

“Drop a Bomb on Them . . . and Problem Solved!” An Analysis of Poverty Discourse on TikTok

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This research analyzes the discursive characteristics of hate messages posted on TikTok Spain against people at risk of social exclusion. Using critical discourse analysis, we analyzed 679 hateful messages generated by 100 videos found about poverty. This method considered the social groups mentioned in those messages, actions attributed to them, the evaluative concepts associated with those actions, and the solutions proposed to eradicate this social problem. We used the qualitative analysis software *Atlas.ti* to code, categorize, and analyze co-occurrences of derogatory terms. The analysis shows that poverty is linked to migration, laziness, and groups at risk of exclusion. Although insults and degrading terms take on a metaphorical form or are less prevalent, the call to violent action is explicit, openly advocating the extermination of these groups. Underlying these messages is a clear neo-Nazi ideology gaining ground with the advance of the extreme political Right.

Keywords: critical discourse analysis, hate speech, aporophobia, racism, hate crimes, social networks, TikTok, Spain, comments, sustainable development goals

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The end of poverty is the first of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. However, COVID-19, growing inflation rates, and the war in Ukraine have caused poverty levels to rise. The U.S. Census Bureau reported that 11.4% of the population in the United States (37.2 million people) was living in reduced circumstances in 2020 (Shrider, Kollar, Chen, & Semega, 2021); the following year, the poverty rate was at 11.6% (37.9 million people). In the European Union, it was estimated that at the end of 2021, one in five people was at risk of poverty or social exclusion (Eurostat, 2021). In the same year, 21.7% of the Spanish population (10,285,517 million people) was at risk of poverty. In Spain, the poverty rate is higher among women (22.2%) than in men (21.1%), but it especially affects children under the age of 18 years at 28.9% (Alguacil-Denche & Quiroga-Terrerros, 2022).

Poverty and social exclusion are shaped into a particular identity. Whereas birth circumstances impact this group's membership, belonging to it does not necessarily depend on these circumstances but relates to changing factors like unemployment or economic crisis. It also manifests with varying intensity, ranging from risk of poverty to severe material deprivation. Poverty features and social marginalization are usually analyzed from a multidimensional perspective that assesses available resources (income per family or person), employment data, and various consumption elements (such as housing, food, and clothing expenses).

The most widespread prejudice in developed countries is that "these are negligent people who try to take advantage of the social welfare system and manage to live without working" (European Anti Poverty Network [EAPN] España, 2021, p. 52). Cortina (2017) argues that this prejudice originates from the neoliberal reliance on individual talent and effort, which fails to consider the social, economic, and cultural capital of a person's parents and country of origin.

People in poverty experience ridicule, shame, degradation, stigma, and hostile attitudes from society, which may carry a powerful negative emotion, as poverty is primarily seen as the individual's fault (Walker, 2014). As in the case of other degraded groups, negative stereotypes and offensive and derogatory terms question their worth and threaten their identity (Pérez, 2015). These expressions cause fear and emotional anguish in the victims and leave them feeling marginalized, which may also constitute criminal offenses.

Numerous studies have reported that hate speech contents are increasingly pervasive (Salminen et al., 2020; Sambaraju & McVittie, 2020). The ease of posting materials that potentially reach millions of people has made the Internet an ideal place to spread hate (Al-Makhadmeh & Tolba, 2020), plan xenophobic attacks (Resende de Mendonça, Felix de Brito, de Franco Rosa, & dos Reis, 2020), and connect with like-minded people who support those acts (McNamee, Peterson, & Peña, 2010). The political and social concern generated by these messages is increased by the severe consequences that most vulnerable groups face, who are devalued "because of their religion, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, national origin or some other characteristic" (Hawdon, Oksanen, & Räsänen, 2017, p.1).

According to an online survey conducted in the United States, almost half of the content perceived as hate speech by participants referred to race or ethnicity (Costello, Hawdon, Ratliff, & Grantham, 2016). These issues are also the main target of hate speech throughout Europe, triggered by the refugee crisis of

2015 (Gómez-García, Paz-Rebollo, & Cabeza-San-Deogracias, 2021), the rise of Far-Right populism (Schroeder, 2019), and political polarization (Paz-Rebollo, Mayagoitia-Soria, & González-Aguilar, 2021). While some research has raised issues of discrimination based on gender (Khosravinik & Esposito, 2018), sexual identity (Cashman, 2012), and religious beliefs (Campos-Zamora, 2018), fewer studies have addressed hatred of people at risk of social exclusion.

Hate speech does not have unique features but rather a set of data that is sometimes difficult to discover (Zhang & Luo, 2019). Although the understanding of hate speech remains a challenge, we believe that critical discourse analysis (CDA) can be helpful to better understand these rhetorical uses of language (Gal, 2019) and enable a more effective discernment. The design of automatic methods to identify it (Fortuna & Nunes, 2018; MacAvaney et al., 2019) remains ineffective because they fail to detect some of the complex textual features of hate speech. In recent years, these texts have become more subtle and indirect due to the content restrictions imposed by websites and reader comments in the digital press, which have led to a reduction in the hostility openly expressed online. The use of metaphors (Marlow, 2015; Santa Ana, 1999), irony, and sarcasm (Son et al., 2019), as well as the inclusion of emoticons, exclamation marks, and multimedia links, make difficult this type of automated analysis.

This research aims to analyze the discursive characteristics of hate messages posted on Spanish TikTok against people at risk of social exclusion. This ideology-related social problem can influence the division of public opinion, especially when it shows signs of radicalization (Hellgren & Lorenzo, 2021), as in the case of Spain.

Literature Review

As noted before, aporophobia is intensified because of Far-Right political discourses as they increase disinformation and hinder the implementation of measures to promote social inclusion and eradicate poverty. Politicians in power indicate who matters and who does not exist within society; if the people who live in poverty are invisible, they are stigmatized, and their existence is denied (Vieira & Zimiani, 2021). When these expressions of hatred are part of a political debate, there is an outstanding defense of freedom of expression and little support for the affected groups (Enarsson & Lindgren, 2019).

Social media replicate and amplify these positions, creating a participatory culture where the most suitable users are involved in the process of producing and creating content (Daros, 2023). Platforms such as YouTube or TikTok base their engagement on the convergence of their algorithm and users. In this context, the content generated by the prosumer public increases the impact of its dissemination and creative participation. In other words, in social networks there is a communication process that involves the creation and consumption of speeches, and the messages issued by users are recontextualized and renewed by other users (Kopytowska, 2022).

TikTok is said to be the social platform transforming how people communicate about politics, how to do and practice journalism, and how counterculture is expressed (Pitre, 2023). It is also the platform that has experienced the strongest international expansion in recent years: Its impact is more significant on the Z and Alpha generations, but older adults also use this platform to produce, disseminate, and get information

(Ng & Indran, 2022). It also has a dynamic structure where through short videos users share cultural contexts, and popular and traditional debates are incorporated (Schellewald, 2021).

Due to how the TikTok algorithm operates, the hosted videos are more likely to go viral than on other platforms without the requirement of being produced and disseminated by influencers. This algorithmically curated content, essentially tailored to each individual, reinforces users' opinions and belief systems based on their experiences and social status (Cotter, DeCook, Kanthawala, & Foyle, 2022). In addition, comments on videos have greater significance than those posted on other social networks since users may not only like or dislike the video but may also operate as initiators of new debates, taking such comments as a reference point to generate another video and post new messages (Linke, 2022; Omar & Dequan, 2020).

Academic interest in TikTok is due to its popularity, specific characteristics, and the changes it has undergone in recent years. While it started as a platform intended for superficial videos, users' creativity and needs have led it to encompass broader social fields. The platform is already used in connection with education, health care, politics, and institutional matters, among others, specifically to reach the younger demographic (Zeng, Abidin, & Schäfer, 2021). As TikTok moved beyond entertainment, some user practices have surfaced that are detrimental to the respect and freedom of some groups, such as people of color and Jews (Weimann & Masri, 2020). As its contents are easily shareable, the platform also makes easy the spread of disinformation (Alonso-López, Sidorenko-Bautista, & Giacomelli, 2021). In addition, the systems used to monitor the content posted on TikTok are ineffective (O'Connor, 2021).

Amidst this feeling of rejection toward poor people (aporphobia), different expressions of hatred are intertwined: Alongside their status as economically marginalized, attacks toward them often refer to their ethnicity, nationality, or migratory situation (Cortés, 2021; Paz-Rebollo, Mayagoitia-Soria, González-Aguilar, 2023). In this sense, as in other social networks, TikTok reproduces current social prejudices. For example, anti-Semitism is related to the conflict between Israel and Palestine, and the conspiracy theory about the global domination of the Jews (Becker, Ascone, & Troschke, 2022). Migrants are considered potential criminals who steal resources and ignore the norms and traditions of the dominant culture (Lilleker & Pérez-Escobar, 2023), and poverty is presented as a consequence of individual acts (Dobson & Knezevic, 2017). This amplifies the marginalization patterns reproduced at local, national, and global levels (Cârstocea, 2022).

This research aims to know the public opinion about poverty and underprivileged people and the nuances of hate speech in this issue. Analyzing these expressions can be helpful in understanding and addressing misconceptions and judgments that prevent the causes of poverty from being examined objectively and the search for solutions. Although social media platforms facilitate the spread of negative and denigrating stereotypes, they can also be a tool for social activism to eradicate these types of messages, given that they can encourage connection with disadvantaged groups and provide knowledge of other realities (Betton et al., 2015). In this sense, the study by Meese, Baker, and Sisson (2020) concludes, after analyzing a New Zealand campaign against poverty on social networks, that these platforms can serve as a space for the destigmatization of poverty. That campaign refuted stigmatizing narratives and sought to build solidarity among and with welfare recipients. In the same context of digital activism, other studies have

focused on trying to give voice to people in poverty or at risk of social exclusion. Some studies focus on conveying the experiences of people experiencing poverty (Caplan, Purser, & Kindle, 2017), while others corroborate the importance of social movements in raising awareness against poverty (Ngidi, Mtshixa, Diga, Mbarathi, & May, 2016). The development of these types of studies could be directly linked to Pardo-Abril (2014), who highlights the political potential of academic work and the need to carry out committed analyses to generate social transformation.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Considering these aspects and based on the cited research, in particular Paz-Rebollo, Mayagoitia-Soria, & González-Aguilar (2023), which also analyzes poverty in TikTok Spain, the research questions and hypotheses for this study are the following:

- RQ1: What are the characteristics of hate messages focused on poor people in social networks like TikTok?*
- H1: Poverty is identified with the situation of specific groups, especially immigrants and Roma people. These discourses denounce the existing inequality in which Spaniards are the victims.*
- RQ2: What solutions do users suggest to deal with the situation of this group of people, and what ideology is underneath those approaches?*
- H2: The comments propose violent solutions (death, extermination) to end the pockets of poverty in advanced and democratic societies, linking themselves to extreme right-wing ideologies.*

Method and Materials

In this research, we use a mixed-method approach that combines quantitative and descriptive qualitative analyses to address derogatory comments posted by users on TikTok about poverty and people living in poverty. We believe that these texts reproduce a social reality and analyzing them can help understand social networks' role in creating stereotypes or social stigmas. This is part of a circular process defined and applied by Richardson (2007) to newspaper news, in which social practices help shed light on the context, and in turn, these texts influence users' opinions. It is interesting to analyze hate speech not only because its use has increased in social networks and has become more subtle but also because online hate has escalated to a different level. We want to show that these messages have evolved from insults to advocating action. Perpetrators of hate speech, faced with what they consider a problem and the inefficiency of authorities, propose radical solutions, usually formulated from specific ideological positions.

Critical Discourse Analysis

Hate speech is a dynamic construction, similar to the concept of gender (Cameron & Kulick, 2003; Kendall, 2007; Sunderland, 2004) and political representations (Joseph, 2006; Osborne, 2005; Wodak, 2015) because they evolve and vary according to the cultural, social, political, and legislative conventions of each country. Critical discourse analysis provides an appropriate theoretical framework for its analysis because it

is based on an understanding of discourse as an instrument of socially constituted power and determined because of economic, social, and cultural changes (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999).

The analyzed texts in this study are created within the cognitive process and social context of social network users, which constitute an active environment in constant transformation within the media (Tamásy & Géring, 2022). The messages that refer to TikTok users' perceptions of people at risk of social exclusion are notably brief, use emoticons, and lack conversational interaction. This compels an analysis of discussions between author and recipient because in this type of forum individual expressions are mainly based on personal or close experience, and participants do not usually engage in an exchange of ideas.

All of the above hinders the broad application of linguistic concepts. However, it is important to analyze these texts because they reflect social ideologies and positions held online, which simultaneously reflect the physical world. The real world and the digital world are increasingly interconnected; what happens in one sphere may have repercussions in the other (Lindgren, 2018). One of the main objectives of CDA is to study how the discursive aspects of power relations and inequality can have negative social impacts (Fairclough, 2010) in an attempt to go beyond the study of language use. In CDA discourse is subject to political and moral assessment. It is intended to give a voice to those who are not heard, empower people, denounce abuse of power, and mobilize people to improve social ills (Blommaert, 2011).

As Van Dijk (2015) proposed, it is helpful to examine the interaction between cognition, discourse, and society. Although discourse is socially determined, it is formulated and interpreted as an aggregate function of participants' cognitive processes and other learned mechanisms, which include political, global, and local social structures, ideologies, and mental models. All of these lead the collective members to define communicative events subjectively within a given context (Van Dijk, 2018).

In short, the purpose of using CDA and textual analysis methods is to identify which social groups the selected TikTok comments were addressed to, what attributes were associated with them, and what solutions or actions were proposed to put an end to what is considered a problem. We understand that the characteristics of the context affect or are affected by the text (Van Dijk, 2015).

Data Collection and Sampling

Following previous research (Basch, Yalamanchili, & Fera, 2021; Hautea, Parks, Takahashi, & Zeng, 2021; Zhu, Xu, Zhang, Chen, & Evans, 2019), we selected 100 videos produced on TikTok Spain between January 2020 and January 2022, coinciding with the outbreak of the pandemic along with the national state of emergency and the return to normal activities. A library of terms (adjectives and nouns) based on the At-Risk-of-Poverty and Exclusion indicator (used by the EAPN) was chosen as the starting point for the searches. As the general terms (poor, unemployment, shack, hunger) yielded few results, we used specific terms related to local situations in accordance with the media agenda of the analyzed period. These included Cañada Real (an illegal housing settlement in Madrid) and Las 3000 Viviendas (a marginal neighborhood in Seville). Other search terms were poverty, homeless, beggar, and hunger queues (lines of people waiting to obtain food from organizations). The 100 videos from the searches reached significant levels of virality gathering up to 14 million views, 38,462 comments, and more than 900,000 likes and 33,000 shares. Given

that the TikTok algorithm tailors its content for each user, one of the researchers was in charge of the video search, introducing each of the chosen terms on the search bar.

We began with a top-down analysis. Three of us manually analyzed all the comments to understand their content and context and analytically selected those that contained hateful messages. Hate was understood to mean contempt and derogatory or humiliating expressions toward a person because they belonged to a particular group at risk of social exclusion (Paz-Rebollo, Montero-Díaz, & Moreno-Delgado, 2020). For training purposes, a pretest was conducted with a sample of 13% (1,154) of the comments. Five sessions were held to agree on how to code each element in relation to the threads where the comments had been posted, reaching a degree of reliability of 94%. We found 679 comments consistent with hate speech.² The comments were stored in xlsx. format as a primary document.

Data Analysis

Various authors (Paulus & Lester, 2016) have shown that technologies can complete discourse analysis research. A qualitative research software package, *Atlas.ti*, was used in this study. Open coding was applied and developed as the data were analyzed. This led to the identification of four categories and 12 variables (Figure 1) to which all the codes from the analysis were associated.

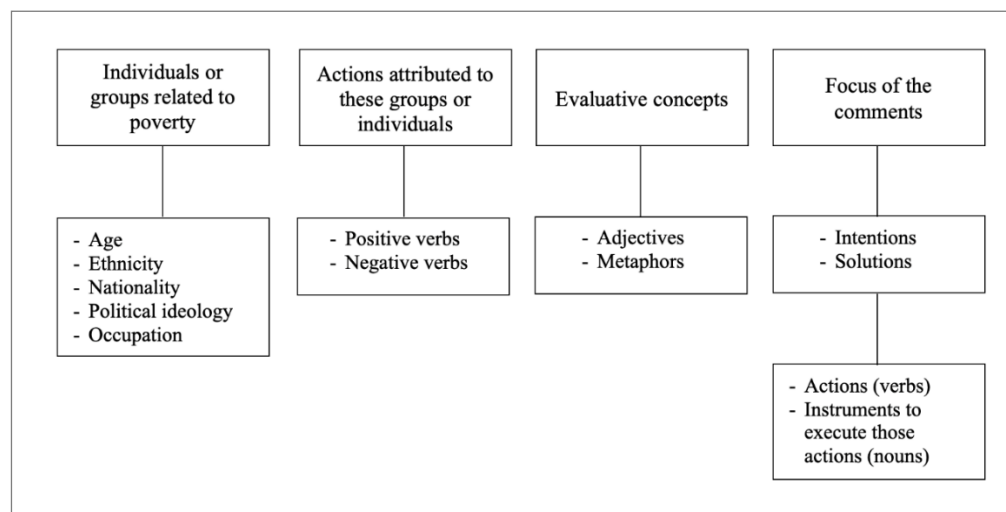


Figure 1. Categories and variables identified in the analysis process.

Additionally, these four groups of variables were coded using *Atlas.ti* to identify degrees, trends, and frequencies, and to analyze co-occurrences between each group of codes. We emulated previous research that has employed this tool (Rambaree & Nässén, 2021) and followed the principles of the NCT scheme on which this tool is based: Noticing, collecting, and thinking (Friese, 2019). This led us to detect whether there was a recurrent use of certain derogatory adjectives to refer to specific groups and in what

² Spelling errors in the comments analyzed were edited.

context they occurred. The process was also reviewed and fine-tuned through the OpenAI that *Atlas.ti* integrates into its version 23.1.1 (Lopezosa, Codina, & Boté-Vericad, 2023). The analysis and systematic exploration of these trends and their intersections, guided by our research questions, made it possible to identify the visible features of hate speech in TikTok videos.

Results

Features of Aporophobic Hate Speech According to Certain Groups and Causes

The identification of poverty in the analyzed groups is not made through direct appeals although most comments use two main discursive categories: "fake poor" and people who live below their means ("poor"). The aforementioned categories converge with the nationalities mentioned in the comments. These three groupings ("fake poor," "poor," and diverse nationalities) interconnect, in varying intensities, with other significant categories (such as "Collectives," "Social benefits," "Slackers," or the phrase "Let them work!"; Figure 2).

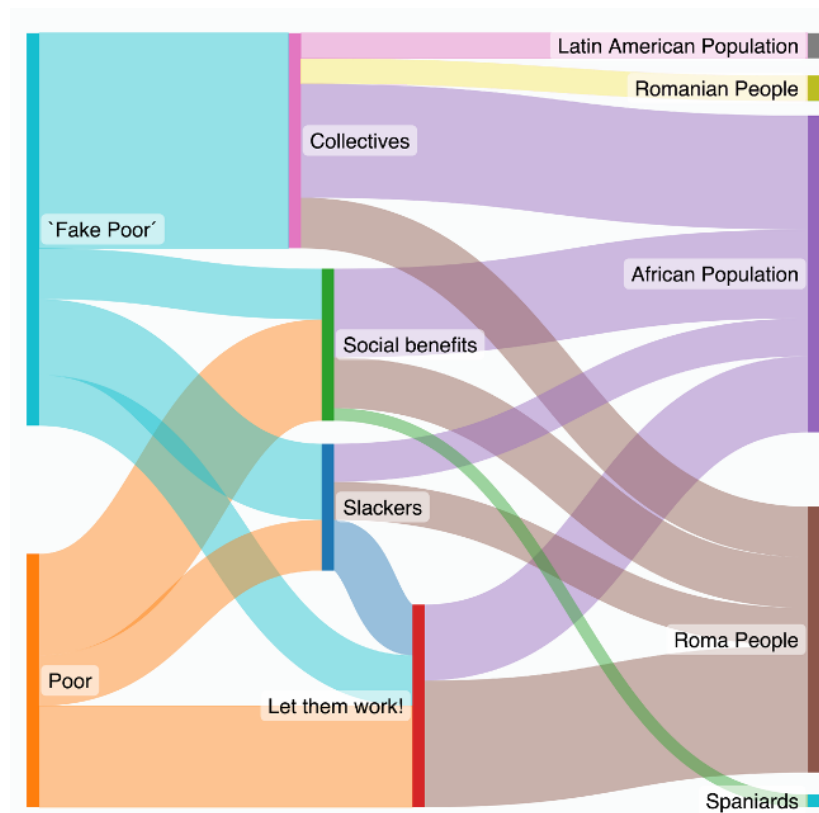


Figure 2. Sankey diagram illustrating the correlation between collectives and significant categories.

From "Fake Poor" to "Welfare-Dependent Poor"

The first category that emerged from the discourse analysis was the "fake poor" ("Who are these people trying to fool . . . ?"; personal communication, January 13, 2021). In these cases, poverty was mentioned only to deny it since the group was associated with owning "luxury" items (mainly cell phones or other nonessential objects). The authors of the comments used this circumstance to detect impostors, with claims such as "They don't have enough to eat but they do have a cell phone . . . yeah, right" (personal communication, July 9, 2020) or "So you do have a cell to use TikTok" (personal communication, February 2, 2021). The frequency and popularity of these comments reflected a Manichaean construction of poverty in which the risk of social exclusion is denied if people do not experience an absolute poverty threshold.

In other cases, we recognized extreme cases of scarcity where the victims are directly blamed for their situation. It was stated that their lack of interest in improving their situation was due to laziness ("Get to work, you slacker"; personal communication, August 7, 2021) as "there is work in the sea, in the fields, etc. you dogs don't work, so you're freeloading on those of us who pay taxes" (personal communication, June 20, 2020). This argument was often repeated and triggered anti-Spanish racist views made by other groups, who accused Spaniards of a similar attitude toward immigrants ("I have never seen migrants complaining that there is no work. . . . but I have come across many Spaniards who do 🤔"; personal communication, March 26, 2020).

The second group of criticisms of these "fake poor" addressed some lucrative illicit activities that are significantly associated with different racial or ethnic groups. The videos and comments especially connected the Roma community with drug trafficking ("The business of refined flour"; personal communication, October 25, 2021), Roma people and "Moors" with theft, and "Africans" with street selling (*manteros*). The state authorities are blamed for this situation on two grounds. One is passivity, linked to the lax position in the face of legal violations ("You come here to live by your wits, or get paid to play with your 🎰. . . our elders will not have a pension because of the government"; personal communication, September 5, 2021). The other is the government's actions, specifically benefiting these people or allowing drug growers not to pay electricity bills ("Power cuts are often due to the marijuana greenhouses that are illegally connected to the network"; personal communication, December 3, 2020).

Living on public welfare accounted for the third most common criticism about poverty. Intuitively, TikTok users match this criticism the perception of the "welfare-dependent poor" (Cozic & Winters, 1997, p. 35) in Western societies. In these cases, the discourse does not distinguish between geographic origins or ethnic groups; Spanish citizens were mentioned along with other groups such as Arabs, Africans, and Roma people. When the aporophobic discourse of TikTok comments went in this direction, it got significantly polarized. The selected posts only differentiated between honest workers who contributed to the social security system and paid taxes and those who did not work and took advantage of the former. The arguments and nuances were that the state perpetuates this way of life and that left-wing politics are responsible for this situation.

All Poor People Are Equal, but Some Poor People Are More Equal Than Others

The argument that the previously mentioned groups are not perceived as "poor" connects with a discourse that states that they benefit from the system; this shifts the focus to the unequal distribution of

social benefits. This is detailed in the comments of groups that are considered as living in a situation of poverty: The distribution is uneven because of the treatment given to immigrants versus Spaniards regarding social protection from the state. The comments considered that immigrants receive “unfair” benefits they do not deserve (“How about their benefits? Enough is enough, the laws should change in this country”; personal communication, October 15, 2020) because they use them for banalities (“So they get a Mercedes, whereas Spaniards have nothing”; personal communication, November 20, 2021). The critical analysis of the discourse points to claims of legal inequality in favor of immigrants and to the detriment of Spanish people.

This perception of inequality in favor of a group that has “never paid taxes and are given a salary and rent support” (personal communication, November 19, 2021) is used to construct a racist discourse around ethnicity and nationality backed by specific policies and ideologies. These expressions of hate serve to legitimize this type of discourse as the posts suggest that hate emanates from a set of injustices driven by these groups and not from racist prejudice. Specifically, three main groups emerged concerning poverty: Immigrants (Africans, Dominicans, Chinese, Moroccans, “Moors,” etc.), Roma people (a group considered neither immigrant nor Spaniards), and Spaniards.

Immigrants are associated with adjectives that question their legal status as residents in Spain. Most of them are considered “illegal,” a description that is usually accompanied by negative labels linked to poverty, low education levels, criminal activities, and social and job insecurity. Two rhetorical lines of argumentation emerge from this type of discourse. The first links individuals from this group to poverty and crime because they are already considered poor or criminals in their country of origin (“I think it refers to leaving [doors] wide open, as we have them, without controls, letting in thousands of undocumented criminals”; personal communication, October 4, 2021). A problem is stated (“We let more and more poor people arrive”; personal communication, July 20, 2021), leading to a second implicit rhetorical argument that formulates a solution: Preventing them from entering the country.

This construction of legality in the comments is not only somewhat associated with the term “papers” (required documentation to legally reside in the country), but it is also linked to economic solvency. Based on this, a clear difference between “desirable” and “undesirable” immigrants is established. The Latin American community is described using the label of “desirable” due to their social and economic status. In contrast, Romas and immigrants from countries of the Arab Maghreb are labeled as “undesirable” immigrants as they are blamed for undermining the resources of the Spanish state (“It’s not right that taxes go to this, to people who don’t contribute and are causing problems”; personal communication, April 21, 2021). These groups are also often criticized for supposedly resolving problems in uncivilized ways: “As a Moroccan, I’d burn the house down rather than letting others live here” (personal communication, May 5, 2021) or views to the effect that “Spain needs a bit of Romanian law” (personal communication, September 26, 2020).

Faced with this dichotomy in the discourse around immigration, the Roma community is the object of a much more homogeneous and heated argumentation since not one positive identification was found. There is a certain consensus in associating them with reprehensible attitudes and behaviors that, in the view of the authors of TikTok comments, legitimize their social exclusion, living conditions, and the verbal violence

they experience. The negative and powerful construction of the stereotype of the Roma collective in Spanish society vaguely explains that they live “a life like most gypsies in Spain, who don’t work, and only live off benefits” (personal communication, July 20, 2021). For these users, this collective and immigrants share the discourse of taking resources undeservedly to the detriment of other groups: “Everything goes to help immigrants or gypsies, you will find yourself on the street without any support” (personal communication, November 15, 2021). The authors seemed to feel that explaining the argumentation about the Roma people was not necessary since the label identifying them as a parasitic group is assumed to be well-known by other users.

Poverty is also associated with a third group: Spaniards. However, the prevailing tone was related to their description as a “threatened group” because of the notion about the parasitic actions of undocumented immigrants and the Roma people. This line of argument led to warnings about an “invasion” (“They’ll eat us all up”; personal communication, January 6, 2021). The posts developed this further through a plenitude of nuances with two main features: Ideological-political and geographical (with regional differences and north-south confrontations, such as “There are a lot of lazy people in the south🤔”; personal communication, May 27, 2021). Within the former, references to Spain served to disparage political and ideological options that were blamed for the economic degradation of the country. The most virulent and recurrent attacks were targeted at the ideologies, parties, and representative figures of the Left, who were currently serving in the Spanish government. The predominant discursive construction associated with left-wing politicians revolved around blaming them for spreading poverty. This blaming argument portrayed these parties as being eager to remain in power, leading them to apply populist policies and hold a lenient view regarding illegal immigration controls. In this sense, the “reds” or “the left” were held responsible for driving poverty and insulted by using terms linked to illicit activities: *manteros*, *menas*, and *okupas*.³

The virulence of the messages received by these incumbent politicians was much higher than that intended for their Right counterparts although there were overtones. The Popular Party (conservative) was associated with political corruption and other problems that afflicted Spain, which they were seen as having caused with the connivance of the Socialist Party (Partido Socialista Obrero Español [PSOE]). The Far-Right party Vox was portrayed as a choice that could enable Spain’s recovery (“Vox is the cure for communist cancer”; personal communication, May 1, 2021). A large number of comments yearned for Vox as the great political alternative to lead the reconstruction or “cleansing” of the country for the future (“When Abascal is president, the 3000 and their cousin neighborhoods will disappear. Long live Vox”; personal communication, May 29, 2021).

Lastly, some posts asserted that there were groups at risk of social exclusion as a consequence of their actions. These were often called *canis* or *quinquis*⁴ and were associated with indolence, delinquency, and drug trafficking. The presence of these groups was not as prominent as others. The same applied to the

³ *Manteros*: people who sell imitation goods on the street, usually placed on a blanket; *menas*: unaccompanied foreign minors; *okupas*: persons who illegally squat in a dwelling or uninhabited space.

⁴ *Canis*: people from low-income neighborhoods with aggressive and criminal behaviors; *quinquis*: people from marginal social groups who engage in theft and other criminal activities.

age variable, which only appeared to be significantly associated with immigration when it was related to *menas*. However, there was no construction linked to poverty in the hate messages targeted at them; rather, these were associated with crime.

Poverty Solutions: Assessment and Solutions in TikTok Comments.

The TikTok comments also reflected a perceived assessment of the problems posed by these groups and solutions to end those problems. The rhetoric associated with these solutions was often incredibly polarizing and aligned with the ideology inherent in hate speech.

There was a noticeable use of dehumanizing metaphors (Musolff, 2015) that identify these groups with small, almost insignificant animals that live off others ("parasites"), are annoying ("lice"), can be a plague and cause harm ("cockroaches," "vermin," or "rats"). There was no shortage of references to names of animals linked to connotations of clumsiness and laziness ("goose") or dumbness and inactivity ("sheep"). The objective of these metaphors was fundamentally to disparage these population groups.

The most hated groups were the *okupas* and those deemed to be illegally settled possibly because they are identified with actions that have or could potentially have a direct impact on the life of the authors of these videos and comments: Having squatters on their property or being the victims of theft in a shanty town area. Squatters were considered despicable ("riffraff") mainly because of the harm they caused to others.

The terms to describe Roma people alluded to their personal and physical characteristics. These qualifiers showed disgust ("trashy" or "repulsive") as they reproduced the negative stereotype attributed to this population group related to lack of hygiene. In contrast, when the adjective "dirty" referred to politicians, it denoted unethical actions. Judgment of the external appearance of Roma people was reinforced by attributing to them an evil inner nature, harmful, and "boneless."

When immigrants were insulted, there were no distinctions regarding geographic origins, activity, or age probably because most expressions were spontaneous. In general, immigrants were described as invaders with illegal status, destructive, and dangerous. Despite these nuances, the most powerful narrative constructed was the threat posed toward the Spaniards by the Roma people and immigrants. This did not constitute an active threat due to their criminal activities but a passive one because they "steal" social aids, medical care, and housing, among other benefits, from Spaniards, who are much more honest and in need of social and medical aid. The construction of a passive threat with a heated and highly virulent dialectic (through the attribution of evaluative actions and concepts) leads to the search for solutions to overcome this threat. Figure 3 offers a comprehensive and visual representation of the concurrence of terms through a Sankey graph, enabling a deeper understanding of the complex relationships within the analyzed context. It highlights notable patterns in the users' comments, shedding light on potential solutions to address the identified problems.

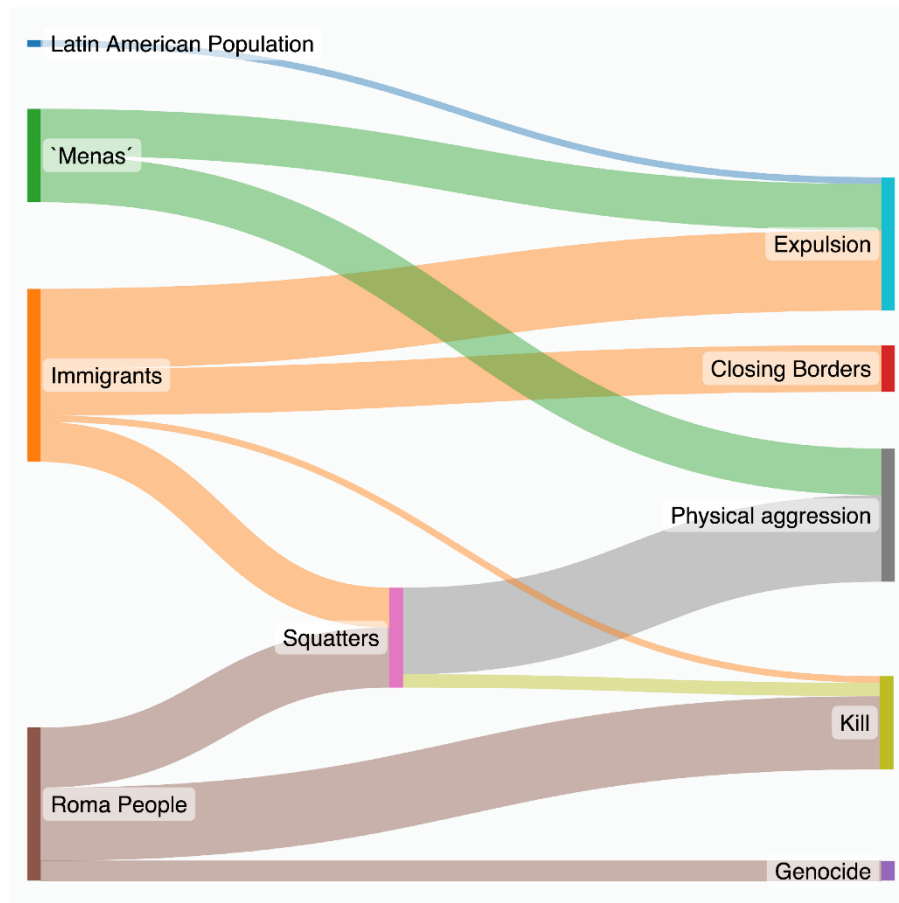


Figure 3. Suggested solutions for different collectives.

The co-occurrence analysis between groups featured in the comments shows different levels of hate. Solutions such as closing borders, removal, and deportation were options for dealing with immigrants (mainly Africans). Physical violence was the main resource when referring to groups considered endogenous (Roma), and there was a significant inclination toward extermination. The suggested methods of eradication were remarkably violent: Burning, gassing, drowning, cracking their heads open, making soap with their bodies, and erasing them from the face of the earth.

This degree of violence was ratified by the instruments that the commenters proposed to use. Various mentioned weapons not accessible to the users of these ideas ("nuclear bomb," "missile," "tanks," "Napalm," or "dynamite") suggest that their discourse revolved around rhetorical extremism rather than posing an actual threat. However, reference was also made to the use of "gasoline and matches," "sticks," "shotguns," and "gunshots." These expressions could be considered a hate crime as they incite violence against these groups by using accessible means, causing the victims to be afraid.

The TikTok comments analyzed framed these actions within a broader code, that of doing justice, in which significant opposition was raised. The institutions in charge of guaranteeing such justice were represented as incompetent. For example, politicians, except those of the Far-Right party Vox, were linked to corruption, lax regulations, defense of parasitic groups, and similar issues. The police were presented as having limited resources, which meant that it was preferable to take justice into one's hands, for example, in dealing with squatters: "But it's really our fault because we call the police instead of kicking the door, beating the hell out of them and throwing them out. If we did that, they'd think twice about doing it" (personal communication, October 26, 2021).

Discussion and Conclusion

The CDA shows that one way of ignoring poverty in advanced societies is to consider that it only exists when extreme; therefore, halfway impoverished situations are deemed fake. However, there was no logical construction of these intermediate situations in social networks since merely superficial aspects were used to characterize poverty-related groups. Owning a cell phone or having a beer was considered clear evidence that someone had sufficient resources to live on. The denial of this social problem was based on a well-settled dialectic formulated by Cortina (2017), whereby groups linked to poverty do not want to work and exploit social benefits. We also perceived the concept of a "culture of poverty" (Ryan, 1976), which blames the victims for their situation, ignoring the lack of access to opportunities (educational, employment, economic, etc.) that these groups suffer.

The CDA of the TikTok comments disclosed semantic constructions that have emerged in public opinion in recent years. Employment was a major concern among the users of these comments and the main criterion in determining poverty status although this could change over time or in contexts of economic crisis. The arguments presented a polarizing confrontation between those who worked (or wanted to work) and those who did not. The former were defined in absolute terms in relation to immigrants. In this case, due to the proximity of the language and culture of Spain, no distinctions were made with people from Latin America. We did not observe that comments of people experiencing poverty who recounted their own experiences contributed to improving their image, as Caplan et al. (2017) point out, but quite the opposite: Their messages were used to ratify discriminatory thinking.

In this article, we analyzed through CDA the comments related to poverty made by users on the TikTok platform. The analysis was based on a broad concept of poverty to identify the recurring codes associated with this situation. Our findings highlight that in this case, the concept of poverty is consistently associated with racial codes and, in some instances, with ideological codes. There is a hegemonic, racist, and xenophobic view of immigration in the analyzed comments, which includes intersectional hatred (Morales, Grineski, & Collins, 2019) based on ethnicity, nationality, and situation of social exclusion. All these groups were represented as being outside the law because of their immigrant status and illicit activities. In contrast, Spaniards in disadvantaged situations were victimized not because they may have been suffering from poverty but because they lived in threatening environments and inferior conditions, with the constant need to defend themselves against the immigrant group. Finally, the Roma people were part of this polarization not because of what they did but because of what they were. The statement made by Fischer, Halperin, Canetti, and Jasini (2018) that dehumanizing verbal attacks are directed at people

“because of who they are, than because of what they do” is valid in this case (p. 309). These data corroborate H1 concerning the groups with which poverty is identified and the irrational and visceral nature of messages that appear to include logical reasoning but generalize very specific cases to support prejudices.

The semantic analysis and correlations between the analyzed terms also show that hatred toward people at risk of social exclusion had grown stronger. Derogatory language was used, and humiliating characteristics were attributed to poverty-related groups. However, what is most striking about the results was the presence of a significant number of physical threats. While insults were less present or took on a metaphorical form to circumvent the control of comments by the social network, the call to violence was more explicit since it openly advocated extermination with cruel and inhumane suggestions. This confirms H2: Hate speech is becoming increasingly grim, more impulsive, and more harmful on social networks, or at least on TikTok. The control systems implemented by companies have reduced insults because they are easy to find by automatic detection systems, but allegorical expressions like “napalm is needed” (personal communication, May 18, 2021) escape moderation and may go beyond the barrier of hate speech becoming a hate crime.

These aggressive appeals were based on two primary arguments: Politicians had neither the intellectual capacity nor the ethical principles to solve this problem. The police were presented as either lacking an appropriate legal framework to act or being restricted by politicians. The call to violence was a call to take justice into one’s hands since, in their opinion, this was the only way to solve problems. Thus, a shift from hate speech to action was proposed in this discourse, establishing a connection between the real and digital world (Lindgren, 2018). This verbal violence moved to the streets, making necessary in Spain the approval of the Equal Treatment and Non-Discrimination Law. It entered into force on July 14, 2022, to include aporophobia and anti-gypsyism as hate crimes.

It should also be noted that some terms related to the Jewish Holocaust in the Second World War were also found in several posts (“gassing,” “making soap,” “exterminating”). This reveals an underlying neo-Nazi ideology ratified by the praise of the Spanish Far-Right Vox party and the confidence that their leader would make the problem and those groups disappear.

There are certain limitations within the scope of this study. It is important to note that the analysis was exclusively focused on hate speech, thereby omitting a comprehensive examination of all comments within the conversation of each video. This prevented evaluating whether there was a division of opinions and favorable comments toward the mentioned collectives. Another limitation is the analysis of the videos. Although short, these may have been equally interesting as a beacon guiding the subsequent comments. In future research, it would be interesting to add information about the authors since a positive evaluation of Latino people may be due to their participation in these forums. This could be a complex variable, but identifying terms typically used in local speech could be helpful in this regard. Finally, it would be worth incorporating emojis’ use, function, and application in the analysis of these conversations as they are increasingly present in social media. This may yield interesting data in sentiment analysis (Shiha & Ayvaz, 2017). In short, CDA offers significant methodological potential to continue to advance the understanding of hate speech.

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