

Content Creators and The Rise of Hate Speech between Brazilians and Portuguese on Digital Platforms: Analysis of an Experiment on a Social Network

Criadores de Conteúdo e a Ascensão dos Discursos de Ódio entre Brasileiros e Portugueses em Plataformas Digitais: Análise de um Experimento em Rede Social

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DOI [10.34623/z2g4-rj46](https://doi.org/10.34623/z2g4-rj46)

Received 2024-01-02
Accepted 2024-01-23
Published 2024-02-29

How to cite and license

Soares dos Santos Neto, V. (2024). Content Creators and The Rise of Hate Speech between Brazilians and Portuguese on Digital Platforms: Analysis of an Experiment on a Social Network. *Rotura – Revista de Comunicação, Cultura e Artes*, 4(1). Retrieved from <https://publicacoes.ciac.pt/index.php/rotura/article/view/228>

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Abstract

In recent years, a notable escalation of hate discourse has emerged between Brazilians and Portuguese on various digital platforms, casting content creators as pivotal actors in this contentious phenomenon. This article purposes to explore the connection between content production on digital platforms regarding the immigration of Brazilians to Portugal and the emergence of hate speech. Employing the Case Study methodology (Yin, 2017) with a qualitative approach, the research entailed a practical experiment involving the establishment of an Instagram profile dedicated to publish content regarding immigration in Portugal. Data collected over a six-month period underwent scrutiny via Content Analysis (Bardin, 2011). The study infers that, despite the initial intent to inform and publicize content suitable to immigration and life in Portugal, hate discourses flourish organically among users, underscoring the imperative for an ethically informed editorial approach. The endorsement of educational initiatives and tools is advocated to empower both content creators and consumers in facing hate speech on digital platforms. This may encompass the establishment of digital monitoring observatories, the provision of targeted training for content creators and the creation of audiovisual awareness materials for the audiences.

Keywords

Case Study · Content Creators · Hate Speech · Immigration

Resumo

Nos últimos anos, temos observado um aumento significativo nos discursos de ódio entre brasileiros e portugueses em plataformas digitais, sendo os produtores de conteúdo frequentemente apontados como figuras centrais nesse fenômeno. Este artigo se propõe a examinar a interação entre a criação de conteúdo em plataformas digitais sobre a imigração de brasileiros para Portugal e a proliferação de discursos de ódio. Utilizando a metodologia de Estudo de Caso (Yin, 2017) com uma abordagem qualitativa, a pesquisa envolveu um experimento prático que consistiu na criação de um perfil no Instagram dedicado à publicação de conteúdo sobre imigração em Portugal. Os dados coletados ao longo de seis meses foram analisados por meio da Análise de Conteúdo (Bardin, 2011). O estudo sugere que, apesar da intenção inicial de informar e divulgar conteúdos relacionados à imigração e à vida em Portugal, os discursos de ódio surgem organicamente entre os usuários, destacando a necessidade de uma abordagem editorial eticamente informada. A promoção de iniciativas educacionais e ferramentas é defendida para capacitar tanto os produtores de conteúdo quanto os consumidores no enfrentamento dos discursos de ódio em plataformas digitais, incluindo o estabelecimento de observatórios de monitoramento digital, fornecimento de treinamento direcionado para influenciadores e criação de materiais audiovisuais de conscientização para o público.

Palavras-chave

Estudo de caso · Produtores de conteúdo · Discurso de ódio · Imigração

1. Initial notes

In recent years, there has been a conspicuous escalation of hate discourse between Brazilians and Portuguese across various digital platforms (Maurício, 2023). Beyond the intricate interplay of cultural, historical and social factors contributing to heightened tensions between these two communities, content creators¹ have been prominently cast as pivotal actors in the upscaling of this contentious phenomenon.

¹ In this study, we will adopt the term “Content Creators” to refer to profiles dedicated to producing content on social media platforms, so as not to limit the scope

Utilising platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook, content creators propagate a direct and personalised perspective of life living abroad, facilitating the sharing of experiences, challenges, and successes. Furthermore, a surge is noted in the emergence of “faceless profiles” dedicated to content production and the appropriation of pre-existing content available on the internet, with the objective of engaging their audience (Rice, 2022). This diverse landscape of content creation and dissemination significantly contributes to the nuanced nature of the ongoing discourse, thereby warranting a comprehensive analysis of the roles undertaken by various content creators in shaping perceptions and interactions within these digital spaces.

In recent times, big techs such as Meta and TikTok have started incorporating methods within their operations to encourage user-generated content on their platforms, including the option for video monetisation (Kopf, 2020). Given the potential for content monetisation, concerns have heightened regarding the lack of depth or fact-checking in content, as well as biased content that could act as vectors for the dissemination or incitement of hate speech (Muñoz, 2023). In this context, the adoption of such practices raises questions concerning the quality and authenticity of the generated content. Some users may prioritize controversial or polarising topics in their pursuit of increased views and engagement.

According to a study conducted by Capozano and Barros (2021, p. 253), often, “the quantitative logic of clickbait and content consumption time generates narratives that align more with the market-driven criteria for monetising YouTube and Facebook channels than a clear sense of the communicated message.”

Due to these new forms of sociability enabled by digital platforms, and especially with the consolidation of algorithmic logics, it becomes increasingly complex to understand how the communicative practices adopted by these content creators will reverberate on social platforms.

This case study², guided by the qualitative methodology and grounded in the theoretical framework

to “influencers”. We acknowledge the complexity of new profiles with specific definitions that deserve to be addressed in future research.

² The ongoing research provides a preliminary glimpse into the outcomes of the conducted experiment, provid-

proposed by Yin (2017), purposes to explore the connection between content production on digital platforms regarding the immigration of Brazilians to Portugal and the emergence of hate speech. Our premise entails the commencement of an inquiry into the critical role of promoting media literacy among content creators and consumers. This exploration underscores the significance of considering this content as a potential catalyst for the stimulation of hate speech.

In the progression of this research, we amalgamated theoretical findings with empirical data, aiming to thoroughly scrutinize the emergence and intensification of hate speech on social platforms, particularly its potential in polarising relations between Brazilians and Portuguese. To conduct this investigation, we selected an experimental design to evaluate both the thematic content and user responses associated with the disseminated materials. To achieve this objective, we created a dedicated Instagram profile focused on the theme of immigration in Portugal, seeking to acquire more accurate insights. Utilising Content Analysis (Bardin, 2011), we categorised the contents mobilised on Instagram and the main findings related to the engagement around such contents.

The undertaken methodological approach has afforded the unravelling of intricate dynamics inherent in the propagation of hate speech, exerting influence over the perceptions and interactions within the targeted communities. The theoretical analysis has laid the groundwork for a comprehensive conceptual understanding of the underlying dynamics of harmful discourses. Concurrently, the practical data has furnished tangible perceptions into the specific situation under examination.

The study accomplishes that, despite the non-intentional purpose behind the videos to promote hate, discussions organically emerge among users, which emphasises the necessity for a critical approach in editorial content choices. Therefore, a lack of understanding regarding the impact and responsibility of content creators in disseminating online information may result in inappropriate practices, including

ing a limited overview of the primary findings derived from the experiment. This exploration sets the stage for future research, where a more in-depth analysis will be undertaken to unravel the intricacies hinted at by the initial findings.

the propagation of stereotypes, misinformation or inadvertent encouragement of harmful behaviours. In response to these findings, the study notes that implementation of educational programs and tools stands recommended to empower both content creators and consumers in addressing hate speech on digital platforms.

2. Content creators and Immigration

For years, the media has exerted a direct influence on how citizens construct imaginaries and develop perceptions about life in a foreign country. Media narratives possess the capacity to shape individuals' perspectives on different nations, encompassing their traditions, lifestyles, and challenges. The portrayal of positive or negative representations, cultural stereotypes and, mainly, editorial choices holds the potential to significantly shape viewers' perceptions of the world beyond their national borders (Dekker & Engbersen, 2014).

Numerous studies scrutinize the significance of digital content creators in the platform era (Van Driel & Dumitrica, 2021; Marôpo *et al.*, 2022). On social media, rapidly ordinary individuals ascend to the status of influencers, serving as authorities for thousands of people across a diverse array of topics (Backaler, 2018).

In this context, with the ascent of digital platforms such as Instagram and Tik Tok, it has become paramount for immigrants, as these networks represent immensely significant communication tools for the promotion of new cultures and life worldwide. Through these platforms, users have the opportunity to share their experiences, success stories, overcome challenges and provide an authentic perspective on their lives in the new country (Jaramillo-Dent *et al.*, 2022).

However, unconsciously (or not), a significant portion of these users mobilise their skills on the platforms to encourage illegal practices that jeopardise the safety and rights of immigrants, who may face exploitation and precarious living and working conditions. The absence of responsibility or imprecision of facts in content production, promoting the dissemination of misinformation or insufficiently substantiated information, has emerged as a global issue (Koltay, 2011; Backaler, 2018).

For instance, beyond the cultural context and integration, these platforms have also evolved into a lucrative business. Content related to life abroad mobilizes and elicits comments, facilitating interaction with other users aspiring to immigrate to Portuguese lands (Nunes & Rothenburg, 2023). In this scenario, content creators utilise a large number of tools to promote workshops, mentorships, courses and other services that align with the expectations of those contemplating their journey abroad.

According to the Brazilian ambassador to Portugal, Raimundo Carreiro, “in Portugal, what we see are people offering facilities through social media, many of them young, creating the false idea that everything in the European country is easy” (Nunes & Rothenburg, 2023). These initiatives not only reflect the adaptability of immigrants to the digital environment but also highlight the demand for guidance and support in preparing for immigration. By capitalising on their experiences and empirical knowledge, these content creators provide practical observations for those considering a move to Portugal.

Nevertheless, it becomes essential to note that content creators actively participate in constructing imaginaries about life living abroad, emphasising differences between countries (Dekker & Engbersen, 2014). By sharing the possibilities and challenges of living in Europe, these users actively influence the expectations and aspirations of their followers, directly impacting their decisions regarding immigration and lifestyles. Undoubtedly, we are discussing communicative practices that, as a result of this influence, can lead individuals to precarious and vulnerable situations, subject to exploitation and marginalisation.³⁴

While not within the direct purview of our analysis, it constitutes a segment of the burgeoning landscape of hate speech on social media. The prevalence of such content suggests a notable demand for information regarding immigration. However, the presentation of this information holds significant consequences for both prospective immigrants

and immigration authorities. Furthermore, content related to immigration seems to elicit discomfort among native citizens, which tends to polarise the discussion about these topics at political levels and accentuate the spread of hate speech (Ekman, 2019).

The idealised or distorted representations by these content producers not only can lead to misguided decisions. Certainly, they also possess the potential to induce and fuel hate speech, extending their impact beyond their audience. In addition to contributing to polarisation and the spread of misinformation, such narratives create an environment conducive to the emergence of hostile and xenophobic discourses.

Avoiding the spread of misinformation in the “era of influencers” has been a crucial challenge, given their significant reach and impact on their audiences (Hobbs, 2021). Studies indicate that content creators often do not invest time in fact-checking or educating their audiences to critically evaluate received information. According to Muñoz (2023), a substantial number of these user is cognizant that content often merely needs to create the appearance of being genuine and authentic, without definitively subjecting the presented facts to analysis. Indeed, this tendency further exacerbates the issue of disinformation. Moreover, the absence of recognition concerning the social responsibility inherent in their influence arises as an imminent concern and of public interest.

Capoano & Barros (2021, p. 253) argue that:

On the web, one observes a process of easily assimilable content into language, alongside others that are more challenging to grasp, amid a cultural explosion. This is because at the intersection of connections between blogs, pages, and groups on Facebook, YouTube and Instagram channels, cultural explosions are taking place. In these dynamic systems, new meanings are generated for signs that communicate with ever-increasing speed and complexity.

Amidst this scenario, the role of content creators becomes increasingly pertinent to many fields of research, considering how content creators tend to handle digital tools and languages to disseminate and propagate information about migratory movements, which can result in damaging impacts on society in

³ <https://www.diariodocentrodomundo.com.br/policia-portuguesa-vestiga-influencers-brasileiros-que-incentivam-a-imigracao-para-o-pais/>

⁴ <https://pplware.sapo.pt/internet/ha-brasileiros-a-passar-fome-em-portugal-enganados-por-youtubers/>

various aspects. The dissemination of inaccurate guidance or the encouragement of irregular immigration, for example, often motivated by simplified and distorted narratives, tends to significantly contribute to increased pressure on migratory systems, leading to challenges for destination countries and even for regular immigrants themselves. It is undeniable that intense, disordered, and unrestrained migratory movements can entail serious problems for a nation, encompassing socio-economic challenges and issues related to security and infrastructure (Tarnu, 2016). Logically, content of this nature has ignited collective discontent among the Portuguese population concerning immigrants.

In addition to the economic considerations pertaining to migratory flows, there exists a conspicuous apprehension concerning hate speech and violence experienced by immigrants in Portugal, particularly within the Brazilian community, which constitutes the predominant immigrant demographic in the country. Presently, Brazilians constitute approximately 30% of the total immigrant population, having ascended to the position of the largest foreign community since 2007 in comparison to other immigrant groups (Santos *et al.*, 2010). This prevailing circumstance raises profound concerns regarding the safety and well-being of individuals pursuing opportunities in Portuguese territory. Acts of violence against immigrants can manifest through a spectrum of manifestations, ranging from instances of discrimination and xenophobia to more egregious occurrences of physical aggression.

Studies demonstrate a noteworthy upswing in the arrival of Brazilian immigrants in Portugal in recent years, subsequent to a decline in the first half of the second decade of the 21st century (Fernandes *et al.*, 2021). Some authors characterize this movement as the fourth wave⁵ of the immigration flow. In this scenario, there has been a discernible upward trajectory in hate speech directed towards Brazilians and Portuguese on digital platforms. Certainly, the

internet has evolved into a fertile ground for these discussions.

3. Discourses Inciting Hatred Between Brazilians vs. Portuguese on Digital Platforms

In recent years, complaints of xenophobia against Brazilian immigrants have experienced a surge of 505%, as evidenced by a survey conducted by the Commission for Equality and Against Racial Discrimination in Portugal (Negreiros, 2023). Despite being deemed a criminal offense in Portugal, the country demonstrates low rates of criminal convictions for such acts (Maurício, 2023). Undoubtedly, these data serve as an indicator prompting contemplation on the apparent liberty individuals often feel in making xenophobic comments, particularly in a domain where the subject matter is less likely to face stringent sanctions, notably within the realm of social media platforms.

Accurately delineating the origin or precise genesis of hate speech poses a challenge for researchers and, notably, for governmental entities. The adoption of machine learning for the identification of hate speech on social media has been used as a promising approach to tracking these contents (Balaji *et al.*, 2021). Using algorithms trained to discern and analyse texts, images, and videos, these tools aim to detect potentially offensive, harmful, or policy-violating content and report them to the platforms. Machine learning-based moderation facilitates a more agile response, enabling the classification and filtering of content in a scalable manner.

Hate speech can emanate from diverse sources, encompassing individuals, extremist groups, media outlets, social networks, online communities and even political leaders (Castaño-Pulgarín *et al.*, 2021). In the contemporary landscape of digital content creators, the curation of content by these actors adheres to logics centred on sustaining viewer attention, with a primary focus on engendering engagement (Bentley *et al.*, 2021). From this vantage point, content creators routinely employ discerning curation strategies to meticulously craft compelling content, leveraging visual elements, captivating narratives and direct interactions with their target audience.

In conjunction with immigrant content creators sharing their daily routines on contemporary media

⁵ The term “wave” in the context of migration refers to distinct periods of migratory flows sharing common characteristics, such as motivations, origins, and destinations. The recent increase in the arrival of Brazilian immigrants may reflect changes in economic, political, and social conditions in both Brazil and Portugal, influencing migration decisions.

platforms, there is a discernible trend wherein profiles produce video compilations, often without featuring the content creator on-screen. These profiles are distinctly focused on curating content available on the internet or through the creation of original material. Such accounts are commonly designated as “faceless profiles or channels”⁶.

According to Rice (2022), these entities stand out for their distinctive methodology, centred on video compilation, often devoid of explicit presence or identification of the content creator. Instead of emphasising a specific personality, these profiles concentrate on curating material available on the internet, either through the collation of existing videos or the generation of original content. In the context of decentralized content production, there is also notable provision of online courses for individuals seeking to become as content creators while maintaining anonymity on social media platforms. The pursuit of high engagement levels, manifested through likes, shares, and comments, plays a central role in stimulating the creation of these profiles.

Moreover, the monetisation aspect in creating content further reinforces this trend, as elucidated by Kopf (2020). This direct audience interaction not only reflects the impact and acceptance of the content but also directly influences visibility and audience reach (Bentley *et al.*, 2021). It is noteworthy that curation logics are intrinsically linked to the competitive dynamics of social networks, where user attention becomes a valuable resource.

Nevertheless, in the expeditious dissemination of content across digital platforms, the propagation of hostility between Brazilian and Portuguese populations has grown increasingly disconcerting. Memes, excerpts from news articles and informative content represent a subset of materials commonly generated, frequently lacking precision in factual accuracy or concern for the proportional impact these contents may exert on digital networks. The rapid and ubiquitous dissemination of such materials accentuates the critical necessity of addressing veracity and pro-

portionality concerns within the realm of social media. In the context of these instances, the deficit in literacy concerning the generation of such content, coupled with the absence of critical awareness about audience engagement in the dissemination of these messages, appears to be an ideal combination for the proliferation and perpetuation of misinformation.

Memes, often conceived to elicit humour or convey satirical messages, may unintentionally distort reality or oversimplify intricate issues (Rodríguez-Ferrández *et al.*, 2023). Excerpts from news articles, when taken out of context, can engender misunderstandings and, mostly, the dissemination of inaccurate informational content undermines the overall quality of available information online (Bolz, 2023).

In recent years, a discernible realisation has emerged regarding the design of social platforms, which, often geared towards maximising engagement and interactions, inadvertently fosters the dissemination of sensationalist and polarising content. This phenomenon contributes to the amplification and proliferation of perceived disparities among users. The instantaneous capacity to disseminate information and opinions on social media transcends geographical boundaries, precipitating discussions in diverse locations.

Algorithms prioritising content with a higher likelihood of eliciting emotional reactions, such as anger, surprise or indignation, tend to magnify the propagation of more extreme and polarised information (Corbu *et al.*, 2021). The foundational rationale behind this design is to retain users on the platforms for extended durations, thereby augmenting screen exposure time and, consequently, enhancing the advertising revenue of these organisations.

Platforms like TikTok and Instagram employ algorithms to tailor each user’s feed based on their interaction history, preferences and past behaviours (Kant, 2020). If a user frequently engages with xenophobic content, the algorithm may misinterpret this as an interest and, subsequently, provide more content of a similar nature.

In this context, algorithms designed to propagate and widely disseminate content on social media can accelerate the spread of xenophobic messages. Kaufman & Santaella (2020) assert that personalised content access based on algorithmic logic, facilitated by artificial intelligence, can lead to implications extending beyond the boundaries of screens. The

⁶ Due to the nature of profiles dedicated to content production without the presence of an individual actively in front of the screens, these profiles can be crucial owing to the anonymity and the way this “freedom of speech” becomes facilitated. Future studies should direct attention towards these profiles.

authors contend that “one of the most debated side effects is the formation of ‘bubbles’ or ‘echo chambers’ (clusters)” (Kaufman & Santaella, 2020, p. 6-7).

The concept of the “echo chamber effect” encompasses a circumstance wherein users are predominantly exposed to information and opinions that affirm and fortify their pre-existing beliefs and perspectives, thereby engendering an “information bubble” (Cinelli *et al.*, 2021). Social interaction within social networks, often predicated on ideological affinities, serves to intensify the formation of these information bubbles, facilitated by the instrumentalization of algorithms. This process can lead to the emergence of homogeneous online communities that reciprocally share and reinforce congruent views.

In this sense, this phenomenon not only configures individual experiences on the internet but also harbours profound implications for social and political dynamics, wielding influence over the formation of collective opinions and the trajectory of public discourse. What can exacerbate the propagation of hate speech is the establishment of informational bubbles perpetuated by misinformation and the fomentation of xenophobic discourse, exemplified as a case in point (Kaufman & Santaella, 2020).

In this trajectory, it is discerned that the depletion of content tailored for these users subtly imparts the user with the erroneous impression that these widely disseminated contents predominantly encapsulate a “truth” pertaining to the presented topics. This phenomenon arises because algorithms, through recurrent personalisation of the news feed based on user interactions, tend to iteratively reinforce specific themes, engendering information bubbles, as previously discussed.

This dynamic can yield various consequences, encompassing the distortion of reality perception, the fortification of pre-existing beliefs and the polarisation of opinions. The perception that a particular perspective is widely embraced can contribute to the formation of more homogenous online communities and, in certain instances, may even bolster extremist attitudes (Barberá, 2020).

As we attain this comprehension, we discern that in a context where specific narratives or negative comments attain prominence, whether through recommendation algorithms or specific content accessed from these profiles,

with the massification of digital social networks, episodes of xenophobia, racism, and hate speech have also come to occupy the online environment, which has become increasingly polarised. In this sense, anti-immigrant discourses may progressively lead to radicalisation, both within and outside digital social networks. However, it is through digital social networks that hate speech directed towards immigrants spreads more rapidly and effectively (Casa do Brasil de Lisboa, 2022, p. 3).

The report #MygramMyths⁷ summarizes that disinformation, across its multifaceted manifestations, exponentially exacerbates animosity between Brazilians and Portuguese, particularly within digital domains. As posited by the project’s investigators, “Social media platforms have become a stage for various types of discourse, including anti-immigration, hate speech, and xenophobia” (Casa do Brasil de Lisboa, 2022, p. 6).

As delineated in the report, when queried about the means through which civil society can counteract hate speech associated with immigration and immigrants in Portugal, respondents advocate for the efficacy of education and awareness campaigns. The prominence accorded to education signifies an acknowledgment of the necessity to tackle the foundational origins of these discourses by fostering a more comprehensive and enlightened comprehension of immigration and its intricacies (Ranieri *et al.*, 2016).

5. Methodological Design

This study positions itself as a Case Study, employing a qualitative approach for analysis and discussion. The adoption of a qualitative approach signifies a concentration on a comprehensive understanding and interpretation of the phenomena under inves-

⁷ The #MigraMyths project – Demystifying Immigration was funded by the Immigrant Associativism Support Program (PAAI), managed by the High Commission for Migration (ACM). The objective was to conduct an initial diagnosis, understanding the diverse realities, life stories, and experiences of the migratory process, especially concerning myths, stereotypes, prejudices, and fake news related to immigration and immigrants in Portugal (Casa do Brasil de Lisboa, 2022). Available on: https://migrant-integration.ec.europa.eu/news/combating-prejudice-and-promoting-diversity-portugal_en

tigation, facilitating a nuanced exploration of the specific case. According to Yin (2018), a case study permits a holistic and in-depth analysis of facts. The utilisation of a Case Study methodology permits the researcher to undertake targeted analyses, seeking to investigate phenomena within their natural context, without the need for universal generalisations.

To conduct this investigation, we elected to conduct an experiment with the primary objective of evaluating content and themes, while also scrutinising user responses to materials disseminated on a dedicated social media platform focusing on immigration-related content in Portugal. Recognising the potential unavailability of universal metrics such as shares and total likes, we opted to create a dedicated Instagram profile to acquire more precise insights.

The profile was established on July 6, 2023, and over a six-month period, 50 videos were published. For this experimental approach, a curation process was instituted, involving the systematic analysis of various profiles pertinent to the research. This analysis took into account the topics and content produced by profiles dedicated to the theme, proving instrumental in defining the themes addressed in the produced materials. The curation aimed to align content with the interests of the target audience, resulting in a strategic and contextualised approach intended to optimize relevance and engagement on social media platforms throughout the experiment.

A total of 50 videos were shared, comprising content gathered from online repositories (YouTube, TikTok, Instagram). Furthermore, original contents were created using tools such as Canva (for design) and Speech Synthesis (utilising AI-based audio narration).

At the conclusion of this period, the profile accumulated a remarkable total of 51,000 followers. This experimental approach offered an opportunity to closely examine audience interactions and engagement with specific content related to immigration in Portugal.

In conducting this study, utmost priority was accorded to adherence to ethical principles and compliance with the General Data Protection Law (LGPD) of the country where the research was conducted⁸. All data, inclusive of profiles, were appropriately

anonymised to safeguard participant privacy. Furthermore, content production adhered to the principle of accuracy, ensuring information precision and compliance with the legal foundation established for this study. These measures were implemented not only to protect participant privacy but also to guarantee the integrity and legitimacy of the research.

Upon the conclusion of the 6-month period, data were systematically collected and, subsequently, categorised with the aid of Content Analysis (Bardin, 2011), based on the themes/language mobilised in each of the presented contents. A total of 50 publications were collected, and the criteria are delineated in the table below.

Theme/Language	Criteria Used
Memes	Cultural elements, often in the form of images or videos, that are shared and modified through humour, satire, or cultural references
Podcast excerpts	Podcast excerpts, typically extracted to highlight an interesting, informative, or amusing part of the original content
Television excerpts	Excerpts from television programs or videos that are taken out of their original context and shared for various purposes, such as entertainment, information, or discussion
News videos	Videos that present information and current affairs, often including coverage of current events, news reports, or journalistic analyses
Informative videos	Videos created with the primary purpose of providing educational, explanatory, or enlightening information about a specific topic
Facts and Curiosities	Content that highlights interesting facts, curiosities, or factually accurate information about a specific topic
Tutorial videos	Instructional videos that provide step-by-step guidance on how to perform a specific task, learn a skill, or use a particular product

⁸ The study was conducted in Brazil.

Viral trends	Content created that follows a specific trend or challenge proposed by other users on the platform
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Table 1. Theme and criteria used in grouping publications.
Source: Authors (2023)

Subsequent to the systematic classification procedure, the data underwent grouping for the purpose of discerning contents that exhibited superior performance on the platform. The ensuing section encapsulates the pivotal findings gleaned from the research.

6. Discussion

6.1. Overview of produced content

During the operationalisation of the project, a considerable following of 51 thousand followers was amassed. This substantial follower count signifies a pronounced interest in the designated theme, affording a more nuanced exploration of interaction dynamics and audience reception throughout the experiment.

In terms of content diversity, the profile created a varied range of materials. Notably, informational videos constituted the most frequently produced content by the profile (17.7%). Following closely were TV excerpts (13.7%), podcast cuts (11.8%), and influencer video cuts (7.8%). These contents, pre-existing on the internet, underwent a meticulous selection and editing process to curate specific cuts for sharing on the platform.

Among the most viewed contents, memes emerged as the most consumed category (22.1%), followed by TV excerpts (20%), podcast cuts (13.7%), and comparative videos (11.3%). Notably, the contents that gained the highest virality were predominantly sourced from third-party origins.

This initial overview underscores the facile management of contents on social media, where the most consumed contents do not originate from the profile. This highlights an awareness of the ease of content replication on the internet, capable of resonating and reinforcing a specific perception of a given topic, as well as intensifying discussions about that topic.

Throughout the experimental period, it was observed that various contents published by the

profile, following a curation process, were readily replicated by other profiles. Such a practice appears to be commonplace on social networks, where other content creators analyse and emulate contents displaying high engagement value to achieve a similar effect on their profiles. However, in the realm of algorithmic logics, numerous other factors beyond the control of content creators can significantly influence user behaviour with such contents.

Despite the majority of contents being derived from external sources, they are susceptible to edits and framing by those managing the profile, underscoring the importance of critical analysis in consuming such contents. For instance, even if contents extracted from reputable media outlets were replicated by the profile, editorial bias can compromise how the message resonates on the networks (via cuts, captions, timing.).

In the examples below, the videos incorporate a call-to-action (CTA) prompting users to engage in specific types of actions. In the first video, a programme on RTP titled “Por Outro Lado” features a Brazilian television presenter discussing the Portuguese influence on sexuality and taste within Brazilian culture (1)⁹; The second video is an SIC investigation into the sale of Portuguese passports (2)¹⁰; and the third video is a podcast cut featuring Luccas Neto discussing the influence of his videos on Portuguese children (3)¹¹. As we can observe, in the first video, the CTA encourages the user to watch the video until the end; in the second video, the user is invited to share the video; and in the last video, to engage in a discussion on the subject.

The experimentation not only elucidates the intricacies of social media engagement. It also underscores the imperative to contemplate the impact of presentation and context on perception and the propagation of hate speech. In the specific context of this experiment, which involves a “faceless profile” with the content producer absents from the visual frame, a notable elevation in engagement is discerned. This elevation is attributed to the manner in which the content stimulates network conversations. In essence, the editorial decisions concerning

⁹ Available to watch on: bit.ly/3uN6LOC

¹⁰ Available to watch on: bit.ly/42U0JHZ

¹¹ Available to watch on: bit.ly/48zqQoW

content selection and their consequential impact are strategically crafted to captivate attention and foster network discussions.



Figure 1. Content published (1), (2) and (3). Source: Author (2024)



Figure 2. Most shared videos (1), (2) and (3). Source: Author (2024)

Among the videos most widely shared by users, a segment from a television programme emerges as the most shared. This segment pertains to the automatic residence authorisation for Brazilians in Portugal, amassing approximately 38 thousand shares (1)¹²; Subsequently, a video featuring a linguistic meme garnered around 30 thousand shares (2)¹³; followed by a news content with approximately 11 thousand shares, focusing on Brazilians residing in tents (3)¹⁴. This final content presents itself as a collage video crafted by the researcher, incorporating excerpts from pre-existing journalistic segments.

The recent public availability of share metrics, previously exclusive to content creators, reflects a

transformation in Instagram's design, underscoring the platform's current prioritisation of content sharing as a pivotal element in user engagement. In the network paradigm, the increased sharing of content not only extends the reach and dissemination of these materials but also underlines the platform's initiative to motivate users to create shareable content.

The videos that drew the most comments include a SIC report on the repatriation of a Brazilian at the airport, amassing around 7 thousand comments (1)¹⁵. In close succession is an informative video (produced by the profile) featuring an excerpt from the *Correio Braziliense* newspaper titled "Things Portuguese people don't like about Brazilians", eliciting approximately 6 thousand comments (2)¹⁶. The

¹² Available to watch on: bit.ly/3ULKhyU

¹³ Available to watch on: bit.ly/3UY5637

¹⁴ Available to watch on: bit.ly/48yHoNM

¹⁵ Available to watch on: bit.ly/49NlrXs

¹⁶ Available to watch on: bit.ly/49DyvDI

third most commented item is a meme highlighting linguistic differences between Portuguese spoken in

Brazil and Portugal, accumulating comments in the order of 3 (3)¹⁷.

¹⁷ Available to watch on: bit.ly/3SNSfxH



Figure 3. Most commented videos (1), (2) and (3). Source: Author (2024)

6.2. Incitement to Hate Speech: Practical Scenarios

Despite the initial intent of the experiment to inform and publicize content suitable to immigration and life in Portugal, the study focus attention on the organic rise of discussions from user interactions. Participants openly share their opinions, fostering an environment conducive to mutual stimulation. The video content, initially designed for informative purposes, inadvertently transforms into a platform for the expression of assorted perspectives, thereby contributing to the evolution of decontextualised debates and occasionally controversial content.

It is noteworthy that, in the specific context of this conducted experiment, instances of hate speech originate within the designated comment space. Illustrated in the case of the publication (Figure 4), the video centred around news-related content addressing the necessary procedures for a foreign citizen experiencing xenophobia in Portugal. The content aimed to inform and publicize the official channels disclosed by the Portuguese government for reporting such incidents.

The video published on November 9, 2023, was based on a xenophobic incident that occurred on November 6, 2023, at Lisbon International Airport. In the video¹⁸, a Portuguese citizen utters xenophobic phrases such as: “You pig! I am Portuguese by race.

You, who are Brazilian, go back to your land.” The video quickly went viral across numerous media outlets.

Based on the excerpt presented, we will notice the incidence of comments that go beyond the topic presented in the video. Namely, the comments do not pertain to the content of the video itself but tend to veer towards misogynistic and xenophobic remarks, exacerbating polarisation within the discussions. Despite not being the primary focus of this investigation, the profiles typically seem to represent ordinary users. Nonetheless, future research should maintain a broader political awareness regarding the rise of bots and professionally managed profiles guided by hashtags in the amplification of hate speech.



Figure 4. Original Post (right) and Comments on the Post (left). Source: Author (2024)

The comment “what have the Portuguese done to our country?” conveys a particular perspective,

¹⁸ Available to watch on: bit.ly/3lcd54R

perhaps expressing discontent regarding the impact of Portuguese culture on Brazil’s colonisation process. “These people looted Brazil”. This additional example emphasizes how a segment of Brazilians employs social media spaces to disseminate animosity rooted in historical, political and social events.

It is important to mention that, despite historical issues and divergences in the histories of both countries, social media discussions do not appear to contribute substantively to a constructive approach to these matters. On the contrary, online discussions often tend to amplify differences, fostering a polarised and hostile environment. This dynamic exposes the intricacies of online interactions, where the participatory culture of users can unpredictably shape the tone and direction of conversations.

In the second excerpt constituting our investigation (Figure 5), the featured video ¹⁹ presents another problematic case related to housing in Portugal. Published on September 21, 2023, the video is based on the assertion that Brazilians were residing in tents due to the high costs of renting.

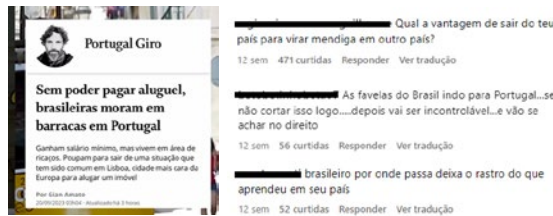


Figure 5. Original Post (right) and Comments on the Post (left). Source: Author (2024)

Drawing understandings from this content, it becomes apparent that the videos disseminated through the profile strategically delve into contemporary and contentious subjects with a substantial capacity to galvanize public sentiment. By engaging with issues that are either controversial or possess significant social relevance, these videos effectively seize the audience’s attention, eliciting interest and active participation. The selection of topics currently at the forefront of societal discussions enriches the discourse surrounding the content, as individuals tend to exhibit heightened curiosity and engagement

in conversations pertaining to matters that directly impact the broader society.

The analysis discerns that the video production hinged on themes enjoying prominence in the public sphere, illustrating a strategic alignment with prevailing trends and interests. This strategic manoeuvre highlights a keen awareness of the ever-evolving dynamics within social media, where visibility and engagement intricately intertwine with the prevalence of topical subjects. The performance of these contents, juxtaposed with those not aligned with ongoing trends, implies a favourable impact stemming from the astute selection of trending topics. This observation resonates with the inherent characteristics of platforms, where relevance and timeliness play pivotal roles in determining content reach and audience interaction.

In the realm of Instagram’s design, following a user’s comment on a post, subsequent responses materialize beneath the original comment. Through active engagement in responses, users contribute dynamically to the construction of a threaded discussion, where subsequent comments are hierarchically organised beneath the originating remark. This interactive space provides users with the opportunity to enhance or challenge the perspectives put forth by the initial commentator.

At first glance, this space appears to facilitate discussions. However, it is evident that as a user comment on the content discussed in the video, other users promptly emerge to express disagreement or escalate xenophobic or misogynistic behaviour, as depicted in Figure 5.

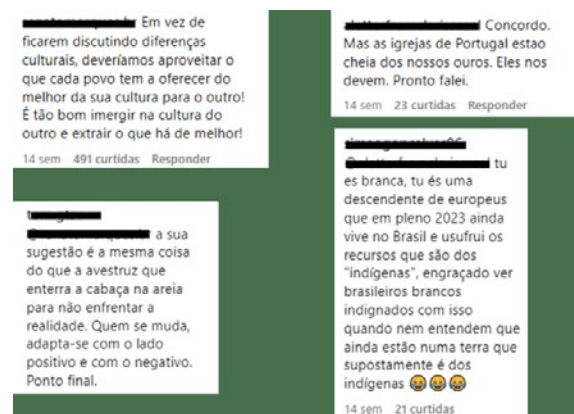


Figure 6. Comments Extracted from Publications. Source: Author (2024)

¹⁹ Available to watch on: bit.ly/42Q82ka

An additional aspect concerns in the amount of likes that these comments accumulate. Frequently, users peruse these comments without actively participating in direct responses. Likes play a pivotal role as a mechanism for ranking these comments, elevating the visibility of the most liked comments above others. It is noteworthy that likes are integral to the algorithmic logic inherent in social networks. Even though certain users may refrain from articulating their opinions directly, likes substantially contribute to shaping the trajectory and perception of these discourses.

At another juncture, another hate comment surfaces within the comments: “but Brazilians are too lazy”. In the realm of discussions within these online conversational spaces, one can discern the intricate challenge of navigating the delicate equilibrium between safeguarding freedom of expression and curbing hate speech that transgresses ethical, legal, and moral boundaries. Messages that disparage and marginalize one group in favour of another have a propensity to resonate, often in a detrimental manner. This resonance can amplify discussions and incite further instances of hate speech.

The conducted experiment accentuates the challenge of comprehending the dynamics of social networks while concurrently navigating ethical principles, a challenge faced by both content creators and consumers.

6.3. Possible Resolutions: Considering Media Literacy as an effort in Combating Disinformation

The ubiquity of hate speech within the digital realm underscores the imperative to contemplate prospective resolutions and intervention strategies. Addressing the conflicts between Portuguese and Brazilians may not yield an immediate or straightforward elucidation, necessitating a nuanced exploration of these issues within the context of their historical and sociological roots for a more profound understanding.

While certain instances of hate speech may find grounding in cultural, historical, and linguistic distinctions, it is discernible that digital platforms act as amplifiers for narratives sustaining stereotypes and prejudices. Our discourse, confined to the realm of social media, treats it as a singular instrument among various others contributing to misinforma-

tion and, consequently, the exacerbation of cases of xenophobia.

Despite our primary focus on the roles of prominent technology firms and civil society in the context of hate speech, due acknowledgment is imperative for the influence wielded by digital content creators, who occasionally, albeit unintentionally, fuel animosity. This alignment with the dynamics of the networks prompts a central question underlying this debate, namely, the delicate distinction delineating the roles of distinct content creators between information and disinformation, including sponsored content that bears semblance to informative content (Wellman *et al.*, 2020).

In contrast to Brazil, the European Union has proactively invested in campaigns promoting media literacy and critical awareness among influencers and consumers (O’Neill, 2010). Notably, France, on June 9, 2023, enacted a pioneering law regulating the activity of digital content creators, representing the first of its kind in combating disinformation and regulating influencers. In Brazil, a bill (Lei 10.937/2018), akin to the one enacted in France, was introduced in the Federal Chamber; however, the project was withdrawn from the agenda in the same year. These comparisons emphasize the protracted journey ahead for Brazil in addressing the dearth of educational policies to combat disinformation.

Ethical responsibility has burgeoned into a paramount concern. Throughout this analysis, a symptomatic phenomenon becomes apparent for both creators and consumers of media on digital platforms. In the context of content creators, ethical pressure is particularly conspicuous given their substantial role in shaping public opinion and directing audience behaviour. Nevertheless, the pursuit of engagement and monetisation of content introduces variables that demand consideration when evaluating ethical commitment in the digital sphere.

For consumers, it is imperative to empower them with the critical skills needed to analyse and comprehend media messages. However, the research underscores the importance of understanding how comments can reverberate in various ways, intensifying discussions to significant levels and contributing to the propagation of hate speech on social media.

This study illustrates that user perception often lacks a critical understanding of how comments

and responses to other users can contribute to large-scale attacks on social media. As highlighted, the absence of visible limits in these spaces fosters an environment conducive to harmful and hostile discourses, allowing negative interactions to proliferate rapidly and disseminate offensive messages, challenging the platforms' capacity to contain the deleterious impact of these behaviours.

These concerns, legitimate and widespread, have piqued the interest of researchers and governmental and non-governmental entities worldwide, particularly in the context of digital relationships. The rapid evolution of online interactions, coupled with the profound impact these relationships exert on society, has prompted a global mobilisation to comprehend and address ethical issues in cyberspace. Collaboration between academic, governmental and, mostly, civil society sectors become indispensable to develop effective strategies promoting responsibility, transparency and ethics in digital interactions, ensuring a healthier and more equitable online environment for all involved.

In this regard, studies on media literacy emerge prominently as an essential approach to understanding the intricacies of digital relationships. These studies not only pursue to analyse the dynamics of media interactions; media literacy studies aim to propose guidelines and strategies to empower the critical skills of both media consumers and creators (Koltay, 2011).

According to Silverstone (2004), media literacy is considered an extremely worthwhile alternative for citizens to exercise their citizenship in the face of various technological and media devices. This approach accentuates the importance of empowering people with the necessary skills to understand, interpret and, essentially, interact critically with media and technology, enabling active participation in modern society. In the context of social media, knowledge of the boundaries between information and misinformation becomes essential for exercising good citizenship.

Reddy *et al.* (2021) draw attention to ethical responsibility concerning the use of information and available technological tools. For the authors, digital literacy constitutes a dynamic process, given the rapid changes and mutations in the media ecosystem. Consequently, digital literacy is not defined as a

static set of skills; Indeed, media literacy constitutes itself as an ever-expanding field of inquiry, exploring avenues to reconsider and, more importantly, guide citizens on how they can adapt to changes in the digital media landscape to ensure deliberate, ethical, and knowledgeable utilisation of available tools.

The elucidation provided by this analysis on how users shape network conversations, frequently provoking hate speech, underscores the importance of contemplating strategies to enhance the depth of discussions concerning users' comments within networks. Understanding the societal resonance of these comments becomes paramount. This consideration is particularly crucial when engaging in discourse related to immigration, a subject that has gained significant popularity. Content creators bear the responsibility of exercising discernment regarding the topics addressed on their networks, seeking a balance between ethical principles and the pursuit of engagement.

In this vein, contemplating ways to empower digital content creators, especially those dedicated to producing content about life in Portugal, to adopt a critical judgment concerning how their content can avoid becoming vectors for articulating hate speech between the two cultures is crucial. Through media literacy, it is believed that content creators can play a significant role in building bridges of understanding between different cultures, thereby avoiding inadvertently contributing to divisive or harmful narratives.

Drawing from actions undertaken within the realm of studies on media literacy and its interrelations with media processes and practices, this space presents potential ramifications in understanding the dynamics between content creators and consumers. These involve considerations such as assessing the quality of content produced by content creators, analysing circulation processes on social platforms and the architecture of social media platforms, and developing curricula and informational materials within the realm of media literacy (Ferrés & Piscitelli, 2015; Borges *et al.*, 2021; Matos & Aguaded, 2023).

7. Conclusion

The study underlines the intricacies involved in examining hate speech within online environments, acknowledging that such discourses may or may not be instigated by content creators. These discourses

can also organically emerge from user discussions and associations related to the themes addressed by content creators.

Based on the analysis derived from the conducted experiment, it is evident that there is a rapid proliferation of profiles centred on immigration-related themes. This highlights how contentious content tends to surpass informative content in terms of engagement and reach. Consequently, the study posits that algorithmic logics play a pivotal role in the amplification of hate speech by prioritising content that stimulates conversation and xenophobic discourses between the two cultures.

Furthermore, based on the applied theoretical framework, it becomes apparent that content creators bear responsibility for immigration-related content. This is particularly relevant in the context of Portugal, given historical issues involving Brazilian influencers and Portuguese immigration services²⁰. This aspect emphasizes the influential role of content creators in shaping public opinion, particularly in contributing significantly to the dissemination of hate speech against immigrants.

As a guiding principle, the study advocates for the promotion of programs and tools that empower both content creators and consumers on digital platforms. To counteract this pervasive trend, critical empowerment is deemed essential for those involved in producing and consuming content on the subject. This may encompass the establishment of digital monitoring observatories, the provision of targeted training for content creators, and the creation of audiovisual awareness materials for the audiences.

Additionally, the absence of systematic studies that categorize the actions taken by content creators and critically evaluate content curation represents a significant gap in understanding the influence of these figures on the promotion of hate speech. A systematic approach would facilitate the analysis and identification of these users who utilize digital platforms to disseminate information about immigration, evaluating whether their practices contribute to fostering constructive dialogue or, conversely, fuelling harmful discourses.

Concerning this issue, it is vital to acknowledge that this study does not seek to furnish a conclusive solution for the eradication of hate speech. Nonetheless, it aspires that the insights cultivated by this work will lay the groundwork for novel directions and strategies in the fight against hate speech, with a particular emphasis on initiatives that prioritize media literacy.

²⁰ <https://observador.pt/2022/07/22/sef-investiga-pe-lo-menos-22-casos-de-influencers-brasileiros-em-portugal/>

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