
Analysis of Media Discourse and Social Audiences on Refugees in the Conflict in Ukraine

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The anonymity provided by social networks offers an ideal space for those who promote the rejection of refugees to publish and expand their discriminatory discourse. This research aims to analyze the discourse of the social audience of the Spanish press with regard to refugees. In this study, we extracted and analyzed the comments written by Twitter users on news related to refugees during the month following the outbreak of the Russian invasion of Ukraine (from 24 February to 24 March 2022) in the five newspapers with the largest number of followers on this social network: El País, El Mundo, ABC, eldiario.es, and La Vanguardia.

We examined a total of 1,581 comments on 232 news items. Through a critical analysis of the discourse, we determined the media's and their social audience's stance on refugees in the context of the conflict. Additionally, on a quantitative level, we conducted a content analysis of the feedback received by the media to measure the impact generated by this type of news. The results reveal the different frames used to portray refugees, with negative frames serving as indicators of rejection and hatred.

Keywords: *refugees, hate speech, social networks, Twitter, media.*

Hate speech against vulnerable audiences is currently considered one of the most worrying social problems due to its exponential increase (Torres, 2021). While it is true that hate speech against certain groups for reasons of national or ethnic origin, race, colour, ideology, religion, sexual inclination, etc., is something that dates back to the origins of societies themselves (Miró Llinares, 2016), in recent years the emergence of social networks has amplified this type of speech. Although the birth of social networks dates back

to around 2000, their popularity did not come about until a decade later, when their functionalities increased. Their users multiplied (Román-San-Miguel *et al.*, 2022), at which point the first researchers began to show that the fight against hate speech on social networks came up against numerous obstacles (Falxa, 2014) due, among other things, to anonymity, which allows users to hide behind their screens, resulting in the reach of their messages and influence being practically unlimited (Bustos *et al.*, 2019). In this sense, and by Burgos-García's opinion, if under the anonymity provided by social networks, behaviour that does not obey critical and constructive thinking is carried out, the limits to freedom of expression are being exceeded to the detriment of the rights of others (2019). Suppose we focus in particular on the social network Twitter, which has more than 500 million tweets per day. In that case, it can reflect the evolution of public opinion, significantly impacting a significant part of the population (Sayce, 2020). These tools that encourage user participation entail an unprecedented change in mentality (Pérez Soler, 2017), as many users now express their opinion regarding what is published in the media, with the subjectivity that this entails (Fernández Smith, 2017).

In short, we find that potentially offensive and dangerous messages against specific audiences seem to have found in social networks the ideal channels to multiply due to the capacity attributed to them to disperse, generate and enhance the effects of such messages (Ardèvol, 2016). We, therefore, see that this type of discourse is no longer the same since the emergence of cyberspace (Miró Llinares, 2016), as with prosumers, the new profiles of content generators (Islas, 2010), content is spread without regulation and with social influence (Cabo-Isasi and García-Juanatey, 2017).

Therefore, the increase in so-called hate speech in the online sphere, as stated in the *Online Hate and Harassment Report* by the Anti-Defamation League (2021), shows an increase in all forms of cyber-hate since 2018, in most of the world's social networks, making this problem a real challenge for today's societies. This is why for some years now, we have been witnessing, from different disciplines and fields of research, exceptional attention to hate speech because although hate speech can be considered as old as societies are, some studies note a direct link between hate messages posted on social networks and hateful behaviour in societies themselves (Congosto, 2014), there is a direct relationship between the online and offline world (Olmos *et al.*, 2020).

Regarding the definition of hate speech, there is, for the moment, no univocal definition due to the controversy generated by the subjectivity of hate as a freely interpreted feeling and the legal and ethical aspects to be considered (Cabo-Isasi and García-Juanatey, 2017). Thus, Kaufman links hate speech to the expression hate crime, which is related to the commission of crimes against certain people due to the social group to which they belong, and which can be disseminated orally, in writing, and in audiovisual form, in the media or on the Internet (2015). Gagliardone *et al.* (2015) define hate speech as any type of expression that directly incites acts of discrimination based on racial hatred or other forms of intolerance, extending the term to those expressions that promote prejudice, generating a climate of hostility that can lead to discriminatory acts and violent

attacks. For the United Nations, hate speech is any form of communication in speech, writing, or behaviour that is an attack or uses derogatory or discriminatory language about a person or group based on who they are or, in other words, based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, colour, descent, gender or other identifying factor (ONU, 2019).

On the other hand, according to data provided by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, in recent years, we have faced the largest migrant and refugee crisis in the world, with 85.8 million people displaced as a result of persecution, armed conflict, or human rights violations (ACNUR, 2020). We refer to migrants as people who move from one place to another, either within their own country or across international borders, for various reasons; and to refugees as people who, due to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, are outside the country of their nationality and are unable, or unwilling because of fear, to avail themselves of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of their former habitual residence as a result of such events, are unable or unwilling to return to it (ACNUR, 1951). To the above figures should be added the nearly 10 million people displaced from their homes as a result of the Russian invasion of Ukraine since the outbreak of the conflict, almost a quarter of Ukraine's population (ACNUR, 2022), of whom 4 million would have been internally displaced, while almost 5 million would have left the country, mainly to Poland, produced by the end of March 2022 the most significant population exodus in Europe since the Second World War (CEAR, 2022).

Situation of refugees from Ukraine (9 June, 2022)



Source: ACNUR.

In this sense, migrants and refugees are one of the groups most affected by hate speech, as reflected in the data collected during the migration crisis of 2015, where up to 7.5 million tweets were collected with the hashtags #refugees and #refugeecrisis (Siapera *et al.*, 2018), noting the rise of negative sentiment

against foreigners (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2015), also fuelling the study of the strategies followed on social networks by anti-immigration movements or xenophobic groups (Ekman, 2019). This increase in hate speech against refugees is consequently reflected in the increase in hate crimes, as stated in the report of the Ministry of the Interior on the Evolution of Hate Crimes in Spain in 2020, which indicates that of the total number of hate crimes and incidents registered by the State Security Forces and Corps (1,401 incidents in 2020), racism/xenophobia is the first cause of victimization, with 510 registered cases, which represents 36.4% of the total (Ministerio del Interior, 2020, p. 17). For all these reasons, it is necessary to carry out research such as this one, whose objective is to analyse the discourse of the social audience of the five Spanish newspapers with the most significant number of followers on the social network Twitter (*El País*, *El Mundo*, *ABC*, *eldiario.es* and *La Vanguardia*), about refugees, derived from the news published during the month following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, in order to determine their positioning and discourse, as well as that of the media itself on these people.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to analyse the discourse of the media and their social audience of the news published by the five Spanish newspapers with the most significant number of followers on the social network Twitter (*El País*, *El Mundo*, *ABC*, *eldiario.es* and *La Vanguardia*) referring to refugees, the first month of the Russian occupation of Ukraine was selected, that is, the news published from 24 February to 24 March 2022, and the readers' comments. In order to achieve the objectives set, the following research questions are posed: What is the media discourse on refugees during the first month of Russia's occupation of Ukraine? What is the media discourse on refugees during the first month of Russia's occupation of Ukraine? The first month of Russia's armed invasion of Ukraine was selected as the sample period because the conflict marked the global media agenda-setting during those first weeks. This analysis aims to show the acceptance, rejection, or normalization of refugees arriving in Spain and other receiving countries, such as Poland, Hungary, Germany, and Slovakia, among others, by the media and citizens.

This is descriptive research with a mixed methodology, combining qualitative methodology (discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis, after this CDA) with quantitative methodology (content analysis). Firstly, to obtain an overview of the media coverage of refugees from Ukraine, in addition to other asylum seekers of Syrian, Afghan, and Iranian origin, among others, and the feedback from the public, a content analysis was carried out on the news published and the reactions they elicited on the official Twitter profile of each media outlet. For each news item, we analysed the number of people who expressed their agreement with it by "liking" it, the number of times it was shared (retweeted) by followers, and the number of comments received.

Secondly, discourse analysis was carried out using the lexicographic technique of corpus linguistics through the frequencies of keywords written by the media

followers in their official Twitter profiles with the Atlas.ti software (Duque, 2014 and García-Suárez *et al.*, 2015). The CAQDAS software (Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software) has been used to clear the semantic frequency variable to establish the predominant discourse. In recent years there has been an increase in the number of methodological publications by the scientific community, which has led to the appearance of numerous computer tools at the service of analysis (Chaves-Montero *et al.*, 2020). In this sense, the offer of this type of software is increasingly wide (Valles, 2002). An example of this type of program is Atlas.ti. It was designed in the late 1980s by the German Thomas Murh. The analysis software applies the methodological approaches of Glaser and Strauss, a tool for analysing large volumes of textual data (Valles, 2002), which facilitates the exploitation of the results and their subsequent classification.

Thirdly, CDA was applied to the comments published by the selected media to determine their positioning according to the language used and their possible effect on the comments received by readers as a reaction to these same news items. In total, 232 news items were analysed, generating 1,581 comments. The inclusion criteria respond to two parameters: temporal and semantic. On the one hand, all news items published by the sample press in the selected period (between 24 February and 24 March 2022) are included. On the other hand, those that include the term “Refugees” in the headline of the news item are included. It should be clarified that the masculine plural includes all refugees regardless of gender in the media. For the analysis of the comments, those words that correspond to pronouns, articles, conjunctions, and prepositions have been discriminated, as they do not provide relevant information to the analysis of the discourse, as well as the descriptive terms “Russia” and “Ukraine” in all their variants “Russians,” “Ukrainians,” etc. All news items that did not meet the inclusion above criteria were discarded. The Twitter user names and nicknames of the authors of the comments analysed have been removed to guarantee their anonymity, as well as emoticons, gif formats, external links, and image and video files that provide more information as new forms of communication and digital language but which exceed the objective of the research.

CDA in social networks has been in existence for more than a decade and a half, years in which a large number of academic articles have been published by authors who determine that the language to be explored is informal (Alcalde, 2019), grammatically incorrect (Muñoz and Argüelles, 2010; Alcalde, 2019) and is mediated by technology (Boyd and Ellison, 2007) and is therefore interpreted within its digital context, which favours a language without the filters imposed by the printed press and face-to-face interpersonal communication. CDA does not focus exclusively on the linguistic aspect of the text, but instead on the ideological production it entails and the power relations it reproduces between interlocutors (Dijk, 2017). CDA makes it possible to answer questions related to the origin of the discourse, the context, the intention, and the perceived concept, among other variables. For Bonet (2012), it is the only methodology that addresses the distinction of the outstanding themes of the discourse, its purpose, where the sender is positioned (first person or third person), which discourses underlie the predominant discourse and detects the relations of power, ideology,

and hegemony of the dominant ideologies. Broadly speaking, Rossetti reduces all these dimensions of discourse in a three-dimensional way, “as a text; as a discursive practice embedded in a given social context; and as a form of social practice that expresses and, at the same time, shapes social relations” (2022, p. 97). CDA focuses on establishing direct relationships between the media discourse and its positioning toward refugees. For Wodak, it is essential to focus on the relations of domination between the people or media in a position to influence and how that influence can be analysed “through the various forms of their language” (2003, p. 19). This author, together with Íñiguez (2012), argues that those who control discourse can indirectly control people’s minds. Moreover, since people’s actions are controlled by their minds (knowledge, attitudes, ideology, norms, values), achieving the full inclusion of certain people, or, on the contrary, prolonging and favouring their social exclusion.

Research variables and indicators are differentiated between quantitative and qualitative analysis. For the former, the variables of visibility (number of news items), impact (number of “likes,” number of comments, and number of retweets), and lexicographic frequency of conceptual expressions (dominant discourse) were established. In the second stage of CDA, an analysis was carried out of all the comments posted by the social audience on the Twitter profile of the media outlet next to the news items that make up the sample in order to place them in the two variables established by Rojas-Lizana (2014): discriminatory discourse, disapproval or hate speech; and discourse of approval. A third variable has been added to this variable to categorize the discourse of those who have normalized refugees, accepting neutrality as part of the approval.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The data was collected using the advanced Twitter search engine in the five profiles analysed during the established period; the comments were located in the thread of the news items that met the inclusion criteria described in the research methodology. In this process, 232 news items were found that received a total of 1,581 comments. The following table shows the number of news items published by each media outlet (visibility) and their impact (repercussion) on their official Twitter social network profile. The overall results of all the news items published are presented to facilitate their interpretation in the analysis and reduce the size of the tables. They are shown in decreasing order concerning the impact generated (Table 1).

The newspaper that dedicated the most significant number of news items to the migratory movement caused by Russia’s war against Ukraine was *eldiario.es*, with 57 news items published, which received 1,257 “likes”, which were shared 670 times and generated 176 comments. *ABC* and *La Vanguardia* were next in the number of news items published, with 46 news items, respectively. *El Mundo* newspaper had the least number of news items dedicated to the topic. However, it generated the most significant impact, mainly due to the publications of the chef José Andrés from the Ukrainian border with Poland, four publications that

achieved 225 comments (34.4% of the total number of comments sent to this media); 1,836 retweets (39.2% of the total number of publications shared by users) and 7,787 “likes” (45.1% of the total number of likes received).

Table 1. Visibility and impact of news published about refugees in the Spanish press between 24 February and 24 March 2022

Visibility		Impact		
Media	News	Comments	Retweets	Likes
<i>El Mundo (@elmundoes)</i>	39	654	4.669	17.250
<i>El País (@el_pais)</i>	44	439	2.113	4.224
<i>ABC (@abc_es)</i>	46	234	720	1.631
<i>eldiario.es (@eldiarios)</i>	57	176	670	1.257
<i>La Vanguardia (@La Vanguardia)</i>	46	78	377	586
TOTAL	232	1.581	8.549	24.948

Source: Own elaboration.

Of the total number of news items published by the media in the sample, 24.5% correspond to *eldiario.es*; 19.8% to *ABC*; the same percentage to *La Vanguardia*; 18.9% to *El País*; and *El Mundo* closes the list with 16.8% of the news items published. Of the number of “likes” for each news item, those received by *El Mundo* stand out, accounting for 69.1% of the total, and, with a lower but significant percentage, the news items shared by 54.6% of the total, which indicates that *El Mundo* followers showed more significant interaction than those of the other media. For comments received, *El Mundo* also stands out with 41.3% of the total number of comments received. On the opposite side regarding the impact generated by its publications is *La Vanguardia*, whose “likes” account for 2.3% of the total, retweets for 4.4% of the total, and comments received for 4.9% of the total.

Regarding the media discourse in their news and publications, none of the newspapers analysed found hate speech or rejection of refugees from Ukraine. However, each media outlet focused on different concepts. After the lexicographical analysis of the media discourse, the following results were obtained: the dominant discourse of *El Mundo* prioritised the conceptual terms “War” (with a frequency of 9N), “Poland” (9N), “Invasion” (7N), “Border” (6N) and finally “Putin” and the chef “José Andrés” with 4N each; *El País* establishes as the dominant discourse “War” (10N), “Millions” (referring to millions of refugees, 10N), “Poland” (10N), “UN” (6N) and “Reception” (6N); for its part, *ABC* highlights “War” (10N), “Madrid” (as a host city, 6N), “Spain” (6N), “Poland” (5N) and “Border” (4N); in *eldiario.es*, news items dedicated to ‘War’ (14N), ‘Spain’ (8N), ‘Millions’ (also referring to millions of refugees, 8N), ‘Papers’ (about the asylum permits urgently approved by the Spanish Government, 7N) and ‘Madrid’ (as a host city, 5N) predominate; Finally, *La Vanguardia* focused its

discourse on ‘War’ (13N), ‘Border’ (11N); ‘Millions’ (of refugees, 10N), ‘People’ (referring to refugees, 9N) and ‘Reception’ (7N). War is the central theme of the news published by all media, regardless of their editorial line. The magnitude of the displacement caused by the conflict is highlighted by using the terms “Millions of refugees” in *El País*, *eldiario.es* and *La Vanguardia*. News items dedicated to the ‘Reception’ of people fleeing the war have a more significant presence in *El País* and *La Vanguardia*, while *ABC* and *eldiario.es* publish those that focus their discourse on Spain or Madrid. The newspaper *El Mundo* devotes the same amount of news to Chef José Andrés as to Vladimir Putin, with four news items each.

Table 2. Twitter social audience analysis on refugees between 24 February and 24 March 2022

<i>El Mundo</i>		<i>El País</i>		<i>ABC</i>		<i>eldiario.es</i>		<i>La Vanguardia</i>	
Dominant discourse	N	Dominant discourse	N	Dominant discourse	N	Dominant discourse	N	Dominant discourse	N
Putin	30	Ayuso	29	Help	7	War	12	Persons	3
War	19	War	27	España	6	España	9	Polonia	3
España	18	Government	23	War	6	Blue eyes	8	War	3
Thanks	15	España	17	People	5	Europa	6	Truth	3
José Andrés	14	Madrid	15	Ayuso, Brother, Invasion	4	Whites	6	“Ja” (laughter)	3

Source: Own elaboration.

The dominant discourse on the part of the social audience is different in each medium, as seen in the table, and the statistics of the main results are shown below. 4.5% (30N) of the comments sent to *El Mundo* had the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, as the object of reference, with 100% being negative and rejectionist messages. For the users of *El País*, the person who received the highest number of comments was the president of the Community of Madrid, Isabel Díaz Ayuso, to whom 6.6% (29N) of the comments were dedicated. Meanwhile, *ABC* users showed greater interest in the aid offered to refugees, with 2.9% (7N) of comments. War was, in the case of *eldiario.es*, the topic most cited by its Twitter users, with 6.8% (12N) of the comments. Finally, *La Vanguardia* users did not favour a specific topic, with the most cited terms being “people” refugees, Poland, war, “truth” and the exclamation to indicate laughter “ja”.

All the texts of the comments on the news items analysed are analysed below to respond to the research variables on the positioning of the social audience with respect to refugees. The ACD table of media discourse is omitted because 100% of the news items in the sample express approval and/or neutrality on the subject analysed. None of them shows discriminatory, disapproving or hateful discourse towards refugees.

Table 3 shows some representative examples of the ACD of comments written by the social audience on Twitter categorised in the variables of approving and/or neutral discourse and those framed within the discouraging discourse as discriminative, disapproving or hate speech.

Table 3. ACD of Twitter social audience discourse between 24 February and 24 March 2022

Media	Approval or neutral discourse		Discriminatory, disapproving or hate speech	
	Sample text	Number	Sample text	Number
<i>El Mundo</i> (@elmundoes)	“Don’t promise anything to the people, who are already hurt enough by the conflict. This is not a cocky joke, of driving thousands of kilometres in a car and leaving them on any pavement. The administrations, where are they? And the governments, don’t they intend to act? This Europe is lost”	643	“Soon we will be one of the most populous countries on Earth. How nice” or “I hope Spain will rise to the occasion and take in the Ukrainians. If in return they turn off the tap to everyone else, so much the better”.	11
<i>El País</i> (@el_pais)	“What a comparison, in 1939 all those who fled to France and were interned in quasi-concentration camps, who after fighting in Spain some of them had to fight against the Germans. The situation in Ukraine concerns us directly, they are our neighbours! “	420	“Refugees with education, not using hooks to attack the police, mostly women and children and not burly men who look like military men, real refugees” or “Some come to seek refuge and others to Islamise”.	19
<i>ABC</i> (@abc_es)	“Honestly, YOU ARE IDIOTS. Stop touching the balls and put means so that these people can be HAPPY and forget their experience”.	229	“Let him visit the centres for minors, expel them, deworm the centres and adapt them to the emergency situation of the Ukrainian people”.	5
<i>eldiario.es</i> (@eldiarioes)	“I, I don’t understand this taking away private property, no matter how Russian they are and no matter how bad we think the war and the attack on Ukraine is, can we take away the property of the Arabs on the Costa del Sol? I think it’s one thing to sanction the country...”	168	“These refugees come to occupy hospital beds, jobs and aid that will not be given to Spaniards... cowardly ultraderechita” or “If I don’t even want my mother-in-law at home, who am I going to want a Ukrainian”.	8

Media	Approval or neutral discourse		Discriminatory, disapproving or hate speech	
	Sample text	Number	Sample text	Number
<i>La Vanguardia</i> (@La Vanguardia)	"The painful part, they have rights and privacy. They should not be used politically or in the media".	78	-	0

Source: Own elaboration.

The discourse of the social audience of the five newspapers analysed on Twitter shows a marked support for refugees, mainly those from Ukraine rather than from other countries. The social audience that shows a discourse of acceptance or neutrality is *La Vanguardia*, where 100% of the comments sent by users (78) favour refugees, even asking for their image rights to be respected, as in the example shown. Of the 1,581 comments analysed, only this one mentions the right to privacy of those fleeing war.

The social audience that shows the most significant rejection of refugees is *El País*, where criticism such as this can be read: "The same authorities that cram Moors into centres and when they turn 18 release them onto the street, whether they are integrated/ready or not, so that they can make a living by mugging old people or robbing shops at knifepoint, give you advice on how to take in refugees" in 19 comments, which represents 4.3% of the total number of comments received by the media outlet. Meanwhile, *El Mundo* received 11 messages with discriminatory, disapproving and hateful discourse towards refugees, although this represents a lower percentage of the total number of comments sent, 1.6%. On the wall of *eldiario.es*, users post 8 messages against refugees, which means 4.5% of the total. Finally, 5 comments with discriminatory discourse were posted on *ABC*, representing 2.1% of all comments received.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In academic research and the media, as well as in other sectors such as politics and education, many articles, news items, political speeches, and teaching projects have been published in recent years that refer to the need to reduce hate speech against migrants and refugees. In this sense, as we have mentioned, the study of hate speech towards vulnerable audiences is relevant insofar as according to the opinion of many of the authors consulted, there is a direct correlation between the increase in hate speech and hate crimes. On the other hand, detecting hate speech opens up new research on its effects on citizens and the mechanisms to prevent it.

The first research question posed one of the significant conclusions being the participation of people with opposing ideological positions in the social Twitter audience of the media *El País* and *eldiario.es* to stir up controversy, hence the high percentage of racist and xenophobic messages sent to both media. However,

the social audience of these media does not participate in the debate of media they do not like, such as *El Mundo* or *ABC*. In this analysis, no hate speech has been found among the social audience of *La Vanguardia*, which means that it does not receive comments from people outside the editorial positioning of the media.

Concerning the visibility and impact of the news and publications analysed, despite *eldiario.es* being the newspaper that dedicated the most significant number of news items to refugees, the media that generated the most significant impact were *El Mundo* (17,250 “Likes”) and *El País* (4,224 “Likes”), which leads to the conclusion that the effects on the social audience are not related to the volume of the information but to the tone of the news and its source. Taking the publications of *El Mundo* as an example of this, the impact achieved by the chef José Andrés, who had a space in the medium in which he narrated in first person the situation of the people assisted on the Ukrainian-Polish border with his organisation World Central Kitchen, stands out. The conclusion is that the signing of a media personality, in this case, the chef José Andrés, is used by the media to generate traffic and increase its social audience. Still, it generates doubts about the genuine interest of the audience, as it is diluted between the character himself and the situation he narrates. In this case, it is the chef himself who is the protagonist of the news, leaving the refugees in the background (e.g., “This gentleman got into NGOs because of the debts and conflicts with the Trump Administration...”) and at the same time praise for his work, even patriotic pride from some users (e.g., “proud to have a Spaniard be the example of support...”).

Answering the second research question, it is worth mentioning the use of inclusive language in Spanish, as the media outlet that showed the most significant sensitivity towards the inclusion of women and girls fleeing Russia was *La Vanguardia*, using the term “refugiadas” instead of “refugiados” to refer to all of them in 9 of its 46 news items. In this sense, thanks to the ACD, a higher cultural and lexicographical level can be seen in *La Vanguardia's* comments than in the rest of the media, as shown by this comment from a user of the medium on Twitter: “Just as you say, some are economic migrants and others are refugees. The former is debatable, the latter is a moral and human duty”. Of all the comments on this medium, there are only two bad-sounding words: “A Slovenian PM’s friend” ... and “Fuck him for snitching”. In this medium, even annoying messages are written correctly. Let’s see an example referring to the media itself by a user who systematically copies, and in capital letters, the same message for five days in a row: “WHEN THE MEDIA AND GLOBALISTS CAMPAIGN ONLY SHOW THEIR “OFFICIAL VERSION” WE KNOW THAT A MONOLOGUE, AN ADOCTRINATION, A MANIPULATION AND THE TRUTH IS HAPPENING? WELL THANKS THE PRESS RADIO TV NETWORKS, THEY MASTICATE THEIR HEADLINES FOR YOU TO SWALLOW IT DOWN WITHOUT MORE”, it is clarified that for the content analysis and the ACD, only one of the five messages is taken into account so as not to alter the measurement.

Another of the conclusions reached is the favourable treatment given to refugees from Ukraine compared to other refugees from other non-European countries, as evidenced by frequent comments in all the media analysed that

appeal to the white skin and blue eyes of people from Ukraine as opposed to the dark colour of those who come from Syria, Afghanistan and the African continent in general; we see as an example a comment published in a news item in *El País*: “These are white Manolo, real people. Essentially because the vast majority of these other ‘refugees’ are nothing more than hustlers with a penchant for gambling and other things.... Hale, *The País*”; although some go further by using derogatory language as seen in the following example also sent to *El País*: “because they are white Europeans is the difference, isn’t it?”. One of the issues that most concerned *eldiario.es* users was related to the white skin (6N) and blue eyes (8N) of refugees from Ukraine, which makes them, according to the comments received, “*first class refugees*”, compared to other people who are also fleeing armed conflicts outside the EU, such as the war in Syria, Yemen or Afghanistan, among a long list. This shows a clear need to work on educommunication, where society must develop critical and ethical digital competence. Education must be the engine of change both in promoting media literacy and respect for human rights to achieve a fairer and more inclusive society.

In all the media analysed, we found users with opposing positions, often reaching the point of insulting and even directly threatening each other. In the software-assisted lexicographical analysis, the term “you are” was found to be the sixth most frequent term among users of the official Twitter profile of *El Mundo*, a verb which, on the one hand, denotes confrontation with disqualifications both among users and towards the protagonists of the news, as can be read in the following examples: “I bet you’re an anti-vaccine nut?”. Or this one was written in a publication by chef José Andrés “Come on Andrés, next time you go to the war in Syria, then to the war in Ethiopia, then to the war in Yemen... I suppose those people deserve the same, don’t they? Or is it that you are Ukrainian since Shiquitito”. And on the other hand, it is used to thank and praise the aid, in the case of this medium to the chef as mentioned above, although some also take the opportunity to criticise a third party: “Thank you, you are a source of pride for our country and our government is a disgrace”; or flattery without ulterior motives, “You are a person to be admired José Andrés, I wish there were more people like you in the world”.

Another conclusion drawn from this study is the need to regulate the comments of media users on social networks since there are messages that incite hatred of refugees, creating a misconception about them, such as this message sent to *eldiario.es* “These refugees come to occupy hospital beds, jobs and aid that will not be given to Spaniards... ultraderechita coward”, a clear example of hate speech that will remain published on the wall of the digital newspaper for years, encouraging rejection and misinformation.

Refugees need the media to normalise their reporting to stop being victims of persecution and xenophobia. It is up to the media to recognise the right to be a refugee, but, as the analysis shows, some media are part of the problem. The solution does not lie solely and exclusively in the field of communication but must be tackled transversally across all social sciences. It is, therefore, necessary for social organisations to consider tackling the increase in hate crimes and derogatory speech against refugees in all areas, from prevention to punishment

and assistance to the victim, which is why four lines of action have been proposed some lines of action. The political parties promote drafting a Comprehensive Hate Crimes Act to protect victims of xenophobic discourse and aggressions, both in the media and citizen participation. To educational institutions, to build bridges and strengthen a society distinguished by acceptance and tolerance of the weakest. The media have a social function as guarantors of democratic systems and could therefore implement internal codes of conduct to safeguard the integrity of refugees, regardless of their origin. It would be a step forward to have the support of social media providers to facilitate the monitoring of hate speech and xenophobia on social media, which is a breeding ground for the violence that refugees, unfortunately, continue to suffer.

Drawing on Kaufman (2015), we pose the following questions for discussion:

- Why, if in constitutional democracies, the protection of discriminated or vulnerable groups from abuse and violence is advocated in the language of rights, should abuse and violence be condoned on the Internet?
- Why is it not possible to transfer to the networks the rules, regulations, controls, prevention and other civilising mechanisms that make peaceful coexistence and the effective exercise of rights in democratic societies possible?
- Why should a reasonable control of the abuses of discourse, similar to that which can be erected in the physical public space, become a violation or an obstacle to that foundational modern right of freedom of expression?

The researchers leave these questions open for future research to answer them soon.

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