



## Polarization and hatred on TikTok against Spain's Trans Law

Polarización y odio en TikTok contra la Ley Trans de España

Polarização e ódio no Tik Tok contra a Lei Trans de Espanha

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Received: 15/09/2023; Revised: 25/09/2023; Accepted: 22/12/2023; Published: 16/05/2024

*To cite this article:* Colussi, Juliana; García-Estévez, Noelia; & Ballesteros-Aguayo, Lucía. (2024). Polarization and hatred on TikTok against Spain's Trans Law. *ICONO 14. Scientific Journal of Communication and Emerging Technologies*, 22(1).

<https://doi.org/10.7195/ri14.v22i1.2088>



## Abstract

This exploratory and qualitative research focuses on the analysis of the polarization of hate messages towards the Trans Law of Spain in the videos published on TikTok. The sample is made up of 112 contents posted between October 13, 2022 and April 13, 2023. For this study, a content analysis has been carried out that includes seven variables. The main findings indicate the predominance of negative affective polarization towards the new legislation against the LGTBI+ community, through discursive resources that use the hate and misinformation to ridicule the law and the trans community.

**Keywords:** polarization; hate; Trans Law; LGTBI+; TikTok; Spain

## Resumen

Esta investigación de carácter exploratorio y cualitativo se centra en el análisis de la polarización de los mensajes de odio hacia la Ley Trans de España en los vídeos publicados en TikTok. La muestra está compuesta de 112 contenidos posteados entre el 13 de octubre de 2022 y el 13 de abril de 2023. Para la realización de este estudio se ha llevado a cabo un análisis de contenido que contempla siete variables. Los principales hallazgos indican la predominancia de polarización afectiva negativa hacia la nueva legislación contra la comunidad LGTBI+, a través de recursos discursivos que utilizan el odio y la desinformación para ridiculizar la ley y el colectivo trans.

**Palabras clave:** polarización; odio; Ley Trans; LGTBI+; TikTok; España

## Resumo

Esta pesquisa exploratória e qualitativa centra-se na análise da polarização das mensagens de ódio sobre a Lei Trans de Espanha em vídeos publicados no TikTok. A amostra possui 112 conteúdos postados entre 13 de outubro de 2022 e 13 de abril de 2023. Para este estudo, realizou-se uma análise de conteúdo que inclui sete categorias. Os principais resultados indicam o predomínio da polarização afetiva negativa frente à nova legislação contra a comunidade LGTBI+, por meio de recursos discursivos que utilizam o ódio e a desinformação para ridicularizar a lei e a comunidade trans.

**Palavras-chave:** polarização; ódio; Lei Trans; LGTBI+; TikTok; Espanha

## 1. Introduction

The consumption of information and news about political events through social networks in Spain is a process that is ever increasing. Digital publications are reaching a large critical mass despite fragmented user consumption. The latest Digital News Report (Neuman et al., 2023) highlights the growth of TikTok in Spain along with Instagram and YouTube, compared to the decline in the use of other platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter.

Since it was released in 2017, TikTok – the favourite among children and adolescents (Guiñez-Cabrera and Mansilla-Obando, 2022), allows users to share short, instant videos, adding animated backgrounds, sound effects and visual filters. While it is true that the existence of short-format videos has created a new opportunity for empowering society while using online platforms, it is also true that the viralisation of messages and the automatism of the online algorithm - heightened by a larger attraction of younger people towards audiovisual content -, places the Asian platform as a focus of disinformation and content that incites hatred.

In Spain, hate crime is codified in the Penal Code, however, and despite the fact that Spanish legislation is solid in terms of the prosecution of crimes, “it is still insufficient, so a transformation in the criminal approach to hate crimes is necessary at a worldwide level” (García, 2020, p. 2).

A paradigmatic event in Spain regarding this involves the case of debate around the Trans Law that provoked different positions in both left and right-wing parties as well as within Spanish public opinion, strongly fragmented and ideologically aligned. The law was finally approved on 28 February 2023, but the debate acquired special virulence on social networks, so that during the fall of 2022 and the spring of 2023 there was a context of division between different layers of the Spanish population in relation to with the approval, legitimacy and justification of the Trans Law.

This article conducts an analysis of content from 112 posts on TikTok between 13 October 2022 and 13 April 2023 in order to identify the type of polarisation and predominant emotions, as well as the expressions of hate present in the TikTok posts regarding the recently approved Spanish law.

## **1.1. Disinformation: between filter bubbles and echo chambers**

Information disorders – fake news (Wardle, 2017), hoaxes or misinformation (Bângăoanu and Radu, 2018) – have been objects of study in several scenarios such as during the pandemic (Salaverría et al., 2020), scientific topics (Oliveira, 2020), social protests (Rodríguez Pérez et al., 2021) or electoral contexts (Canavilhas et al., 2019; Colussi, 2020; Paniagua Rojano et al., 2020). Regardless of the circumstance, disinformation manifests itself under four strategies that, according to Volkoff (2000), examine: 1) dissimulation of information; 2) biased, incomplete or false information; 3) information overload; and/or 4) targeted comments.

Specifically in cases of biased, incomplete or false information, Wardle (2017) warns us about seven levels of disinformative content according to the intentionality to misinform, which include everything from satire or parody -which is the mildest level- to manipulated

content and fabricated content -the highest levels on the scale (Wardle and Derakhshan, 2018).

The starting point lies in the evolution of the web and the popularisation of online applications and social networks, such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp or TikTok. These phenomena have allowed the decentralisation in the distribution of informational content, a process in which traditional media have little control and which, moreover, favours the viralisation of content in a matter of minutes (Castells, 2012). Disinformation constitutes one of the greatest threats to the future of our societies, "since it is expected that wars will also be technological and media-based around hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discursive narratives" (Ballesteros-Aguayo and Chaparro-Escudero, 2022, p. 250).

Another aspect of disinformation is related to filter bubbles, which consists of an automatic selection of content conducted by algorithms on digital platforms (Pariser, 2017). In this sense, Morozov (2016) asks us to reflect upon the fact that the new filters and algorithmic practices have consequences for public opinion. Facebook is an example of this, a space where algorithms show content related to the user's way of thinking (Bucher, 2016), so that a "kind of labyrinth with no exit" is designed (Rodríguez, 2017). Therefore, it is important to question the role of algorithmic mediation within online social networks and its close relationship with filter bubbles.

This phenomenon is also related to echo chambers which, according to Törnberg (2018), are interconnected with disinformation dissemination strategies. This dynamic takes place above all in homogeneous groups of users with a preference for self-confirmation, where hoaxes and fake news are cultivated and grow. It is, therefore, a fertile online space to share narratives and promote polarised groups that resist content contrary to their beliefs, a universe, in short, ripe for disinformation.

There are multiple studies (Bessi et al., 2016; Del Vicario et al., 2016) that warn about the impact of echo chambers with online content, so that social networks support the creation of user groups with like-minded ideas that frame and reinforce a shared narrative (Cinelli et al., 2021) impacting the dissemination of information and the formation of echo chambers. Therefore, user polarisation and confirmation bias play a key role in the proliferation of misinformation.

In short, the tendency on the part of users of online social networks to select information that corresponds to their belief system entails significant risks for debate and healthy and enriching dialogue in order to create a critical mass of citizenship. At the same time it poses a challenge, because it promotes the formation of like-minded groups of users that frame and reinforce a shared narrative, which may not be true in its origin.

This trend dominates flow of information and it affects public debates about relevant social issues, in particular, the case of approving the Trans Law in Spain, a debate in which there was also a profusion of polarising messages.

## 1.2. Ideological and affective polarisation

Polarisation, which has intensified with the popularisation of using online social networks, is the subject of study in various disciplines that interact with Communication and Politics, which highlights academic research on populism, the strengthening of the extreme right and hate speech. After the election of Donald Trump as president of the United States in 2016, polarisation is growing and is configured as a factor that threatens current democracies, since it entails “attitudinal and political extremism, as well as the rejection and expulsion of interests and actors” (Waisbord, 2020, p. 250). In this way, it depicts a scenario in which the contraposition of “ours” and “others” is present as well as the dichotomy of good versus evil.

In the case of Brazil, for example, polarisation is marked by an aggressive discourse led by the extreme right through former president Jair Bolsonaro (Colussi et al., 2023; Bayarri et al., 2024); in counterpoint to the polarisation generated by parties with extreme left ideologies in Latin America at the end of the 20th century. In Europe, the data points to Spain as one of the most polarised countries – a context similar to that of Italy and Greece – in terms of the position of the parties on a left-right scale (Simón, 2020; Torca and Comelles, 2022).

On the one hand, it should be stressed that, in this context, ideological polarisation is understood as “differences in symbolic issues” (conservatism, progressivism, nationalism) or more practical issues (how much tax we pay) between political parties” (Miller, 2020, p. 14) and that, in addition, ideological/party identity prevails over other types of political action (Iyengar et al., 2012). On the other hand, affective polarisation corresponds to the feelings aroused by voters, leaders and political parties that we have an affinity for, as well as hostile emotions, such as anger, towards those with which we do not identify. A recent study on affective polarisation towards Spanish politicians indicates that right-wing leaders do not obtain the sympathy – positive polarisation – of ideologically left-wing respondents, and vice versa (Olaz Capitán and Ortiz-García, 2021). It could be summarised that Spain is among the countries with low-affective polarisation and high-ideological polarisation (Garrido et al., 2021). In this context, hostile emotions are often manifested through hate speech towards minorities (Benesch, 2014).

## 1.3. The tiktocracia: TikTok as a citizenship and political platform

The use of TikTok by populist parties as a fundamental element of their online communication strategies has become increasingly common (González-Aguilar et al., 2023), especially because of its ability to reach the younger population.

Recent studies (Weimann and Masri, 2020; Albertazzi and Bonansinga, 2023) warn of the presence of extreme right-wing extremism in the videos, comments, symbols and images

included in TikTok posts. At the same time, they add that, although similar situations have occurred on other social platforms, TikTok has unique characteristics that make it more problematic.

Efforts have been made to determine which specific characteristics from each social network invite polarisation, viralisation, and the arousal of emotions (Barroso-Moreno et al., 2023), just as search engines reinforce racism and discrimination (Umoja Noble, 2018), but it is problematic in the case of TikTok due to the complexity of capturing posts (Guiñez-Cabrera and Mansilla-Obando, 2022). An attempt has also been made to identify polarising content on social networks in order to predict future fake news topics (Del Vicario, et al., 2019).

In the case of TikTok, the social network itself, as well as the format of the messages, determines the way in which said content is consumed, along with user emotions and conviction (Bessi et al., 2016; Del Vicario et al., 2016). The presence of echo chambers helps support beliefs and forms polarised groups that share the same vision.

In this way, the populist message spun through short videos and with the appearance on many occasions with playful and humorous content close to entertainment is based on the discourse of hate that identifies certain social groups as “enemies” of “the people” (González-Aguilar et al., 2023).

Some of the most recent groups at risk of suffering online hate and harassment are, in addition to the LGTBI+ community (Arce-García and Menéndez-Menéndez, 2022; Pickles, 2021; Rivera et al., 2022; Paterson et al., 2019), content creators and social media personalities with large audiences on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok and YouTube (Thomas et. al., 2022). Along with this, the #StopAsianHate campaign on TikTok stands out after the increase in hatred against Asians and in favour of pan-Asian solidarity (Lee and Lee, 2023), and the hashtag “racial trauma” on TikTok as a result of racial incidents in the USA between March 2020 and May 2022 (Hung et al., 2023; Ibañez et al., 2021).

## 2. Material and Methods

The main objective of this exploratory research project is to analyse the polarisation of hate messages towards the Spanish Trans Law posted on the social network TikTok. This study therefore pursues the following two specific objectives:

- O1. Identify the type of polarisation and the predominant emotions in TikTok posts in regard to the Spanish Trans Law.
- O2. Analyse the resources and discursive elements used by TikTok users to promote the spread of hate towards the Trans Law in Spain.

In accordance with the above, this study has been developed based on the following research questions:

- PI1. Is there predominant negative affective polarisation within TikTok posts in regard to the Trans Law?
- PI2. Through what emotions is this polarisation transmitted in TikTok videos?
- PI3. Is there a trend towards hate messages in relation to the Spanish Trans Law on the social network TikTok?
- PI4. What visual and discursive techniques and resources do Tik Tok users use in their videos to project that hatred?

The design and determination of the sample size was carried out through a multi-phase procedure. First of all, once our sampling framework was identified, the search for videos posted on TikTok was done through the combination of the hashtag “#leytrans” followed by the word “Spain” to filter the content specifically related to this law. The result includes all videos posted between 13 October 2022 and 13 April 2023. The choice of these dates is justified because the Trans Law was approved on 16 February 2023, and the objective was to analyse both content posted before its approval and those posted later.

Therefore, on 13 April 2023, the aforementioned search was conducted, obtaining a total of 281 videos, of which 112 posts (n=112) have been analysed. Although in quantitative terms, the sample size was obtained from a confidence level of 90% and a margin of error of 6, the selection of the sample in this exploratory-phenomenological study does not respond so much to probabilistic calculations, but rather to its selection has been based mainly on theoretical saturation criteria, that is, theoretical saturation indicates the moment in which the additional data that is collected does not add significant information to what is already available (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 2002).

Finally, once the sample<sup>1</sup> was fixed, a non-probabilistic purposeful sampling was used for selecting the analysis units. The 281 videos were ordered by the number of “likes” from most to least and three intervals were selected based on this criterion: the first interval corresponds to the videos that have received the highest number of “likes” (n1=37) the second interval is situated in the middle of the list (n2=38); and the third interval refers to the videos with fewer “likes” (n3=37). It is important to specify that the analysis was conducted between May 8 and 21, 2023, since the number of “likes” for each video changes over time, and may receive more likes according to the number of views they have been able to obtain subsequently.

In accordance with the objectives established and in order to answer the research questions, an analysis of content has been conducted by (Krippendorff, 2004) using an analysis sheet prepared ad hoc in which the main study variables are defined, which can be summarised as follows:



Table 1. Analysis sheet and variables considered

1	Basic data from the post	Date of posting and corresponding day of the week, video duration, inclusion of descriptive text next to the video, inclusion of hashtags and mentions.
2	Audience	Count the number of “likes” and comments, as well as the number of times each video has been shared or marked as a favourite, <u>in order to understand the audience reach and viralisation from each post.</u>
3	Predominant emotions	Locate the main emotions projected in the videos, considering emotions such as joy, sadness, anger, fear, disgust and surprise (Ekman, 1992; Sautera et al., 2010).
4	Affective polarization	Identify the level of polarisation for each video, based on an analysis of positive-negative-neutral polarisation on the discourse, as well as the emotions present in the messages (Arce-García y Menéndez-Menéndez, 2022). To determine a lexicon of association between words and emotions we rely on Mohammad and Turney (2012). In this study, the authors tell us, for example, how to verify the correlation between the polarity of a word and the emotion associated with it, which we have adapted to the audiovisual environment. In this way, from the nouns, adjectives and adverbs, a positive or negative value (+1 or -1) is assigned, which increases or decreases according to the adjectives and adverbs used in the message.
5	Discursive resources that incite hatred	Detect the possible discursive resources used by TikTok users in the creation of videos that spread hate, understood as a heterogeneous conglomeration of statements that encompasses everything from threats to individuals or groups to cases in which some people simply express their anger against the authorities, in a more or less offensive way (Gagliardone et al., 2015).
6	Actors	Find authorship for the accounts that post the analysed content in order to identify the political and social actors that address aspects related to the Trans Law in Spain, as well as their name, biography and possible links to other social networks or websites. To do this, we measured how many accounts they follow, the number of followers and “likes”.
7	Geolocation	Identify the country or city where the content was posted

Source: own elaboration.

A detailed code book<sup>2</sup> has been prepared in order to apply this analysis sheet, and special work has been done on the training of the coders and their degree of agreement based on a two-stage protocol. First, a pilot phase was carried out in which each of the 3 participating judges analysed a small sample of 10 elements, and the results were compared. In this way, some flaws in the analysis sheet were detected and improved, and the study variables in the codebook were redefined and adapted. The second phase was carried out once the



analysis of the content was carried out, using Scott's Pin (n) and Cohen's Kappa (k) statistical methods to evaluate inter-judgmental reliability, obtaining 90% concordance in both, which lends great reliability to the technique.

Given the exploratory and complex nature of the variables that make up this research, an interpretive-hermeneutic approach based on compression has been adopted (Gadamer, 2004; Gadamer, 2015; Ferrater Mora, 1990). A deep reflection of the data is necessary, which allows us to explore ideas, concepts and perceived patterns (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). To this end, we have implemented a qualitative discourse analysis with which we have been able to extract and group discursive passages, recognise similarities and differences between them and interpret them (Sayago, 2014).

### **3. Results: between negative polarisation and hatred towards the Trans Law**

Taking into account that the main objective of this exploratory study is to analyse the polarisation of messages and the manifestation of hate towards the Spanish Trans Law in TikTok posts, the results are presented in two parts: 1) an analysis of polarisation and 2) an analysis of the discursive elements of hate identified in the content posted on TikTok about the Spanish Trans Law.

Based on the analysis of the 112 videos, which corresponds to 40% of the content posted between 13 October 2022 and 13 April 2023, the main findings indicate the preeminence of using negative polarisation and hate to denigrate the Trans Law and the LGTBI+ community. The videos analysed have an average duration of 1 minute and 35 seconds, with the shortest being 6 seconds, and the longest being 9 minutes and 44 seconds.

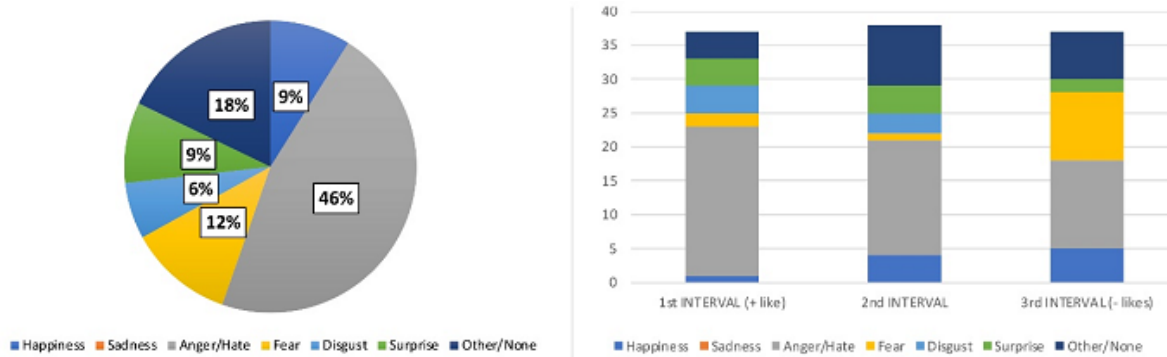
#### **3.1. Polarisation against the Trans Law**

The analysis of the videos posted under the hashtag #LeyTrans reveals that 77% of the videos present affective polarisation, which are distributed in negative (61%), neutral (23%) and positive (16%) polarisation. In content that identifies negative or positive polarisation (see graph 1), the predominant emotions are: anger/hate (46%), other/there is none (18%), fear (12%), surprise (9%). -which can be positive or negative-, joy (9%); and, finally, disgust (6%).

If we look at the videos posted on TikTok ordered according to the number of "likes", from most to least, it is interesting to see how it is in the first interval where we see the highest number of posts that invoke anger and hatred (59.46%). On the other hand, fear is an emotion that increases as we move towards the third interval, representing 27.03%

compared to 5.41% in interval one. Something similar occurs with joy, whose presence is residual in the first interval (2.7%), and relatively notable in the third interval (13.51%). Therefore, we can affirm that not only is there an evident proliferation of posts with negative polarisation and anger as the predominant emotion, but that the TikTok audience is mostly positioned in that sense, as shown by the number of “likes” received by these types of videos.

Graph 1. Emotions identified in the sample total and by intervals



Source: own elaboration

These results point to the predominance of negative polarisation regarding approval of the Trans Law in Spain which, in this case, is built from the use of contrary and/or derogatory arguments towards the new legislation. To do this, the TikTok users who are the authors of this content have used characters, stories and simulations in order to support their arguments, anchored in more conservative ideologies.

Among the most recurrent arguments used in the analysed videos that generate negative polarisation and, consequently, a tendency against the Trans Law, the following stand out: 1) the avalanche of men who will declare themselves women to request a change of sex due to the legal benefits and other rights of women - in this case reference is made to the youtuber Roma Gallardo and the fact that she has declared herself a woman before a civil registry office;- 2) criticism that trans women would have equality in competitions, such as police competitions, for example, and sports competitions; 3) claims that trans women will be able to access feminine spaces, such as bathrooms; 4) rejection of the fact that prisoners, especially those accused of rape, could negotiate going to women’s prisons; and 5) allusion to other countries that had approved a similar law and had to back down.

Of particular interest is the controversy over Gallardo’s self-declaration as a trans woman because she appears in several videos in which negative polarisation is encouraged. “The one who has made this farce very clear has been the YouTuber Roma Gallardo”, this is how “Part 7 - Roma Gallardo makes a fool of the Trans Law in Spain”, a video published by the Argentine political scientist Agustín Laje on 3 April 2023, in order to incite polarisation

around the fact that any man can go to the civil registry and become a woman. From this video, which has 78.2k “likes” and a duration of 6:52, two phrases have been selected in which the law is denigrated, in addition to generating polarisation and invoking negative emotions in the public: 1) “We have already seen the level of repression that exists in Spain in the name of inclusion, diversity, to minority rights, etc.” and 2) “It also throws overboard the fact that we live in a patriarchal system, one of oppression, where being born a woman is a curse”.

This type of content gives rise to others such as: “Women make money”, in which the author of the video published on 4 March 2023 by the user untiotoxico states: “Women no longer cry, women make money,” when pretending to be a trans woman named Noah. Other content also distorts the issue of self-declaration provided in the Trans Law, as in the case of “I am a trans woman and my name is Noah”, posted on 26 February 2023 by untiotoxico. It is a video in which a heterosexual man, from Vox, ironically says that he has now changed his sex and his name is Noah.

By distorting aspects of the legislation or providing irony around the issues already mentioned, this content favours negative polarisation in this case, causing anger to prevail as an emotion, which will be the centre of the next part of the analysis in this research. Taking into account that anger was the predominant emotion in the videos that present negative polarisation, we now focus on analysing the characteristics of this type of communication that manifests hatred and animosity.

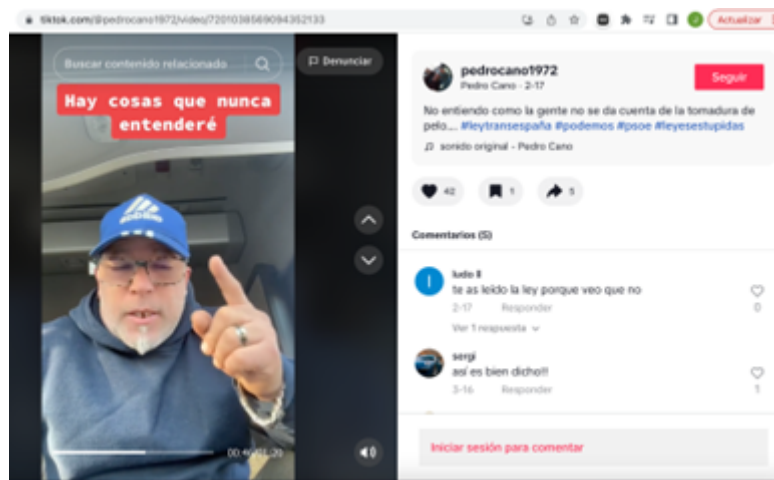
### **3.2. Proliferation of hatred towards the LGBTI+ community**

The spread of hate through the analysed videos is manifested through the use of discursive elements that aim to: 1) attack public figures and the Government; 2) use news and/or media to invoke this negative emotion with the public; 3) threaten women’s rights; and 4) attack the trans community. For this reason, below, we have selected phrases from the analysed content in which the proliferation of hate is evident.

In the first point, it is observed how TikTok users of some of the analysed videos use public figures to criticise the Trans Law, as is the case of Irene Montero in the sarcastic video entitled “Did the patriarchy win once again? #”, published on 20 March 2023 by melyverso, in which she includes part of a statement in which Roma Gallardo says that she is a woman and that Irene Montero is not. Another example is the video “What Sánchez says is that I produce a lot of testosterone...”, posted by santiabascal\_ on 6 March 2023, in which he satirises the approval of the Trans Law and the fact that Pedro Sánchez has spoken about equal representation; this can be clearly observed when he states: “Before the end of the legislative session, Mr. Sánchez can perceive himself as a madam, and therefore, for the first time there will be a female president in the national government”.

The manifestation of hatred directed at the Government in general is observed, on the one hand, for example, when the user pedrocano1972 shows his anger with the law and with “the aberration of the government” by saying: “women are being ignored on the left” in the video “I don’t understand how people don’t realise the joke... #leytransespaña #podemos #psoe #leyesestupidas”, posted on February 17, 2023 (see figure 1). On the other hand, there is evidence of the use of anger by jose77sanchez, who has achieved 22.9k “likes” on the video posted on 24 February 2023 to attack the Trans Law and also the Spanish Government. The expression of hate is reflected in the following sentences: “What the fuck is going on in Spain? What the fuck is going on with the Spaniards? What’s going on with us Latinos? That we are the ones chosen by the world’s elites to be a social experiment and determine how easy it is to control people...”.

Figure 1. Screenshot of the video posted by pedrocano1972



Source: TikTok.

Another technique used by the TikTok accounts analysed to proliferate hate and sustain negative polarisation is to use news and/or quote media, as occurs in the aforementioned video by Agustín Laje, which states: “The newspaper itself has to become an accomplice in this lie,” referring to the newspaper ABC, when it published the article about Roma Gallardo, who had declared herself a woman, and, therefore, is a woman. We find something similar in the post from the user astragalo2 (account currently deleted) who on 23 February 2023 broadcast a video titled “The first repentant trans woman in Spain sues the state” or that of the user albertorivera\_oficial who on February 24 shared a video entitled “First repentant trans #”; In both, an informative piece from Antena3 is shown in which the journalist Sandra Golpe narrates that a 24-year-old girl claims more than 300 000 euros from the public health system in order to start the process of gender transition when she was 16 years old, which she now regrets.

The threat to women’s rights constitutes a central theme in the sample analysed, which has been used to spread hatred towards the Trans Law, as can be seen in the statement

"...law that ends up granting women the same qualities as a Coca-Cola vending machine...", from the video "BEATRIZ GESTATIONAL PARENT AND NON-GESTATIONAL PARENT". This content, posted by *elpelao\_noticias* on 21 February 2023, references, in a derogatory manner, the change of the term mother to "mother or surrogate parent" in the Civil Code with the approval of the Trans Law. The use of fear is a key tool in this type of post, conveying the feeling of vulnerability and defenselessness against women's integrity, as user *paulattier* does in his post dated 27 February 2023 in which he states that the "Trans Law is an opportunity for degenerates" that has received 13K "likes" and shares by 1110 TikTok users; or from *unmorenomuylegal* when he argues in his video posted on 21 February 2023 that with the current law "the disgusting person who wants to get into the women's locker room will be able to do it".

The fourth and last point related to the spread of hate refers to the attacks on the trans community, as seen in the video posted on 19 March 2023 by *alexjimenezleon*, in which he ironically mentions that archaeologists only identify remains of men and women. The fact that the Trans Law allows the free self-determination of gender and that it includes as the only requirement for the change in the Civil Registry the "express declaration" of the person is a very criticised aspect and used in a derogatory and manifestly angry tone. This is what is conveyed by the videos from users such as *elpelao\_noticias* or *ramseyferrero\_cuenta\_5* posted on March 13 and 16, 2023, respectively.

## 4. Discussion and conclusions

This exploratory study has revealed the existence of a negative affective polarisation in TikTok posts related to the Spanish Trans Law, where emotions such as anger and disgust predominate. A trend towards hate messages has been shown, and various techniques and discursive resources used to spread this hate have been identified. The debate surrounding approval of the Trans Law in Spain on 28 February 2023 became especially virulent on social networks in a context of misinformation within the online ecosystem promoted by filter bubbles (Pariser, 2017) and echo chambers (Törnberg, 2018).

The present research aims to be an advancement in addressing these problems on TikTok, the platform preferred by children and adolescents (Guiñez-Cabrera and Mansilla-Obando, 2022). In response to the first objective established, the results show the existence of an affective polarisation, mostly negative (61%), understood as a factor that threatens current democracies, which leads to an "attitudinal and political extremism" (Waisbord, 2020).

The manifestations of hatred towards the Trans Law and the LGTBI+ community identified in this study corroborate, in addition to the existence of a negative affective polarisation (Olaz Capitán and Ortiz-García, 2021), the presence of an ideological polarisation (Miller, 2020) contrary to the new Spanish legislation. Regarding this last

aspect, the features of conservatism marked by heteronormativity stand out, which are observed in the messages posted in the videos analysed.

The data obtained from the study also show that the predominant emotions through which this polarisation is transmitted are anger and hate, to a lesser extent fear and surprise, which corroborates the preference of the younger user profile for short videos that often appear to have playful and humorous content close to entertainment, despite the fact that the discursive dynamic is based on hate speech that identifies certain social groups as “enemies” of “the people” (González-Aguilar et al., 2023).

Regarding the discursive techniques and resources used by TikTok users in their videos to project this hatred and in response to the second objective formulated, it is worth mentioning that in many cases the “Tiktokers” in the videos analysed use misinformation (Wardle, 2017; Wardle and Derakhshan, 2018) as a resource to generate polarisation and attack the LGTBI+ community. The results also highlight the use of satire as a very marked discursive resource, when ridiculing issues related to the loss of women’s rights or the fact that any man can declare themselves a woman with the approval of the Trans Law. In this case, as a consequence of polarisation, there is a rejection of the committed actors involved with the Trans Law, so that the contrast between “ours” and “others” and what would be “good” or “bad” is on display, according to the most conservative ideology (Waisbord, 2020).

In short, the use of social networks by the population to express emotions and perspectives on national events has made them a popular forum, but also a favourable support for the dissemination of polarising messages that lead to a negative affect and the multiplication of expressions of hate. TikTok has special significance due to its impact on the younger population – being preferred by children and adolescents (Guiñez-Cabrera and Mansilla-Obando, 2022) – and its intrinsic characteristics such as fleeting communication and audiovisual potential that make it a favourable channel of communication by populist parties as part of their online communication strategies (Bayarri et al., 2024; González-Aguilar et al., 2023).

The findings obtained underline the importance of addressing polarisation and hate on digital platforms in future research, especially on sensitive topics such as trans rights and other minority communities in order to develop new lines of study that explore the consequences of the use of algorithms in terms of discrimination against these minorities. No less relevant is the promotion of a constructive and respectful dialogue, which can occur as a result of developments on future research whose results can serve as a tool to promote digital literacy.



## Authors' contribution

**Juliana Colussi:** conceptualization, data collection, formal analysis, visualization, writing-original draft, writing review & editing. **Noelia García-Estévez:** data collection, methodology, visualization, supervision, formal analysis, writing-original draft, writing review & editing. **Lucia Ballesteros-Aguayo:** data collection, visualization, writing-original draft, writing review & editing. The authors have read and accepted the published version of the manuscript and declare that they have no conflict of interest. Availability of research data.

## Funding

The work has been funded by the Department of Journalism at the University of Malaga and with the support of the European Union-Next Generation.

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#### Notes

- 1 The main data matrix for this research can be consulted at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17632/cjnyhtm26r.1>
- 2 The full codebook can be consulted at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17632/r2ycsfcvwb.1>