Article

Social Media and Otherness: The Case of #Islamterrorism on TikTok

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Abstract
Social media and their participatory characteristics promote the construction of meanings that differ from those emitted by mainstream media outlets, becoming a tool that enables a reconfiguration of the dominant discourses. TikTok offers unique possibilities to confront the neoliberal imaginary and open a space for debate, incorporating political viewpoints and establishing itself as a new communication scenario. Regarding news about jihadism, many researchers have observed that those who practice Islam are classified as a monolithic entity, and this entire religious group is generalized as a threat to modern societies. The main objective of our research is thus to know the discourses used on TikTok to respond to the binomial Islam = terrorism spread by mainstream media and the affordances of this platform used to challenge this misconception. Using the snowball method, a multimodal analysis was conducted by identifying TikTok videos with the hashtags #yihadista, #yihad, and #islamterrorismo (in its English and Spanish versions) to explore the uses of the TikTok platform. The resulting selection criteria included: (a) content related to mainstream media discourses on jihadism, (b) discussion of a topic related to Islam and terrorism, and (c) where the content creator declares him/herself to be a Muslim. In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted to provide an enhanced understanding of how the media promote the need to generate a counter-narrative on TikTok. The results reveal that discourses from Muslims that combat Islam = terrorism discourses are constructed within the spiral of the dominant narrative, thus visualizing the negative discourses about Islam.

Issue
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1. Introduction

This article analyzes the discourses of the Muslim community in relation to the messages transmitted in mainstream media about Islam and its association with the concept of terrorism. Specifically, we evaluate in depth their use of TikTok as a platform to respond to these discourses and how they take advantage of the affordances offered by this platform to question them and share their viewpoints. In this sense, we understand mainstream media as conventional news sources (newspaper, television, radio) that "are trapped within entrenched norms and values that predispose a certain perspec-

tive of the world" (Jean-Kenix, 2011, p. 2). In addition, mainstream media are considered credible, serious, and influential, so they could have a strong effect on viewers (Gondwe & Bhowmik, 2022). We thus explore the potential of TikTok as a medium that favors expression and allows bidirectional discourses, thereby opening a debate on religious, political, cultural, and social issues. This goes beyond approaches where the audience simply consumes information passively from the main agents (political leaders and mainstream media), turning them into prosumers who generate content and participate in conversations through TikTok. Using a qualitative approach, we carry out a multimodal content

analysis of TikTok videos shared by Muslims that specifically address discussions on topics related to Islam, terrorism, and jihadism. We also conducted semistructured interviews with subject-expert journalists, thus providing an enhanced understanding of the phenomenon.

Currently, Islam is the first-most widely practiced religion in the world with approximately 1.6 billion followers (Statistics and Data, 2022), which means that one out of four people in the world is Muslim (Merino, 2020). The representation of this religion in the media can directly influence the public's perception of and attitudes toward Muslims as a group as well as Islam as a religion (Akbarzadeh & Smith, 2005). In this regard, previous studies have shown that the representation of Muslims in the media has an eminently negative focus. The Muslim community is often typecast as a terrorist group and as a threat to democratic systems and freedom of expression (Rahman, 2022).

Against this backdrop in which popular media culture has linked Islam to a negative representation in the West (Farooqui & Kaushik, 2022), social media have become a space that allows Muslims to counter such negative discourse regarding their religion and consolidate their identity and self-image (Deroo & Mohamud, 2022). Indeed, these platforms offer an opportunity for users to create their own content, which implies a greater diversity of media representations. Therefore, citizens have more information and viewpoints to better understand personal experiences and social events surrounding a given phenomenon. Given the narrative possibilities offered by social media, in this research we focus on TikTok, whose popularity has increased exponentially in recent years, becoming the most downloaded app worldwide (Sensor Tower, 2022).

We intend to understand how the Muslim community thrives on TikTok following two research questions:

RQ1: What are the discourses used by the Muslim community to respond to the binomial Islam = terrorism on TikTok?

RQ2: How are TikTok affordances used to challenge misconceptions spread by mainstream media?

Through this analysis, we contribute to understanding how the Muslim community uses TikTok to express themselves and to challenge misconceptions. According to Pearce et al. (2020), knowing how people express themselves on social media helps to design better social media communication experiences.

To address this approach the theoretical background includes discussion about the representation of Muslims in Western mainstream media, Islam on social media, and the TikTok affordances offered to challenge misconceptions. We then specified the methodology used and present the findings. The results enable us to identify the discourses used on TikTok to respond to the binomial Islam = terrorism. And, to understand the needs and concerns of the Muslim community about this phenomenon. Furthermore, it provides a wider view of how they thrive and represent themselves in social media spaces.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. The Representation of Muslims in Western Mainstream Media

The relationship between the West and Islam has been categorized as conflictive by many researchers over the years (Canclini, 2004; Miles, 1989; Said, 1978). The expansion of the West results in the generation of an antagonistic dichotomy between the West and East, which maintains that the culture of Islam is not compatible with European values and is presented as a threat (Said, 1978). According to Miles (1989), there are two clear examples of this polarization: first, the definition of "others" as "blacks" and "savages," which results in situations of exclusion, since Westerners are considered white, logical, delicate, and virtuous (Donald, 1992); and secondly, culture, where the European representation of the Islamic world is associated with terrorism and barbarism. To achieve the aims of the current work, otherness is understood as a discursive process where the "other" is represented as a stranger (Iqbal, 2020), relating Islam to terrorism through the news frames of mainstream media.

According to Casteleiro-Ruiz-de-Azcarate (2015), the frames used to present terrorism-related news are full of cliches and simplifications, contributing to the identification of religion with terrorism and driving a state of ignorance about Islam and its nature (Villepin, 2003). Studies conducted during the last two decades have provided evidence that such news framing has focused on the representation of Islam as monolithic, sexist, homogeneous, fanatical, and terrorist (Civila et al., 2020; Ewart, 2012; Ibrahim, 2010; Korteweg, 2008). This results in demonization, stereotyping, and negative feelings toward the Muslim community (Akbarzadeh & Smith, 2005).

Along the same vein, in his book *Orientalism*, Edward Said argues that there is a particular discourse in Europe that promotes the differences between the familiar (Europe, the West, or "us") and the foreign (the East or the "others"; Said, 1978, p. 19). These discourses are promoted by the mainstream media, limiting Islam to a series of misconceptions that do not represent reality and that polarize societies (Poole, 2002). Brown and Levision (1987), as well as Lee and Pinker (2010), state that broadcasters use ambiguity, indirect discourses, and other strategies to inform, especially when the topic is about the "other," and even substantiate statements with personal experiences (Galasin'ska & Galasin'ski, 2003; Giglietto & Lee, 2017). However, most of the news is written from a non-Muslim perspective. Such coverage does not illustrate what Muslims consider about this phenomenon (Gabsi, 2015), but rather adopts a Western perspective.

When these negative discourses promoted by the media relate Islam and terrorism, they can be labeled as "Islamophobia" (Poole, 2002). The term has been discussed by many scholars but is too broad to provide a tight definition. According to Ross (2014), Islamophobia constitutes an understanding of Islam as a threat to Western societies and intolerance to those who practice this religion. Meanwhile, Acim (2019) defines Islamophobia as the representation of Muslims as "others.'' As well as the prohibition of Islam cultural elements in the West, such as the hijab in France or the construction of mosques in Switzerland.

Nowadays, social media offer a space for minorities to express themselves (Echchaibi, 2013), thus reflecting how Muslim people fight against the discourses issued by mainstream media, which are considered to be hegemonic. Following many studies demonstrating how Western media demonize Islam by relating it with terrorism (Ahmed & Matthes, 2017), we focus on determining how the Muslim community challenges such discourses on TikTok. Thus, we contribute to understanding how the Muslim community uses this platform to express themselves and challenge misconceptions spread by the media.

2.2. (De)Construction of Islam on Social Media

Social media have changed how we communicate by allowing people to create their own content. It is not only communication unidirectional, but users can participate in media debates and adopt positions in relation to their contexts, thus challenging dominant discourses (Jaramillo-Dent et al., 2022). The Internet and thereby social media offer the opportunity to represent the diverse identities that are present in the contemporary world as well as the autonomy to share beliefs and values with other users (Campbell & Evolvi, 2020). This helps minority groups express themselves, breaking misconceptions associated with their group and challenging hate speech (Gómez-García et al., 2021). According to Campbell and Evolvi (2020, p. 8), minority groups include those who are stigmatized by society, for example, Muslim people living in non-Muslim countries. Therefore, in the present article, Muslim people as represented in Western media are considered to belong to a minority group.

Minorities, in different contexts, are forced to challenge the discrimination they suffer from the dominant culture, which limits their opportunities to relate to and participate in some mainstream conversations. However, social media can be a tool to combat these threats and make their culture and identity visible (Abidin, 2021). We thus identify a generation of Muslim individuals in the West who are publicly committed to negotiating their religious values with modern societies and altering Western narratives by promoting the relationship between Islam and modernity (Echchaibi, 2013; Göle, 2002). Through this engagement, we observe pro-

files on blogs and social media whose mission is to challenge the representation of Islam in mainstream media, such as the Muslimah Media Watch or Yallah blog (Echchaibi, 2013; Evolvi, 2017). It is also remarkable the emergence of movements such as #Noenminombre (#Notinmyname in English) or #MuslimsareNOTterrorist following the waves of attacks that occurred in Europe during 2016–2018.

Studies related to "digital religion," a discipline that emerges from the combination of religion and Internet studies (Campbell, 2017), have examined how Islam is represented by Muslims on social media, claiming generally that they respond to dominant narratives and associations aimed at their collective (Echchaibi, 2013; Evolvi, 2017; Looy, 2015; Wheeler, 2014). This supports previous research finding that Muslim creators often create content to refute misconceptions about their religion (Mosemghvdlishvili & Jansz, 2012). Accordingly, some authors, such as El-Haj and Bonet (2011), question whether Muslim people represent themselves in social media exclusively in relation to controversies about their religion or, in contrast, for their own interests.

In this case, in line with Hoover and Echchaibi (2014), social media would act as a "third space," a term that arises in relation to evolving media discourses and that has been used in studies on digital religion. This third space refers to a hybrid space that offers new forms for the reconstruction, expression, and questioning of religion, as well as new possibilities for the construction of meanings: It describes an alternative space to the dominant ones. In this study, hybridization occurs between the discourses broadcasted by the mainstream media and those shared by TikTok users. This theory is thus applied to understand the discursive practices used on TikTok to challenge misconceptions about Islam, as previously applied to analyze aspects concerning Islam in Facebook groups (Al-Rawi, 2016; Illman & Sjö, 2015), memes (Aguilar et al., 2017), and other social media (Bahfen, 2018).

According to Mirra et al. (2018), young people today engage critically with the media and challenge misconceptions about Islam. Therefore, digital contexts can modify the perception of reality and generate conversations outside mainstream narratives. In this case, we focus on TikTok, the most downloaded app, with 188 million downloads during the first half of 2022 (Statista, 2022).

2.3. TikTok as a Tool to Challenge Mainstream Media Discourses

Since its inception, TikTok has been growing and has now become one of the most popular social media in the world, shaping engaged communities that respond to the app's affordances (Zhao & Wagner, 2022). In our research, we consider the affordances of TikTok as tools offered by this social media platform (audios, challenges, trends, hashtags, filters, virality, etc.) that allow users to

express themselves creatively (Kaye et al., 2021). TikTok confers power and opportunities for expression to users who acquire the role of the sender, which favors mass self-communication (Castells, 2013) and bi-directionality in the messages issued by conventional media. This social media platform is becoming a space for debate, incorporating a political viewpoint, and establishing itself as a new communication scenario (Cervi & Marín-Lladó, 2021). Users can thereby actively participate in social and political debates, taking advantage of TikTok's affordances and its particularities.

TikTok allows users to share short videos (although the option to create videos lasting up to ten minutes has been added in March 2022), which can be edited in the app itself adding filters, effects, or stickers. The innovations offered by this platform in terms of content distribution and discovery have established it as one of the most highly valued platforms. It includes recommendation algorithms aimed at the interests of the users themselves and its famous "For You" page which attracts and retains users (Zhao & Wagner, 2022). According to Vijay and Gekker (2021) and Literat et al. (2022), TikTok's affordances additionally favor content that responds to mainstream media and encourage users to interact with other videos (through options such as "green screen," "paste from," or video responses to comments from other accounts). Previous studies have shown that TikTok users employ the affordances offered by this platform to question media representations of "others" in the news, criticize the media framework, and expand narratives by offering new viewpoints (Literat et al., 2022). In this sense, TikTok becomes an environment for self-expression and sense-making of others and otherness (Schellewald, 2021).

This convergence between traditional and emerging media leads to a new media ecology in which communication is no longer the exclusive remit of classical actors (parties, political leaders, and the media); rather, social media break into the discussion, significantly influencing social mobilization and facilitating the democratization of dialog thanks to their interactivity and immediacy (Islas, 2015; Piñeiro-Otero & Martínez-Rolán, 2020). According to Şot (2022), users take advantage of TikTok's technological and practical features to create content that is tailored to their audience to generate an intimate and safe space for both them and their followers.

3. Method

3.1. Sample and Inclusion Criteria

The present analysis, conducted during May and September 2022, provides a case study with a qualitative design, mainly adopting two methods: (a) a multimodal content analysis that aims to explore the intersection between misconceptions of Islam in mainstream media and discourses on TikTok; and (b) interviews, a qualitative analysis technique with an exploratory and explanatory

nature whose purpose is to understand the studied phenomenon in depth (Hernández-Sampieri et al., 2014).

For sample selection, a new TikTok profile was created, to avoid algorithmic contamination and obtain objective results. Once the account had been opened, we applied the snowball method, a qualitative data collection technique to reach difficult-to-access samples (Naderifar et al., 2017), and the sample was identified. To achieve this, the hashtags #yihadist, #yihad, and #islamterrorismo were searched for in the "explore" section of the app (in its English and Spanish versions), applying the filters "last 6 months" and ordering by "relevance." A total of 2,546 videos were then viewed and those that met the following criteria were selected: (a) content related to the discourses of mainstream media about jihadism, (b) discussion topics related to Islam and terrorism, and (c) where the content creator declared him/herself to be Muslim. The final sample comprised 62 videos. The files were downloaded by using the SnapTik app and collated in Excel using the video description and the numbers of likes, comments, and views. Finally, the data were analyzed using Atlas.ti 8, which allows qualitative analysis (Figure 1).

The data were examined utilizing a multimodal approach, which allows for the comprehension of both verbal and nonverbal data as well as the exploration of several representative modes (Dicks, 2019). TikTok's audiovisual, textual, interactive, and the way these modes are combined are all included in the multimodal analysis (Korhonen, 2010). Iterative analysis was used to categorize the data developing a codebook. In the first round, we analyzed the discourses spread by the Muslim community. Then, we related the affordances (audios, challenges, trends, hashtags, filters, virality, etc.) of TikTok with their discussion.

Moreover, to understand the content created by Muslim users on TikTok and how the media participates in the construction of the Islam = terrorism binomial in more depth, semistructured interviews were conducted during June and July 2022. Two main themes were addressed in the interviews: the use of terms and the stigmatization of Muslims. To obtain a diverse sample, seven journalists (who preferred to remain anonymous) were selected from different local, national, and international media outlets (Table 1). This number of journalists was selected because it was found that no new information was being collected thereafter, thus reaching what is known as thematic saturation (Guest et al., 2020). The following process was applied for data collection: (a) The interview was carried out according to previous research related to the object of study; (b) journalists with expertise in the subject were selected and contacted online to schedule an interview; (c) permission was requested to use the interviews for research purposes and their transcription; (d) the interviews were transcribed and summarized to identify the most important and relevant data obtained in terms of the object of study; (e) data analysis was performed by using Atlas.ti 8.
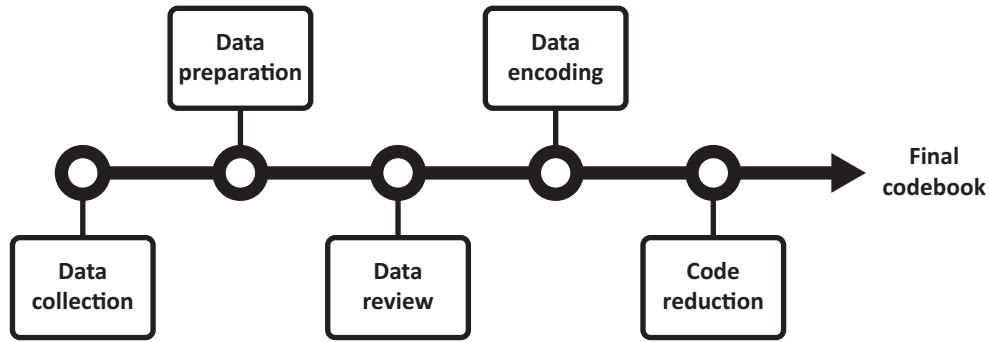
Figure 1. Data analysis procedure.

3.2. Codebook and Data Analysis

The data analysis was carried out using inductive–iterative reasoning, to identify the topics of interest for the current research. This approach enabled findings to be extracted from the data and allowed us to increase our knowledge about the subject (Vives-Varela & Hamui-Sutton, 2021). Three rounds of analysis were carried out, yielding a total of 30 codes. Finally, a total of seven of these were considered relevant to answer the research questions these codes are now presented in Table 2.

3.3. Ethical Considerations

Any reference to private persons or companies has been removed from the examples and images in this article,

both to protect their identities and to avoid copyright infringement (Boyd & Crawford, 2012).

4. Results and Discussion

The results are described according to the research questions presented above. We also describe the conversations with journalists, which enable us to delve into the construction of this meaning and the understanding of the discourses created by Muslim users on TikTok.

4.1. Discourses Used by the Muslim Community to Respond to the Binomial Islam = Terrorism

The most relevant discourses propagated by the Muslim community about the Islam = terrorism binomial include

Table 1. Interviewees' characteristics.

Name	Nationality	Type of media outlet
EN1	Argentinean	International
EN2	Spanish	National
EN3	Moroccan	National
EN4	Spanish	International
EN5	Italian	International
EN6	Spanish	Local
EN7	Spanish	National

Table 2. Codebook for content analysis.

Codebook	Definition
DIS	This code helps us to classify the discourses used to challenge the idea that Islam = terrorism.
OTHER	This code helps us to identify them versus us discourses (otherness).
OPIN	This code describes the opinion of users regarding the news published by mainstream media.
STOP	This code allows us to identify discourses against islamophobia.
AFFOR	This code helps us to analyze the affordances used to challenge misconceptions spread by mainstream media.
STRA	This code allows us to classify content creation strategies to respond to the binomial Islam = terrorism.
LANG	This code describes the use of multimodal elements such as captions, hashtags, icons, gifs, etc.

the explanation of their religion, its terminology, and the dismantling of dominant discourses. Thus, we identify two main issues: the simplistic presentation of Islam and the representation of Muslims in the Western media. Following Echchaibi (2013), it is thus observed how the possibilities offered by social media platforms promote the desire of modern participants to subvert the mainstream discourses and become actively involved in political discourses. The formation of unconventional discourses related to religion on TikTok by this collective shows, according to Hoover and Echchaibi (2014), that digital platforms act as a third space that allows the negotiation of the values of Islam in contemporary societies and a deconstruction of the established social imaginaries regarding this religion. The third space becomes a place where not only can religious practices be exercised but also alternatives to the hegemonic narratives can be constructed. This locates the present study in the fourth wave of digital religion, which emphasizes the political and social aspects of research on religions (Campbell & Evolvi, 2020).

As stated by Jaramillo-Dent et al. (2022) in their research on the creative practices of migrant TikTokers, content creation enables minorities to express themselves and construct alternative meanings to the prevailing conversations. In the case of TikTok, its affordances offer a space to develop involvement and engagement in politics, helping users to mobilize (Cervi & Marín-Lladó, 2021; Galpin, 2022) and generating new forms of expression that enable the social empowerment of the Muslim community. Moreover, presenting such discourses on TikTok amplifies a narrative that lacks visibility in other spaces (Echchaibi, 2013). The present analysis revealed four main types of discourses that are used to challenge social-political conceptions about Islam: (a) explanatory, (b) controversial, (c) demystifying, and (d) performative.

Firstly, we identified content aimed at explaining and deepening knowledge of what Islam is and clarifying different concepts that sometimes are used indifferently (Ahmed & Matthes, 2017). These concepts are Arab, Muslim, Islamic, Islamist, and jihad(ist). Owing to the relationship between jihad and terrorism, there is an ongoing desire to explain the meaning of the word "jihad," whose translation would actually be "effort." However, two strands can be detected. The first defends that the word "jihad" indeed means "effort," despite the appropriation of the term by the ISIS terrorist group. On the other hand, other TikTokers accept this appropriation and, when explaining concepts, argue that jihad is indeed related to terrorism. This disparity of opinions indicates that, contrary to its presentation in mainstream media (Ahmed & Matthes, 2017), the Muslim community is not a monolithic entity. However, according to Campbell and Evolvi (2020), such disparate contributions on social media can lead to a misrepresentation of identities rather than to social change, despite the appearance of a collective purpose, in this case, to convey that Islam is a religion of peace.

The journalists' responses reveal the need to take advantage of this third space to raise awareness of these different terms, which could break the misconceptions about Islam (Pearce et al., 2020). According to the interviews conducted, content creators thus need to explain them and improve their understanding by the majority. According to Romero-Rodriguez et al. (2021), knowledge of those considered to be different avoids falling into the traps of stereotyping and polarization. From the interviews:

IN2: In a society of immediate consumption, the traditional media tends to draw a broad picture and tell things in general terms, without differentiating between terms.

IN4: When writing, in order to avoid repetition, we sometimes use terms as synonyms whereas, actually, they have their own nuances and differences.

Secondly, the discourse classified as controversial refers to those publications aimed at questioning mainstream media. This content is focused on expressing opposition to news frames, highlighting how mainstream media use terrorist attacks to drive the concept that Islam is a threat to Western values. Moreover, as part of this type of discourse, TikTokers aim to raise awareness among the majority population that the mainstream media are politically biased sources (Jean-Kenix, 2011; Poole, 2002). These discourses agree with Ahmed and Matthes (2017), who support that western media demonize Islam by relating it to terrorism. Despite numerous studies (Casteleiro-Ruiz-de-Azcarate, 2015; Miles, 1989; Said, 1978) have demonstrated that news frames applied to Islam are stigmatizing, our data evidence how this is currently undergoing a process of change and improving the representation of Islam in the media. From the interviews:

IN3: I am aware, both due to the changes made in the media I work and in which other colleagues work, that work is being done to not link Islam with a political and military ideology in a generalized way. More and more specialized journalists in newsrooms and international organizations are reviewing news of this nature.

IN4: The change is growing, and although a Muslim is rarely the protagonist of a positive news story, the activism of the collective on social media is promoting change in the traditional media.

These responses related to representation in the media reveal how the pressure exerted by this minority group on social media is shaping the hierarchies of power and diminishing the weight of the media in public opinion as observed by Echchaibi (2013) and Evolvi (2017). Platforms such as TikTok facilitate the dissemination of

minority opinions and challenge hegemonic discourses (Literat et al., 2022), allowing them to make their culture and identity visible (Abidin, 2021).

Furthermore, the demystifying discourse, which refers to content focused on emphasizing the positive aspects of Islam, promotes not only visibility but recognition. We observed how the creator demystifies the religion and encourages its recognition by relating Islam to love and peace, thus seeking common ground with "them." However, according to Gray (2013), this need not necessarily promote real recognition, as it may be a neoliberal technique to celebrate diversity rather than a recognition of the structural problems associated with Islam.

In the videos focused on demystifying the symbols of Islam, it is mainly argued that they are not terrorists, and that the Muslim community is the main victim of the terrorism that is classified as jihadist. This is evidence that they're committed to negotiating their religious values with modern societies and altering Western narratives by promoting the relationship between Islam and modernity (Göle, 2002). Interaction with the dominant culture and common ground is sought to reduce polarized discourse, which, in accordance with Vizcaíno-Verdú and Aguaded (2022), enhances opportunities to build new social relationships and reinforce recognition. On the other hand, according to the analysis conducted by Hamid et al. (2022), for messages to have an impact they must transmit new narratives, construct discourses on what we have in common, and not focus on differences (them versus us), to enable a feeling of identification in the audience and promote real recognition. The results obtained from the interviews show the pressure they suffer to create demystifying discourses and promote action to make their voice heard. From the interviews:

> IN5: In investigative reporting on jihadist terrorism, they wheel out Muslim people from the neighborhood to make themselves look good, but the main message is still "beware that a neighbor may be a potential terrorist."

> IN6: The voice of the Muslim collective only appears in the media when there is a terrorist attack.

> IN7: The media generates ignorance about Islam since we often work under the dictates of political groups.

Finally, we identify the performative discourse which refers to those narratives constructed through mimesis helping users express themselves creatively and connect with their collective (Kaye et al., 2021). This content is created using audio and videos that are constantly copied on the platform with the addition of new meanings (Literat et al., 2022; Vijay & Gekker, 2021). The use of these trends reveals an intention to get visible and challenge polarization by using the vernacular language spoken on the Internet.

4.2. TikTok Affordances Used to Challenge Misconceptions Spread by Media

After analyzing the discourses, we correlated the codes focused on the discourse with those focused on the affordances in the sample units. We identified that the most relevant affordances used by these content creators on TikTok are audio, hashtags, text, embedded text, and visual elements. In this section, we delve into the use of TikTok affordances to challenge misconceptions spread by media. This will allow us to better understand how they deploy the discourses to respond to the binomial Islam = terrorism.

Our analysis revealed that the use of original audio in combination with visual affordances such as embedded texts and images—that visually strengthen the message—enables us to explain and argue the different concepts (see Figure 2): Arab, Muslim, Islamic, Islamist, and jihad(ist). Furthermore, the use of the hashtags #aprendeconTikTok (learningwithTikTok), #curiosidadesenTikTok (curiositiesonTikTok), or #educación (education) is also observed, reflecting the explanatory aim of such posts. Previous research has shown that activist political practices on social media are more effective when followed by an explanation and intellectual argument, thus strengthening the message and enhancing the critical level of society (Raley, 2009).

On the other hand, the embedded text and captions are the most used affordance to express their annoyance with the media's treatment of Islam. However, visual elements such as embedded image carousels are also identified, being used to highlight the positive aspects of Islam and reinforce the textual argument (Figure 3). This evidence that TikTok users employ the creative options offered by this platform to question media representations of "others" and expand alternative narratives (Literat et al., 2022). These affordances are accompanied by hashtags such as #islam or #muslims, as well as music that is trending on the platform and thus extends the reach of the transmitted message and the number of views (Zhao & Wagner, 2022). This reflects new approaches for campaigning in the face of otherness and power structures, supporting the theory proposed by Bossetta et al. (2018) that political participation is improved and increased using social media. According to Echchaibi (2013), the propagation of these discourses allows the topic of Islam to be located at the center of modern society, promoting its acceptance and recognition in the society to which it belongs. However, recent research conducted within the MAGIC project (Muslim women and communities Against Gender Islamophobia in soCiety; see Hamid et al., 2022) indicates that, despite the importance of challenging mainstream media on social media to change the dominant discourse, one should go further and contact the media to raise awareness of the message transmitted.

These affordances are also used to demystify the discourse about Islam. TikTok offers a space for debate
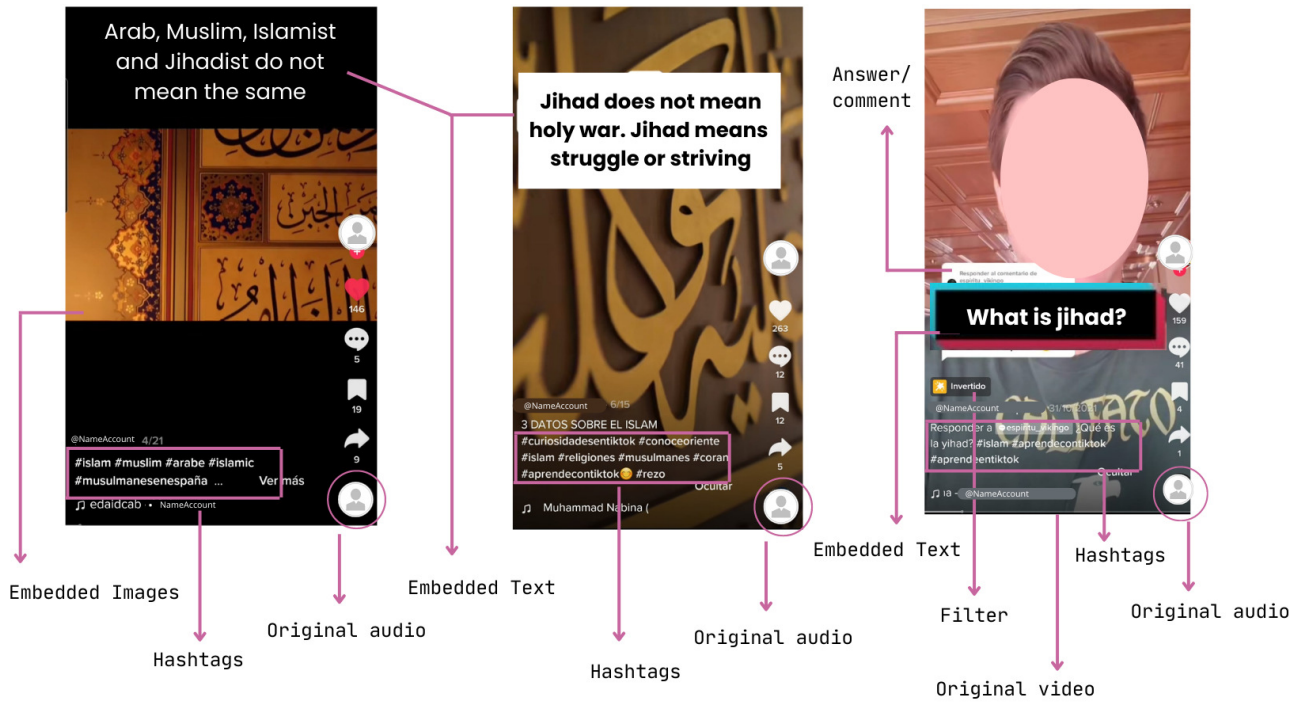
Figure 2. Use of visual and oral affordances to explain religion.

and to combat these threats (Abidin, 2021) helping to challenge the misconception that Muslims are terrorists. These affordances facilitate action and offer an opportunity to justify their religious values to be understood by others. The hashtags most used to demystify Islam are #allah, #hijabi, #muslim, and #islam, followed by positive ones such as #love and #peace, thus relating Islam with peace (Figure 4). At this point in the analysis, it can thus be seen how TikTok offers a space to deconstruct misconceptions and promote acceptance and recogni-

tion, whereas the use of this platform by this collective does not promote total change. Gray's (2013) theory, i.e., that social media increase the visibility but not necessarily the actual recognition of minority groups, holds. This drives us to support the idea that marginalized people are between risk and opportunity on social media (Pearce et al., 2020).

Our analysis evidence how TikTok facilitates the creation of content based on popular trends to reach a wider audience (Kaye et al., 2021), and offers a space for
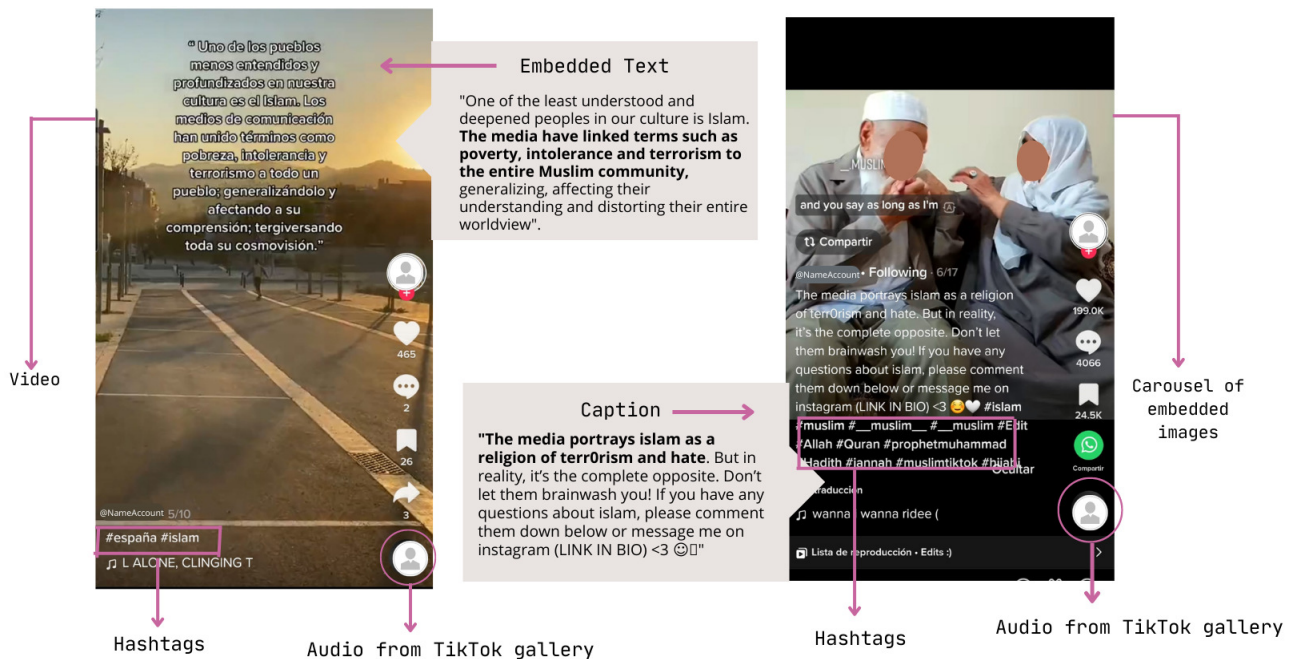

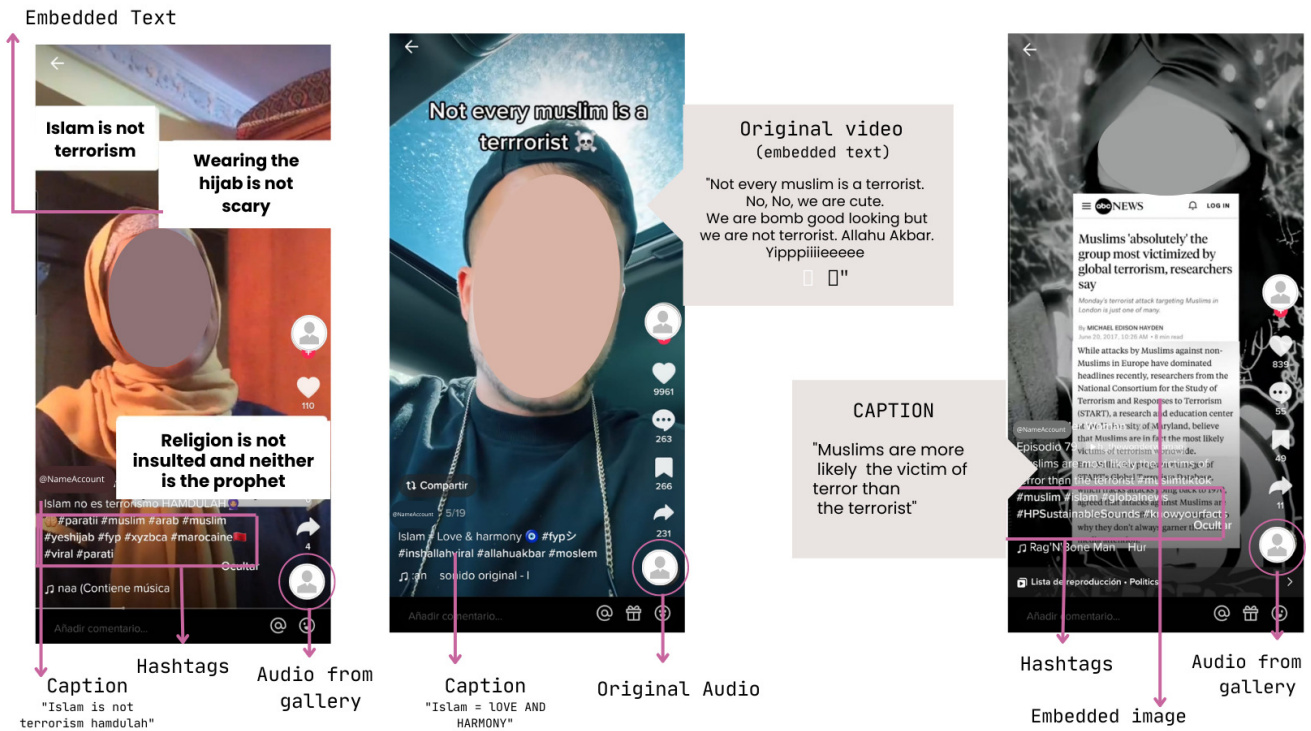**Figure 3.** TikTok affordances used to challenge hegemonic discourse.

Figure 4. Uses of TikTok to demystify the discourse about Islam.

sense-making of "other" and "otherness" (Schellewald, 2021). It notes the use of hashtags such as #viral, #followme, #goviral, #FyP, and #Foryou, to extend the reach and thereby improve the visibility of the post (Klug et al., 2021). Moreover, the discourses to increase visibility are created from trending audios and videos, lacking original audio and generally presenting visual argu-

ments. In the case of the two most used trends, what the West thinks of Islam is presented using embedded text, while the corresponding replies, which are considered to be "the reality," are presented with images that reflect the positive values of Islam. The arguments with embedded text are accompanied by a sad face emoji, reflecting the Muslim community as a victim. The use
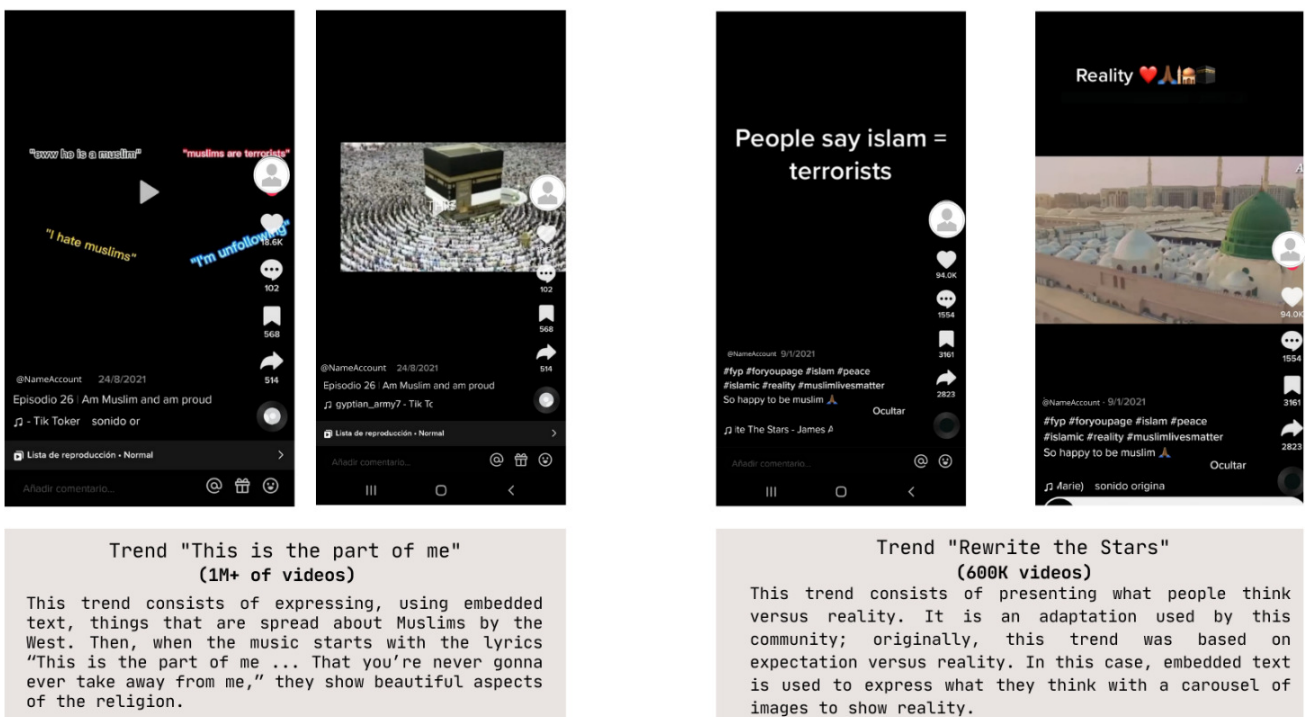

Figure 5. Uses of TikTok trends to increase the visibility of religion.

of humorous strategies with hashtags such as #humor or #joke to challenge oppressive structures is also identified. It is found that the struggle of otherness is not handled in a positive way, emphasizing the differences between "us" and "them" rather than the empowering aspects of differences, which is fundamental to promote recognition (Romero-Rodriguez et al., 2021).

5. Conclusions

The analysis of TikTok content created by the Muslim community about the binomial Islam = terrorism spread by mainstream media reveals this platform as an environment to challenge prevailing misconception narratives. In this sense, it appears that Muslim minorities need to motivate discourses in a way that penetrates societies, thus promoting social change and challenging misconceptions. TikTok allows this community to seek recognition as well as to generate discourses that make their culture visible (Abidin, 2021). However, the way these creators use TikTok highlights the misconceptions about Islam spread by the mainstream media. This does not promote the construction of an alternative narrative as evidenced by Hamid et al. (2022).

Regarding our first research question, the discourses used to address the dichotomy Islam = terrorism made negative misconceptions about Islam and Muslims more visible. Instead of constructing new discourses, the arguments used to challenge Western mainstream narratives and take part in political debate are based on negative narratives. Thus, the reconfiguration of dominant discourses on TikTok is constructed within the spiral of the prevailing narrative. However, according to the journalists interviewed, we found that messages posted by this collective destabilize Western narratives, promoting the relationship between Islam and modernity (Göle, 2002). As supported by El-Haj and Bonet (2011), these discourses deployed on TikTok are a result of the pressure and need to constantly challenge power structures. They intend to be recognized by others and to value what is considered contrary.

In response to the second research question, the results show that TikTok affordances encourage political participation (Brown et al., 2022) and provide tools to foster social empowerment (Vizcaíno-Verdú & Aguaded, 2022), providing a space to challenge the discursive soapbox and the holistic construction of the counternarrative. However, the use of affordances does not necessarily contribute to diminishing the difference between "us" and "them." This means that textual and visual elements are used to highlight the differences between what "we are" versus what "they are," while other affordances such as "duo" or "green screen" do not encourage the challenging of opinions, according to Zulli and Zulli (2020). Following Civila and Jaramillo-Dent (2022), the spread of such content, beyond empowering the Muslim collective, provides visibility and recognition of discriminatory practices, which reinforces Gray's

(2013) theory of recognition. As a result, it seems that the affordances of the platform have an impact on the construction of otherness, while TikTok potentially fails to provide a space for these groups to confront established mechanisms of domination.

The study limitations were presented in terms of sample and platform. Although the sample provides answer to our research questions, we acknowledge that according to the TikTok algorithm, our location and search term could limit the results shown by this platform (Jaramillo-Dent et al., 2022). Furthermore, our study is focused on one platform, which could be amplified in further research. Accordingly, we suggest that further research approaches interview the users to have a better understanding of how they represent themselves in social media spaces.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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