kaye et al., 2021). This content is created using audio and videos that are constantly copied on the platform with the addition of new meanings (Literat et al., 2022; Vijay & Gekker, 2021). The use of these trends reveals an intention to get visible and challenge polarization by using the vernacular language spoken on the Internet.

4.2. TikTok Affordances Used to Challenge Misconceptions Spread by Media

After analyzing the discourses, we correlated the codes focused on the discourse with those focused on the affordances in the sample units. We identified that the most relevant affordances used by these content creators on TikTok are audio, hashtags, text, embedded text, and visual elements. In this section, we delve into the use of TikTok affordances to challenge misconceptions spread by media. This will allow us to better understand how they deploy the discourses to respond to the binomial Islam = terrorism.

Our analysis revealed that the use of original audio in combination with visual affordances such as embedded texts and images—that visually strengthen the message—enables us to explain and argue the different concepts (see Figure 2): Arab, Muslim, Islamic, Islamist, and jihad(ist). Furthermore, the use of the hashtags #aprendeconTikTok (learningwithTikTok), #curiosidadesenTikTok (curiositiesonTikTok), or #educación (education) is also observed, reflecting the explanatory aim of such posts. Previous research has shown that activist political practices on social media are more effective when followed by an explanation and intellectual argument, thus strengthening the message and enhancing the critical level of society (Raley, 2009).

On the other hand, the embedded text and captions are the most used affordance to express their annoyance with the media’s treatment of Islam. However, visual elements such as embedded image carousels are also identified, being used to highlight the positive aspects of Islam and reinforce the textual argument (Figure 3). This evidence that TikTok users employ the creative options offered by this platform to question media representations of “others” and expand alternative narratives (Literat et al., 2022). These affordances are accompanied by hashtags such as #islam or #muslims, as well as music that is trending on the platform and thus extends the reach of the transmitted message and the number of views (Zhao & Wagner, 2022). This reflects new approaches for campaigning in the face of otherness and power structures, supporting the theory proposed by Bossetta et al. (2018) that political participation is improved and increased using social media. According to Echchaibi (2013), the propagation of these discourses allows the topic of Islam to be located at the center of modern society, promoting its acceptance and recognition in the society to which it belongs. However, recent research conducted within the MAGIC project (Muslim women and communities Against Gender Islamophobia in soCietY; see Hamid et al., 2022) indicates that, despite the importance of challenging mainstream media on social media to change the dominant discourse, one should go further and contact the media to raise awareness of the message transmitted.

These affordances are also used to demystify the discourse about Islam. TikTok offers a space for debate

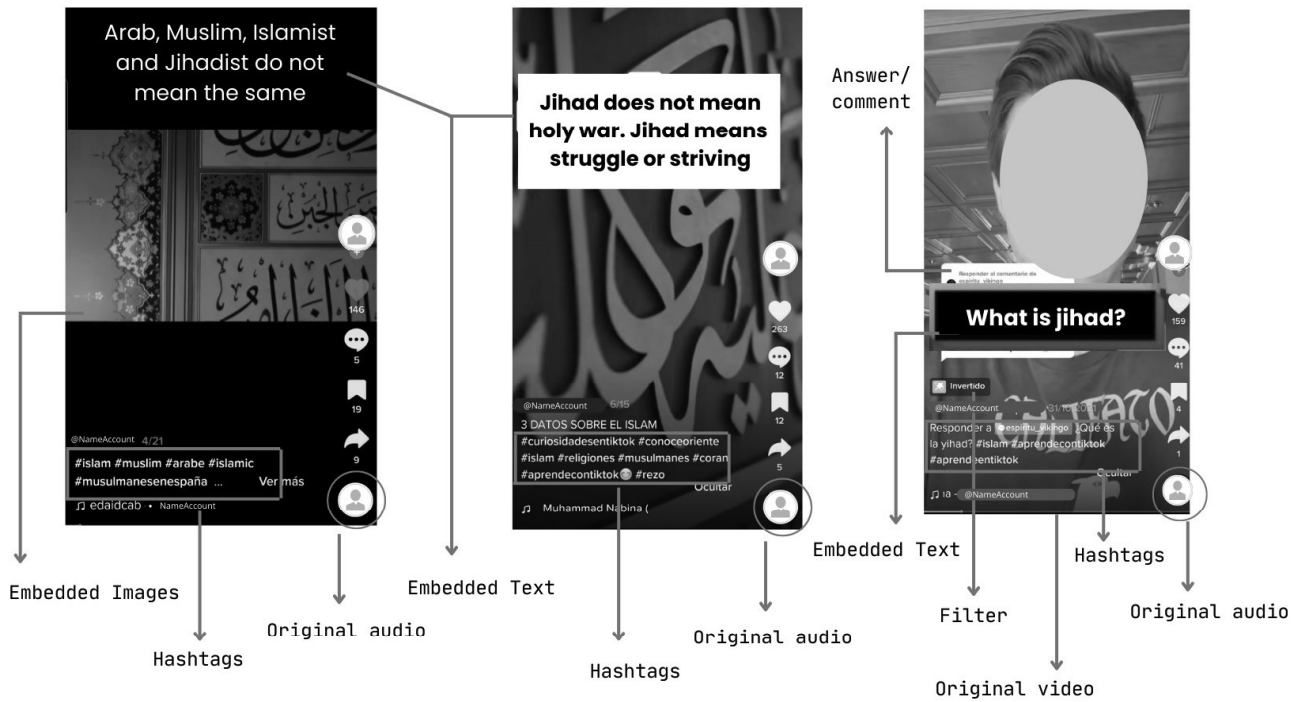


Figure 2. Use of visual and oral affordances to explain religion.

and to combat these threats (Abidin, 2021) helping to challenge the misconception that Muslims are terrorists. These affordances facilitate action and offer an opportunity to justify their religious values to be understood by others. The hashtags most used to demystify Islam are #allah, #hijabi, #muslim, and #islam, followed by positive ones such as #love and #peace, thus relating Islam with peace (Figure 4). At this point in the analysis, it can thus be seen how TikTok offers a space to deconstruct misconceptions and promote acceptance and recogni-

tion, whereas the use of this platform by this collective does not promote total change. Gray's (2013) theory, i.e., that social media increase the visibility but not necessarily the actual recognition of minority groups, holds. This drives us to support the idea that marginalized people are between risk and opportunity on social media (Pearce et al., 2020).

Our analysis evidence how TikTok facilitates the creation of content based on popular trends to reach a wider audience (Kaye et al., 2021), and offers a space for

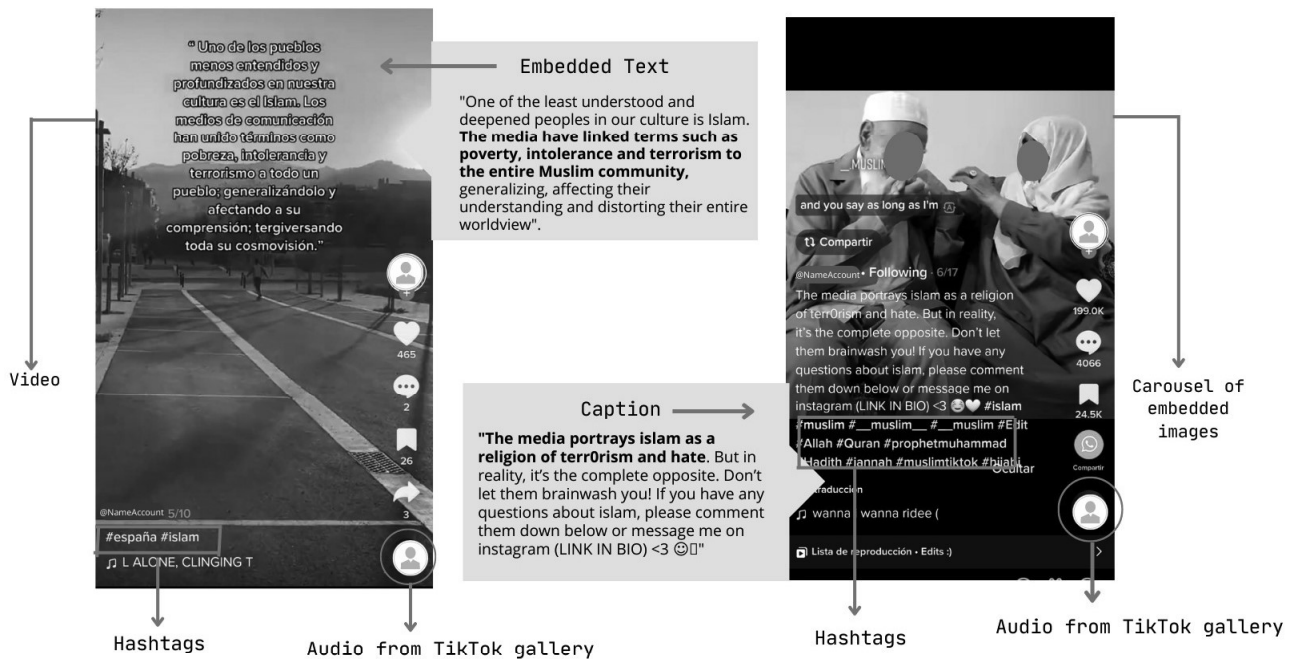


Figure 3. TikTok affordances used to challenge hegemonic discourse.

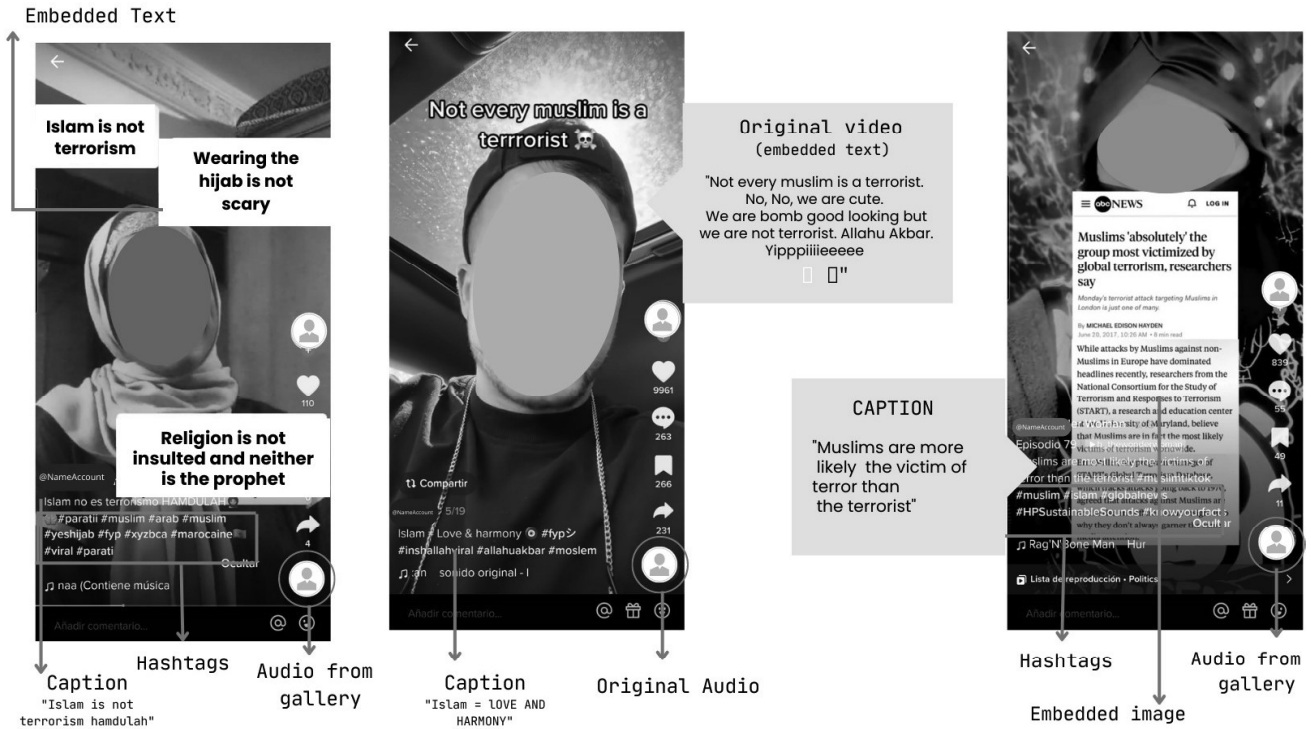


Figure 4. Uses of TikTok to demystify the discourse about Islam.

sense-making of “other” and “otherness” (Schellewald, 2021). It notes the use of hashtags such as #viral, #followme, #goviral, #FyP, and #Foryou, to extend the reach and thereby improve the visibility of the post (Klug et al., 2021). Moreover, the discourses to increase visibility are created from trending audios and videos, lacking original audio and generally presenting visual argu-

ments. In the case of the two most used trends, what the West thinks of Islam is presented using embedded text, while the corresponding replies, which are considered to be “the reality,” are presented with images that reflect the positive values of Islam. The arguments with embedded text are accompanied by a sad face emoji, reflecting the Muslim community as a victim. The use



Figure 5. Uses of TikTok trends to increase the visibility of religion.

of humorous strategies with hashtags such as #humor or #joke to challenge oppressive structures is also identified. It is found that the struggle of otherness is not handled in a positive way, emphasizing the differences between “us” and “them” rather than the empowering aspects of differences, which is fundamental to promote recognition (Romero-Rodriguez et al., 2021).

5. Conclusions

The analysis of TikTok content created by the Muslim community about the binomial Islam = terrorism spread by mainstream media reveals this platform as an environment to challenge prevailing misconception narratives. In this sense, it appears that Muslim minorities need to motivate discourses in a way that penetrates societies, thus promoting social change and challenging misconceptions. TikTok allows this community to seek recognition as well as to generate discourses that make their culture visible (Abidin, 2021). However, the way these creators use TikTok highlights the misconceptions about Islam spread by the mainstream media. This does not promote the construction of an alternative narrative as evidenced by Hamid et al. (2022).

Regarding our first research question, the discourses used to address the dichotomy Islam = terrorism made negative misconceptions about Islam and Muslims more visible. Instead of constructing new discourses, the arguments used to challenge Western mainstream narratives and take part in political debate are based on negative narratives. Thus, the reconfiguration of dominant discourses on TikTok is constructed within the spiral of the prevailing narrative. However, according to the journalists interviewed, we found that messages posted by this collective destabilize Western narratives, promoting the relationship between Islam and modernity (Göle, 2002). As supported by El-Haj and Bonet (2011), these discourses deployed on TikTok are a result of the pressure and need to constantly challenge power structures. They intend to be recognized by others and to value what is considered contrary.

In response to the second research question, the results show that TikTok affordances encourage political participation (Brown et al., 2022) and provide tools to foster social empowerment (Vizcaíno-Verdú & Aguaded, 2022), providing a space to challenge the discursive soapbox and the holistic construction of the counter-narrative. However, the use of affordances does not necessarily contribute to diminishing the difference between “us” and “them.” This means that textual and visual elements are used to highlight the differences between what “we are” versus what “they are,” while other affordances such as “duo” or “green screen” do not encourage the challenging of opinions, according to Zulli and Zulli (2020). Following Civilia and Jaramillo-Dent (2022), the spread of such content, beyond empowering the Muslim collective, provides visibility and recognition of discriminatory practices, which reinforces Gray’s

(2013) theory of recognition. As a result, it seems that the affordances of the platform have an impact on the construction of otherness, while TikTok potentially fails to provide a space for these groups to confront established mechanisms of domination.

The study limitations were presented in terms of sample and platform. Although the sample provides answer to our research questions, we acknowledge that according to the TikTok algorithm, our location and search term could limit the results shown by this platform (Jaramillo-Dent et al., 2022). Furthermore, our study is focused on one platform, which could be amplified in further research. Accordingly, we suggest that further research approaches interview the users to have a better understanding of how they represent themselves in social media spaces.

Acknowledgments

This study was supported by the R+D+I Project (2019–2021), entitled Youtubers and Instagrammers: Media Competence in Emerging Prosumers, under code RTI2018–093303-B-I00, financed by the Spanish Ministry of Science, Innovation, and Universities, the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), and the R+D+I project (2020–2022) entitled Instagrammers and Youtubers for the Transmedia Empowerment of the Andalusian Citizenry. Media literacy of the Instatubers, with code P18-RT-756, was financed by the Government of Andalusia in the 2018 call for tenders (Andalusian Plan for Research, Development and Innovation, 2020) and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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About the Authors



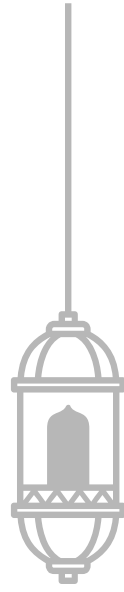
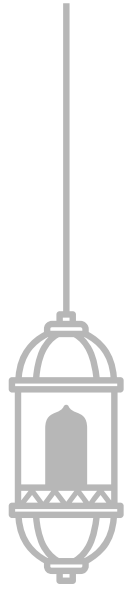
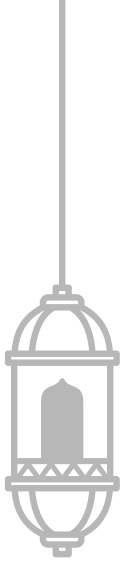
Sabina Civila is a FPI predoctoral researcher and a PhD candidate in the Interuniversity Communication Program (Málaga, Huelva, Sevilla y Cádiz) in the educommunication line. She has a master’s in strategic communication and communication innovation (Malaga, Huelva, Seville, and Cádiz), and graduated in advertising and public relations from the University of Cádiz. Sabina is a researcher at the “Ágora” Research Group (HUM-648). Currently, she focuses her research on social networks, educommunication, media literacy, and Islamophobia.



Mónica Bonilla-del-Río is a PhD candidate in the Interuniversity Communication Program at the University of Huelva in the media literacy and educommunication line. Monica graduated in teaching preschool education at the University of Cantabria (Spain) and has a master’s in emotional, social, and creativity education in the University of Cantabria, and in communication and audiovisual education in the Internacional University of Andalucía and University of Huelva. Nowadays, she is a PhD fellow at the University of Huelva and is developing her dissertation about the digital and social inclusion of young people with disability.



Ignacio Aguaded is a full professor of education and communication at the Universidad de Huelva. He is Editor-in-chief of *Comunicar* and the president of Grupo Comunicar, a long-standing media literacy collective in Spain. He is also head of the “Ágora” investigation team that forms part of the Andalusia Investigation Plan (HUM-648), is the director of the international master of communication and education (UNIA, UHU), and the coordinator of the UHU Interuniversity doctoral program in communication (US, UMA, UCA, UHU).





**REPRESENTATIONS OF ISLAM ON TIKTOK:
MEDIA EDUCATION AS A TOOL TO MITIGATE
ISLAMOPHOBIA**

Sabina Civila



Universidad
de Huelva



UNIVERSIDAD
DE MÁLAGA



UCA





Doctorado
Interuniversitario en
Comunicación

This research focuses on analyzing the content creation practices carried out by the Muslim community in relation to discriminatory narratives that are present on social media, promoted both by traditional western media and by users. Social media offers expression environments that promote the experience of minority groups. In this sense, we should understand how these counter narrative are constructed and disseminated and how minorities take measures to counteract the hegemonic discourses. In this context, media education is considered a relevant tool for empowering members of the Muslim community to share their own narratives and perspectives, enabling them to counter western stereotypes and misinformation. As well as promoting more accurate and diverse representation of the Muslim community on social media. For this purpose, I analyze the affordances of TikTok, including the way in which content is presented and the interaction options. The aim is to understand how they influence the consumption and representation of Islam.



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