# Universidad de Huelva

## Departamento de Pedagogía

# Platformed migrant narratives: mediated (self) representations of migration on social media

**Memoria para optar al grado de doctora**
**presentada por:**

**Daniela Jaramillo Dent**

Fecha de lectura: 15 de diciembre de 2022

Bajo la dirección de las doctoras:

María Amor Pérez Rodríguez

Paloma Contreras Pulido

Payal Arora

Amanda Paz Alencar

**Huelva, 2022**

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Daniela Jaramillo-Dent

# Platformed Migrant Narratives:

## Mediated (self)representations of migration on social media

**Supervisors:**
Dr. María Amor Pérez-Rodríguez
Dr. Paloma Contreras-Pulido
Dr. Payal Arora
Dr. Amanda Paz Alencar

# Platformed Migrant Narratives:

Mediated (self)representations of migration on social media

# Narrativas Migrantes Plataformizadas:

Las (auto)representaciones mediáticas de la migración en las redes sociales

# Geplatformeerde Migrantenverhalen:

Gemedieerde (zelf)representaties van migratie op sociale media

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# Narrativas Migrantes Plataformizadas: Las (auto)Representaciones mediáticas de la migración en redes sociales

# Platformed Migrant Narratives: Mediated (self)representations of migration on social media

Tesis por compendio de publicaciones para optar al grado
de doctora en cotutela por
la Universidad de Huelva (España) y la Erasmus
University Rotterdam (Holanda)


## Daniela Jaramillo-Dent


**Directoras:**
**Dra. M. Amor Pérez-Rodríguez (Universidad de Huelva)**
**Dra. Payal Arora (Erasmus University Rotterdam)**
**Dra. Paloma Contreras-Pulido (Universidad Internacional de la Rioja)**
**Dra. Amanda Paz Alencar (Erasmus University Rotterdam)**

**Doctorado Interuniversitario en Comunicación (Universidad de Huelva) y Doctorado (Erasmus University Rotterdam)**

**2022**

**Doctoral Committee:**

**Promotors:** Prof. dr. P. Arora
Dr. A. Pérez-Rodríguez

**Other members:** Dr. I. Awad Cherit
Prof. dr. M. Deuze
Prof. dr. S. Ponzanesi
Dr. M. Georgiou

**Copromotors:** Dr. A.P. Alencar
Dr. P. Contreras-Pulido

*For Daniel, Julia, and Candela*
*For believing that everything is possible.*

# Acknowledgements

Support networks are key as one embarks in the work required to complete a dissertation. Among these, my husband Daniel and my two daughters Julia and Candela take center stage.

Thank you, Daniel, for all the times when you supported my work, heard me practice for conference presentations and facilitated time for me to write. Thank you for all the messages of support as I travelled. I know it was hard but thank you. I especially appreciated all the food you cooked and all the care you provided in times of excitement and frustration, thank you for setting my home office and taking the kids so I could teach/present/become a researcher. I love you and feel so lucky for having you as my life partner.

To my daughters, Julia and Candela, thanks for the kisses and the patience while mommy wrote and looked at the screen. Your hugs, your love and your happiness have been key. You motivate me to be a better person, you keep me sane and centered, you remind me of what is truly important. In moments of difficulty, your joy and laughter have kept me going. You are the beams of light that guided me in this process. I love you more than you will ever know.

I want to thank my mother, who made difficult decisions as she raised me, she was not a conventional mother, but she is the best mother I could ask for. Thanks to your inspiration I became a strong woman early on, I now understand how hard it was mom…thank you.

To my sister Andrea, thank you for your support, for listening to me for hours on end about my research and for celebrating every publication and conference.

To my uncle Eddy and my aunt Poche…you made me realize how important it was to be the first in the family to have a PhD. Thank you for the memes and jokes, the video calls, the retweets, and the subversive support for every little success ☺.

I am privileged to work with four supervisors, which may sound hard but for me was ideal. First and foremost, I want to thank Dr. Paloma Contreras-Pulido. We have joked and said that you provide the most comprehensive PhD supervision. Your mentorship comprises a wide range of areas, from therapeutic phone calls to long talks about life, love, and academia to endless sevillana dancing. I would

say that the most valuable part of your supervision is the way you model how to enjoy life at every moment. You are an example of resilience and grit; I am honored to count you among my friends.

I truly appreciate Dr. Amanda Alencar, with whom an email exchange during the pandemic prompted a collaboration that would become a dissertation supervision and friendship. Through zoom, email and WhatsApp I have been lucky to have you as an inspiring mentor and a generous friend. In person, I was always overwhelmed by your openness and empathy. Thank you, Amanda, for your kindness and your time. I will never forget all the conversations, advice, and planning while writing this dissertation. You are a passionate, activist scholar and I feel honored to have you in my life.

I would like to thank Dr. Payal Arora for her leadership and mentorship. Thanks to you I have been part of fascinating projects while learning how research adapts to different spheres, from academic spaces to agency-based collaborations and the private sector. Thank you for the opportunities you have offered me and for introducing me to the wonderful FemLab gang. You are a model to follow.

Dr. Amor Pérez-Rodríguez was the one to motivate me to engage in academic work. You helped me narrow my research focus and think of the best ways to approach the topics that interested me. Thank you.

Special thanks go to my dear libélulas [fireflies]. Your support, your example, and your friendship are a light in my days. You are there during my highs and lows. Thank you for the wonderful meals together, the conversations and the laughter. I will remember your kindness forever. May we always laugh as hard as we can.

Los chéveres provided support and guidance in every step of the way. I appreciate you and miss our talks. Thank you!

This dissertation would not exist without a PhD cohort with whom to navigate academic spaces. I am fortunate to count with many supportive peers who have driven me to grow as a scholar and more importantly, as a person.

First, I thank you Sabina for your light and your authenticity. I will always remember our experiences attending conferences, getting awards, writing for days on end, and responding to difficult peer reviews. I will never forget our immersion into postcolonial theory together ☺. You are always up for an

adventure, from dressing in full flamenco attire to experience El Rocío for the first time, to teaching a class together about publishing academic papers and coming up with the best metaphor to convey what it feels like to publish the first paper to new PhD students. In friendship and in academia, you are a plus in any team. You have become part of my family.

Antonella was the angel who appeared at the end of the second year. You lend your energy and time for the greater good. I have seldom met a person so centered and so generous. All the walks, ice creams, coffees and gin and tonics allowed me to push through this last year. I appreciate your patience and availability; you are a kind soul. Thanks for your presence, your wisdom, and your friendship.

The brillis appeared at the beginning of this dissertation process and the WhatsApp group we shared became a space of support and friendship. Regardless of the difficulties we have faced, I appreciate you brillis, and wish you the very best in you academic and personal trajectories. May you find a space to shine like a true brilli.

Mónica and Belén are two vitamin women. Your insights are always wise and thoughtful. I appreciate your courage, your energy, and your warmth. Wherever you go, you deserve to have all your dreams come true.

A special thanks to Brenthe Tilbroughs, who selflessly reviewed the Dutch translation of the summary. Finally, thanks to all those Twitter friends who made pandemic PhDing more palatable. I have been fortunate to have a Twitter community of support. Many of them worried when the impostor syndrome hit and helped me get rid of it. Some of them sent private messages when the papers got published and retweeted them with a kind comment. Meeting many of them in person was wonderful and it was exciting to realize that digital connections often translate into wonderful real-life friendships. My #AcademicTwitter community has also become part of this success.

At the end, it truly takes a village.

# Publication History

**Note:** Five chapters of this dissertation have been adapted into articles for academic journals, three have been published, one is forthcoming and another one is under review. One chapter has been adapted as a book chapter and is forthcoming.

### Chapter 2. #MigrantCaravans and othering on Instagram

Jaramillo-Dent, D., & Pérez-Rodríguez, M. A. (2021). #MigrantCaravan: The border wall and the establishment of otherness on Instagram. *New Media & Society, 23*(1), 121–141.

### Chapter 3. Immigration and the Spanish right on Instagram Stories

Jaramillo-Dent, D., Contreras-Pulido, P., & Pérez-Rodríguez, M. A. (2021). Right-wing immigration narratives in Spain: A study of persuasion on Instagram Stories. *European Journal of Communication*. https://doi.org/10.1177/02673231211012157

### Chapter 4. #Migrantes on TikTok and platformed belongings

Jaramillo-Dent, D., Alencar, A., & Asadchy, Y. (Forthcoming 2022) #Migrantes on TikTok: Exploring platformed belongings. International Journal of Communication.

### Chapter 5. Immigrant influencers' diversity and (in)visibility on TikTok

Jaramillo-Dent, D., Contreras-Pulido, P., & Pérez-Rodríguez, M. A. (2022). Immigrant influencers on TikTok: Diverse microcelebrity profiles and algorithmic (in)visibility. *Media and Communication*

### Chapter 6. Algorithmic (in)visibility tactics among immigrant TikTokers

Jaramillo-Dent, D. (under review). *Mediální Studies*.

### Chapter 7. Migrant Agency and platformed belongings: The case of TikTok

Jaramillo-Dent, D., Alencar, A., & Asadchy, Y. (Forthcoming 2022). Doing Digital Migration Studies. Amsterdam University Press.

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# Chapter 1

## General Introduction

# Chapter 1: General Introduction

The present chapter serves as a general introduction for the dissertation. It presents the main concepts that frame social media narratives about immigration by various actors including immigrants in two countries. This chapter also introduces the research questions and provides a rationale of the methodological approaches used. It serves as a general outline of the dissertation and summary of each of the chapters that comprise it.

## 1.1 Locating myself: A migrant studying migratory narratives

The objects of study of this dissertation have a very personal and intimate motivation. They derive from a personal experience of migration and the challenges experienced in this personal life journey. In this section, I will attempt to describe these experiences and hopefully, as the reader navigates this document, the connections between my experience and the narratives and creators studied will become evident.

I am an Ecuadorian immigrant, who moved to the US at age 20. I was in the privileged position of entering a country by plane –rather than crossing by foot. I entered with a tourist visa. Once my visa expired, I experienced the strange feeling of being undocumented. I spent my first four years as an undocumented immigrant in the US, waiting for complex bureaucratic processes. I became an adult while unable to see my family for those first years, in a grey space of uncertainty about when and how my situation would be resolved. After four years I became a green card holder, I never got an American passport.

Years later I migrated to Spain. As the wife of a Spanish national I was granted residency quickly. During COVID I became undocumented once again because my residency expired and there were delays caused by the pandemic. When I lost my status, my work situation became uncertain again, and I had to do random jobs as the main breadwinner in my family of 4, while writing this dissertation. I have found that living as an immigrant often means that the only constant is the feeling of uncertainty and fear. I got my Spanish citizenship in March 2021, and I can say with certainty that I had never felt so safe or free to move around.

The limitations experienced in these two countries are by no means comparable to some of the pain and suffering many immigrants go through when making the journey. In this sense, I consider myself a privileged immigrant due to the support networks I rely on, my linguistic skills and luck, which has enabled me to identify, access, and take advantage of opportunities at each stage of my 18 years as an immigrant. However, the difficulties I faced, from my

privileged position, made me think of others who are less fortunate and how their lives are impacted every day due to their migratory status.

Thus, my first-person experience in migration prompted my interest in the experiences of others, as reflected by the content they create online and the narratives they face on digital spaces. As I conducted each of the studies presented in this dissertation, I was aware and engaged in reflection to always consider my bias while gathering and analyzing data in the process of writing each of these words.

## 1.2 Setting the problem

In the past two decades, social media platforms have become some of the main spaces where discussions about immigration develop. Migratory narratives and contents are aided and constructed within multimodal configurations designed to promote different levels of interaction, from likes, to comments, shares, and reuses of content. Different actors such as politicians, influencers and activists turn to digital spaces to express their own versions of what migration is, to advance specific political and social ideologies or simply to express an opinion on the issue. For immigrants, these spaces become reminders of the contentious nature of their existence. On the one hand, the range of opinions and perspectives become concrete within algorithmic feeds and walls. On the other hand, migrants may have an opportunity to present individual experiences of what their personal reality of migration looks like.

In this context, the utopian idea that social media democratizes content creation and dissemination has been faced with the realization that the media industry has just shifted to a new model of power. In this new configuration, Silicon Valley and a few other actors in China control what is visible and allowed, while governments attempt to legislate spaces that are obscure and technologically complicated. Marginalized groups see their offline experiences perpetuated within algorithmic systems and are rendered voiceless once again through moderation processes that obscure them and misrepresent them, as evidenced by researchers such as internet scholar Safiya Noble (2018) and sociologist Ruha Benjamin (2018), among others.

One of the aspects that makes the study of immigrant content creators unique and necessary is that in the past decade, their safety while creating social media content has been reduced by oppressive practices and legislation that

renders their content and devices open to surveillance and scrutiny. This has been reported in the US in cases of immigration officers accessing mobile phones in airports (Victor, 2017); ICE agents tracking Latin American immigrants' social media accounts (Funk, 2021); the requirement of 5-year social media data to obtain a visa (García, 2019); collecting social media handles, and other related information as part of an applicant's immigration file (Nixon, 2017; Vincent, 2019). In Europe, laws in Austria, Germany, Denmark, Norway, the United Kingdom, and Belgium enable the extraction of mobile phone data in asylum and immigration procedures (Brekke & Balke Staver, 2019; Meaker, 2018). Such policies have the potential to become additional content moderators, shaping the types of content immigrants create and curtailing their willingness to create content at all.

This dissertation focuses on the ways in which social media platforms shape migratory narratives by different actors, including generalist content creators, political figures, immigrants, and immigrant influencers. The study centers on two countries that have become preferred destinations for Latin American migrants: The United States and Spain. The platforms of interest are Instagram and TikTok because of their popularity and visuality as well as the (self)representative configurations they enable.

The overall theoretical approach could be understood through an otherness versus sameness (Orkin & Joubin, 2019) lens and in the case of immigrant content creators the need to respond to various digital bordering strategies online (Chouliaraki & Georgiou, 2019). The conceptual framework draws from media, migration, and social anthropology scholarship as well as internet and cultural studies. It considers the prominence of migratory narratives as instrumental for political, cultural, social, and ideological positioning as well as their role in the ability of receiving societies and diverse individuals to coexist. The awareness of the ways in which different content creators –including immigrants– negotiate their own views and perspectives on immigration within these algorithmic spaces becomes relevant to glimpse at the importance of the platform as a dimension that shapes, enables and constraints certain migratory representations.

The next section outlines the role of the platform as a key concept to describe the ways in which narratives about immigration develop and navigate social media.

### 1.2.1 From digitally mediated stories to platformed narratives

Throughout this dissertation the term *platformed* is used to refer to the ways in which digital spaces –structurally and through its policies/politics– enable, promote and constraint certain types of content and interactions. This concept goes beyond the mere presence of content, dialogue and/or interaction on digital spaces to include the ways in which content, dialogue and/or interaction changes as it is resignified and adapted within and across social media platforms. The term, as used in this dissertation, draws from the contemporary conceptualization of platform within online spaces as defined by internet scholar Tartleton Gillespie (2010; 2018) and considers aspects such as the vernaculars (Gibbs et al., 2015) and affordances (McVeigh-Schultz & Baym, 2015) that characterize each social media platform.

Gillespie (2010) explains, in his seminal work on platforms, that the term "platform" draws from four different semantic areas: (1) computational, which understands the platform as a space that allows the design and deployment of specific applications; (2) architectural, describing a platform as a level structure that is raised and enables people to stand and carry out specific tasks; (3) figurative, which depicts the platform as the basis or first step towards something more; and (4) political, which refers to a twofold use of the use of the term platform. First, as the physical space from where a political figure speaks to an audience, and second, as the set of stances a candidate takes on a specific issue. Gillespie (2010) describes that these connotations of the term platform, when applied to digital spaces, serve to imply a sense of neutrality and the facilitation of a range of activities to take place within. As the author explains, the strategic use of the term platform limits technology companies' liability by arguing that they only provide a space of opportunity without need for intervention. The commercial nature of social media platforms and their business models are also relevant to understand more comprehensively what the term "platform" comprises. In this sense, the strategic deployment of visibility strategies that are adapted to each social media space should be considered as relevant within contemporary social media platforms.

Narratives become *platformed* in a process of negotiation by content creators with socially mediated digital spaces, fellow creators and users, and algorithmic systems. Contents become *platformed* through their adaptation to distinct platform vernaculars (Gibbs et al., 2015) which include the specific

grammars, logics and genres that are understood by the community of creators. The platform's unique linguistic, connective, and narrative elements are perpetuated through imitation and the use of specific affordances within the social media platform. In this process, phenomena such as the templatability of content on Instagram (Leaver et al., 2020) and the structurally mimetic nature of TikTok (Zulli & Zulli, 2020) emerge as relevant to understand that social media contents are forged within very specific sociotechnical contexts where both online and offline forms of culture impact them.

Templatability refers to specific aesthetics that characterize contents on Instagram, aided by algorithmic processes that perpetuate certain visual configurations that make them identifiable. According to Leaver et al. (2020, p. 215) there are four aspects that comprise templatability: (1) *affordances and algorithms* that enable content with certain visual characteristics to become visible within the platform; (2) *aesthetics and affect* in the attempts by the platform to balance certain aesthetic algorithmic preferences while maintaining affect as part of the user experience; (3) *attention and audiences* which drive attempts by the platform to maintain users engaged by adjusting the amount of advertisement presented to users; (4) *agency and activism* —which refer to the perception by users of the power of their actions, individually and as part of social justice initiatives.

Similarly, Zulli and Zulli (2020) argue that TikTok is structurally mimetic in the way that its design, content configurations and affordances promote the imitation of different elements of TikTok content. Examples of TikTok's mimetic nature include audio tracks, which can be easily reused through the *use this audio* function. Audio also connects all the videos that use the same audio track and present them in an audio track page, which labels the first video that used an audio track as well as the total number of videos featuring the track. In this sense, the culturally relevant elements within content created by immigrants on TikTok is both unique to the specific culture and identity of the creator and connects with a larger TikTok community through components that may be visual, sonic, or facilitated by other multimodal functions. Other mimetic functions include the various forms of reuse of existing content enabled by the platform such as the duet and stitch. The visual vernaculars of TikTok and specific narrative configurations that have emerged within this social media platform are also relevant. Considering the imitation that is taking place within this platform

allows the location of their content creation practices within the larger context of TikTok.

The next section provides guidelines about the concepts related to immigration that were used throughout this dissertation. It considers current debates in the use of concepts and describes the process of reflection and decision-making involved in writing the present dissertation.

## 1.2.2 Contested terms for ethnicity, culture, and migratory experience

The terminology used in the present dissertation has gone through a process of reflection and adaptation. In this section, the various conceptual frameworks to refer to immigrants are described, and a rationale is provided to understand the decision-making process while writing the different chapters comprised in this dissertation.

### *1.2.2.1 Migrants or immigrants*

The terms used to refer to people who are in different stages of mobility are constantly being contested and explored from different perspectives. I have attempted to consider diverse views on the issue to be respectful and sensible in my approach to this community of content creators. I will present some of the arguments on the topic and explain my choice of terms for this doctoral work.

As a starting point for this reflection, I bring the perspectives of migration scholar Bridget Anderson and political scientist Scott Blinder (2019) who provide an overview of the complicated nature of the terminology used to refer to migrants. Both scholars argue that the main problem lies in the fact that the term "migrant" has no legal definition, while also highlighting the lack of consensus in its conceptualization. They explain that the term "immigrant" is often used to refer to people who intend to settle in the receiving country.

On the other hand, critical migration scholars Stephan Scheel and Martina Tazzioli (2022) emphasize the importance of recognizing mobility as a key aspect of migration in the face of bordering strategies deployed by nation states to limit the possibilities of people to move or stay in certain countries. Considering this, these authors define a migrant as

> a person who, in order to move to or stay in a desired place, has to struggle against bordering practices and processes of boundary-making that are implicated by the national order of things (Scheel & Tazzioli, 2022, p. 3).

In the case of the present dissertation, the multimodal elements related to immigration in the contents analyzed include Spanish and English markers that provide insights as to the creators' own self-perception or their perception of the nature of their contents –in terms of migration– such as "migrante/migrant" or "inmigrante/immigrant" alongside other labels related to their origins and place of residence that highlight the experience of specific groups of migrants. Yet, in most cases, it is hard to determine whether the content is created by people with a specific type of migrant background (socioeconomic, cultural, ethnic, etc.), as only some of the creators engage in a detailed explanation of their migration story and the snippets that are present in their content provide only part of their migratory –and life– experiences.

It is important to note that immigrants across the range of precarity and throughout their migratory processes experience struggles and difficulties (Mezzadra, 2011). The author suggests that these struggles and precarity should be considered across the immigration continuum –from undocumented migrants to those in the different stages in the documentation process. Chouliaraki and Georgiou (2022) emphasize the importance of acknowledging the fluidity of migrants' experiences and legal statuses over time and its implications for the construction and representation of belonging and identity across digital networks of migrant connectivity (Chouliaraki & Georgiou, 2022).

Thus, I use the broad terms "migrant" and "immigrant" interchangeably throughout this research project to refer to the vast diversity of populations who migrate, including undocumented and forced migrants. The use of these two terms recognizes the struggles of people across the migration continuum (Mezzadra, 2011; Chouliaraki & Georgiou, 2022). The use of these terms also attempts to incorporate the right of people to become established in a country –immigrants– as well as their right to move to a different country if they need to or want to –migrants. I also considered their own use of both "migrants" and "immigrants" in the content analyzed, which was present in the form of hashtags, song lyrics, oral speech, or text. This reflects the goal to engage with migrants' epistemologies as they are expressed in digital spaces.

#### *1.2.2.2 Latin American, Latinx/a/o, or Hispanic*

In terms of the wording used to refer to the cultural, national, and ethnic background of the content creators studied, and the communities portrayed, the word used to refer to their Latin American background also gives rise to contested concepts that require some explanation. It is important to note that most of these debates related to the use of specific terms refer to debates taking place in the US rather than the Spanish context. This is due to the proliferation of studies and arguments related to terminology that are prevalent in the United States and much less so in Spain.

For instance, in the early 1970s, the term "Hispanic" was given preference by federal agencies in the United States instead of the term "Latino" following a report by the Ad Hoc Committee on Racial and Ethnic definitions of the Federal Interagency Committee on Education (Flores-Hughes, 2006). This committee considered that the word Hispanic could be used as an ethnic category that comprised all the racial backgrounds and national origins of persons of Latin American descent. In the 2000's the term "Latino" was added in the US Census (Taylor et al., 2012). In contrast, the European use of the term "Latino" refers to the countries of the Mediterranean that speak languages deriving from Latin. Although the use of these terms to refer to the evolving identities of Latin American diasporas, the practical uses of the terms in Europe provide some insights. In Spain for instance, the term "Hispanic" is used to refer both to Spanish-speaking Latin American communities and Spaniards, while the term Latino is used to refer to Latin American people (Barragán & Romerales, 2019). This use of the term "Hispanic" arguably erases the experience of Latin Americans and reflects the colonial relationship between the Iberian and Latin American regions, as explained below.

A study by the Pew Research Center in 2012 assessed the preferred terms for this community in the US. Their findings suggest that there is no preference between the terms "Latino" and "Hispanic" among most of the surveyed members of this community. However, among those who did express a preference, they favored the term "Hispanic" (Taylor et al., 2012). In 2017, the Pew Research Center found that new generations of individuals of Latin American descent who are born and living in the United States do not identify with either term (Lopez et al., 2017). However, community activist and author

Andrea Vásquez Jiménez (2018, p.103) joins part of the Latino Studies academic community to argue that the term "Hispanic" is "exclusionary, Eurocentric, white supremacist and racist". She argues that the term "Hispanic" erases different parts of Latin American identities, especially those of communities who are subject to further discriminations such as Black, Indigenous, and non-binary individuals who are also Latin American. This perspective of exclusion of intersectional groups within Latin American communities by using the term "Hispanic" is supported by Martínez and González (2021). Vásquez Jiménez (2018) also points to the colonial significance of the word and its emphasis on language above all other aspects and stories lived by the Latin American community throughout its history.

Other authors and scholars have expressed similar perspectives on the term "Hispanic", seeing its use as white-washing, and illustrative of a preference of Spain over the *mestizaje* that characterizes Latin America (Abalos, 2007). Due to these reasons, I avoid using the term "Hispanic" in this dissertation. However, it is important to note that some of the published articles derived from the chapters in this dissertation do feature the term "Hispanic" because at the time of writing them I had limited knowledge about the contested nature of this term.

Similarly, in the research process, the existing debate in the use of the terms Latino/a and Latinx emerged as relevant for reflection. The appearance of the term "Latino" has been pointed as taking place locally and regionally in the United States from an increased panethnic consciousness in neighborhoods, religious congregations, and civic organizations (Martínez & González, 2021). Latinx is also a highly contentious word. For some it is seen as a "space of possibility" comprising debates about the right to self-name, the issue of linguistic purity, and the representation of more members of the community using a sole term (Vidal-Ortiz & Martínez, 2018).

Throughout this dissertation, the terms *Latin American* and *Latinx* are favored to refer to the specific creators and contents studied. The term *Latin American* refers to individuals from countries in the region spanning 19 countries in North and South America who speak Romance languages, mainly Spanish and Portuguese (Bodenheimer, 2019). In the case of *Latinx*, and in agreement with Vidal-Ortiz and Martínez (2018), I consider the term as an opportunity for inclusion and resignification. It is a non-gendered term that goes beyond the common language dimension to comprise diverse ethnicities and

cultures across various national origins that is in constant flux (Bodinger-deUriarte & Valgeirsson, 2019).

In the next section the relevance of studying Latin American immigrants in the United States and Spain are outlined.

### 1.2.3 Two migration destinations for Latin American immigrants

Spain and the United States have traditionally been desirable options for the Latin American migrant community. This is due to financial, legal, geographic, and cultural factors that are decisive when considering these two countries as possible destinations (Connor & Massey, 2010). Moreover, both countries follow civic integration models that focus on the acquisition of values established as "ideal", "shared" and "national" (Larin, 2020). In the case of Spain, language proficiency is also important as a benchmark to integration (European Commission, n.d.; Fernández-Suárez, 2017).

Both countries boast significant Latin American populations. In this sense, Spain has seen a large increase in Latin American migrant groups, such as Venezuelan nationals (47%), Hondurans (32.4%) and Colombians (25.1%) in 2018 (European Commission, n.d.). In the case of the US, Latin American migration is key, with around 51.3% of all migrants in the country originating from Latin America (Yemane & Fernández-Reino, 2019).

The relevant perspectives in the historical migratory relationships between Latin America and each of these two countries is explored in the following sections.

#### *1.2.3.1 United States and Latin America: A long and winding migration history*

Latin American migration to the United States is marked by a long history of Mexican immigration —motivated by the precarious labor market in Mexico, higher wages in the US and geographic proximity— which officially began in 1848 and has continued since then (Gutiérrez, 2019).

There have been different legal approaches that underpin the current anti-immigration sentiment in the US. Thus, the perception of Latin American immigrants in the US is closely related to documentation status (Oboler, 2021). Today's situation, which started becoming more constraining for immigrants in

2001, features the criminalization of immigration, increasing deportations, the militarization of the borders, and securitization legislation that enables the US government to increase the surveillance of immigrants as "potential terrorists" (Gutiérrez, 2019). Moreover, Trump's administration was characterized by harsh rhetoric and policies establishing all forms of immigration as a threat to the American economy and safety. These have hardened the United States' approach to immigration, with more deportations and increased detention rates (Pierce & Steele, 2017).

All of this happens regardless of the key role of Mexican immigration to the industrial expansion of the US at different points in history (Oboler, 2021). Like the Spanish case described in the next section, Latin American immigrants have been considered valuable due to their potential for certain labor-related activities and exploitation rather than a more significant integration into US society (Dietrich, 2012).

In terms of inclusion in the job market and in education, Latinx immigrant communities in the United States are characterized by low levels of educational achievement, compared to other minorities in the country, which have been linked to their exclusion from the qualified job market (Yemane & Fernández-Reino, 2019). These data point to the structural limitations in educational and work-related opportunities. In terms of the kinds of jobs carried out by Latin American immigrants in the US, it is worth noting that starting in the 1980s, Mexican immigrants have worked mainly in the construction and service industries (Gutiérrez, 2019).

For the purposes of this doctoral project, it is relevant to understand how these laws have affected the perception Latinx immigrants in this North American country. In terms of the social construction and understanding of Latin American immigrants in the United States, the notion of *social illegality* is relevant as a constructed constraint to the integration of this community and one that is based on superficial and misinformed perceptions of immigration, its relationship with criminality and discrimination (Flores & Shachter, 2018). The "illegal" label has also be found to be generally linked to Latin American immigration (Dietrich, 2012), even though more than 20% of undocumented immigrants are not from this region (Migration Policy Institute, 2019).

#### *1.2.3.2 Spain and Latin America: An uneven chronicle of migration*

Migratory flows between Spain and Latin America have been constant for around 200 years. The direction of these flows has shifted between both sides of the Atlantic due to political and economic changes. Between 1846 and 1932 around 3.5 million Spaniards settled in various South American and Caribbean countries (Martín Díaz et al., 2012, p. 816). Initial migration from Spain, motivated by work opportunities in Latin America, was replaced by political exile from Francisco Franco's totalitarian regime in the 1930s. Spain maintained its status as an emigration nation until the 1960s, and starting in the 1980s, the trend started to change due to the rise of dictatorships in different Latin American countries (Martín Díaz et al., 2012). In the last three decades Spain has become one of the major migrant destinations for Latin American individuals (Hierro, 2013).

Martín Díaz et al. (2012) describe the social construction of Latin American immigrants in Spain and how they moved from acceptance to rejection and being classified as "good" versus "bad" migrants in Spanish society. These authors describe how Spaniards' perception towards Latin American immigrants was initially positive and friendly, arguably due to the cultural and ethnic similarities and the previous support provided to Spanish individuals who moved to the Latin American region due to the persecution of Franco's regime. However, although there have been various programs to provide legal status to immigrants in Spain —in 1986, 1991, 1996, 2000, 2001 and 2005 (Hierro, 2013). These procedures established certain requirements to acquire legal status. These stipulations included employment and economic means, limiting the possibility to gain documented status to some immigrants —while differentiating between the "good" and the "bad" migrants (Martín Díaz et al., 2012).

Studies focusing on the types of jobs carried out by Latin American immigrants in Spain have found out that first generation Latinxs are often overqualified for their jobs, especially after the 2008 economic crisis (Bradatan & Kolloju, 2015) and relegated to construction, cleaning, and care-related occupations (Yemane & Fernández-Reino, 2019). Meanwhile, immigration policies in Spain have been shaped by the needs of the Spanish labor market to sustain precarious economic sectors, which, along with the cultural similarities,

have positioned Latin American immigrants as more desirable than those of other provenances (Martín Díaz et al., 2012).

Moreover, research suggests that along the range of perceptions from the acceptance to the rejection of Latin American immigrants in Spain, they were never considered as people, but as "tools for the labour market" (Martin Díaz et al., 2012, p.820). This is supported by research focusing on immigration-related political discourse and legislative arguments in Spain, which have traditionally been connected to employment (Fernández-Suárez, 2017).

Considering the historical migration between these receiving nations and Latin America, it is key to understand the othering and belonging narratives that underpin these relationships. Thus, the next section details the main theoretical perspectives on otherness and sameness and their broader implications for platformed forms of persuasion, identity, belonging, agency, and visibility as key conceptual tools within the different chapters that comprise this dissertation.

### 1.2.4 Otherness and Sameness in migration research

Otherness is understood at its simplest as "the quality of being other or different" (Otherness, n.d.). In this research project, this concept goes beyond in-person othering and takes dimensions from the platforms where it is deployed. In this case, otherness is understood in a twofold sense. On the one hand, within the traditional conceptualization of otherness as the attempt to distance from the other by emphasizing differences and focusing on a constructed inferiority (Bourdieu, 1986; Greer & Jewkes, 2005). On the other hand, otherness understood as the process of establishing one's own identity without attempting to be as the other, circumventing established societal expectations and constructions (Orkin & Joubin, 2019).

In the present dissertation I take a social constructivist approach to identity (Hall, 2019) to reflect on the unexpected ways in which the identity of a content creator is shaped and illustrated through the content they choose to share and present. Social constructivism posits that people shape and build their identity through interactions and negotiations with their context. It is relevant to consider that the context in this case includes the social media platforms where these narratives develop, as well as the national, social, and cultural environments that these creators inhabit. Moreover, from the field of internet research, persona studies (Moore et al., 2017) are useful to think about the

strategic ways in which creators deploy different aspects of their identities in online spaces to achieve specific goals.

It is relevant to understand the ways in which identity and othering processes intersect at the individual and collective levels. In this sense, social and cultural geography scholar Jean-François Staszak (2009, p. 44) explains that otherness is

> the result of a discursive process by which a dominant in-group ("Us", the Self) constructs one or many dominated out-groups ("Them", Other) by stigmatizing a difference –real or imagined– presented as a negation of identity and thus a motive for potential discrimination.

The author goes on to explain that othering is closely linked to identity construction due to the need to compare oneself to others to self-identify. Staszak explains the existing hierarchies and identities built upon discursive power and how the political power of the source of discourse is key in the impact that such discourse can have. The author points to Western ethnocentrism as unique for its imposition of a series of binary relationships of positive/negative connotations in identity-related concepts related to gender, race, age, among others. This assertion aligns with Hall et al.'s (2010) argument of the historic role of dominant, mostly binary definitions of othering in the media and in society as continuous attempts to self-identify in relation to others, achieve order, exclude to establish power, and enable fantasies about possible outcomes.

Furthermore, postcolonial scholar Edward W. Said (2003) proposed some of the key understandings of othering through his study of Orientalism. According to this author, the construction of the oriental other reflects the ways in which the West positions Arab and Muslim societies as different through labels positioning them as "backward" and "inferior" to justify oppressive policies and to establish structures of power and domination. Said also explains that one of the key strategies of othering discourses and representations lies in the homogenization of large groups of people, even though non-Western, non-white –and other non-dominant– individuals are very diverse regardless of their common cultural, national, or religious background. These arguments are relevant to understand the ways in which dominant narratives are presented in digital spaces, the labels used to group immigrants in both receiving countries,

and their relationships with first-person immigrant accounts. It is also pertinent to explore all the sources of othering within the study, such as horizontal forms of othering that establish unexpected hierarchies among immigrant creators.

Moreover, the ways in which these symbolic and discursive representations are constructed also reflect a sense of sameness. Sameness enables the construction of an identity through an emphasis on the collective similarities that position oneself in relation to others and society (Szytniewski & Spierings, 2014). The concept of sameness is closely related to identity construction and belonging. Human geographer Rosa Mas Giralt (2011) describes the ways in which children of Latin American descent in England enact sameness in relation to their ethnically diverse counterparts. The author describes the strategy of emphasizing identity traits that are unrelated to racial or national heritage such as shared preferences and activities while avoiding conversations related to difference. This provides an interesting framework for this dissertation, as the analysis includes digital discourses of othering and the negotiation by immigrant content creators in the face of existing narratives online.

In terms of online othering, media scholars Fernanda Rosa and Arthur Soto-Vásquez (2022) explore the *aesthetics of otherness* within Instagram posts linked by the #MigrantCaravan and #CaravanaMigrante. These authors conceptualize the *aesthetics of otherness* as the ways in which the visual contents about immigration are shaped by the preferred aesthetics of the platform, in detriment of the representations of the migrant caravan and the human aspect of this migratory narrative. They suggest that content related to the migrant caravans on Instagram is quite professionalized and driven by a quest for likes and interactions rather than a more profound engagement with the issues of immigration. Their findings provide an additional, platformed dimension to traditional understandings of otherness, in line with the objectives of the present dissertation. Moreover, their results engage in dialogue with chapter two, supporting the idea that migrant voices related to the migrant caravans are largely absent on Instagram and adding an interesting finding related to the Spanish version of the hashtag providing a space for migrant voices to emerge.

Besides the absence of the migrant voice on Instagram posts related to migrant caravans, chapter two also explores othering practices by Instagram content creators using the hashtags #MigrantCaravan and #CaravanaMigrante on posts that visually feature the US-Mexico wall. Using different theoretical

perspectives of otherness and sameness (Hall et al., 2010; Orkin & Joubin, 2019; Szytniewski & Spierings, 2014), this chapter involves an analysis of the multimodal nature of Instagram posts (Leaver et al., 2020) and the ways in which content creators established otherness through their representation of migrants and other actors in the migratory narrative, such as law enforcement agents.

The use of specific formats to portray migratory imaginaries is also relevant to understand how social media platforms shape narratives of otherness and sameness. In this sense, the third chapter takes a political perspective to analyze a nativist and authoritarian party in Spain (Ferreira, 2019) to explore rhetorical strategies of othering and how they translate to the Instagram Story format. The analysis assessed the ways in which this format and its affordances were leveraged by the far-right party VOX in Spain to construct migrant narratives and representations that fit their political leaning and legislative aims. The multimodal analysis focuses on the rhetorical nature of interactive affordances within the story format, such as sliders and the emotional appeal possibilities of emojis (Ge & Gretzel, 2018) as part of persuasive arguments about immigration. The visual and textual aspects of the messages were also considered and the specific ways in which each of these elements shape the narratives and arguments about immigration. The short duration and ephemeral nature of the Instagram Story were also considered.

The quest for the migrant voice within socially mediated content about immigration drove the research to another platform that became increasingly relevant throughout the Pandemic. During this period and beyond, TikTok has become one of the fastest growing social media platforms with content that features choreography and humor, as well as discussions about social justice issues and politics. A digital ethnography approach was used to identify content by immigrant creators using relevant hashtags and keywords. Overall, a 19-month non-participant digital ethnography was carried out, which led to the identification of 53 immigrant content creators on TikTok who uploaded content periodically. The next chapters focus on these creators and their platformed migratory narratives.

Chapter four features an analysis of the ways in which immigrants respond to existing narratives about them and enact their sameness and belonging using the affordances available on TikTok. For this, the study relies on previous theories of belonging focusing on digital spaces (Marlowe et al., 2017; Marino, 2015) from the perspective of the platform (Gillespie, 2010) to explore

immigrant TikTokers using the specific affordances to convey and establish their various cultural, national, and migratory belongings. The chapter also explores migrants' digital belongings related to the TikTok universe, including their belonging to a community of creators on the platform and its role in the construction of a TikToker identity and visibility through strategies to be picked up by the *for you* page (Zulli & Zulli, 2020; Abidin, 2021). The analysis considers content creation practices that rely on shared experiences of discrimination and othering as well as responses to existing beliefs about immigration as the basis for affinity and belonging within migrant communities of creators.

The multimodal study of belonging among immigrant creators led to findings related to the visibility strategies within these digital platforms' algorithmic systems. Through the study of four immigrant creators who achieved a relevant following of more than 10,000 followers on TikTok, chapter five explores the range of identities and personas deployed by these TikTokers. The range of their ideologies and perspectives on the issue of immigration is noteworthy. Moreover, their negotiations with TikTok's algorithmic systems to achieve visibility regardless of the controversial nature of their content are also explored.

The findings related to algorithmic visibility and resistance (Karizat et al., 2021) shape chapter six, to provide a more nuanced perspective of the ways in which immigrants negotiate algorithmic forms of othering that render their content as controversial and unable to fit the mainstream (Appadurai, 2019). The study is carried out by exploring these (in)visibility practices as they appear among the community of immigrant content creators. I argue that these contents are rendered strategically (in)visible because creators' tactics within the platform involve the concealment of controversy by deploying specific genres of humor that are native to the TikTok context and content that appears light and adapted to the platform vernaculars. The findings include instances of audio-based activism to make the abuse of in-house maids visible, as well as strategies of partial deplatforming in the case of temporal or permanent profile bans and the creative use of TikTok's platform vernaculars (Gibbs et al., 2015; Zulli & Zulli, 2020) to negotiate moderation.

Chapter seven connects the narratives of belonging enabled and constrained by the platform to propose a typology of agentic styles for identity and belonging. The narrative and platformed agentic styles proposed are facilitated by the configurations and affordances within the platform and reflect

relationships between immigrant content creators that go from support to policing of the best ways to belong. It provides additional nuance to the unexpected ways in which immigrants respond to othering in their respective societies, with a range of horizontal narratives aimed at fellow immigrants to guide them in their personal perspective to belong *correctly*.

Figure 1 reflects the relationship between the different chapters in the dissertation and the underpinning theories of otherness and sameness.

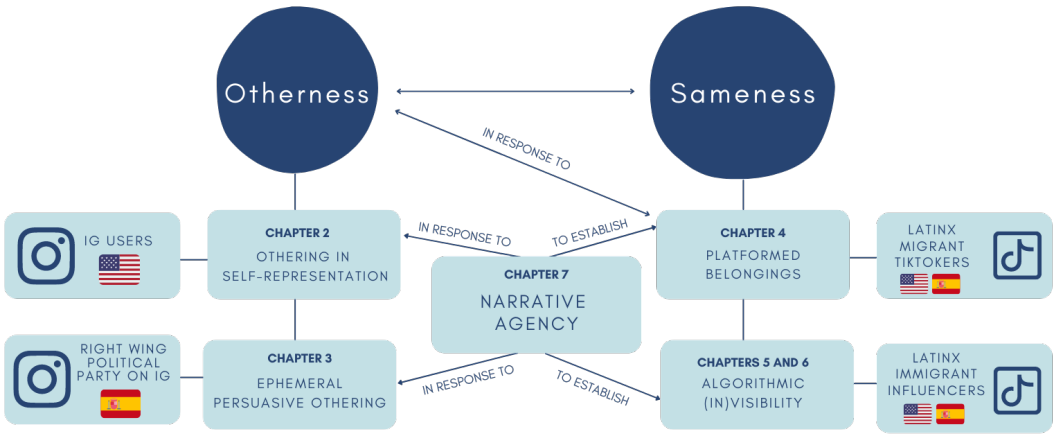


**Figure 1.** Conceptual framework between the chapters of this dissertation

## 1.2.5 Responding to existing literature gaps

The present work aims to advance current media and migration research by engaging with internet scholarship, cultural studies, sociology, and social anthropology to consider the ways in which narratives about immigration are shaped and built on social media. This section provides a rationale, based on previous literature, supporting the need to engage with user-generated, social media content to understand current forms of (im)migrant media representations.

As media and migration scholars Koen Leurs and Kevin Smets (2018) explain, this growing field presents various challenges that need answers from a multidisciplinary stance that considers diverse sources for its imaginaries. They mention some actors that are relevant to digital migration research, including social media users, mainstream news media, activists, and migrants themselves as key agents in the circulation of digital migration imaginaries. In the case of

this dissertation, I add politicians and platforms as relevant agents in the establishment of certain migration imaginaries that become mainstream. On the one hand, politicians are pertinent because they can connect directly to their following through their digital profiles and advance narratives that support specific ideologies. On the other hand, social media platforms are also key because they enable and constraint certain contents and make them (in)visible through human and algorithmic moderation systems that are biased, and give preference to posts that reflect the values of the platform, as internet scholars Blake Hallinan, Rebecca Scharlach and Limor Shifman (2022) propose.

In the field of internet research, various scholars have argued for the need to de-center current scholarship from the European and US contexts. For instance, digital anthropologist Crystal Abidin and internet scholar Megan Lindsay Brown (2018) have argued for the need to study digital experiences from the perspective of the Global South to gain a wider and more diverse understanding of internet microcelebrity. Digital anthropologist Payal Arora has argued that the digital practices of the next billion users are key to understand how digital experiences should be designed and what technologies should be developed next (Arora, 2019). Meanwhile, critical data scholars Stefania Milan and Emiliano Treré (2019) also argue for the study of data and its imaginaries from a global south perspective.

This dissertation's theoretical contributions integrate the platform as key in the strategies set forth by different creators to advance their perspectives on immigration. The study's empirical contributions include instances where processes of othering, persuasion, identity-building, belonging, and agency become *platformed* using the affordances and configurations available.

In this sense, the digital context provides a permanent record of public sentiment about any issue and immigration is no exception. Sociologists Marisol Clark-Ibanez and Richelle Swan (2019) describe how social media become instrumental in the construction of immigrant stories. These authors explain that due to the format and distribution models offered in these spaces, these contents can be supported, contradicted, or challenged by readers, who can also use parts of the stories as needed to strategically support their own opinions/narratives.

Another important characteristic of social media –the user-generated creation, adaptation, modification and propagation of content and a more visual, less textual depiction of issues– presents specific challenges when

dealing with information. For instance, media literacy scholars Paul Milhailidis and Samantha Viotti (2017) argue that mainstream media is no longer necessary to reach audiences in the current digital, user-generated content environment. Likewise, Cacciatore et al. (2016), suggest that the current media environment requires a different approach due to visual representation and persuasion strategies present in social media. These studies describe a shift in the processes in which societal perceptions are built. The scholarship presented justifies the need to move beyond traditional professional journalistic media representations towards an exploration of the current, convergent media environment, where representations emerge in the form of spreadable media (Jenkins et al., 2013). Studies focused on media representations need to consider the ability of content to move along social and digital media and be reshaped by users and content creators.

The social, relational, and contextual experiences afforded by digital media must also be considered to locate the places where these phenomena develop. In this sense, Lister et al. (2008) describe the ways in which stories develop differently within digital media, including the "relationships between embodiment, identity, and community: different ways of (…) experiencing time, space and place changing how we see ourselves in the world" (p. 12). These digital configurations give way to an array of forms of communication, where information, opinions and facts converge using audiovisual content generated from a lineup of stakeholders, including media conglomerates adapting to this new ecosystem, politicians and opinion leaders, Internet microcelebrities, but also created by a contemporary version of Toffler's (1980) prosumer – understood as a person that simultaneously engages in consumption and creation of content. These changes in the self- and community perception of individuals through digital media, the ubiquity and complexity in the promotion of interaction and content creation, as well as the convergence of motivations and ideologies, have important implications for perceptions about immigration and for the opportunities of immigrants to claim agency in their own narratives.

Moreover, the role of social media in identity formation and expression has been solidified in media and migration scholarship. Scholars in this field have explored the possibilities of social media to document migratory experiences. Sociologist Dana Dimenescu (2008) proposed the concept of the *connected migrant* to explain the nature and relevance of digital technologies in migration research with a significant emphasis on the relational and social

aspects of connectivity. Moreover, the implications of digital practices for identities and belongings in different stages of human mobility processes are reflected by studies on the narration of migratory journeys (Labayen & Gutierrez, 2021).

Deservingness is a relevant trope in the study of immigrant self-representations. Narratives of deservingness have been used to categorize underprivileged and poor individuals in order to make decisions about the characteristics of people who merit assistance. Deservingness is a socially constructed notion that often connects poverty with immorality, abuse of the public system, fraud, and unwillingness to work, while serving to establish mechanisms of control and surveillance (Watkins-Hayes & Kovalsky, 2017). Historian Michael Katz (2013) challenged this notion as divisive, exclusionary, and heavily focused on the obligations of underprivileged individuals towards society, while remaining unclear as to the responsibilities of the state towards them. In the field of migration, narratives of deservingness translate to oppressive migratory policies that establish who can access documented status and aid (Watkins-Hayes & Kovalsky, 2017).

In the analysis carried out in this dissertation, the deservingness trope serves to ascertain the ways in which some immigrants attempt to fit a certain mold of who they are *expected* to be. Arguably, immigrant content creators do this to establish their right to belong, in line with previous research on digital media representations of migrants that attempt to include their voice and instead perpetuate stereotypes that fit Western expectations (Georgiou, 2018;2022). This also supports previous research that suggests that migrant practices of self-representation often serve as devices to establish deservingness (Nikunen, 2019). Thus, deservingness is a useful framework because it connects the expectations of the receiving society as they are understood by immigrants and how these understandings shape their portrayed identities, personas, beliefs, and opinions.

Moreover, media and migration scholars have also focused on the affinity and affective connections within and across borders facilitated by social media (Marino, 2015; Marlowe et al., 2017) and the aspirations and achievements enabled by digital platforms and devices (Witteborn, 2015, 2019). The political migrant identities established through social media content for agency and rights claims (Leurs, 2017a) have also been analyzed, as well as their negotiation with real and symbolic borders (Chouliaraki & Georgiou, 2019;2022). These

perspectives are relevant to contextualize the functions of social media content creation by migrants with those of migrant microcelebrities to assess how these evolve once creators become more popular. Chapters 4, 5 and 7 delve into the ways in which platform affordances enable and constrain such relationships between creators and their negotiation with existing contents about migration.

The understanding of the ways in which these migratory narratives are shaped by digital platforms and various actors lie at the center of my inquiry to position immigration more clearly as part of the collective imaginary. In the next section I outline the research questions that guide my research.

## 1.3 Research questions

The overarching research question that underpins this dissertation is: *How are narratives about immigration shaped and built on social media platforms?* To respond to this question, five supporting research questions are set forth:

SRQ1: How do the sociotechnical configurations of social media shape narratives about immigration? (Chapters 2, 3, 4, 5, 6)

SRQ2: What role do otherness and sameness play in narratives about immigration? (Chapters 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7)

SRQ3: What strategies do different content creators use to make their migratory narratives visible and to enter public discourse through social media? (Chapters 3, 4, 5, 6)

SRQ4: What are the unique challenges and opportunities for migrant creators to participate in existing discourse about themselves? (Chapters 4, 5, 6)

SRQ5: What are the narratives conveyed and (self)representations portrayed and what are their implications for migrant communities and specific agents creating relevant content? (Chapters 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7)

## 1.4 Methods and data collection/analysis

In terms of methodology, the study involved a literature review, and non-participant digital ethnographic observations to identify narratives, profiles, configurations, and content creation strategies of interest for the research

questions established. Hashtags were used to identify content in both platforms, and as the study advanced, a record of profiles of interest was gathered reaching 53 immigrant creators on TikTok.

Pink et al. (2016, p. 228-229), in their work on digital ethnography, explain that there are four different understandings of *being there* for digital ethnography work. (1) *being there co-presently*: when in-person interactions with participants take place; (2) *being there remotely*: when the researcher uses video conferencing, messaging, or voice technologies to connect with participants; (3) *being there virtually*: when researchers and participants connect in a "third place" such as a web forum or a virtual reality game; (4) *being there imaginatively:* when ethnographic interaction between participants and researchers takes place asynchronously, through digital content available in digital spaces such as social media platforms, blogs, among others. Pink et al. (2016) explain that there should not be a hierarchy between the different forms of "being there" and that each of them offers benefits and pitfalls, although a combination of different forms of co-presence are preferred.

### 1.4.1 The walkthrough method to understand the platform

To understand the platform configurations and design, I employed different forms of the walkthrough method (Light et al., 2018). The walkthrough method is defined as

> a way of engaging directly with an app's interface to examine its technological mechanisms and embedded cultural references to understand how it guides users and shapes their experiences (Light et al., 2018, p. 882).

These systematic observations of the platform's functions enabled a deeper understanding of platform navigation and logics, as well as mainstream practices of content creation and trends within each social media site beyond migratory narratives. It is a method that draws from ethnography and requires observation and the generation of fieldnotes (Light et al., 2018).

Two types of walkthroughs were carried out. First, I performed periodic walkthroughs aimed at understanding navigation and interaction logics from the perspective of the user. Taking TikTok as an example, these walkthroughs-as-

user involved the navigation of the different feeds available on TikTok such as the *for you* page and the *following* page –which feature the same design and clickable elements within each of the videos. The LIVE feed –which features live videos being broadcast at any given time– was explored within walkthroughs but was not observed among immigrant creators, so it is not included in this analysis.

I gathered fieldnotes aimed at recording design aspects within the videos such as sharing options and clickable elements. Within sharing options, I observed the possibility of duetting and stitching existing content. In terms of available clickable elements, I identified components such as the audio track and the effect and explored the options provided within these to reuse and observe all the videos that had used each specific option, as well as the information provided in pages that connect all the videos. Annex 1 features examples of the types of walkthroughs carried out and the observations made during these walkthroughs.

For the analysis of content created by immigrants on TikTok, these walkthroughs enabled a content and discourse analysis that considered the possibility of existing trends within the platform to shape said videos. The connections and structures identified through the review of relevant literature such as Abidin (2021) as well as Zulli and Zulli (2020) combined with the walkthroughs carried out, enabled an analysis located in the digital spaces where these contents developed and circulated.

### 1.4.2 Data collection

In relation to data collection, for Chapter 2 two hashtags related to the US-Mexico Migrant Caravans were selected: #MigrantCaravan and #CaravanaMigrante. For this study, a cloud-based social media analytics tool called Netlytic (Gruzd, 2016) was used to gather publicly available Instagram posts through the Instagram API and harvested post metadata. It is important to note that as of the end of 2018, this tool is no longer able to scrape Instagram data. For Chapter 3 the dataset of stories from the Story Collections in three official Vox Instagram accounts were manually downloaded and screenshot. For Chapters 4 and 5, focused on TikTok, I partnered with a data scientist with whom I collaborated to scrape the relevant posts using Python scripts based on different sampling strategies. Chapter 4 involved TikTok videos focused on

immigration, identified using relevant hashtags and an adaptation of the digital snowball method (Baltar & Brunet, 2012). Chapter 5 relied on the videos scraped from four profiles by immigrant influencers and analyzed collaboratively with the creators.

Python scraping was carried out in close collaboration with a data scientist. It is important to note that every instance of Python scraping was done after an observation of the data and selection through likes (Chapter 4) or videos within profiles of creators that had been interviewed (Chapter 5). In this sense, scraping was not deployed blindly but within specific videos that were previously observed and selected.

A total of 452 TikTok videos (Chapters 4 and 5), 105 Instagram posts (Chapter 2) and 114 Instagram stories (Chapter 3) were extracted to be analyzed for the different chapters that comprise this dissertation. Moreover, a participatory content analysis and interviews were conducted with four immigrant influencers with a following between 16K and 500K for Chapter 5. For Chapters 6 and 7, an additional 150 TikTok videos were viewed within the TikTok mobile app to identify instances where creators deployed specific strategies for content to become visible within the platform. In this case I considered fieldnotes taken in previous analyses of scraped content (Chapters 4 and 5) but did not scrape additional content. These two chapters relied on observations and notes gathered throughout the development of the dissertation but only the illustrative examples used in the chapter were screenshot and archived to create each of the renderings.

The empirical material comprises the two social media platforms – Instagram and TikTok– which have been analyzed in their mobile app version and used regularly throughout the process of developing this dissertation to explore their content creation possibilities and new developments. The study considers the profiles, narratives, and multimodal elements, including visual and audio, content creation configurations, text, hashtags, emojis, stickers and interactive components in each of the formats studied on both platforms. For Chapter 5, interview transcripts and video footage are also part of my empirical data.

### 1.4.3 Data analysis

Data analysis was approached inductively (Glasser and Strauss, 2006) through qualitative, multimodal content and discourse analysis to delve into the content and narratives of interest within platform-specific texts for Instagram (Leaver et al., 2020) and for TikTok (Zulli & Zulli, 2020) to locate specific phenomena within the logics and politics of these platforms (Gillespie, 2010).

Serafini and Reid (2019, p.9) explained the procedure to carry out a qualitative multimodal content analysis (MMCA):

(1) *Recognizing an Area of Interest*: In this case the area of interest is the exploration of social media content about immigration.
(2) *Developing Initial Research Questions*: Interrogating the multimodal and sociotechnical nature of content about immigration on TKTK and IG.
(3) *Constructing the Data Corpus*: In the case of this dissertation, ethnographic observations and hashtag/keyword searches enabled the identification of creators and posts of interest for the study of migratory narratives on social media.
(4) *Defining the Object of Study*: In this case the migratory narratives on social media are further defined in each of the chapters to include different aspects of relevance, such as the creator, the platform, and the format. In each of the cases the analysis included all the multimodal aspects of the post: the image/video, visual elements appearing within the image/video including text/emojis/hashtags/stickers/other interactive elements, the audio (oral speech or music), any effects enabled by the platform (such as filters and transition effects), the caption (including text, emojis and hashtags).
(5) *Developing the Analytical Template*: In each chapter, an analytical template was developed that included all the modes present in each design/format detailed in point 4 that were applicable in each case. These are detailed in each chapter as part of the codebook.
(6) *Testing the Analytical Template*: Each analytical template was tested in a smaller sample of posts and adapted as needed through a combination of observations of the content and platform

walkthroughs to understand each element within analyzable content and its platformed origin. This is described in each of the chapters.

*(7) Applying the Analytical Template to the Data Corpus*

(8) *Constructing Potential Themes*: Once the different categories in the analytical template were established for each chapter, themes were identified inductively in the data analyzed. The themes in this case describe the nature or essence of the content, such as the narrative storylines being advanced, the genres, emotions portrayed in the different modes of content, among others.

To explain this process of codebook development in this dissertation it is helpful to understand the difference between category and theme:

> A category is a collection of similar data sorted into the same place, and this arrangement enables the researchers to identify and describe the characteristics of the category (…). A theme is a meaningful 'essence' that runs through the data (…). It is the basic topic that the narrative is about, overall (Morse, 2008, p. 727).

The themes mentioned by Morse (2008) emerge as part of the interpretative process of analysis by the researcher, and thus it is important to note the role of the researcher in this process (Serafini & Reid, 2019). In addition to this, I considered the connective and interactive elements within the contents analyzed. In the case of the present dissertation, the categories –related to the modes and formats within the content– and the themes –which refer to the narrative genres, topics, and characters within these contents– are embedded within the code groups in each of the codebooks presented.

## 1.5 Ethics

It is important to note that as a researcher I am aware of the partial nature of the knowledge that can be acquired through the content-centered methods deployed in this dissertation as well as the issues of technological determinism and the criticism of data-centered approaches in migration research (Leurs, 2017b).

Thus, every decision made in the research process considered the limitations of a data-centered approach carried out and attempted to foreground the local contexts and situations of the creators to the extent to which it was possible (Leurs, 2017b). This was done through extended engagement with the communities of creators online, including their live presentations, media coverage of their work and activism, and periodic navigation through their profiles in various social media platforms. In this case the platform itself was considered one of the contexts that shapes and modifies migrant narratives in relation to other narratives about immigrants that are also created, circulated, and located online. In the process of analyzing and reporting on the findings, and as a scholar with a migrant background who has experienced the long process from undocumented status to full citizenship, I attempted to provide a fair account of the observations, considering the power discrepancies that may occur in a research setting. When possible, I aimed to involve participants in the decisions for data analysis and reporting of findings, contacting content creators across various social media platforms and profiles. It should be noted that in the case of TikTok (where content created by immigrants was analyzed), it was difficult to connect with creators to get their approval to include their content in the study due to a constraint within the platform which limits private messaging to people who follow each other. In many cases, I was able to contact only those who had a profile in a different platform (in this case Instagram), which helped me recruit creators for the interviews.

Moreover, in the process of developing this dissertation, I took measures to avoid endangering or bringing any negative consequences for participants. This was done by anonymizing images and not including the names of content creators or those depicted in the visual content. It was important to include multimodal—including visual— content because the dissertation relies on a multimodal analysis that attempts to go beyond textual and oral forms of "voice" to reflect the relevance of multimodality in representation.

In Chapter 2, for instance, I only used images taken by professional photojournalists and excluded user-generated content from the figures. For Chapters 3, 4, 6 and 7, an adaptation of Markham's (2012) proposal of *fabrication as ethical practice* was followed to protect vulnerable content creator's privacy. Specifically, the visual and textual contents included in these chapters have been translated from Spanish and presented as illustrated

renderings of the content analyzed rather than screenshots. This was done to ensure that their identities remain protected while enabling the exemplification of the data analyzed with minimal risk for content creators.

In the case of the chapters where I analyze content created by immigrants and other actors, a Python script was used to scrape data following the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR) Ethics guidelines 3.0 (Franzke et al., 2020), which on page 10 describe the challenges of obtaining informed consent in the case of scraped data and the possibility of anonymizing and pseudonymizing such content (we have done both, in the case of microcelebrity creators I have used pseudonyms and in the case of regular immigrant content creators I have completely anonymized the contents analyzed, including visual content). It is important to note that while immigrant influencers in Chapter 5 gave their oral informed consent to participate in the study including the use of their TikTok videos and profile, I chose to anonymize and pseudonymize their identity to ensure that risk was minimized through the actions described above.

# Chapter 2

**#MigrantCaravans and othering on Instagram**

# Chapter 2: #MigrantCaravans and othering on Instagram

This chapter provides insights about platformed forms of othering observed among content creators on Instagram. It includes an analysis of the multimodal characteristics of Instagram posts focusing on the visual presence of the border wall and the ways in which non-immigrant content creators coopt migratory narratives to self-represent as humanitarians or patriots –depending on their expressed opinion on immigration– by emphasizing specific angles of the #MigrantCaravans in their content.

## 2.1 Introduction

Border walls along with their symbolic and physical meaning have long been the subject of close examination by scholars as us versus them rhetorical enablers (DeChaine, 2012; Nevins, 2002; Ono, 2012; Orsini et al., 2019). This characteristic of borders lends itself to further exploration as real and metaphorical places where narratives about immigration occur. Certain border walls have been the subject of more attention, such is the case of the US-Mexico Border, which has been deemed the most crossed border in the world, according to Nevins (as cited in Ono, 2012). On social media, the ways in which posters with diverse opinions about the issue of immigration depict the wall and the characters around it takes on increased significance as citizen's news consumption is becoming more and more reliant on digital media in general and social media, especially for those aged 18-44 (Newman et al., 2017).

Recently, the argument for the construction of a border wall, which has been a recurring theme throughout the Trump administration, has gained momentum in the current immigration debate and in the political sphere (Demata, 2017; Zurcher, 2019). The wall has been used as one of the main isolationist strategies, carrying a significant symbolic load (Dombrowski & Reich, 2017; Martin, 2017). In this sense, it becomes significant to describe how mediated narratives and images about the people and places around the border and what takes place in its surroundings create generally accepted ideas about "where America ends and something 'other' begins" (DeChaine, 2012, p. 7).

Along these lines, the establishment of otherness –understood at its simplest as "the quality of being other or different" (Otherness, n.d.)– emerges as a familiar paradigm with new dimensions. For the purposes of this study, otherness is understood in a dichotomic sense. On the one hand, traditional distancing from the other emphasizes differences and focuses on a constructed inferiority (Bourdieu, 1986; Greer & Jewkes, 2005). This is a perspective shared by Durkheim (1961) in terms of the otherness established between the individual and society. On the other hand, otherness understood as an emphasis on being oneself without attempting to be as the other, bypassing the social order or societal expectations and constructions. Thus, enabling the establishment of a person's own identity through his or her status as another (Orkin & Joubin, 2019). Moreover, the ways in which these symbolic representations are constructed can also establish sameness –e.g. when using Benson's (2013)

humanitarian frame in a "we are all human" configuration. Each of these different strategies are motivated by the intentionality of the message.

Hall et al. (2010) illustrated the historic role of dominant, mostly binary definitions of othering in the media and in society as a continuous attempt to self-identify in relation to others, achieve order, exclude to establish power, and enable fantasies about possible outcomes. The process described as an "exercise in symbolic violence" (Hall et. al., 2010, p.431). Another concept described by these authors is fetishism, where what is represented can only exist in relation with something that cannot be shown, effectively representing something beyond itself. Other authors have analyzed this problematic relationship of othering and media. Said (2008) illustrates how it has played a pervasive role in perpetuating (mis)representations of certain groups, in this case using the Islamic example. His argument establishes a solid relationship between "crises" as fertile grounds to position the "other" according to legislative and ideological needs. He describes how a variety of media including news media, film, literature, and electronic media slowly –over decades– construct the "other" in order to exert power and minimize the group to a unit that is inferior, threatening and easily (mis)represented.

As to otherness and the wall, this inanimate object emerges as one of the protagonists of the current "crisis." It appears as a simultaneous enabler of otherness and sameness. On the one hand, it marks the place where people change status by just crossing (Anderson et al., 2009); a place where labels abound, from person to migrant, from national to foreigner, from citizen to illegal, from human to detainee, from migrant to refugee. Conversely, it can be a place of encounter and connection (Newman, 2003), in some cases the border wall typifies the possibility of opportunity, dreams and advancement just beyond.

In this sense, the specific characteristics of social media lend themselves as worthy spaces for exploration of the strategies that enable otherness to emerge as both a paradigm of exclusion and differentiation and one of self-representation and identity through interaction. As Lesage and Natale (2019, p.5) explain, current media is characterized by "interdependency and complexity (…) making it harder to "bracket" a specific medium from its surroundings." The relationship between new and old media has been further illustrated as one of interplay rather than replacement (Natale, 2016). Current media trends have also been described by Jenkins (2006) focusing on the

concept of convergence as one where the media industry and users collide and find each other as definers of what, when and where content is produced. These descriptions delineate the essential traits of current —including new and social— media. Today's media environments are intricate, with information that is constantly intersecting, not only within digital platforms but also with traditional media. In this ecosystem, the lines between fact and fiction are blurred and the editorial board is no longer the main definer of content. Such everchanging configurations offer new ways to understand and analyze the establishment of otherness; moving it away from previous traditional, straightforward places where representations developed and challenging scholars to understand it within these new complexities.

## 2.2 Literature review

### 2.2.1 Politics and public opinion about immigration

In this context, the opinion of those creating, posting and disseminating information is an important consideration as U.S. public opinion regarding immigration has historically been subject to change as the political and informational climate changes, especially near election periods (McCarthy, 2018). Moreover, various studies suggest that attitudes towards immigration are deeply affected by the way in which it is framed (Boomgaarden & Vliegenthart 2009; Freeman, et al. 2013; Wright, 2002).

Historically, the situation at the US-Mexico border has motivated diverse ideological movements and rhetorical trends. Campbell's (2015) chronology of this crisis illustrates the discourse surrounding these events. She described the mid-1990s as a period of growth for the white supremacist movement near the border, supported by populist, far-right rhetoric. She went on to describe the rise of armed, vigilante nativist groups in the early 2000s focused on curbing illegal immigration at the border by using intimidation and rhetorical formulations characterized by racism, hate and calls to armed action. She also chronicles a "migrant surge" in 2014, marked by the appearance of unaccompanied minor migrants; Campbell (2015) highlights the use of private detention centers to house asylum seeking families as an important shift in immigration policy towards border crossers.

Similarly, the period surrounding the 2018 U.S. midterm elections was filled with coverage of the "crisis" at the border. This was reflected by news stories showing increasing numbers of immigrants at the border and the so-called migrant caravans garnering significant attention from the media, and also prevailing as some of the hot topics for political discourse from different figures, including president Donald Trump. After the deployment of 5,600 American troops to the border as part of the so-called Operation Faithful Patriot (Gibbons-Neff & Cooper, 2018), the focus of news platforms, concerned citizens and other stakeholders were aimed at the border during a crucial electoral and political period from early November to mid-December 2018. Jengelley and Clawson (2019) describe the sensationalization of these events in the media during this period, pulling the attention of the citizenry towards immigration, positioning the border as central in the discussion of political issues. They describe the use of a threat frame, and a disregard for data evidencing that the number of illegal migrants was lower than it had been since 2004.

The digital context provides a permanent record of public sentiment about any issue and immigration is no exception, Clark-Ibanez and Swan (2019) describe how social media is instrumental in the construction of stories about immigrants that –due to the format and ways in which content is created and disseminated– can consequently be supported, contradicted or challenged by readers, who can also use components of the stories as needed and in support of their own opinions/narratives.

In terms of the characterization of migrants, the current US administration has deepened a climate of political polarization by referring to any action by immigrants as illegal (Holpuch, 2019). This aligns with a solid body of research that supports the idea that mainstream media and dominant discourse from political figures have traditionally portrayed immigrants in a frame that focuses excessively on the illegality factor (Brouwer et al., 2017; Clark-Ibanez & Swan, 2019; Dunaway et al., 2011; Figenschou & Thorbjørnsrud, 2015; Horsti, 2007).

### 2.2.2 Representations and content generation in the current media landscape

As has been established, the current trend towards a pursuit of identity and identification through self-representation (Rettberg, 2018) as well as opinion expression on social media as a predictor of civic participation (Valenzuela,

2013) lie at the heart of today's mediated communication. Another important characteristic of social media –the user-generated creation, adaptation, modification and propagation of content and a more visual, less textual depiction of issues– presents specific challenges when dealing with information. Milhailidis and Viotti (2017) argue that mainstream media is no longer necessary to reach audiences in the current digital, user-generated content environment. Likewise, Cacciatore et al. (2016), suggest that the current media environment requires a different approach with visual representation strategies in social media emerging as powerful persuasive techniques. These two studies point towards a shift in the places and contexts where significant ideas that mold societal perceptions occur. This justifies the need for studies that explore the limits of traditional professional journalistic media representations in favor of the current convergent media environment where representations reside in the form of spreadable media (Jenkins et al., 2013) and its ability to move along social and digital media and be reshaped as needed.

Although visual media representations have been extensively analyzed on traditional and mainstream media, social media platforms such as Instagram are unique in this sense because of the challenges they present for the user to discern fiction from fact. For example, on TV, programming genres generally adhere to a set of common practices (Lawrence & Boydstun, 2017) and representations are framed within these genres. Even though stereotypes are an issue on television, a critical interpretation of its content and visual representations is facilitated by programming genres that adhere to certain common elements. Moreover, traditional media outlets often separate opinion-based content from news articles following specific journalistic standards. Social media, on the other hand, bypass these boundaries. Therefore, the study of representation becomes more complex, as more actors –including those who are less regulated by ethical and other guidelines– are contributing to these representations based on their own ideology, opinion, and interests.

The social, relational, and contextual experiences afforded by current media configurations must also be considered in order to locate the places where this phenomenon develops. In this sense, Lister et al. (2008) describe the ways in which stories develop differently within new media, including the "relationships between embodiment, identity, and community: different ways of (…) experiencing time, space and place changing how we see ourselves in the world" (p. 12). These new configurations give way to an array of forms of

communication, where information, opinions and facts are combined using audiovisual content generated from a lineup of stakeholders, including media conglomerates adapting to this new ecosystem, politicians, and opinion leaders, but also created by a modern version of Toffler's (1980) prosumer.

To further understand the significance of participation in this context, van Dijck's (2009) analysis of user agency is enlightening. According to van Dijck (2009), the era of User Generated Content is less of a creative and productive boom and more a continuum going from joiners to collectors, critics, and active creators. She specifies that more than 80% of all users are actually passive, implying that User Generated Content is in fact controlled by a minority. It is important to specify that since van Dijck's (2009) article was published, social media sites have implemented functions to promote interaction and content generation. In the case of Instagram, it has gone from a simple Flickr-type photo sharing app into an increasingly complex medium that is intimately connected to its parent company, Meta. Instagram incorporates traits that resemble YouTube (Instagram tv video feed and channel creation), Snapchat (stories, stories' highlights, photo effects), Twitter (strict limits in the length of posts and videos, extensive use of hashtags), even offering content curation (through its collections function), TikTok (reels). It could be argued that what makes Instagram unique is the combination of content creation and dissemination functions that illustrate van Dijck's (2009) different types of users, as well as an asymmetrical configuration (Hu et al., 2014).

These changes in the self- and community perception of individuals through new and social media, the ubiquity and complexity in the promotion of interaction and content creation, as well as the convergence of motivations and ideologies, have important implications for an issue that has received prominent media coverage –the Migrant Caravan– and a significant medium in the current media landscape –Instagram.

### 2.2.3 Instagram: A reflection of current trends in new media

Instagram has gone from five hundred thousand to one billion monthly active users from 2016 to 2018 (Statista, 2018) and this rising trend outlines its position of influence within the current digital environment. Instagram was the chosen platform for this study due to its growth, characteristics, and public.

Previous academic inquiry on Instagram addressing representation has focused on the self-representation of different types of Instagram users including identity and multilingualism (Blackwood, 2018) youth and sexuality (Calvo González & San Fabián Maroto, 2018) gender in self representations (Shumaker et al., 2017; Van Oosten et al., 2017) and the analysis of grouped hashtags and inanimate objects for self-representation (Baker & Walsh, 2018). Even politically-themed studies have delved into this medium from the self-representation perspective (Muñoz & Towner, 2017). Within these studies, the focus has traditionally been on the construction of the poster's identity. The novel approach proposed by the present study is the consideration of Instagram as a medium, where a large percentage of the young adult population is consuming news (Newman et al., 2017) and information, while expressing their opinions about important topics (Valenzuela, 2013), effectively becoming the setting where symbolic understandings of socially-constructed reality are molded (Searle & Willis,1995).

A study by the Pew Research Center found that 75% of 18 to 24 year-olds in the US are Instagram users (Perrin & Anderson, 2019). This is important in the upcoming 2020 US elections, where it is estimated that 1 in 10 American voters will belong to the 18 to 23 age group (Cillufo & Fry, 2019). This data positions Instagram as one of the prime contexts where political discourse to persuade a crucial segment of the electorate will develop. Moreover, another Pew Research Center study found that more than half (55%) of U.S. adults get their news from social media platforms, with 36% of Instagram users getting their news from this platform and 40% of Instagram users aged 18 to 29 consuming news in this platform (Shearer & Grieco, 2019).

The importance of social media platforms in democratic processes is also an important consideration. In this sense, recent inquiries suggest that Instagram —as a subsidiary of Facebook— may have been one of the strategically selected platforms to deploy disinformation by Russia in the 2016 U.S. election (Vaidhyanathan, 2018). Also, the large number of politicians attempting to harness the power of Instagram ahead of the 2020 campaign (Hinsliff, 2019; Murphy & Sevastopulo, 2019) signals its importance in the current political and social arenas.

## 2.3 Methodology

Using inductive methods based on the grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 2006), three specific research objectives were formulated to frame and guide this research study:

> (O1) Describe characteristics of posts connected by the hashtags #MigrantCaravan and #CaravanaMigrante.
>
> (O2) Identify characters and interactions of interest in the establishment of otherness.
>
> (O3) Describe media representations of the immigration phenomenon within Instagram posts in relation to opinions towards immigration and considering the two hashtags.

### 2.3.1 Data Collection and sample

The hashtags: #MigrantCaravan and #CaravanaMigrante delimited the sample. The English and Spanish versions of the hashtag were chosen in order to assess whether messages in these two groups were pertinent to the establishment of otherness. Through time, these hashtags have also become popular within the topic in Instagram (with 15,697 and 16,017 posts respectively), increasing the significance of this analysis for the study of the migratory phenomenon at the US/Mexico border. The Instagram function that allows users to follow hashtags is an important consideration that further justifies a hashtag-based sample.

The cloud-based social media analytics tool Netlytic (Gruzd, 2016) was used to gather Instagram posts containing the two hashtags #MigrantCaravan and #CaravanaMigrante every hour during the month ranging from November 15th to December 15th, 2018. Netlytic works through the Instagram API to access publicly available Instagram profiles and harvest post information. Due to the events taking place in the political sphere and at the border, mainstream media reflected these events (Gibbons-Neff & Cooper, 2018; Jengelley & Clawson, 2019), which may have caused a spike in Instagram posts using these hashtags during the dates of interest.

For the purposes of this study, only the hashtag function was used to collect the sample. Although Netlytic enables the analysis of a range of

metadata, this information was not used in the present project. Thus, the data extracted and analyzed included: date of post, number of likes, poster textual comment, image (not filter) and hashtags used in the main comment.
When looking at the number of posts per day, a spike took place on December 4th, delimiting sample dates. Subsets were taken from December 3rd to the 5th, 2018 for both datasets.

In order to approach the research objectives, non-probability sampling using the hashtags #migrantcaravan and #caravanamigrante was conducted. The first sample contained 353 posts for #MigrantCaravan and 292 posts for #CaravanaMigrante for a total of 645 posts from 3 days. Each post (including image, video and text) constitutes one unit of analysis. Comments on posts were excluded from the sample because the focus of this doctoral thesis is centered on the media representation of immigration as intended by the poster and not the reactions of Instagram users towards those media representations.

A first round of open, inductive coding was performed to further delve into posts and messages that respond to topics of interest to answer the research objectives. After an overview of the entire sample and the coding of 9.92% (n=64 posts) of the initial sample (n= 645 posts), a recurring pattern emerged in which the main characters in the images interacted in ways that indicated important relationships that called for further analysis.

**Table 1.** Sampling process. Created by the Author.

| Sample | Criteria |
|---|---|
| 645 | Posts with the hashtag #MigrantCaravan and #CaravanaMigrante from December 3rd to December 5th, 2018 extracted using Netlytic. |
| 582 | Remaining posts after manually excluding posts that were no longer available or posts that were completely unrelated to the issue of immigration. |
| 117 | Remaining posts after excluding all posts that did not contain an image or video depicting the wall. |
| 105 | Remaining posts after excluding duplicates (posts that contained both hashtags and therefore were included twice). |

The three main characters in Instagram post images gathered using these two hashtags were: immigrants, different types of law enforcement agents and the wall. This last character became an important entity that appears in 16.4% of the original posts' media (images and/or videos). No posts within the sample contained GIFS, just images or short videos. The appearance of different types of walls and the actions, relations and interactions that occur with this inanimate object emerged as an interesting aspect in terms of the research questions, the analysis of the immigration phenomenon and its development on Instagram.

Following the principles of purposive, criterion sampling defined by Palys (2008) as sampling on the basis of cases that meet a certain criterion, all posts that did not portray the wall visually in the image or video were excluded. Table 1 shows the sampling process from the initial to the final sample.

It is important to note that other characters appeared on some posts that displayed the wall, including activists and politicians. This was true especially on posts that included a video. In these cases the characters are not included in the analysis because they appear sparingly on the image/video or because they do not appear with the wall. In some cases, even though the wall was illustrated in one part of the video, the character was not represented with the wall and was therefore excluded from this analysis.

**Table 2.** Codes used for analysis. Created by the Author.

| Code | Definition |
|---|---|
| WALL | This code group includes types of walls that appear in posts graphically and textually. |
| IMMOP | This code group describes the opinion of the poster regarding immigration, in the case of anti- and pro-immigration posts, this opinion had to be explicitly expressed, the rest of the posts were classified as neutral. |
| PATROL | This code group comprises terms and depictions of border patrol officers. |
| DEFIMMIG | This code group includes terms used to refer to migrants and visual depictions of migrants. |
| ACTION | This code group always appeared paired with a code within a subject code group (PATROL or DEFIMMIG) and it comprises the textual description of actions carried out by the subject. |
| DISTRI | This code group describes the spatial distribution of subjects in the image or video. It always includes the wall as part of this distribution. |
| HASH | This code group includes characteristics of hashtags (grouped or in-text) and the terms used as hashtags in the post. |

Following iterative, inductive coding rounds, a code chart was developed from these emerging codes and themes (see Annex 2). The code chart derives from a thorough and continuous analysis of the data on Atlas.ti, while recording information about each post as a whole on an Excel spreadsheet (see Annex 3). Even though the code chart is extensive, the code groups analyzed in this chapter are included in Table 2.

To delve deeper into interesting code co-occurrences, c-coefficients were extracted from Atlas.ti. These indicate the "strength of the relationship between two codes and is similar to a correlation coefficient" (Friese, 2013, p. 291).

In terms of the ethical challenges that arise from employing user data without consent (boyd & Crawford, 2012) in digital environments, and to protect users and their identity, information was made anonymous to the extent to which it was possible.

### 2.3.2 Limitations

Some limitations that were inherent to the method selected include the difficulty of evaluating the trustworthiness of the results and the research process. To minimize the effects of these methodology-related limitations, attempts have been made to curtail bias through iterative rounds of coding and by describing the research process and procedures in as much detail as possible. Other limitations relate to the platform itself, which changes constantly and in some cases these changes affect the availability of some posts. During this research project, the Instagram API emerged as an important potential limitation as it can significantly curtail the contents to which a researcher has access at different points in time. Finally, the selection of these two hashtags to delimit the sample may present a limitation as it may exclude Instagram users who are not familiar with the use of hashtags as Mayr and Weller (2017) explain and also other significant hashtags related to this issue.

## 2.4 Results

The initial content analysis of the 105 posts in the sample revealed that there was a higher number of posts for #MigrantCaravan than for #CaravanaMigrante as reflected on Figure 2.

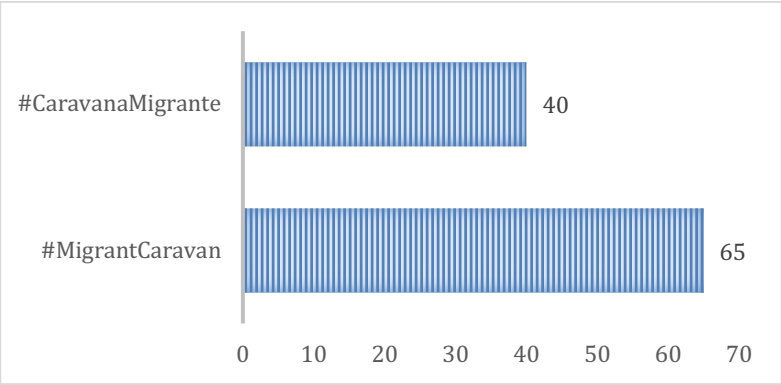


**Figure 2.** Number of posts by hashtag. Created by the authors

Explicit opinions regarding immigration were coded, revealing a higher number of pro-immigration posts, followed by neutral ones and finally those against immigration. Figure 3 depicts these results.

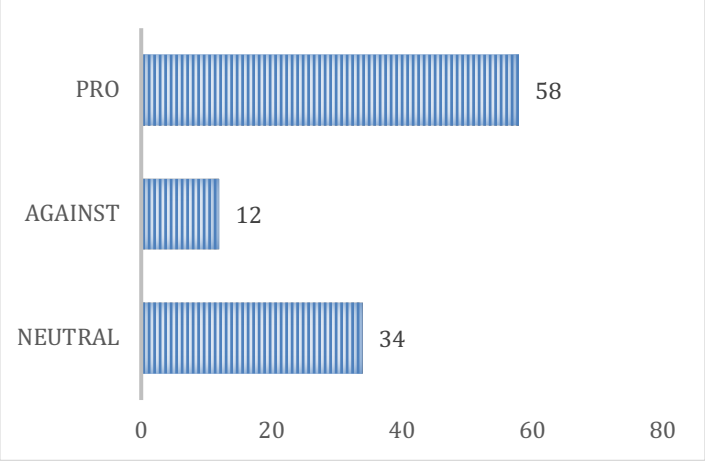


**Figure 3.** Number of posts per type of opinion regarding immigration. Created by the Authors.

Moreover, a query conducted on Atlas.ti using the cooccurrence table functionality revealed that none of the posts against immigration contained the hashtag #CaravanaMigrante and none of them were written in Spanish. Figure 4 displays the language of posts, with a significantly higher number of posts in English than in other languages.

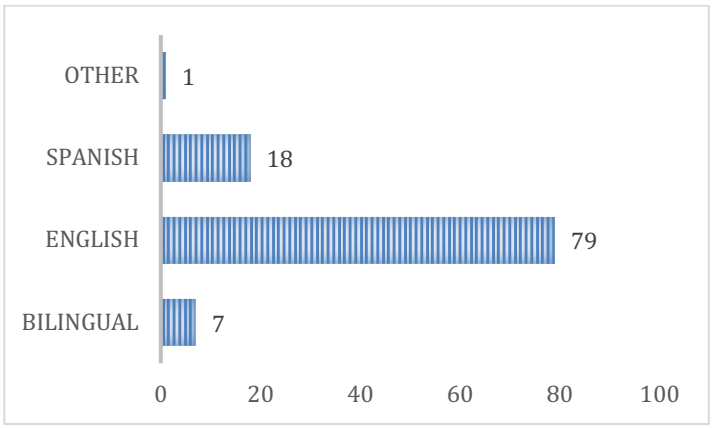


**Figure 4.** Post languages. Created by the Authors.

Codes to describe the types of walls presented visually and textually reflected a wide array of representations. Figure 5 displays the most common types of walls in terms of the codes used to describe their visual portrayal, the word clouds were created using their cooccurrence index with codes related to opinions on immigration. The results show that six types of walls are portrayed across quotes that are for, against and neutral regarding immigration: barbed wire, border, metal bar, chain link and concrete. The three wall depictions that are not present in the anti-immigration posts are the human wall, the shadow and the comparison with Gaza. The differences in the indexes reflect the higher numbers of pro-immigration and neutral posts overall as described on Figure 3 above.

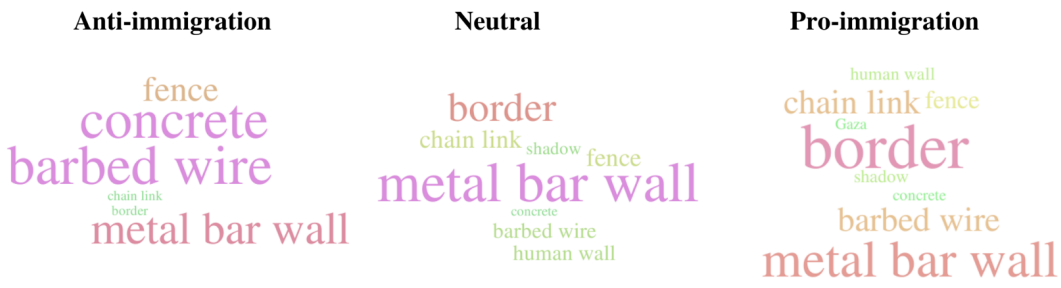


**Figure 5.** Codes and co-occurrence indexes between WALL and IMMOP code groups. Source: Created by the Authors.

Different types of law enforcement officials were also represented. The codes used in these representations identified the attire they used, and the words used to describe their actions. Figure 6 displays the labels used to describe different law enforcement characteristics classified by the three types of opinions regarding immigration.

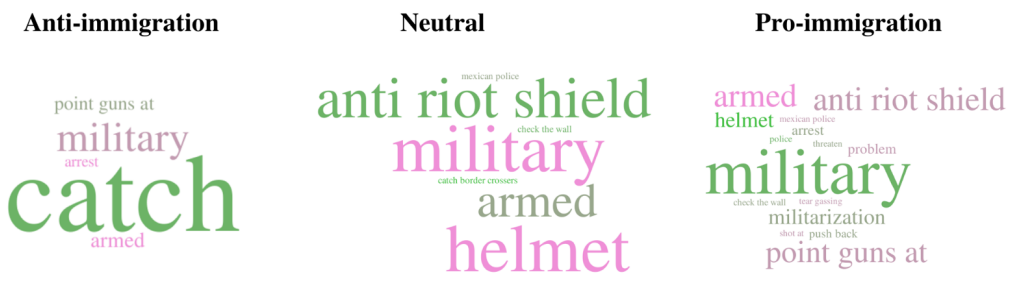


**Figure 6.** Codes and co-occurrence indexes between ACTION, PATROL, and IMMOP code groups. Source: Created by the Authors.

The portrayal of migrants was coded from the perspective of the words used to refer to them, the characteristics conveyed by the images that depict them and the actions attributed to them in relation to the wall and other characters through textual narratives. These are related to the opinions reflected on the posts towards immigration (Figure 7).

**Figure 7.** Codes and co-occurrence indexes between ACTION, DEFIMMIG, and IMMOP code groups. Source: Created by the Authors

Upon a deeper look at posts, journalists and photojournalists emerged as an important voice, although they are not often depicted on images, there are signs of their presence in the form of watermarks, photo credits and hashtags, accompanied by relatively neutral accounts of the events, suggesting journalistic assignments and content. Figure 8 includes two posts that exemplify this journalistic presence.

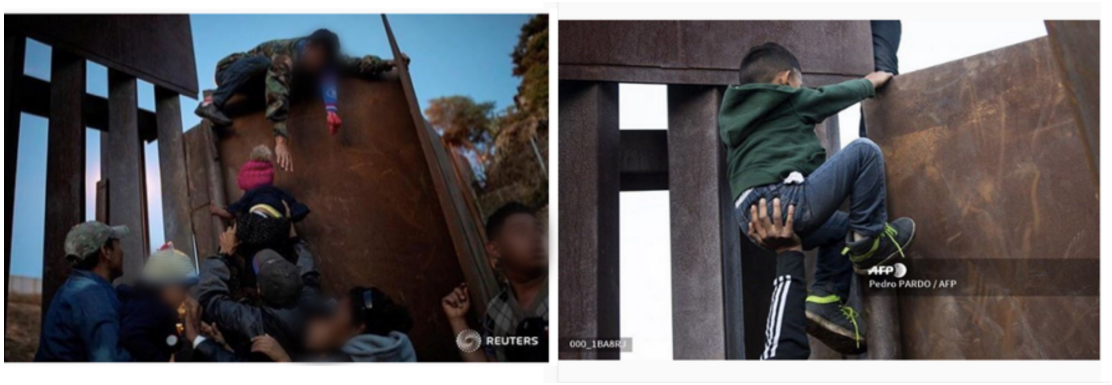


**Figure 8.** Mainstream media watermark examples on Instagram

Posts suggesting journalistic content include hashtags and mentions of journalists and mainstream media sources as part of the captions as is evident in the three extracts included in Figure 9. Moreover, watermarks on the image suggest copyright for some traditional media enterprises such as Reuters and AFP on both images included on Figure 8.

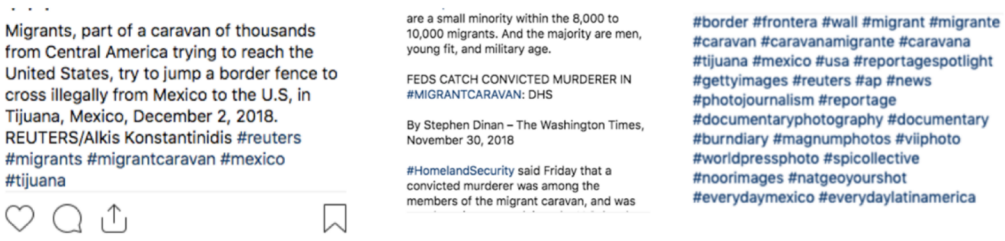


**Figure 9.** Different post captions that suggest journalistic content.

In terms of other themes that were significant in the inductive coding process, the distribution of subjects on the images was coded as a defining characteristic of the pictorial representations. The most frequent subject distributions displayed variations of the immigrant or immigrant groups in the foreground and the wall in the middle or background with or without other

subjects behind the wall. In most instances, migrants are positioned on the Mexican side of the wall, usually in the process of crossing (86 instances). Significantly, border patrol agents and migrants appear together in the same image very seldom, both in opposing sides of the wall (6 instances) and on the same side of the wall (9 instances). Of the 9 instances where they appear together on one side of the wall, 7 posts contain the same image.

Figures 10, 11 and 12 exemplify posts and were coded with the different types of subject distributions. Data in this sense showed that in most cases, the migrant is depicted in the foreground across opinions about immigration, while the wall and law enforcement agents appear in the foreground mostly in neutral or pro-immigration posts.

**Figure 10.** DIST immwall. Translated by the Author.

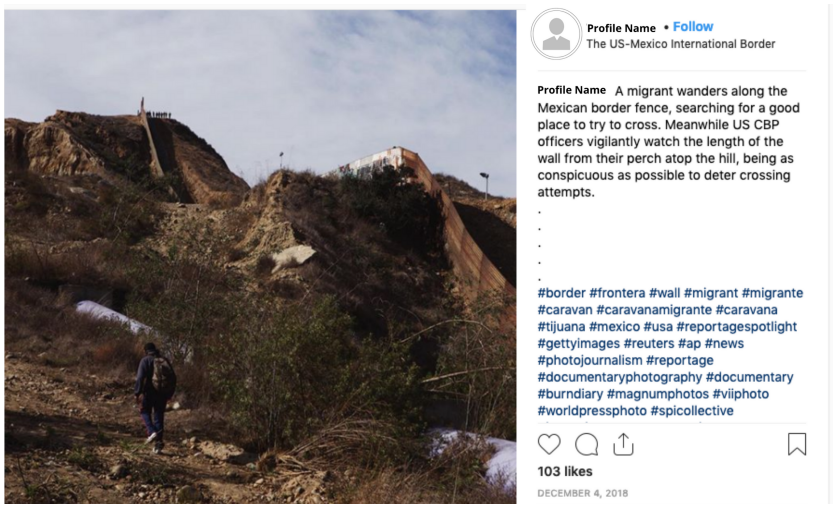


**Figure 11.** DIST immwallpatrol

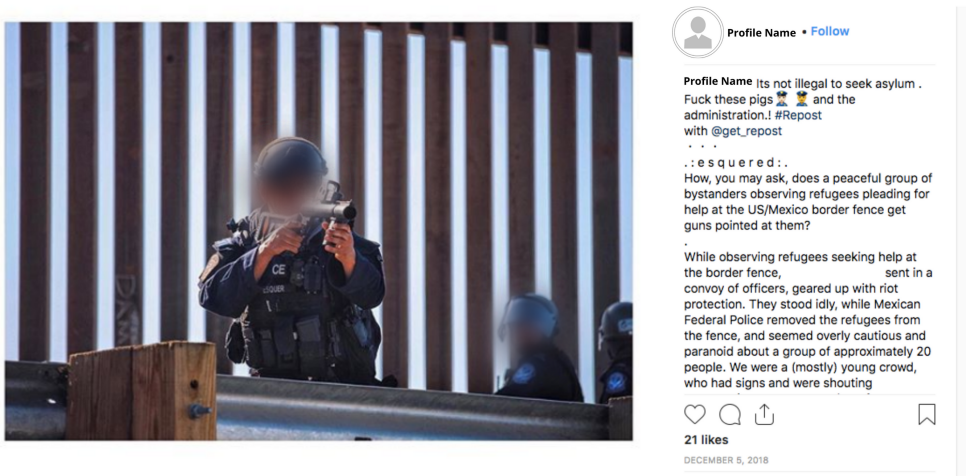


**Figure 12.** DIST patrolwall.

## 2.5 Discussion and Conclusions

In general terms, the sample displays a lower number of posts in the Spanish version of the hashtag, than in English. An overwhelming majority of posts are written in English. This suggests that the posts connected by these hashtags are written by and directed at the English-speaking community and the narratives are aimed at these readers. Moreover, posts that reflect anti-immigration opinions do not use the Spanish version of the hashtag #CaravanaMigrante and are always written in English within this sample. This is a finding that could be related to the fact that Instagram has an asymmetrical configuration (Hu et al., 2014), and this relationship calls for messages to be customized to a specific group of followers. This also suggests that the discourse in the Spanish version of the hashtag is significantly skewed towards pro-immigration and neutral accounts of events at the border.

### 2.5.1 Otherness and the wall

The emergence of the wall as an important character in the context of migratory narratives is not a new idea. Some authors have described how borders have been a natural part of discourse related to migratory processes when they asserted that they "embody juxtapositions of belonging and exclusion, inside and outside, familiar and foreign, native and other" (Pottie-Sherman & Wilkes, 2016, p. 83). Alongside these authors, and as mentioned in the literature review,

the wall as an establisher of otherness has been analyzed extensively (DeChaine, 2012; Nevins, 2002; Ono, 2012; Orsini et al., 2019). The results support these findings as can be seen, for example, in the prevalence of words and depictions of immigrants that are connotatively negative in posts against immigration and rather neutral or positively framed on pro-immigration posts. I found that otherness is delineated when an attempt is made to exclude and distance the dominant, acceptable behavior from that of the migrant who transgresses against the wall in his or her actions. This is emphasized through verbs that strengthen the idea of contrast, collision and a certain level of violence, such as plot, bust into, sneak and smuggle, and labels that explicitly criminalize human mobility behaviors, such as criminal, dangerous, invaders, lunatics, non-citizens, not asylum seekers, supporting other studies that have found similar strategies in immigration representations (Brouwer, et al., 2017; Clark-Ibanez & Swan, 2019; Dunaway et al., 2011; Figenschou & Thorbjørnsrud, 2015; Horsti, 2007). This emphasis on behaviors and labels focused on illegality have also been found to be classic, straightforward strategies used to imply otherness (Greer & Jewkes, 2005) and establish migrants as a threat (Jengelley & Clawson, 2019).

The analysis illuminates the new languages and modes of communication unique to Instagram. The visual distribution of characters within posts was one of the main strategies used to establish otherness in this sample. First, the metal bar wall, which is the most common in visual depictions, offers an opportunity for Instagrammers to illustrate the migratory journey from both sides, as one can easily see through such a wall. The findings in terms of the distribution of characters along the wall suggest a generalized trend of images that serve a narrative purpose for part of the story, which in the majority of cases is continued in the textual component of the narrative. For example, a post depicting a police officer (Figure 12) excludes migrants from the image, but the textual story included in the post focuses mainly on the “refugees” facing that police officer and “innocent bystanders”, who are located out of the range of the lens and are described as “observing”.

In this example, the threat and violence represented by the border patrol official are conveyed through the textual construction of the other: the migrant facing him, the bystanders who are part of a group of young people, families and children, non-threatening others who make this contrast and identification possible. These findings support what Hall et al. (2010) described as representation that can only be understood in relation with the unseen. These

strategies develop in parallel with stories from traditional news media about the militarization of the border in an attempt to contextualize, from a pro-immigration perspective, the so-called Operation Faithful Patriot (Jengelley & Clawson, 2019). This is an example of one of the affordances of social media; allowing individuals to interpret and resignify information from the mainstream media to subsequently disseminate among their social media followers (Clark-Ibanez & Swan, 2019).

Border narratives frame migratory phenomena and enable the establishment of otherness in its temporal and spatial sense (Anderson et al., 2009). An example of this type of post is featured in Figure 10, which depicts migrants before crossing but is accompanied by a text that narrates how they surrendered when they reached the other side, even though no image in the sample depicts the surrender of migrants. A few narratives coded as pro-immigration or neutral display this same type of narrative. This supports previous studies in which migrants are represented as victims and the issue is framed as a power struggle (Johnson et al., 2011) and one of control (Horsti, 2007). In these Instagram posts, the migrants' ultimate feat is crossing the border (effectively changing their legal status). Otherness is established through the description of their actions after crossing. The power struggle as defined by Johnson et al. (2011) is broken when these migrants surrender to authorities, implying need, humanity, victimization, rather than acting to escape or commit acts of violence as may be implied in other storylines. Perhaps this is an attempt to counter other narratives that position the migrant in a frame that justifies anti-immigration policies (Abrajano & Hajnal 2015; Chavez, 2001; 2013).

Otherness is also effectively established between posters/Instagrammers/photographers and subjects when the wall in the image is used as a device to establish the immigrant as a separate entity from the poster. In this visual and textual discourse, images are always taken from the perspective of an individual who is not part of the migrant community, or at least not explicitly. Otherness is set up in this sense when an activist uses the humanitarian frame (Benson, 2013) as a device to victimize the immigrant and appeal to the guilt or compassion of the reader. It could be argued that the humanitarian portrayal of migrants can be construed as an attempt to establish sameness; but even posts that appeal to humanitarianism display characteristics of otherness in the form of third person accounts and disengagement with the subject of the narrative. Otherness is also established by using strategically

grouped hashtags with the intent to position the poster in relation to the image (Baker & Walsh, 2018) and in relation to the subjects in the human mobility narrative. This finding may reflect an attempt by the Instagrammer/poster/photographer to position him/herself within the migratory phenomena through an opinion, expressed as a hashtag.

The attempts to position immigrants as others in posts is widespread. This positioning is used to differentiate characters within the images and posts, facilitated by the presence of the wall. This positioning also allows one to become a passive participant in the events depicted by the images. In other words, the instagrammer is, almost always, an external witness to the events being documented and posted. In very few cases do posters frame themselves as active participants or provide personal accounts for such events. This is interesting considering that Instagram is a platform traditionally used for self-representation. In this sense, the findings suggest that the migrant and the human mobility phenomenon are used as tools to establish the poster's position towards the phenomenon, while emphasizing his or her level of humanity and legality through strategies of otherness.

These findings have important implications, especially when considered in terms of the political representativeness of Instagram users likely to be active in the 2020 US election —where the 18 to 23 age group is critical (Cillufo & Fry, 2019) and a similar age group (18 to 24) comprises 75% of Instagram users in the US (Perrin & Anderson, 2019). The polarized views of posters and the different strategies used to establish otherness support recognizing social media as a powerful tool for political persuasion and representation. These findings support arguments suggesting that social media platforms such as Instagram are fertile grounds for political manipulation and polarization (Vaidhyanathan, 2018). Gaining a deeper understanding of the configurations and mechanisms that enable this type of social media discourse to permeate and reach first and second-time voters becomes an important line of inquiry for future studies.

Future studies could delve into the motivations of posters while crafting Instagram posts related to issues such as immigration and the representation of its actors, as well as issues related to other migratory and mediatized phenomena around the world, such as the social media representation of current European migrations, recent Venezuelan migratory events, among others. Other focuses could include comparisons between different types of

social media platforms to analyze whether these types of narratives and representations are typical throughout current mediated communication.

# Chapter 3

**Immigration and the Spanish right on Instagram Stories**

# Chapter 3: Immigration and the Spanish right on Instagram Stories

This chapter engages with the Instagram Story format to understand the strategies for persuasion and representation within contents about immigration from the perspective from right-wing party Vox in Spain. The analysis considers three official Instagram accounts for the party and delves into the significance of this type of ephemeral content.

## 3.1 Introduction

Immigration is one of the main issues employed by right-wing parties around the world to advance their political agendas. The critical role of this topic and related, highly mediatized events, are harnessed as persuasive instruments for political positioning in electoral processes (Pardos-Prado, 2020). Moreover, in order to fulfill specific ideological intentions, immigration issues are constructed and represented in unique ways that in many cases formulate an imaginary where these characters –the immigrants– comprise characteristics that position them as the outgroup (Krämer, 2017) by framing them as a threat (Jengelley & Clawson, 2019) to legality (Horsti, 2007) or economic wellbeing and a danger to dominant social norms (Dennison & Geddes, 2018) in discourse that dehumanizes migrants (Ekman, 2019).

Thus, in a media environment that is characterized by convergence and the ability to connect with audiences directly (Mihailidis & Viotty, 2017) the tendency of right-wing populist political groups to bypass mainstream media both ideologically and in practice (Krämer, 2017), has led to the instrumentalization of social media and its user-generated-content capabilities for the deployment of narrative strategies that support and perpetuate migratory storylines aligned with certain communicative intentions, to maintain and attract their like-minded following.

In this context, Instagram emerges as the fastest-growing social media platform –from five hundred million to one billion monthly active users from 2016 to 2018 (Statista, 2018)– positioning itself as one of the most influential digital contexts. This study focuses on Instagram due to its growth, unique traits, and users. Its content configurations are worthy of exploration, to gain a deeper understanding of how these functionalities are being harnessed for political communication. Furthermore, Instagram Stories (IG Stories) represent the most successful content format in the platform in terms of daily users (Leaver et al., 2020). The case of Spanish far-right party Vox is used as an example of a party that has attracted a large following on social media, especially Instagram (Viejo & Alonso, 2018) while obtaining parliamentary representation to become the third political force in Spain in the last two election cycles (Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019b).

This chapter begins with a discussion of the theoretical basis of interest for this study, including the issue of immigration and its implications as a unique

topic for political positioning and polarization. I then move to an overview of ideology and persuasion, followed by a contextualization of Vox and the Spanish case and IG Stories as a worthy format for the exploration of political communication. The coding procedure is then laid out, to end with the findings and discussion.

## 3.2 Literature review

### 3.2.1 Immigration as a topic for political polarization

Polarizing content in social media has been described as rhetorically alieniating and inciendary, displaying flawed reasoning and/or misleading data (Howard et.al., 2017). When issues such as immigration are concerned, these narrative phenomena are especially problematic, considering that migrants are pervasively absent from the discourse (Jaramillo-Dent & Pérez-Rodríguez, 2021; Said, 2008), unable to defend themselves, making them uniquely vulnerable to become the subject of misleading information and targets for violent discourse and attacks (Ekman, 2019). For instance, Clark-Ibanez and Swan (2019) found that social media is instrumental —due to its configuration as well as its content creation and dissemination functionalities— in the construction of migratory narratives that serve the communicative intentions of specific ideologies and persuasive messages, regardless of their veracity.

Moreover, Ekman (2019) describes how racist anti-immigrant discourse on social media is effectively violent and creates symbolic boundaries that in turn, establish migrants and refugees as valid targets for violence. This goes in line with Chouliaraki and Georgiou's (2019) definition of the digital border that includes discursive practices that attempt to classify migrants as perennial "others".

In this sense, Dennison and Geddes (2018) pinpoint to issue salience as the culprit for the recent increase in the support for anti-immigration parties in Western Europe. Moreover, these authors describe how issue salience is defined by individual and collective social interests, as well as events that attract national attention. Pardos-Prado (2020) describes how the media's portrayal of immigration seems to have a greater impact in Spanish public opinion about this issue to a greater degree than actual migratory flows.

In the case of Spain, McMahon (2017) described seven frames used in parliamentary debates in the 2008-2011 period used to discuss immigration issues. These frames are represented on Figure 13.

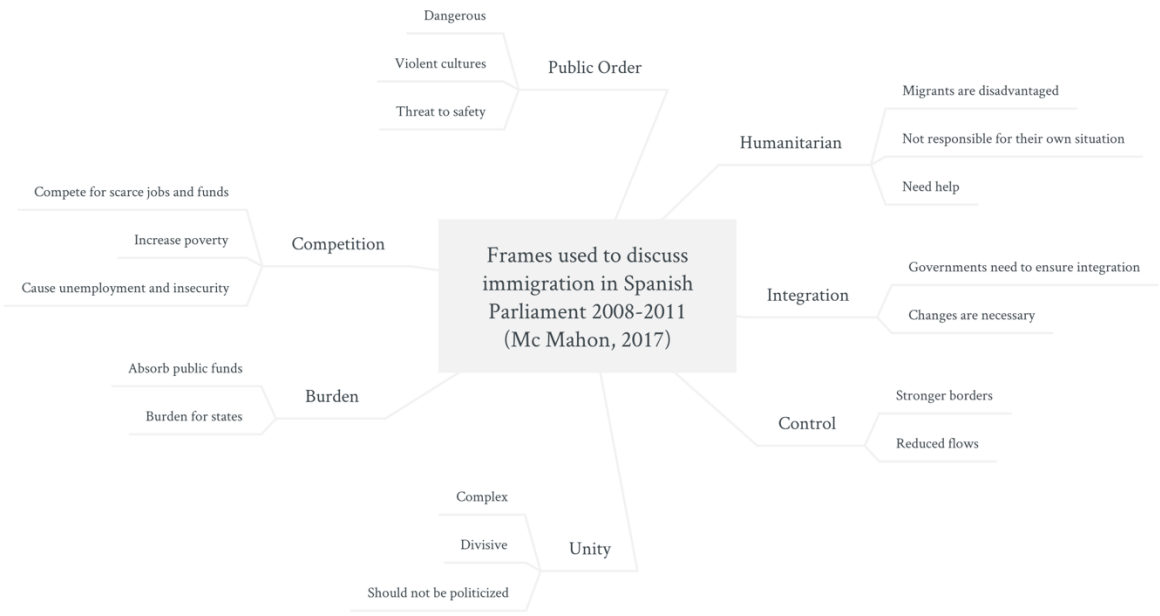


**Figure 13.** Frames used to discuss immigration in Spanish Parliament 2008–2011. Created by the Author based on McMahon (2017).

The importance of immigration as a topic for political polarization and the ways in which representatives in the Spanish congress have framed this issue represents a small part of the complex discursive configurations that develop and spread online, with the aim to persuade the public. In the next section, the characteristics of online persuasive messages are laid out, as well as the Spanish case and Vox as an example.

### 3.2.2 Political Persuasion on Social Media: The case of Spain and Vox

The ways in which User-Generated-Content on social media impacts opinion formation processes has been established in recent literature. In this sense, Diehl et al. (2015) found that people's uses of social media platforms are closely linked to political persuasion. Furthermore, studies have found that social media users favor content according to its narrative, displaying a preference for those that reinforce their beliefs while fostering polarization (Del Vicario et al., 2016).

According to Garner and Palmer (2011), citizens today base their policy preferences more closely upon their group interests, core values, and party identifications than they did several decades ago, making their opinions less variable and more predictable from these core political predispositions. Moreover, the authors suggest that this preference leads to the propagation of biased information based on rumors.

In their study of the different types of information shared on social media during the 2016 US election, Howard et al. (2017) established a typology of sources for information being shared on social media platforms, included in Figure 14. This classification is interesting in light of the social media content analyzed in the present study, as it compartmentalizes content according to defined classifications, and it is of interest to assess its applicability to the sample analyzed.

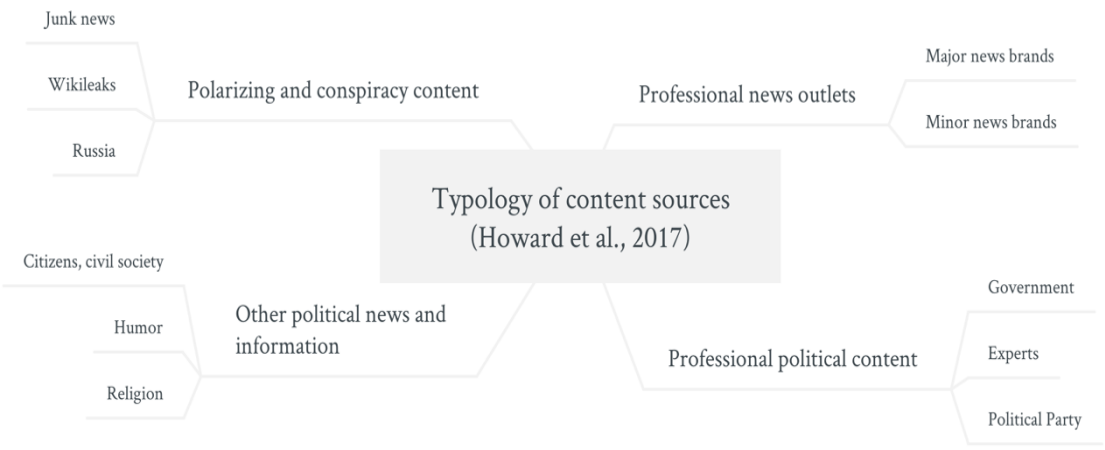


**Figure 14.** Typology of content sources on social media. Created by the Author.

In order to contextualize Vox's situation in Spain, it is important to understand that until the end of the decade of 2010 Spain was considered an exceptional case –alongside other countries such as Germany– for not having a far-right party with parliamentary representation (Pardos-Prado, 2020; Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019b). Moreover, Vox's ideology has been described as far-right, displaying nativist and autoritarian traits (Ferreira, 2019). In this sense, Simón (2020) describes Vox's stance on immigration as severe, advocating for the deportation of undocumented migrants and the elimination of social benefits that purportedly attract further immigration flows, in the so-called *call effect*.

Moreover, Turnbull-Dugarte (2019b) argues that Vox's ideology is far from being uniquely anti-immigration, covering a wide array of topics including hardline positions on gender-related issues, including same-sex marriage, abortion, gender quotas, gender-based violence, among others.

Previous studies in other countries have delved into narrative practices of political parties on Instagram, focusing on politicians' self-representation (Lalancette & Raynauld, 2019; Muñoz & Towner, 2017). In the case of Vox, its rise and ideological traits have been analyzed in depth, but few studies have focused on Vox and social media, while even fewer have pinpointed the party's rhetorical and ideological presence on Instagram. Traditional media have identified and described Vox's presence on social media, emphasizing its role on Instagram and the electoral/democratic implications of its popularity on this platform (Calabrés & Vicente, 2019; Viejo & Alonso, 2018) suggesting that this is a significant aspect in Vox's success and a matter of public interest. Moreover, Turnbull-Dugarte (2019a) explored the use of Instagram by the major Spanish parties in the general elections of 2015 and 2016, but his analysis precedes Vox's significance in the Spanish political landscape, and it is not included in his chapter.

The present chapter represents an innovative perspective in terms of its analysis of IG Stories as a format for political communication and persuasion, in the case of a party that has been successful in harnessing a significant following on this platform while gaining representation in congress. In the next section, the unique traits of the platform are described.

### 3.2.3 Instagram as a platform: Stories and ephemeral content

In 2019, 766 million users accessed Instagram monthly worldwide and this number is projected to reach almost 1 billion monthly users by 2023 (Statista, 2020). In Spain, Instagram is the social platform with the highest growth at 49%, with 70% of its users belonging to the 18 to 30 age bracket and 62% of them female (IAB Spain, 2019). This makes Instagram a platform of interest for the examination of political content, due to its increasing penetration and the segment of the population it serves —a significant group in electoral terms.

The popularity of ephemeral social media content was led by Snapchat Stories. Scholars have described the disappearing nature of Snapchat communication as a return to conversation-like interactions (Rettberg, 2014;

Soffer, 2016). In the case of Instagram, it introduced its Stories function in August 2016 in an attempt to increase time spent on the app (Leaver, et al., 2020). These authors locate the success of Stories –identified as the main success factor for Instagram as a whole– in their limited 24-hour duration, since users feel the need to check their friends' and followed profiles' feeds every day, to avoid missing out on their latest content. Since then, the Stories function has grown to become the most successful Instagram content sharing mode, with more than 500 million daily users (Instagram Business, 2020).

The creativity enabled by the Stories format includes a range of filters, GIFs and regular stickers, polls, sliders, music and other interactive add-ons. Videos, GIFs and photos can be shared within this configuration, with the ability to combine an array of content in each Story. Their prominent position within the platform –at the top, in a highly visible place for users– make them significant. The possibility to archive stories at the top of the profile's wall –through story highlights– means that content creators can make these messages available to users permanently. In the case of Vox, story highlights are grouped by issue, initiative or type of content, making stories uniquely relevant in terms of the availability of user-generated, persuasive and in some cases even propagandistic content.

The unique approach advanced in this study is the consideration of Instagram as a medium for political communication, where a large segment of the young adult population is consuming news (Newman et al., 2020) and information, effectively becoming one of the settings where symbolic understandings of socially-constructed reality are molded (Searle & Willis,1995).

## 3.3 Methods

The present exploratory research study involved content analysis and subsequent discourse analysis. To carry out the present study, three specific research objectives were set out:

(O1) Describe the characteristics of Instagram stories related to immigration in the three official Vox Instagram profiles.

(O2) Identify the representations of characters involved in migratory narratives, including the depiction of those telling the story, the

characteristics of the migrant groups involved, and the portrayal of migratory experiences.

(O3) Identify persuasive strategies made possible by textual/visual representations and the use of functionalities and affordances of the platform within migratory narratives.

The codebook was developed through a combination of deductive approaches —involving code groups based on broad dimensions that were set from the literature review prior to commencing the analysis— and inductive methods — referring to the derivation of codes from the data itself, as proposed by Glaser and Strauss (2006). The majority of the codes were derived inductively within three pre-established, broad dimensions, guided by the objectives of the study. In this case, the exploratory approach and the inclusion of inductively derived codes is appropriate due to the scarcity of previous research available on the phenomena analyzed (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005), namely the study of political communication about immigration on IG Stories.

Moreover, the analysis included a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods. The quantitative approach involved assessing single code frequencies (*f*) and code coocurrence frequencies enabled by the Atlas.ti (v.8.4.3) content analysis software. This assessment was complemented by a qualitative approach —conducting a deeper analysis of the contents in their context, considering the affordances of the platform, the temporal qualities of this format (7 to 15 seconds) and their multimodal nature. This process was implemented through iterative rounds of coding to identify trends in the data that point to phenomena of interest —in this case, to pinpoint the characteristics of narratives and discourse referring to migrants and migratory phenomena. A final qualitative analysis provided a deeper understanding of what these images, functionalities and texts imply for persuasive strategies involving narratives about migration within the plataformed context, in official political accounts of the far-right party Vox in Spain.

Figure 15 reflects the research design and process that guided the present study.

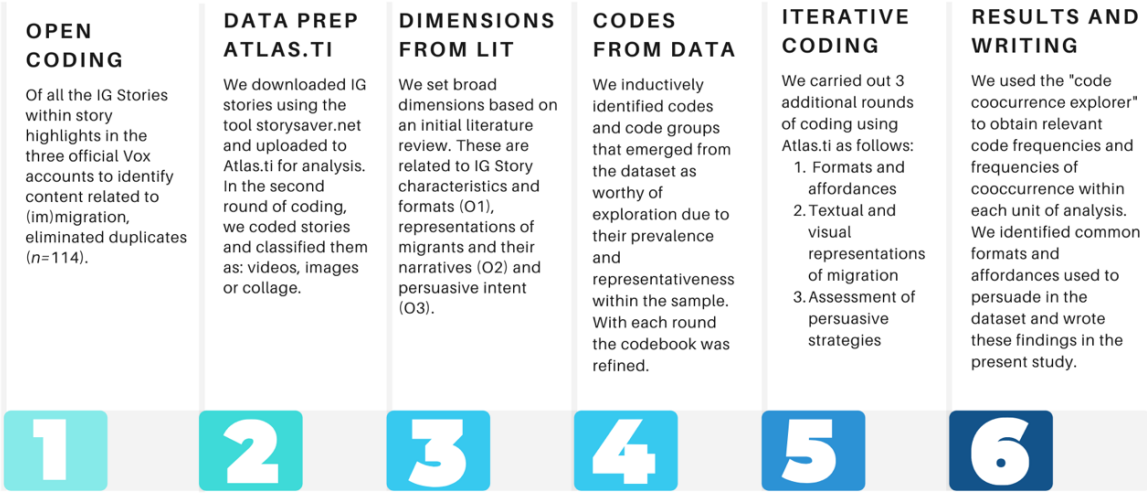


**Figure 15.** Research design. Created by the Author.

### 3.3.1 Data Collection and Sample

Three official Instagram accounts for Vox were selected to extract the sample. These accounts were selected on the basis of a search of all official, verified accounts for the party. Story collections are used consistently in these accounts over long periods of time, enabling the analysis of this type of content. In this sense, the sampling was purposive, as defined by Palys (2008). The accounts included, and relevant information about them, are reflected in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Account information and sampling process. Created by the Author

| Account | Followers | Total Stories | Immig. Stories |
|---|---|---|---|
| @voxnoticias | 150K | 486 | 79 |
| @vox_es | 560K | 280 | 42 |
| @voxjovenes | 116K | 66 | 1 |
| | | Total posts | 122 |
| | | Final sample | 114 |

Note: 8 stories were excluded because they were duplicates (cross-posted in different accounts)

The Stories were included based on their mention of any topic directly related to immigration issues excluding IG Stories about racism and other similar

but unrelated topics. As of 29 March 2020, I carried out a first round of open coding in a total of 832 Instagram stories in story collections for immigration content to exclude all unrelated content from the sample. This resulted in a sample of *n* =122 which after excluding duplicates, yielded a final sample of *n* = 114 stories. The only post related to immigration in the @voxjovenes account was a duplicate and was therefore eliminated from the final sample. It is important to note that Vox has the largest following of all the Spanish parties on Instagram (Viejo & Alonso, 2018). Meanwhile, of all the social networks the party uses, Instagram is their most successful social media platform in terms of number of followers. Moreover, Vox has repeatedly attacked the mainstream media, and one of the three profiles analyzed is called @voxnoticias or vox news, suggesting an attempt at bypassing traditional news media gatekeepers and reaching their audience directly with their own version of the facts.

### 3.3.2 Codebook development

The first step in the development of the codebook involved the identification of relevant theoretical perspectives to respond to each of the research objectives set forth, as described by Riffe et al. (2013).

In terms of O1, previous studies have explored the variety and significance of Instagram formats and affordances, including IG Stories (Jaramillo-Dent et al., 2020; Leaver et al., 2020) and provided guidance to approach multimodal content such as the one analyzed in the present study (Highfield & Leaver, 2016). Moreover, in relation to O2, McMahon (2017) pointed to immigration frames used in Spanish parliamentary debates as shown in Figure 13. It is worth noting that these don't apply to the complexity of social media content because they don't consider the visual aspect nor the characteristics of the speaker, thus, after testing the frames in an initial round of coding, I decided to derive inductive codes to more accurately describe the ways in which political discourse about immigration is shaped in this ephemeral, multimodal format.

**Table 4.** Code groups used for analysis. Created by the Author.

| Objective | Code group | Definition |
|---|---|---|
| O1 Describe the characteristics of Instagram stories | MEDTY | This code group includes images, videos/GIFs and collage (these last understood as stories where at least 2 types of content from different sources appear together which may include screenshots, stickers, GIFs and text) |
| | SCSH | This code group describes the types of screenshot content including Instagram posts/profiles, tweets, YouTube videos, news platforms, TV videos. |
| | AEST | This code group includes aesthetic characteristics such as the use of filters and color schemes. |
| | INSTA | This code group includes specific functionalities of the Instagram platform such as stickers, emoji, hashtags, @tags, swipe/arrows/see more. |
| | EMOJI | This code group serves to describe the communicative intention/emotion conveyed by specific emoji used. |
| | NEWS SOURCE | This code group describes whether the name of the source of news is included in the post. |
| O2 Identify the representations of characters involved in migratory narratives | POLIT IMAGE | This code group includes the visual characteristics politicians when they are portrayed visually. |
| | IMMIG IMAGE | This code group describes the visual depiction of immigrants. |
| | IMMIG TXT | This code group includes textual terms used to represent/describe immigrants. |
| | VICTIM IM | This code group identifies characters portrayed as victims of immigrants and the human mobility phenomenon. |
| O3 Identify persuasive strategie | PERS INTENT | This code group identifies aspects of the narrative that suggest an intention to persuade, including formats, affordances, representations and storylines that constitute rhetorical devices. |

Finally, regarding O3, I was interested in assessing the persuasive intent of these messages. For the purposes of this chapter, I define persuasive intent as a narrative configuration that reflects an intention to shape attitudes, beliefs or actions (Blair, 2012). For this goal, after several rounds of coding to respond to O1 and O2, I identified trends within the coded content that suggested the intention to persuade.

Thus, through iterative coding rounds, a code chart was developed on Atlas.ti. In the process, some code groups were derived from previous single codes. Such is the case of the code group EMOJI which was initially an individual code to signal the presence of emoji but the need to include nuance in the emotions represented by emoji motivated the derivation of a new code group. The final code chart is extensive, but the code groups analyzed in this chapter are included in Table 4.

## 3.4 Findings

In this section, the analysis of Vox's Instagram stories about immigration is laid out, considering the IG Stories' formats and affordances used, their portrayal of migrants and migratory narratives and finally, their persuasive strategies considering the aforementioned aspects. In order to exemplify the strategies and contents discussed, representative stories in the dataset have been replicated and translated by the authors using Adobe Illustrator and included as figures.

### 3.4.1 Characteristics of IG Stories about immigration on official Vox accounts

In this section I will describe IG Stories in terms of formats and affordances across the sample to respond to O1.

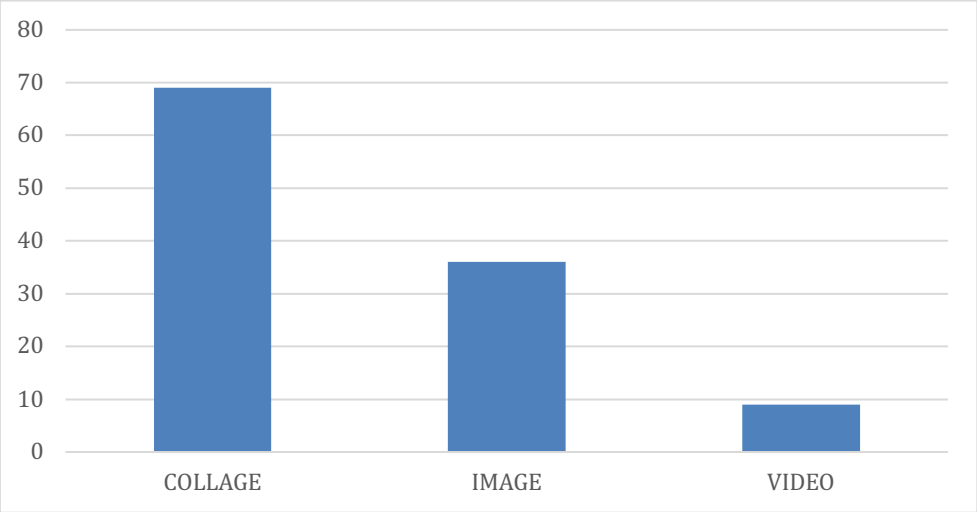


**Figure 16.** Story media types' frequencies by format. Prepared by the Author.

As can be seen in Figure 16, the collage media format—understood as a story with a combination of a minimum of 2 types of content from different sources— was prevalent within the sample (*f*=69). Notably, screenshots were prevalent within collage stories (*f*=91) from a total of 109 screenshots across the sample. Figure 17 is a representative example of a collage media story comprised, in this case, by three screenshots from different sources. Among screenshots (SCSH), the NEWS SOURCE code group is noteworthy (*f*=58) and is exemplified, in this case, by a screenshot of a news headline and another one portraying an unidentified news source. Overall, among screenshots of news content, some did not identify their sources (*f*=17) and others did (*f*=41). Some of these sources include traditional media platforms and so-called junk news platforms, which, in this case include blogs and other pseudo journalistic content.

**Figure 17.** Translated illustration of a collage story format example. Created by the Author.

#### *3.4.1.1 Instagram functionalities and affordances*

The use of Instagram Story functionalities includes the use of emoji (*f*=72), both within screenshots from other social media platforms as well as emoji-related affordances from Instagram. This suggests a cross-media strategy, as well as an attempt to appeal to the audience in very specific ways. Figure 18 includes the analysis of the use of emoji in this sample, including the functions and emotions conveyed by this visual component.

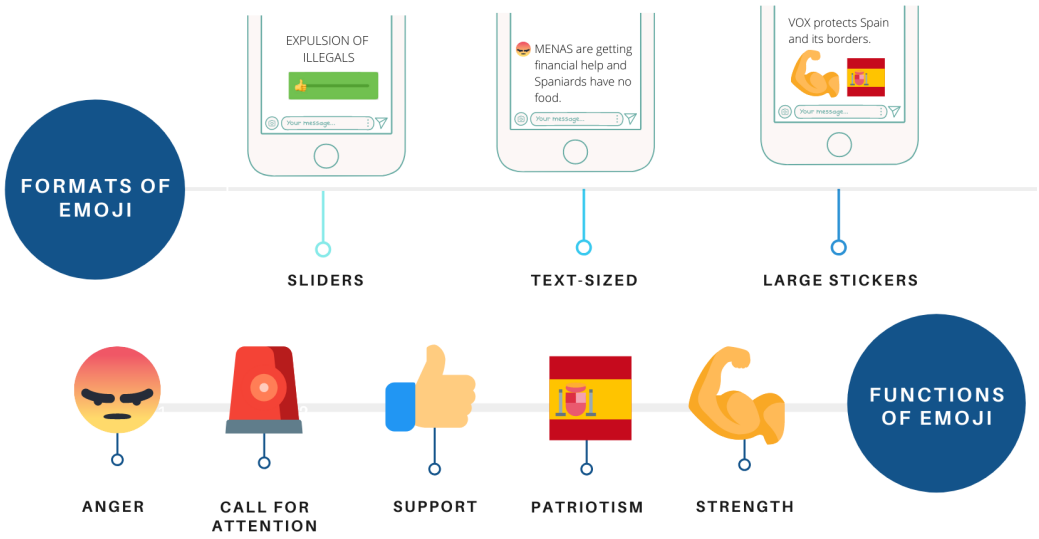


**Figure 18.** Uses of emoji on IG Stories by VOX. Created by the Author.

#### *3.4.1.2 Instagram aesthetics*

In terms of aesthetics, coded within the AEST code group, collage stories overwhelmingly use a white background with small details in green, and Instagram affordances such as sliders also align with this palette, while the red/yellow scheme is secondary, but also important. This supports the findings of Sampietro and Sánchez-Castillo (2020) in their analysis of Abascal's Instagram account, suggesting that the use of Vox's brand and national Spanish colors is part of a larger social media strategy across personal and party-wide accounts.

### 3.4.2 Traits of migrants and migratory narratives

In this section I will describe the visual and textual representation of migrants in the sample, as well as the actors who convey migratory narratives in response to O2.

It is worth noting that only 21 units of analysis (stories) depicted migrants visually, and the rest of the sample included 28 visual depictions of politicians, while the remaining stories included text and other unrelated or general stock images.

Visually, the depiction of migrants in this sample reflects a prevalence of *unidentified, black, male migrants* who are mostly portrayed as *part of a group*, as can be evidenced from the frequency of cooccurrence of visual codes within

the sample. Textually, the words used in migratory narratives describe the characters, using words such as *massive, MENAS* (unaccompanied migrant minors), *illegal, aggressive,* and *violent*. Figure 19 depicts the highest frequencies of cooccurrence among pairs of IMMIG codes, involving three possibilities of cooccurring pairs: two visual codes, two textual codes and one visual and one textual code. The frequency of cooccurrence is an analysis function available in Atlas.ti and it refers to the number of times two codes appear together in the same unit of analysis, and it serves to obtain an overview of the type of migrant portrayed in this sample.

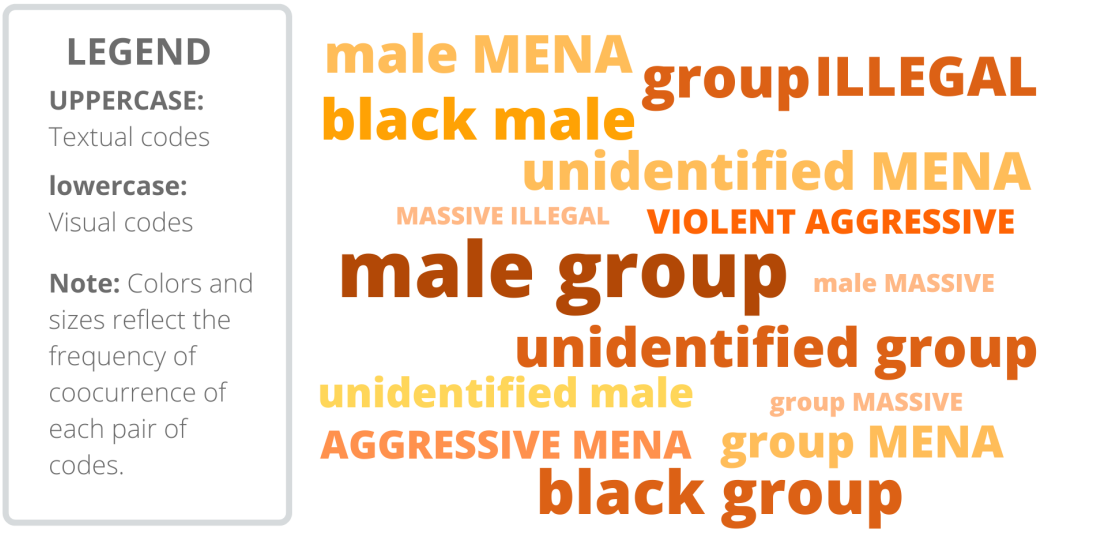


**Figure 19.** Word cloud depicting pairs of cooccurring textual and visual codes used to describe migrants on the basis of Atlas.ti co-occurrence explorer. Created by the Author.

The use of the term *MENA* suggests a pejorative representation of migrants who are minors and often accompanies arguments about their need for financial support by the government, in line with McMahon's (2017) burden frame and supporting previous analyses of traditional media that suggest that the term *MENA* has become a metaphor of crime and welfare-dependence (Gómez-Quintero et al., 2021). It is interesting to consider Vox's focus on the youth of these migrant populations, which could imply a humanitarian frame (Benson, 2013), since it may elicit empathy and a desire to help, but in this case their youth is presented as a problem.

The focus on the illegality factor aligns with Horsti (2007), centering on the violence they bring and the criminality of their actions. This representation

of migrants supports the idea of them as a threat, in line with Jengelley and Clawson (2019) and resembling the control and public order frames proposed by McMahon (2017). This threat is established in the social/civic sense as well as the economic/financial sense (Dennison & Geddes, 2018) due to discourse that focuses on their *massive* numbers and their status as *minors*.

The formats and configurations in which these arguments are presented, combined with the representations of migrants, are of special interest to theorize about their persuasive nature and are described in the next section.

### 3.4.3 Persuasive formats and affordances for multimodal representations of migration

In this section I bring together the findings related to Instagram's formats and affordances with the visual and textual representation of migrants to identify how these are instrumentalized in an attempt to persuade their followers (O3).

In terms of the formats, the use of collage stories to present an argument about immigration suggests an attempt to construct a complex discursive configuration and fit it into the 7 to 15 seconds that an Instagram Story lasts on screen. Arguably that these temporal and spatial limitations make it hard for users to read and process the information presented, possibly impairing their ability to make decisions about the veracity or trustworthiness of said information. By including ideas from different sources, and combining them on a white background, the content creator forces the user to focus on specific parts of the message, in an attempt to process it as a whole and not as the different parts put together to create it. Furthermore, specific emoji and emoji sliders constitute rhetorical devices for persuasion, with functions similar as those described by Ge and Gretzel (2018). In this case they are used to trigger specific emotions — attention, anger, support, strength, patriotism— by offering limited interaction possibilities —through sliders— supporting the idea of a persuasive message configuration (coded under PERS INT).

#### *3.4.3.1 Migrant representations in right-wing Instagram*

Moreover, images portraying migrants mostly fall into two categories: the first category includes screenshots from external sources such as other social media profiles and news media platforms, in many cases as part of collage posts (Figure 17). The second category involves posts that use design items including highly contrasting colors and symbols, combined with filters and other affordances unique to Instagram, to portray migrant populations as exemplified in Figure 20. This is worth noting considering the status of Instagram as the visual platform par excellence. These characteristics, in combination with the very specific portrayal of migrants described in the previous section, supports Clark-Ibanez and Swan's (2019) claim that social media presents a perfect context for disinformation about migration due to its functions and configurations.

An interesting aspect within Vox's representation of the human mobility phenomena is defined by the migrant profiles that are excluded from these narratives, which become noticeable in Figure 19. Examples of these are female or older migrants, families, as well as unaccompanied younger children, who would also be considered *MENAS* but are not included in these representations. The significance of these excluded migrant profiles lies in a possible attempt to persuade followers to support certain policies and political proposals, by presenting a unique perspective on migrant populations, and one that gives way to an array of problems for the Spanish society.

The migrant profile advanced by Vox involves a very clear age range and gender, alongside negative traits, as described before, establishing the basis for their strict deportation policy proposals (Simón, 2020), in the face of migratory phenomena taking place in Spain. Both posts in Figure 20 convey this idea very clearly through the messages "Expulsion of illegals now" and "immediate expulsion" accompanied by images and text that emphasize an aggressive stance of migrant groups and the large groups crossing the border. Moreover, the exclusion of the migrant groups mentioned before may respond to a need to position migrants in opposition to the needs of Vox supporters, including their need for safety, a stable job and in some cases government aid.

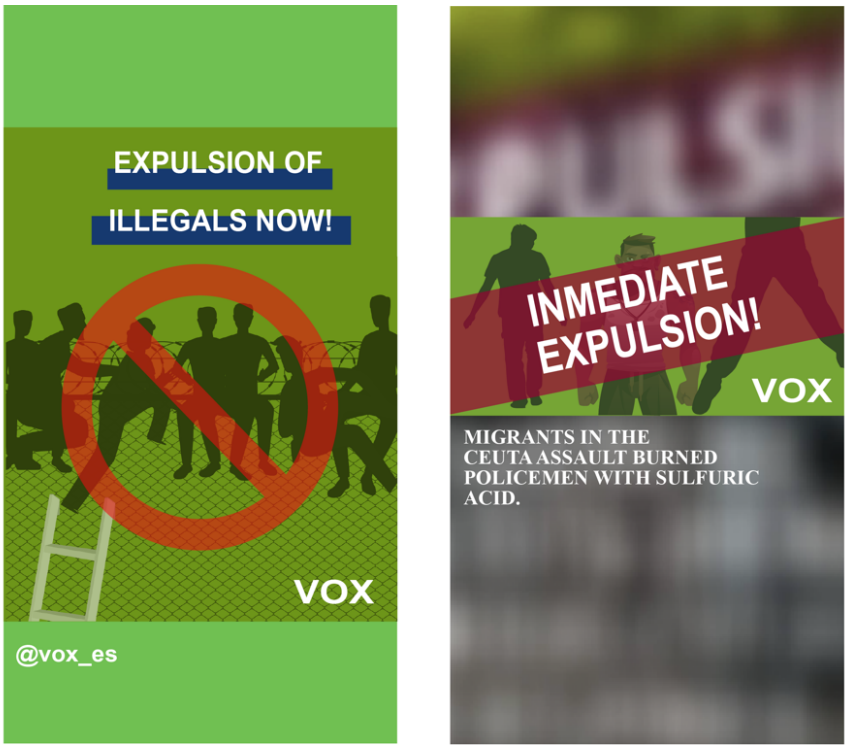


**Figure 20.** Translated illustration of two stories using filters and other representative AEST. Created by the Author.

Within arguments about violence perpetrated by migrants, the frequencies of codes related to migrants' victims in this sample are represented in Figure 21. The prevalence of females as victims is related to two argumentative lines: one involves an argument by Vox that states that gang rapes in Spain are mostly perpetrated by foreign individuals; the second is related to the argument that migrants use fake gender-based violence claims to access additional humanitarian aid, in turn minimizing the experience of real violence suffered by Spanish women.

These storylines support Turnbull-Dugarte's (2019b) argument suggesting that Vox is not only anti-immigration, as they use other unrelated issues in conjunction with immigration to advance ideological and legislative proposals. Moreover, positioning law enforcement officers as victims also serves Vox's strategy of establishing migrants as direct, violent opponents of social order.

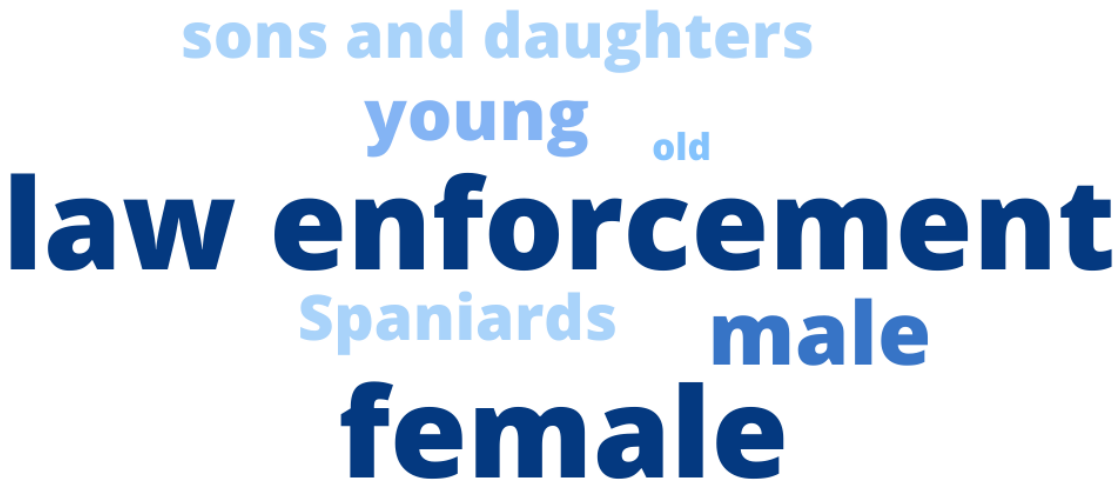


**Figure 21.** Word cloud of the frequencies of textual codes for content that describes the victims of migrants. Created by the Author on the basis of Atlas.ti co-occurrence explorer.

The portrayal of politicians in images includes, in its majority, members of the party delivering a speech alone, with Santiago Abascal, the leader of Vox, portrayed more often than any other member of the party. Text is often added to include quotes from the speech on images and videos, emphasizing certain words from the speech using red and green fonts. Moreover, flags often appear on posts with politicians, in the form of emoji or in the image.

As described before, the use of color is relevant as it reflects, in some cases, an overview of the nature of the message and in others, it strengthens and highlights the messages conveyed by the text. Within the AEST code group, the use of a specific hue of green as the branded content of the party is present across the sample, as can be seen in Figure 20. White is a major color in this sample, used in contrast with the party's green and in collage posts, where information from different sources is presented. The use of red is employed to highlight and urge as exemplified in Figures 20 and 22 and to emphasize negative aspects of migrants and opposition –including opposing parties and activists. Red also appears with yellow in some cases, highlighting the flag colors as the national symbol and usually accompanying messages that extol national values/needs/interests in the face of immigration, further strengthening nativist ideas (Ferreira, 2019).

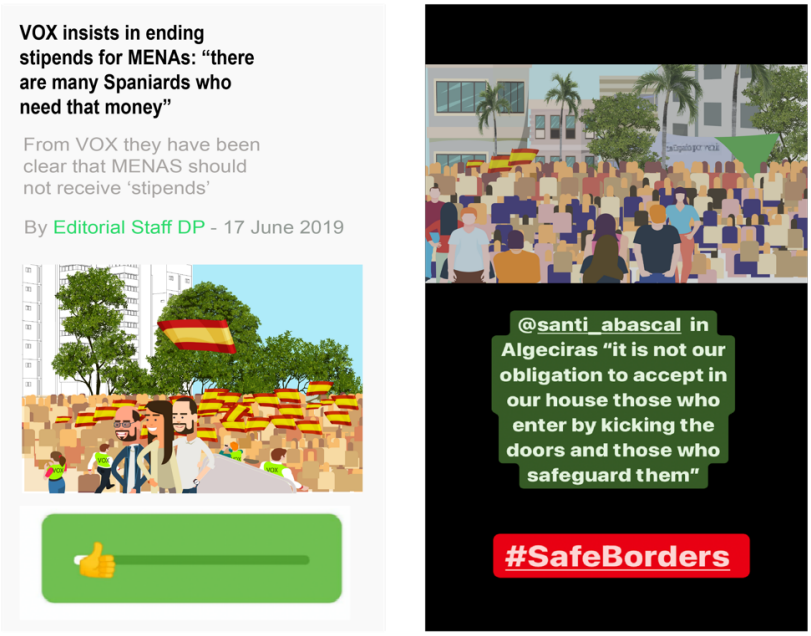


**Figure 22.** Translated illustration of two stories portraying politicians and audiences. Created by the Author.

Another visual portrayal of interest includes massive audiences and Spanish flags with Vox politicians. Two representative examples of this portrayal are shown in Figure 22. In the context of migratory narratives, the presence of flags may respond to the need to strengthen the national identity in contrast with globalization and multiculturalism, which, alongside support for Spaniards and their interests, as displayed in the text of Figure 22, are advanced as more valuable than those of migrants, in line with Vox’s nativist ideology as suggested by Ferreira (2019). The portrayal of large audiences conveys the idea of massive support for their policies and them as a party and constitutes a relevant visual rhetorical device, supporting Blair’s (2012) idea of the one-sidedness of visual persuasion.

### *3.4.3.2 Other persuasive storylines*

Alongside the visual and textual representation of migrants, the dominant ideas presented by Vox in this sample of IG Stories, include arguments that are thematically based on two main claims: the *call effect* (Simón, 2020) and the risk of *violence* brought by migrants, the former is in line with McMahon’s (2017) burden and competition frames and the latter follows his control and public

order frames. Two additional relevant ideas that appear less often and are instrumentalized for these arguments include, on the one hand, the idea that migrants commit *fraud* to access public aid and are therefore undeserving of this assistance; on the other hand, and in contrast, Vox argues that Spaniards have no jobs/resources and *should be helped first* and foremost. These ideas give way to policy proposals that argue that providing aid to migrants will, in turn cause increased immigration (call effect), while burdening the national economy and threatening safety and social order. It follows that humanitarian financial support for migrants needs to be eliminated to reduce financial and social burdens.

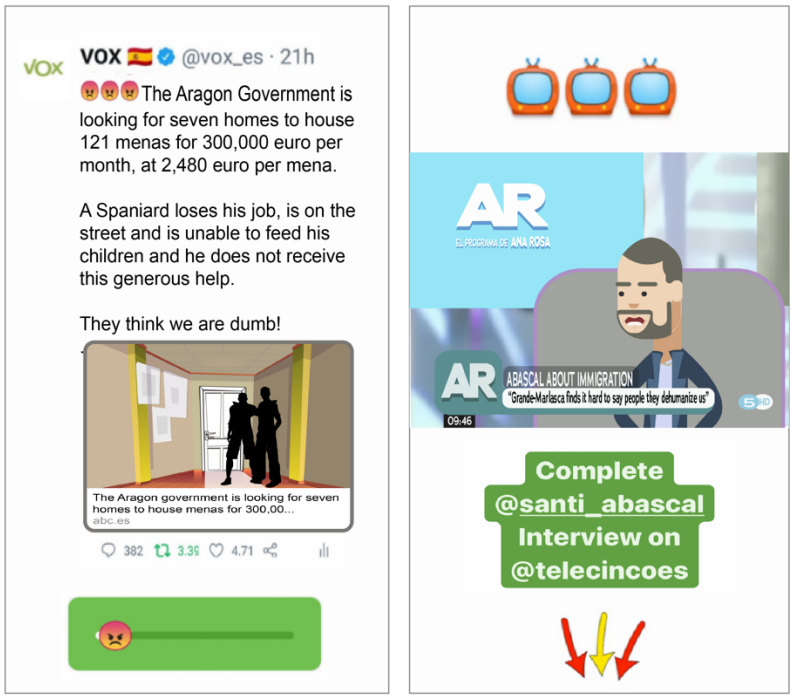


**Figure 23.** Translated illustration of two collage stories. Created and translated by the Author.

In terms of argumentative strategy, Vox's Instagram communication messages reflect a tendency to interpret news items and external source pieces. In this sense, Figure 23 exemplifies a collage post featuring, from the top: a screenshot of a tweet from Vox's official Twitter account interpreting the content of the article below and giving their opinion. Below, the story displays a news article from an identified source (abc.es) describing the expenditure of the Autonomic region of Aragon on housing for unaccompanied migrant minors or MENAS.

This approach, which in most cases displays Vox's opinion and interpretation on top and the source at the bottom of the Instagram story, highlights the information given by Vox —strengthened through the use of aesthetic affordances such as the green and red colors on a white background and Instagram functionalities including emoji, stickers and hashtags— and emphasizing emotional appeals towards the reader —specifically anger or support. This configuration, when positioned alongside studies such as the one by Del Vicario et al. (2016) and considering the rhetorical functions of emoji (Ge & Gretzel, 2018) suggests that by providing users with fewer interaction options, Vox is effectively attempting to persuade its followers towards a limited range of opinions about immigration.

## 3.5 Conclusions

In this chapter, I have taken a closer look at the use of Instagram story highlights as tools for political and ideological communication and persuasion, focusing on far-right immigration narratives. The results point to a cross-media strategy by Vox reflected in the use of collage posts comprised of screenshots form external Vox accounts and other media sources, with original content in the form of interpretations and paraphrased information by Vox, to construct arguments and policy proposals. These narratives develop and change when adapted to the Instagram ecosystem by incorporating unique affordances offered in this platform, effectively establishing a multimodal and visual rhetorical and persuasive structure using the Story format, by appealing the reader to interact with the content within its limited interaction options: support or anger towards the presented content.

We could argue that the use of collage content in 7 to 15-second, ephemeral, Instagram story posts can make it very difficult for readers to find out more about each piece of information included —especially considering that in many cases there are no links, as most are screenshots. Moreover, unidentified content sources that often include so-called junk news, obscure the validity of these arguments and make it hard for the reader to discern facts from ideological opinions. As Chadwick et al. (2018) argue, the use of tabloid and other lower-quality news on social media is detrimental to a healthy democracy. Thus, this type of post is especially problematic, due to its seemingly natural

argumentative line and conclusion, leaving very little space for reflection and opinion formation.

Topically, the construction of very specific migrant profiles and victims of migrant groups are very limited to those that support Vox's policies and proposed laws. These narratives are constructed by strongly emphasizing a nativist and nationalist character and establishing Vox as the sole party who understands what it means to care for Spaniards and their needs, in opposition to foreign interests. This is supported visually, and through the use of emoji and similar components that are visually appealing and enable a quick and, one could argue, thoughtless interpretation of the message.

The portrayal of politicians is secondary in this sample, but it gives footing to the idea of a strong and serious party that represents Spain through vast support in the form of large audiences, implying majority support for their proposals —in this case, migratory policies. The large number of followers that Vox displays in its three official Instagram profiles suggests that they are successful in their social media strategy, by maintaining and increasing their base in this context.

This study has a few limitations including its focus on one platform rather than a cross-platform overview, as well as the intrinsic limitations related to the content and discourse analysis method, which doesn't provide a full picture of the effectiveness of their persuasive strategies, but only a point of reference as to what they are attempting to do through their discourse and use of the platform. These limitations could be approached by future studies focused on audiences and the user experience in the face of these narratives to measure their response to them.

# Chapter 4

**#Migrantes on TikTok and platformed belongings**

# Chapter 4: #Migrantes on TikTok and platformed belongings

The following chapter engages with both ideas of othering and sameness by exploring content created by immigrants. Some of the content is created in response to specific beliefs about immigration, contradicting or resignifying what It means to be an immigrant. Other videos establish different forms of belonging by using specific affordances and content configurations available on the platform. The concept of platformed belongings is proposed.

## 4.1 Introduction

In the era of User-Generated-Content, some argue that the ability to craft, tell and propagate stories has been democratized (Blank, 2013). However, in the case of migrant populations, their experiences are still being told by dominant others on digital and social media, instrumentalized to fulfill political, economic, and ideological goals (Ekman, 2019; Jaramillo-Dent & Pérez-Rodríguez, 2021). Nevertheless, recent evidence suggests that migrants and diasporic groups are, in some ways, becoming active agents of their own narratives on social media platforms, with several important initiatives being implemented to shed light on the diverse stories of migrants (Chouliaraki, 2017). Although, in many cases, migrants need to adapt these narratives by conforming to certain values and expectations in order to fit generally accepted plots in their receiving nation-states (Appadurai, 2019; Georgiou, 2018).

Thus, the aspirational nature of migrant tiktokers' content responds to the difficulty of their narratives to fit (Appadurai, 2019) as well as the desire for a better life both socially and financially (Witteborn, 2019). Moreover, the tendency of mainstream media (Benson, 2013), government-funded institutions (Georgiou, 2018), and political actors (McMahon, 2018) to instrumentalize migratory storylines means that migrant individuals often need to respond to widespread beliefs about themselves using creative practices and narrative strategies of interest (Udwan et al., 2020).

Performativity is a relevant concept for the analysis of content created by immigrants. Austin (1975) described performative utterances as those that go beyond *describing reality* to *changing the social reality* they are aiming to describe. Moreover, gender theorist and philosopher Judith Butler (1999) explained performativity in the context of gender by explaining that gender is comprised of repeated actions by individuals within an existing "rigid regulatory frame" that constrains how gender identities are configured. According to Butler's theory of performativity, gender is not something one *is* but a set of actions one *does* often in anticipation of social expectations. In migration research, Innes (2016) describes the performative construction of security as reflected by the actions and narratives by an asylum seeker from Ghana traveling to Greece in the face of real experiences of insecurity and beyond state-based notions of what security means. Thus, *performativity*, for the purposes of this

study entails content creation approaches by immigrants aimed at resignifying what it means to be a foreigner in a new country.

In this context, social media has been identified as an important component in the acculturation process for refugees and migrants in general, and as one that needs to be harnessed by government actors, to ensure that migrants have access to accurate and helpful information (Alencar, 2018). Considering this, I argue that performative and aspirational creative practices deployed by migrants on social media can, in some cases, constitute acts of self-governance as well as strategies to create a sense of belonging. Piper (2003) described these bottom-up approaches as grassroots efforts of empowerment, stemming from migrants themselves, and attempting to fill the gap left by state-based governance in terms of rights, norms, services, and protections.

In the present study, I aim to understand the performative strategies and creative practices of Latin American creators who explicitly self-identify as foreigners living in the US and Spain, to assess their aspirations and negotiate a sense of belonging through governance within the content they create online. Thus, the analysis attempts to assess how this platform shapes migrant narratives and creative practices of belonging. This analysis allows us to expand on Marlowe et al.'s (2017) conceptualization of digital belongings, to theorize on the role of social media infrastructures as enablers of alternative forms of platformed belongings.

## 4.2 Literature Review

### 4.2.1 Latin American migration in the US and Spain

Spain and the United States have traditionally been desirable options for the Latin American migrant community, with financial, legal, geographic, and cultural factors as decisive when considering these two countries as possible destinations (Connor & Massey, 2010). In terms of approaches to integration, both countries follow civic integration models, focusing on the acquisition of values established as "ideal", "shared" and "national" (Larin, 2020) and in the case of Spain, language proficiency (European Commission, n.d.; Fernández-Suárez, 2017), as benchmarks for sociocultural integration.

While the possibility of accessing the job market in both countries has been pointed out as relevant in the decision to migrate (Yemane & Fernández-Reino, 2019), the challenges for Latin American migrants remain significant. In the case of the US, this group's low levels of educational achievement among minorities in the country have been linked to their exclusion from the qualified job market (Yemane & Fernández-Reino, 2019), suggesting the existence of structural limitations in educational and work-related opportunities. In Spain, first generation Latinxs are often overqualified for their jobs (Bradatan & Kolloju, 2015) and relegated to construction, cleaning, and care-related occupations (Yemane & Fernández-Reino, 2019).

Furthermore, in the past 5 years, both countries have experienced a political and ideological shift. The recent rise of far-right, anti-immigration party Vox in the Spanish national congress has created new challenges for the migrant community, through calls for the elimination of social benefits and other policies aimed at curbing migratory flows (Simón, 2020). In comparison, Trump's stern rhetoric and policies establishing legal and undocumented migration as a threat to the American economy and safety have profoundly changed and hardened this country's approach to immigration, with more deportations and increased detention rates (Pierce & Steele, 2017). The challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic in both countries have been detrimental to perceptions toward immigration, due to a limited availability of resources and rhetoric that positions the migrant as one of the culprits for the health crisis and in the case of the US, even harsher policies (Garcini et al., 2020).

In the US, increased xenophobia has promoted a surge in instances of hate toward Spanish speakers in this country (Martinez, Rojo & González, 2019), whereas in Spain, its colonial relations with many Latin American countries have derived in a culture that is closer to that of Latin American migrants (Connor & Massey, 2010). Research has shown that Latinx migrants encounter lower levels of discrimination than other migrant groups (Yemane & Fernández-Reino, 2019), but the fact that they are performing jobs that do not match their skill level and training (Bredatan & Kolloju, 2015) suggests that colonial imaginaries and social structures still constitute a problematic boundary for this group of migrants to become full participants in Spanish society.

Thus, the relevance of the Latin American migrant population in both countries under study cannot be denied. In the case of Spain, a large increase in Latin American migrant groups, such as Venezuelan nationals (47%), Hondurans

(32.4%) and Colombians (25.1%) was evidenced in 2018 (European Commission, n.d.). In the case of the US, the prevalence of Latin American migration has been solidly established, with around 51.3% of all migrants originating from Latin America (Yemane & Fernández-Reino, 2019).

The sociopolitical environment that migrants face in their receiving societies constitutes an important aspect in their possibilities to become part of these communities. In the next section I explore the concept of belonging and its implications for emerging practices of fitting in as a migrant in these two nations.

### 4.2.2 Negotiating belonging

Scholars have long been interested in the multiple ways in which migrants embody their belonging. From a socio-linguistic perspective, Heyd (2016) explored narratives of belonging to delve into the changing characteristics of personal diasporic stories in digital spaces and assess emerging linguistic practices of identity and affiliation. Along these lines, Marlowe et al. (2017) advance the theoretical framework of digital belongings to analyze "the dynamic of social participation and social cohesion as it interfaces with contemporary practices of family and friendship" (p.17). These authors consider various forms of identity, and different levels of belonging, analyzed through the functions of digital media in the narrative, communicative and identity-building practices of migrants. In their argument, the role of digital tools is merely instrumental, used to create or maintain connections that resemble in-person communication with family, friends, or diasporic groups. In these cases, social media are deemed as suitable contexts to observe such practices and the examination attempts to understand in-person belonging practices through the use of digital and social media tools. In the present chapter, I aim to extend this concept to consider the socio-technical affordances and configurations of social media –with TikTok as an example– as intimately intertwined with strategies of belonging, in a process where the aspirations of migrants to belong shape their use of social media affordances and these, in turn, mold the embodied belonging possibilities of migrant creators.

We rely on two areas of research to expand on these concepts, on the one hand, media and migration scholarship exploring the (self)representation practices of migrants using digital devices and social media. On the other hand,

Internet research, which illuminates the ways in which platformed sociality diverges from instrumental adaptations of social interactions using digital media.

Researchers in the field of media and migration have explored the aspirational and performative modes of belonging and exclusion enabled by digital media, including research focused on material and constructed first-person accounts by refugees such as the appropriation of refugee selfie practices by mainstream media (Chouliaraki, 2017; Risam, 2018); the deployment of selfie activism to reframe refugees through individual stories, enabling belonging through adherence to dominant ideas of success (Nikunen, 2019); the instrumentalization of first-person migrant accounts to perpetuate ideal modes of belonging versus grassroots media initiatives that enable agency and civic participation by migrants to define their own belonging (Georgiou, 2018). Studies have also assessed the mediated narrative practices of migrants including the amplifying effects of mobile devices for migrants' belonging practices through self-presentations of individual aspirations and achievements (Witteborn, 2019); the documentation of migration trajectories (Labayen & Gutierrez, 2021) and strategies of othering within these narratives (Jaramillo-Dent & Pérez-Rodríguez, 2021); the virtual, interactive and multimodal practices of belonging by forced migrants through digital technologies (Witteborn, 2015).

Research of social media and migration is also relevant, including a model for refugee integration using social media (Alencar, 2018); the digital togetherness established between migrants who share common cultural/national traits and collective experiences in digital spaces (Marino, 2015); the analysis of social media as a significant site of witness for forced migrants (Rae et al., 2018). It is worth noting that migrant portrayals and creative practices often face symbolic borders that confer a sort of "conditional" belonging status that establishes behavioral and cultural requirements to become part of the receiving society (Chouliaraki & Georgiou, 2019; Georgiou, 2018).

Thus, the present research considers this corpus of research and intends to build on it to go beyond multimodality to draw on research related to platformed practices of visibility and influence to assess how these shape and inform new modes of belonging in the sample of migrant creators, considering their aspirations, performativity and self-governance. In the next section, I will

introduce the significance of TikTok as a platform and a suitable example to explore such platformed practices.

### 4.2.3 TikTok, visibility and belonging in the social media ecosystem

TikTok offers an excellent opportunity to explore strategies of belonging due to its popularity, with 1.5 billion downloads and more than 800 million active users (Mohsin, 2020). Moreover, the platform has significantly grown during the pandemic, becoming the top earning App in the iOS App Store in Q2, 2020 (Koetsier, 2020). Its mimetic and viral character has been harnessed by companies to expand their reach, evidencing its potential (De-Casas-Moreno et al., 2020). Finally, TikTok has been identified as a platform where hate speech, including anti-immigration discourse, flourishes (Weimann & Masri, 2020), making it a space worthy of exploration for immigration-related content.

The role of platforms in social interactions has been illustrated by van Dijck (2013), who suggests that they go beyond facilitating communication to offer technological configurations and affordances that promote and/or inhibit interactive exchanges that follow specific characteristics. The importance of platform affordances in users' relationships has been seconded by McVeigh-Shultz and Baym (2015), who conceptualized the idea of vernacular affordance as a process of sense-making in which users of technologies negotiate their own practices with existing material structures. Moreover, the platform vernacular has been defined as the unique mixture of grammatical, logical and stylistic practices in the uses of particular social media platforms' affordances (Gibbs et al., 2015).

Along these lines, Zulli and Zulli (2020) suggest that TikTok encourages mimesis through its content creation capabilities, interaction options and algorithmic content distribution model. Abidin (2021) argues that TikTok has also changed previous logics of visibility. In this sense, she suggests that this platform's post-based virality model –versus other platforms' profile-based popularity– has changed the practices and strategies of creators, who aim for visibility through the inclusion of their short videos in the for you page. According to Abidin (2021) this overarching goal means that tiktokers often sacrifice the construction of a cohesive personal brand to follow the latest content creation trends and include visibility strategies such as the use of certain hashtags, filters, audio tracks, etc. I argue that this platform's coded structure of

mimesis and post-based virality is especially useful to explore the opportunities and challenges faced by traditionally underrepresented voices to exercise their agency.

These perspectives constitute the basis of the proposed expansion on the digital belongings concept advanced by Marlowe et al. (2017) to include contemporary practices that enable migrant creators to appropriate and deploy specific platform vernaculars (Gibbs et al., 2015) and creative elements in order to negotiate narrative, symbolic and technological borders (Chouliaraki & Georgiou, 2019). I suggest that migrant creators harness these possibilities through the deployment of belonging strategies of mimesis, aimed at virality, and enabled by their level of understanding of the platform. In this sense, platformed belongings include traditional understandings of belonging through self-representation and new digital cultures of belonging through social media visibility.

## 4.3 Method

Using a variation of the virtual snowball method (Baltar & Brunet, 2012) a sample of TikTok videos was identified, focusing on the narrative elements and specific affordances of interest.

It is worth noting that the use of hashtags for sampling enables the identification of contents related to a topic of interest, but it also constitutes a limitation because it excludes contents created by people who may not be familiar with hashtagging conventions and those who don't use them. In this sense, the sample was purposive (Palys, 2008) to include only content created by individuals who explicitly self-identified as foreigners residing in the US and Spain (Figure 24).

Scraping was carried out using Python TikTok API Wrapper (Avilash, n.d.), an unofficial Python library that allows scraping of necessary metadata from liked TikTok videos, such as hashtags, descriptions, number of likes and shares, embedded audio, etc. The data collection process was automated by a Python script written by one of the researchers. The script performed a two-step procedure: (1) requesting from the TikTok Server the information regarding videos liked by the researcher's public profile, (2) saving metadata of liked videos in a csv file.

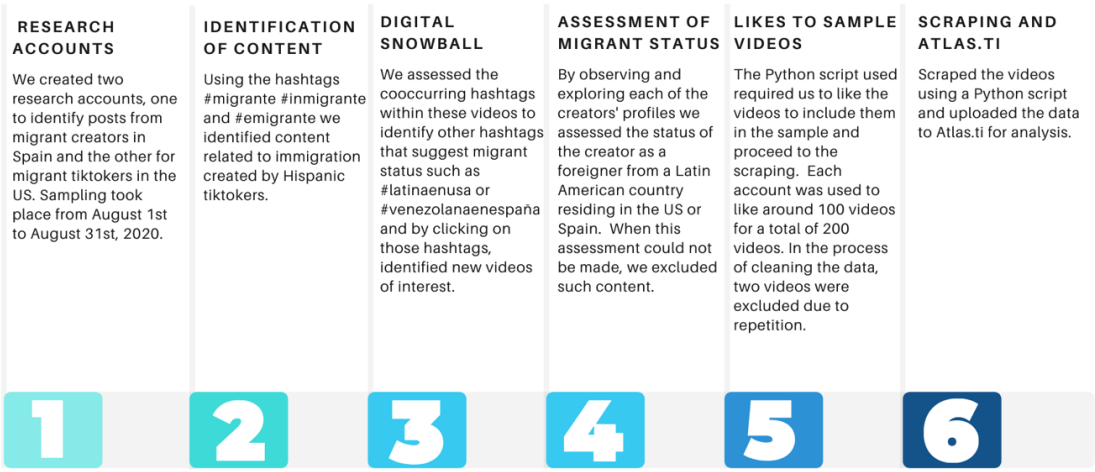


**Figure 24.** Sampling process. Created by the Author.

Due to the ethical challenges that arise from exploring user's social media data without consent (boyd & Crawford, 2012) and to protect creators and their identity, I created illustrations that reflect the original videos. Also, all the quotes and text within the videos have been translated from Spanish, providing an additional layer of anonymity.

In my analysis, I assess how the creative and self-representative practices of migrants on TikTok are constructed as aspirational content, which includes evaluating the creators' attempts to fit their narratives, culture and identity to dominant storylines and formats (Appadurai, 2019). It also involves content that establishes a benchmark of achievement toward the desired life, as described by Witteborn (2019).

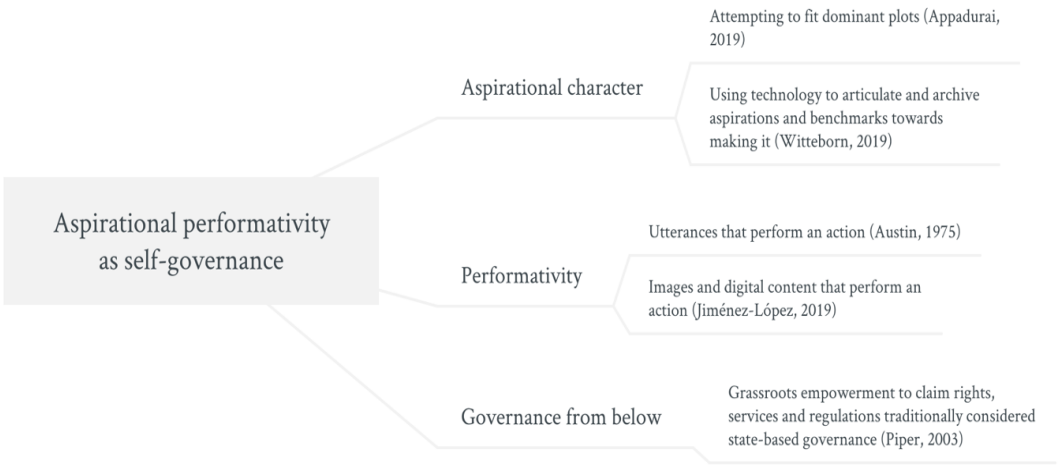


**Figure 25.** Theoretical basis for analysis. Created by the Author.

Moreover, I ascertain whether the migrants' performative expressions of the self constitute bottom-up governance proposals, involving content that provides guidance for the migrant community to exercise their citizenship, navigate services, policies and rights that concern them. These guiding concepts constitute the basis for the conceptualization of platformed belongings.

**Table 5.** Code groups derived for the present study. Created by the Author.

| Code Group | Definition |
|---|---|
| BIO | Includes contents within the creators' Bio, including communicative elements (text, emoji), as well as branding elements (beliefs/phrases, interests/hobbies, call to action, content description, email, name, goals about followers, other social media, products). Communicative functions and topics of interest described through text and emoji were also coded. |
| CAPTION | Describes the contents of the caption in each video, it includes the different types of communicative elements used (text, emoji, hashtag). The communicative functions and topics of interest described through text, emoji and hashtags were also coded. |
| VISUAL | Includes the visual aspect of the video and a label to describe what can be seen in the shot (e.g. visual work, visual journey, visual transport, dance, monologue, one-person dialogue roleplay). The content embedded within the video including emoji are also coded within this code group. The communicative functions and topics of interest described through these components are also coded. |
| TKTK | Includes the affordances and content configurations that are enabled by the platform itself (e.g. embedded text, duo, response to comment, green screen, other effects). |
| AUDIO | This code group includes types of audio (oral, music) whether the audio was original or existing (original, non-original) and practices such as lip-synching. Music genres are also coded (see Figure 31). |
| PLOT | This code group aims to describe narrative plots within the videos, it labels the main themes and topics advanced by each video (e.g. migration as common experience, counter mainstream narratives, comparison, discrimination, difficulty, nostalgia) |

The analysis was conducted on Atlas.ti (V.8.4.5) using a hybrid codebook involving theoretically and inductively derived codes (explained on Figure 25). The main code groups are included in Table 5, they are classified by the location

of the content (Bio; caption; in-video) with types of content as subcodes (text; emoji; hashtag).

Two types of content have their own code groups due to their importance within the sample (audio; visual). Moreover, one code group labels the use of specific TikTok affordances of interest (TKTK) such as the use of embedded text, green screen, duet, response to comment and other effects. In iterative rounds of coding, these codes were also grouped within theoretical frameworks and sub-themes. These groupings are not exclusive, as they refer to practices that happen simultaneously within the same content, but they attempt to provide different perspectives to understand the practices and themes present in the sample analyzed.

Moreover, through iterative rounds of coding, themes describing the relationship between creative practices and the proposed theoretical framework were derived, as well as their relationship with the conceptualization of *platformed belongings*.

Limitations are related to the method selected, for example the hashtag-based sample, which excludes various types of creators, and the intrinsic limitations of content analysis related to the types of inquiry this analysis enables. In the next section I will describe the results within each of the theoretical frameworks proposed to guide this study.

## 4.4. Results

### 4.4.1 The aspirational and memetic nature of TikTok

Within aspirational content, migrant creators' collective negotiation of symbolic bordering practices (Chouliaraki & Georgiou, 2019) is deployed through narrative strategies that establish similarities between migrants. Storylines within the migration as common experience theme reflect the aspiration of affinity with people going through a similar journey, which may include difficulties, nostalgia, discrimination, identities, among others. This is done by using memetic configurations enabled by TikTok's affordances (Zulli & Zulli, 2020) that illustrate the unique character of this platformed belonging practice. Within collective experiences, the financial and work-related motivations to emigrate to the US and Spain are central in these plots. In this sense, their level of integration in the labor market of their receiving country presents a series of challenges (Yemane

& Fernández-Reino, 2019). This section discusses such aspirations and narratives.

Thus, migrants' collective limitations and difficulties to fulfill their aspirations are expressed in different ways. Thus, a noteworthy format that promotes different digital belongings is TikTok's duet format. In this case, tiktokers use an existing video as the basis for their own, and both appear side-by-side, enabling narrative imitation, which refers to content that reflects on a similar experience (Zulli & Zulli, 2020). Figure 26 illustrates an example of a duet video featuring a female migrant (right) describing her difficulties using embedded text:

> I came to Spain after obtaining my journalism degree. I dreamt of having my own radio station (...). I have worked as a cleaner and caretaker for seniors. One day, while cleaning bathrooms (...) I asked a woman to be careful because the floor was wet. She spat in my face and said 'fucking immigrants... an ignorant Indian with no education cannot order me around.' I cried a lot, but the next day I woke up and kept going.

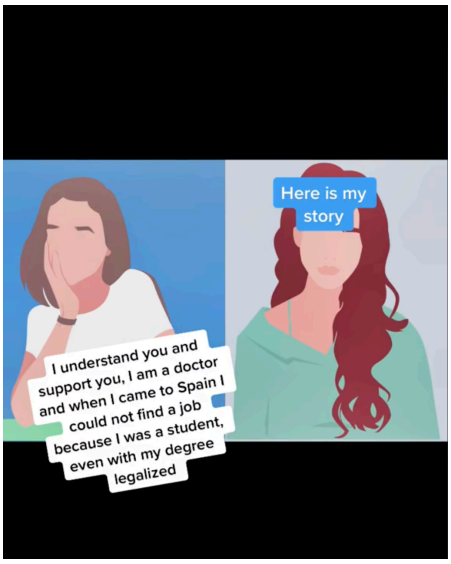


**Figure 26.** Illustration of duet configuration to establish affinity. Created and translated by the Author.

Moreover, the second creator (left) uses text bubbles to respond to each of the statements by the original creator:

> I understand you and I support you...I am a doctor and when I came to Spain I could not work because I was a student, even though my degree was certified….I worked handing out flyers and waiting tables (...) I was constantly humiliated at these jobs...You are not alone.

The video features a popular audio meme with lyrics about the difficulties of life's journeys (vallenato pop), lip synched by the original creator (right). This specific track has been used in 55.7K videos within the platform and has become popular among migrant creators. The use of popular audio tracks has been identified as a strategy to enhance the visibility of creators' content (Zulli & Zulli, 2020). This exemplifies a platformed belonging practice that strengthens the common experience narrative among migrant creators through its implementation within the duet format. It also reflects a form of digital togetherness (Marino, 2015) enabled by the commonalities between the two and the seemingly safe space created, albeit lacking intimacy.

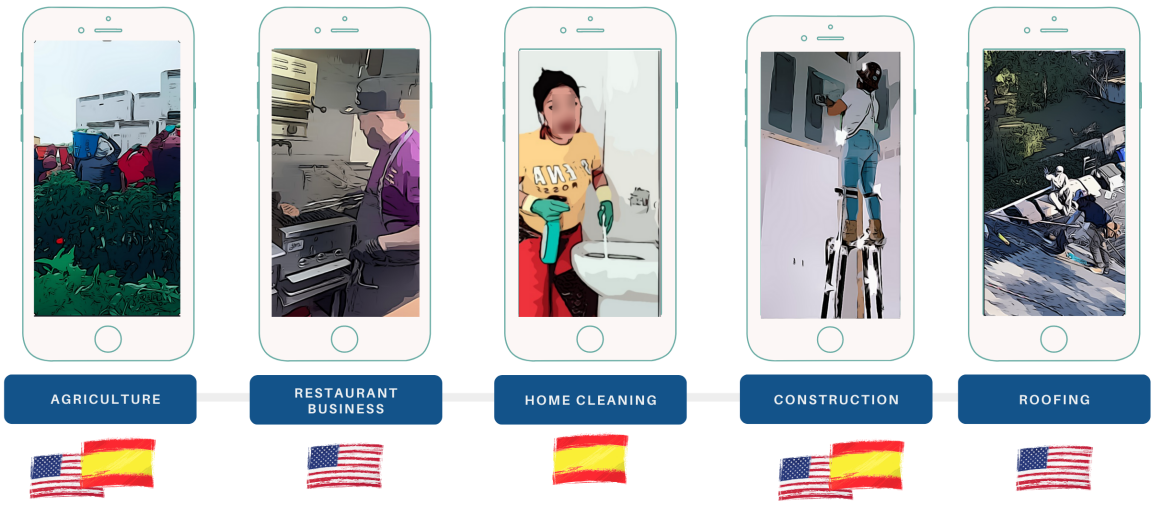


**Figure 27.** Visual portrayals of work.

This public display of shared vulnerability emphasizes the collective challenges migrants face in Spain to achieve their professional aspirations. In terms of the labor market, it supports findings that suggest Latin American

migrants are overqualified for their jobs (Bredatan & Kolloju, 2015) as well as the fact that female migrants are overwhelmingly constrained to caretaking and cleaning occupations (Yemane & Fernández-Reino, 2019). This example highlights the existence of occupational symbolic bordering (Chouliaraki & Georgiou, 2019) by illustrating the limitations in the types of jobs migrants can do, regardless of their education level. Figure 27 reflects the jobs migrant creators undertake in each country.

Although immigration discourse in Spain is often linked to employment (Fernández-Suárez, 2017) and the US defines the ability to self-advance and transcend one's provenance, however humble it may be, as desirable within the myth of the American Dream (Kimmage, 2011), Latin American migrants seem to be occupationally pigeonholed in both countries, supporting research by Yemane and Fernández-Reino (2019).

### 4.4.2 Aspirational performativity in migratory journeys

Aspirational plots also underscore migratory journey narratives. In the case of the US sample, there is a narrative focus on the shared difficulties of the journey through the desert and crossing the border wall. This includes the border-crossing journey, ICE, detention and death. The extreme experience of crossing the border by foot is central in this plot, and in some cases, the deaths and abuse suffered are narrated as part of sad corrido songs. In the US sample, Mexican corrido lyrics such as "I am here, far from where I was born, I crossed the Rio Bravo to get here" and "I crossed in my first attempt...my dream was not that far" position the journey as part of an aspirational storyline toward migratory goals beyond the wall (Labayen & Gutierrez, 2021).

In the case of Spain, Latin American migration involves airports and passports, reflected through photo montages and nostalgia toward what is left behind. The difficulty in this case is conveyed by the longing of the native country rather than physical danger or inhuman conditions in the journey (Figure 28).

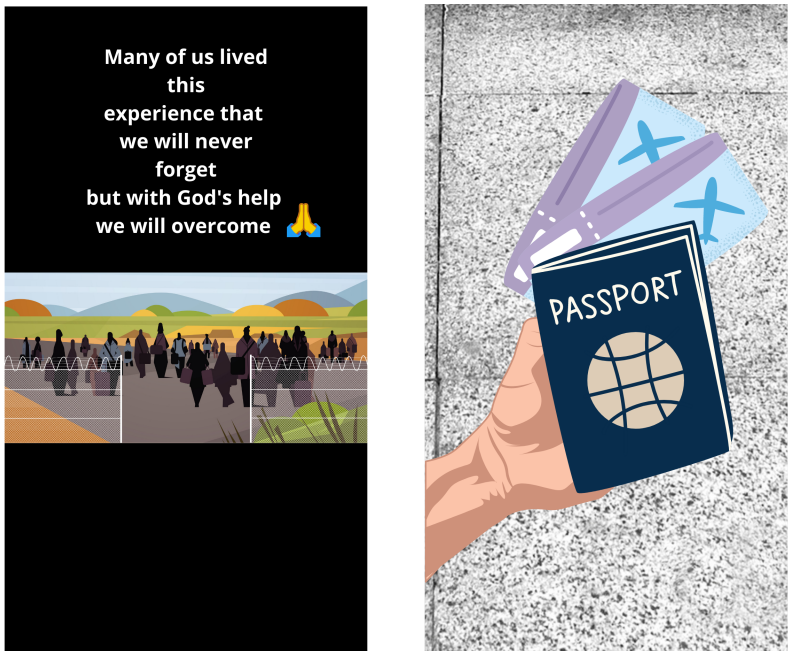


**Figure 28.** Illustrations of Journey-related storylines in the US and Spain respectively. Created and translated by the Author.

Journey-centered narratives enable a then vs. now comparison to highlight a nuanced definition of success by emphasizing previous difficulties to current achievement. Success here is characterized by the opportunity to work, and it allows the migrant to highlight the achievements of the journey while self-representing certain emotions, such as gratefulness. These desirable values are illustrated through platformed belonging creative practices within self-portrayals such as that of the grateful migrant. This self-representation appears in the use of hashtags and Bio descriptions across the sample, as well as entire videos devoted to gratefulness toward the receiving nation. Figure 29 illustrates such content in each country. Both share an aspiration to belong to their receiving society through their story, by fulfilling national value acquisition requirements to belong within civic integration models (Larin, 2020), reflecting the familiarity of migrant creators with values that are required in order to belong (Chouliaraki & Georgiou, 2019; Georgiou, 2018; Nikunen, 2019).

In this case, both creators take advantage of a comparison between their aspiration and what has been achieved. On the left, the embedded text with a yellow background refers to the time since the creator arrived to Spain, with a performative display of Spanishness. The creator combines clothing featuring national symbols and colors, with platform affordances such as Spanish flag emoji and the hashtag #vivaespaña with a patriotic storyline, reflecting her

appreciation of national symbols and color palettes. On the right, the creator presents a performative self-representation of the good migrant ideal (Kibria, O'Leary & Bowman, 2018). The embedded text states, "Essential workers" and "under the rain", depicting solid work ethics under subpar working conditions, positioning herself as an essential worker during the pandemic, regardless of weather. The aspirational caption refers to the American Dream, suggesting that she is still in a journey toward her achievements (Witteborn, 2019). She also uses flag emoji to represent her nationality/place of residence and #campesina hashtags that connect her content with that of other farmers, establishing occupational belonging with other creators through these connective elements.

**Figure 29.** Illustration of the Grateful Migrant storyline in Spain and Good Migrant self-portrayal in the US. Illustrated and translated by the Author.

Both videos use embedded text to narrate the story and incorporate existing audio memes to accompany these storylines (Abidin, 2021). In the Spanish case, a flamenco pop song "I wouldn't change you for anything (...) I would die of love for you". In the US case a Mexican corrido song "We are here for the American dream, we all agree that it is not easy here." This form of platformed belonging combines aspirations to become part of the dominant culture/society through patriotic values and work ethics, by deploying affordances of interest. In both cases, the story is constructed through a

combination of suggestive visual appeals, mimetic elements such as the reuse of existing audio, and unique storylines enabled by embedded text, emoji and hashtags. Allegiance to the receiving country is present in both. In the Spanish case, visually and in lyrics and in the US case through lyrics and captions referring to the "American Dream."

Previous examples show that an important platformed belonging practice involves the use of embedded text in videos, as portrayed in Figure 30.

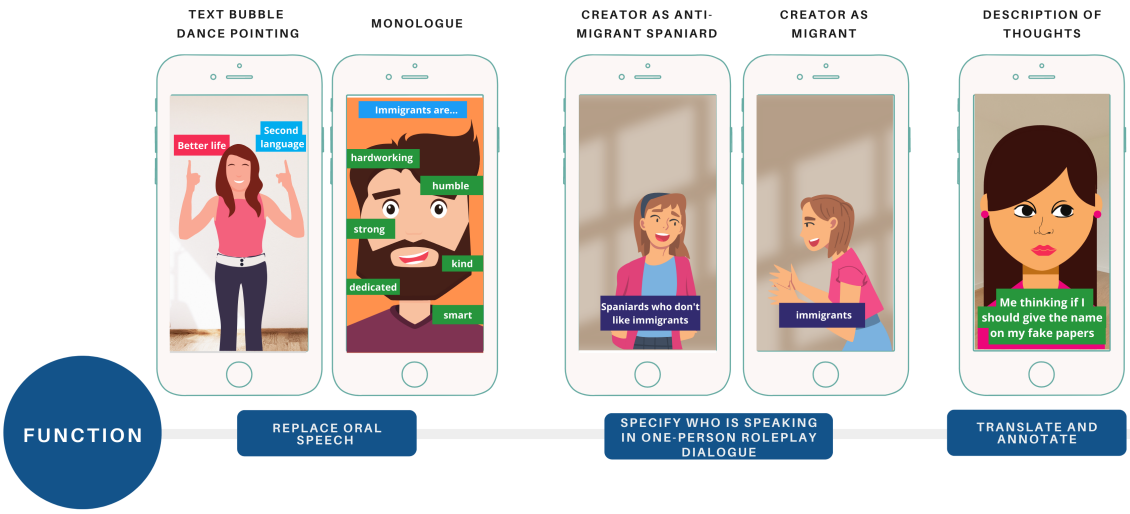


**Figure 30.** Illustrations of functions of embedded text. Illustrated and translated by the Author.

Embedded text functions are interesting, especially considering the linguistic and narrative limitations that this short-video format presents to creators. The use of text to replace oral speech and use of viral audio memes is widespread in the platform, as explained in the previous sections. It enables creators to customize the storyline and adapt it to their own experience without compromising the visibility provided by the use of an existing, highly viral audio track. The first function, which refers to text bubble dance pointing, enables the customization of personal migratory stories using different narrative formats of interest which include reasons to migrate, and advantages of the receiving country. Both examples end with the difficulties experienced. This establishes various modes of belonging, from the dual nature of their national identity to the use of mimetic practices present throughout the platform, to tell a unique story. Thus, platformed belongings are established in relation to other migrants and also toward other tiktokers, through mimesis (Zulli & Zulli, 2020). Another example involves embedded comments received from native citizens about

each migrant creator, adapted to the country of nationality, this suggests an emphasis in existing stereotypes about Latin American migrants through laid back, creative content. This establishes TikTok as a sort of site of witness (Rae et al., 2018), where creators themselves document their own experiences, providing a sense of credibility –due to the first-person account– of what life it is like for migrants in the receiving society.

The one-person roleplay dialogue is also characteristic of the TikTok vernacular (Zulli & Zulli, 2020). As portrayed in Figure 30, it was used to depict exchanges between migrants and natives as a form of performative agency through stereotypical exchanges (Opfermann, 2020).

### 4.4.3 Performative platformed belongings

In this section, specific creative practices of interest will be described and analyzed to further understand how these creators resignify migration and debunk beliefs regarding migrants using TikTok's affordances and vernaculars.

The use of specific audio tracks is noteworthy as a platformed belonging practice, as diaspora, creativity and visibility strategies converge with the functionalities of the platform. In this sense, music and utterances of cultural belonging emerge as definers of a sort of soundtrack for specific migrant communities in both countries. The ways in which these audio files are used exemplify the aspirational character of this content, as it suggests an attempt to fit (Witteborn, 2019) with other tiktokers in the platform through characteristic vernacular practices and content creation configurations. They do this while reflecting their cultural identities through their choice of music genre. These creative strategies include lip-syncing oral (spoken) and melodic (sang) audios. The use of audios that are viral among generalist tiktokers is also noteworthy as a practice aimed at visibility (Abidin, 2021; Zulli & Zulli, 2020). This is illustrated by a video where the very popular song Ride it (2.8M videos) is used with embedded text bubbles describing the stereotypes that exist in Spain about Argentinians. Moreover, another practice of interest involves a music track called Laxed-Siren Beat (51.3M videos) that has become a staple of the TikTok community and a remix version adapting it into a new audio track to be used by Salvadorean creators.

These practices reflect Zulli and Zulli's (2020) argument that the remix of existing components seems to be more effective in making the content visible

on this platform. Moreover, it aids in musicalizing a specific storyline (Abidin, 2021) that includes a solid cultural component that reflects an identity marked by nationality, creative practices and an insider knowledge of trends and affordances on TikTok. In their use of music, creators engage in forms of "(in)visible relationalities" of belonging, similar to those described by De Martini Ugolotti (2020, p.3), but adapted to the digital space. Stemming from his argument, TikTok functions as an informal space of co-creation where the choice and modification of existing audio tracks, and their integration to video narratives constitute mimetic statements to collectively reflect on experiences of difficulty, success and uncertainty that characterize migratory experiences. Platformed belongings emerge toward fellow Latinx tiktokers through a combination of narrative plots in lyrics, embedded text and culturally relevant musical choices as reflected in Figure 31.

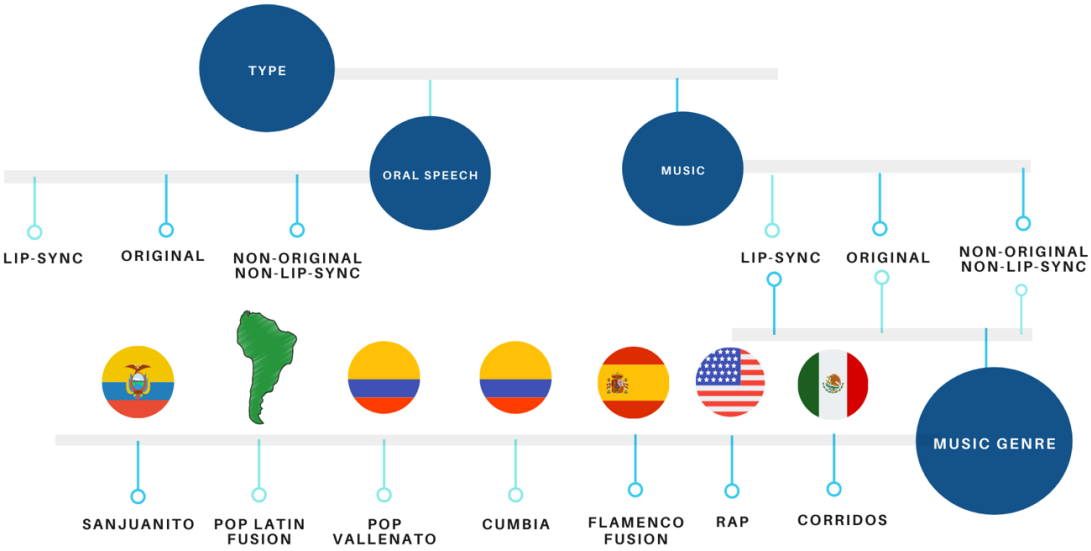


**Figure 31.** Audio categories used by Latin American migrant creators. Created by the Author.

In this case, the use of lyrics and specific music genres is inextricably linked to performative and empowering practices within self-governance, which will be described in the next sections.

Within the sample, platformed belongings occur in relation to multiple identities and aspirations to fit and also within specific audience niches. There are widespread practices, such as the use of visibility hashtags including #foryou, #fyp and their Spanish versions #parati; there are also self-explanatory examples

such as #viral and #trend, which are also present in Spanish. However, there are more refined visibility hashtags such as #xyzbca and its variations, which respond to a belief of unknown origin among tiktokers that its use can trick the algorithm into promoting said content in a practice coined as algorithmic gossip (Bishop, 2019). Conversations about the use of such hashtags and the results of these uses are often shared in forums (MpSocial, 2019) where creators exchange experiences in the use of certain hashtags and their combinations to "test" the algorithm. In this context, I argue that these visibility strategies illustrate the migrants' agency to amplify their own voice and make it heard. They emerge as unafraid agents who enter a conversation about themselves, an important process where Couldry's (2010) embodied, self-representative and active nature of voice is deployed. In this case, voice is neither given, nor enabled but it is taken, seized and reclaimed as inherently human and undeniable, by a community that has been excluded from their own stories, which have been told and retold by others (e. g. Georgiou, 2018; Jaramillo-Dent & Pérez-Rodríguez, 2021). Moreover, these practices constitute a mediated defiance of established beliefs that limit migrants' agency in deciding where to live (Labayen & Gutierrez, 2021). These strategies reflect a negotiation with social media logics and structures through the use of vernacular affordances (McVeigh-Schultz & Baym, 2015). In this case migrant creators attempt to go beyond perceptibility to become salient and even viral among some circles, taking advantage of existing "algorithmic imaginaries" (Bucher, 2017) that enable a mode of platformed belonging through inclusion in the for you page.

This is even more evident in posts that include hashtags that reveal the intended recipient of the content, which may include COO and RC or a succession of Latin American countries, with hashtags such as #MAGA in the US (referring to Trump's slogan Make America Great Again) and #Vox in Spain (referring to the far-right party with legislative representation), usually paired with content responding to, debunking or challenging statements by these political movements. It is important to note that, as Georgiou (2018) reminds us, the presence of migrant voices does not involve their definite recognition, due to existing structural limitations and symbolic bordering practices that exist in the digital realm. Thus, the different levels of platformed belonging, from memetic content to the competent use of enhanced visibility strategies is in constant contestation with oppressive configurations, narratives, and limitations, that in many ways constitute bordering strategies (Chouliaraki & Georgiou,

2019; Georgiou, 2018). Thus, these narratives become visible through their inclusion in certain videos and in the adaptation of personal experiences to well-established TikTok configurations, as exemplified in the next section.

### 4.4.4 Performative creative practices to resignify migrant identities and narratives

Content considered performative involves storylines that counter mainstream narratives, where attempts are made to respond and, in some cases, debunk existing beliefs about migrants. This is done through the inclusion of creative and narrative elements that establish the multiple identities of the creator, in line with previous research on digital migrant identities and belonging (Marlowe et al., 2017; Heyd, 2016). Thus, the migrant tiktoker's relational resilience is displayed in their use of vernaculars and affordances, enabling a complex aggregation of digital identities (Udwan et al., 2020). This is reflected by the twofold goal within this type of content, on the one hand clarifying the reality of life for prospective migrants and on the other hand debunking and challenging widespread misinformation about migrants for audiences within the RC.

In this sense, the redefinition of the migrant goes beyond positioning this segment of the population as the "good migrant", namely a deserving, law abiding, hardworking person who is a family member (Kibria et al., 2018) to establish them as necessary within the receiving society and especially important in the face of the health crisis brought by the COVID-19 pandemic. The "migrant as…" themes fall within this type of counternarrative and go from an argument for equality and humanity to establish migrants as students, professionals, entrepreneurs, essential workers, among others. Performative utterances and actions emphasize migrant identities that counter mainstream ideas and widespread beliefs in both countries but often fall within arguments for worthiness (Georgiou, 2018; Nikunen, 2019).

The most common sub-category within this topic is the migrant as a worker, and the migratory experience as an aspirational quest for an improved life. An example of this includes questioning of widespread beliefs of migrants and their actions as felonies and contrasting work and crime as opposites,

> Similar to others, we work to make sure that we have everything we need. I don't understand what the crime is of working hard to earn a few pesitos (Rap, US).

These lyrics also clarify some of the motivations and actions that compel people to migrate, establishing the work as *hard* and the pay as *scarce*. This example positions the migrant as unthreatening (Benson, 2013) but within the boundaries of victimhood and marginalization expected (Georgiou, 2018) while proving civic integration by being law abiding and hardworking (Larin, 2020).

Some creators portray themselves and migrants in general as brave, and strong in some cases going further to say that migration makes people better at certain desirable occupations such as entrepreneurship due to the resilience developed through the migration experience. An example of this is reflected in this original oral audio in Spain "three things from my migrant experience that made me a better entrepreneur." These narratives make a strong equality argument by positioning the migrant in the same realm as non-migrants and the migratory experience as an enriching attribute, rather than a disadvantage. These practices reflect a resistance in the face of dominant narratives (Georgiou, 2018). However, they could also be seen as attempts to establish worthiness by aligning with neoliberal values of productivity (Georgiou, 2019). In the US, entrepreneurial messages align with the American Dream narrative "I came 12 years ago from El Salvador. I used to be homeless (...) and now I own a restaurant" as a benchmark for economic success and possibility regardless of the starting point (Kimmage, 2011).

Another example, which is only present among creators in Spain, represents a powerful counternarrative that could be defined as a more aggressive, empowered protest. This Rap audio meme has been used 840 times. First, it clarifies a widespread belief that migrants take Spaniards' jobs (McMahon, 2018) "Immigrants don't come to take your job away, they are doing those jobs that you don't want." This part of the song also positions migrants as subalterns who deserve to be in the country because they take jobs nobody wants (Georgiou, 2018) engaging in support for migrants through occupational symbolic bordering and worthiness to belong (Chouliaraki & Georgiou, 2019; Nikunen, 2019). The tone changes in the second part, where the song constructs a narrative that faces migrants and native citizens as opposites and positions the migrant as hardworking and the Spaniard as reliant on public aid,

> This myth must be nipped in the bud, while you are at home, they are lifting the country. You are sleeping, happy, receiving public aid, while they are contributing in order to get you paid.

### 4.4.5 Self-governance

In the sample analyzed, these may involve practical information about getting an apartment, visa documents (Figure 32), as well as discussions about rights. Thus, self-governance videos mostly fall into the monologue category and use original audio, as they reflect a person speaking directly to users and interested viewers.

**Figure 32.** Illustration of videos about practical aspects of migration in Spain. Created and translated by the Author.

A noteworthy storyline that is present in the Spanish sample involves the legitimization of migration, and a call to gain representation in leadership roles and become part of all levels of society, not only those where migrant people are allowed, needed or helpful "we have entered the commercial realm and have businesses (…) but we need to enter the government institutions (…) we are a group that contribute to society and should not be sub-represented as we are." It goes beyond the idea of or the good migrant worker (Kibria et al., 2018)

to establish the need for legislative and electoral representation to match the migrant population in the country, in an empowering use of migrant voice (Couldry, 2010; Georgiou, 2018; Nikunen, 2019). This content also uses hashtags related to the intended audience, and directs content to Vox, the far-right party, suggesting an attempt to challenge and argue with opposers. This is an interesting take on the rights of migrants in their RC because once again, there is a solid equality argument that establishes the migrant as deserving of representation in government.

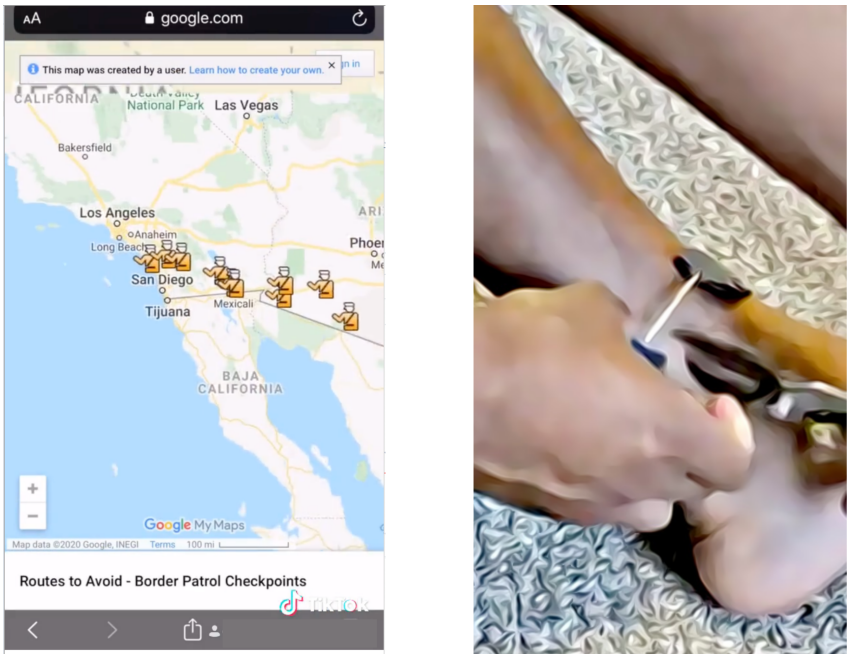


**Figure 33.** Illustrations of videos that challenge border-crossing limitations in the US.

Moreover, in some cases, self-governance appears in the form of stern and fearless challenges to oppression, establishing the right to migrate through comedic content about deported migrants returning, videos that show how to deactivate a GPS ankle bracelet, as well as digital strategies to avoid border patrol checkpoints when crossing the US-Mexico border (Figure 33). These contents establish any means used to migrate as adequate, providing resources to enable border crossing, and challenging material means of border enforcement recognizing these actions as acts of survival (Labayen & Gutiérrez, 2021).

Within the governance theme, some of these creators have achieved the level of minority celebrity, a concept that refers to social media influencers

whose "fame and recognition is founded on commodifying and representing a marginalized (…) demographic of society." (Abidin, 2019, p. 1). In the sample analyzed there are 41 profiles with over 10K followers and 11 with over 100K, evidencing the reach and influence some of these tiktokers have achieved. In all the cases presented here, the creators/influencers self-identify as foreigners living in Spain and the US and some monetize their status as migrants to gain followers from this community through calls for follows and shares.

Thus, the present analysis suggests that grassroots attempts at self-governance as described by Piper (2003) are present in the sample. These reflect platformed belonging practices aimed at reaching intended audiences and adapting the information offered to current needs of the diverse migrant community. They use enhanced visibility strategies to reach and enter a conversation with their audience and seem to effectively bridge the gap left by public and other organizations to cater to the needs of migrants.

## 4.5 Conclusions

The present study aims to understand the content creation strategies of Latin American migrants living in Spain and the US. The use of platformed belonging practices emerges as especially significant because, if successful, these contents may enter in dialogue with other migratory narratives with opportunities of interest. Thus, the use of these elements and creative practices represents an attempt at going beyond aspirations to fit (Appadurai, 2019) toward perceptibility (Witteborn, 2015) to reach visibility (Georgiou, 2018) and finally use their own voice (Couldry, 2010). The seemingly strategic use of certain affordances and vernaculars that characterize and differentiate TikTok from other platforms, namely its memetic nature (Zulli & Zulli, 2020) and visibility possibilities (Abidin, 2021), make it the perfect context to test and experiment the reach and opportunities of underrepresented segments of the population to embody different belongings (Marlowe et al., 2017).

In this sense, platformed belonging practices combine migrant tiktokers' familiarity with algorithmic imaginaries (Bucher, 2017) with their endeavors to belong through (self) representations that go from marginalized to aspirational and empowered. The possibilities to negotiate migrant belongings through the use of platform vernaculars (Gibbs et al., 2015) and vernacular affordances (McVeigh-Schultz & Baym, 2015) are harnessed through migrant communities'

appropriation of the structural mimesis (Zulli & Zulli, 2020) that characterizes TikTok. The co-existence of audio and visual memes that are unique to migrant tiktokers and those that are generalized in the platform suggest the construction of multiprongued identities and belongings of resilience (Udwan et al., 2020), both in terms of their cultural/national selves as well as their digital persona. These practices reflect the aspirational character of migrant storylines, which need to fit (Appadurai, 2019) but it also shows the creation of unique diasporic spaces where the multiple creative practices and experiences of migrant tiktokers can fit and connect. In this case, within the platformed context, while reaching a variety of digital audiences. However, some of these narratives seem to constitute attempts to justify migrants' worthiness and deservingness in each of these countries (Georgiou, 2018; 2019; Nikunen, 2019) suggesting their awareness of symbolic borders and conditional belongings (Chouliaraki & Georgiou, 2019; Georgiou, 2018) that define their role in their receiving society.

The themes of these narratives become relevant as part of a collective story from the migrants themselves and one that speaks of nostalgia, hard work, discrimination and difficulties but also of empowerment and success, of gratefulness and belonging. They go from narratives that fit expected molds to those that break with expectations and forcefully challenge them, through content that is honest, in some cases raw and undeniable. Future work could focus on the privacy and safety implications of this type of creative and visibility practices for vulnerable populations, such as migrants.

# Chapter 5

**Immigrant influencers' diversity and (in)visibility on TikTok**

# Chapter 5: Immigrant influencers' diversity and (in)visibility

This chapter explores how Latin American immigrant influencers build their online personas. It focuses on the ways in which their migratory experience shapes their portrayed identities. It also explores de range of ideologies and identity traits conveyed by these creators. Their negotiations with the platform, its moderation guidelines, and the algorithmic feed are also considered, to understand the platformed nature of their stories.

## 5.1 Introduction

Internet research has traditionally focused on microcelebrity phenomena anchored in the Global North, which have shaped and framed leading understandings of the modes of popularity that are native to online contexts. This has been observed by Internet scholars who have approached this issue by emphasizing diverse microcelebrity cases in understudied regions and minority groups (Abidin, 2019; Abidin & Brown, 2019; Semati & Zambon, 2021). Meanwhile, the digital practices of immigrants have traditionally been studied in terms of their unique integration and adaptation needs (Alencar, 2020) as well as their self-representations and archiving practices (Leurs, 2017a) emphasizing their unique vulnerabilities to datafication and categorization by private and state actors within their receiving societies (Witteborn, 2021). Thus, their agency and uniqueness as influencers within their own communities and beyond has been largely overlooked by research in media and migration as well as Internet research, with the few exceptions mentioned before. The present study attempts to bridge this gap by highlighting the role of Latinx immigrants in Spain and the US who have reached a significant following on TikTok, to assess the ways in which they achieve a position of influence and negotiate their own identities within the algorithmic (in)visibility enabled by the platform.

For this, I start with an overview of previous scholarship on the subject, considering the lens of Internet microcelebrity (Abidin, 2018; Marwick, 2013; Senft, 2013), the dimensions of the online persona (Moore et al., 2017) and a constructivist perspective of identity (Hall, 2019). I then explore the negotiation with platform policies and politics (Gillespie, 2010, 2018) and algorithmic visibility (Bishop, 2019; Bucher, 2012). Media and migration scholarship will also be instrumental to understand the approaches and motivations of immigrants to engage in content creation (Leurs, 2017a) and the possible opportunities of niche Internet celebrity and (in)visibility strategies that reflect their agency within the platform. I then move to describe the research process with a focus on the appropriateness of the narrative case study approach to delve into the vast diversity among Latinx immigrant tiktokers. This enables us to delve into the main objective of the present study which is to explore how their creative practices and life experiences shape their microcelebrity identities and strategies for algorithmic (in)visibility. The results provide insights about their multidimensional online personas, including their platformed strategies to

present controversial political content, their creative approaches to moderation, and the ways in which their content models the "correct" ways to be an immigrant and take action in their own unique microcelebrity styles.

## 5.2 Literature review

### 5.2.1 TikTok in the social media ecosystem

TikTok is a social media platform owned by the Chinese company ByteDance launched in 2014 and merged with Musical.ly in 2018 after ByteDance purchased it and incorporated it to the existing TikTok platform (Anderson, 2020). The social media app has grown exponentially to become the 7th largest with 689 million active users accessing every month as of Q1 2021 (Mohsin, 2021).

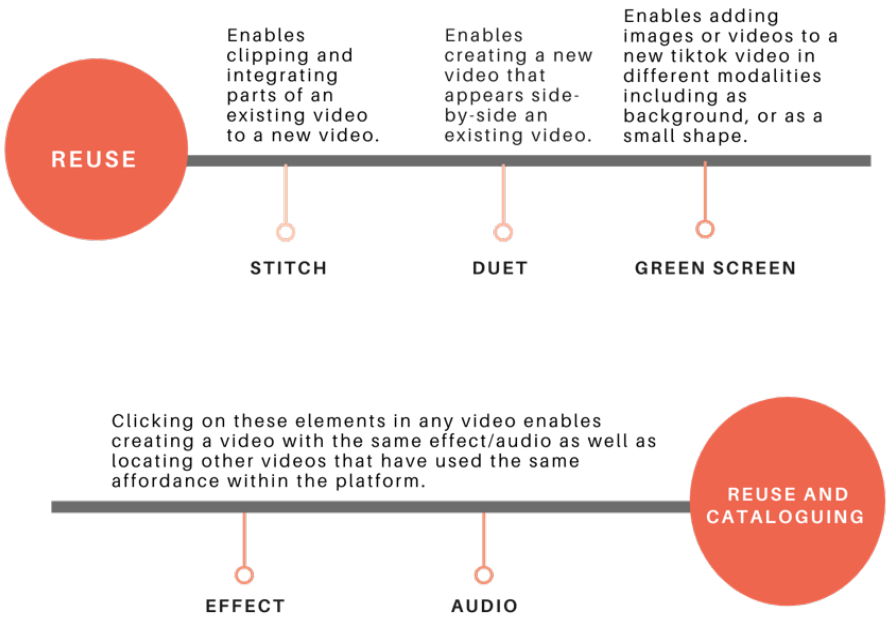


**Figure 34.** TikTok's content reuse and cataloguing possibilities of interest for this study (not comprehensive). Created by the Author based on (Abidin, 2021; Hutchinson, 2020; Zulli & Zulli, 2020)

The unique affordances of TikTok are relevant to the study of influencers and content creators due to the singularities of this platform in terms of visibility and mimesis (Abidin, 2021; Zulli & Zulli, 2020). It offers a sole content format – 15-to-180-seconds vertical video–and a unique *for you* algorithmic wall that enables content to become highly viral regardless of the connections between

users (De-Casas-Moreno et al., 2020) expanding the viralization possibilities for creators. Moreover, authors have explored the structurally mimetic nature of TikTok (Zulli & Zulli, 2020) and the functionalities and content creation configurations it offers (Figure 34), which are relevant to understand how the platform shapes content creators' negotiations of their own (in)visibility and interactions with other tiktokers and their viewers/followers.

The platform's community guidelines specifically mention a variety of protected groups in their "hateful behavior" moderation norms that are relevant to the present study. These guidelines include speech that attacks people because of their race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, caste and immigration status (TikTok, n.d.). However, minority creators have recently voiced their concerns, and some have even left the platform due to unequal treatment in moderation policies. A recent example includes Black creators who have attempted to flag racist accounts and content through response videos and had their content taken down by the platform due to "harassment and bullying" while the original racist posts and accounts were not deleted (Contreras & Martinez, 2021).

In response to censorship and moderation issues that disproportionally affect minority creators, TikTok has justified them as algorithmic glitches and errors. Meanwhile, minority creators have also pointed to problematic differences that allow phrases such as "I am a neo nazi" to be accepted and "Supporting Black voices" to be flagged as inappropriate (Ohlheiser, 2021). This aligns with previous literature on systemic algorithmic oppression issues for the Black community in search engines (Noble, 2018) and the ways in which new technologies perpetuate offline inequalities through biased code (Benjamin, 2019). The problems racial and ethnic minorities face could be applicable to immigrants, who are often members of these minority groups, while the hybrid human-algorithmic moderation model of social media platforms such as TikTok lends itself to the analysis of moderation (in)justice issues and the ways in which content creators negotiate their own visibility with these systems.

Moreover, TikTok is a mobile app, where content creation possibilities are available mainly through its mobile version. This is relevant, as research on media and migration has suggested that mobile connectivity provides immigrants with access to information of interest, content creation and archiving possibilities.

### 5.2.2 Immigrant identities, online personas and social media practices

In the present chapter I take a social constructivist approach to identity as a trait that is not static, but shaped and changed through a process of negotiation within the contexts where the individual exists (Hall, 2019). These identities develop beyond their traditional connotations –such as religion, gender, race and ethnicity– to include online identities shaped by their platformed actions and behaviors (Senft, 2013). In the case of Internet microcelebrities, some aspects of their identity are shaped through strategic self-branding (Marwick, 2013). In this case, TikTok functions as a digital environment where creators position themselves in relation to their mediated contexts and stated connections on and offline, as portrayed in their content and in the conversations carried out with them.

In this case, Moore et al.'s (2017) online persona lens provides a multidimensional framework to understand these behaviors and strategies as they occur in online spaces through five dimensions. (1) The public persona –which is shaped by the shift towards an increasingly public exposure and visibility– is often a sharper and perfected version of the self that follows established conventions of correct publicness in the face of a growing audience. (2) The mediatized persona refers to the media formats and skills that shape today's digital content creation and sharing, in a constant negotiation with the platform and online communities, resulting in a set of media identities shaped by interactions and meaning making between audiences and creator. (3) The performative persona emphasizes actions and content creation practices that reflect the different aspects of the creator's identity such as gender, interests, profession, stances, among others; this is done in a way that combines the authentic and fictitious self, in a complex blend of various aspects that are part of identity. (4) The collective persona reflects the individual as a node that connects with various publics of different sizes and characteristics. (5) The value dimension refers to the intentions behind the creation of specific personas and the shift between different persona registers and self-presentations to cater to diverse publics, intentions, and the achievement of goals such as prestige, fame, among others.

The role of social media in identity formation and online persona presentation through its archiving and placemaking possibilities has been

solidified in media and migration scholarship. Thus, the possibilities of social media to collect migratory experiences and their implications for identities and belongings in different immigration stages are reflected in studies related to the narration of life stories, from migratory journeys (Labayen & Gutierrez, 2021) to the practices of self-representation as devices to establish deservingness (Nikunen, 2019). Moreover, others have focused on the affinity and affective connection facilitated by social media (Marino, 2015; Marlowe et al., 2017) and the aspirations and achievements enabled by mobile social media (Witteborn, 2015; 2019). The political immigrant identities established through social media content for agency and rights claims (Leurs, 2017a) and their negotiation with real and symbolic borders (Chouliaraki & Georgiou, 2019) have also been explored. In the case of the Latin American community in the US specifically, researchers have focused on the ways in which social media enables simple and multi-present connectivity among families, who often share online content and digital materials (Bodinger-deUriarte & Valgeirsson, 2019). These perspectives are relevant to contextualize the functions of social media content creation by immigrants with those of immigrant microcelebrities to assess how these evolve once creators become more popular.

An important consideration for the exploration of identity is the diversity among Latinx immigrant populations' national origins and migratory experiences, as well as their political and ideological stance, which in many cases will shape their public-facing affiliations and online personas. In this sense both countries boast large and diverse Latin American immigrant populations due to aspects such as culture, geography, legislation, and financial opportunity, that motivate them to choose these two destinations (Connor & Massey, 2010). The political heterogeneity of the Latinx community is also relevant, as recent research suggests that immigration issues are not prioritized equally across Latin Americans in the US and Trump has attracted a relevant following among this group (Galbraith & Callister, 2020).

### 5.2.3 Diversity in Internet Microcelebrity

The current celebrity ecosystem has been described as one where a range of networked, transnational publics navigate and negotiate ideologically diverse provocations, and where a range of identities related to race, nationality and class are performed (Semati & Zambon, 2021). Similarly, Internet microcelebrity

has been conceptualized on the basis of strategic practices and processes (Abidin, 2018) where metrics like the number of followers are less important than the feeling of authenticity and interactivity conveyed (Marwick, 2013). Thus, in these processes and strategic actions, the relationship established with followers is critical (Abidin, 2018) as well as the negotiation of visibility and popularity with the platform (Gillespie, 2010; 2018) and the algorithm (Bishop, 2019; Bucher, 2012). In terms of specific celebrity profiles applicable to the present study, Abidin (2019) defined minority celebrities as online creators who shape their brand and popularity by harnessing their status as part of a marginalized group and one where different layers of identity and celebrity converge.

Additional scholarship of interest has explored examples of microcelebrity with a global, culturally diverse and minority perspective (Abidin & Brown, 2019); the instrumentalization of celebrity immigrants to promote linguistic integration in Germany (Zambon, 2021); and the analysis of linguistic and cultural practices of Chinese diasporic and rural microinfluencers residing abroad (Zhang & Zhao, 2020; Zhang, 2020). The scarcity of literature on immigrant influencers reflects a gap that may provide some alternatives to the well-documented fact that immigrants become voiceless in their own narratives and subject to symbolic bordering (Chouliaraki & Georgiou, 2019).

## 5.3 Methods

To capture the evolving nature of Latinx immigrant microcelebrity with a focus on identity and algorithmic (in)visibility practices, I take a narrative case study approach to four exemplary profiles within this niche TikTok ecosystem. The case study involves the multimodal content and discourse analysis of 252 TikTok videos and in-depth interviews with four immigrant creators. This study does not intend to enable generalization but to understand specific, diverse examples (Flyvbjerg, 2006) that illustrate the variation that exists among Latin American immigrant influencers and their voices, and to reflect on the importance of emphasizing the diversity within seemingly homogeneous minority groups. The objective of the study is to explore how their creative practices and life experiences shape their microcelebrity identities and strategies for (in)visibility. I do this within the framework of Hall's (2019) view of identity as shaped and constructed through life experiences and social, contextual negotiation and considering Senft's (2013) definition of digital identities, which are molded

through online actions and behaviors. The research procedure is described in Figure 35.

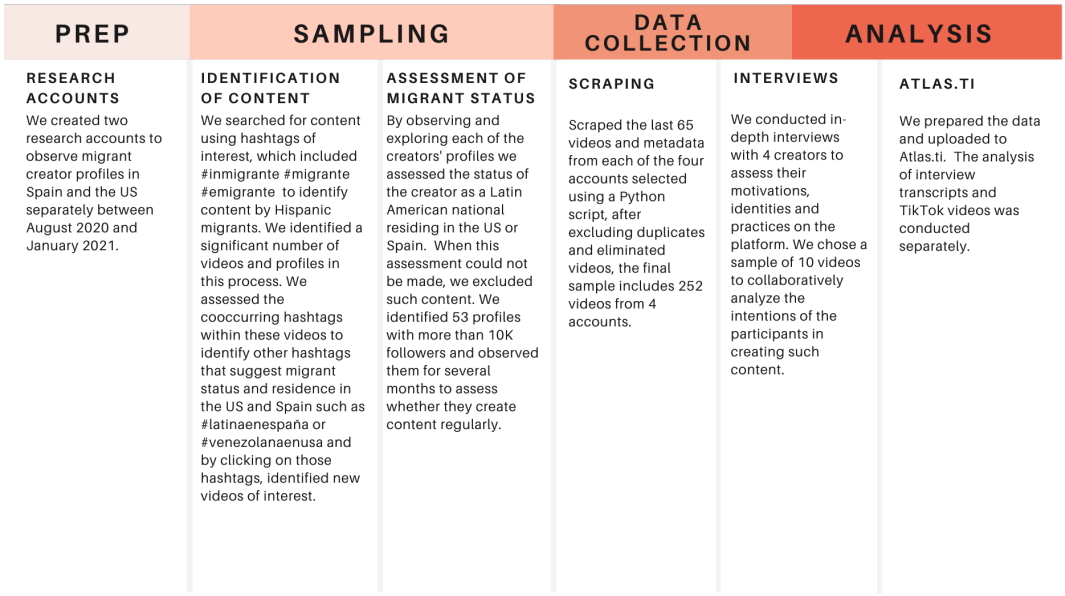


**Figure 35.** Research procedure. Source: Created by the Author.

### 5.3.1 Sampling, data collection and analysis

The sampling process was carried out as part of a larger research project through the initial analysis of 53 profiles of Latin American immigrant creators on TikTok residing in the US and Spain, with more than 10,000 followers in each country, as this is the threshold where creators begin receiving payments from TikTok (Cariaga, 2021). Between August 2020 and January 2021, I observed videos in these profiles daily and took field notes. The resulting selection criteria included: adherence to topics related to immigration, periodic growth in terms of followers and overall likes, and posting content regularly. It is worth noting the challenge of contacting TikTok creators because of the platform's limitations in terms of private messaging. After failed attempts, I identified alternative contact forms including email addresses or profiles on Instagram and Facebook and contacted them through those profiles. This excluded creators who did not have alternative contact options. Using this strategy, I contacted a total of 23 creators (11 in the US and 12 in Spain) who aligned with the selection criteria

and got responses from five, with a final sample of four profiles chosen purposively (Palys, 2008) as depicted in Table 6.

**Table 6.** Profiles included in the sample. Created by the Author.

| Pseudonym | Followers | Likes | Other profiles | Gender | Country | Posting Periodicity | Sampled videos |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| @ICE_hunter | 502.0K | 3.9M | IG, YT | Male | US | Daily or more | 63 |
| @Emy_blondie | 56.6K | 446.7K | IG, YT | Female | US | Daily or more | 65 |
| @PetehonduranDJ | 57.3K | 485.3K | IG, FB | Male | Spain | Every 3 days | 63 |
| @JanSuarez | 17.5K | 188.3K | IG, FB | Female | Spain | Every 2 days | 61 |

Notes: Number of followers and likes as of September 24, 2021. Total sample consists of 252 videos. Posting regularity is approximate and in some cases, there are periods with no posts due to content moderation and suspension by the platform.

In-depth interviews were conducted in Spanish between March and May 2021 with a semi-structured script derived from the initial observation and field notes from 53 profiles. The interviews covered 5 topics: general data, self-described identities, use of TikTok affordances and functionalities, strategies for algorithmic visibility and relationship with followers (Annex 4). The complete list of topics is included as supplementary material. During the interviews, participants provided informed consent to scrape their videos and for their profile information and content to be used in the present study. Due to the possible risks for participants and considering the ethical implications of exposing immigrant creators, I made the decision to exclude identifying information from the results and use pseudonyms that exemplify their real names without exposing them. The figures and hashtag examples have been modified in some cases to avoid the identification of the creator but to enable us to illustrate the present argument. The analysis of data was carried out using an iterative process of analysis whereby I selected a subset of 10 videos to illustrate practices of interest during the interviews and include participants' perspectives and rationale for content creation to complement the subsequent critical multimodal content and discourse analysis of their videos.

Scraping was done on 11 June, 2021 using the unofficial API wrapper for TikTok in Python (Teather, 2021). This API enabled us to download each profile's last 65 videos and related metadata by writing and executing a Python script. Videos and related metadata were uploaded to Atlas.Ti and analyzed using

inductively derived code groups related to phenomena of interest in relation to the research objective and the conversations with creators.

**Table 7.** Code groups for TikTok video content analysis. Created by the Author.

| Code Group | Definition |
|---|---|
| MLTMD | Multimodal linguistic elements (e.g, emoji/hashtags/text) |
| TKTK | Specific TikTok affordances and creative configurations (e.g, duet/stitch/audio/ effects) |
| IDENT | Creative elements and narratives that suggest specific national, cultural, political, ideological, creative, and digital identities. |
| BRAND | Personal branding elements. |
| FOLWERS | Promotion of interactions with followers. |
| PLATF | Content creation strategies to negotiate platform visibility and content moderation. |

## 5.4 Findings

In the next sections I will describe each microcelebrity profile and their use of TikTok affordances as relevant to understand some of the commonalities among those who have achieved a significant number of followers, as well as the intricate identities of these creators. Emphasis is placed in the intersections with their microcelebrity identities and algorithmic visibility strategies.

### 5.4.1 Fearless political activism for TikTok visibility

ICEhunter defines himself as a Latin American activist in favor of human rights. His brand name is present as embedded text signatures and hashtags which illustrate his identity as a creator. His content reflects a combination of footage of himself and others following and facing ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) agents and the promotion of human rights for immigrants

regardless of their status (Figure 36). He provides practical information for immigrants facing deportation, emphasizing the strategies of ICE officers. His experience as an undocumented immigrant for 22 years motivates and shapes his content. His visibility strategies in the use of multimodal elements are relevant as part of his identifying creative practices.

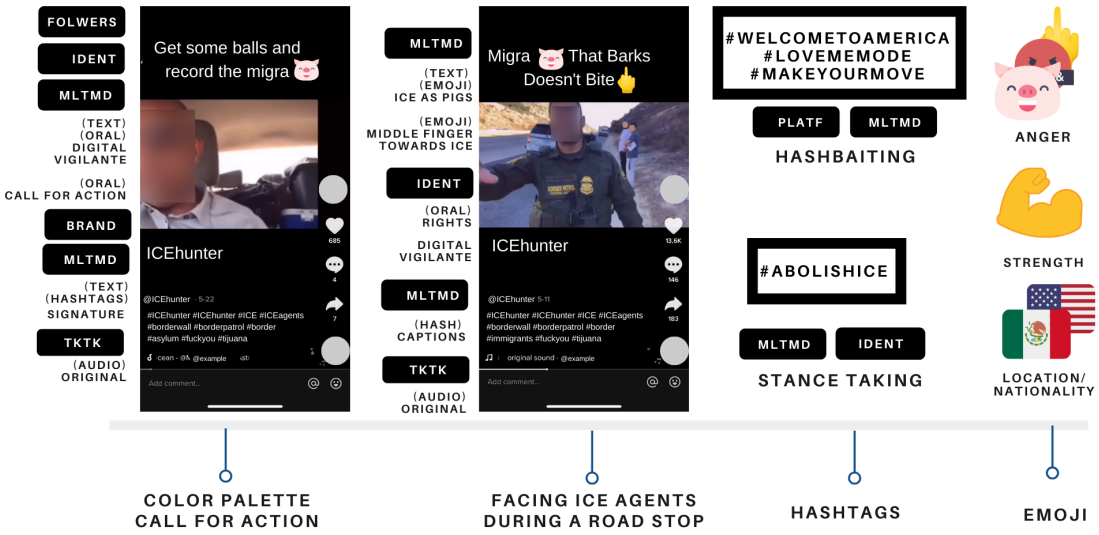


**Figure 36.** ICEhunter's use of multimodal elements and TikTok configurations. Reproduced with permission and translated by the Author.

For this creator, losing his account on Facebook severely impacted his current approach to moderation. He describes his experience:

> I started on TikTok in December, after my Facebook was cancelled (…) as part of Facebook's mass closure of MAGA, neo-Nazi and white supremacist accounts. The algorithm took my activist and personal accounts for good because I was confronting them and exposing them.

This personal anecdote with Facebook's algorithmic moderation resembles Black creators' claims of unequal treatment on TikTok, where their content flagging racist videos is deleted (Contreras & Martinez, 2021; Ohlheiser, 2021). He describes this experience as "Jail" and when asked about TikTok's moderation algorithm he describes it as "completely unpredictable". Due to this unpredictability, Icehunter was unable to describe the sort of content that gets

flagged because he usually doesn't understand the reason, but he explained his negotiation with the platform:

> When a video gets flagged, I erase it, and then edit it, change the editing cuts, or add effects such as snow falling or colors, which confuses the algorithm, and I post it again. If it gets flagged again, I take it down. If TikTok determines that it doesn't want to see the video, I don't post it again and I do something different.

This reflects his current self-moderating approach of trial-and-error, in line with Gillespie's (2018) description of platform content removal and account suspension impacting present and future speech by forcing creators to move to other platforms and become wary of the guidelines and the need to adapt their content to abide by the rules. It also illustrates his management of his mediatized persona (Moore et al., 2017) by skillfully modifying the format and presentation of his message to find a way across platform moderation. This also supports previous research about immigrants' use of social media to present different identities through content creation (Leurs, 2017a), in this case curating content to avoid deletion. It is noteworthy that his approach to content moderation does not include mentioning eliminated or flagged content in his videos, as opposed to @Emy_Blondie, as I will explain later.

Moreover, for increased viewership he reported including "eye-catching, dramatic headlines" as illustrated in Figure 36 with the headline "get some balls and record the migra". He also describes his strategy identifying trending hashtags that fit his content topics through TikTok searches to foster algorithmic visibility. His content reflects the use of hashtags created for the launch of the movie #WelcometoAmerica to label his content supporting immigration. These actions reflect a refined strategy to be picked up by the *for you* page and expand his reach in line with previous research (Abidin, 2021; Zulli & Zulli, 2020). I have coined this practice *hashbaiting* due to its similarities with clickbaiting. *Hashbaiting* is defined as the use of trending hashtags that connotationally relate to the hashtagged content but refer to mediated events that are thematically different. This practice enables a creator to take advantage of highly popular campaigns without sacrificing thematic coherence, while targeting his intended audience and prospective new publics through cooccurring hashtags that

combine profile branding –#ICEhunter (MLTMD/BRAND)– and stance taking –#abolishICE that reflects his political identity as part of his self-branding practices (Marwick, 2013) and in line with previous research on hashtag branding functions (Page, 2012).

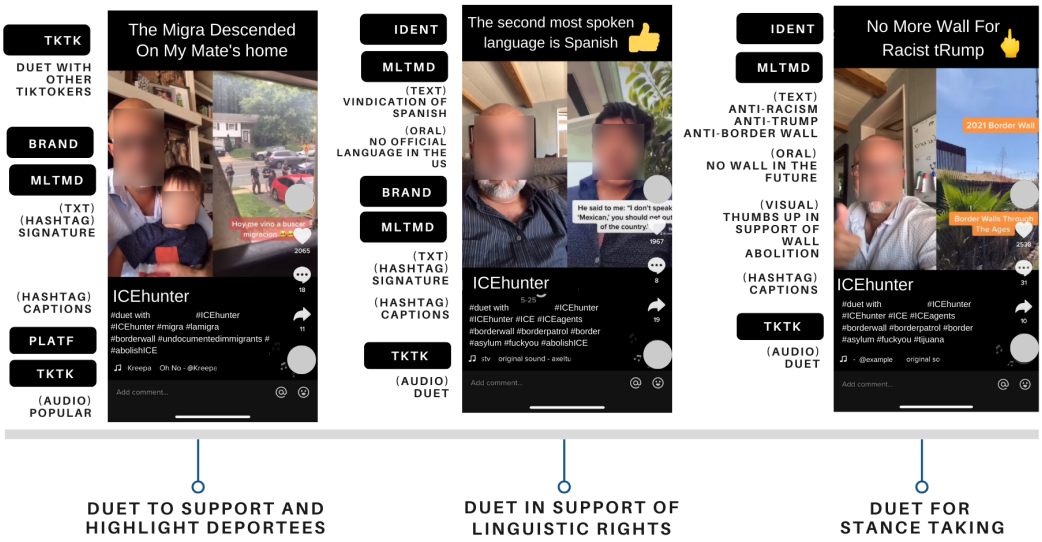


**Figure 37.** ICEhunter's use of the duet function, multimodal elements and TikTok configurations. Reproduced with permission and translated by the Author.

These strategic, multimodal practices illustrate a careful understanding of the sociotechnical nature of TikTok visibility and its algorithm. His use of the black and white color palette and visual cues –emoji– are part of his visual identity and are strategically deployed to maintain the attention of new *for you* viewers beyond the one-time viewership opportunity afforded by TikTok. Figure 37 reflects his use of the duet function to highlight other tiktokers while emphasizing his TikTok creator self as described in his interview by (1) expressing his support for deportees and showing ICE agents visiting people at home; (2) highlighting instances of language-based discrimination and highlighting the linguistic rights of people in the US while featuring the voice of the original creator; (3) by stating his political stance in relation to Trump and the border wall as racist and oppressive symbols of the current US policies towards immigration.

His account features content that is mainly in Spanish, although I found some English terms, pronunciations, and hashtags, reflecting his dual linguistic

profile as a long-term Latin American immigrant in the US. When asked about his followers and the nature of his interactions with them, he said:

> (…) ninety-eight percent of the people who watch the videos are grateful because many have no idea about the level of racism in this country. (…) most people didn't know that their rights are guaranteed by the Constitution (…) even if you're undocumented (…). Occasionally white supremacists threaten to kill me, to the point where I must go to the Sheriff's office with screenshots of images of AR-15s pointed at me (…).

Thus, his relationships with supporters, opponents, other tiktokers and the algorithm shape the performative nature of his digital vigilante persona (Gabdulhakov, 2019) by systematically involving his viewers in diverse ways. This ranges from prompting action in their own context as seen in Figure 36, where he provides detailed instructions on the best ways to face ICE agents and calls for followers to submit this content to him to post in videos that often follow his model of rights-based interaction with ICE agents.

By following and facing ICE agents after a road stop of two immigrants and establishing his right to record and be around with questions and statements such as "Why did you stop them?", or "you don't have the right to touch me" or "I have a right to record" he provides an illustrated how-to guide. In many cases, his vigilante self converges with his mediatized persona (Moore et al., 2017), which is reflected in his creative practices and anonymization of information about the immigrants portrayed on videos submitted to him.

Arguably, by sharing these anonymized third-party videos, he effectively becomes the visible face of the collective experiences of immigrants in the US, which often depict systematic oppression and unlawful prosecution, which are prevalent themes in his content. This also highlights his awareness of the threats and opportunities afforded by algorithmic visibility (Bucher, 2012), with an understanding of the unique implications of this visibility for vulnerable populations (Witteborn, 2015, 2021). He expresses no fear of continuing to create and share this content regardless of the online or in-person attacks he receives because "I see this as key work; I need to leave a better country for my son."

### 5.4.2 Unexpected politics and unwilling co-creation

Emy_blondie self-identifies as a conservative immigrant from Mexico who has lived in the US for 10 years and in her own words "aims to promote the right of Latinos in the US to think differently." She states that she does not want people to think like her, but her aim is to provide an alternative political perspective. She fits within Lewis' (2020) description of "reactionary microcelebrity" due to her opposition to social justice movements and mainstream media, especially Latin American media outlets in the US. Her content ranges from sarcastic political stances to fierce responses to criticism. She routinely positions herself politically through the involvement of *tiktokers* across the political spectrum using the *stitch* function –which enables creators to take a portion of an existing video and attach their content to it– as well as the *respond to comment* and *green screen* functionalities in a practice I have called *unwilling co-creation*.

*Unwilling co-creation* is defined as the use of platform affordances to coopt another person's content –including videos, comments, or audio– using the editing possibilities afforded by the platform, in an aim to criticize the original creator or solidify a stance. This could be considered a TikTok-enabled sub-genre of *response videos*, a YouTube genre that involves a creator from one political side editing video by a creator from the opposing political side to simulate a debate (Lewis et al., 2021).

TikTok is a particularly fertile ground for this kind of practice due to its mimetic structure that facilitates imitation, reuse and resignification of existing content (Zulli & Zulli, 2020). Thus, Emy_blondie's *unwilling co-creation* practices include viewers and other *tiktokers* whose content enables her to contextualize and validate her various identities, but especially her political stance, often without regard for the (mis)representation of an issue or a person. It is possible to suggest that this also constitutes an attempt at visibility through controversy (Gillespie, 2018).

In contrast with ICEhunter, her content is mainly in English, and she routinely argues for "language-as-integration" in line with previous research on immigrant celebrities as icons for "proper" integration (Zambon, 2021, p. 216). During her interview, she reflects on her shift to English content:

> When I just started on TikTok, I posted a message in Spanish criticizing BLM protesters saying 'I don't agree that they are using the Mexican flag when they are destroying and burning places'. The next day I received messages threatening to kill me and my family (…) just for saying that I didn't agree. (…) I decided to use English because (…) a lot of young people who grew up in the US don't speak Spanish (…) and they don't have very good information (…) and I have found a lot of support from the American community.

This episode profoundly shaped her public persona (Moore et al., 2017) in response to attacks by her Spanish-speaking community and the support of the native US community on TikTok. In this sense, her multilayered persona includes performative dimensions of her Latin American immigrant background, conservative politics, and an emphasis on patriotism towards the United States, which suggests an extreme attempt at establishing herself as a deserving immigrant through a display of cultural and national values (Chouliaraki & Georgiou, 2019; Nikunen, 2019).

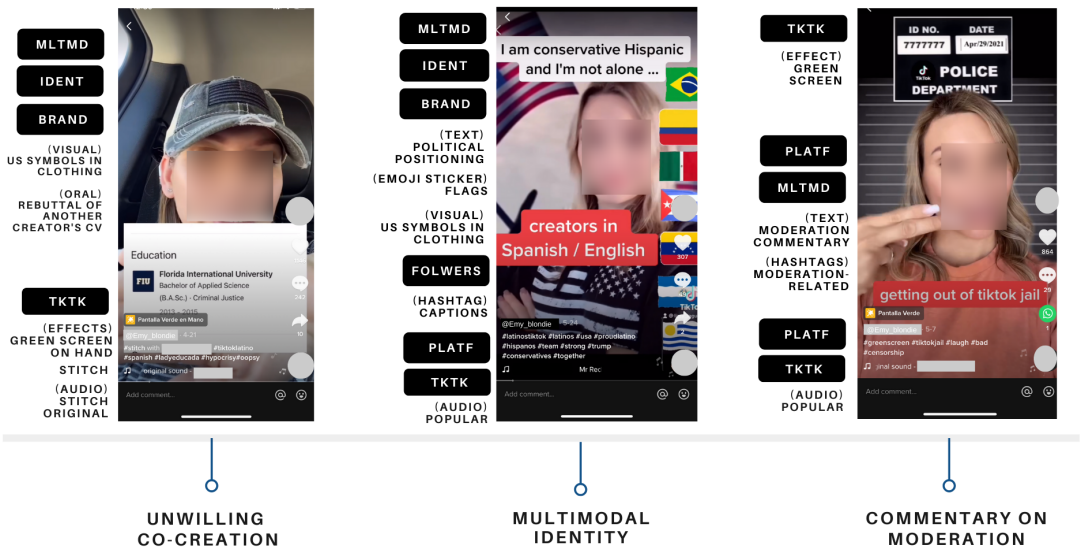


**Figure 38.** Emy_blondie's use of multimodal elements and TikTok configurations. Reproduced with permission.

The inclusion of other like-minded Latinx tiktokers in her content suggests a unique form of digitally enabled claims of belonging (Marino, 2015; Marlowe et al., 2017) with the added layer of political affinity and the construction of

common enemies that exist beyond their common national and cultural identities. Moreover, this community of like-minded creators engage in collectively generated content to suggest that moderation policies disproportionally affect Latin American conservatives and place part of the blame on individuals who flag their content.

She describes TikTok's moderation practices as "censorship" and akin to ICEhunter mentions of "TikTok jail" as a period when content is obscured, or the account is suspended. In her videos (Figure 38), she discusses this perceived suppression in her self-described sarcastic, humorous tone, illustrating an overlap of her mediatized, performative, and public personas (Moore et al., 2017). Her approach to moderation is sternly different to ICEhunter's as she uses her videos to highlight periods of suspension and 'obscuring' of her content while he adapts his content quietly and attempts to abide by the platform's moderation rules. In this regard, Gillespie (2018) reminds us that social media are privately owned and therefore entitled to limit users' speech, albeit with implications that are problematic in a highly mediatized and platformed information ecosystem.

### 5.4.3 Fearless empowerment and motivation from the margins

JanSuarez is a Honduran immigrant who moved to Spain 3 years ago. Her content centers on the promotion of rights, empowerment, and motivation for fellow immigrants and other TikTok users. She creates empathetic content that stems from her self-described difficulties and migratory experiences. Her videos display a mixture of humor, nostalgia, affirmations for resilience and nods to her multilayered identities, as can be seen in Figure 39.

JanSuarez considers viewer engagement as central in her success as a creator. She attempts to make most of her content light and positive while highlighting a balanced perspective on her life as a foreigner in Spain. Her content displays fewer consistent branding elements in comparison to the rest of the creators, which supports Abidin's (2021) argument that TikTok's algorithmic configuration has meant that creators rely on video-based popularity rather than cohesive profiles. Her platformed cultural and national identities are shaped by the use of emoji flags, hashtags, punta music and occasionally through clothing to convey her Honduran background as can be seen in Figure 39.

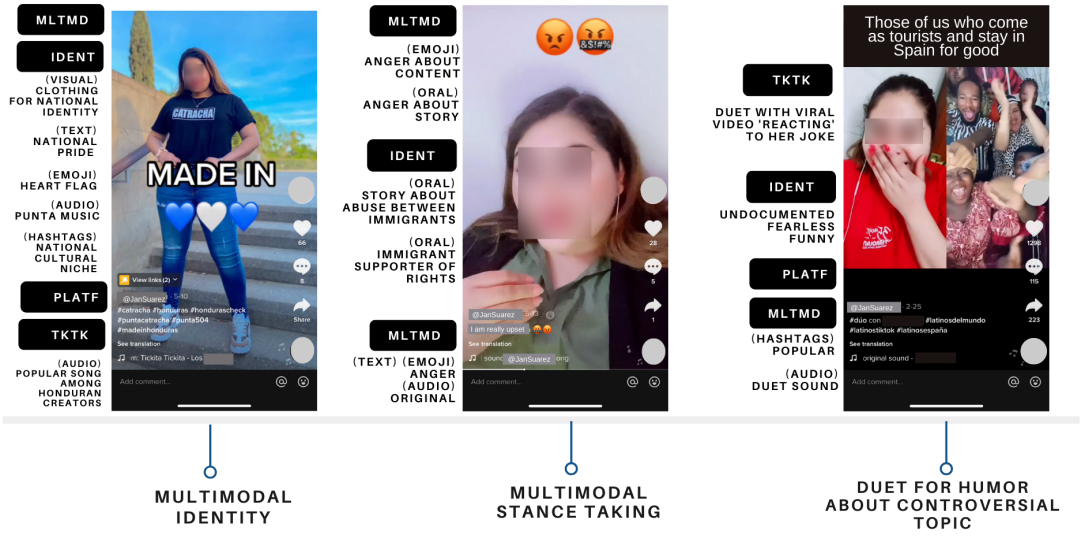


**Figure 39.** JanSuarez's multimodal identity and persona-related practices. Reproduced with permission and translated by the Author.

She regularly posts content about immigrant rights which goes from serious statements to anger towards immigrant abuse and light humor imitating trendy TikTok content to touch upon controversial issues such as entering as a tourist and staying in Spain as shown in Figure 39. When asked about this content she replied:

> (…) the simple fact of being a human being, you have rights, you must know them (..) being in the country with no papers does not mean you have to become a slave. (…) we must open people's eyes to the fact that they have many rights (…) For example, they should receive respect from their boss, from their coworkers, they cannot be physically and verbally abused.

Her stance on immigrant rights reflects and influences much of the videos she produces and the way in which her migratory experience shapes her identity as a creator highlights the socially constructed (Hall, 2019) and evolving nature of online identities, through her creative actions and decisions (Senft, 2013). On the one hand, the mediatized and value dimensions of her online persona (Moore et al., 2017) are portrayed in the creation of original audio tracks of motivation, empowerment, and self-esteem to be re-used by others. This reflects her understanding of the mimetic nature of the platform (Zulli & Zulli, 2020) as

well as the role of audio memes as vehicles for storytelling and connection between creators and viewers (Abidin, 2021).

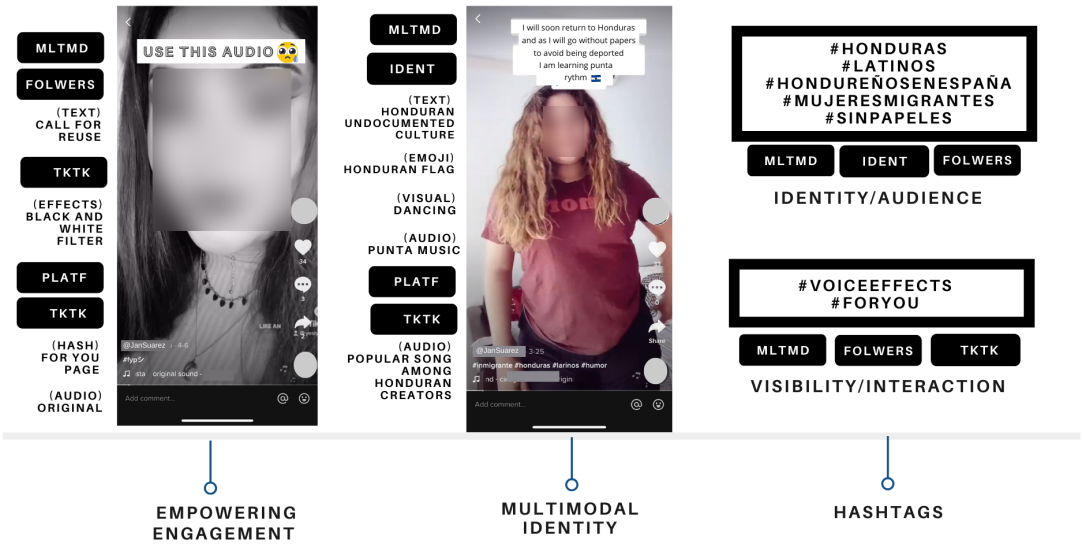


**Figure 40.** JanSuarez's multimodal and visibility practices. Reproduced with permission and translated by the Author.

Figure 40 illustrates her labels of this type of audio track using the hashtag #voiceeffects and in some cases including embedded text and captions that read "use this audio track." The deployment of multimodal elements to promote interaction beyond likes and views reflects an insider knowledge of algorithmic visibility within this specific platform (Bishop, 2019; Bucher, 2012). Some of these audio tracks stem from personal experiences that are applicable to the immigrant community:

> Every migrant has his or her own story (...) it is very difficult to start anew in a new country, new languages, new cultures (...) far away from your family (...). I know I am going to make it; I am going to achieve everything I set out to do (@JenSuarez's audio track)

It is noteworthy that –like ICEhunter– she reports no fear of retaliation or hate by followers due to content that discusses issues such as undocumented immigration. She constitutes an unlikely example considering the fear many immigrants experience when creating online content due to symbolic and digital bordering (Chouliaraki & Georgiou, 2019) and in line with the idea of social

media content creation as a claim for communication rights and political positioning (Leurs, 2017a). She also notes that none of her content has been filtered or eliminated by the platform, suggesting that she is able to balance controversial topics with humor and an acquired familiarity with TikTok's algorithmic visibility. This seems to have allowed her to develop a more *platform friendly* political style that enables her to bypass moderation and flagging while presenting information that may be contentious for some users.

### 5.4.4 Crossmedia cultural and national pride

PeteHonduranDJ self-describes as a proud Honduran, a journalist who has lived in Spain for the past 16 years but has never lost his connection with his country of birth. He explains that he understands that Spanish media prefers to hire native journalists, so he has mostly worked in media aimed at the Latin American public. He works as a DJ in a radio station based in Barcelona geared to Honduran nationals and uses TikTok to expand his reach. His content features advice for love and life, often related to immigration and being Honduran as well as messages of support for fellow Latin Americans.

PeteHonduranDJ features the most comprehensive branding strategy among participating creators. It is shaped by what he calls the "character" he becomes when he wears his glasses and clothing that reflects his Honduran identity or his public persona (Moore et al., 2017). His use of branded clothing and punta music is similar to JanSuarez's but much more consistent and strategic. Figure 41 illustrates his logo and slogan "Honduras in the house 504" and objects that visually reflect his branding.

His crossmedia strategy combines visual props for TikTok and audio branding at the end of all his TikTok videos "PeteHonduranDJ…I'm gone…hahahaha." This is a creative way to ensure reuses of his audio include his signature among this platform's imitation publics (Zulli & Zulli, 2020) in line with his concern related to audio reuse enabled by the platform "what sometimes annoys me is that (…) they use the audio and don't give you the credits."

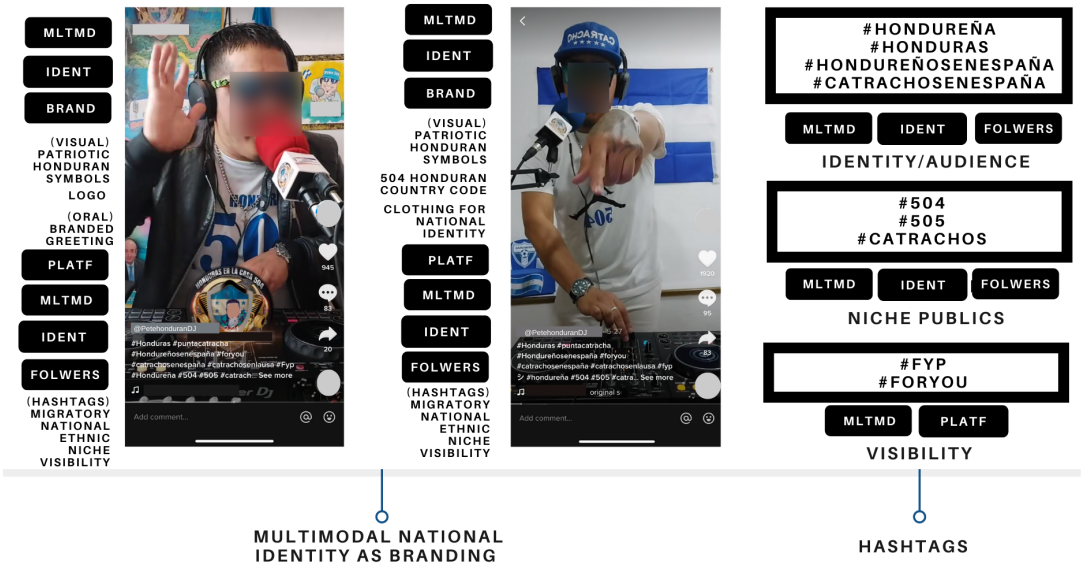


**Figure 41.** PeteHonduranDJ's multimodal branding and hashtag uses. Reproduced with permission.

His entire creative strategy and personal brand is in stern contradiction with previous research that suggests that immigrants attempt to reflect their integration through allegiance to the receiving country's values, culture, and patriotism (Nikunen, 2019) which could be due to his relative privilege in comparison with other immigrants and his professional status, working in niche media targeted at Latinx audiences.

He discusses various issues related to immigration such as advice for undocumented immigrants who want to travel by plane and his take on linguistic integration by Honduran immigrants:

> When you come to these countries, the United States or Spain, if you want to speak like a Spaniard (…) speak however you want. Now my advice is that, when you are with fellow Hondurans, (…) you should try to speak like a Catracho [word Hondurans use to refer to themselves].

His position of influence makes this especially relevant as he advices and models a specific way to migrate without losing one's national/cultural identities. His perception of identity seems to negate multiplicity, in favor of one *authentic* self that should align with one's national background and native language/dialect rather than linguistic and cultural adaptations to become

integrated in the country of residence. This reflects a stern opposition to Emy_blondie who takes an extreme stance about the need to culturally and linguistically adapt in order to belong.

He negotiates his algorithmic visibility using culturally relevant hashtags and the remix and parody of trending audio tracks. He uses his knowledge of musical mixing to create parodic content that fits his creative, humorous TikTok persona while including slight nods to his own culture and nationality. This aligns with Zulli and Zulli's (2020) description of the partial imitation of popular audio tracks as a strategy to increase visibility on TikTok but with the added layer of culturally relevant creative elements within mainstream trending audio tracks.

## 5.5 Conclusions

The multilayered profiles and creative practices of these tiktokers reflect complex and diverse identities and online personas that exist among Latin American immigrants in both countries. Arguably that these smaller niche communities of followers enable the emergence of microinfluencers whose life trajectory, identity and politics often diverge from what is expected, simultaneously exemplifying the diverse profiles that exist among Latinx immigrants who may engage in rights claims (Leurs, 2017a) to unexpected ideas of ideological freedom and seemingly contradictory identities that have been studied in terms of political participation by Latin Americans in the US (Galbraith & Callister, 2020).

All the creators reflected the goal to reach as many people as possible with statements that reflect a stance on issues, claims for rights and motivating affirmations that illustrate the presence of an immigrant identity, reflected by a focus on culturally relevant life experiences and different approaches to political engagement. The ways in which these creators understand and harness TikTok's possibilities for co-creation shape their behavior-based microcelebrity personas (Abidin, 2018; Moore et al., 2017; Senft, 2013) but also build upon their immigrant experiences as identity-shaping narratives. Their creative strategies position them in relation to political issues such as the border wall or linguistic integration, while platformed practices such as *hashbaiting* and *unwilling co-creation* reflect some of the algorithmic visibility and identity construction strategies enabled by the platform and harnessed by these creators.

Thus, *algorithmic (in)visibility* actions by these creators are threefold. First, they reflect an understanding of the unique technical nature of the TikTok algorithm using hashtags, effects, remixed audio and visually impactful content. Second, they promote specific actions by viewers that may range from likes and shares to co-creation enabled by the platform. Third, they show different approaches to content moderation that enable them to present contentious political content and engage with their followers in unique ways. For this, they often rely on personal traits to establish affinity with their followers, based on their immigrant experience, linguistic preferences, political leaning, or national/cultural selves. Their approach to moderation, censorship and relevant politics illustrates a multitude of ways in which they navigate real and perceived injustice as outsiders in their respective societies –and within TikTok. It also reflects their distinct perspectives of integration and immigrant rights, shaped by their own migratory experience and their position of –relative– privilege.

The limitations of this study include the small sample that provides an initial overview of diverse microinfluencers and may benefit from further studies that delve into the larger community of immigrant creators and their algorithmic and creative practices.

# Chapter 6

**Algorithmic (in)visibility among immigrant TikTokers**

# Chapter 6: Algorithmic (in)visibility among immigrant TikTokers

This chapter explores Latin American immigrant tiktokers in the United States and Spain and their *algorithmic (in)visibility* practices, which refer to the set of strategies deployed by immigrant content creators on social media –and possibly other marginalized and vulnerable populations– to negotiate the conspicuousness of their controversial content with the aim of avoiding its deletion from the platform. The findings unveil three exemplary *algorithmic (in)visibility* practices that include content reuse and re-upload, vernacular visibility, and partial deplatforming. These strategies shift between collective and individual approaches to achieve selective visibility and concealed conspicuousness within algorithmic moderation systems.

## 6.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the strategies deployed by immigrant content creators on TikTok to convey controversial content by harnessing the unique genres, functions, and narrative configurations available on the platform. In the case of TikTok, these practices may include well-known tactics that are widespread among generalist tiktokers, such as the use of specific hashtags –e.g. #fyp, #viral and #foryou. They may also involve other, more subversive schemes, where creators negotiate the conspicuousness of their content through the deployment of specific platform vernaculars (Gibbs et al., 2015). In some cases, immigrant tiktokers do this by creating videos that follow mainstream logics and grammars of the platform to present contentious content under the concealment of TikTok humor, choreography, overlaid text, and popular audio tracks. This content relates to intimate accounts of border crossing, tips to navigate life in the receiving country while undocumented and audio-visual evidence of discrimination and oppression against immigrants.

Videos that reflect overt discussions by content creators about their perspective of the algorithm and their interpretations of the platform's moderation practices (Gillespie, 2018) are also interesting, and they serve to assess the unique challenges faced by immigrant tiktokers to present their content. Thus, the chapter focuses on the specific ways in which immigrant TikTok creators deploy their knowledge of platform vernaculars to negotiate their algorithmic positioning (Bucher, 2012) through an array of strategies adapted to their unique experiences, needs and identities.

This chapter continues to explore content created by 53 Latin American immigrant tiktokers in the United States and Spain to assess and conceptualize their *algorithmic (in)visibility* practices on the platform. The chapter starts with a description of the challenges for immigrants creating content on social media, it then moves to an explanation of the uniqueness of TikTok as a platform, its affordances, and vernaculars, followed by a theoretical framework related to issues of visibility within social media-based algorithmic systems. The research design and methods are then described, explaining the purposive sampling method (Palys, 2008) to extract illustrative examples that identify these strategies through an inductive, multimodal content and critical discourse analysis.

In this chapter, the aim is to deepen the understanding of the different forms of *algorithmic (in)visibility* tactics (Jaramillo-Dent et al., 2022), which refer

to the set of strategies deployed by immigrant content creators on social media —and possibly other marginalized and vulnerable populations— to negotiate the conspicuousness of their controversial content with the aim of avoiding its deletion from the platform. These practices resemble Brit Rusert's (2017) description of the ways in which Black people become strategically visible and opaque in the face of oppressive representations of who they are. The notion of *space invaders* is also relevant, as it refers to minority individuals who occupy a public space that is not originally conceived for them, but for dominant members of the community. Being physically present in such spaces is seen as a subversive action of resistance (Puwar, 2004). In this case immigrants are the outsiders in these digital spaces that are not designed thinking of them, and they occupy them through their visibility strategies, becoming *digital space invaders* in line with previous research on young refugees in digital spaces (Leurs & Ponzanesi, 2013).

In this sense, the findings of the present chapter unveil three exemplary *algorithmic (in)visibility* practices that include content reuse and re-upload, vernacular visibility, and partial deplatforming. I find that these strategies shift between collective and individual approaches to achieve selective visibility and concealed conspicuousness within algorithmic moderation systems.

## 6.2 Literature Review

### 6.2.1 Immigrants, digital (self)representation, and algorithms

It is well established in scientific literature that immigrants are excluded from their own stories, which are often instrumentalized to fulfill specific communicative, othering intentions (Szytniewski & Spierings, 2014). In this sense, migrant agency and voice are, in many cases, absent from narratives related to their life experiences and subject to various symbolic, digital, and material borders (Chouliaraki & Georgiou, 2019). Furthermore, immigration is deeply rooted in colonial and oppressive structures that define who migrates and where, through a hierarchized perspective of the representations, knowledge, and ideas of who immigrants are and what is involved in their experiences.

Although social media has been recognized as a prime space for self-representation across different segments of society, immigrants are often

excluded from these spaces due to the risks that sharing certain information publicly represent to them. In this context, Appadurai (2019) described the difficulties faced by immigrants and their narratives to fit mainstream expectations set by modern nation-states. Moreover, Mitchell (2019) argues that social media storytelling by refugees creates a collective space of meaning-making which enables them to shape, resignify, and remix these stories collaboratively from the bottom-up. She describes the ways in which the power of mainstream media industries has been replaced by social media platforms' algorithmic systems, who own these stories and have the power to shape, expand or constrain the reach of these contents (Mitchell, 2019). This is due to the combination of human and algorithmic moderation systems, which determine what is available, visible, and viral (Gillespie, 2010, 2018). Thus, structures of dominance are perpetuated through coded biases (Benjamin, 2019) and algorithmized oppression systems (Noble, 2018). The internal functioning of these moderation infrastructures is obscure, although we can glimpse at them through the contents and discourse of creators who describe their experiences with the platform, its algorithm, and the moderation policies that shape and affect their content creation practices.

### 6.2.2 TikTok's algorithm and vernaculars: The grammars and logics of the platform

To explore algorithmic visibility, the role of platform vernaculars becomes key. Gibbs et al.'s (2015) defined platform vernaculars as the specific genre of communication employed by users and enabled and constrained by the design of the social media platform and its affordances (McVeigh-Schultz & Baym, 2015). In this section I will describe the unique content configurations and affordances of TikTok that comprise its vernacular logics. Emphasis will be placed on the uniqueness of TikTok's platform vernaculars due to their memetic and imitational nature, since they promote and facilitate imitation among users at different levels (Zulli & Zulli, 2020). In this context, defining the affordances that characterize TikTok when compared to other platforms is key to understanding the ways in which content creators deploy algorithmic (in)visibility tactics.

Audio is central to TikTok, it functions as a connector and cataloguing element on the platform (Abidin, 2021). It has been analyzed as a mode of

storytelling (Vizcaíno-Verdú & Abidin, 2022) and a structurally memetic affordance (Zulli & Zulli, 2020) that is especially prominent prompting users to "use this sound." The platform features an audio track page where the user can follow and find every video that has used the audio track, with the *original* poster listed first and followed by other videos in an order defined by a combination of popularity and recency. This page also includes the number of videos on the platform that use that specific audio track, which serves to assess the popularity of a specific sound on the platform.

Furthermore, reuse and resignification content creation possibilities are also noteworthy on TikTok. In this sense, the duet, stitch, and green screen affordances enable creators to incorporate existing videos in their new creations and interact with this content in different ways. Figure 42 describes these different affordances and their functions.

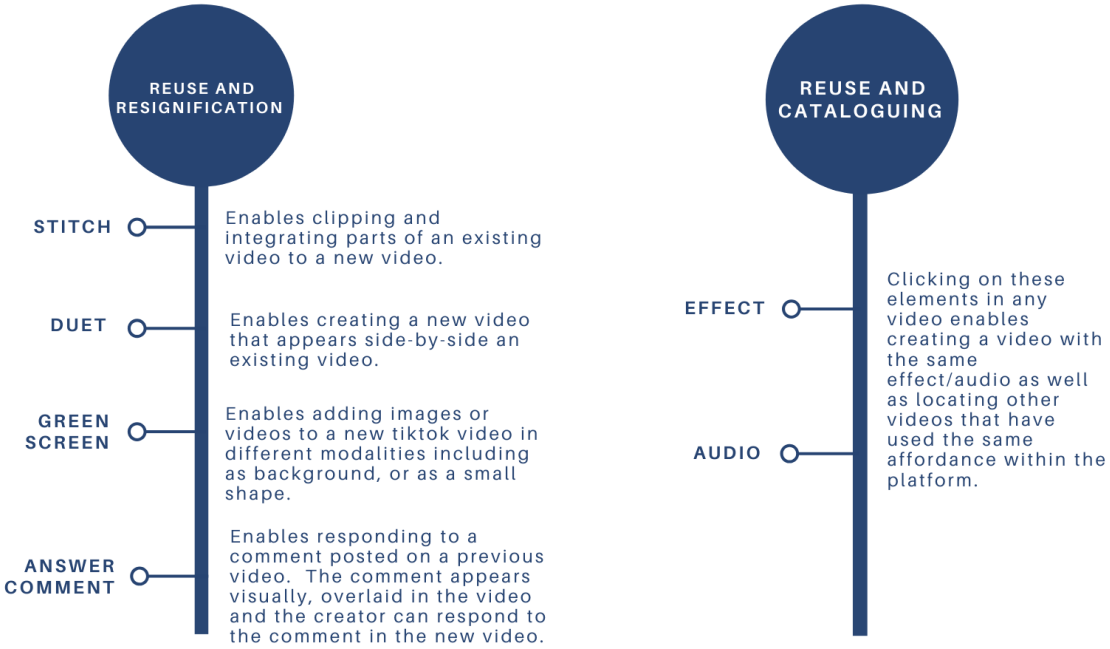


**Figure 42.** Affordances for reuse, resignification and cataloguing on TikTok. Adapted from Jaramillo-Dent et al. (2022)

The algorithmic functions of TikTok related to visibility and moderation have prompted conversations and controversy among content creators, users, and other stakeholders. In this sense, research on aspects that users consider influential to the TikTok algorithm include "video engagement, posting time and adding and piling up hashtags" (Klug et al., 2021, p. 84). Klug et al. (2021) also

provide evidence, through a content analysis, that two of these assumptions seem to affect the algorithmic popularity of a video. These include different forms of engagement such as likes, comments and shares, along with specific posting times. However, the use of hashtags such as #foryou or #fyp and using many popular hashtags on one video yield uncertain results regarding the likelihood of the video becoming *trending*.

In the next section, previous research on algorithmic visibility and its implications for minority creators is presented.

### 6.2.3 Algorithmic (in)visibility in the face of digital and algorithmic borders

The concept of social media *visibility* is key to understand the politics and policies of popularity and voice in digital spaces. In this sense, critical data expert Stefania Milan defines visibility as

> the digital embodiment and online presence of individuals and groups and their associated meanings, which are (and need to be) constantly negotiated, reinvigorated, and updated (Milan, 2015, p. 6).

She suggests that the politics of visibility begin and end with individuals and "ultimately create individuals-in-the-group rather than groups" (Milan, 2015, p. 1). She also argues that, since social media are not neutral actors, content creators engage in a sensemaking process that harnesses their technical components to build their collective identity (Milan, 2015). This is relevant for research on immigrant creators because they are far from a monolithic group whose narrative and content-creation strategies often rely on individual stories that are unique and dependent on individual characteristics including their nationality, mode of entry to the country, and whether they fled due to a recognized crisis, a search for opportunity, among others. These narratives are also located within a public sphere of mediatized events that prompt content creation by different groups to clarify, position themselves or counter existing narratives and representations (Jaramillo-Dent & Pérez-Rodríguez, 2021; Jaramillo-Dent et al., 2022).

Moreover, Karizat et al. (2021) describe how TikTok users' sensemaking process of the algorithmic *For You* feed is related to their identity. Their findings suggest that marginalized individuals' experience with the algorithm differs due to personal identity characteristics that shape their feed. TikTok users identifying as minorities in terms of race, language or sexual orientation reported perceiving that their minority identities were not represented in their feed and considered that it would be less likely to become visible when creating content as a person from a non-dominant group.

Previous research on vernacular visibility has explored the ways in which feminist groups in Latin America appropriate the potential of four different social media platforms to gain visibility and argue that this process of adaptation shapes the feminist movement (Sued et al., 2021). These researchers describe how the aesthetics of their TikTok videos use specific features such as overlaid text and an emphasis on audio. Humor, role-play, and music are also mentioned as part of TikTok's unique narrative genres. Visually, these researchers also describe how female bodies are shaped by TikTok's configurations and appear sexualized. They also describe that a lot of this content related to feminist activism does not follow established vernacular aesthetics of the platform. The findings of this study are relevant to the present analysis because they point to TikTok as one of the main platforms that shapes the formats and configurations of content for visibility by minority groups discussing issues of abortion and women's rights. This case also differs from ours in that their study focuses on established activist initiatives and ours is geared towards a combination of regular users and microcelebrities making immigrant issues visible on the platform.

The concept of *algorithmic (in)visibility* is useful to explore the visibility practices of immigrants and other creators who advance controversial content. As mentioned before, *algorithmic (in)visibility* is defined as the set of strategies deployed by a community of creators to have their content picked up by the platform's algorithmic feed regardless of its level of controversy (Jaramillo-Dent et al., 2022). I argue that these strategies ensure different levels of visibility within the platform depending on the degree of controversy of the content. In the case of immigrants, controversial content may include discussions related to entering a country as a tourist to stay as an immigrant, supporting undocumented immigrants through fundraising initiatives, narrating very intimate stories about crossing the border, or providing information about how to navigate the system

without documentation. They do this by using specific affordances and platform vernaculars (Gibbs et al., 2015; McVeigh-Schultz & Baym, 2015) to negotiate their visibility within TikTok's algorithmic structures.

These behaviors are closely related to algorithmic resistance tactics, understood as behaviors that work within the framework of the algorithm with the intention to prompt specific algorithmic outcomes (Velkova & Kaun, 2021). They also emerge in response to users' perspective of the straining nature of algorithmic social feeds which refers to

> (…) an algorithm recognizing, classifying, sorting and suppressing social identities based on its conception of which social identities are (or are not) 'valuable' and 'wanted', or which ones (do not) deserve visibility (Karizat et al., 2021, p. 21)

*Algorithmic resistance* emerges in response to perceived *algorithmic privilege* (Karizat et al., 2021) which refers to the idea that certain identities are at an advantage and less likely to be suppressed by the feed. Thus, attempts to avoid moderation and ensure visibility on social media platforms emerge in the face of various coded biases that exist within algorithmic systems. These include the digital borders built through exclusionary narratives, representations, and symbols that place immigrants in established frames and classifications as victims or threats and reproduces these narratives constantly, constraining their ability to challenge them (Chouliaraki & Georgiou, 2019).

In parallel, coded borders exist in these sociotechnical systems that recognize and classify information. For instance Google has been found to be profoundly biased when searching terms related to racial minorities (Noble, 2018). The problem of coded biases goes beyond narratives, representations, and searches to affect the likelihood of surveillance a specific group may receive (Benjamin, 2019). This becomes even more relevant for immigrants and refugees as their migratory status and personal safety can be affected by the contents they create and post online due to legislation that enables social media screening to establish refugee status (Brekke & Balke Staver, 2019; Meaker, 2018) which means that creating social media content is often not an option for many immigrants, as they don't have the same communication rights as other members of society (Leurs, 2017a).

Considering previous work and the implications of social media visibility for immigrants, in the next section I describe the methodological approach followed in this study.

## 6.3 Methods

This chapter relies on observations from a digital ethnography that started in November 2020 exploring immigrant creators on TikTok, it was done through a five-step process:

1. Monthly walkthroughs (Light et al., 2018) of TikTok using the mobile app to understand the specific affordances and content configurations that are available on the platform. Two types of walkthroughs were carried out. The first included navigation of existing content, focusing on the aspects that imitate previous videos and the affordances that derive from existing TikTok trends, for instance navigating from a video through the audio link to explore the videos that used that audio track before. The second type of walkthrough involved the creation of new content to explore the process of content creation in order to understand whether some components of the content analyzed were created within the platform or if they used an external tool.
2. Identification of immigrant creators through searches of hashtags and keywords related to immigration in Spanish and English and the subsequent identification of coocurring hashtags that refer to specific nationalities residing in Spain and the US. This was followed by the observation of specific profiles that featured migratory narratives to establish the creators' self-identification as immigrants.
3. Daily observations of the general TikTok feed and selected immigrant creator profiles five days a week for a minimum of one hour a day to understand general TikTok trends and specific practices of immigrant creators, as well as their adaptation to wider platform vernaculars (Gibbs et al., 2015). Observations were recorded using a system of fieldnotes and screenshots to exemplify phenomena of interest and connections between generalist content creators and immigrant creators.

4. Identification of content that mentions platform moderation practices and/or promotes actions to avoid content elimination and/or to make content visible in the face of previous deletion. The final sample is purposive (Palys, 2008) as the examples analyzed were extracted from a wider observation due to their illustrative value to exemplify algorithmic (in)visibility tactics by these creators.
5. Manual, inductive coding of selected content to identify the characteristics and practices of these content creators and establishment of the types and subtypes of algorithmic (in)visibility tactics among these creators.

### 6.3.1 A note on ethics

Due to the structural difficulty of contacting immigrant content creators directly to get their informed consent to use their data –as the platform does not allow users to contact creators directly unless they follow the user– following an adaptation of Markham's (2012) proposal of *fabrication as ethical practice* to protect vulnerable content creator's privacy. In this sense, the contents included in this chapter have been translated from Spanish and presented as illustrated renderings of their content rather than screenshots. This was done to ensure that their identities remain protected while enabling the exemplification of the data analyzed with minimal risk for content creators.

## 6.4 Findings

In this section, the main findings are described and explained. The results are contextualized within TikTok as a unique platform, but these content creation practices provide insights about the possibilities of social media platforms for visible controversial storytelling by traditionally marginalized groups such as immigrants.

### 6.4.1 Content reuse for visibility

The first tactic involves different forms of content reuse as well as the promotion of certain interactions by creators attempting to make their content visible and avoid deletion by the platform. This strategy follows the four mechanisms within the politics of visibility proposed by Milan (2015) by (1) centering on the

performative nature of the migrant experience by giving voice to the original creator of the content; (2) prompting certain engagements and interactions by users through overlaid text or in the caption; (3) expanding the duration of the protest by creating new, updated videos on the basis of existing content; (4) reproducing social action through the use of TikTok's imitation possibilities. In this case it involves more committed forms of interaction in which users are called upon to create new content using the existing video. This may involve the reuse of the audio track or the entire video through one of the affordances and content configurations available on TikTok such as green screen or duet. In this section, a few different examples of this tactic will be explained.

#### *6.4.1.1 Audio re-upload and reuse to avoid deletion*

This tactic is exemplified by narratives that rely on an audio track as the main controversial aspect of the content. An example of this is the recorded audio of a Latin American immigrant worker in Spain who was verbally abused by her employer and whose recording was used by several creators who expressed their support and empathy using captions and overlaid text. Creators who reshared this audio track also commented on their own experiences of abuse and the parts of the audio that are especially shocking. This strategy is deployed through two separate tactics that are seemingly opposite but seem to respond to a process of negotiation and learning by the community of creators with the algorithmic feed to make content visible on the platform regardless of its level of controversy.

The first tactic involves creators uploading audio tracks as originals more than once to trick the algorithm into thinking that it is an *original* track. It is important to understand that the *original* label on TikTok audio tracks denotes that the creator uploaded (or recorded) the audio from their device. This means that a second creator who wants to share the same audio track without connecting with the original poster may upload it again and two *original* tracks featuring different creator names may indeed be the same recording that has been uploaded by two different creators. This has also been identified as a strategy to avoid attributing authorship to the original creator on TikTok by reuploading existing audio tracks that appear as original (Kaye et al., 2021). This practice arguably makes it harder for the algorithm to delete an audio track from all the videos where it appears because they keep emerging as different audio

tracks under different names and connecting a different set of videos that have reused said track. In this case at least five different audio tracks featuring the exact recording under different creators' names were identified. Each of them had been reused between 20 and 40 times. The visual part of these videos often shows an empty wall or ceiling where no person appears and in other instances a person is looking at the camera, in most cases they are female creators. In the case of this recording, it is hard to know where the abuse is taking place, but it is so violent that the audio is successful in expressing the violence and fear experienced by the immigrant worker who recorded it. It is also possible to discern the Latin American accent of the immigrant woman as compared to the accent from Spain by the female voice who uses slurs and yells.

Almost all the videos that share this audio track also include overlaid text with various functions which include: (1) describing the emotions of the poster about the audio track; (2) expressing having experienced similar instances of abuse; (3) explaining how common this type of experience is for other immigrants in Spain; (4) promoting specific actions to avoid the deletion of the video and/or audio track.

At the same time, the overlaid text in this case mentions the importance of sharing this video because it had already been taken down by TikTok. In this sense, this audio-based strategy follows two different actions, which may include re-uploading the audio track under a different name and then promoting the reuse of the audio track to avoid deletion. It is possible to argue that these are forms of algorithmic resistance (Velkova & Kaun, 2021) in which immigrant users reclaim their narratives and present them using a range of the possibilities offered by the platform and through a process of negotiation with the algorithmic feed. Figure 43 reflects a rendering of one of these *original* videos on the left and the audio track page that reflects the number of videos that have used the audio track on the right.

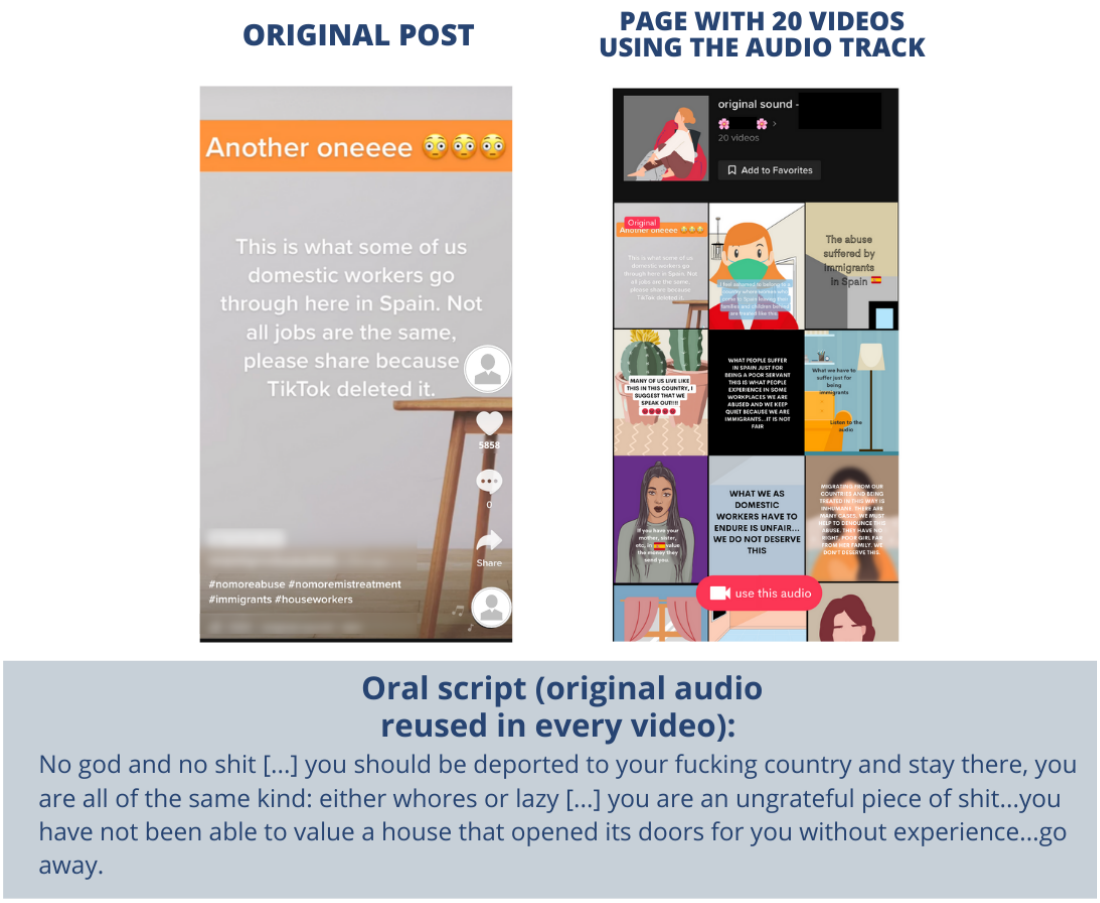


**Figure 43.** Rendering of (in)visible content made visible through audio reuse and re-upload. Created and translated from Spanish by the Author.

Moreover, TikTok videos that use this tactic often express in some way that they are the type of video TikTok eliminates. In the case of Figure 43 they describe that the video is a repost due to its previous deletion. It is noteworthy that many creators promote the reshare and reuse of the video and audio as a form of protest towards abusive employers and moderation guidelines. In this case the possibility to reuse the audio track –which is one of TikTok's main features and one of its main organizing principles (Abidin, 2021)– is instrumentalized for visibility and protest in the face of the TikTok community, the algorithm, and society in general.

It is noteworthy that this audio track goes against platform moderation guidelines under its "Abusive Behavior" guidelines, as it contains content that falls under

> (…) expressions of abuse, including threats or degrading statements intended to mock, humiliate, embarrass, intimidate, or hurt an individual. (…) Do not post, upload, stream, or share content that insults another individual, or disparages an individual on the basis of attributes such as intellect, appearance, personality traits, or hygiene (…) To minimize the spread of egregiously offensive terms, we remove all slurs from our platform (TikTok, n.d.).

This suggests that strategic use of audio tracks may bypass algorithmic moderation and enable instances of abuse to become visible on the platform. It is also possible that human moderators have allowed the content to stay up due to its value to public interest, as the intention of those who share this content is not to discriminate against immigrants but to provide visibility to an instance of abuse. This suggests that moderation processes may follow some forms of contextualization in the process of deciding to eliminate content, in line with internet scholar Tartleton Gillespie's (2010) description of the ways in which different platforms handle graphic content, mentioning context as an important aspect in moderation decisions.

The issue of which content is moderated, and which content remains up is problematic considering the recent reports by Black TikTok creators who have experienced what they see as unfair moderation instances where their content is flagged citing "harassment and bullying" when they reshare content exemplifying racist attacks while the original discriminatory videos remain on the platform (Contreras & Martinez, 2021). This may be due to hybrid moderation systems that rely on a combination of algorithms, human moderators, responses to user reports and flagging. Regardless, the obscure nature of moderation systems (Myers West, 2018) makes it hard for creators to approach visibility more effectively on the platform.

#### *6.4.1.2 Content reuse and resignification for visibility*

This tactic is similar to the audio reuse tactic but in this case the entire video is integrated into the new video. Creators use TikTok's reuse and resignification functions such as duet and green screen, as reflected on Figure 44.

In this case the original video is shared by the official profile of news channel Telemundo. This video was recorded by a fast-food restaurant worker who witnessed a xenophobic attack by a customer who was upset about his order. The customer utters the words "you are a fucking immigrant loser" and overlaid text is added to emphasize this part of the video. After the video was posted, immigrant creators appropriated the video and shared it through the duet and green screen affordances to comment about their own experiences and opinions about the attack.

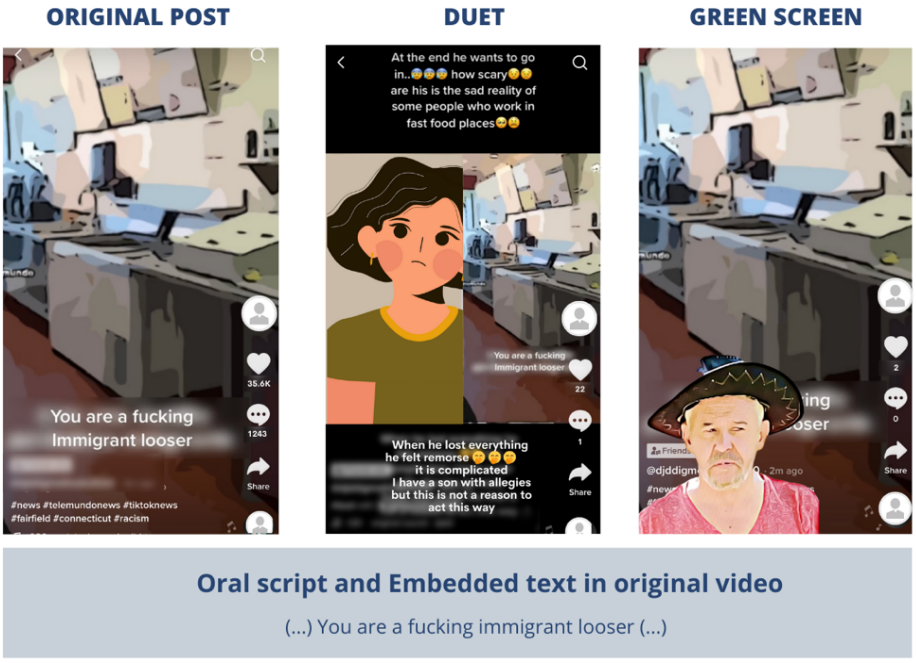


**Figure 44.** Rendering of different forms of content reuse for visibility. Created and translated by the Author.

Similar to the audio reuse tactic, overlaid text is often employed to express the creator's opinion or experiences related to the instance of abuse depicted in the video and it provides interesting insights as to the uses and functions of overlaid text for marginalized creators attempting to make abuse and oppression visible on the platform. The visual component provides more

context and is more illustrative of the development of the specific instance of abuse. The presence of this content and its continued reuse and resignification exemplifies Mitchell's (2019) argument of digital narratives as collective spaces for meaning making. In this case immigrants use the green screen and duet configurations to asynchronously discuss their views on this recorded instance of oppression, as well as its connection with wider collective experiences of discrimination.

## 6.4.2 Vernacular visibility on TikTok

This section explores how some of the specific TikTok platform vernaculars (Gibbs et al., 2015) are instrumentalized by immigrant creators to convey controversial topics, bypass moderation and enter the algorithmic feed. In this case it is possible to suggest that narrative configurations that are repeatedly present on the platform are part of these vernaculars. Zulli and Zulli (2020) suggested that there is a relationship between imitation of existing content and increased visibility on the platform by linking –through audio and effects– new content to existing, often highly viral content. These authors also explain that creating videos that follow a certain type that is available on TikTok may also boost their visibility through physical imitation, this includes modeling specific uses for available affordances such as overlaid text and the imitation of visual configurations.

### *6.4.2.1 Vernacular humor and sarcasm*

Some of these content creators publish videos that discuss topics that are highly controversial such as strategies to enter a country as a tourist to stay. They are successful by following some aspects of the platform vernacular understood as the set of grammars, logics and narrative configurations that characterize a social media platform (Gibbs et al., 2015). Users learn these vernacular languages and their implications for visibility through their use and navigation of the platform, as well as through a set of folk theories that are shared by the community of users and creators (Karizat et al., 2021) which have also been described as *algorithmic gossip* (Bishop, 2019). Vernacular visibility practices are made possible through the strategic use vernacular affordances, understood as the sociotechnical aspects of the platform that reflect how users appropriate and make sense of

available affordances for their own goals within the platform (McVeigh-Schultz & Baym, 2015).

In the case of TikTok the example provided includes two components of its vernacular: (1) the use of the *answer comment* affordance and (2) sarcastic humor. As can be seen in Figure 45, the creator explains that he entered the country as a tourist and managed to stay and obtain documentation. His message is surrounded by a series of humorous statements, many of them shocking. It is possible to suggest that this format is successful in tricking the moderation system and reach people, in this case with 71.3K views and 2.6K likes. This creator has 91.6K followers which suggests that he is very successful in presenting his content although it may be controversial.

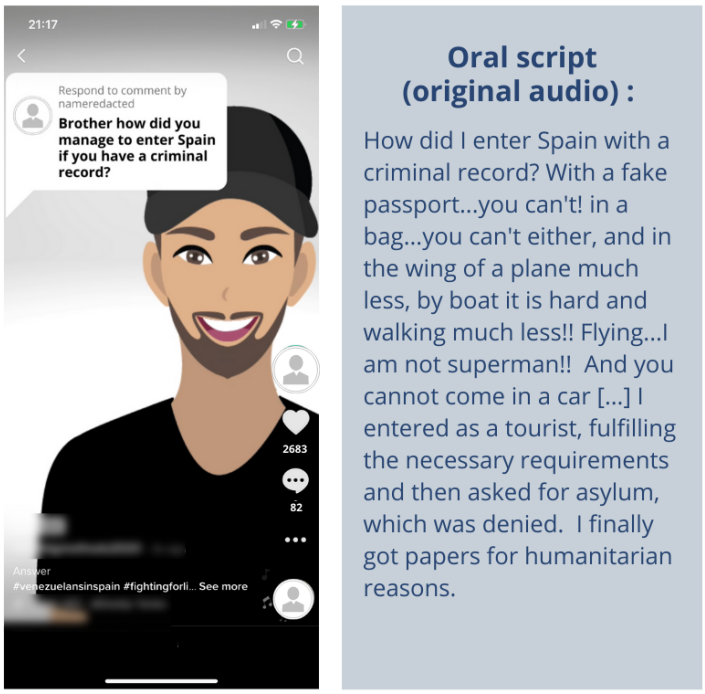


**Figure 45.** Rendering of visibility strategy for controversial content through humor and sarcasm. Created and translated by the Author.

### *6.4.2.2 Overlaid text for (in)visibility*

The use of a popular audio track was covered in a previous section but in this case, it is combined with an affordance that is part of the TikTok vernacular which is the use of overlaid text to customize the narrative while connecting to other creators through a popular music clip. In this case, a section of Natalia Lafourcade's song Hasta la Raíz with the lyrics: "Looking back you'll know that I

haven't forgotten you. I carry you inside me" is appropriated by the immigrant community to tell controversial and profoundly intimate stories about crossing the border. It illustrates the ways in which this micro challenge is configurated among immigrants who crossed the US-Mexico border around an audio meme (Abidin, 2021) extracted and curated from this song and used as a form of storytelling (Vizcaíno-Verdú & Abidin, 2022) to express this very specific experience of memory and identity. Figure 46 illustrates the different overlaid texts present in a few of the more than 6000 videos that use this audio track.

**Figure 46.** Examples of overlaid text used in videos with clip from the song "Hasta la raíz" by Natalia Lafourcade describing controversial intimate practices. Created by the Author.

It is evident that these are stories of pain, difficulty, and gratefulness involving people who helped these immigrants to cross safely through the US-Mexico border and obtain documentation. This is considered controversial for many reasons but one of them is the fact that they are publicly announcing that they crossed the border. Moreover, two of them refer to situations of abuse *en route* and the involvement of coyotes, while one of them discusses marrying to gain documented status. The other two texts refer to ICE agents who helped these immigrants cross, and this is very relevant because there is very little content that mentions ICE agents as possible allies for immigrants, which is rare within immigrant narratives which often present ICE agents as abusive and deceiving (Jaramillo-Dent et al., 2022). These narratives are disruptive and unexpected, and they are presented using TikTok vernacular logics, accompanied by a culturally relevant music genre, which derives from

Huapango (a traditional Mexican genre) with lyrics from a song that refers to identity through the metaphor of roots and the ways in which memories become an integral part of who people are. It is important to note that the name of this audio track does not connect to the songwriter/singer or the name of the song but it displays the name of a creator that has reuploaded this clip of the song, suggesting the overlap of two different (in)visibility tactics.

These immigrant creators are positioning these characters in their immigration story as key in their current lives and identities, as well as their possibilities to be part of their new country. This very short video –which lasts only nine seconds– is a powerful example of the way in which this community of creators followed the imitational nature of TikTok to convey their most intimate stories of gratefulness and migratory resilience through overlaid text connected by a short musical clip. In this sense the controversial content becomes visible through a connective audio track, but it is concealed by using overlaid text –in Spanish– which enables creators to customize their narrative. It is possible to argue that this content is (in)visible and it successfully bypasses moderation systems due to its alignment with TikTok's vernacular.

### 6.4.3 Partial deplatforming for renewed visibility

The elimination of content related to immigrant rights for going against the platform's guidelines reflects oppressive moderation practices. In this context, Jaramillo-Dent et al. (2022) describe how an immigrant activist got his Facebook account banned due to its mentions of white supremacists and MAGA supporters. In the present study an example of this was found in an immigrant creator who supports other immigrants and their rights and has achieved more than 2 million followers. In this case the creator had turned to his alternate social media profiles to explain what happened on TikTok and to promote alternative channels such as his Instagram account due to a different moderation approach that enables him to carry out his activist and fundraising activities. His strategy is threefold and can be seen in Figure 47.

**Figure 47.** Rendering of threefold strategy to maintain visibility and interaction from followers. Created and translated from Spanish by the Author.

This resembles digital methods expert Richard Rogers' (2020) analysis of *deplatforming* practices by extreme internet celebrities who flee to alternative social media platforms to continue sharing their content as a response to moderation by mainstream platforms. In the case of this creator, he engages in partial deplatforming, as he creates an alternative profile on TikTok alongside his Instagram account and expresses hope about his original TikTok profile which was repeatedly blocked before being completely banned. The ban cited his engagement in "unlawful activities" in content that fundraised to help undocumented individuals in the United States.

His detailed description of the moderation process through an Instagram video and his negotiation with TikTok illustrate the obscurity and cluelessness that prompts the emergence of folk moderation theories that attempt to make sense of these processes with no clear pathway to figure out why some content is moderated while other –seemingly more damaging– content remains on the platform (Myers West, 2018).

## 6.5 Conclusions

This chapter provides insights about the strategies that immigrant tiktokers deploy to bypass moderation processes and negotiate the visibility of their contents in the face of algorithmic systems that reflect biased structures for minority creators. These strategies include (1) content reuse and re-upload (2) vernacular visibility and (3) partial deplatforming to guide users to the channels

where content can become visible and accessible when TikTok profiles are banned. It is important to note that the goal of this study was not to generalize across creators on the platform but to identify instances of controversial content by immigrants on the platform and inquire about the possible aspects of the content that make it more likely to remain visible regardless of its level of controversy. These practices provide insights as to the difficulties faced by immigrants –and possibly other content creators– in some platforms and their attempts to make their content visible through subversive narratives and platformed strategies.

The strategic concealment of aspects of the narrative behind overlaid text and popular audio tracks is relevant to the need of minorities to model and shape their narratives to their context due to their difficulty to fit (Appadurai, 2019). This translates into the algorithmic aspect of the narrative, i.e. ensuring its presence and visibility within the platform. In this sense, one more analytical dimension is added to the mix of digital borders (Chouliaraki & Georgiou, 2019) faced by immigrants in user-generated-content contexts: the algorithmic visibility border. It is noteworthy that, although traditional indicators of success such as the number of views or likes are mentioned in this analysis, the goal was not to ascertain whether this content is highly visible but how it has remained present on the platform. In many cases, it is possible to suggest that tactics such as re-uploading audio have a twofold consequence, which includes limiting the video's visibility, while minimizing the possibility that it will be flagged or banned.

This chapter's limitations include the non-participant ethnographic approach and content analysis, which are limited by the lack of engagement with creators. It is important to note that TikTok makes it very difficult to contact creators directly which limits the feasibility of engaging directly with them. Future research could use quantitative methods to assess moderation experiences by immigrant creators through surveys and reach results that are more applicable to the general population of creators rather than the qualitative, unique observations made in the present study.

# Chapter 7

## Immigrant tikokers' narrative agency and belonging

# Chapter 7: Immigrant tiktokers' narrative agency and belonging

This chapter proposes four distinct forms of narrative agency and belonging experienced by Latin American content creators on TikTok, namely 1) (self)representative, 2) utilitarian, 3) prescriptive and 4) activist agentic styles. The proposed typology expands the notion of platformed belongings understood as creative, narrative, and agentic practices deployed by migrants –and other marginalized groups– that instrumentalize platform vernaculars and affordances to construct their identity by connecting, countering, or establishing a dialogue with existing narratives.

## 7.1 Introduction

This chapter continues to delve into the platformed, (self)representative and activist narratives by 53 Latin American migrant tiktokers living in the US and Spain. The decision to explore immigrant creators in the United States and Spain is motivated by their status as the two top destinations for the Latin American migrant community outside Latin America (Lorenzi & Batalova, 2022). However, research suggests that there are significant challenges for Latinx in both countries, due to issues related to the difficulties to access the qualified job market (Yemane & Fernández-Reino, 2019). Both countries have seen a rise in far-right ideologies and related discrimination. In the case of the US these have resulted in instances of rejection of Spanish speakers (Martinez, Rojo & González, 2019) while in Spain there has been a general hardening of opinions about immigration in the past few years (González-Enríquez & Rinken, 2021). The current political and economic situation results in significant precarity due to the scarce cultural, social and/or economic capital they can access as well as an irregular migration status, which makes them increasingly vulnerable (Nedelcu & Soysüren, 2020, p. 2).

The unique situations faced by immigrants in both countries may affect their identity construction processes. For example, they call for increased adaptations to their surrounding context, due to political environments that have become more polarized with the emergence of the far-right, in the case of Spain with Vox and in the US with MAGA. The case of immigrant tiktokers provides unique and multidimensional insights into identity construction and belongings that are reflected by their agency in creating content. Such content points to online and offline personas that reflect the creators' individual and collective selves as they navigate unfamiliar spaces and societies. Moreover, the visual and multimodal nature of these narratives illuminates the ways in which new interactive and digital sociality is shaped.

The platformed aspects of migrant narratives and related identities on TikTok are shaped by the connective, imitational, and interactive possibilities of the social media platform's memetic structure and affordances (Zulli & Zulli, 2020). Throughout this chapter I use the term platformed to refer to the ways in which digital spaces —structurally and through its policies/politics— enable, promote and constraint certain types of content and interactions.

Methodologically, I use a digital ethnography approach –started in November 2020– to identify immigrant creators and assess their content to select only those who (self)identify as immigrants living in the US or Spain. Qualitative, inductive, and multimodal content analyses enable us to empirically explore the agentic character of these narratives, considering the sociotechnical nature of platformed belongings as conceptualized by Jaramillo-Dent et al (Forthcoming 2022).

Below, I first define the key concepts that serve as the basis of the conceptualization proposed including agency, belonging and identity. I then present the relationships between these and social media affordances, which enable the deployment of new digital and platformed forms of belonging, with TikTok as an example. The methodological considerations are then outlined, followed by an explanation and exemplification of four modes of agency identified in content by immigrant tiktokers and their implications for platformed belongings.

## 7.2 Theoretical Framework

### 7.2.1 Agency, belonging and identity

Migrants have often been considered as passive, vulnerable victims. Their agency has largely been excluded from theoretical and analytical approaches in migration research (de Haas, 2021). It is urgently needed in digital migration studies to explore the extent to which migrants can counter governmental, legal, social, and cultural limitations they face through their own forms of agency. Migratory agency is defined by de Haas (2021, p. 14) as:

> the limited –but real–ability of human beings (or social groups) to make independent choices and to impose these on the world and, hence, to alter the structures that shape and constrain people's opportunities or freedoms.

Narrative agency is relevant for this study, which in the context of social media and hashtagged content has been defined as "the capacity to create stories on social media by using hashtags in a way that is collective and recognized by the public" (Yang, 2016, p. 14). In this case I consider the ability

of such content to counter existing beliefs and stereotypes about who migrants are, through the lens of their own life experience and expertise gained through their own migration. The analysis goes beyond hashtags to consider other connective possibilities afforded by TikTok such as audio tracks, effects, and memetic affordances such as the duet. Moreover, although I consider actual public recognition as relevant in the study of platformed migratory stories, I consider that the mere willingness of migrants to create content and deploy visibility strategies on a platform such as TikTok —which in many cases can put them at risk for harassment and discrimination— constitutes a form of narrative agency worth exploring due to the possibilities it entails.

Thus, I explore the relationship between these forms of agency in the formation of migrant identities and belongings through content creation, with TikTok as a case study. For this purpose, I take an approach to identity that is socially constructed and molded by the contexts occupied and negotiated by the individual (Hall, 2019). In online spaces, identity is defined and built through users' actions and behaviors (Senft, 2013). It is then through identity construction that "individuals come to situate themselves, for instance, as belonging to a distinct 'race', place, ethnicity, nationality, gender, or culture" (Nsamenang, 2008, p. 6).

Belonging has been described by feminist sociologist Nira Yuval-Davis (2011, p. 10) as the "emotional (or even ontological) attachment (…) [that] becomes articulated, formally structured and politicized only when it is threatened in some way." Yuval-Davis goes on to describe the dynamic nature of belonging processes, that are construed as 'fixed' or scripted to the benefit of certain hierarchical power structures, as well as multi-layered including various forms such as practical, emotional, and ideological belongings.

In migration studies, Jay Marlowe (2019) argues that social media provide unique opportunities for refugees to enact and expand their political capital and belonging to local and distant communities while negotiating different forms of identity expression. Thus, the narrative enactment of belonging can be understood as an articulation that has been denied to immigrants through various symbolic and material bordering strategies (Chouliaraki & Georgiou, 2019). In this sense, sociolinguist Theresa Heyd's (2016) narratives of belonging are instrumental, as they describe the shifting nature of digital diasporic stories that provide insights about emerging linguistic practices of identity and affiliation. Moreover, Marlowe et al.'s (2017, p. 17) notion of digital belongings

describe the digitally enabled forms of social participation and cohesion among friends or family members. These authors incorporate various perspectives on identity, and belonging, analyzed through the narrative functions of digital media to understand the identity-building practices of migrants.

For example, at the intersection of agency, identity and belonging, researchers that explored migrant integration in Ecuador suggest that Colombian immigrants engage in an agentic invisibility bargain to negotiate the aspects of their identity they choose to present and make visible depending on how acceptable they are in their receiving society (Pugh, 2018). Moreover, sociolinguist Dominika Baran (2018) suggests that refugees' personal stories on Facebook illustrate different levels of agency in relation to their perceived ethnic and national belonging. These previous studies provide the grounds for the proposed theorization of different levels of agency modeled by migratory platformed narrative forms on TikTok.

Thus, when belongings, identities and agentic styles are established in the digital realm, they expand beyond traditional –non-digital– understandings to incorporate digital modes shaped by the creators' personal creative styles and their allegiance to certain digital groupings and trends. Arguably tiktokers enact their various belongings and related identities using platformed strategies that are shaped by their agentic style and their perception, appropriation, and vernacular knowledge of the platform. In the next section the platformed dimensions of the proposed framework are introduced.

### 7.2.3 A framework for platformed belongings

Our proposed framework to study platformed belongings is informed by various concepts derived from Internet research. On the one hand, the concept of vernacular affordances (McVeigh-Schultz & Baym, 2015) refers to the process by which users make sense and negotiate their digital behaviors with a platform's material structures, by navigating the actions that are enabled and constrained within. On the other hand, Gibbs et al.'s (2015) platform vernaculars describe the unique combination of styles, grammars, and logics that constitute the popular genres generated within a particular social media platform and are shaped and developed by users' behaviors. These are key concepts to locate belonging strategies in the negotiation between migrant creators and the

platform, through their use and appropriation of existing affordances and vernaculars.

This constant bargaining process between the content creator and the platform is delimited by its moderation policies and its politics (Gillespie, 2018), as well as the unique algorithmic for you page —in the case of TikTok. Creators belonging to marginalized groups have been able to impact platform policies in the past, an example was the case of Black creator Ziggy Tyler, who created videos bringing attention to biased moderation practices by TikTok when using the word "Black" in any phrase and getting flagged as inappropriate and comparing it to the use of the word "white", TikTok responded claiming that it was a glitch in the algorithm that was immediately fixed (Murray, 2021).

The politics of belonging as described by Yuval-Davis (2011) are, in some ways, perpetuated within digital platforms, where power configurations and their agents are actively enacting digital (Chouliaraki & Georgiou, 2019), coded (Benjamin, 2019) and algorithmic (Noble, 2018) forms of bordering. Concurrently, I suggest that migrant content creators who are actively responding to these exclusionary sociotechnical structures by harnessing their own lived experiences and their platformed know-how to legitimize their status and their rights through multimodal (self)representations.

In this chapter, I understand platformed belongings as creative, narrative, and agentic practices deployed by migrants —and other marginalized groups— that instrumentalize platform vernaculars and affordances to construct their identity by connecting, countering, or establishing a dialogue with existing narratives in digital spaces that enable and constraint these contents.

## 7.3 Methodological considerations

The first step was to identify content and profiles of interest through hashtag and keyword searches on the platform. I then assessed profiles to ascertain creators' self-identification as immigrants living in the US and Spain. The non-participant ethnographic study performed included four separate actions: (1) periodic observation of migrant content creators' videos for one hour a day every weekday, (2) consumption of general content on the platform to assess the latest and most relevant trends two times a week and (3) monthly walkthroughs as consumers of content and as content creators to identify changes in the affordances and configurations of the platform. These observations were

recorded using field notes and screenshots of phenomena of interest considering these three separate tasks. Task (4) involved the selection and scraping of specific datasets to further delve into phenomena of interest.

One of the main challenges of conducting research on social media is its ever-changing nature. In terms of the platform, this means guidelines and moderation policies that are constantly shifting or whose interpretation changes (Gillespie, 2018). To minimize these challenges, I employed different forms of the walkthrough method (Light et al., 2018) to keep the analyses current and relevant in relation to the platform and design changes. I conducted walkthroughs with two main goals: to understand the user experience while navigating and consuming content on the for you page and as a content creator, attempting to create videos and assessing the changes in platform affordances and configurations as they would be experienced by creators.

As part of the project, different analyses of the sample have been performed, including three separate qualitative, inductive, multimodal content and discourse analyses comprising a total of more than 600 TikTok videos analyzed. Each of these analyses served to inform the next, as phenomena of interest was identified, and new video samples were analyzed to delve into specific phenomena. This chapter derives from observations made in the process of gathering and analyzing the data in these three different studies to refine the concept of platformed belongings in migration research.

The main reason for doing a non-participant approach was the difficulty to contact content creators due to structural limitations of the platform, which make it very hard to contact other users. For the purposes of the present study, data were identified in a process of observation for an extended period as explained before. For two of the data analyses the videos were labeled before being scraped as examples of phenomena of interest and for the third, four profiles of immigrant creators were identified and a sample of each of their profiles was scraped. In this case, the digital ethnography fieldwork of these communities of creators informed the scraping process, through a series of iterative observations of the data and fieldnotes that detailed the phenomena of interest.

When researching migration in these digital spaces, there are added difficulties due to the controversial topics migrant creators discuss, and the harassment they often receive due to their migratory status. Researchers in the field of media and migration need to keep in mind that the content that is

available online is a tiny sliver of the migratory experience and provides a limited glance towards migrants' lives due to the risks many other prospective and former migrant content creators have undergone. It is worth noting that TikTok offers a relevant space for the analysis of migratory narratives, due to its status as the most-downloaded app in 2021 (Cyca, 2022) and one that has also become a recognized space for political expression and influence (Lorenz, 2022). The TikTok Cultures Research Network (https://tiktokcultures.com/), led by Digital Anthropologist Dr. Crystal Abidin, provides a space of collaboration among scholars interested on TikTok and its communities of creators.

In terms of data collection and analysis, data analyzed in depth were scraped using the Python TikTok API Wrapper (Avilash, n.d.). Since various ethical challenges arise from analyzing social media data without consent (boyd & Crawford, 2012) information was anonymized to protect creators and their identity. A critical and reflexive process was followed to ensure that the perspectives and realities of migrant content creators were included, by understanding specific contexts, as well as considering ethical concerns over privacy and data ownership in digital research (Metcalf & Crawford, 2016).

Below I include content examples that illustrate each mode of migrant agency and their associated belonging enacted on the platform, including their multimodal aspects and the ways in which these creators harness TikTok's affordances and creative functionalities to convey different agentic styles for belonging and identity. It is important to note that quotes have been translated form Spanish.

## 7.4 Four modes of migrant agency for enacting belonging

In this section I propose a typology of agentic styles that define the platformed belongings and identities deployed by migrant tiktokers. These agentic styles are all adapted to the platform through practices that position them in relation to others, through original creations, affinity or by countering existing content. I came up with this typology while analyzing TikTok content created by migrant creators, I observed that these contents reflected their agency through narrative genres that were unexpected and that in some cases promoted different forms of agency in the immigrant community. Figure 48 reflects the four modes of

agency and corresponding forms of belonging reflected by immigrant tiktokers' content.

**Figure 48.** Proposed forms of agency and belonging, characteristics and examples. Created by the Author.

In terms of platformed practices, belongings and their respective identities are established through an array of affordances and formats, such the inclusion of niche hashtags that connect migrant creators with their perceived communities. These may refer to specific national (#mexican) or ethnic groupings (#Latinos) there are also words that are known by those familiar with the specific culture itself such as (#catrachos). There are also platform-specific hashtags (#foryou or #parati) that connect content with specific communities of creators and reflect their vernacular knowledge of the platform. The use of affordances within the platform that enable the reuse of content –such as duet, use this audio and green screen– are deployed to connect with and counter

existing narratives. Multiple identities are reflected through these belongings and agentic styles.

### 7.4.1 (Self)representative agency: belonging through storytelling

The first agentic style and its corresponding mode of belonging can be described as migrant (self)representation. Such self-representations may range from seemingly passive to subversive. This style can be illustrated by migrant creators who present a specific rendition of the migrant experience that offers opportunities for interpretation, and which may challenge existing beliefs. Self-representations present a story that is often personal and may include persuasive elements. In the strongest cases, it may include an identifiable call to action or a clear message about what is expected from the viewer.

Examples of (self)representative agency include content featuring migrant workers. Migrant worker (self)representations in previous research revolve around narratives where the immigrant strives for deservingness to belong (Georgiou, 2018; Nikunen, 2019) and that strategically emphasizes identity features perceived as more desirable to be accepted into receiving societies (Pugh, 2018). This content ranges from passive representations of a working migrant to a more empowered rhetoric that includes mentions of the stereotypical beliefs within the receiving country versus the reality shown in the narrative.

An example of a seemingly passive (self)representation includes a video that visually depicts a man and his colleagues picking up vegetables in the field on a sunny day with overlaid text that reads "Working in Spain, the life of an immigrant 💪 (Ecuadorian and Spanish flag emojis)." The audio is a popular Ecuadorian song used around 4000 times on the platform with the lyrics (translated from Spanish): "I am also a migrant, a Latino migrant. I did not have enough to live in a dignified way. Going through risks in the journey, I have come to strive." The caption promotes action from the viewer: "(…) 💪💪💪 (Ecuadorian and Spanish flag emojis) like this video for the workers." In this example, agency is twofold, first through the presentation of immigrants in a positive light, which, beyond the establishment of deservingness, these content creators can respond to widespread beliefs through first-person accounts of their life, second by promoting support from the viewer.

Another form of (self)representation is exemplified by videos establishing affinity between migratory experiences. One such video portrays two female immigrants who have experienced similar situations in Spain establish affinity and (self)represent collectively. The first creator prompts others to share their stories using an emotional audio track that expresses sadness in the face of difficulty and a story (using overlaid text) that enables her to reflect her own experience of hardship and discrimination in the Spanish job market. The second creator offers her own story, supporting and relating to the first one through her own overlaid text, narrating her own professional and lived experience with migration. The narrative develops in a sort of asynchronous dialogue which reflects a digital togetherness, which illustrates a unique sense of identity and belonging derived from the action of sharing intimate experiences (Marino, 2015, p. 6).

As shown in Figure 48, the assumptions of this mode of agency and belonging include the value of testimonial, first person accounts. The tone of the message will often match TikTok's platform vernacular (Gibbs et al., 2015; Zulli & Zulli, 2020) such as the use of emoji and overlaid text, as well as audio that has been used in several videos before. The vernaculars in this type of video may also appear as humorous or choreographed messages that may include narrative configurations such as one-person role-plays, point-dancing, or lip-syncing to illustrate the desired message.

In the (self)representative agentic example, belonging can also be established through narratives that can go from (self)representation to affinity and the shared migrant identity constructed collectively through the deployment of the duet format. Other TikTok formats for reuse such as green screen or stitch—which enables the use of an existing TikTok video that can be cut to create a new video and 'stitch' them together— can also be used as part of the (self)representative agentic style.

## 7.4.2 Utilitarian agency: practical belonging

The second agentic style involves practical tips and advice to make belonging easier for prospective and current migrants. There is an emphasis on functional aspects of belonging through the provision of a set of guidelines to facilitate basic needs and resources acquisition for migrants. I posit that the focus on accessing resources constitutes an empowered form of belonging (Yuval-Davis,

2011). Content reflecting this style thematically ranges from financial matters related to migration, to finding a home, getting a job, or accessing school. It also includes strategies about bureaucratic processes to gain lawful status. In some instances, it may involve answering questions about specific actions that are (un)safe for migrants including specific tips to navigate life in the new country while undocumented.

Overall, utilitarian agency refers to a perspective which assumes that migratory status is not paramount to enter a country with the intention to stay, integrate to the job market, get housing, or access school. The tone is instructional, non-judgmental, and based on a combination of personal experience, anecdotal information, and different levels of knowledge of the legal, cultural, and social systems in the receiving country. The format is mostly original video and audio which sometimes may include the response to comment affordance –which allows for a creator to visually embed a comment from a previous video on a new one and respond to said comment.

For example, a female creator speaking to the camera and responds to a comment that reads "(...) can I travel to Colombia for a month as soon as I get my Residence card?" by using original audio:

> You can travel to Colombia for a month when you get your residence card (...) the first card expires after one year and you need to contribute to your Social Security for a minimum of six months by the time of renewal.

The quote illustrates an immigrant creator who is knowledgeable –from her own experience– sharing information about the strategies needed to navigate migratory processes in the receiving nation. In the case of this creator –whose content ranges from Colombian recipes to housing advice and cultural content– the advice is prompted by a person using the response to comment affordance. The recommendations feature a knowledge of the procedural requirements to maintain residency status and ensure its renewal. The creator's position of power among her followers as a leader for Colombian immigrants is evident. This agentic mode also highlights the role of digitally-enabled community support networks (Udwan et al., 2020) who build forms of collective agentic knowledge among immigrants establishing different forms of utilitarian and practical belonging in their new context.

Another example of this agentic utilitarian belonging mode is reflected by a video with overlaid text "Renting a room or apartment (...) things you must know this before migrating", where the creator orally explains the difficulty of renting "when you migrate you cannot rent a whole apartment to share with your husband, your kids and family because you need to have a work contract." In this case, the creator provides information that is both practical and experience-based, drawn from the community of immigrants. Agency is enacted to ensure the prospective immigrant has the basic resources needed to live in the new country regardless of their status, enacting their rights from below. Belonging is established through asserting to a collective audience of fellow (aspiring) migrants? that housing is a basic right, also for migrants, although it may be precarious at the beginning.

Utilitarian agency also resembles Marlowe's (2019) description of a sort of awareness-raising political engagement through social media, which enables the commenter to take control of her newly acquired status and ensure a form of legal-status-based belonging. The hashtags included in the caption for the example above are "#parati #foryou #inmigrantes #colombianosenelexterior #viajaracolombia" and reflect the intended audience, and TikTok-specific hashtags relating to the algorithmic for you page, suggesting the goal of gaining visibility within the platform and the specific community of Colombian immigrants. Thus, the utilitarian agentic style enables belonging by promoting the compliance with legal requirements of residency in Spain, which are delineated by this creator.

### 7.4.3 Prescriptive agency: 'how-to' belong correctly

Prescriptive agency intends to promote certain *correct* ways to belong to the new country, in this case, the assumptions include the belief that there are correct and incorrect ways to belong, in terms of what is expected from the migrants in their host society. It reflects an authoritative tone, often with a sense of superiority from the perspective of a more experienced immigrant who instructs others who just arrived or are making the decision to travel. The platformed configuration of this content may include a monologue by the creator looking at the camera or a duet/green screen to include examples of the wrong ways to be. Thus, the narrative format of this agentic form often includes examples of *wrong* forms to be an immigrant and the corresponding *corrective*

modes according to the creator. These may involve linguistic, cultural, or attitudinal instructions that in many cases resemble top-down integration policies to achieve mainstream forms of belonging, such as adapting to the host country's labor market, regulations and their ways of working.

An example is depicted by an immigrant creator promoting gratefulness. This goes beyond the grateful migrant or the migrant worker representations illustrated in the first case and in previous literature as forms to establish deservingness to belong (Georgiou, 2018; Nikunen, 2019). In this case the creator provides stern instructions about the best way to migrate in which seemingly contradictory claims about the home country's identity appear side by side: using a commanding tone within an original oral audio,

> I want to invite Latinos and Colombians to be grateful with what Spain gives us. (…) look, come to Spain to contribute, and do not try to trick the system, leave that 'indigenous malice' that they mention in Colombia behind.

The video is an example of her personal definition of a "good migrant" which refers to different forms of acceptable and civic behaviors that enable certain immigrants to belong (Chauvin & Garcés-Mascareñas, 2014). This is faced with what she sees as incorrect behavior described as "indigenous malice", which she portrays as an intrinsic form of corruption that is native to Colombia that circulates within the community. In this case, belonging is established within these behavioral lines the creator provides, as well as leaving behind what is seen as a negative trait among Colombians to become a "better immigrant."

In the next example, the creator employs an authoritative tone to convey information about how immigrants should behave. Considering that the lack of recognition and loss of social identity are important post-migration challenges affecting the belonging prospects of migrants in their host societies (Mulvey, 2013), these narratives can be interpreted as forms of resistance towards exclusionary integration policies that undermine migrants' agency and aspirational life trajectories (De Haas, 2021). This case shows that the modalities overlap, however the predominant undertone is prescriptive as reflected in the creators' oral statement,

> There are lots of migrants that get here and used to be nurses or teachers in their country. (…) When you migrate to another country you must have an open mind (…). For instance, if your degree validation takes a long time, you often must work in whatever is available such as cleaning houses or caring for the elderly. (…) You need to get down from your high horse and work hard to achieve your goals.

This mode of agency/belonging also reflects the ways in which top-down normative belongings set by governments permeate horizontal forms of belonging established between members of the immigrant community in these receiving nations (Chin, 2019). The lack of empathy to the possible variations in the migratory experience is salient in this example where the hard truth as seen by some members of the migrant community are salient.

### 7.4.4 Activist agency: belonging through the performance of rights

Activist platformed belongings are reflected by themes related to specific actions and behaviors that can be enacted to change the outcome of real-life experiences for vulnerable populations such as the case of some of the most precarious immigrants –those with an irregular migration status (Nedelcu & Soysüren, 2020). These videos also follow what Cogo (2019) has defined as migrant activism through narratives that emphasize experiences of oppression and racism and claims for rights and citizenship. In this case the creator emphasizes aspects of life that are subject to inequality, systemic oppression, and injustice. The assumptions in this case include the belief that all people have rights regardless of their documentation. Rights, in this case, include human or constitutional rights as well as driving principles such as equality and justice for all people.

The tone of content illustrating this form of agency and belonging is empowered, active, instructional, and performative. It includes specific actions viewers can take in such situations in a way that is fearless and unconcerned with the possibility of retaliation by haters or opponents. In this regard, it is important to highlight that an explicit awareness of the dangers of surveillance by the

government (Witteborn, 2021) and/or explicit mentions of fear related to these dangers are also absent from content reflecting this agentic style.

The least common form of agency in the dataset concerned anti-ICE vigilantism. Although it is uncommon, it is noteworthy because of its strength and the risk taken by the content creator to post such content. In this case the creator goes beyond (self)representing, telling a story, advising, or providing guidelines to taking real action and recording it to model what to do in cases of injustice. For instance, a creator that deploys activist agency describes examples of the injustice many immigrants face in the US due to deceitful strategies by ICE officers. He also models how to act when harassed while filming ICE agents and their behaviors and promotes imitation. In his videos, he frames his practices within the rights provided by the constitution to individuals regardless of their migratory status. This content configuration reflects what Gabdulhakov (2019) termed digital vigilantism through the promotion of collective forms of retaliation against injustice. Belonging is established among the community of followers who may have been wronged and may benefit from these instructive and activist messages about their rights.

Another example involves an immigrant who provides information about entering the country as a tourist to stay and reside in Spain in response to a follower's question "What type of questions does the immigration officer ask?." The tiktoker responds facing the camera and describing the exchange with the immigration officer provides specific questions and requirements a person needs to enter the country as a tourist and stay:

> They asked whether I had family here, I said I didn't. They asked about the length of my stay, I said 15 days. They asked about the hotel, (...) the amount of money I had (…) it is important to answer calmly (…) you need to bring 90 euro per day.

The quote is an example that borders the utilitarian agentic style described in an earlier section, but in contrast to the utilitarian agentic style, this example highlights the importance of making use of digital spaces to enact narrative agency in the context of existing political structures. This is a subversive form of agency that intends for the immigrant to claim mobility rights from below, in their own terms. It is considered activist agency because it subversively and strategically models this form of entrance to a country. Belonging is

established through assumptions that legitimize this migration strategy and enable a form of casual, political counter-narrative (Marlowe, 2019) while facing material and legal borders established by Europe in relation with many Latin American countries for prospective immigrants. Activist agency connects to a form of belonging based upon migrant activism (Cogo, 2019).

## 7.5 Conclusions

The present chapter considered a perspective on narrative agency to analyze how different forms of belonging are enacted on TikTok contents created by Latin American migrants in the US and Spain. The current study found that traditional forms of belonging, agency and identity in migration research can be enriched by new dimensions enabled by platformed spaces and creative possibilities.

First, the relationship between narrative agency, belonging and identity were outlined and the relevance of understanding these together was established. An explanation of the platformed content creation possibilities adds an analytical dimension to the proposed conceptualization of agency and platformed belongings. Furthermore, each of the four agentic forms and their corresponding belongings were presented and illustrated with examples of TikTok content and the use of different affordances that enable these agentic forms to emerge. Finally, it was argued that content creation on TikTok can be seen as an opportunity for different levels of migrant agency and rights claims, as well as the construction of collective knowledge in the process of establishing their belongings in their receiving country. There are nuanced differences between these agentic forms in the two receiving countries analyzed. For instance, prescriptive agency always intends the migrant community to follow certain guidelines but the guidelines themselves change depending on the individual content creator and in some cases reflects normative integration notions of the receiving nation –linguistic integration in the US that is not necessary in Spain, for instance.

The relevance of developing approaches that consider migrant agency in the analysis of belonging and identity processes is becoming increasingly pressing in the face of diverse bordering strategies that may be physical, symbolic, and digital (Chouliaraki & Georgiou, 2019). It is noteworthy to highlight the methodological possibilities of scrutinizing social media content

which provides an overview of the diverse voices within immigrant communities and their content creation strategies of identity, agency and belonging. Social media analyses of content created by immigrants, such as the one presented here, can provide interesting perspectives about the nuanced and unexpected ways in which horizontal forms of agency, belonging and identity are policed and negotiated within the migrant community and facilitated by the configurations of the platform.

# Chapter 8

**General Conclusion and Discussion**

# Chapter 8: General conclusion and discussion

This chapter reexamines the main question and five sub-questions that guide this dissertation. It addresses the main findings, considering the different theoretical and conceptual contributions of each of the chapters. It establishes the relevance of locating social media content in the algorithmic and platformed spaces it navigates and migratory narratives as a unique case that comprises issues of belonging, identity, and agency in the face of discrimination and othering. This chapter brings together the implications and contributions of the dissertation and provides possible future lines of research for consideration.

## 8.1 Revisiting the research questions

The present dissertation aimed to explore the ways in which narratives about immigration are shaped and built on social media platforms. This was done by responding to five sub-questions: (SRQ1) How do the sociotechnical configurations of social media shape narratives about immigration? (SRQ2) What role does otherness and sameness play in narratives about immigration? (SRQ3) What strategies do different content creators use to make their migratory narratives visible and to enter public discourse through social media? (SRQ4) What are the unique challenges and opportunities for migrant creators to participate in existing discourse about themselves? (SRQ5) What are the narratives conveyed and (self)representations portrayed and what are their implications for migrant communities and specific agents creating relevant content?

In the next sections, the answers to these questions are delineated, considering the interactions and convergent points between the different chapters and their contribution to answer the general query.

### 8.1.1 Sociotechnical considerations

"Every type of social setting produces its own visions of the dangers that threaten its identity, visions made to the measure of the kind of social order it struggles to achieve or to retain."

—Zygmunt Bauman

Across the chapters that comprise this dissertation and following the multimodal nature of the analysis carried out, I engaged with the technical aspects, formats, functions, affordances, and configurations enabled by the two social media platforms explored. The roles of the specific design features that comprise Instagram (IG) and TikTok (TKTK) are important to understand the *platformed* nature of these narratives and (self)representations of migration.

From the self-representative nature of Instagram, the analysis of posts connected by the #MigrantCaravan and #CaravanaMigrante hashtags reflects that these contents follow the generalist functions of Instagram as a space for self-representation, identity construction and self-expression. In this case the

images of the journey, militarization, and difficulty are appropriated by content creators across the range of opinions about immigration to position themselves in a continuum between humanitarians and concerned citizens protecting their nation.

This extends to the Instagram Story format, which maintains the self-representative nature of Instagram as a platform while providing a political branding space for Vox as a party. In this sense, the use of color palettes and aesthetics enabled by the IG Story format builds the digital identity and branding of Vox as a political party and emphasizes the good (green and white) vs. bad (red and black) configurations presented in their content. As the findings suggest, the short and ephemeral character of IG Stories offer a range of multimodal elements such as overlaid text, interactive stickers, and profile tags, as well as a blank slate to collate different pieces of information and deploy brand aesthetics and visual designs. The persuasive functions deployed by Vox in their three official profiles reflect strategic uses of the slider sticker and emojis as emotional appeals to readers in discussions about immigration, whose main characters' voices are absent. The aggregation of screenshots from different news and opinion pieces on a white background, which I have called "collage", reveal strategic presentations of information to support specific ideologies about immigration.

In the case of TikTok, its connective and mimetic nature as a platform (Zulli & Zulli, 2020) is embedded in the analysis of migratory narratives. From TikTok's structurally mimetic functions, it is noteworthy to point to audio tracks, effects such as green screen, overlaid text, reuse options such as the duet and stitch. The narrative configurations made possible by these functions include TikTok's vernacular genres of humor and choreography. The combination of these functions and the narrative genres within TikTok constitute its main sociotechnical configurations. For instance, the use of content sharing/reuse functionalities such as the duet reflects the possibility of expressing support or attacking creators by coopting their content and resignifying it within this format. TikTok is further characterized by the application of these functions and affordances within specific genres of humor enabled by narrative forms such as role playing, lip-synching and/or choreography.

The shift from *stories told in digital spaces* to *stories shaped by the digital spaces they inhabit* is at the center of the sociotechnical analysis performed in this dissertation. It is possible to suggest that the lightness and playfulness of

both platforms are instrumentalized by various actors to inflict discrimination and othering, while other creators counter them. Moreover, these instances of platformed storytelling are further understood when adding the narrative "essence" (Morse, 2008) of the stories told by the different agents discussing migration, including migrants. The convergence between the platform and the story outlines the main contributions of this dissertation and are described in each of the following sections.

### 8.1.2 The role of otherness and sameness

"We reveal most about ourselves when we speak about others."
— Kamand Kojouri

The concepts of otherness and sameness provide a guiding thread to analyze content created by different actors across the chapters that comprise this dissertation.

On Instagram, content creators discussing the #MigrantCaravan engaged in othering towards migrants regardless of their –self-proclaimed– stance on immigration. In this case the representation of migrants served to position the content creator in relation to the issue of immigration without engaging with the migratory experience at a deeper level. The visual distribution of characters and their relationship with the border wall served to support the narrative and position the storyteller, while the voice of the migrant remained absent. Similarly, and as expected, right-wing party Vox engages in open and unfettered othering towards immigrants, while their chosen affordances and functions of the IG Story enable strategic presentations of information with little time-space for followers and viewers to make an informed decision about the immigration-related content presented.

The analysis carried out across the last four chapters suggests that the engagement of immigrant tiktokers with narratives of othering is twofold. First, they bring their own experiences of othering to the fore when they justify, clarify and counter discriminatory and oppressive beliefs that render them as the perennial subalterns. In these contents, othering is often reflected when immigrant tiktokers mention specific segments of their imagined viewership such as "MAGA supporters" or "Spaniards who hate immigrants" and direct their

message to those specific publics orally, using overlaid text, captions, or hashtags. Second, immigrant content creators engage in horizontal forms of othering when they establish different hierarchical structures within the immigrant community. This is evident in content where the creator criticizes certain immigrants or provides judgmental guidelines to *migrate correctly*. Content creators that establish governmental agencies as the enemy also engage in othering. This is exemplified in content where an immigrant activist faces and challenges the actions by ICE while positioning them as anti-human rights –regardless of one's stance on immigration this is also an instance of othering.

According to the results, sameness is embedded in processes of othering. This is illustrated by creators expressing their affinity to certain ideas or communities in an attempt to strengthen their arguments of difference and/or superiority. In this sense, and to afford credibility to their stances of otherness, these tiktokers and instagrammers often need to emphasize the existence of a community of support within narratives of sameness and belonging. Some examples of these representations of *collective othering* include: (1) Vox politicians who visually appear surrounded by people who seem to cheer them on as they counter the "threat" of immigration; (2) a right-wing immigrant tiktoker who constantly integrates her conservative community of Latin American peers –through the use of duet, stitch and profile tags– who collectively criticize undocumented, Latinx immigration; (3) immigrant tiktokers who present examples of discrimination that portray them as a collective experience, in an apparent attempt to substantiate their claims, as if one instance of abuse was not enough. These narratives of collectivity become *platformed* through affordances such as duet, stitch, reuse of audio combined with overlaid text expressing support and affinity, among others. Some uses of identity-related hashtags also reflect labels that bring communities of creators and viewers together.

The storylines described before are often controversial, especially in cases where instances of abuse are revealed, or when certain provocative advice to navigate migrant life is disclosed. Creators across the board mention instances of censorship or moderation of their content. In the next section, the strategies deployed by these creators to avoid moderation and make their content visible are presented.

### 8.1.3 Visibility strategies

"Everyone is invisible to someone."
— Natasha Anastasia Tarpley

The concept of visibility is key when discussing immigration and it is also fundamental when considering social media content. Success on social media is often measured through indicators related to visibility. In the case of Instagram, the story format reports on the *viewers* of any story published, while TikTok videos provide a *views* count. These indicators consider the importance of passive visualizations in contrast with more active forms of interaction such as likes, comments, shares, or reuses of content. Furthermore, the creators' search for success is reflected in content that reveals strategies aimed at engagement and interaction. In this dissertation, three themes emerge as relevant in relation to visibility: the appropriation of migration-related stories/images; the inability of migrant narratives to fit within mainstream storylines; and the (un)expected strategies for algorithmic (in)visibility observed throughout the analysis.

Similar to previous research in the field of media and migration (e.g. Chouliariaki & Georgiou, 2019; 2022; Georgiou, 2018), in the present dissertation findings suggest that migratory storylines are appropriated by content creators (migrant or non-migrant) by hijacking images, media events or narratives. In the case of content created by instagrammers, many of them appropriated the visibility afforded by the #MigrantCaravans and related hashtags, storylines, and visual cues. This suggests that highly mediatized events focusing on immigration lend themselves to the opportunistic appropriation of migratory contents to bring the spotlight to certain ideologies, stances, and Instagram profiles. This is evident in the analysis of coocurring hashtags during the #MigrantCaravans as well as the use of strategically curated immigrant images and news articles in the case of Vox and IG stories. The platform-enabled collation of contents within IG Stories and the coopting of TikTok videos by different creators in the duet and green screen are examples of these tactics. The deployment of strategies such as *unwilling co-creation* (Chapter 5) –where the creator uses existing content to counter an idea or stance– also reflects these platformed modes of visibility-by-association.

The difficulty of migrant narratives to fit the mainstream was proposed by Appadurai (2019) and it serves as a useful framework to understand some of the platformed visibility strategies deployed by immigrant creators. It is important to note that migrant narratives often become controversial due to structural issues that maintain migrants and their life experiences outside the mainstream, such as the social construction of *illegality* (Flores & Schachter, 2018) and other limiting stereotypes targeting immigrant communities.

In this context, tactics like *hashbaiting* (Chapter 5) reflect the mainstreaming attempts by a subversive immigrant activist advancing social justice messages about human rights that are often provocative for the general population. Along the same lines, tiktokers in Spain highlight instances of violent abuse by deploying audio functions combined with overlaid text to negotiate and promote their visibility on TikTok's algorithmic feed and avoid moderation, as described in Chapter 6. In the same chapter, tactics such as *vernacular humor* and *partial deplatforming* also derive from the difficulty of migrant stories to fit the expected configuration of TikTok's algorithmic system.

Algorithmic (in)visibility is deployed through the strategic presentation of content that obscures the controversial narrative using specific affordances and vernaculars of the platform. The use of humor to highlight undocumented migration such as in the examples provided in Chapter 5 illustrate the concealment of contested issues under the appearance of light, fun genres.

In the next section, the challenges, and opportunities of social media narratives about immigration are explored.

### 8.1.4 Challenges and opportunities for migrant creators

"Loud as all the sounds can be, let my silence be loud, so I may resurrect the dead, and give voice to the oppressed. My silence speaks."

— Kamand Kojouri

Throughout this dissertation, an overview of the different representations of migrants and their stories has been posed, contrasting user-generated and social media content with previous literature on the frames that shape migratory storylines. Immigration frames constitute challenges to migrant agency as they attempt to navigate life in their receiving societies, and people's imaginaries

about immigration are shaped by these images and narratives. Studies on the framing of immigration examined for this dissertation range from Benson's (2013) seminal work on the frames of migration in the North American and French media, to the Spanish parliament's frames on the topic (Mc Mahon, 2017). I explored literature on the different forms of criminalization of immigration (Brouwer et al., 2017) and frames of deservingness for integration (Chauvin & Garcés-Mascareñas, 2014) that enriched my analytical framework. Current legal limitations to content creation by some of the most vulnerable immigrant communities are also problematic. In this sense, laws that make the acquisition of documented status –and the provision of assistance and services– contingent on the nature and types of content produced on social media –such as the case of the US (Funk, 2021) and several countries in Europe (Meaker,2018) – are relevant to understand contemporary challenges of content creation for some immigrant creators.

Findings allude to additional challenges posed by socially mediated narratives of migration. These are illustrated by more nuanced and platformed forms of othering made possible in these digital spaces –such as Instagram. For instance, the deployment of social media formats for persuasion about immigration conveyed by Vox in Spain elucidate the implications of this short, highly visual ephemeral format presented in an impactful manner. The combination of traditional othering –strategic presentations of young, male migrants in groups described as aggressive– and platformed strategies –e.g. collage and interactive elements–shaping migratory narratives exemplify some of the challenges for immigrant communities. Such persuasive and intentional representations have the potential to become embedded in the imaginaries of receiving societies.

In contrast, the need of many immigrant creators on TikTok to build their platformed self-representations around existing discriminatory beliefs about immigration is noteworthy. They do this by clarifying, mentioning, or countering specific stereotypical and misinformed views on immigration, as described in Chapter 4. These counternarratives also reflect some of the challenges experienced by marginalized populations, who convey a need to constantly justify their existence, or define themselves in relation to standardized ideas of *who immigrants are* and *who immigrants should be*. According to the findings, there are top-down and horizontal pressures to conform to specific *correct modes of migration*.

It is worth noting that in the observation of 53 immigrant content creators, many of them presented a variety of interests such as art, fashion, dance, daily lives, professional and academic aspects of life, among others. Nevertheless, the impact and prevalence of the migratory experience in many of these migrant-generated-contents point to the importance of this struggle in their lives. In this sense, Mezzadra (2011) argues that immigrants across the different stages in the migratory process experience struggles and difficulties in their lives. This author argues for the consideration of these struggles –which are commonly connected to undocumented status– as generalized to all those across the immigration continuum, and not only applicable to irregular immigrants.

Hence, the notion of *migrant identities* is advanced within the studies that comprise this dissertation. Thus, the experience of migrating seems to present both a challenge and an opportunity. On the one hand, it may limit the ability of content creators to move beyond their migratory status or national origin and focus on other topics unrelated to migration. On the other hand, this life experience marks the life of individuals at such a degree that it becomes an indelible aspect of who they are and its inclusion in their content helps provide a more authentic and holistic image of who the creator is.

For undocumented and other immigrants in the process of acquiring a more stable immigration status such as refugees or asylum seekers, the stakes are high when creating content online. However, in interviews with migrant influencers, which included formerly and currently undocumented immigrants, they reflected on the opportunities afforded by social media, even in the face of physical danger. Some of them reported being harassed and attacked in digital and physical spaces. Nevertheless, they all considered their content-creation practices –making the rights of immigrants visible– as important work regardless of the risk.

This courage displayed by immigrant influencers invites reflection about the ways in which the privilege of content creation is configured. In this sense, creating online content about immigration –without thinking of the repercussions– is reserved mostly for non-immigrants whose legal status and physical safety are not on the line. Generalist content creators, politicians and their parties, and mainstream media outlets can portray immigrants and tell their stories with little regard for consequences, in contrast with many immigrant creators. The fact that (im)migrant content creation is regarded as an act of

courage is profoundly problematic, as it reflects the depth of injustice facing immigrants today.

As I draw this section to a close, I cannot help but think about the *content that is not there* and the *immigrants who opt out of creating content* in the face of dominant representations of migration that are increasingly discriminatory and hateful. I wonder about the stories that we are missing and the voices that we are silencing as societies today. This *content creation gap* between migrants and non-migrants has implications for the field of media and migration –as well as other fields that are interested in opinion formation and public perception– due to the trend in current legislation towards more invasive policies and surveillance of the devices, profiles, and digital footprint of immigrants (Funk, 2021; Meaker, 2018). The current digital media ecosystem enables (almost) anyone to (self)express, including appropriating immigrant stories for (self)representation by non-immigrants, as argued in chapter 2. More research is needed to explore *who is discussing migration* and *who is unable to do so*. This is important in the current digital ecosystem where it seems like anyone –but migrants– are free to discuss immigration.

This leads to the last research question, where I attempt to describe the rich and varied stories of migration that these creators convey, the identities that they choose to portray, and the communities with whom they connect. In the next section, some of the main the topics and themes of these narratives about immigration are outlined.

### 8.1.5 Migratory narratives and (self)representations

"There's really no such thing as the 'voiceless'. There are only the deliberately silenced, or the preferably unheard."

— Arundhati Roy

In this dissertation, the stories about and by immigrants residing in two countries are explored. These stories follow the life trajectories of immigration from different perspectives, reflecting the vulnerable and agentic nature of migrant populations. The narratives and representations created by non-migrants will be presented from their inclusion in immigrant counternarratives, to dismantle the dominant paradigm of narrative power as I draw this dissertation to a close. Thus, in this section, findings will be summarized through a chronology of migration,

delineating the different steps and stages of the migratory experience. This section will also outline de differences between narratives from immigrants in the US and Spain.

The starting point in the process of migration is marked by the decision to migrate. In the content analyzed throughout this dissertation, this life-changing decision is present in various ways. Some of them offer advice, reality checks, or discouraging comments. These narratives contrast idealistic beliefs of a better life with visual and textual evidence of the difficulties experienced. The stories told change depending on the migrants' country of residence. In the US, these contents mostly focus on hard work and limited economic gain, while in Spain these discouraging contents describe the impossibility of getting a place to live or the discrimination suffered at work. The honesty of these storylines seems to have a twofold goal: first it moves away from idealistic notions of migration by portraying the difficulties faced and second, it discourages migration while supporting a more informed decision-making process.

The journey to travel and enter the desired country is the next step for migrants. Journey-related narratives are also diverse and depend on the country and mode of entry, as mentioned in a previous section. In the case of immigrants who cross by foot –mainly in the case of the US-Mexico border– the stories often include crude experiences of abuse, rape, and death. These are conveyed multimodally, through descriptive Mexican Corridos, using overlaid text and/or orally, within their first-person accounts. On TikTok, well known templates are deployed –such as photo compilations– that in some cases become micro challenges among migrant creators' communities to show the life trajectory of migrants from crossing the border or arriving by plane, to their current situation.

In the case of Spain, border-crossing narratives involve advice to get a visa and enter the country, in some cases as a tourist. This is explained within the practical agentic style in Chapter 7 or within controversial humorous content, as described in Chapter 4. These contents offer step-by-step guides to the reality of migration. They narrate painful experiences but also provide advice for successful journeys. The legality of this advice is contested, but it also responds to structural oppressive norms, laws, and infrastructures in place, that maintain immigrants traveling from the Global South towards the Global North as perpetual others and illegalizes their actions.

Once the person enters the country, the narratives diverge. From the agentic typologies proposed in Chapter 7, it is possible to describe

(self)representative contents that aim at positioning the migrant from a national and cultural perspective, as well as identity traits that are unrelated to migration such as dance, fashion, or career. These (self)representations also bring to the fore the discriminatory experiences of many of these creators, as they often present a version of themselves that counters extended beliefs about immigration. Two forms of the "migrant worker" representation illustrate these beliefs, such as migrants in the US positioning themselves as essential workers during the pandemic or migrants in Spain explaining that they don't receive public aid.

The cultural aspects of migratory narratives are reflected by the deployment of Latin American culture and music through audio memes. These reflect a familiarity with platform trends and the construction of a community of creators through the reuse of culturally relevant genres such as Ecuadorian Sanjuanitos and Mexican Corridos that disclose collective migratory experiences connected through music. The lyrics of these songs go from general lyrical descriptions of difficulty and love in both countries to specific migratory narratives in the US that describe border-crossing, hard work and the American Dream. In Spain, the findings didn't include as many migration-related lyrics. Immigrant creators in Spain are more likely to use existing songs about life or family to describe their migratory experience. This may be due to the long history of immigration that exists between Latin America and the United States and the uneven migratory relationship between Spain and Latin America.

Storylines related to discrimination are conveyed in creative ways that reflect attempts to partially conceal them in most cases. This suggests a negotiation with the platform moderation guidelines, as explained in Chapters 5 and 6. The content of these stories describes painful experiences in both countries. In the US, journey-related discrimination is key, including coyotes and others in the process of crossing the border. US-based immigrant creators also focus on systemic and structural forms of discrimination such as legal limitations for immigrants and baseless ICE raids in homes and cars. In Spain, creators describe different types of discrimination that are less focused on the process of crossing the border and more focused on job-based abuse and everyday racism/xenophobia.

A key finding of this dissertation involves the unexpected forms of othering that exists between immigrants. In this sense, instructions about *how to be a better immigrant* described in Chapter 7 become relevant, as well as

contents created by immigrants that suggest that some immigrants and forms of entry are *more acceptable* than others.

## 8.2 Empirical and theoretical contributions

The main contributions of this dissertation are achieved through the multidisciplinary perspective of internet and cultural studies, social anthropology and media and migration research. This approach enabled a nuanced exploration of digital content about immigration considering the spaces where it is created, negotiated, and disseminated. The inclusion of diverse content creators is also noteworthy, although the focus has been on immigrant creators, as the key protagonists of their own stories.

The application of Multimodal Content Analysis (Serafini & Reid, 2019) combined with in-depth interviews, participatory analysis, and the walkthrough method (Light et al., 2015) provides a methodological contribution as well. It enables the integration of the platform as an important component of the content, which shapes these narratives as they navigate social media spaces. Although it is not part of the chapters of the present dissertation, a forthcoming coauthored article reflects on some of these methodological considerations while approaching content analyses on social media, with a specific focus on TikTok.

The main conceptual contributions of this dissertation include the processes by which narratives become *platformed* and strategies of *algorithmic (in)visibility*. These contributions are exemplified by the conceptualization of platformed forms of othering, persuasion, sameness, and belonging. In turn, they provide the basis for the proposal of unique forms of algorithmic (in)visibility tactics among immigrant creators, including *unwilling co-creation*, *hashbaiting*, *partial deplatforming*, and *vernacular visibility*.

The exploration of in-group othering among immigrants is also an important contribution of this doctoral thesis, as these forms of discrimination and oppression are understudied and provide insights about the hierarchies that form within marginalized groups.

The theoretical, conceptual, and methodological approaches described enable the theorization of digital content creation as an agentic action by immigrants in response to existing beliefs and imaginaries circulating about them.

## 8.3 Transnational perspectives

Throughout this dissertation, I focused on the US and Spain as relevant receiving countries for Latin American immigrants. Moreover, the specific nationalities of the immigrants portrayed and those creating content include countries across Latin America. This transnational focus enabled a comparative perspective that illustrates some interesting differences and similarities in the content creation practices of these actors. In terms of the nationalities portrayed, the main differences included the specific cultural and national symbols such as music genre, flags, national colors and symbols, area codes, and in-group terms such as *catracho*. Some of the main disparities between the two receiving countries include the language used, the discriminatory narratives countered, and the journeys described.

It is noteworthy that most of the immigrant-created content analyzed in both countries was in Spanish. This suggests that, in the case of the United States, content that clarifies and counters stereotypical migratory narratives may be part of a conversation within the migrant community rather than an attempt at entering the general, mainstream public sphere of English-speakers.

The main differences between the narratives in the US and Spain reflect the specific beliefs about immigration in these two different national, political, and ideological spaces, as described in section 8.1.5.

## 8.4 Limitations and future lines of research

The different articles and chapters that make up this dissertation engage with immigration content created by different actors of interest from various perspectives and fields, but it has some limitations. TikTok as the main platform where content created by immigrants was identified presents some limitations as it was difficult to gain direct contact with many of these creators to engage them more directly in the research process. I was able to contact some of them through alternative platforms, but this limited contact with creators as many of them only have a profile on TikTok. Another set of limitations was defined by the pandemic, and the inability to engage with creators in-person.

Methodologically, the main limitation lies with the use of data collection and digital methods to identify and gather the sample in some of the chapters

of this dissertation, the reflection carried out in the data collection process and a more nuanced description of the limitations involved is described in the Ethics section. In terms of the study of immigration, the analysis of online content also constitutes a limitation, as it only reflects a small aspect of the migratory experience –as many immigrants don't create content and the content created doesn't reflect every aspect of a migrant's life. Also, search terms that include hashtags limit the sample to creators who use these labels and understand hashtagging conventions. Yet, an inquiry located in digital contexts, such as social media, can also be seen as an opportunity to challenge methodological nationalism –understood as the generalized assumption by scholars that "the nation/state/society is the natural social and political form of the modern world" (Wimmer & Schiller, 2002, p. 302)– by moving beyond geography to the fluid digital spaces offered by TikTok and Instagram.

Similarly, the theoretical developments proposed here do not represent the overall migrant experience. For instance, South-South migration or human movements within the same country are not included. However, the theoretical contributions of this dissertation related to the sociotechnical aspects of these migratory narratives open possibilities of application to other communities of creators, including other types of migrants and marginalized creators on these platforms.

The creators analyzed in this dissertation include general instagrammers, right-wing politicians, immigrants, and immigrant influencers. Future studies could expand this to include news organizations on social media, generalist influencers, and political commentators, among others. It would also be interesting to study the comments on posts to assess the responses by the different audiences within these digital spaces.

Future research could engage more deeply with the emergence of immigrant influencers and explore their role as leaders within immigrant communities and the public-facing images of immigration. The platformed aspect of content analyzed in this dissertation could be applied to other traditionally marginalized communities of creators to assess whether these findings are applicable to other cases.

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# Annexes

# Annex 1

# Walkthrough-as-user

## SHARING OPTIONS

**Procedure:** (1) click on the share button; (2) observe and make note of all the share options available; (3) click on options that allow to create new content and go through the process of creating content using each of them.

### TikTok Friends

You can send the video accompanied by a message to TikTok friends who you follow and follow you back.

### Social Media Platforms

WhatsApp
WhatsApp Status
Telegram
IG Stories
Instagram
Copy link
Fecebook
Messenger
SMS
Twitter
Other (opens general menu to share including airdrop; other social media platforms)

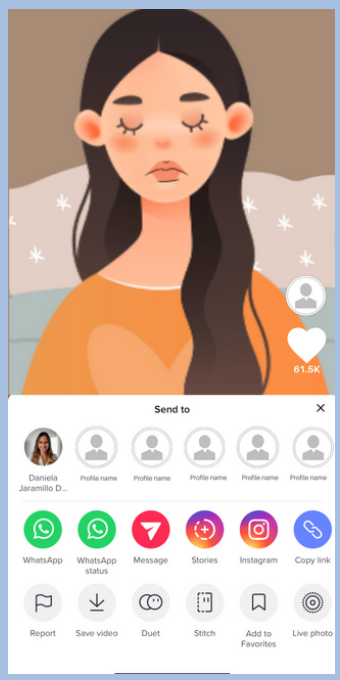
### Other options

Report
Save video
**Duet**
**Stitch**
Add to favorites
Live photo
Share as GIF

### Fieldnotes about walkthrough

TikTok offers almost unlimited options to share content. It is interesting to note that the duet and stitch options are located within the sharing functionality, suggesting that these two are creation/interaction functions within TikTok. Need to do a walkthrough-as-user-creator to find out more.

### Screenshot




### Fieldnotes about implications for immigrant creators

It is possible to block the possibility of duetting or stitching a video, which means that immigrant creators are able to safeguard themselves from possible attacks by other creators. The videos could still be coopted to create new content using tools beyond TikTok.
Creating a duet or a stitch requires some instrumental skills, and its use reflects a good level of familiarity with the platform and literacies related to the reuse of content on TikTok.
Immigrant creators' observable uses of these functions enable learning more about the platformed ways in which they build their identity and belonging in relation to other creators' content.

# Walkthrough-as-user-creator

Both these sharing and content reuse options were accessed through walkthroughs-as-user but they lead to the creation of new content by using existing videos.

### Duet

The duet enables the creation of a new video that appears side by side the existing video and uses the sound from the original video.

### Stitch

The stitch enables clipping a part of the existing video and creating a new video that is starts when a clip from the original video ends.

### Fieldnotes about uses of both by immigrant creators

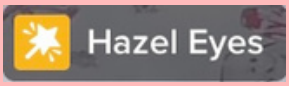
- Creators use both for fun, responding to general TikTok trends.
- Users also construct a narrative in relation to the original video, to counter or support the original video.
- In the case of the duet, the creator is limited by the original audio track, so he/she relies on gestures and overlaid text to express his/her opinion about the original content.
- The stitch allows the creator to have a dedicated space for his/her content, voice and visual representation, in contrast with the duet.

# Walkthrough-as-user

## CLICKABLE ELEMENTS

### Effect

There are hundreds of effect options, they appear with a yellow star at the bottom left corner of the video, just above the profile name.
Examples: **Green Screen**, Eye color, Eyebrow shape, Filters




### Audio Track

The name of the audio track is located at the bottom left corner of the video. The text moves in one line as it is too long to appear all together. It provides information as to whether the audio track is original (uploaded by a user) or provided by the platform (crediting the artist). An example is provided below:

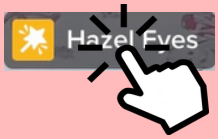
Original sound_Profile Name (contains music from: Name of song)

### Audio Track profile picture

A round moving image is presented at the bottom right part of the video. Music notes moving away from the picture. This is the profile picture of the creator who uploaded the audio track. In the case of music made available by TikTok there is no black background

### Effect and audio pages

TikTok offers the possibility to observe all the videos that have used a specific effect or audio track. They also offer the option of creating a new video using the audio track or effect. These pages can be accessed by clicking on the specific audio track or effect logo.




Click on the effect button to access the effect page

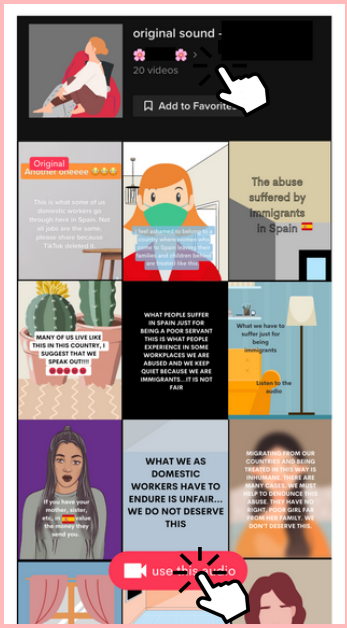
Click on the profile name to access the profile of the creator of the specific effect.

Click on any video to watch it.

Click on the audio track profile pic or name to access the effect page

Click on "try this effect" or "use this audio" to use it in your own video

### Audio track page




### Fieldnotes about implications for immigrant creators

- Clicking on audio tracks or effects can reflect whether a video is part of a larger TikTok trend beyond a specific community of creators.
- Some creators generate unique audio tracks to be reused by others. These are labeled by captions, hashtags and/or overlaid text reading "use this audio".. Usually provide motivational reflections but tend to be general (non-migration)
- Identified corridos as a relevant music genre among US-Mexico immigrants. In Spain Punta music (Honduran) is more common.
- Creative uses of audio involve the inclusion of overlaid text to contextualize the narrative within immigrant experiences. Example: types of discrimination while dancing to popular song (number of uses) (name)

# Annex 2

| | | | | | Expressed opinion about immigration | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Post | File Number | File Name | Likes | Language | Neutral | Against | Pro |
| 1 | 1 | 3 MC MM VIDEO 1 OF 1.mp4 | 11 | ENG | | | 1 |
| | 2 | 3 MC TEXT 1 OF 1.png | | | | | |
| 2 | 3 | 4 MC MM IMAGE 1 OF 1.png | 1417 | ENG | 1 | | |
| | 4 | 4 MC TEXT 1 OF 1.png | | | | | |
| 3 | 5 | 9 MC MM IMAGE 1 OF 5 .png | 113 | BIL | | | 1 |
| | 6 | 9 MC MM IMAGE 2 OF 5.png | | | | | |
| | 7 | 9 MC MM IMAGE 3 OF 5.png | | | | | |
| | 8 | 9 MC MM IMAGE 4 OF 5.png | | | | | |
| | 9 | 9 MC MM IMAGE 5 OF 5 .png | | | | | |
| | 10 | 9 MC TEXT 1 OF 2.png | | | | | |
| | 11 | 9 MC TEXT 2 OF 2.png | | | | | |
| 4 | 12 | 10 MC MM IMAGE 1 OF 1 .png | 85 | SPA | | | 1 |
| | 13 | 10 MC TEXT 1 OF 2.png | | | | | |
| | 14 | 10 MC TEXT 2 OF 2 .png | | | | | |
| 5 | 15 | 22 MC MM IMAGE 1 OF 1.png | 20 | ENG | | 1 | |
| | 16 | 22 MC TEXT 1 OF 1.png | | | | | |
| 6 | 17 | 29 MC MM IMAGE 1 OF 1.png | 6 | ENG | | 1 | |
| | 18 | 29 MC TEXT 1 OF 2 .png | | | | | |
| | 19 | 29 MC TEXT 2 OF 2.png | | | | | |
| 7 | 20 | 42 MC MM IMAGE 1 OF 1 .png | 39 | ENG | | | 1 |
| | 21 | 42 MC TEXT 1 OF 1.png | | | | | |
| 8 | 22 | 43 MC MM IMAGE 1 OF 1 .png | 36 | ENG | | | 1 |
| | 23 | 43 TEXT 1 OF 1 .png | | | | | |
| 9 | 24 | 48 MC MM IMAGE 2 OF 2.png | 117 | ENG | | | 1 |
| | 25 | 48 MC MM IMAGE 1 OF 2.png | | | | | |
| | 26 | 48 MC TEXT 1 OF 1.png | | | | | |
| 10 | 27 | 70 MC MM IMAGE 1 OF 1.png | 105 | ENG | | | 1 |
| | 28 | 70 MC TEXT 1 OF 2.png | | | | | |
| | 29 | 70 MC TEXT 2 OF 2.png | | | | | |
| 11 | 30 | 81 MC MM IMAGE 1 OF 4.png | 33 | ENG | | 1 | |
| | 31 | 81 MC MM IMAGE 3 OF 4.png | | | | | |
| | 32 | 81 MC MM IMAGE 4 OF 4.png | | | | | |
| | 33 | 81 MC MM VIDEO 2 OF 4.mp4 | | | | | |
| | 34 | 81 MC TEXT 1 OF 4.png | | | | | |
| | 35 | 81 MC TEXT 2 OF 4.png | | | | | |
| | 36 | 81 MC TEXT 3 OF 4.png | | | | | |
| | 37 | 81 MC TEXT 4 OF 4.png | | | | | |
| 12 | 38 | 82 MC MM IMAGE 1 OF 4.png | 231 | ENG | | | 1 |
| | 39 | 82 MC MM IMAGE 2 OF 4.png | | | | | |
| | 40 | 82 MC MM IMAGE 3 OF 4.png | | | | | |
| | 41 | 82 MC MM IMAGE 4 OF 4.png | | | | | |
| | 42 | 82 MC TEXT 1 OF 1.png | | | | | |
| 13 | 43 | 83 MC MM IMAGE 1 OF 1.png | 125 | ENG | | 1 | |
| | 44 | 83 MC TEXT 1 OF 1.png | | | | | |
| 14 | 45 | 86 MC MM IMAGE 1 OF 4 .png | 14 | ENG | | | 1 |
| | 46 | 86 MC MM IMAGE 2 OF 4 .png | | | | | |
| | 47 | 86 MC MM IMAGE 3 OF 4 .png | | | | | |

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 48 | 86 MC MM IMAGE 4 OF 4 .png | | | | | | | |
| | 49 | 86 MC TEXT 1 OF 4.png | | | | | | | |
| | 50 | 86 MC TEXT 2 OF 4.png | | | | | | | |
| | 51 | 86 MC TEXT 3 OF 4.png | | | | | | | |
| | 52 | 86 MC TEXT 4 OF 4.png | | | | | | | |
| 15 | 53 | 87 MC MM IMAGE 1 OF 4.png | 5 | | ENG | | 1 | | |
| | 54 | 87 MC MM IMAGE 2 OF 4.png | | | | | | | |
| | 55 | 87 MC MM IMAGE 3 OF 4.png | | | | | | | |
| | 56 | 87 MC MM IMAGE 4 OF 4.png | | | | | | | |
| | 57 | 87 MC TEXT 1 OF 4.png | | | | | | | |
| | 58 | 87 MC TEXT 2 OF 4.png | | | | | | | |
| | 59 | 87 MC TEXT 3 OF 4.png | | | | | | | |
| | 60 | 87 MC TEXT 4 OF 4.png | | | | | | | |
| 16 | 61 | 89 MC MM VIDEO 1 OF 1.mp4 | | 2 | ENG | | | 1 | |
| | 62 | 89 MC TEXT 1 OF 3.png | | | | | | | |
| | 63 | 89 MC TEXT 2 OF 3.png | | | | | | | |
| | 64 | 89 MC TEXT 3 OF 3.png | | | | | | | |
| 17 | 65 | 95 MC MM IMAGE 1 OF 1.png | 7 | | ENG | 1 | | | |
| | 66 | 95 MC TEXT 1 OF 1.png | | | | | | | |
| 18 | 67 | 96 MC MM IMAGE 1 OF 1.png | | 6 | ENG | | 1 | | |
| | 68 | 96 MC TEXT 1 OF 1.png | | | | | | | |
| 19 | 69 | 98 MC MM IMAGE 1 OF 1 .png | 6 | | ENG | | | 1 | |
| | 70 | 98 MC TEXT 1 OF 2.png | | | | | | | |
| | 71 | 98 MC TEXT 2 OF 2.png | | | | | | | |
| 20 | 72 | 102 MC MM IMAGE 1 OF 1.png | | 108 | ENG | | | | 1 |
| | 73 | 102 MC TEXT 1 OF 1.png | | | | | | | |
| 21 | 74 | 108 MC MM IMAGE 1 OF 1.png | 184 | | ENG | 1 | | | |
| | 75 | 108 MC TEXT 1 OF 1.png | | | | | | | |
| 22 | 76 | 115 MC MM IMAGE 4 OF 7 .png | | 63 | ENG | | | | 1 |
| | 77 | 115 MC MM IMAGE 1 OF 7 .png | | | | | | | |
| | 78 | 115 MC MM IMAGE 2 OF 7 .png | | | | | | | |
| | 79 | 115 MC MM IMAGE 3 OF 7 .png | | | | | | | |
| | 80 | 115 MC MM IMAGE 5 OF 7 .png | | | | | | | |
| | 81 | 115 MC MM IMAGE 6 OF 7 .png | | | | | | | |
| | 82 | 115 MC MM IMAGE 7 OF 7 .png | | | | | | | |
| | 83 | 115 MC TEXT 1 OF 1.png | | | | | | | |
| 23 | 84 | 117 MC MM IMAGE 1 OF 4.png | 1517 | | ENG | | 1 | | |
| | 85 | 117 MC MM IMAGE 2 OF 4.png | | | | | | | |
| | 86 | 117 MC MM IMAGE 3 OF 4.png | | | | | | | |
| | 87 | 117 MC MM VIDEO 4 OF 4.mp4 | | | | | | | |
| | 88 | 117 MC TEXT 1 OF 3.png | | | | | | | |
| | 89 | 117 MC TEXT 2 OF 3.png | | | | | | | |
| | 90 | 117 MC TEXT 3 OF 3.png | | | | | | | |
| 24 | 91 | 126 MC MM IMAGE 1 OF 1.png | | 49 | BIL | | 1 | | |
| | 92 | 126 MC TEXT 1 OF 1 .png | | | | | | | |
| 25 | 93 | 127 MC MM IMAGE 1 OF 1.png | 20 | | ENG | | | 1 | |
| | 94 | 127 MC TEXT 1 OF 3 .png | | | | | | | |
| | 95 | 127 MC TEXT 2 OF 3 .png | | | | | | | |
| | 96 | 127 MC TEXT 3 OF 3 .png | | | | | | | |
| 26 | 97 | 129 MC MM IMAGE 1 OF 1 .png | | 50 | ENG | | | | 1 |
| | 98 | 129 MC TEXT 1 OF 4.png | | | | | | | |

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 99 | 129 MC TEXT 2 OF 4.png | | | | | | | |
| | 100 | 129 MC TEXT 3 OF 4.png | | | | | | | |
| | 101 | 129 MC TEXT 4 OF 4.png | | | | | | | |
| 27 | 102 | 135 MC MM IMAGE 1 OF 1.png | 59 | | ENG | | | 1 | |
| | 103 | 135 MC TEXT 1 OF 1.png | | | | | | | |
| | 104 | 136 MC MM IMAGE 1 OF 1.png | | 180 | ENG | | | | 1 |
| | 105 | 136 MC TEXT 1 OF 3 .png | | | | | | | |
| | 106 | 136 MC TEXT 2 OF 3 .png | | | | | | | |
| | 107 | 136 MC TEXT 3 OF 3 .png | | | | | | | |
| 28 | 108 | 165 MC MM VIDEO 1 OF 1 .mp4 | 18 | | other | | | 1 | |
| | 109 | 165 MC TEXT 1 OF 3.png | | | | | | | |
| | 110 | 165 MC TEXT 2 OF 3.png | | | | | | | |
| | 111 | 165 MC TEXT 3 OF 3.png | | | | | | | |
| 29 | 112 | 166 MC MM VIDEO 1 OF 1.mp4 | | 11 | ENG | | 1 | | |
| | 113 | 166 MC TEXT 1 OF 1.png | | | | | | | |
| 30 | 114 | 173 MC MM IMAGE 1 OF 1.png | 39 | | ENG | | | 1 | |
| | 115 | 173 MC TEXT 1 OF 2.png | | | | | | | |
| | 116 | 173 MC TEXT 2 OF 2.png | | | | | | | |
| 31 | 117 | 174 MC MM IMAGE 1 OF 1 .png | | 20 | ENG | | | | 1 |
| | 118 | 174 MC TEXT 1 OF 1.png | | | | | | | |
| 32 | 119 | 175 MC MM IMAGE 1 OF 1.png | 25 | | ENG | | | 1 | |
| | 120 | 175 MC TEXT 1 OF 1.png | | | | | | | |
| 33 | 121 | 176 MC MM IMAGE 1 OF 1.png | | 22 | ENG | | | | 1 |
| | 122 | 176 MC TEXT 1 OF 2 .png | | | | | | | |
| | 123 | 176 MC TEXT 2 OF 2 .png | | | | | | | |
| 34 | 124 | 177 MC MM IMAGE 1 OF 1 .png | 82 | | ENG | 1 | | | |
| | 125 | 177 MC TEXT 1 OF 1.png | | | | | | | |
| 35 | 126 | 178 MC MM IMAGE 1 OF 1.png | | 18 | ENG | | | | 1 |
| | 127 | 178 MC TEXT 1 OF 2.png | | | | | | | |
| | 128 | 178 MC TEXT 2 OF 2.png | | | | | | | |
| 36 | 129 | 179 MC MM IMAGE 1 OF 1.png | 28 | | ENG | | | 1 | |
| | 130 | 179 MC TEXT 1 OF 2.png | | | | | | | |
| | 131 | 179 MC TEXT 2 OF 2.png | | | | | | | |
| 37 | 132 | 180 MC MM IMAGE 1 OF 1.png | | 22 | ENG | | | | 1 |
| | 133 | 180 MC TEXT 1 OF 2.png | | | | | | | |
| | 134 | 180 MC TEXT 2 OF 2.png | | | | | | | |
| 38 | 135 | 182 MC MM IMAGE 1 OF 1.png | 22 | | ENG | | | 1 | |
| | 136 | 182 MC TEXT 1 OF 2 .png | | | | | | | |
| | 137 | 182 MC TEXT 2 OF 2 .png | | | | | | | |
| 39 | 138 | 184 MC MM IMAGE 1 OF 1.png | | 24 | ENG | | | | 1 |
| | 139 | 184 MC TEXT 1 OF 2.png | | | | | | | |
| | 140 | 184 MC TEXT 2 OF 2.png | | | | | | | |
| 40 | 141 | 186 MC MM IMAGE 1 OF 1 .png | 24 | | ENG | | | 1 | |
| | 142 | 186 MC TEXT 1 OF 2.png | | | | | | | |
| | 143 | 186 MC TEXT 2 OF 2.png | | | | | | | |
| | 144 | 187 MC MM IMAGE 1 OF 1 .png | | 21 | ENG | | | | 1 |
| | 145 | 187 MC TEXT 1 OF 2 .png | | | | | | | |
| | 146 | 187 MC TEXT 2 OF 2 .png | | | | | | | |
| 41 | 147 | 188 MC MM IMAGE 1 OF 3.png | 25 | | ENG | | | 1 | |
| | 148 | 188 MC MM IMAGE 2 OF 3.png | | | | | | | |
| | 149 | 188 MC MM IMAGE 3 OF 3.png | | | | | | | |

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 150 | 188 MC TEXT 1 OF 2.png | | | | | | | |
| | 151 | 188 MC TEXT 2 OF 2.png | | | | | | | |
| 42 | 152 | 189 MC MM IMAGE 1 OF 1.png | | | ENG | | 1 | | |
| | 153 | 189 MC TEXT 1 OF 1.png | | | | | | | |
| 43 | 154 | 213 MC MM IMAGE 1 OF 1 .png | 28 | | ENG | | | 1 | |
| | 155 | 213 MC TEXT 1 OF 2.png | | | | | | | |
| | 156 | 213 MC TEXT 2 OF 2.png | | | | | | | |
| 44 | 157 | 226 MC MM IMAGE 1 OF 1.png | | 26 | ENG | | 1 | | |
| | 158 | 226 MC TEXT 1 OF 1.png | | | | | | | |
| 45 | 159 | 227 MC MM IMAGE 1 OF 3.png | 17 | | ENG | | | 1 | |
| | 160 | 227 MC MM IMAGE 2 OF 3.png | | | | | | | |
| | 161 | 227 MC MM IMAGE 3 OF 3.png | | | | | | | |
| | 162 | 227 MC TEXT 1 OF 1.png | | | | | | | |
| 46 | 163 | 231 MC MM IMAGE 1 OF 1.png | | 1 | ENG | | | | 1 |
| | 164 | 231 MC TEXT 1 OF 1.png | | | | | | | |
| 47 | 165 | 232 MC MM IMAGE 1 OF 1.png | 164 | | ENG | 1 | | | |
| | 166 | 232 TEXT 1 OF 1.png | | | | | | | |
| 48 | 167 | 233 MC MM IMAGE 1 OF 1.png | | 59 | ENG | | | | 1 |
| | 168 | 233 MC TEXT 1 OF 2.png | | | | | | | |
| | 169 | 233 MC TEXT 2 OF 2.png | | | | | | | |
| 49 | 170 | 234 MC MM VIDEO 1 OF 1.mp4 | 51 | | ENG | 1 | | | |
| | 171 | 234 MC TEXT 1 OF 1.png | | | | | | | |
| 50 | 172 | 235 MC MM IMAGE 1 OF 1 .png | | 5 | ENG | | | 1 | |
| | 173 | 235 MC TEXT 1 OF 1.png | | | | | | | |
| 51 | 174 | 236 MC MM IMAGE 1 OF 1 .png | | 79 | ENG | | 1 | | |
| | 175 | 236 MC TEXT 1 OF 1 .png | | | | | | | |
| 52 | 176 | 237 MC MM IMAGE 1 OF 10.png | | 103 | ENG | | 1 | | |
| | 177 | 237 MC MM IMAGE 2 OF 10.png | | | | | | | |
| | 178 | 237 MC MM IMAGE 3 OF 10.png | | | | | | | |
| | 179 | 237 MC MM IMAGE 4 OF 10.png | | | | | | | |
| | 180 | 237 MC MM IMAGE 5 OF 10.png | | | | | | | |
| | 181 | 237 MC MM IMAGE 6 OF 10.png | | | | | | | |
| | 182 | 237 MC MM IMAGE 7 OF 10.png | | | | | | | |
| | 183 | 237 MC MM IMAGE 8 OF 10.png | | | | | | | |
| | 184 | 237 MC MM IMAGE 9 OF 10.png | | | | | | | |
| | 185 | 237 MC MM IMAGE 10 OF 10.png | | | | | | | |
| | 186 | 237 MC TEXT 1 OF 1.png | | | | | | | |
| 53 | 187 | 238 MC MM VIDEO 1 OF 1.mp4 | | 10 | ENG | | | 1 | |
| | 188 | 238 MC TEXT 1 OF 1.png | | | | | | | |
| 54 | 189 | 239 MC MM IMAGE 1 OF 1.png | | 53 | | | | | |
| | 190 | 239 MC TEXT 1 OF 2.png | | | | | | | |
| | 191 | 239 MC TEXT 2 OF 2.png | | | | | | | |
| 55 | 192 | 240 MC MM IMAGE 1 OF 1.png | | 48 | ENG | | | | 1 |
| | 193 | 240 MC TEXT 1 OF 2.png | | | | | | | |
| | 194 | 240 MC TEXT 2 OF 2.png | | | | | | | |
| 56 | 195 | 241 MC MM IMAGE 1 OF 3.png | | 65 | ENG | | | | 1 |
| | 196 | 241 MC MM IMAGE 2 OF 3.png | | | | | | | |
| | 197 | 241 MC MM IMAGE 3 OF 3.png | | | | | | | |
| | 198 | 241 MC TEXT 1 OF 2.png | | | | | | | |
| | 199 | 241 MC TEXT 2 OF 2.png | | | | | | | |
| 57 | 200 | 244 MC MM IMAGE 1 OF 1 .png | | 19 | ENG | | | | 1 |

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 201 | 244 MC TEXT 1 OF 1.png | | | | | | | | |
| 58 | 202 | 245 MC MM VIDEO 1 OF 1.mp4 | | 8 | ENG | | | | | 1 |
| | 203 | 245 MC TEXT 1 OF 1.png | | | | | | | | |
| 59 | 204 | 246 MC MM VIDEO 1 OF 1 copy.mp4 | | 1064 | ENG | | | | | 1 |
| | 205 | 246 MC TEXT 1 OF 1.png | | | | | | | | |
| 60 | 206 | 247 MC MM IMAGE 1 OF 2.png | | 32 | ENG | | | | | 1 |
| | 207 | 247 MC MM IMAGE 2 OF 2.png | | | | | | | | |
| | 208 | 247 MC TEXT 1 OF 3.png | | | | | | | | |
| | 209 | 247 MC TEXT 2 OF 3.png | | | | | | | | |
| | 210 | 247 MC TEXT 3 OF 3.png | | | | | | | | |
| 61 | 211 | 248 MC MM IMAGE 1 OF 1 .png | | 334 | ENG | | | | 1 | |
| | 212 | 248 MC TEXT 1 OF 1.png | | | | | | | | |
| 62 | 213 | 249 MC MM IMAGE 1 OF 1.png | | 31 | ENG | | | | | 1 |
| | 214 | 249 MC TEXT 1 OF 2.png | | | | | | | | |
| | 215 | 249 MC TEXT 2 OF 2.png | | | | | | | | |
| 63 | 216 | 250 MC MM IMAGE 1 OF 1.png | | 24 | ENG | | | | | 1 |
| | 217 | 250 MC TEXT 1 OF 1.png | | | | | | | | |
| 64 | 218 | 251 MC MM IMAGE 1 OF 1.png | | 152 | BIL | | | | | 1 |
| | 219 | 251 MC TEXT 1 OF 2.png | | | | | | | | |
| | 220 | 251 MC TEXT 2 OF 2.png | | | | | | | | |
| 65 | 221 | 252 MC MM IMAGE 1 OF 3 .png | | 33 | ENG | | | | | 1 |
| | 222 | 252 MC MM IMAGE 2 OF 3.png | | | | | | | | |
| | 223 | 252 MC MM IMAGE 3 OF 3.png | | | | | | | | |
| | 224 | 252 MC TEXT 1 OF 1.png | | | | | | | | |
| 66 | 225 | 253 CM MM IMAGE 1 OF 1 .png | | 47 | BIL | | | 1 | | |
| | 226 | 253 CM TEXT 1 OF 1 .png | | | | | | | | |
| 67 | 227 | 254 CM MM IMAGE 1 OF 1.png | 27 | | BIL | 1 | | | | |
| | 228 | 254 CM TEXT 1 OF 1.png | | | | | | | | |
| 68 | 229 | 255 CM MM VIDEO 1 OF 1.mp4 (2) (2) | | 10 | ENG | | | | | 1 |
| | 230 | 255 CM TEXT 1 OF 1 .png (2) | | | | | | | | |
| 69 | 231 | 256 CM MM IMAGE 1 OF 1.png | 218 | | SPA | | | | 1 | |
| | 232 | 256 CM TEXT 1 OF 3.png | | | | | | | | |
| | 233 | 256 CM TEXT 2 OF 3.png | | | | | | | | |
| | 234 | 256 CM TEXT 3 OF 3.png | | | | | | | | |
| 70 | 235 | 259 CM MM IMAGE 1 OF 1.png | | 135 | SPA | | | | | 1 |
| | 236 | 259 CM TEXT 1 OF 1.png | | | | | | | | |
| 71 | 237 | 260 CM MM IMAGE 1 OF 1 .png | 84 | | BIL | | | | 1 | |
| | 238 | 260 CM TEXT 1 OF 2 .png | | | | | | | | |
| | 239 | 260 CM TEXT 2 OF 2 .png | | | | | | | | |
| 72 | 240 | 261 CM MM IMAGE 1 OF 1.png | | 5 | SPA | | | | | 1 |
| | 241 | 261 CM TEXT 1 OF 1.png | | | | | | | | |
| 73 | 242 | 262 CM MM VIDEO 1 OF 1 .mp4 | 10 | | SPA | 1 | | | | |
| | 243 | 262 CM TEXT 1 OF 1.png | | | | | | | | |
| 74 | 244 | 264 CM MM VIDEO 1 OF 1.mp4 | | 29 | SPA | | | 1 | | |
| | 245 | 264 CM TEXT 1 OF 1.png | | | | | | | | |
| 75 | 246 | 265 MC MM VIDEO 1 OF 1.mp4 (2) | 272 | | ENG | | | | 1 | |
| | 247 | 265 CM TEXT 1 OF 1.png | | | | | | | | |
| 76 | 248 | 266 CM MM IMAGE 1 OF 1 .png | | 71 | ENG | | | | | 1 |
| | 249 | 266 CM TEXT 1 OF 2.png | | | | | | | | |
| | 250 | 266 CM TEXT 2 OF 2.png | | | | | | | | |
| 77 | 251 | 267 CM MM IMAGE 1 OF 1.png (2) | 42 | | SPA | 1 | | | | |

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 252 | 267 CM TEXT 1 OF 1.png | | | | | | |
| 78 | 253 | 268 CM MM IMAGE 1 OF 2.png | 20 | | ENG | 1 | | |
| | 254 | 268 CM MM IMAGE 2 OF 2.png | | | | | | |
| | 255 | 268 CM TEXT 1 OF 1.png | | | | | | |
| 79 | 256 | 269 CM MM IMAGE 1 OF 1 .png | 91 | | ENG | | 1 | |
| | 257 | 269 CM TEXT 1 OF 2.png | | | | | | |
| | 258 | 269 CM TEXT 2 OF 2.png | | | | | | |
| 80 | 259 | 270 CM MM IMAGE 1 OF 1.png | 8 | | SPA | 1 | | |
| | 260 | 270 CM TEXT 1 OF 2.png | | | | | | |
| | 261 | 270 CM TEXT 2 OF 2.png | | | | | | |
| 81 | 262 | 272 CM MM VIDEO 1 OF 1.mp4 | 33 | | SPA | 1 | | |
| | 263 | 272 CM TEXT 1 OF 1.png | | | | | | |
| 82 | 264 | 275 CM MM IMAGE 1 OF 2.png | | 201 | SPA | | | 1 |
| | 265 | 275 CM MM IMAGE 2 OF 2.png | | | | | | |
| | 266 | 275 CM TEXT 1 OF 3.png | | | | | | |
| | 267 | 275 CM TEXT 2 OF 3.png | | | | | | |
| | 268 | 275 CM TEXT 3 OF 3.png | | | | | | |
| 83 | 269 | 276 CM MM VIDEO 1 OF 1.mp4 | 4 | | SPA | 1 | | |
| | 270 | 276 CM TEXT 1 OF 1.png | | | | | | |
| 84 | 271 | 277 CM MM IMAGE 1 OF 5 .png | 72 | | SPA | 1 | | |
| | 272 | 277 CM MM IMAGE 2 OF 5 .png | | | | | | |
| | 273 | 277 CM MM IMAGE 3 OF 5 .png | | | | | | |
| | 274 | 277 CM MM IMAGE 4 OF 5 .png | | | | | | |
| | 275 | 277 CM MM IMAGE 5 OF 5 .png | | | | | | |
| | 276 | 277 CM TEXT 1 OF 1.png | | | | | | |
| 85 | 277 | 278 CM MM IMAGE 1 OF 7.png | 3312 | | ENG | 1 | | |
| | 278 | 278 CM MM IMAGE 2 OF 7.png | | | | | | |
| | 279 | 278 CM MM IMAGE 3 OF 7.png | | | | | | |
| | 280 | 278 CM MM IMAGE 4 OF 7.png | | | | | | |
| | 281 | 278 CM MM IMAGE 5 OF 7.png | | | | | | |
| | 282 | 278 CM MM IMAGE 6 OF 7.png | | | | | | |
| | 283 | 278 CM MM IMAGE 7 OF 7.png | | | | | | |
| | 284 | 278 CM TEXT 1 OF 1.png | | | | | | |
| 86 | 285 | 279 CM MM IMAGE 1 OF 3.png | 11 | | ENG | | 1 | |
| | 286 | 279 CM MM IMAGE 2 OF 3.png | | | | | | |
| | 287 | 279 CM MM IMAGE 3 OF 3.png | | | | | | |
| | 288 | 279 CM TEXT 1 OF 1.png | | | | | | |
| 87 | 289 | 280 CM MM IMAGE 1 OF 1 .png | 7 | | SPA | | 1 | |
| | 290 | 280 CM TEXT 1 OF 1 .png | | | | | | |
| 88 | 291 | 281 CM MM IMAGE 1 OF 3 .png | 103 | | ENG | | 1 | |
| | 292 | 281 CM MM IMAGE 2 OF 3 .png | | | | | | |
| | 293 | 281 CM MM IMAGE 3 OF 3 .png | | | | | | |
| | 294 | 281 CM TEXT 1 OF 2 .png | | | | | | |
| | 295 | 281 CM TEXT 2 OF 2 .png | | | | | | |
| 89 | 296 | 286 CM MM IMAGE 1 OF 1.png | 16 | | ENG | 1 | | |
| | 297 | 286 CM TEXT 1 OF 1.png | | | | | | |
| 90 | 298 | 287 CM MM VIDEO 1 OF 1 .mp4 | 12 | | ENG | | 1 | |
| | 299 | 287 CM TEXT 1 OF 1.png | | | | | | |
| 91 | 300 | 288 CM MM IMAGE 1 OF 1.png | 100 | | ENG | 1 | | |
| | 301 | 288 CM TEXT 1 OF 2.png | | | | | | |
| | 302 | 288 CM TEXT 2 OF 2.png | | | | | | |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 92 | 303 | 289 CM MM IMAGE 1 OF 1 .png | 187 | SPA | 1 | | |
| | 304 | 289 CM TEXT 1 OF 3.png | | | | | |
| | 305 | 289 CM TEXT 2 OF 3.png | | | | | |
| | 306 | 289 CM TEXT 3 OF 3.png | | | | | |
| 93 | 307 | 292 CM MM IMAGE 1 OF 3.png | 34 | ENG | | 1 | |
| | 308 | 292 CM MM IMAGE 2 OF 3.png | | | | | |
| | 309 | 292 CM MM IMAGE 3 OF 3.png | | | | | |
| | 310 | 292 CM TEXT 1 OF 1.png | | | | | |
| 94 | 311 | 293 CM MM IMAGE 1 OF 1.png | 176 | SPA | 1 | | |
| | 312 | 293 CM TEXT 1 OF 1.png | | | | | |
| 95 | 313 | 294 CM MM IMAGE 1 OF 1 .png | 42 | ENG | | 1 | |
| | 314 | 294 CM TEXT 1 OF 2.png | | | | | |
| | 315 | 294 CM TEXT 2 OF 2.png | | | | | |
| 96 | 316 | 295 CM MM IMAGE 1 OF 1 .png | 104 | ENG | 1 | | |
| | 317 | 295 CM TEXT 1 OF 1 .png | | | | | |
| 97 | 318 | 296 CM MM IMAGE 1 OF 1 .png | 30 | ENG | 1 | | |
| | 319 | 296 CM TEXT 1 OF 2.png | | | | | |
| | 320 | 296 CM TEXT 2 OF 2.png | | | | | |
| 98 | 321 | 297 CM MM IMAGE 1 OF 1.png | 272 | ENG | 1 | | |
| | 322 | 297 CM TEXT 1 OF 2.png | | | | | |
| | 323 | 297 CM TEXT 2 OF 2.png | | | | | |
| 99 | 324 | 298 CM MM IMAGE 1 OF 10 .png | 4269 | ENG | 1 | | |
| | 325 | 298 CM MM IMAGE 2 OF 10 .png | | | | | |
| | 326 | 298 CM MM IMAGE 3 OF 10 .png | | | | | |
| | 327 | 298 CM MM IMAGE 4 OF 10 .png | | | | | |
| | 328 | 298 CM MM IMAGE 5 OF 10 .png | | | | | |
| | 329 | 298 CM MM IMAGE 6 OF 10 .png | | | | | |
| | 330 | 298 CM MM IMAGE 7 OF 10 .png | | | | | |
| | 331 | 298 CM MM IMAGE 8 OF 10 .png | | | | | |
| | 332 | 298 CM MM IMAGE 9 OF 10 .png | | | | | |
| | 333 | 298 CM MM IMAGE 10 OF 10 .png | | | | | |
| | 334 | 298 CM TEXT 1 OF 2.png | | | | | |
| | 335 | 298 CM TEXT 2 OF 2.png | | | | | |
| 100 | 338 | 299 CM MM IMAGE 1 OF 1.png | 227 | ENG | 1 | | |
| | 339 | 299 CM TEXT 1 OF 1.png | | | | | |
| 101 | 340 | 300 CM MM IMAGE 1 OF 2.png | 55 | ENG | 1 | | |
| | 341 | 300 CM MM IMAGE 2 OF 2.png | | | | | |
| | 342 | 300 CM TEXT 1 OF 2.png | | | | | |
| | 343 | 300 CM TEXT 2 OF 2.png | | | | | |
| 102 | 344 | 301 CM MM IMAGE 1 OF 1 .png | 19 | ENG | | 1 | |
| | 345 | 301 CM TEXT 1 OF 2.png | | | | | |
| | 346 | 301 CM TEXT 2 OF 2.png | | | | | |
| 103 | 347 | 302 CM MM IMAGE 1 OF 5.png | 4384 | ENG | | 1 | |
| | 348 | 302 CM MM IMAGE 2 OF 5.png | | | | | |
| | 349 | 302 CM MM IMAGE 3 OF 5.png | | | | | |
| | 350 | 302 CM MM IMAGE 4 OF 5.png | | | | | |
| | 351 | 302 CM MM IMAGE 5 OF 5.png | | | | | |
| | 352 | 302 CM TEXT 1 OF 2.png | | | | | |
| | 353 | 302 CM TEXT 2 OF 2.png | | | | | |
| 104 | 356 | 303 CM MM IMAGE 1 OF 3.png | 45 | SPA | 1 | | |
| | 357 | 303 CM MM IMAGE 2 OF 3.png | | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 358 | 303 CM MM IMAGE 3 OF 3.png | | | |
| | 359 | 303 CM TEXT 1 OF 1.png | | | |
| 105 | 360 | 304 CM MM IMAGE 1 OF 1 .png | 218 | BIL | 1 |
| | 361 | 304 CM TEXT 1 OF 2 .png | | | |
| | 362 | 304 CM TEXT 2 OF 2 .png | | | |

# Annex 3

| CHART OF CODES | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| CATEGORY | | SUBCODE 1 | | SUBCODE 2 | |
| PREFIX | CODE | PREFIX | CODE | PREFIX | CODE |
| MEDTY | Video | MEDTYVID | Activism<br>News<br>**Music**<br>**Description** | FORMAL | **Close shot**<br>**Extreme long shot**<br>Full shot<br>Medium shot<br>**High Angle**<br>**Low Angle**<br>Professional |
| | Image | MEDTYIMAGE | Photo<br>Screenshot<br>**Photo + hd**<br>**Photo + ov**<br>**Photo + text** | DIST | **Immpatrolwall**<br>**Immwall**<br>**Immwallimm**<br>**Immwallpatrol**<br>**Journalistwall**<br>**Patrolwall**<br>**Patrolwallpatrol**<br>**Wallimm**<br>**Wallimmwall**<br>**Wallpatrol** |
| | | | | SUBJ | Adult<br>Child<br>**Female**<br>**Male**<br>**American Flag**<br>**Anti-riot shield**<br>**Armed**<br>**Group**<br>Identified<br>Anonymous |
| | | | | WALL | **Barbed wire**<br>**Barrier**<br>**Border**<br>**Concrete**<br>**Fence**<br>**Human wall**<br>**Metal bar wall**<br>**Shadow**<br>**Chain link wall**<br>**WALLSUBJ** |
| | Text | LANG | English<br>Spanish<br>Bilingual<br>**Other** | SUBJ | **P. of a Group**<br>**Group**<br>Child<br>Adult<br>**Female**<br>**Male** |
| | | IMMOP | Pro<br>Against<br>**Neutral** | ACTION | Accuse<br>Catch<br>**Climb**<br>**Crawl**<br>Cross<br>**Deport**<br>**Divide**<br>**Escape**<br>**Help**<br>**Install or build**<br>**Observe**<br>**Point guns at** |

| CHART OF CODES | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| CATEGORY | | SUBCODE 1 | | SUBCODE 2 | |
| | | | | | Protest |
| | | | | | Run |
| | | | | | **Reach the US** |
| | | | | | **Smuggle** |
| | | | | | **Sneak** |
| | | | | | **Squeeze through** |
| | | | | | **Support** |
| | | | | | **Surrender** |
| | | | | DEFIMMIG | **Asylum seeker** |
| | | | | | Criminal |
| | | | | | Dangerous |
| | | | | | **Discriminated** |
| | | | | | **Family** |
| | | | | | **Helpless** |
| | | | | | **Human** |
| | | | | | **Invader** |
| | | | | | Migrant |
| | | | | | **Militant** |
| | | | | | **National of** |
| | | | | | **Not breaking laws** |
| | | | | | **Not asylum seeker** |
| | | | | | **Part of a group** |
| | | | | | **Refugee** |
| | | | | | **Strong** |
| | | | | | **Victim** |
| | | | | | **Young** |
| | | | | EMOTION | **Empathy** |
| | | | | | Fear |
| | | | | | **Gratitude** |
| | | | | | **Love** |
| | | | | | **Patriotism** |
| | | | | | Sadness |
| | | | | CREDIB | **Government** |
| | | | | | **Mainstream Media** |
| | | | | | **Numbers** |
| | | | | | **Personal Experience** |
| | | | | MEDLIT | **Clarification of facts** |
| | | | | | **Interpretation** |
| | | | | | **Sources listed** |
| | | | | | **Credit Photo** |
| | | | | QHASH | Grouped |
| | | | | | In text |
| | | | | | Number |

# Annex 4

# Topics for unstructured interview: Immigrant TikTokers

## GENERAL DATA

Name
Nationality
Place of birth
Accounts in other social media
Date of creation of TikTok account

## IDENTITY

### Cultural

Music genre
Language
Food
Clothing

### National

Countries/regions
Politics/economy/social issues in country of origin/residence
Content creation based on political views.

### Digital

Digital identity
Identity as a creator
Content and identity
Main goal as content creator

## USE OF AFFORDANCES AND FUNCTIONALITIES

### Mimesis

Imitation views, practices and purposes
Effect imitation
Audio imitation
Visual imitation
Partial imitation (own version of other's content)

### Creation of trending content

Original content for others to imitate
Audio tracks
Creative use of effects
Check! or similar
Others

### Strategies to promote interactions

Calls for follows/likes/comments
Interactive formats (Duet/stitch...etc)
Collaboration with other tiktokers to expand reach others

### Hashtags

Usage criteria; xyzbca or similar; Audience; Type of content; Popularity hashtags (for you); Identity-based; Location; others.

### Emoji/text

Usage criteria; preferences; intentions

## ALGORITHMIC VISIBILITY

Learning; adapting; perceptions of the platform and the algorithm
Negotiation with moderation.

## RELATIONSHIP WITH FOLLOWERS

Gratefulness; mutual validation; debate/argumentation; hate/silencing; others.

# English Summary

# English summary

This dissertation explores the ways in which social media platforms shape migratory narratives created by different actors, including generalist content creators, political figures, immigrants, and immigrant influencers. The study centers on two countries that have become preferred destinations for migrants: The United States and Spain. The platforms of interest are Instagram and TikTok because of their popularity and visuality as well as the (self)representative configurations they enable.

The overarching research question that underpins this dissertation is: *How are narratives about immigration shaped and built on social media platforms?* To respond to this question, five supporting research questions are set forth: (1) How do the sociotechnical configurations of social media shape narratives about immigration? (2) What role do otherness and sameness play in narratives about immigration? (3) What strategies do different content creators use to make their migratory narratives visible and to enter public discourse through social media? (4) What are the unique challenges and opportunities for migrant creators to participate in existing discourse about themselves? (5) What are the narratives conveyed and (self)representations portrayed and what are their implications for migrant communities and specific agents creating relevant content?

## Chapter Overview

### Chapter 2: #MigrantCaravans and othering on Instagram

The first study in this dissertation aimed to assess the multimodal discourses within Instagram posts connected by the hashtags #CaravanaMigrante and #MigrantCaravan. Thus, chapter 2 provides insights about platformed forms of othering observed among content creators on Instagram. It includes an analysis of the multimodal characteristics of Instagram posts focusing on the visual presence of the border wall and the ways in which non-immigrant content creators coopt migratory narratives. This chapter answers three research objectives (O1) Describe characteristics of posts connected by the hashtags #MigrantCaravan and #CaravanaMigrante; (O2) Identify characters and interactions of interest in the establishment of otherness; (O3) Describe media

representations of the immigration phenomenon within Instagram posts in relation to opinions towards immigration and considering the two hashtags.

Previous academic inquiry on Instagram addressing representation has focused on the self-representation of different types of Instagram users. Within these studies, the focus has traditionally been on the construction of the poster's identity. The novel approach proposed by the present study is the consideration of Instagram as a medium, where a large percentage of the young adult population is consuming news (Newman et al., 2017) and information, while expressing their opinions about important topics (Valenzuela, 2013), effectively becoming the setting where symbolic understandings of socially-constructed reality are molded (Searle and Willis,1995).

The findings suggest that content creators on Instagram engage in othering practices towards migrants regardless of their stance on immigration. In all cases the immigrant representation serves to position the content creator regarding the issue without deeply engaging in the migratory experience, while the migrant first-person narrative is absent in this sample. The visual distribution of characters and their relationship with the border wall serve to support the narrative and position the storyteller. This is relevant for the present dissertation because it highlights the ways in which the representations of marginalized individuals and groups are shaped in user-generated digital contexts where traditional forms of representation converge with personal opinions and the self-representative character of the platform.

**Chapter 3: Immigration and the Spanish right on Instagram Stories**

This chapter engages with the Instagram Story format to understand the strategies for persuasion and representation within contents about immigration created by the right-wing party Vox in Spain. The analysis considers three official Instagram accounts for the party and delves into the significance of this type of ephemeral content.

Chapter 3 considers the uniqueness of ephemeral social media, which enables conversation-like interactions (Rettberg, 2014; Soffer, 2016) as well as a range of filters, GIFs and regular stickers, polls, sliders, music, and other interactive add-ons. The option to share videos, GIFs and photos includes the possibility to combine different types of contents within the same story. The Instagram Story format also allows the creator to archive stories at the top of the

profile's wall –through story highlights– which means that content creators can make these messages available to users permanently. In the case of Vox, story highlights are grouped by issue, initiative, or type of content, making stories uniquely relevant in terms of the availability of user-generated, persuasive and in some cases even propagandistic content.

In this case, findings suggest that Vox uses a "collage" content configuration enabled by the IG Story format to collate different pieces of information from traditional media outlets, diverse Vox party member profiles and other sources into single IG Stories. This platformed argumentative strategy makes it difficult for the reader to assess the reliability of the information presented and make an informed opinion about the migratory issues discussed. This is especially concerning in a format that lasts from 7 to 12 seconds. Interactive affordances such as sliders and emoji function as emotional appeals that lead the reader towards specific opinions about the content presented. The visual migrant representations within this sample are limited to one profile of migrant: a young, male individual that is dark-skinned and part of a group. The textual narrative supports this stance with words such as "violent, aggressive, dangerous, invasion." Other profiles of immigrants are not present in these stories.

This chapter builds on the relevance of specific formats and configurations enabled by visual and interactive social media to promote forms of persuasion and representation that adapt to these modes of communication. Moreover, the narratives and arguments about who immigrants are and their experiences match previous research about right-wing representations of immigration and othering.

**Chapter 4: #Migrantes on TikTok and platformed belongings**

After analyzing Instagram as a context for the expression of opinions and political communication about immigration, chapter 4 explores both ideas of othering and sameness by analyzing content created by immigrants on TikTok. Some of the content is created in response to existing beliefs about immigration, contradicting or resignifying what it means to be an immigrant. Other videos establish different forms of belonging by using specific affordances and content configurations available on the platform. The concept of *platformed belongings* is proposed.

Along these lines, Marlowe et al. (2017) advance the theoretical framework of digital belongings to analyze "the dynamic of social participation and social cohesion as it interfaces with contemporary practices of family and friendship." (p.17) These authors consider various forms of identity, and different levels of belonging, analyzed through the functions of digital media in the narrative, communicative and identity-building practices of migrants. In their argument, the role of digital tools is merely instrumental, used to create or maintain connections that resemble in-person communication with family, friends, or diasporic groups. In these cases, social media are deemed as suitable contexts to observe such practices and their exploration attempts to understand in-person belonging practices using digital and social media tools. In the present chapter, I aim to extend this concept to consider the sociotechnical affordances and configurations of social media —with TikTok as an example— as intimately intertwined with strategies of belonging, in a process where the aspirations of migrants to belong shape their use of social media affordances and these, in turn, mold the belonging possibilities of migrant creators.

I propose the concept of *platformed belongings,* defined as the strategies of belonging deployed by migrants and other marginalized groups that instrumentalize platform vernaculars and creative affordances to connect, self-identify, counter, or establish a dialogue with existing narratives. This concept reflects the combination of TikTok affordances and vernaculars by migrants to position themselves through narratives of identity and belonging. Platformed belongings include traditional understandings of belonging through the self-representation of culture, nationality, and ethnicity as well as new digital cultures of belonging to a larger community of TikTok creators and users through social media visibility in the *for you* page.

**Chapter 5: Immigrant influencers' diversity and (in)visibility**

This chapter builds on the previous studies, to further understand how Latin American immigrant influencers build their online personas. It focuses on the ways in which their migratory experience shapes their portrayed identities. It also explores de range of ideologies and identity traits conveyed by these creators. Their negotiations with the platform, its moderation guidelines, and the algorithmic feed are also considered, to understand the platformed nature of their stories. The main objective of the chapter is to explore how their creative

practices and life experiences shape their microcelebrity identities and strategies for algorithmic (in)visibility.

For this, the chapter starts with an overview of previous scholarship on the subject, considering the lens of Internet microcelebrity (Abidin, 2018; Marwick, 2013; Senft, 2013), the dimensions of the online persona (Moore et al., 2017) and a constructivist perspective of identity (Hall, 2019). I then explore the negotiation with platform policies and politics (Gillespie, 2010, 2018) and algorithmic visibility (Bishop, 2019; Bucher, 2012). Media and migration scholarship will also be instrumental to understand the approaches and motivations of immigrants to engage in content creation (Leurs, 2017a) and the possible opportunities of niche Internet celebrity and (in)visibility strategies that reflect their agency within the platform. The chapter then moves to describe the research process with a focus on the appropriateness of the narrative case study approach to delve into the vast diversity among Latinx immigrant tiktokers.

Each of these influencers reflect unique personas that are shaped by their specific migratory experiences, identity, and goals within the platform. The results provide insights about their multidimensional online personas, including their platformed strategies to present controversial political content, their creative approaches to moderation, and the ways in which their content models the "correct" ways to be an immigrant and take action in their own unique microcelebrity styles.

**Chapter 6: Algorithmic (in)visibility among immigrant tiktokers**

This chapter explores the *algorithmic (in)visibility* practices of Latin American immigrant tiktokers in the United States and Spain. These refer to the set of strategies deployed by immigrant content creators on social media –and possibly other marginalized and vulnerable populations– to negotiate the conspicuousness of their controversial content with the aim of avoiding its deletion from the platform.

Previous research on vernacular visibility has explored the ways in which feminist groups in Latin America appropriate the potential of four different social media platforms to gain visibility and argue that this process of adaptation shapes the feminist movement (Sued et al., 2021). These researchers describe how the aesthetics of their TikTok videos use specific features such as overlaid text and an emphasis on audio. Humor, role-play, and music are also mentioned

as part of TikTok's unique narrative genres. Visually, these researchers also describe how female bodies are shaped by TikTok's configurations and appear sexualized. Research on algorithmic resistance tactics is very relevant to the present chapter, which are understood as behaviors that work within the framework of the algorithm with the intention to prompt specific algorithmic outcomes (Velkova & Kaun, 2021).

This chapter expands migrant narratives and linguistic components used to include the importance of interactive and multimodal elements within the content to achieve increased visibility and reach within algorithmic systems. The findings unveil three exemplary *algorithmic (in)visibility* practices that include content reuse and re-upload, vernacular visibility, and partial deplatforming. These strategies shift between collective and individual approaches to achieve selective visibility and concealed conspicuousness within algorithmic moderation systems.

**Chapter 7: Narrative agency and belonging among immigrant tiktokers**

This chapter proposes four distinct forms of narrative agency and belonging by Latin American content creators on TikTok, namely 1) (self)representative, 2) utilitarian, 3) prescriptive and 4) activist agentic styles. The proposed typology expands the concept of platformed belongings to include notions of agency that are based on the stories told by these creators and their power to have an impact in their lived realities.

The platformed aspects of migrant narratives and related identities on TikTok are shaped by the connective, imitational, and interactive possibilities of the social media platform's memetic structure and affordances (Zulli & Zulli, 2020). Throughout this chapter I use the term platformed to refer to the ways in which digital spaces –structurally and through its policies/politics– enable, promote and constraint certain types of content and interactions. Thus, when belongings, identities and agentic styles are established in the digital realm, they expand beyond traditional –non-digital– understandings to incorporate digital modes shaped by the creators' personal creative styles and their allegiance to certain digital groupings and trends. In this sense, I argue that tiktokers enact their various belongings and related identities using platformed strategies that are shaped by their agentic style and their perception, appropriation, and vernacular knowledge of the platform.

The first agentic style and its corresponding mode of belonging can be described as migrant (self)representation. Such self-representations may range from seemingly passive to subversive. This style can be illustrated by migrant creators who present a specific rendition of the migrant experience that offers opportunities for interpretation, and which may challenge existing beliefs. Self-representations present a story that is often personal and may include persuasive elements. In the strongest cases, it may include an identifiable call to action or a clear message about what is expected from the viewer.

The second agentic style involves practical tips and advice to make belonging easier for prospective and current migrants. There is an emphasis on functional aspects of belonging through the provision of a set of guidelines to facilitate basic needs and resources acquisition for migrants. I posit that the focus on accessing resources constitutes an empowered form of belonging (Yuval-Davis, 2011). Content reflecting this style thematically ranges from financial matters related to migration, to finding a home, getting a job, or accessing school. It also includes strategies about bureaucratic processes to gain lawful status. In some instances, it may involve answering questions about specific actions that are (un)safe for migrants including specific tips to navigate life in the new country while undocumented.

Prescriptive agency intends to promote certain "correct" ways to belong to the new country, in this case, the assumptions include the belief that there are correct and incorrect ways to belong, in terms of what is expected from the migrants in their host society. It reflects an authoritative tone, often with a sense of superiority from the perspective of a more experienced immigrant who instructs others who just arrived or are making the decision to travel. The platformed configuration of this content may include a monologue by the creator looking at the camera or a duet/green screen to include examples of the wrong ways to be. Thus, the narrative format of this agentic form often includes examples of "wrong" forms to be an immigrant and the corresponding "corrective" modes according to the creator. These may involve linguistic, cultural, or attitudinal instructions that in many cases resemble top-down integration policies to achieve mainstream forms of belonging, such as adapting to the host country's labor market, regulations and their ways of working.

Activist platformed belongings are reflected by themes related to specific actions and behaviors that can be enacted to change the outcome of real-life experiences for vulnerable populations such as the case of some of the most

precarious immigrants –those with an irregular migration status (Nedelcu & Soysüren, 2020). These videos also follow what Cogo (2019) has defined as migrant activism through narratives that emphasize experiences of oppression and racism and claims for rights and citizenship. In this case the creator emphasizes aspects of life that are subject to inequality, systemic oppression, and injustice. The assumptions in this case include the belief that all people have rights regardless of their documentation. Rights, in this case, include human or constitutional rights as well as driving principles such as equality and justice for all people.

Chapter 7 brings together the thematic and strategic deployment of migratory narratives considered throughout this dissertation. Here the goal is to propose a fourfold perspective on narrative agency to analyze how different forms of belonging are enacted on TikTok contents created by Latin American migrants in the US and Spain. The current study found that traditional forms of belonging, agency and identity in migration research can be enriched by new dimensions enabled by platformed spaces and creative possibilities.

## Conclusions

This chapter reexamines the main question and five sub-questions that guide this dissertation. It addresses the main findings, considering the different theoretical and conceptual contributions of each of the chapters. It establishes the relevance of locating social media content in the algorithmic and platformed spaces it navigates and migratory narratives as a unique case that comprises issues of belonging, identity, and agency in the face of discrimination and othering. This chapter brings together the implications and contributions of the dissertation and provides possible future lines of research for consideration.

In response to the question related to the sociotechnical considerations of these contents, the shift from "*stories told in digital spaces*" to "*stories shaped by the digital spaces they inhabit*" is key. It is possible to suggest that the lightness and playfulness of both platforms are instrumentalized by various actors to inflict discrimination and othering, while other creators counter by establishing their sameness and belonging. Moreover, these instances of platformed storytelling are further understood when adding the narrative "essence" (Morse, 2008) of the stories told by the different agents discussing migration, including migrants.

In terms of the otherness-sameness balance, findings suggest that sameness is embedded in processes of othering. This is illustrated by creators expressing their affinity to certain ideas or communities in an attempt to strengthen their arguments of difference and/or superiority. In this sense, and to afford credibility to their stances of otherness, these tiktokers and instagrammers often need to emphasize the existence of a community of support within narratives of sameness and belonging. Some examples of these representations of *collective othering* include: (1) Vox politicians who visually appear surrounded by people who seem to cheer them on as they counter the "threat" of immigration; (2) a right-wing immigrant tiktoker who constantly integrates her conservative community of Latin American peers –through the use of duet, stitch and profile tags– who collectively criticize undocumented, Latinx immigration; (3) immigrant tiktokers who present examples of discrimination that portray them as a collective experience, in an apparent attempt to substantiate their claims, as if one instance of abuse was not enough.

To respond to the research question related to visibility, there is evidence of the creators' search for success, which is reflected in strategies aimed at engagement and interaction. In this dissertation, three themes emerge as relevant in relation to visibility: the appropriation of migration-related stories/images; the inability of migrant narratives to fit within mainstream storylines; and the (un)expected strategies for algorithmic (in)visibility observed throughout the analysis.

In response to the challenges and opportunities for immigrant creators, it is relevant to note that undocumented and other immigrants in the process of acquiring a more stable immigration status such as refugees or asylum seekers, face high stakes when creating content online. The fact that many of them create content regardless of the consequences invites reflection about the ways in which the privilege of content creation is configured. In this sense, creating online content about immigration –without thinking of the repercussions– is reserved mostly for non-immigrants whose legal status and physical safety are not on the line. Generalist content creators, politicians and their parties, and mainstream media outlets can portray immigrants and tell their stories with little regard for consequences, in contrast with many immigrant creators. The fact that migrant content creation is regarded as an act of courage is profoundly problematic, as it reflects the depth of injustice facing immigrants today.

It is also important to reflect about the *content that is not there* and the *immigrants who opt out of creating content* in the face of dominant representations of migration that are increasingly discriminatory and hateful. It is worth wondering about the stories that I are missing and the voices that we are silencing as societies today.

# Resumen en español

# Resumen en español

La presente tesis doctoral explora cómo las redes sociales configuran las narrativas migratorias creadas por diferentes actores, incluidos los creadores de contenidos generalistas, las figuras políticas, los inmigrantes y los influencers inmigrantes. El estudio se centra en dos países que se han convertido en los destinos preferidos de los inmigrantes: Estados Unidos y España. Las plataformas de interés son Instagram y TikTok por su popularidad y visualidad, así como por las configuraciones (auto)representativas que permiten.

La pregunta de investigación general que sustenta esta tesis doctoral es: ¿Cómo se configuran y construyen las narrativas sobre la inmigración en las redes sociales? Para responder a esta pregunta, se plantean cinco (sub)preguntas de investigación: (1) ¿Qué papel tienen las configuraciones sociotécnicas de las redes sociales en las narrativas sobre inmigración? (2) ¿Qué papel desempeñan la otredad y la mismidad en las narrativas sobre la inmigración? (3) ¿Qué estrategias utilizan los diferentes creadores de contenidos para hacer visibles sus narrativas migratorias y penetrar en el discurso público a través de las redes sociales? (4) ¿Cuáles son los desafíos y las oportunidades para que los creadores inmigrantes participen en el discurso existente sobre sí mismos? (5) ¿Cuáles son las narrativas transmitidas y las (auto)representaciones plasmadas y cuáles son sus implicaciones para las comunidades migrantes y los agentes que crean contenidos relevantes?

## Resumen de capítulos

### Capítulo 2: #CaravanasMigrantes y otredad en Instagram

El primer estudio de esta tesis se centró en evaluar los discursos multimodales de las publicaciones de Instagram relacionadas con los hashtags #CaravanaMigrante y #MigrantCaravan. Por lo tanto, el capítulo 2 proporciona información sobre las formas de otredad observadas entre los creadores de contenido en Instagram. Incluye un análisis de las características multimodales de las publicaciones de Instagram, centrándose en la presencia visual del muro fronterizo y en las formas en que los creadores de contenido no inmigrantes se apropian de las narrativas migratorias. Este capítulo responde a tres objetivos de investigación (O1) Describir las características de los posts conectados por

los hashtags #MigrantCaravan y #CaravanaMigrante; (O2) Identificar los personajes e interacciones de interés en el establecimiento de la alteridad; (O3) Describir las representaciones mediáticas del fenómeno de la inmigración en los posts de Instagram en relación con las opiniones sobre la inmigración y considerando los dos hashtags.

Estudios previos sobre la representación en Instagram se han centrado en la autorrepresentación de diferentes tipos de usuarios. Estos estudios se han focalizado tradicionalmente en la construcción de la identidad del autor. El enfoque novedoso que propone el presente estudio es la consideración de Instagram como un medio, donde un gran porcentaje de la población joven adulta consume noticias (Newman et al., 2017) e información, al tiempo que expresa sus opiniones sobre temas importantes (Valenzuela, 2013), convirtiéndose efectivamente en el escenario donde se moldean las concepciones simbólicas de la realidad y su construcción social (Searle y Willis,1995).

Los resultados sugieren que los creadores de contenidos en Instagram se distancian de los inmigrantes al margen de su postura sobre la inmigración. En todos los casos, la representación de los inmigrantes sirve para posicionar al creador de contenidos en relación con el tema sin involucrarse plenamente en la experiencia migratoria, mientras que la perspectiva del inmigrante en primera persona está ausente en esta muestra. La distribución visual de los personajes y su relación con el muro fronterizo apoyan el relato y posicionan al narrador. Esto es relevante para la presente tesis doctoral porque pone de relieve las formas en que las representaciones de individuos y grupos marginalizados se perfilan en contextos digitales generados por los usuarios, donde las formas tradicionales de representación convergen con las opiniones personales y el carácter autorrepresentativo de la plataforma.

### Capítulo 3: La inmigración y la derecha española en las Stories de Instagram

Este capítulo se centra en el formato de las Historias de Instagram para entender las estrategias de persuasión y representación en los contenidos sobre inmigración creados por el partido Vox en España. Se analizan tres cuentas oficiales del partido en Instagram y se profundiza en el significado de este tipo de contenidos efímeros.

El capítulo 3 considera la singularidad de los formatos efímeros en las redes sociales, que permiten interacciones similares a las de una conversación (Rettberg, 2014; Soffer, 2016), así como una serie de filtros, GIF y pegatinas, encuestas, sliders, música y otros complementos interactivos. La opción de compartir vídeos, GIFs y fotos incluye la posibilidad de combinar diferentes tipos de contenidos dentro de la misma historia. El formato de las Historias de Instagram también permite al creador archivar las historias en la parte superior del muro del perfil —a través de las historias destacadas—, lo que significa que los creadores de contenidos pueden poner estos mensajes a disposición de los usuarios de forma permanente. En el caso de Vox, las historias destacadas se agrupan por tema, iniciativa o tipo de contenido, lo que hace que las historias tengan una relevancia única en cuanto a la disponibilidad de contenidos generados por los usuarios, contenidos persuasivos y, en algunos casos, incluso propagandísticos.

En este caso, los hallazgos sugieren que Vox utiliza una configuración de contenidos "collage" habilitada por el formato de IG Story para aglutinar diferentes fragmentos informativos procedentes de medios de comunicación tradicionales, de diversos perfiles de miembros del partido Vox y de otras fuentes en una única Historia de IG. Esta estrategia argumentativa plataformizada dificulta que el lector evalúe la fiabilidad de la información presentada y se forme una opinión informada sobre los temas migratorios tratados. Esto es especialmente preocupante en un formato que dura de 7 a 12 segundos. Los elementos interactivos, como los sliders y los emoticonos, actúan como apelaciones emocionales que conducen al lector hacia opiniones específicas sobre el contenido presentado. Las representaciones visuales de los inmigrantes en esta muestra se limitan a un perfil de inmigrante: un individuo joven, de sexo masculino, de piel oscura y que forma parte de un grupo. La narrativa textual apoya esta postura con palabras como "violento, agresivo, peligroso, invasor." Otros perfiles de inmigrantes no están presentes en estos relatos.

Este capítulo se basa en la relevancia de los formatos y configuraciones específicas que permiten los medios sociales visuales e interactivos para promover formas de persuasión y representación que se adaptan a estos modos de comunicación. Además, las narrativas y los argumentos sobre quiénes son los inmigrantes y sus experiencias coinciden con investigaciones previas sobre las representaciones migratorias de la derecha y la otredad.

## Capítulo 4: #Migrantes en TikTok y el sentido de pertenencia plataformizado

Tras analizar Instagram como contexto para la expresión de opiniones y la comunicación política sobre la inmigración, el capítulo 4 explora las ideas de otredad y mismidad mediante el análisis de los contenidos creados por inmigrantes en TikTok. Algunos de los contenidos se crean en respuesta a las creencias existentes sobre la inmigración, contradiciendo o resignificando lo que significa ser un immigrante. Otros vídeos establecen diferentes formas de pertenencia mediante el uso de funcionalidades específicas y configuraciones de contenido disponibles en la plataforma. Se propone el concepto del sentido de pertenencia plataformizado.

En esta línea, Marlowe et al. (2017) avanzan en el marco teórico del sentido de pertenencia digital para analizar "la dinámica de la participación y la cohesión social en su interacción con las prácticas contemporáneas de la familia y la amistad." (p.17) Estos autores consideran varias formas de identidad, y diferentes niveles de pertenencia, analizados a través de las funciones de los medios digitales en las prácticas narrativas, comunicativas y de construcción de identidad de los migrantes. En su argumento, el papel de las herramientas digitales es meramente instrumental, utilizado para crear o mantener conexiones que se asemejan a la comunicación en persona con la familia, los amigos o los grupos diaspóricos. En estos casos, los medios sociales se consideran espacios adecuados para observar dichas estrategias y su exploración intenta comprender el sentido de pertenencia presencial a través de las herramientas digitales y de las redes sociales. En el presente capítulo, pretendo ampliar este concepto para considerar las posibilidades y configuraciones sociotécnicas de las redes sociales —con TikTok como ejemplo— como elementos íntimamente ligados al sentido de pertenencia, en un proceso en el que las aspiraciones de pertenencia de los migrantes dan forma a su uso de las redes sociales y estas, a su vez, moldean las posibilidades de pertenencia de los creadores migrantes.

Propongo el concepto del *sentido de pertenencia plataformizado*, definido como el conjunto de estrategias de pertenencia desplegadas por los migrantes y otros grupos marginados que instrumentalizan los lenguajes vernáculos de las plataformas y sus posibilidades creativas para conectarse, autoidentificarse, desafiar o establecer un diálogo con las narrativas existentes.

Este concepto refleja la combinación de las funcionalidades de TikTok y los lenguajes vernáculos por parte de los migrantes para posicionarse a través de discursos de identidad y pertenencia. El sentido de pertenencia plataformizado incluye la comprensión tradicional de la pertenencia a través de la autorrepresentación de la cultura, la nacionalidad y la etnia, así como las nuevas culturas digitales en cuanto a la pertenencia a una comunidad más amplia de creadores y usuarios de TikTok a través de la visibilidad en los medios sociales en la página "for you."

**Capítulo 5: Diversidad e (in)visibilidad de los influencers inmigrantes**

Este capítulo se basa sobre los capítulos anteriores para comprender mejor cómo los influencers inmigrantes latinoamericanos construyen su imagen en Internet. Se centra en las formas en que su experiencia migratoria da forma a las identidades que retratan. También explora la gama de ideologías y rasgos de identidad que transmiten estos creadores. Asimismo, se analizan sus negociaciones con la plataforma, sus pautas de moderación y el sistema algorítmico, para comprender la naturaleza plataformizada de sus historias. El objetivo principal del capítulo es explorar cómo las prácticas creativas y las experiencias vitales de estos creadores conforman sus identidades de microcelebridad y sus estrategias de (in)visibilidad algorítmica.

Para ello, el capítulo parte de un repaso de los estudios previos sobre el tema, considerando la lente de la microcelebridad en Internet (Abidin, 2018; Marwick, 2013; Senft, 2013), la construcción de los personajes digitales (Moore et al., 2017) y una perspectiva constructivista de la identidad (Hall, 2019). A continuación, exploro la negociación de estos creadores y sus contenidos con las políticas y las políticas de las plataformas (Gillespie, 2010, 2018) y la visibilidad algorítmica (Bishop, 2019; Bucher, 2012). El estudio se nutre del área de los medios y migrantes para comprender los enfoques y las motivaciones de los inmigrantes para participar en la creación de contenidos (Leurs, 2017a) y las posibles oportunidades de celebridad especializada en Internet y las estrategias de (in)visibilidad que reflejan su capacidad de acción dentro de la plataforma. A continuación, el capítulo describe el proceso de investigación, centrándose en la idoneidad del enfoque de estudio de caso narrativo para profundizar en la gran diversidad de los tiktokers inmigrantes latinoamericanos.

Cada uno de estos influencers refleja una personalidad única, moldeada por experiencias migratorias, identidades y objetivos específicos dentro de la plataforma. Los resultados proporcionan información sobre sus personajes multidimensionales en línea, incluyendo sus estrategias en la plataforma para presentar contenido político controvertido, sus enfoques creativos frente a la moderación, y las formas en que su contenido modela los modos "correctos" de ser un inmigrante y actuar en sus propios estilos de microcelebridad.

**Capítulo 6: (in)visibilidad algorítmica de los tiktokers inmigrantes**

Este capítulo explora las prácticas de (in)visibilidad algorítmica de los tiktokers inmigrantes latinoamericanos en Estados Unidos y España. Estas se refieren al conjunto de estrategias desplegadas por los creadores de contenidos inmigrantes en las redes sociales –y posiblemente otras poblaciones marginadas y vulnerables– para negociar la visibilidad de sus contenidos –controvertidos– con el fin de evitar su supresión de la plataforma.

Investigaciones anteriores sobre la visibilidad mediante lenguajes vernáculos de las plataformas han explorado los grupos feministas de América Latina y su capacidad para ganar visibilidad y argumentan que este proceso de adaptación da forma al movimiento feminista (Sued et al., 2021). Estas investigadoras describen cómo la estética de los vídeos de TikTok emplean características específicas como el texto superpuesto y el énfasis en el audio. El humor, la dramatización y la música también se mencionan como parte de los géneros narrativos exclusivos de TikTok. Visualmente, estas investigadoras también describen cómo los cuerpos femeninos son moldeados por las configuraciones de TikTok y aparecen sexualizados. La investigación sobre las tácticas de resistencia algorítmica es muy relevante para el presente capítulo. Estas se entienden como comportamientos que funcionan dentro del marco del algoritmo con la intención de provocar resultados algorítmicos específicos (Velkova & Kaun, 2021).

Este capítulo amplía los relatos de los migrantes y los componentes lingüísticos utilizados para incorporar la importancia de los elementos interactivos y multimodales dentro del contenido para lograr una mayor visibilidad y alcance dentro de los sistemas algorítmicos. Los resultados desvelan tres prácticas ejemplares de (in)visibilidad algorítmica que incluyen la reutilización y la resubida de contenidos, la visibilidad vernacular y la

deplataformización parcial. Estas estrategias oscilan entre lo colectivo y lo individual para lograr una visibilidad selectiva y encubierta dentro de los sistemas de moderación algorítmica.

**Capítulo 7: *Agency* narrativo y pertenencia entre los tiktokers inmigrantes**

Este capítulo propone cuatro formas distintas de *agency* narrativo y de pertenencia por parte de los creadores de contenidos latinoamericanos en TikTok, concretamente: 1) (auto)representativo, 2) utilitario, 3) prescriptivo y 4) activista. La tipología propuesta amplía el concepto de *pertenencia plataformizada* para incluir nociones de *agency* que se basan en las historias contadas por estos creadores y su poder para impactar sus realidades.

Los aspectos plataformizados de los relatos migratorios y las identidades relacionadas con ellos en TikTok están conformados por las posibilidades conectivas, imitativas e interactivas de la estructura memética y las posibilidades de la plataforma (Zulli y Zulli, 2020). A lo largo de este capítulo utilizamos el término "platformizado" para referirnos a las formas en que los espacios digitales —estructuralmente y a través de sus reglas/normativas— permiten, promueven y restringen ciertos tipos de contenidos e interacciones. Así, cuando la pertenencia, las identidades y los estilos de agency se establecen en el ámbito digital, se expanden más allá de las concepciones tradicionales —no digitales— para incorporar modos digitales conformados por los estilos creativos personales de los creadores y su adscripción a determinadas formaciones y tendencias digitales. En este sentido, sostenemos que los tiktokers promulgan una diversidad de modos de pertenencia e identidades afines utilizando estrategias relacionadas con la plataforma que están conformadas por su estilo de agency y su percepción, apropiación y conocimiento vernáculo de la plataforma.

El primer tipo de *agency* narrativo y su modo de pertenencia correspondiente puede ser descrito como la (auto)representación migrante. Estas autorrepresentaciones oscilan entre relatos pasivos hasta subversivos. Este estilo puede ser ilustrado por creadores migrantes que presentan una interpretación específica de la experiencia migrante que ofrece oportunidades de interpretación y que puede desafiar las creencias existentes. Las autorrepresentaciones presentan una historia que suele ser personal y puede incluir elementos persuasivos. En los casos más fuertes, puede incluir una

llamada a la acción identificable o un mensaje claro sobre lo que se espera del espectador.

El segundo tipo de *agency* narrativo implica consejos prácticos para facilitar el sentido de pertenencia de los futuros y actuales migrantes. Se hace hincapié en los aspectos funcionales de la pertenencia mediante la provisión de un conjunto de directrices para facilitar el acceso a necesidades y recursos básicos para los inmigrantes. Postulo que el enfoque en el acceso a los recursos constituye una forma empoderada de pertenencia (Yuval-Davis, 2011). El contenido que refleja este estilo temático abarca desde cuestiones financieras relacionadas con la migración hasta la búsqueda de un hogar, la obtención de un empleo o el acceso a la escuela. También incluye estrategias sobre procesos burocráticos para obtener documentación legal. En algunos casos, puede implicar la respuesta a preguntas sobre acciones específicas que son (in)seguras para los migrantes, incluyendo consejos específicos para navegar el nuevo país para personas indocumentadas.

El agency prescriptivo pretende promover ciertas formas "correctas" de pertenencia en el nuevo país, en este caso, se asume que hay formas correctas e incorrectas de pertenecer, en términos de lo que se espera de los inmigrantes en su sociedad de acogida. Esta tipología refleja un tono autoritario, a menudo con un sentido de superioridad desde la perspectiva de un inmigrante más experimentado que instruye a otros que acaban de llegar o están tomando la decisión de viajar. La configuración plataformizada de este contenido puede incluir un monólogo del creador mirando a la cámara o un dúo/pantalla verde para incluir ejemplos de “errores”. Así, el formato narrativo de este *agency* suele incluir ejemplos de formas "erróneas" de ser inmigrante y los correspondientes modos "correctivos" según el creador. Éstos pueden consistir en instrucciones lingüísticas, culturales o actitudinales que, en muchos casos, se asemejan a las políticas de integración desde arriba, para establecer formas de pertenencia convencionales, como adaptarse al mercado laboral del país de acogida, a la normativa y a sus formas de trabajar.

Las pertenencias plataformizadas activistas se ven reflejadas en temas relacionados con acciones y comportamientos específicos que pueden ser promulgados para cambiar el resultado de las experiencias de la vida real para las poblaciones vulnerables, como es el caso de algunos de los inmigrantes más precarios —aquellos con un estado migratorio irregular (Nedelcu & Soysüren, 2020). Estos vídeos también siguen lo que Cogo (2019) ha definido como

activismo migrante a través de narrativas que enfatizan las experiencias de opresión y racismo y las reivindicaciones de derechos y ciudadanía. En este caso el creador enfatiza aspectos de la vida que están sujetos a la desigualdad, la opresión sistémica y la injusticia. Los supuestos en este caso incluyen la creencia de que todas las personas tienen derechos independientemente de su documentación. Los derechos, en este caso, incluyen los derechos humanos o constitucionales, así como los principios impulsores como la igualdad y la justicia para todas las personas.

El capítulo 7 recoge el despliegue temático y estratégico de las narrativas migratorias consideradas a lo largo de esta tesis doctoral. Aquí el objetivo es proponer una perspectiva de cuatro partes sobre el agency narrativo para analizar cómo se promulgan diferentes formas de pertenencia en los contenidos de TikTok creados por los migrantes latinoamericanos en Estados Unidos y España. El presente estudio sugiere que las formas tradicionales de pertenencia, agency e identidad en la investigación de la migración pueden ser enriquecidas por nuevas dimensiones habilitadas por los espacios platformizados y sus posibilidades creativas.

**Conclusiones**

Este capítulo reexamina la pregunta principal y las cinco subpreguntas que guían este proyecto de investigación doctoral. Aborda las principales conclusiones, considerando las diferentes aportaciones teóricas y conceptuales de cada uno de los capítulos. Establece la relevancia de situar el contenido de las redes sociales en los espacios algorítmicos y de plataformas en los que emerge y las narrativas migratorias como un caso único que comprende cuestiones de pertenencia, identidad y agency frente a la discriminación y la otredad. Este capítulo reúne las implicaciones y contribuciones de la tesis.

En respuesta a la pregunta relacionada con las consideraciones sociotécnicas de estos contenidos, es clave el giro de "historias contadas en espacios digitales" a "historias moldeadas por los espacios digitales que habitan". Es posible sugerir que la ligereza y el carácter lúdico de ambas plataformas son instrumentalizados por diversos actores para infligir discriminación y otredad, mientras que otros creadores contraatacan estableciendo su mismidad y pertenencia. Además, estas instancias de narración a través de las plataformas se entienden mejor cuando se añade la

"esencia" narrativa (Morse, 2008) de las historias contadas por los diferentes agentes que discuten la migración, incluidos los migrantes.

En cuanto al equilibrio entre otredad y mismidad, los resultados sugieren que la mismidad está integrada en los procesos de otredad. Esto se ilustra en los creadores que expresan su afinidad con ciertas ideas o comunidades en un intento de reforzar sus argumentos de diferencia y/o superioridad. En este sentido, y para dar credibilidad a sus posturas de alteridad, estos tiktokers e instagramers a menudo necesitan enfatizar la existencia de una comunidad de apoyo dentro de las narrativas de igualdad y pertenencia. Algunos ejemplos de estas representaciones de alteridad colectiva son: (1) los políticos de Vox que aparecen visualmente rodeados de personas que parecen animarles mientras contrarrestan la "amenaza" de la inmigración; (2) una tiktoker inmigrante de derechas que integra constantemente a su comunidad conservadora de compañeros latinoamericanos —mediante el uso del dúo, del stitch y el tag de perfil— para criticar colectivamente a la inmigración indocumentada y latinoamericana; (3) tiktokers inmigrantes que presentan ejemplos de discriminación que los retratan como parte de una experiencia colectiva, en un aparente intento de fundamentar sus reclamos, como si un solo caso de abuso no fuera suficiente.

Para responder a la pregunta de investigación relacionada con la visibilidad, hay evidencias de la búsqueda de éxito de los creadores, que se refleja en las estrategias dirigidas al *engagement* y la interacción. En esta tesis doctoral, surgen tres temas relevantes en relación con la visibilidad: la apropiación de las historias/imágenes relacionadas con la migración; la incapacidad de las narrativas de los migrantes para encajar en las líneas argumentales convencionales; y las estrategias (in)esperadas para la (in)visibilidad algorítmica observadas a lo largo del análisis.

En respuesta a los retos y oportunidades para los creadores inmigrantes, es relevante señalar que las personas indocumentadas y otros inmigrantes en proceso de adquirir un estatus migratorio más estable, como los refugiados o los solicitantes de asilo, se enfrentan a grandes riesgos al crear contenidos en línea. El hecho de que muchos de ellos creen contenidos sin tener en cuenta las consecuencias invita a reflexionar sobre las formas en que se configura el privilegio en la creación de contenidos. En este sentido, la creación de contenidos digitales sobre la inmigración —sin pensar en las repercusiones— está reservada para creadores no inmigrantes, cuya situación legal y seguridad física

no están en juego. Los creadores de contenidos generalistas, los políticos y sus partidos, y los medios de comunicación convencionales pueden retratar a los inmigrantes y contar sus historias sin tener en cuenta las consecuencias, en contraste con muchos creadores inmigrantes. El hecho de que la creación de contenidos migratorios por parte de los inmigrantes se considere un acto de valentía es profundamente problemático, ya que refleja la injusticia a la que se enfrentan los inmigrantes hoy en día.

También es importante reflexionar sobre los *contenidos que no existen* y los inmigrantes que *optan por no crear contenidos* ante las representaciones dominantes de la migración que son cada vez más discriminatorias y lenguajes del odio. Merece la pena preguntarse por las historias que nos estamos perdiendo y las voces que estamos silenciando como sociedades.

# Nederlandse samenvatting

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Deze doctoraatsthesis onderzoekt hoe sociale media platformen vorm geven aan de migratieverhalen die gecreëerd worden door verschillende actoren, waaronder generalistische content creators, politieke figuren, immigranten en immigranten influencers. De studie focust op twee landen die als voorkeursbestemmingen voor migranten beschouwd worden: De Verenigde Staten en Spanje. De sociale platformen waar het onderzoek zich op richt zijn Instagram en TikTok, vooral vanwege hun populariteit en visualiteit en wegens de (zelf)representatieve configuraties die ze mogelijk maken.

De algemene onderzoeksvraag die aan de basis ligt van deze dissertatie is: Hoe worden narratieven over immigratie geconfigureerd en geconstrueerd op sociale media platformen? Om op deze vraag te beantwoorden worden vijf (sub)onderzoeksvragen gesteld: (1) Hoe geven de socio-technische configuraties van sociale media vorm aan verhalen over immigratie? (2) Welke rol spelen anders-zijn en samen-zijn in immigratieverhalen? (3) Welke strategieën gebruiken verschillende content creators om hun migratieverhalen zichtbaar te maken en het publieke discours te betreden via sociale netwerken? (4) Wat zijn de unieke uitdagingen en kansen voor migrantencreators om deel te nemen aan het bestaande discours over zichzelf? (5) Wat zijn de overgebrachte verhalen en de belichaamde (zelf)representaties en wat zijn hun implicaties voor migrantengemeenschappen en agenten die relevante content creëren?

## Hoofdstukoverzicht

### Hoofdstuk 2: #MigrantCaravans en anders-zijn op Instagram

De eerste studie stelde als doel de multimodale discoursen binnen Instagramposts verbonden door de hashtags #CaravanaMigrante en #MigrantCaravan te beoordelen. Op die manier biedt Hoofdstuk 2 inzichten over de geplatformeerde vormen van anders-zijn die werden waargenomen content creators op Instagram. Het hoofdstuk omvat een analyse van de multimodale kenmerken van Instagram-posts, waarbij de nadruk ligt op de visuele aanwezigheid van de grensmuur en de manieren waarop niet-

immigrerende content creators, migrerende verhalen coöpteren. Dit hoofdstuk beantwoordt de volgende drie onderzoeksdoelstellingen : (O1) Beschrijf de karakteristieken van posts die verbonden zijn met de hashtags #MigrantCaravan en #CaravanaMigrante; (O2) Identificeer de personages en interacties die van belang zijn bij het vaststellen van anders-zijn; (O3) Beschrijf de mediarepresentaties van het immigratiefenomeen binnen Instagram posts in verhouding tot meningen over immigratie en rekening houdend met de twee hashtags.

Voorgaand academisch onderzoek naar de representatie van Instagram-gebruikers heeft zich vooral gericht op de zelfrepresentatie van verschillende soorten Instagram-gebruikers. Binnen deze studies lag de nadruk traditioneel op de constructie van de identiteit van de gebruiker. De nieuwe benadering die door de huidige studie wordt voorgesteld betreft de beschouwing van Instagram als een medium waar een groot percentage van de jongvolwassen bevolking nieuws (Newman et al., 2017) en informatie consumeert, terwijl ze hun mening geven over belangrijke onderwerpen (Valenzuela, 2013), waardoor het platform effectief een setting wordt waar symbolische opvattingen van sociaal-geconstrueerde werkelijkheid worden gekneed (Searle en Willis,1995).

De bevindingen suggereren dat content creators op Instagram zich bezighouden met anders-zijn ten opzichte van migranten, ongeacht hun standpunt over immigratie. In alle gevallen dient de immigrantenvertegenwoordiging om de content creater te positioneren ten opzichte van het onderwerp, zonder diep in te gaan op de migratie-ervaring, terwijl het migrantenverhaal in de eerste persoon in deze steekproef ontbreekt. De visuele verdeling van de personages en hun relatie met de grensmuur dienen om het verhaal te ondersteunen en de verteller een positie te geven. Dit is relevant voor deze dissertatie omdat het de manieren belicht waarop de representaties van gemarginaliseerde individuen en groepen vorm krijgen in door gebruikers gegenereerde digitale contexten waar traditionele vormen van representatie samenkomen met persoonlijke meningen en het zelfrepresentatieve karakter van het platform.

## Hoofdstuk 3: Immigratie en het Spaanse recht op Instagram-stories

Dit hoofdstuk gaat in op het Instagram Story-formaat om inzicht te verkrijgen in de overtuigings- en representatiestrategieën binnen de content over immigratie gemaakt door de rechtse partij Vox in Spanje. In de analyse worden drie officiële Instagram-accounts van de partij onder de loep genomen en wordt het belang van dit soort efemere content onderzocht.

Hoofdstuk 3 beschouwt het unieke karakter van efemere sociale media, die conversatie-achtige interacties mogelijk maken (Rettberg, 2014; Soffer, 2016), evenals een waaier aan filters, GIF's en gewone stickers, polls, sliders, muziek, en andere interactieve add-ons. De optie om video's, GIF's en foto's te delen omvat de mogelijkheid om verschillende soorten content te combineren binnen hetzelfde verhaal. Het Instagram Story-formaat stelt de maker ook in staat om verhalen te archiveren bovenaan de profiel –door middel van story highlights– wat betekent dat content creators deze berichten permanent beschikbaar kunnen maken voor gebruikers. In het geval van Vox worden de hoogtepunten van de verhalen gegroepeerd per onderwerp, initiatief of type van content, waardoor de verhalen een unieke relevantie hebben wat betreft de beschikbaarheid van door gebruikers gegenereerde, overtuigende en in sommige gevallen zelfs propagandistische content.

De bevindingen suggereren in dit geval dat Vox een "collage" contentconfiguratie gebruikt die mogelijk wordt gemaakt door het IG Story formaat om verschillende stukken informatie van traditionele media-outlets, diverse profielen van Voc-partijleden en andere bronnen samen te voegen in enkele IG Stories. Deze geplatformeerde argumentatieve strategie maakt het moeilijk voor de lezer om de betrouwbaarheid van de gepresenteerde informatie te beoordelen en zich een gefundeerde mening te vormen over de besproken migratiekwesties. Dit is vooral zorgwekkend in een format dat 7 tot 12 seconden duurt. Interactieve mogelijkheden zoals schuifbalken en emoji dienen als emotionele aantrekkingsmiddelen die de lezer naar specifieke meningen over de gepresenteerde content leiden. De visuele migrantenrepresentaties in deze steekproef beperken zich tot één migrantenprofiel: een jong, mannelijk individu met een donkere huidskleur dat deel uitmaakt van een groep. Het tekstuele verhaal ondersteunt deze houding met woorden als "gewelddadig, agressief, gevaarlijk, invasie". Andere profielen van immigranten komen in deze verhalen niet voor.

Dit hoofdstuk bouwt voort op de relevantie van specifieke formats en configuraties die mogelijk worden gemaakt door visuele en interactieve sociale media om vormen van overtuiging en representatie te bevorderen die zich aanpassen aan deze communicatievormen. Bovendien komen de verhalen en argumenten over wie immigranten zijn en hun ervaringen overeen met eerder onderzoek over rechtse voorstellingen van immigratie en 'othering'.

## Hoofdstuk 4: #Migrantes op TikTok en het geplatformeerde saamhorigheidsgevoel

Na een analyse van Instagram als een setting voor het uiten van meningen en politieke communicatie over immigratie, verkent hoofdstuk 4 zowel ideeën van 'otherness' als van 'sameness' door het analyseren van content die door immigranten op TikTok is gemaakt. Een deel van de content is gecreëerd als reactie op bestaande opvattingen over immigratie, waarbij wordt tegengesproken of beredeneerd wat het betekent om een immigrant te zijn. Andere video's creëren verschillende vormen van '*belonging*' door gebruik te maken van specifieke mogelijkheden en contentconfiguraties die op het platform beschikbaar zijn. Het concept van '*platformed belongings*' wordt voorgesteld.

In deze lijn stelden Marlowe et al. (2017) het theoretisch kader van digitale saamhorigheidsgevoel voor om "de dynamiek van sociale participatie en sociale cohesie als het raakvlakken met hedendaagse praktijken van familie en vriendschap" (p.17) te analyseren. Deze auteurs beschouwen verschillende vormen van identiteit en verschillende niveaus van 'belongings', geanalyseerd via de functies van digitale media in de narratieve, communicatieve en identiteitsvormende praktijken van migranten. In hun argumentatie is de rol van digitale instrumenten louter instrumenteel, gebruikt om connecties te creëren of te onderhouden die lijken op persoonlijke communicatie met familie, vrienden, of diasporagroepen. In deze gevallen worden sociale media beschouwd als geschikte contexten om dergelijke praktijken te observeren en hun onderzoek probeert persoonlijke saamhorigheidspraktijken te begrijpen door gebruik te maken van digitale en sociale media-instrumenten. In dit hoofdstuk wil ik dit concept uitbreiden en de sociotechnische mogelijkheden en configuraties van sociale media –met TikTok als voorbeeld– beschouwen als nauw verweven met strategieën om ergens bij te horen, in een proces waarin de

aspiraties van migranten om ergens bij te horen vorm geven aan hun gebruik van de mogelijkheden van sociale media, en deze op hun beurt de mogelijkheden van migranten om ergens bij te horen creëren.

Ik stel het concept van het *'platformed belongings'*, gedefinieerd als de strategieën van verbondenheid om erbij te horen gehanteerd door migranten en andere gemarginaliseerde groepen die gebruik maken van de vernaculaire en creatieve mogelijkheden van het platform om aansluiting te vinden bij bestaande verhalen, zichzelf te identificeren, zich ertegen te verzetten of er een dialoog mee aan te gaan. Dit concept weerspiegelt de combinatie van TikTok-mogelijkheden en -taal door migranten om zichzelf te positioneren via verhalen over identiteit en 'belonging'. Het *'platformed belongings'* omvat traditionele opvattingen van saamhorigheid via zelfrepresentatie van cultuur, nationaliteit en etniciteit, maar ook nieuwe digitale culturen van saamhorigheid in een grotere gemeenschap van TikTok-creators en -gebruikers via zichtbaarheid op sociale media in de *for you* feed.

**Hoofdstuk 5: Diversiteit en (on)zichtbaarheid van influencers met een immigratieachtergrond**

Dit hoofdstuk bouwt voort op de vorige studies, om verder te begrijpen hoe Latijns-Amerikaanse influencers met een immigrantenachtergrond hun online persona's opbouwen. Het richt zich op de manier waarop hun migratie-ervaring vorm geeft aan hun geportretteerde identiteiten. Verder onderzoekt het hoofdstuk ook het scala aan ideologieën en identiteitskenmerken die door deze makers worden uitgedragen. Ook hun onderhandelingen met het platform, de moderatierichtlijnen en de algorimtische feed komen aan bod, om de platformkarakter -en aard van hun verhalen te begrijpen. Het belangrijkste doel van dit hoofdstuk is te onderzoeken hoe hun creatieve praktijken en levenservaringen vorm geven aan hun microcelebrity-identiteiten en strategieën voor algoritmische (on)zichtbaarheid.

Hiervoor begint het hoofdstuk met een overzicht van eerdere studies over dit onderwerp, waarbij we de lens van Internet microcelebrity (Abidin, 2018; Marwick, 2013; Senft, 2013), de dimensies van de online persona (Moore et al., 2017) en een constructivistisch perspectief van identiteit (Hall, 2019) in overweging nemen en onderzoeken. Vervolgens verken ik de onderhandeling met het beleid en de politiek van het platform (Gillespie, 2010, 2018) en

algoritmische zichtbaarheid (Bishop, 2019; Bucher, 2012). De media- en migratiewetenschap zal ook onder de loep genomen worden om inzicht te krijgen in de benaderingen en beweegredenen van immigranten om content te creëren (Leurs, 2017a) en de mogelijke kansen van niche-internetberoemdheid en (on)zichtbaarheidsstrategieën die hun agency binnen het platform weerspiegelen. Het hoofdstuk beschrijft vervolgens het onderzoeksproces, waarbij de focus ligt op de geschiktheid van de narratieve casestudy-benadering om de enorme diversiteit onder Latijns-Amerikaanse tiktokers met een immigratieachtergrond te onderzoeken.

Elk van deze influencers weerspiegelt unieke personas die gevormd zijn door hun specifieke migratie-ervaringen, identiteit en doelen binnen het platform. De resultaten bieden inzicht in hun multidimensionale online personas, waaronder hun platformstrategieën om controversiële politieke content te presenteren, hun creatieve benaderingen van moderatie, en de manieren waarop hun content model staat voor de "juiste" manieren om een immigrant te zijn en actie te ondernemen in hun eigen unieke microcelebrity-stijlen.

**Hoofdstuk 6: Algoritmische (on)zichtbaarheid bij immigranten tiktokers**

Dit hoofdstuk onderzoekt de algoritmische (on)zichtbaarheidspraktijken van Latijns-Amerikaanse tiktokers met een immigratieachtergrond in de Verenigde Staten en Spanje. Deze verwijzen naar de reeks strategieën die door immigratiecontent creators op sociale media —en mogelijk andere gemarginaliseerde en kwetsbare bevolkingsgroepen— worden toegepast om te onderhandelen over de opvallendheid en zichtbaarheid van hun controversiële content, met als doel te voorkomen dat deze van het platform wordt verwijderd. Eerder onderzoek naar ‘‘vernaculaire zichtbaarheid’’ ging na hoe feministische groepen in Latijns-Amerika zich de mogelijkheden van vier verschillende sociale-mediaplatforms toe-eigenen om aan zichtbaarheid te winnen, en stelt dat dit aanpassingsproces de feministische beweging vorm geeft (Sued et al., 2021). Deze onderzoekers beschrijven hoe de esthetiek van hun TikTok-video's gebruik maakt van specifieke kenmerken, zoals overlappende tekst en een nadruk op audio. Humor, rollenspel, en muziek worden ook genoemd als onderdeel van TikTok's unieke narratieve genres. Visueel beschrijven deze onderzoekers ook hoe vrouwenlichamen worden gevormd door TikTok’s

configuraties, en zo geseksualiseerd lijken. Onderzoek naar algoritmische weerstandstactieken is zeer relevant binnen dit hoofdstuk, die worden gedefinieerd als gedragingen die werken binnen het kader van het algoritme met de bedoeling om specifieke algoritmische uitkomsten uit te lokken (Velkova & Kaun, 2021).

In dit hoofdstuk worden de migrantenverhalen en de gebruikte taalkundige componenten uitgebreid met een focus op het belang van interactieve en multimodale elementen binnen de content om een grotere zichtbaarheid en een groter bereik binnen algoritmische systemen te bereiken. De bevindingen onthullen drie exemplarische algoritmische (on)zichtbaarheidspraktijken, waaronder het hergebruiken en opnieuw uploaen van content, vernaculaire zichtbaarheid en gedeeltelijke deplatforming. Deze strategieën wisselen tussen collectieve en individuele benaderingen om selectieve zichtbaarheid en verborgen opvallendheid te bereiken binnen algoritmische moderatiesystemen.

**Hoofdstuk 7: Narratieve *agency* en saamhorigheid onder tiktokers met een immigratieachtergrond**

In dit hoofdstuk worden vier verschillende vormen van 'narratieve *agency*' van Latijns-Amerikaanse content creators op TikTok voorgesteld, namelijk 1) (zelf)representatief, 2) utilitair, 3) prescriptief en 4) activistische *agency* stijlen. De voorgestelde typologie breidt het concept van « platformed belongings » uit met noties van "agency" die gebaseerd zijn op de verhalen van deze makers en hun macht om een impact te hebben op hun geleefde realiteit.

De geplatformeerde aspecten van migrantenverhalen en gerelateerde identiteiten op TikTok worden gevormd door de connectieve, imiterende en interactieve mogelijkheden van de memetische structuur en mogelijkheden van het sociale-mediaplatform (Zulli & Zulli, 2020). In dit hoofdstuk gebruiken we de term "platformed" om te verwijzen naar de manieren waarop digitale ruimten –structureel en via hun politiek– bepaalde soorten content en interacties mogelijk maken, bevorderen en aan banden leggen.

Dus, wanneer '*belongings*', identiteiten en '*agentic styles*' in het digitale domein worden gevestigd, breiden ze zich uit tot voorbij de traditionele –niet-digitaal– opvattingen en omvatten ze digitale modi die gevormd zijn door de persoonlijke creatieve stijlen van de makers en hun trouw aan bepaalde digitale

groeperingen en trends. In die zin stellen we dat tiktokers hun '*belongings*' en identiteiten tot uitdrukking brengen door gebruik te maken van platformstrategieën die gevormd worden door hun agency-stijl en hun perceptie, toe-eigening en vernaculaire kennis van het platform.

De eerste '*agency* '—stijl en de bijbehorende manier om erbij te horen— kunnen worden omschreven als migranten(zelf)representatie. Dergelijke zelfrepresentaties kunnen variëren van schijnbaar passief tot subversief. Deze stijl kan worden geïllustreerd door migrantencreators die een specifieke weergave van de migrantenervaring presenteren die ruimte biedt voor interpretatie, en die bestaande overtuigingen in twijfel kan trekken. Zelfrepresentaties presenteren een verhaal dat vaak persoonlijk is en overtuigende elementen kan bevatten. In de sterkste gevallen kan het een aanwijsbare oproep tot actie bevatten of een duidelijke boodschap over wat van de kijker wordt verwacht.

De tweede 'agency'-stijl omvat praktische tips en adviezen om het voor toekomstige en huidige migranten gemakkelijker te maken erbij te horen. De nadruk ligt op de functionele aspecten van 'belonging' door het verstrekken van een reeks richtlijnen die het migranten makkelijker maken om basisbehoeften en middelen te verwerven . Wij stellen dat de focus op de toegang tot middelen een empowered vorm van '*belonging*' is (Yuval-Davis, 2011). Content die deze stijl thematisch weerspiegelt, varieert van financiële zaken in verband met migratie, tot het vinden van een huis, het vinden van een baan, of de toegang tot school. Het omvat ook strategieën voor bureaucratische procedures om een legale status te verkrijgen. In sommige gevallen kan het gaan om het beantwoorden van vragen over specifieke handelingen die (on)veilig zijn voor migranten, waaronder specifieke tips om het leven in het nieuwe land te navigeren terwijl ze geen papieren hebben.

'Prescriptive agency ' wil bepaalde "correcte" manieren promoten om bij het nieuwe land te horen; in dit geval omvatten de veronderstellingen de overtuiging dat er juiste en onjuiste manieren zijn om erbij te horen, in termen van wat er van de migranten in hun gastsamenleving wordt verwacht. Er klinkt een gezaghebbende toon, vaak met een gevoel van superioriteit vanuit het perspectief van een meer ervaren immigrant die anderen instrueert die net zijn aangekomen of die de beslissing nemen om te gaan reizen. De platformconfiguratie van deze content kan een monoloog van de maker omvatten, kijkend naar de camera, of kan gaan om een duet/groen scherm met

voorbeelden van de verkeerde manieren om iets te doen of te zijn. Het narratieve format van deze agentische vorm omvat dus vaak voorbeelden van "verkeerde" manieren waarop je een immigrant kan zijn, en de bijhorende "corrigerende" manieren volgens de creator. Het kan gaan om taalkundige, culturele of gedragsinstructies die in veel gevallen lijken op een top-down integratiebeleid om mainstream-vormen van '*belonging*' te bereiken, zoals aanpassing aan de arbeidsmarkt van het gastland, aan de regelgeving en aan de manier van werken.

'Activistische agency 'wordt weerspiegeld door thema's die verband houden met specifieke acties en gedragingen die kunnen worden uitgevoerd om de uitkomst van echte ervaringen voor kwetsbare bevolkingsgroepen te veranderen, zoals het geval is bij enkele van de meest onzekere en precaire immigranten — degenen met een onregelmatige migratiestatus (Nedelcu & Soysüren, 2020). Deze video's volgen ook wat Cogo (2019) heeft gedefinieerd als migrantenactivisme door middel van verhalen die de nadruk leggen op ervaringen van onderdrukking en racisme en claims voor rechten en burgerschap. In dit geval benadrukt de maker aspecten van het leven die onderhevig zijn aan ongelijkheid, systemische onderdrukking en onrechtvaardigheid. De veronderstellingen in dit geval zijn onder meer de overtuiging dat alle mensen rechten hebben, ongeacht hun papieren. Rechten, in dit geval, omvatten mensenrechten of grondwettelijke rechten, evenals drijvende principes zoals gelijkheid en rechtvaardigheid voor alle mensen.

Hoofdstuk 7 brengt de thematische en strategische inzet van migratieverhalen samen die in deze dissertatie aan de orde zijn gekomen. Het doel van dit hoofdstuk is om een viervoudig perspectief op narratieve agency voor te stellen om te analyseren hoe verschillende vormen van 'belonging' tot stand komen in TikTok-content gecreëerd door Latijns-Amerikaanse migranten in de VS en Spanje. De huidige studie toont aan dat traditionele vormen van 'belonging', 'agency' en identiteit in migratieonderzoek kunnen worden verrijkt met nieuwe dimensies die gerealiseerd worden dankzij platformruimtes en creatieve mogelijkheden.

## Conclusie

In dit hoofdstuk worden de hoofdvraag en de vijf deelvragen die de leidraad vormen van dit proefschrift, opnieuw onderzocht. Het overloopt de belangrijkste bevindingen, met aandacht voor de verschillende theoretische en conceptuele bijdragen van elk van de hoofdstukken. Het stelt de relevantie vast van het lokaliseren van sociale media content in de algoritmische en geplatformiseerde ruimten waarin ze navigeert en van migratieverhalen als een uniek geval dat kwesties omvat van erbij horen, identiteit en agency tegenover discriminatie en anders-zijn. Dit hoofdstuk brengt de implicaties en bijdragen van het proefschrift samen en neemt mogelijke toekomstige onderzoekslijnen in overweging.

Als antwoord op de vraag naar de sociotechnische overwegingen van deze contents, is de verschuiving van *"verhalen in digitale ruimten"* naar *"verhalen gevormd door de digitale ruimtes waarin zij leven"* van essentieel belang. Het is mogelijk te suggereren dat de lichtheid en speelsheid van beide platformen door verschillende actoren worden gebruikt om discriminatie en anders-zijn teweeg te brengen, terwijl andere makers zich hiertegen verzetten door hun gelijk-zijn en erbij-horen vast te stellen. Bovendien worden deze voorbeelden van het vertellen van verhalen via platforms beter begrepen wanneer de narratieve "essentie" (Morse, 2008) wordt toegevoegd aan de verhalen die worden verteld door de verschillende actoren die over migratie spreken, waaronder migranten.

Wat het evenwicht tussen andersheid en 'belonging' betreft, suggereren de bevindingen dat '*belonging*' ingebed is in processen van 'othering'. Dit wordt geïllustreerd door creators die hun affiniteit met bepaalde ideeën of gemeenschappen uitdrukken in een poging hun argumenten van verschil en/of superioriteit te versterken. In die zin, en om hun standpunt van anders-zijn geloofwaardig te maken, moeten deze tiktokers en instagrammers vaak het bestaan van een ondersteunende gemeenschap benadrukken binnen verhalen over samen-zijn en erbij horen. Enkele voorbeelden van deze representaties van collectief anders-zijn waren: (1) Vox politici die visueel omringd lijken door mensen die hen lijken toe te juichen als ze de "dreiging" van immigratie tegengaan; (2) een rechtse tiktoker met een migrantenachtergrond die voortdurend haar conservatieve gemeenschap van Latijns-Amerikaanse leeftijdsgenoten integreert –door het gebruik van duet, stitch, en profieltags–

die collectief kritiek uiten op immigratie zonder papieren; (3) tiktokers met een immigratieachtergrond die voorbeelden van discriminatie tonen die hen afshchilderen als een collectieve ervaring, in een kennelijke poging hun beweringen te staven, alsof één geval van misbruik niet genoeg was.

Om de onderzoeksvraag in verband met de zichtbaarheid te beantwoorden, zijn er aanwijzingen voor de zoektocht van de creators naar succes, die tot uiting komt in strategieën gericht op engagement en interactie. In deze dissertatie komen drie thema's naar voren die relevant zijn in relatie tot zichtbaarheid: de toe-eigening van migratiegerelateerde verhalen/beelden; het onvermogen van migrantenverhalen om te passen binnen de mainstream verhaallijnen; en de (on)verwachte strategieën voor algoritmische (on)zichtbaarheid die tijdens de analyse zijn waargenomen.

In reactie op de uitdagingen en kansen voor makers van met een immigratieachtergrond, is het relevant op te merken dat immigranten zonder papieren en andere immigranten die bezig zijn een stabielere immigratiestatus te verwerven, zoals vluchtelingen of asielzoekers, met een hoge inzet te maken hebben wanneer zij online content creëren. Het feit dat velen van hen, ongeacht de gevolgen, content creëren, zet aan tot nadenken over de manier waarop het privilege van het creëren van content is geconfigureerd. In die zin is het creëren van online-content over immigratie – zonder aan de gevolgen te denken– meestal voorbehouden aan niet-immigranten van wie de legale status en fysieke veiligheid niet op het spel staan. Generalistische content creators, politici en hun partijen, en de mainstream media kunnen immigranten portretteren en hun verhalen vertellen zonder zich te bekommeren om de gevolgen, in tegenstelling tot veel creators met een migratieachtergrond. Het feit dat het creëren van content door migranten wordt beschouwd als een daad van moed is zeer problematisch, omdat het de diepte van het onrecht weerspiegelt waarmee immigranten vandaag worden geconfronteerd.

Het is ook belangrijk om na te denken over de *content die er niet is* en de *immigranten die ervoor kiezen om geen content te creëre,* in het licht van dominante voorstellingen van migratie die steeds meer discriminerend en haatdragend zijn. Het is de moeite waard na te denken over de verhalen die we missen en de stemmen die wij als samenlevingen vandaag het zwijgen opleggen.

# Portfolio

# Portfolio

## Publications that make up the chapters of this PhD

### Peer reviewed articles

- Jaramillo-Dent, D., & Pérez-Rodríguez, M. A. (2021). #MigrantCaravan: The border wall and the establishment of otherness on Instagram. *New Media & Society, 23*(1), 121–141. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444819894241
- Jaramillo-Dent, D., Contreras-Pulido, P., & Pérez-Rodríguez, M. A. (2021). Right-wing immigration narratives in Spain: A study of persuasion on Instagram Stories. *European Journal of Communication*. https://doi.org/10.1177/02673231211012157
- Jaramillo-Dent, D., Contreras-Pulido, P., & Pérez-Rodríguez, M. A. (2022). Immigrant influencers on TikTok: Diverse microcelebrity profiles and algorithmic (in)visibility. Media and Communication.
- Jaramillo-Dent, D., Alencar, A., & Asadchy, Y. (in press) #Migrantes on TikTok: Exploring platformed belongings. International Journal of Communication.
- Jaramillo-Dent D. (in press) Algorithmic (in)visibility tactics among immigrant TikTokers. Mediální Studia.

### Book Chapters

- Jaramillo-Dent, D., Alencar, A., & Asadchy, Y. (under review). Migrant Agency and platformed belongings: The case of TikTok. In Leurs, K. & Ponzanesi, S. Doing Digital Migration Studies: *Doing Digital Migration Studies: Theories and practices and the everyday*. Amsterdam University Press

## Publications that are not part of the dissertation

### Peer-reviewed articles

- Civila, S., & Jaramillo-Dent, D. (Forthcoming 2022). #Mixedcouples on TikTok: Performative hybridization and identity in the face of discrimination. *Social Media + Society*. Accepted for publication.
- Vizcaíno-Verdú, A., de-Casas-Moreno, P., & Jaramillo-Dent, D. (2022). 'Thanks for joining our life' Intimacy as performativity on YouTube parenting vlogs. *El Profesional de la Información*, 31(4). https://doi.org/10.3145/epi.2022.jul.07
- Castillo-Abdul, B., Jaramillo-Dent, D., & Romero-Rodríguez, L.M. (2021). 'How to Botox on YouTube': Influence and beauty procedures in the era of User-Generated-Content. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 18*. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18084359

### Agency reports

Arora, P., Alencar, A., Jaramillo-Dent, D.; Warnes, J.; Pérez-Iglesias, E. (2021). The Digital Leisure Divide and the forcibly displaced. UNHCR. https://bit.ly/3O44m60

### Book Reviews

- Jaramillo-Dent, D. (2022). Instagram: visual social media cultures. *Information, Communication and Society, 25* (9). https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2021.1950805

### Books

Jaramillo-Dent, D., Vizcaíno-Verdú, A., De-Casas-Moreno, P., & Baldallo-González, C. (2020). Instagramming: temas, tópicos y tendencias. Octaedro.

#### Edited Books

- Tornay-Márquez, M., Sánchez-López, I., & Jaramillo-Dent, D. (Eds) (2021) Inclusión y Activismo Digital: Participación ciudadana y empoderamiento desde la diversidad [Digital Inclusion and Activism: Diverse Citizen Participation and Empowerment]. Dykinson. (Open Access)
- Aguaded, I., Jaramillo-Dent, D., Delgado-Ponce, A. (Eds) (2020). Curriculum Alfamed de formación de Profesores en Educación Mediática. [Alfamed Curriculum for Teacher Training in Media Education]. Octaedro.

### Publications for a wider audience

- Jaramillo-Dent, D, & Contreras-Pulido, P. (July 28, 2022). El fenómeno de los tiktokers inmigrantes: Nuevas formas de influencia desde los márgenes [The phenomenon of immigrant influencers: New forms of influence from the margins]. The Conversation. https://bit.ly/3vnToRG
- Jaramillo-Dent, D., & Pérez-Rodríguez, M. A. (2020). #ProfesdeInstagram: Instagram como recurso pedagógico para la mejora de la práctica docente. Cuadernos de Pedagogía (525) https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444819894241
- Vizcaíno-Verdú, A. & Jaramillo-Dent, D. (2021). Retos para la enseñanza: Profesores en YouTube, Instagram y TikTok. Comunicación y Pedagogía. https://bit.ly/3xQKaOd

## Awards

- (2022) *Top student paper award* in the Intercultural Communication Division of the International Communication Association. For the paper entitled #MoroccanSpanish TikTok couples against intolerance" coauthored with Sabina Civila.
- (2021) *Honorary Mention: Best Paper Award, Emerging Scholar* in the Migrant Belongings. Digital Practices and the Everyday Conference. For the paper "#Migrantes on TikTok: Exploring platformed belongings" coauthored with Dr. Amanda Alencar and Yan Asadchy.

### Special Issues as Editor

Pérez-Rodríguez, A. Alencar, A., & Jaramillo-Dent, D. (July, 2022) Culturas digitales en las redes sociales [Digital Social Media Cultures]. Icono 14.

## Participation in research projects

- (April 2021-present) UNHCR project Digital Leisure for Refugees, financed by UNHCR's Innovation service. With Co-Principal Investigators Dr. Payal Arora and Dr. Amanda Alencar from Erasmus University Rotterdam.
- (April 2021 - February 2022) Research Fellow R+D+i Project (research contract). With Principal Investigator Dr. M. Amor Pérez-Rodríguez at the University of Huelva. "Instagrammers and YouTubers for the transmedia empowerment of the Andalusian citizenry: The media competence of Instatubers". https://yougrammersid.wixsite.com/instatubers
- (January 2019 - October 2022) R+D+i Project "YouTubers and Instagrammers: Media competence among emerging prosumers" With Co-Principal Investigators Dr. M. Amor Pérez-Rodríguez and Dr. Ignacio Aguaded. Financed by the Ministry of Innovation, Research and Universities
- (September 2019 – February 2022) A Chance for Change (Erasmus+ KA2) University of Huelva. International Principal Investigator: Dr Theodore Gavrielides (Restorative Justice for All). https://www.achance4change.eu/

## Media Appearances

- Culture & Inequality podcast. (2022, May 16). Music, social media and migration, interview with Dr. Julian Schaap. Spotify. https://spoti.fi/3ndo2Zl
- Programa En Red. (2021, May 31). #Instatubers R+D+I Project. https://bit.ly/3QzJkOc
- Huelva Información. (2021, June 6). Investigadoras de la Universidad de Huelva diseccionan el 'mundo paralelo' de Instagram. [Researchers at the University of Huelva dissect the 'parallel world' of Instagram]. https://bit.ly/3Hzh6z2
- RTVE. (2021, June 16). Instagramming: Temas, tópicos y tendencias. [Instagramming: themes, topics and trends]. https://bit.ly/3Or5Gj4

## Courses taught during the PhD trajectory

- (2021) Digital Ethnography for Social Media Research: Content analysis and the walkthrough method. University of Huelva (Agora Research Group)
- (2022) Social Media in Higher Education. Universidad Técnica Particular de Loja (Ecuador)
- (2020- 2021) Design and Production of Digital Content course. Master's in communication and Audiovisual Education. University of Huelva and International University of Andalusia

## Academic Conferences

- (November 2-5, 2022 Dublin – Ireland) Association of Internet Researchers Conference. Immigrant tiktokers decolonizing algorithmic visibility.
- (October 19-22, Aarhus-Denmark) 9th European Communication Conference: Rethink Impact. Algorithmic (in)visibility among immigrant tiktokers.
- (May 26-30, 2022, Paris-France) 72nd Annual ICA Conference: One World, One Network. Influencers #Inmigrantes: Diverse profiles of microcelebrity and algorithmic (in)visibility on TikTok.
- (May 26-30, 2022, Paris-France) 72nd Annual ICA Conference: One World, One Network. #MoroccanSpanish TikTok couples against intolerance. Coauthored with Sabina Civila
- (March 7-8, 2022) Jaramillo-Dent, D., Vizcaíno-Verdú, A., & Pérez-Rodríguez, A. Teaching challenges: Teachers on YouTube, Instagram and TikTok. INTED 2022. https://bit.ly/3NkEX70
- (April 28-30, 2021, virtual) Comunicación y Pensamiento Conference. Instagram Stories as a format of political communication: The case of Vox and migratory representations of the Spanish right.
- (September 6-9, 2021, virtual) ECREA: 8th European Communication Conference. #MigrantCaravan on Instagram: Opinions on immigration and media literate persuasion strategies. Coauthored with Dr. Paloma Contreras-Pulido and Dr. Amor Pérez-Rodríguez.
- (July 11-15, 2021, virtual). IAMCR Rethinking Borders and boundaries: Beyond the global/local dichotomy in Communication studies.
  Panel: Refugee integration in a sharing economy: collective action, organisational communication, and digital technologies.
  Paper: #Migrantes on TikTok and platformed belongings. Coauthored with Dr. Amanda Paz Alencar and Yan Asadchy
- (April 21-24, 2021, virtual) ECREA DMM Migrant Belongings Conference. #Migrantes on TikTok: Exploring Migrant Belongings. Coauthored with Dr. Amanda Paz Alencar and Yan Asadchy
- (March 11-13, 2019) INTED Conference. Brites, M.J., Gerrard, A., Contreras-Pulido, P. & Jaramillo-Dent, D. (2019). Teachers and media literacy improvements, the relevance of specific training, INTED2019 Proceedings, Conference-paper, doi: 10.21125/inted. 2019.0535
- (May 29-31, 2019) IV Alfamed Conference. Baldallo-González, C., Jaramillo-Dent, D., Pérez-Rodríguez, M.A. (2019). YouTubers infantiles, competencia mediática y contenido publicitario: Diseño y validación de un instrumento de análisis.

## Invited talks

- June 29, 2022 – Roundtable participant: Una nueva gobernanza necesita de innovación y nuevas propuestas comunicativas [New Governance needs innovation and new communicative proposals]. Escuela de Governanza San José (Uruguay)
- May 16, 2022 – Moderator: TikTok Books Roundtable. Invited as part of the TikTok Cultures Research Network
- (June 18, 2021) MelCi Lab Webinar, Lusófona University. Exploring the digital cultures of #Migrant TikTokers.
- (October 20-22, 2020, Córdoba – Spain) II International Congress in Intercultural Education and Gender: Communication in Times of Crisis. Invited Keynote: "Educommunication to face Gender-Based Violence"
- (October 14-16, 2020, virtual) International Congress Alfamed: Social Media and Citizenship towards an empowered world. Invited Webinar: "Networked social activism: From self-representation to massive mobilisation in the hashtag era"

## Guest Lectures

- (March 7, 2022) Research Seminar Cultural Identities and New Media. Erasmus University Rotterdam, Invited by Dr. Amanda Alencar.
- (November 17, 2021) Research Seminar Media and Migration. Erasmus University Rotterdam, Invited by Dr. Amanda Alencar.
- (March 1, 2021) Research Seminar Cultural Identities and New Media. Erasmus University Rotterdam, Invited by Dr. Amanda Alencar.

## Peer Review Experience

**Journals**

Comunicar Journal – 3 papers
Social Media + Society - 2 papers
International Journal of Communication – 1 paper
Observatorio Journal – 1 paper
Icono 14 journal – 1 paper
Corporate Communications – 1 paper
Children and Society – 1 paper
New Media & Society – 1 paper

**Conferences**

AoIR Conference (2021-2022)– 7 papers
ECREA Conference (2022) – 2 panels (8 papers)
ICA Conference (2022) – 4 papers

## Service during the PhD

| | |
|---|---|
| 2022-Current | **Student and Early Career Representative**<br>Intercultural Communication Division of the International Communication Association (ICA) |
| 2021-Current | **Key Regional Leader.**<br>TikTok Cultures Research Network |
| 2019-2021 | **Advisory Board Member**<br>SMART-EU: Social Media Resilience Toolkit (Co-Funded by the EC) |
| 2018-2022 | **Board of Management Member**<br>Comunicar Journal (JCR Q1) |

## Membership during the PhD

International Communication Association (ICA)
European Communication Research and Education Association (ECREA)
Member of the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR)
International Migration, Integration and Social Cohesion in Europe (IMISCOE)

# Courses followed during the PhD trajectory

| Course Title | Institution | EC | Date |
|---|---|---|---|
| ISS Responsible Data Management (RDM) | Erasmus University Rotterdam | 1.5 | May 5, 2022 |
| ISS Professionalism and integrity in research | Erasmus University Rotterdam | 1.5 | March 3, 2022 |
| ECREA European Media and Communication Doctoral Summer School 2021. | University of Cadiz | 0 | Sept. 20-24, 2021 |
| NOISE Summer School 2021. Borders, Boundaries and the politics of belonging: Feminist Digital Cartographies. | Utrecht University | 0 | Aug. 30-Sept.3, 2021 |
| RMeS Summer School 2021: Media, Inequalities and Social Change | Erasmus University Rotterdam | 2 | June 21-23, 2021 |
| Research Gym: Analyzing Qualitative Interviews: Coding, Identifying Themes and Reporting your Findings | Canada Excellence Research Chair (CERC) in Migration and Integration Research. | 0 | May 7, 2021 |
| Research Gym: Social Media as Data in Migration Research | Canada Excellence Research Chair (CERC) in Migration and Integration Research. | 0 | May 14, 2021 |
| Digital Methods Summer School | University of Amsterdam | 6 | Jun. 29- Aug. 3, 2020 |
| Bergen Summer Research School | University of Bergen | 10 | Jun.8-19, 2020 |
| Fall Research School 2021 | University of Málaga | 0 | Nov. 11-12, 2021 |
| Fall Research School 2020 | University of Sevilla | 0 | Oct. 30-31, 2020 |
| Spring Research School 2021 | University of Huelva | 0 | April 15-16, 2021 |
| Round Table About Academic Conferences in Communication | Pompeu Fabra University | 0 | Dec. 10, 2020 |
| | **TOTAL ECs.** | **21** | |

# Curriculum Vitae

Daniela Jaramillo-Dent (1983) started her PhD in Media and Communication at the University of Huelva (Spain) and Erasmus University Rotterdam (Netherlands) in 2019. Daniela holds an MA degree in Communication and Audiovisual Education from the International University of Andalusia, where she received an award for best MA Thesis and was also awarded as top of the class (2019). She also has MA degrees in secondary education (2017) and educational leadership (2015) Her BA studies focused on Communication Studies and were conducted at the University of Maryland, College Park (US) and she received the Cum Laude recognition during her undergraduate studies. Daniela has been awarded various scholarships and grants throughout her academic trajectory including the Transfer Excellence Scholarship at the University of Maryland, the Talent Attraction Scholarship at the University of Huelva and various awards for her MA thesis and research papers.

Her professional background includes work in Education and Communication roles in Ecuador, the United States and Spain. She has been an educator, teacher trainer and educational leader and has also worked in educational programs focusing on media literacy. She has served as a fundraising specialist, writing grants, and working on reports and dissemination materials. She has also managed large conferences as part of the National Council for the Social Studies. Her work has always been at the intersection of the fields of Communication and Education.

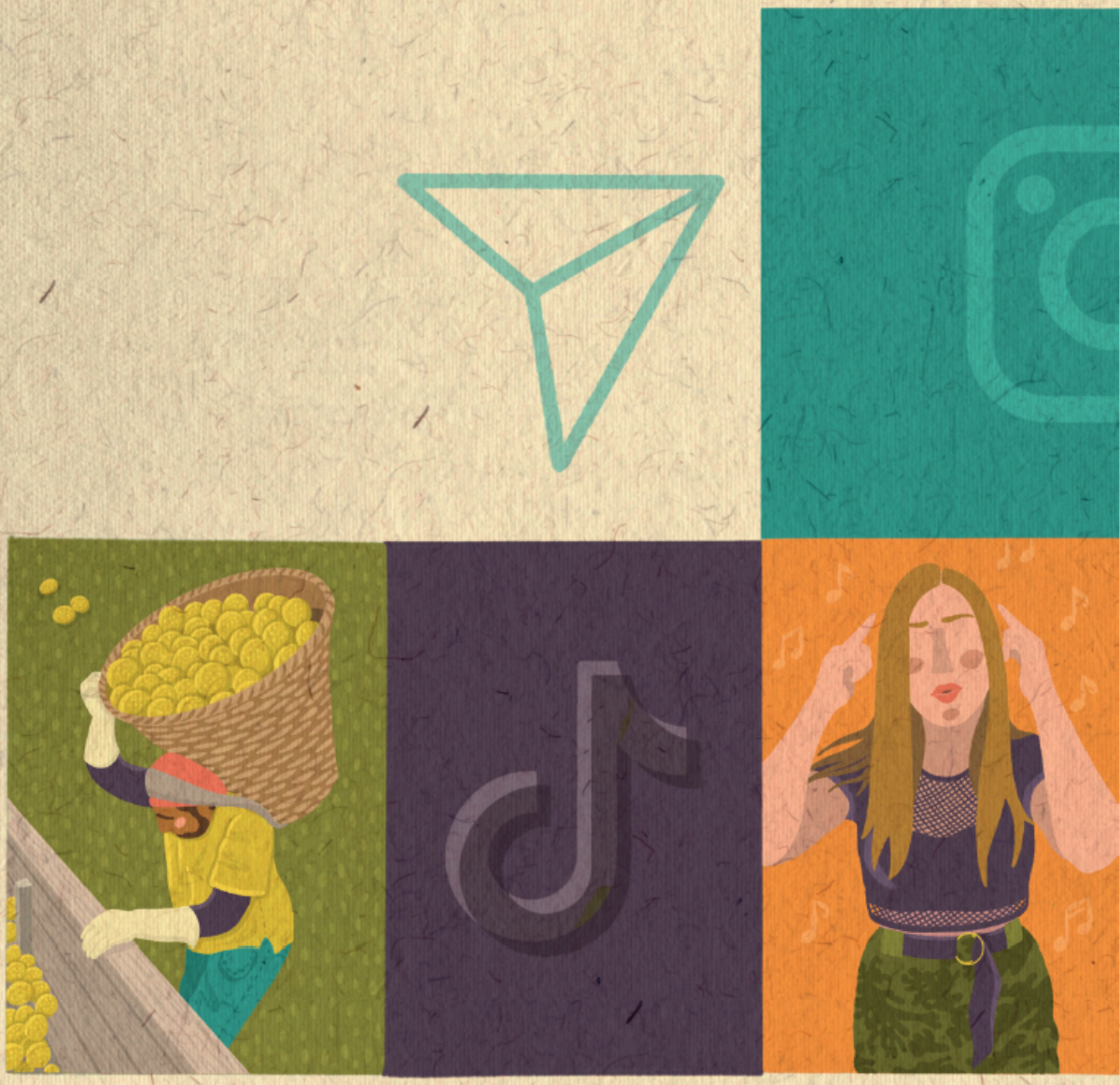
Since beginning her postgraduate studies, Daniela has worked in various research projects at the local, national, and European levels focusing on media education, digital inclusion, and internet studies. She has designed and delivered courses focusing on digital research methods, publishing strategies and innovative teaching approaches for university professors in Ecuador and Spain. She has also worked as a research fellow at the University of Huelva and has collaborated on an international project focusing on Digital Leisure as a pathway for inclusion, based on fieldwork carried out with Venezuelan refugees in Brazil.

Her research focuses on the mediated (self)representations of immigration on social media platforms including Instagram and TikTok. She explores migratory narratives and platformed creative practices of othering, belonging, identity, and minority celebrity. While carrying out her doctoral research, she has participated in various projects related to social media platforms and the opportunities and risks they afford to immigrants and other disenfranchised communities. She has published her research in *New Media & Society, The European Journal of Communication,* and *Media and Communication* and has forthcoming publications in the *International Journal of Communication* and *Social Media +Society,* and chapters in various edited books.

During her doctoral studies she has participated in some of the most prestigious conferences in her fields including ECREA, ICA and AoIR and has received awards for her work at the local, European and International levels. Daniela is also an active member of the Internet Studies, Media and Migration and Media Literacy research communities at the international level. This is reflected in her participation in research networks (e.g. TikTok Cultures Research Network led by Dr. Crystal Abidin), co-authorship (e.g. Tallin University in Estonia) and collaboration in projects and publications (e.g. Lusófona University in Portugal) as well as teaching (e.g. Universidad Técnica Particular de Loja in Ecuador). She is active in academic service, as Student and Early Career Representative for the Intercultural Communication Division at ICA and was a member of the Advisory Board for the SMART-EU European project focusing on Digital Resilience, as well as reviewer for various journals and conferences.

In her spare time, Daniela enjoys singing and playing the ukulele, as well as dancing salsa and sevillanas.

Interuniversity Program in Communication,
University of Huelva and Doctoral Program,
Erasmus University Rotterdam
2022



Erasmus University Rotterdam

UCA Universidad de Cádiz

Universidad de Sevilla

Universitas Malacitana
UNIVERSIDAD DE MÁLAGA

Universitas Onubensis
Universidad de Huelva