

Spreadability and hate speech of radical conservatism: The Peruvian case on TikTok

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to establish a typology of the modes of spreadability of hate speech by radicalized conservative groups. Using Veron's semiotic model, we focused on three analytical dimensions of circulation: temporalization, spatialization, and tracking. This approach helped us understand the qualities of spreadability inherent in hate speech. Employing a qualitative methodological strategy, we selected a corpus of 188 videos featuring Peruvian radical conservatives on TikTok. Through this analysis, we identified four modes of spreadability among conservative groups on TikTok: contagion, propagation, contamination, and population. The modes of spreadability through contagion and propagation generate themes of change. Spreadability through contamination and population upholds the preservation of the past. The contribution of this study lies in explaining how the modes of circulation for conservative hate speech function as strategies within a cultural war aimed at ideological entrenchment.

ARTICLE INFO:

Volume: 09

Issue: 02

Winter 2023

ISSN: 2459-2943

DOI: 10.18680hss.2023.0018

Pages: 27-53

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KEYWORDS:

Hate Speech

TikTok

Conservatism

Far-Right

Virality

1. Introduction

Given the polarized social landscape, radical conservative groups have been excluded from traditional media, leading them to embrace an active and intense presence on social networks, which often feature lax levels of security against hate speech. The viral spread of these groups' messages across digital platforms has gained prominence, as it signifies a dispute

prioritizing cultural warfare over political control. Previous literature has focused on the conceptualization of hate speech; however, delving deeper into the tracking of messages is necessary for a comprehensive understanding of discursive strategies. Therefore, this study establishes a typology of hate speech propagation modes within radicalized conservative groups. Accordingly, the research question is posed as follows: What modes of hate speech spreadability are evident within Peruvian radical conservative groups on TikTok?

1.1. Who are the radical conservatives?

From a global perspective, specialized literature defines radical conservative groups as those whose discourse is characterized by social and political antagonism, the defense of national sovereignty threatened by immigrants, the populist labeling of any intellectual stance, the instrumentalization of law and order as the salvation of society, and a deep aversion to liberal democracy (Forti 2021, Merriman 2019). However, prior literature has emphasized the need to differentiate between classical and radical conservatives, as they are often mistakenly associated with religious groups or neo-fascists (Cuevas-Calderón et al. 2022, Fasce and Avendaño 2022, Richards et al. 2021, Strobl 2022).

Classical conservatives uphold hierarchy as a constitutive feature of society and warn that its violation triggers social crises (Swartz 2023). Their constitutive basis is the bourgeoisie, and they view enlightened liberalism and revolutionary socialism as their enemies (Min 2021). Consequently, their teleology implies ensuring relations of domination, as their highest values include hierarchical order and property. Their ultimate goal is to attain and preserve governmental and political power.

While sharing characteristics with classical conservatism, radical conservatism differs due to its positioning outside the political system and the use of propagation strategies. Classical conservatism centers on power struggles, whereas radical conservatism focuses on cultural disputes to establish discursive hegemony under “progressive dictatorship” (Cowe 2022, Demuru 2022, Fedatto 2023). These groups may convey contradictory messages or raise issues associated with the left; however, they always conclude with conservative demands, as seen in the cases of feminist nationalism or homonationalism (Farris 2017). Radical groups strive for a constant presence in traditional media, but their primary focus is on non-traditional media, such as social networks, where they aim to influence the cultural agenda and spread their vision through transgressive and provocative strategies (Forti 2020). In this regard, while classical conservatism aims to secure relations within the status quo, radical conservatism endeavors to transcend the political order by swiftly and comprehensively transforming society through a cultural war that converts into common sense what might have been sanctioned years ago.

1.2. Culture war in social networks

The struggle of radical conservatives aligns with a right-wing reading of Gramsci, as they focus on the capture of civil society and include the media, not just political society (Finlayson 2021, 2022; Schwingel 2022). Due to traditional media outlawing them, social networks have become their most prominent outlets (Al-Rawi 2021, Khoshsabk and Southcott 2019).

The strategy of radical conservatism involves transgression and provocation stemming from its positioning within the cultural agenda. Their technique is hate speech, and their technologies include the use of fake accounts to attack political enemies, the deployment of bots or troll farms to generate 'shitstorms,' or the propagation of fake news. 'Hate speech' is understood here as verbal or written expressions or behaviors that denigrate, defame, or attack an individual or group based on characteristics such as their race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, disability, or any other feature protected by the platform's community guidelines, in this case, on TikTok. Regarding the latter, rather than disinforming, such tactics legitimize ideological intuitions or establish an affiliation with radical conservatism. Notably, the most hate-filled messages go viral with the highest intensity (Fanjul 2021, Lee and Hosam 2020, Norocel 2018, Prusova and Gulevich 2020).

Therefore, social networks function as amplifiers when the objective is to wage a cultural war (Larsson 2020). In this context, our focus is on hate speech as a technique that employs hate rhetoric as a synonym for freedom of expression and portrays political correctness as an analogy to censorship (Aguilar 2023, Amores et al. 2021, Hernandez Urbano et al. 2021, Lee and Lee 2023, Nguyen et al. 2023, Ollagnier et al. 2023, Paz, Mayagoitia-Soria and González-Aguilar 2021, Weimann and Masri 2023).

1.3. Relevance of TikTok and radical conservatism

Prior research has highlighted that although social networks were initially perceived as platforms for participatory democracy, they have turned into a cesspit of hate (Avdeeff 2021, Le Compte and Klug 2021, Sánchez-Castillo and Mercado-Sáez 2021, Schaffar 2021, Wheatstone and O'Connor 2020). The same platforms have implemented rules to prevent communication that discriminates based on factors such as race, creed, disability, age, or sexuality. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram have been among the first to implement measures against hate speech, causing both classical and radical conservative groups to migrate to TikTok due to the laxity in detecting content that violates the rules of the community (Cuevas-Calderón et al. 2022, Cervi et al. 2023, Sherman 2020). Although algorithms have fine-tuned their detection systems, they are still more successful in TikTok.

Unlike other platforms, TikTok has operability that distinguishes it from other social networks, as it does not require a large number of followers or videos with many views for content to go viral (Klug et al. 2021, Peña-Fernandez, Larrondo-Ureta and Josep Morales-I-gras 2022, Slater 2022). TikTok's algorithm is known for its unique features that allow anonymous individuals to make their content viral and accurately connect interests shared by its users. Unlike other social networks, TikTok does not solely rely on hashtags or copies to display relevant content. It uses an advanced algorithm that searches for and suggests videos based on users' preferences and behaviors and the videos' characteristics. MIT Technology Review considered this one of the Top 10 Break-through Technologies in 2021 (Zhang and Liu 2021).

Consequently, TikTok is relevant for the study of curators not only due to the shift toward the platform but also as a cultural production device. Aligned with the aims of radical conservatives, TikTok serves as an ideal social network to study how messages are spread, helping us understand how hate speech evolves into common sense and magnifies existing differences.

1.4. Circulation: from viral spread to spreadability

Studies on the use of TikTok by radical conservative groups have revealed that the viral spread has become an effective tool to convey news about their political positions (Chobanyan and Niokolskaya 2021, MacKinnon, Kia and Lacombe-Duncan 2021). Viral spread combines conservative content from unknown or low-visitation users with viral hits (Schellewald 2021). Weimann and Masri confirmed this approach by noting that on the For You page, users do not need many followers to go viral (2023). Thus, videos will be shown to users who have interacted with similar ones within the application, making it easier to go viral on TikTok than on other social networks. Here, virality becomes the condition for conservative groups to confront a semiosphere presumably taken over by 'foreign elites' or 'communist groups' instituted within the State apparatus.

Recognizing virality as an assumed objective in producing conservative messages raises a semiotic question about the meaning of 'viral.' How has criticism approached this concept? Previous literature has used the term 'viral' (Peña-Fernandez, Larrondo-Ureta, and Josep Morales-I-gras 2022) to describe content's rapid and far-reaching dissemination through Diggs, shares, comments, and views. Moreover, cultural criticism has enriched this perspective from thinkers like Baudrillard (Samuels 2021) to the insights provided by others (Han 2022), revealing the use of the term 'viral' as a form of historicization of society where external elements such as technology or otherness affect our subjectivity. The term 'affection' used by theorists of virality is significant, given that, from their perspective, the contents are part of

strategies and tactics to “be able to affect” another (Terranova 2004). However, from the perspective of a mediation theory, the concept of virality has faced certain problems.

The transmedia and mediatization theoretical perspective has rejected the denomination of viral spread when referring to the transversal type of circulation to the media. This is because, in virality, participants are passive agents in communication. In reality, they play an active and participatory role. Therefore, concepts like virality and stickiness have been set aside in favor of the term spreadability (Jenkins, Ford and Green 2013).

Spreadability, rather than virality, has been presented as a form of media circulation underpinning the theoretical framework of transmedia theories. Theorists have chosen spreadability because it refers to the prosumer’s ability to circulate content in a participatory way. Unlike ‘stickiness,’ ‘memeification,’ and ‘viral spread,’ spreadability recognizes the social connections between individuals. Thus, it is built from dispersed material, diversified experiences, open-ended participation, motivation for dissemination, infinite and localized temporal networks, actants promoting from the grassroots, and collaboration between roles. The idea of discourse as a virus is inconvenient (Fratlicelli 2021). This is because the virus shares the same contagious discursive unit. Furthermore, spreadability implies constant change at the discursive level.

How did semiotics approach this debate? According to some studies, semiotics has theorized about contagion at both an inter-somatic and medial level. For instance, Landowski (2015) and Basso Fossali (2007) discussed how transmission and infection occur. It is important to note that these theories often involve ongoing processes. Regarding the spreadability analysis, starting with Veron’s socio-semiotic perspective on circulation is helpful. Like other semioticians, such as Lotman (1990), every media phenomenon has a gap or dialectical contradiction between presences. This gap prevents a linear transmission between production and recognition, which can be identified in the discourse that reports its emission forms and in the reception of the discourse. Veron (2004a, 2013) also discussed this concept in greater detail.

Production and recognition, center, and periphery are only clots of a fluidized process of semiosis in constant imbalance (Verón 2004b). Circulation is the process that sets the value produced in motion and is proper for enunciation. Thus, all media chains have a constitutive mismatch between production (grammar of production), product (object discourse), and consumption (grammar of recognition). A study (Veron 2004a) has proposed qualitatively different forms produced by this gap, aligning with another study’s (Jenkins, Ford and Green 2013) critique of virality. Following Verón, this study chooses the concept of spreadability as a mode of circulation because there exists a lag between the production of content and its recognition that is not addressed by the concept of ‘virality.’ Contents (discourses) evolve (continuity) or revolutionize (discontinuity) in recognition as they “proliferate” in circulation (Verón 2013:210).

Although Verón did not delve into circulation processes at the level of digital spreadability, scholars (Carlón 2022) have enriched his hypotheses by identifying types of digital circulation (ascending, descending, horizontal, and transversal) between social networks and mass media. However, this proposal primarily provides an extensive description of the phenomenon and does not delve into the defining quality of propagation. Merely capturing moments of circulation falls short; instead, a comprehensive portrayal of spreadability's quality is required. The displacement of content through the media is one of the other dimensions that can semiotically define spreadability. Likewise, semiotics can adopt a position concerning the traditional way of studying virality, quantifying the reach and speed of content diffusion. Therefore, it is not a matter of opposing a qualitative (intensive) mode to a quantitative (extensive) mode but to scrutinize the correlations between the two aspects (Verón 2013: 307).

Along these lines, qualitative modes of describing circulation complement the extensive (quantitative) approaches that identify whether a piece of content is viral, such as the number of likes, comments, or shares. From this socio-semiotic perspective, grammatical structures are identified within creators' content and their followers' responses to identify gaps, discrepancies, and contradictions between them. Consequently, this study adopts a theoretical approach that focuses on the quality of the circulation of messages from radical conservatives on TikTok.

1.5. Dimensions of spreadability: space, time, and tracking

The study of circulation is evanescent (Verón 2014b). This is because it belongs to the order of becoming an event. That is to say, semiosis occurs in the interval, as communication is established between disparate elements (Deleuze 1995). This does not imply that the analysis does not start from categories or dimensions that fit the study of circulation phenomena. Various categories of analysis have been employed to examine the circulation of an exhibition at the Georges Pompidou Center and in the study on travel narratives (Verón 2013). These categories of analysis encompass temporality, waiting, journey, connection, and density in space to understand users' progression in these contexts (Verón 2013: 305-360). Given the above, the gap between production and recognition (consumption) allows us to study the qualities of the spreadability of conservative messages in TikTok across three dimensions: spatiality, temporality, and tracking (see Table 1).

These dimensions have been quantitatively operationalized in another research. Regarding the temporal dimension, the literature has proposed virality as an estimation through the time or speed of video exposure (MacKinnon, Kia and Lacombe-Duncan 2021). In the case of spatiality, the numerical reach (scale) of the viral content (Gray 2021, Peña-Fernandez 2022) has defined the digital space of dissemination. The analysis of interactions in TikTok has highlighted the prominent presence of the tracking dimension. This dimension has been manifested in the references between videos on the platform,

in the connections between videos and comments, and in the relationships with media content from other mass formats, such as television (Cervi and Marín-Lladó 2021). The theoretical approach of this study is semiotic and seeks to be complementary to the previous quantitative approach. The study approach is supported by experiences within the disciplinary field itself, given that the dimensions of temporality, spatiality, and tracking are constant in semiotic circulation analyses (Floch 2002, Marsciani 2022, Verón 2013). Likewise, we have embarked on an exploratory study that addresses the dimensions of spatiality and temporality to theoretically define the grammar of production for conservative groups on TikTok (Cuevas-Calderón et al. 2022).

Table 1. Dimensions for the Study of Message Spreadability Circulation in TikTok

SPREADABILITY DIMENSIONS				
Spatiality	concentrated	specialized	broad	diffuse
Temporality	fragile	ephemeral	resistant	durable
Tracking	discontinuous	non-continuous	non-discontinuous	continuous

Spatiality is defined as a lag relationship between the amount of information that can be communicated on TikTok through videos and the response to comments on the TikTok platform (Du, Lin and Zhang 2022, Hartley et al. 2020). Considering that space is a concept established through analytical definitions of the center-periphery, production-reception relationship, the digital space is shaped by how close or distant each of these two points is. If the reception of the message adheres to all the indications of conservative content, a concentrated spatiality is created; however, if the messages diverge from the original content of the account, then a broad digital space is formed. Thus, lags can be concentrated, specialized, wide, or diffused between video production and recognition in comments.

Moreover, within conservative groups in TikTok, the concept of ‘concentrated’ emerges as a type of ‘low lag’ in comment recognition. The ‘specialization’ opens the lag and presents comments that take up some secondary elements in the video that are not part of the main content. Likewise, the ‘broad’ mode expands the differences between the videos and the comments, widening the gap. Finally, the ‘broad’ mode has a differentiated lag, as it blurs the boundaries between videos and comments, creating forms of speculation through rumor.

The dimension of temporality refers to the time of interactions among production, discourse, and recognition. At a quantitative level, temporality is measurable, as, in terms of virality, videos that fluctuate between 15 and 60 seconds generate the most interaction (Gray 2021, Guíñez and Mansilla 2022). However, this chronological value generates a

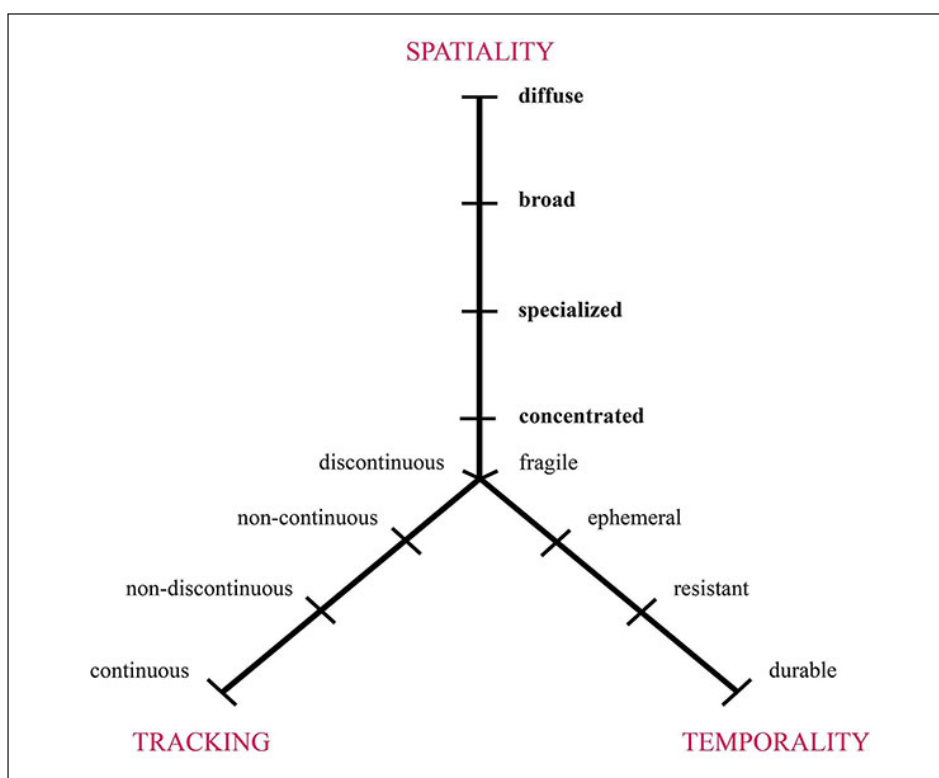


Figure 1. Visual Scheme of Spreadability

black figure, which does not consider the thematic variety. Therefore, more than a metric factor, we need a unit that allows us to express a qualitative factor that accounts for a cognitive and emotional component sustained in production and recognition. Thus, following a study (Weimann-Saks et al. 2022), the present investigation considers that the quality that maintains the time of spreadability is the participants' belief in the discourse of the videos, that is, users' trust in the information they are exposed to through the media. Thus, the fragile, ephemeral, resistant, and lasting temporality are qualities generated by the belief sustained by the gap between production and recognition.

The tracking plays a fundamental role in TikTok, as it registers the displacement of information between mass media and the contents created in social networks, and vice versa. Thus, discontinuity is characterized by interruption, either by a comment or by leaving the platform. This causes the video to 'jump' to other mass media and formats, losing its original tracking path. It can become a meme or other type of content outside of TikTok. Furthermore, non-continuous content is completely lost from TikTok and goes to different spaces, such as the street. Non-continuous content recovers its tracking, thinking about its distribution on other platforms like Twitter. Finally, continuous content remains trending on TikTok, maintaining its tracking within the platform. It is widespread and remains relevant in the context of TikTok. This study organizes these three categories within a visual framework to vividly depict their interrelationships.

2. Methodology

The social semiosis approach was considered to formulate a theoretical-methodological model to analyze the modes of spreadability of messages of radical conservatives (Veron 2004b). Namely, there exist three stages encompassing the criteria of production, recognition, and circulation. In this regard, the first stage corresponding to the production criteria was the construction of the corpus. Based on the previous studies, the unit of analysis included the video in TikTok selected from a set of inclusion and exclusion criteria that specify what is and what is not a content of radical conservatism (production grammar). Based on the methodology used previously (Cuevas-Calderón et al. 2022, Weimann and Masri 2020), the videos ($n = 188$) in this study were selected by recognizing the production criteria that allowed us to choose the data of Peruvian radical conservative groups.

1. Creation of a sterile account dedicated to research and the detection of hashtags in TikTok videos to make an initial immersion in the quality of the videos for five hours a day for three months.
2. Deepen the search from the content offered from the “For you” section and induce the algorithm to offer content limited to the interactions acquired through “Follow,” “Like,” and “Comment” for one month.
3. Creation of a list of accounts (Following) and videos using the “For you” section as a refined search engine to obtain videos whose producers and recipients included radical conservatives.

We performed the data collection manually and not via software due to the nature of the content expressed by radical conservatives, which involves hate speech (Jaramillo-Dent et al. 2022, Weimann and Masri 2020). As this content is sensitive and could be subject to censorship by TikTok, it is usually covered up with distraction strategies (hashtags that emulate trends, music that refers to trends, or content unrelated to the quality of the video). The use of technologies based on metric and technical parameters vitiated the sample and was not detected by the software; thus, we used manual collection to ensure the validity and diversity of the sample.

The second stage related to the recognition criteria involved triangulating the videos selected as object discourse, the comments as part of the reception grammars, and the profiles of TikTok users as part of the production grammars.

The third stage, circulation criteria, included tracing the forms of production and reception of the previous stages within the platform to identify interaction gaps. As a result of this triangulation, the analysis revealed a series of gaps that created various circulation spaces. Some comments adhered to the enunciation of the videos, and others made visible differentiated conditions in their recognition.

In line with the above, we described the production and reception of messages that cut across all hate speech communication among radical conservatives on TikTok. We considered three constant components indicated by researchers (Forti 2021, Strobl 2022) as transversal inputs in all communications exceeding community norms on TikTok: fear, insecurity, and loneliness. However, the authors above merely grouped different qualities of messages under hate speech and neglected the gradients appearing in each of these. Consequently, we identified this research gap by contributing the qualities of fear, insecurity, and loneliness.

Table 2. Affect Qualities in Radical Conservatives

Message Components according to Forti (2021) and Strobl (2022)	Message Qualities
Fear	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reaction against someone • fright against something • concern for the nation • fear against communism
Insecurity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reactive against the antagonist • propositional against the detrimental aspect • evasive against situational evil • defensive against universal evil
Loneliness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • loss of one's close circle • loss of one's amical-labor group • loss of the nation • loss of the homeland

However, following Veron's model, we used the description of gradualities to define the spreadability modes based on their time lag between production and recognition. Therefore, to enhance explanatory clarity, we first presented the gradualities of the transversal inputs of hate speech (fear, insecurity, and loneliness) and introduced the dimensions found in the spreadability scheme (see Fig. 1). This resulted in the emergence of its forms as follows: contagion, propagation, contamination, and population of hate messages from radical conservatives in TikTok.

This approach diverges from an "immanentist" analysis, as it does not stop at identifying the grammar of production through the traces of the videos. Our proposal is rooted in acknowledging the gap between the messages produced by radical conservatives and their recognition through the comments and modes of spreadability within the platform. However, the so-called 'inmanentist' analysis Verón (2004a) referred to has significantly contributed to the ethnographic field in its post-structural era, appreciating the mobile and changing nature of the object of study (texts). Thus,

the relationship between Verón and poststructural semioticians such as Eric Landowski (2007) and Basso-Fossali (2015) finds relevance in studying circulation at specific points. Accordingly, they have been employed to identify a level of more or less direct digital interaction corresponding to the description of medial or intercorporeal space presented by Basso-Fossali and Eric Landowski, respectively, which we have termed as 'contagion.' We find the intercommunication that Eliseo Verón maintains with post-structural semiotics valuable for optimizing the interpretation of our findings.

3. Results and discussion

The main objective of Veron (2013) is to associate political objectives with media pressures. In this context, the relationships of political mediatization shift from televised mechanisms to online linguistic strategies. The structural conditions of the conflict are established on the digital platform and introduce individuals into a collective (collective as a set of social actors) formed by points of convergence such as fear, insecurity, and loneliness (Forti 2021, Strobl 2022). In this case, they are long-term identity collectives, as they emphasize rules inherent to libertarian thinking (existing collectives). Still, in most cases, they are more affective modes of contact, such as communication collectives without rules associating them ("I am different from them"), except for repulsion towards the other and enunciation from the 'Self.' The latter case shapes the collective as momentary agglomerations that define the media collective. In this sense, the collective is constructed through its circulation in various types of propagation, whether as a media collective through contagion, spread, contamination, and population. They are not passive communities but rather participatory and content-creating entities that alter their definition of the collective according to their digital interaction. We will now explain these changes in the digital collective of conservative groups through their four forms of propagation.

3.1. Contagion

The first approach explains how fear, loneliness, and insecurity manifested in a specific mode of spreadability among radical conservative groups. Many cases have indicated that fear serves as an affective strategy aiming to terrorize through the personification of someone. The choice of the term 'terrorize' is not incidental, given its frequent appearance in hate speech, often using the label 'terrorist' to depict those opposing radical conservative stances. Likewise, another form of somatization is to focus fear on immigrants (Jaramillo-Dent et al. 2022).

Hate affects construct insecurity, serving as an emblem of concern against specific enemies. Consequently, this insecurity is an ongoing struggle against perceived wrongdoers, expressed through visceral and vivid tones. Thus, when dealing with anguish generated by personified enemies, insecurity manifests itself as the overcoming

and eliminating of the enemy, either with its exclusion from politics or symbolically with its expulsion (for example, through border closures).

Loneliness, in the context of hate speech, takes on the form of emotional emptiness within the inner circle. The blame for such depopulation can be attributed to terrorists or immigrants, leading to the perception that minorities have gained influence, subsequently depersonalizing the intimate realm. This expression of loneliness is marked by a sense of isolation, and from their perspective, insults and attacks remain as 'just reasons,' even if that can lead to censure. Generally, such 'reasons' arise from the fact that fewer and fewer people have the judgment to detect the encroachment of terrorists. Therefore, the proposed solution emerges from the rupture with liberal democracy, advocating concrete answers and not demagogic solutions.

The thematic observation of the affects of production and recognition allows us to define the type of circulation involved in this first description. Thus, we may refer to contagion as the gap between the affective conditions of production and recognition of fear against someone, insecurity with the terrorist enemy, and loneliness due to isolation from peers.

Consequently, we can interpret contagion as the intersomatic relationship (A-B) of the affects of fear, insecurity, and loneliness between production and recognition at a medial or phenomenological level (Basso Fossali 2007, Landowski 2015). In other words, contagion is a type of spreadability that occurs when agents enter a direct infectious relationship (A infects B). Therefore, hate speech driven by fear against someone, insecurity against the terrorist enemy, and loneliness due to isolation translates into the circulation of a concentrated digital space, non-continuous content tracking, and a brief time of spreadability.

- Ephemeral time arises from the strong coherence and familiarity between production and recognition. In this sense, spreadability is contagious because users interacting with individual TikToks are specific to a highly unified group (McKinnon et al. 2021).
- Concentrated spacing (see Figure 1) emerges when only those participants who respond directly to the explicit insults in the videos are involved. In this scenario, the lag between videos and comments is weak, as both elements remain within the same subject matter.
- Non-continuous tracking unfolds as the videos generated by conservative users transfer TikTok's content to the physical realm of the streets. Thus, adopting an electoral rationale, interviews frequently ensue, wherein passers-by are engaged to underscore that terrorists and Venezuelan immigrants embody major societal issues. Therefore, despite employing false data and interpretative hyperbole rather than offering a fact, these interviews present a narrative that is present and constantly debated in social networks (Finlayson 2022).

Thus, we graphically express the contagion in the following scheme (see Fig. 2).

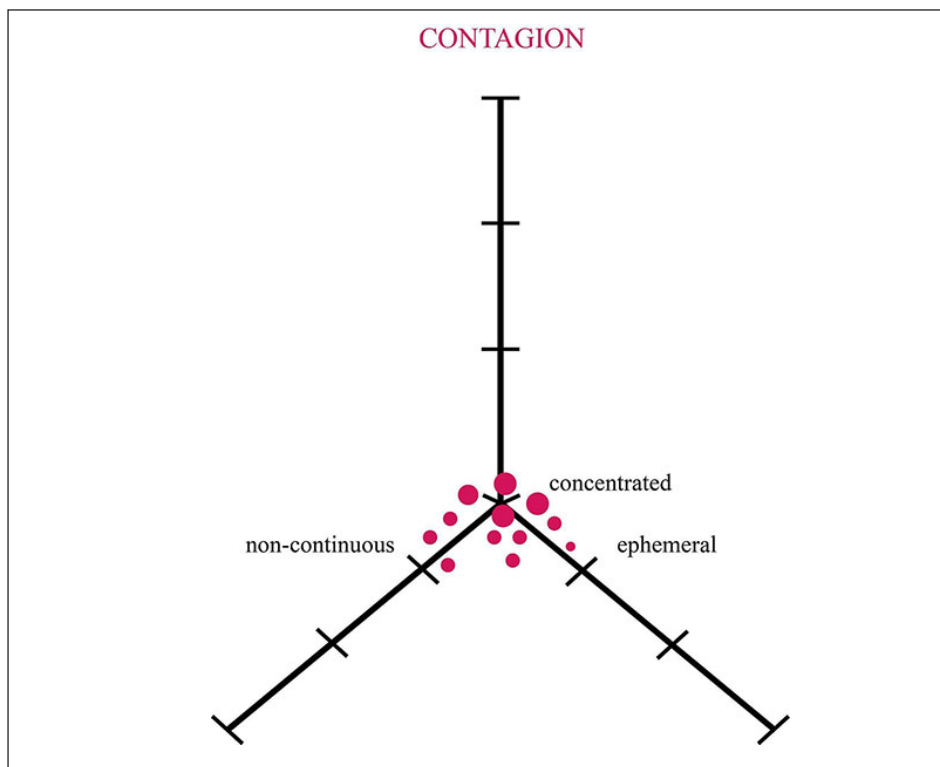


Figure 2. Representation of Contagion According to Times, Space, and Tracking

3.2. Propagation

In a second mode of spreadability, fear is spread by frightening with something and not with someone, as in contagion. The difference between ‘something’ and ‘someone’ is a matter of abstraction. Let us return to what is expressed in contagion. The terrorist (someone) is a figure that opposes specific interests and can be eliminated from the political horizon, which is why fear is usually spread via a scapegoat. However, fear in this second mode of spreadability is more abstract, as it becomes a chaos in which different entities that are not necessarily linked to each other can be grouped together. Here appears the ‘progress’ (progressives), the ‘caviars,’ and the ‘cojudignos.’ All of them, politically affiliated with left-wing discourses or ideologically interested in enriching the content of liberal democracies, expanding rights and freedoms, and pursuing the idea of the common good, are abstracted as a (somewhat) antagonistic bloc.

Regarding insecurity as a mode of affect, it fights against the bad, i.e., it possesses a propositional approach and not a reactive one as in contagion. While contagion behaves as “I have no solutions, but I have answers,” the contents have a propositional approach in this second mode of spreadability. It is presented as something that is not the definitive answer but could be a palliative. If, in the contagion, it is stated “zero tolerance to Venezuelans” or “jail to terrorists,” the propagation sentences are as follows: “Let’s close the borders” or “Let’s fight for freedom.” Their actions are usually demagogic.

Finally, a type of loneliness appears based on the loss of their brotherhood members (social group), friendships, or work because the common and hegemonic sense is that the new media are brainwashing them with progressive attitudes. To fill that void, they turn toward traditional and alternative media (TikTok, Telegram, and Tam-Tam) that reinforce their ideas and beliefs, even if these go against what the “progressive dictatorship” and offended sensibilities (“ofendidos”) prohibits. There exists a synergy between unsubstantiated claims (lies) and ideological confirmations. Namely, acts without empirical or scientific basis, rather than misinforming, serve as devices of ideological confirmation and reaffirmation of a conservative creed. It is recurrent to observe rebounds in TikTok videos from newspapers with conservative stances on speculative topics, dollar devaluation, instilling fears about the new government, and suggesting electoral fraud. This is accompanied by red text, emojis expressing concern or anger, and hashtags emphasizing “wake up, people.”

Thematic observation allows us to define propagation as the diffusion in flow from one text (production, discourse, and recognition) to another at a mediational level. In other words, propagation occurs when agents develop a participating role as they spread affect-infection. Therefore, hate speech based on fear of something, insecurity against the bad, and loneliness due to loss translates into the circulation of a resistant time of spreadability, a specialized digital space, and a discontinuous content path.

- Resistant time emerges because the collective behaves at the level of group solidarity, validating in the comments the accusation, parody, and defamation produced in the videos. Thus, a faith component is found, sometimes linked or associated with the religion. This coincides with what researchers (Forti 2021, Strobl 2022) have underlined in Europe, as the struggle waged by radical conservatives is more cultural than political. They are more focused on propagating a vague but powerful idea that is difficult to eradicate in (cultural) enemies rather than (political) adversaries.
- Specialized space emerges as the production of the videos, and the commentaries return again and again to those abstract labels and characters. Namely, circulation possesses a moderate time lag as followers engage with the themes propagated by content creators. Their discussions focus on the “cavars” or “progressives” as enemies of the status quo.
- Discontinuous tracking is evident as they frequently reinforce their accusations by criticizing mass media. These individuals both refer to and are referred to by mass media in numerous cases. This aligns with global conservative groups such as Vox (Albertazzi and Bonansinga 2023), who use the ability to reinterpret viral videos and memes or other media events to generate virality on TikTok. This way, propagation on this platform is linked to imitation or mimesis of content (Zulli and Zulli 2020).

Thus, we express the propagation graphically in the following scheme (see Fig. 3).

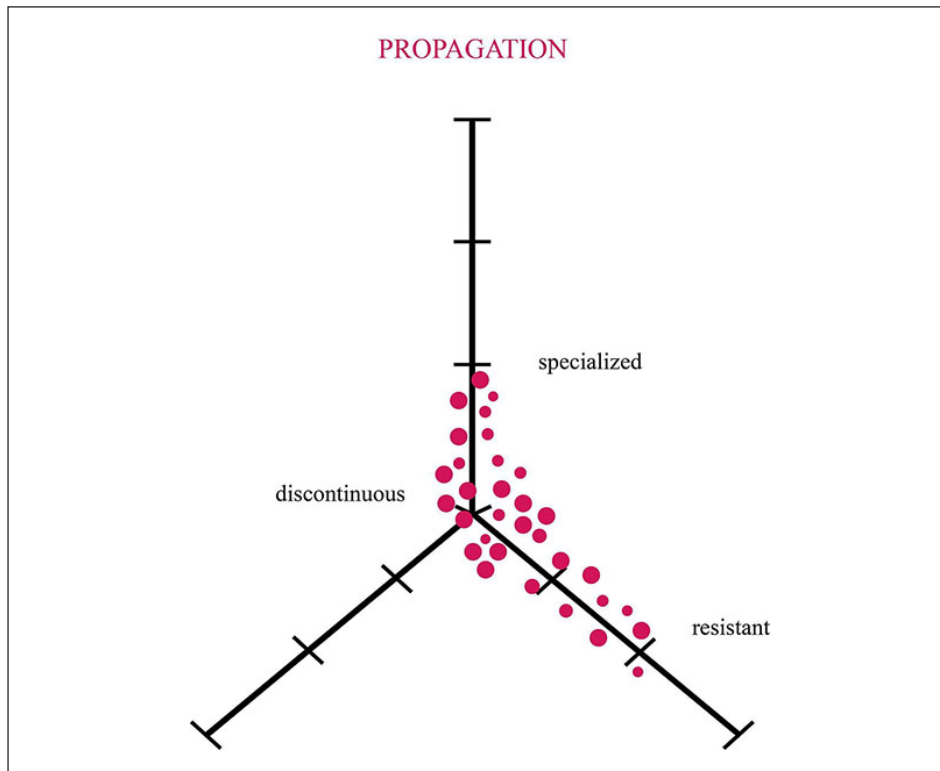


Figure 3. Representation of Propagation According to Time, Space, and Tracking

3.3. Contamination

In a third mode of spreadability, fear is identified as a powerful catalyst in the conservative discourse, using cognitive cues to confront society's constant changes. The videos aim to promote debate and confrontation of ideas as central elements of the conservative discourse, thus seeking to return to the near past and align with the authoritarian principles of radical conservatism. These videos are intended to affiliate with their followers and maintain conservative principles that propose or defend strong, authoritarian, and nationally committed governments.

The insecurity that emerges as an affect of radical conservatives in this third group is elusive as it is usually outlined under the slogan “never again” (terrorism never again, communism never again). Thus, they aim to elude the institutional evil rooted in the government of the day or the threat of nearby government, all in defense of an idealized notion of “nation.” The comments reinforce their political agenda by reinterpreting viral videos and memes and creating an expansive narrative that underscores the threat to national integrity.

Finally, the conservative groups spread a feeling of loneliness, leading to community division. This loneliness by separation is manifested through the selection of individuals

who are considered the “best” members and who should fervently defend the conservative group. This dynamic is clearly observed in photos and videos where users wear national soccer team sports jerseys to show their loyalty and commitment to the radical conservative cause. The feeling of loneliness spread by these groups seeks to create a collective (but limited) identity based on exclusivity vis-à-vis those who do not share their ideals. Here, the jersey of the national team does not serve as a unifying element of Peruvians but of the selection of “the best,” which, in this context, is represented by those who represent a small, limited, select, and defensive group that opposes the “progressive dictatorship.”

The thematic observation of production and recognition affects allows us to define the mode of spreadability as contamination, as it refers to expanding the communication of conservative affects from one text to another through a mediating process. From there, it jumps from TikTok to traditional media, using soccer jerseys as a communicative form and conservative emblem. In other words, contamination occurs when the agents involved in production and recognition disseminate the discourse according to an ideological commensurability that moves away from insults or parodies and gives way to principles as a common measure of their interactions. Thus, in contamination, hate speech whips up insecurity against situational nastiness and loneliness by separation translates into the circulation of a lasting time, a wide digital space, and a non-discontinuous tracking.

- Durable contamination time indicates a retrogressive belief that yearns to return to a near past that is considered closer to law and order. Thus, it spreads ideas of “renewal” that should extend to other countries in the context of a reality degraded by the “progressive plague” (i.e., a perception of situational evil). Contamination aims to go against the invasion or disturbance of the nation and express fear toward the interference of foreign governments, pro-socialist or leftist, which put national sovereignty at risk. This defense of the nation is not interrupted if those who opine or propose solutions are from Spanish radical conservative parties, as is the case with VOX. Instead, it is mainly celebrated as a transnational alliance in defense against the lurking “evil.”¹
- Broad space uses speculation and rumor as a rhetorical form. That is to say, the gap between the videos and the comments is wide. While the videos engage in ideological debates with their adversaries through stitches and duets, the comments broaden the debate by covering other aspects, such as speculation motivated by ideological victory. The rumor or “it is said that” is placed as a circulation process that mutates with respect to the content proposed by the users. This form of rumor persists, as sarcasm and attacks of a cognitive and intellectual nature tend to last much longer than the simple insult of contagion

¹ VOX videos appear both in the contagion and in the population. However, in the contagion, these are mentioned or quoted verbally, while in the populating, they are employed as videos or fragments of shared emblematic videos.

or the resistance of propagation. To this end, both bots and trolls are employed as technologies to solidify a simple idea within the public sphere.

- Non-discontinuous tracking unfolds as the contents of the production grammars recover recognition grammars and discourses from other social networks, such as Twitter or Instagram, and from Telegram or TamTam, where similar conservative groups have been formed. That is, the interaction and spreadability of content can be directed to other social networks that share their political vision (Khoshshabk and Southcott 2019).

Thus, we graphically express the contamination in the following scheme (see Fig. 4).

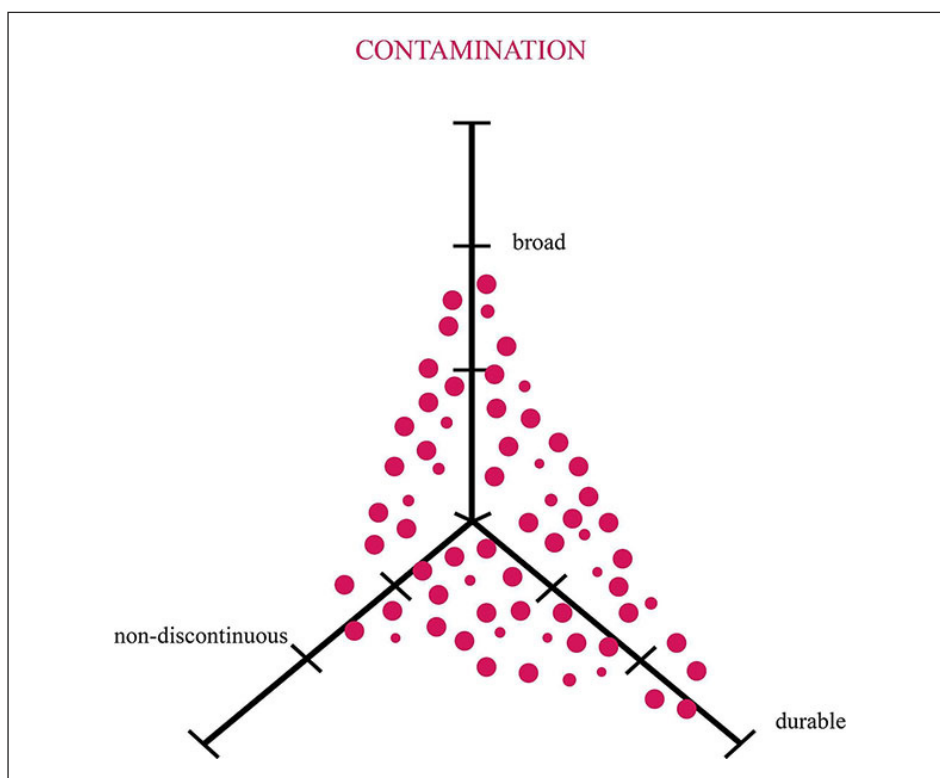


Figure 4. Representation of Contamination According to Time, Space, and Tracking

3.4. Population

A fourth mode of spreadability promotes the fear of oblivion by proliferating unfounded fears. It is based on ominous rumors, without a concrete figure; on the fear generated by hearsay. While the contagion of fear is directed toward the particular, here, a rejection is generated toward a universal evil, such as historical, unified, and conspiratorial communism. We chose the term 'population' due to its impact at a broader population level, encompassing communities, regions, and entire countries.

This term reflects the maximum extent of the impact at a social level, including larger groups, and is associated with the global scale of the conservative discourse.

The insecurity that arises is of a defensive nature, as protection is built around the homeland, which explains the recurrent presence of military stakeholders in this context. In this way, the possibility of losing the homeland to a threat considered a universal evil is categorically denied.

Finally, conservative groups spread a feeling of loneliness in the crowd. While the videos expose the danger of the unknown, the commentary placates this diversity with a return to 'common sense,' using phrases historically rooted in conservative sentiment. This includes the normalization of racism and the naturalization of classism through catchphrases or popular sayings. Thus, while navigating this virtual community, one experiences a feeling of loneliness amid the crowd.

The thematic observation of production and recognition affects allows us to define the mode of spreadability of the population as it refers to the expansion of conservative affects from one text to another through a media process. In other words, the population constructs the conservative affect through the speech's diffusion, duration, and continuity. Thus, hate speech from fear that frightens, insecurity against universal evil, and loneliness in multitude translates into circulation in a lasting time, a diffused space, and continuous tracking.

- Lasting temporality represents a constant historical struggle that transcends locality. It is a struggle to be taken up again against the marginality assumed by the political power. There is a typical conservative project in the population, a traditional and historical one.
- Spatiality is diffused as a wide gap between the videos and the comments. While the videos allude to VOX in Spain and decisions made by the previous administration of Trump in the United States, the comments often delve into pure speculation, disseminating other fabricated news texts, facilitating doxing, and fueling a sense of historical paranoia.
- Continuous tracking remains within the social network itself. Hence, studies (Cervi and Marín-Lladó 2021) have shown that the dissemination of conservative political party content on TikTok, such as VOX, is originally produced for this platform. Thus, population effects are monomedial, stay in a single medium, and are discussed as whispers in a single ecosystem.

Thus, we graphically express the population in the following scheme (see Fig. 5).

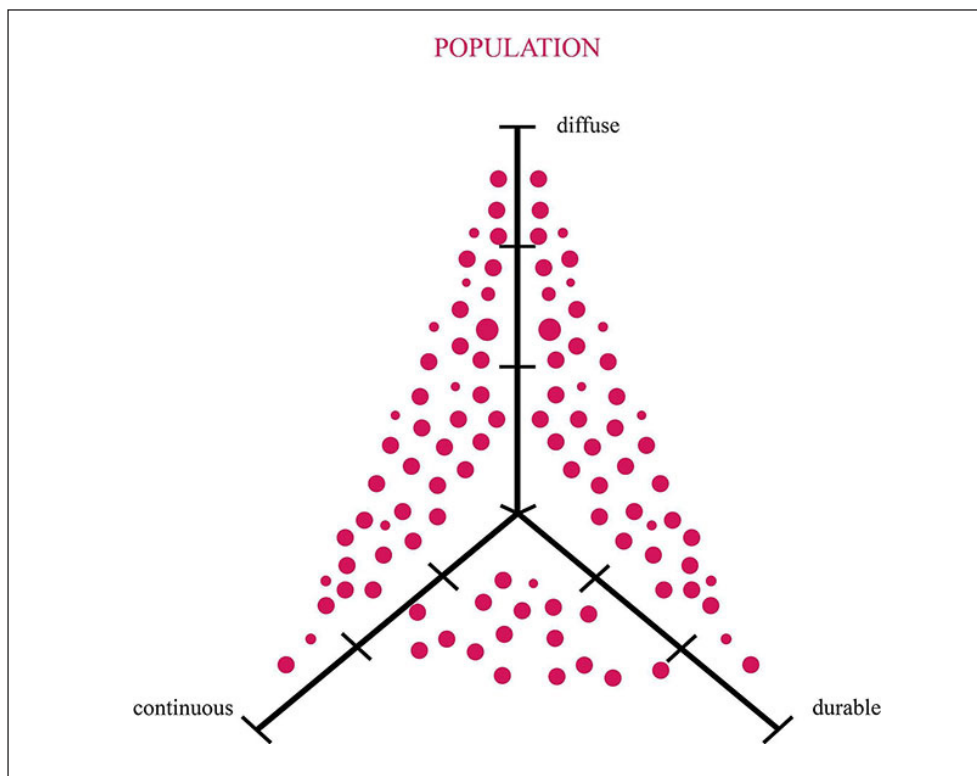


Figure 5. Representation of the Population According to Time, Space, and Tracking

4. Conclusions

The analysis of the modes of spreadability of the messages of Peruvian radicalized conservatives on TikTok reveals a complex circulation network with four identified types: contagion, propagation, contamination, and population. Spreadability leads to cultural warfare, aligned with the right-wing interpretation of Gramsci, thereby escalating the dissemination of hate affect to a heightened level. Each of these modes of spreadability contributes to a more profound and qualitative description of the spread of conservative content on the platform. Likewise, we have identified how spreadability by contagion and propagation redounds to themes of change (change to) while contamination and population retain or aim to return to a previous figure ('return to'). We present the following scheme that summarizes what has been developed so far:

Table 3. Summary of Spreadability Modes

	MODES OF SPREADABILITY			
	Change something		Return to something	
	CONTAGION	PROPAGATION	CONTAMINATION	POPULATION
Fear	Reactive [someone]	Scare [something]	Unsettle [to provoke]	Frighten [all]
Insecurity	Reactive “against the bad guy”	Propositional “against the bad”	Evocative “against situational evil.” (nation)	Defensive “against universal evil.” (homeland)
Loneliness	Loneliness due to isolation	Loneliness due to loss	Loneliness by selective separation	Loneliness in multitude

The four modes of spreadability identified can expand and relate to each other, generating various effects and levels of influence on the audience. How messages are transmitted also plays a crucial role. Meanwhile, spreadability by contagion and propagation can generate themes of change, contamination, and population, as well as preserve or return to the past. This diversity of modes of spreadability reveals the importance of understanding how conservative narratives are constructed and disseminated in TikTok. Furthermore, it shows how radicalized conservatism presents itself as a driving force of rapid and complete transformation in the political sphere, indicating a warlike frontality toward its opponents whom they consider as carnal enemies, not as political adversaries. Their stance is characterized by a lack of solidarity, harshness, and opposition to political correctness, which has led them to stand out in social networks. Unlike studies on radical conservatism (Al-Rawi 2021, Fedatto 2023, Finlayson 2021 and 2022, Forti 2021, Larsson 2020, Merriman 2019, Min 2021, Strobl 2022, Weiman and Masri 2023) that may even raise progressive banners in certain aspects to then rechannel them into conservative policies, the circulation of messages in Peruvian radical conservatives persists the figures and themes of a heteronormative, homophobic, chauvinistic, and elitist conservatism, where value comes from fighting for something. However, what appears in both cases is that from the ideological war, racist statements are becoming more and more common as forms of freedom of expression.

Finally, for our research, it is crucial to debunk the myth that seemingly viral and widely resonant videos reflect the circulation content. Traditional metrics, such as likes, shares, and comments, may give apparent visibility, but they do not always reflect the quality of spreadability of conservative messages. Finally, it is critical to analyze the outbursts of discourse and study the forms of circulation that normalize conservative content. This deeper understanding will allow a more complete view of these messages' influence and reach on the platform. It is essential to consider the approach to conservatives without falling into a biased view that focuses only on their outbursts, as this would limit the analysis to a moral judgment of their 'mistakes' or 'ideological incongruities,' such as proposing a flat tax and simultaneously reducing the retirement age to 65. It is necessary to broaden the perspective to understand their strategies over time, not only during elections or specific political movements. Therefore, future research can analyze the TikTok accounts and comments of conservative influencers, as they are waging a battle centered on cultural influence within alternative media. Closely examining these factors will lead to a comprehensive and objective view of the political and communicative dynamics to better understand the scope of the culture war being waged by radical conservatives.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This article was funded by the Instituto de Investigación Científica (IDIC) of the Universidad de Lima as part of the project "The Construction of the People in the Peruvian Conservative Discourse on TikTok."

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