

From Belief to Hate. An Analysis of the Beliefs That Support the Hate Speech Towards Migrants and Refugees Spread on Twitter from the Theory of Reasoned Action

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This study seeks to identify the beliefs that underlie racist and xenophobic attitudes, in addition to the perceived pressure that influences the spread of such hate speech through tweets in Spanish. Thus, a content analysis based on the reasoned action theory was carried out. The main findings show that direct interactions with migrants and refugees play a crucial role when it comes to publishing or withholding racist and xenophobic messages. Besides, perceived social pressure is the primary reason for most of the

racist and xenophobic hate speech on Twitter in Spanish, which suggests the need to explore how formal structures of power influence discourses on migration. Finally, the study analyses the relationship between the connotative frames used to represent migrants and refugees, and the beliefs underlying such attitudes, thus identifying how the migration frames used to spread hate are created.

Keywords: hate speech, racism, xenophobia, migration, reasoned action.

Migratory movements have affected all societies in the world along the history, almost without exception. Today, however, these human transit flows are changing dramatically, in terms of scale, direction, frequency, and even the nature of the migrants themselves, as mass movements of people, many of them as refugees, take place now more than ever. According to the estimates made by the United Nations, at the end of June 2022, there were

103 million forcibly displaced people, which represents an increase of 13.6 million (more than 15%) compared to the end of 2021 (UNHCR, 2023). In other words, the UNHCR estimates that, by mid-2022, one in 77 people in the world had been forcibly displaced, that is more than double in relation to the previous decade (one in 167 people in 2012). Faced with the growth of these migratory flows, there has been an increase in demonstrations of rejection of the displaced people, and more specifically of hate speech of a racist and xenophobic nature that, in its maximum expression, can lead to violence against cultural properties or symbols or directly against those groups (Müller and Schwarz, 2020). It is for this reason that it is a priority to establish an explanatory framework for this particular behaviour that allows exploring the variables that intervene for its execution, taking as a starting point the existing empirical evidence that links beliefs, representation frameworks and hate speech, and, in this way, fill the conceptual gap to better understand the personal justifications of those who emit this type of racist and xenophobic messages.

In this work, we seek to identify the variables that allow us to recognize the path that hate speech follows to consolidate, and the bases on which it is based, from the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) (Fisbhein, 1967). This is a classic theoretical and conceptual framework of cognitive psychology, which, however, has hardly been considered in the communication sciences, and much less so in the works that study a problem as current as the massive spread of racist and xenophobic hate speech in social media. According to this theory, behavioural intention depends on two specific constructs: attitude and subjective norm. Both are the product of the beliefs that people have, both about the behavioural object and about their own environment. This is how attitudes are shaped through beliefs linked to objects and the evaluations of an affective nature that the individual makes of these; and subjective norms arising from normative beliefs evaluated through perceived social pressure. Following these approaches, the objective of this work is to analyse the tweets through which hate towards migrants and refugees in Spanish is spread, in order to identify the underlying beliefs on which these racist and xenophobic discourses are based, thus elaborating an explanatory path that determine the subjective variables involved in this phenomenon.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND STATE OF THE ART

RACIST AND XENOPHOBIC HATE SPEECH

The spread of hate speech is one of the main communication dysfunctions that has aggravated the immersion of digital platforms and, especially, of social media. And of all the types of hate speech currently being spread on the Internet, in the same way that occurs with hate crimes committed in the physical environment, the one that monopolizes the most space is the racist and xenophobic type, both in the Spanish context, as in the rest of Europe. This is evidenced by the latest Reports on the Evolution of Hate Crimes in Spain, elaborated by the National Office for the Fight against Hate Crimes of the Spanish Ministry of the Interior (2019, 2020).

Along these lines, in addition, the report presented by the Spanish Observatory of Racism and Xenophobia (OBERAXE) in 2021, indicates that hate speech towards migrants continues to grow. Specifically, the observatory registered 33.7% of anti-immigration cases in this year, thus identifying an increase with respect to previous periods in this category. Regarding the conceptualization of hate speech, it is worth paying especial attention to the concepts and recommendations put forward by European institutions, since they are the ones on which most of the national criminal codes are subsequently based. Thus, the Council of Europe, through its Recommendation No. R (97)20 of the Committee of Ministers on hate speech (1997), defines this speech as the promotion of messages that imply “rejection, contempt, humiliation, harassment, discredit and stigmatization of individuals or social groups based on particular attributes”. Along these lines, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, through its General Recommendation No. 15 on how to Combat Hate Speech (ECRI, 2016), specifies that hate can be motivated by reasons of race, colour, ancestry, national or ethnic origin, ideology, age, disability, language, religion, sex, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation and other personal characteristics or conditions. Similarly, the United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action to Combat Hate Speech defines hate speech as any form of communication that attacks or uses pejorative or discriminatory language in relationship “with a person or a group (...) by reason of their religion, ethnic origin, nationality, race, colour, ancestry, gender or other identity factor” (UN, 2019).

With regard to racism and xenophobia, reasons underlying all hate speech against migrants and refugees (because of their ethnic or national origin, race, descent, colour, language or even religion), it should be noted that, in turn, these they are two similar and interconnected types of discrimination and intolerance, both based on prejudice towards otherness, towards the outgroup, towards those who are different (Díez Nicolás, 2009). Along these lines, Allport (1954), one of the authors who has theorized the most about prejudice, defines this concept as the negative feeling or attitude towards a group or towards an individual for being a member of a specific group, based on generalizations inflexible, rigid, and erroneous, which can be manifested through negative behaviours such as acts of rejection and discrimination. According to this author, in addition, prejudices are made up of three different dimensions: cognitive, which refers to thoughts and beliefs about the other group; the emotional or affective, that what is felt towards the outgroup; and behavioural, which would be the discriminatory behaviours through which prejudices are finally expressed (Dovidio and Gaertner, 1986). Based on the notions raised by Allport, other authors, such as Cea D’Ancona (2006) or Pettigrew and Meertens (1995) add that prejudice can be understood as a predisposition to adopt negative behaviours towards a different group to which one belongs, or towards one of its members only because they belong to that group, and this predisposition may be conditioned by negative beliefs and/or emotions (Gómez Berrocal and Navas, 2000). But if it is important to study this type of discourse and the explanatory variables on which it is based, it is especially because its massive spread can influence an increase in hate crimes in the physical field, as Müller and Schwartz (2020) point out.

This shows that the narratives used to refer to the phenomenon of migration can have many consequences, so the precision of the concepts and fidelity to the facts must prevail in the media messages, so as not to promote negative belief frames about migration in the audience (Arcila *et al.*, 2021). Media play a transcendental role in the transmission of certain ideas to public opinion, as well as in the construction of cognitive frames that are reproduced in society and that, ultimately, manifest themselves in the form of audience frames, frequently on social platforms such as Twitter (Valdez Apolo *et al.*, 2019).

FRAMING OF MIGRATION

In this work, the study of hate speech towards migrants and refugees starts from the analysis of the structures that are used to create the messages and ideas that are transmitted through them. In this sense, we must point out that the characteristics that are used in the construction of those messages evidence some cognitive frames present in the senders, but they also have the capacity to generate particular cognitive changes in those who receive the messages (Igartua *et al.*, 2007). To better understand the way in which this happens, it is necessary to resort to the framing theory (Entman, 1993), which allows us to identify the way in which the elements that make up a message can generate cognitive channelling, reaffirming or modifying previous schemes, and promote specific attitudes towards certain issues.

Based on Entman's conceptualization (1993), other authors such as de Vreese (2003) have pointed out that the frames are formed in and affect four differentiated (although interrelated) dimensions at the subjective level, which would be similar to those considered when dealing with racism and xenophobia, and similar to those that will be considered when dealing with the theory of reasoned action. These dimensions would be the cognitive, the affective, the attitudinal and the behavioural.

In this line, Igartua *et al.* (2007) argue that frames influence the perceptions of public opinion, exerting direct and indirect socio-cognitive effects. This occurs because the frames influence the processing of information by establishing the references on which the understanding of reality is built, and thus conditioning the formation of opinions. For this reason, the frames or approaches selected and highlighted in media content, as well as in those spread online in the form of audience frames, are the product of previous cognitive frames, but in turn will influence the formation of new ones, as well as opinions and attitudes towards certain matters of public interest or towards certain social groups. Thus, in the case of the migration issue, it is understood that the negative media frames will tend to have a negative influence, thus being able to promote an increase in rejection and violent behaviour, such as hate speech and other racist and xenophobic crimes (Amores and Arcila, 2019, Amores *et al.*, 2020).

So, it is convenient to explore and study the frames through which migrants and refugees are represented more repeatedly in the media, trying to identify which are the most negative, and which could be influencing negative attitudes towards migration. In this sense, Amores and Arcila-Calderón (2019), based on

the review of previous literature, propose 4 main frames through which migrants and refugees are connotatively represented in the news media as in the content spread on social media (Valdez Apolo *et al.*, 2019; Latorre and Amores, 2021). These frames would be the following: *normalization*, which portrays migrants in daily situations; *victimization*, which depicts them as innocent victims, not responsible for their dramatic situation; *burden*, which represents them as an social or economic burden for the receiving companies; and *threat*, which represents them as a danger both to security and to the cultural values of Western societies. According to these authors, the last two would be the frames that would have a more negative effect on the audience, being able to promote negative opinions and attitudes towards migration, and even serve as base frames, also in turn, through which to spread racist and xenophobic hate speech.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that there are many studies that analyse the capacity of news frames (and specifically those of migration) to generate cognitive effects that lead to particular attitudinal schemes in audience. There are also numerous works that have analysed racist and xenophobic hate speech. However, none of them focuses on the frames and beliefs underlying these messages, nor does they consider that these discourses, in turn, also affect beliefs and attitudes that citizens have about migrants and refugees. In this sense, when specifically addressing the study of the beliefs that underlie anti-immigration hate speech and that may be being affected and altered through processes such as framing, within the field of social sciences there is a theoretical-explanatory gap. It is for this reason that the present work is based on the postulates of the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), raised from the field of cognitive psychology, which allows studying the mental processes that underlie certain attitudes or behaviours.

THEORY OF REASONED ACTION

The Theory of Reasoned Action and planned behaviour (Fisbhein, 1967) posed that the human is a rational being that processes information in a systematic way, establishing conducts based on the assessment made of the results of their behaviour and the expectations they have of their behaviour in relation to the achievement of specific results. Since its initial approach, this model has been applied to very diverse areas of knowledge and with very different objectives, such as the study of beliefs about health applied to the case of AIDS (Páez *et al.*, 1994), the measurement of attitudes towards disability in the university population (Novo-Corti *et al.*, 2011) or the study of the acceptance of mobile internet services (Ramírez Correa *et al.*, 2015). But in no case has this model been applied with the purpose of identifying and understanding the underlying beliefs that motivate manifestations of hate towards migrants and refugees spread through social media.

This theoretical model proposed that beliefs about a specific issue provide the basis for the formation of attitudes and subjective norms, and these are formed through the association of two or more specific aspects of the individual's experience. According to Fisbhein (1967), the intention of a person to carry out a

behaviour is a direct determinant for the execution of said behaviour, therefore, knowing the attitudes it would be possible to predict the behaviours. In fact, according to the model, certain behaviours are not dependent on the situational context and, therefore, are virtually predictable from the measurement of attitudes. The TRA model can be schematically expressed through various intervening constructs that explain the origin of the behaviour by analysing the related underlying attitudes. These constructs will be summarized below.

Attitude

According to Fishbein, (1967), a person's attitude towards an object is generated as a function of the beliefs he has about the object (the probability that the object is associated with other objects, concepts, values or goals) and the evaluation of these beliefs, which refers to the affective dimension in front of an object, concept, value or attribute that an individual establishes from a stimulus. Guzmán *et al.*, (2014), affirm that the attitude is determined by the beliefs that link the object with the results and the evaluation of said results. Thus, attitudes could be defined as a conglomeration of beliefs, knowledge and feelings towards an object or situation, which are interconnected. This is how, when an individual acquires a belief towards an object, he automatically and simultaneously acquires an attitude towards that object. In this sense, it should be noted that attitudes have diverse properties, including tone or direction (positive or negative) and intensity (high or low). These properties of attitudes are particularly important for their adequate measurement (García *et al.*, 2011). On the other hand, Cea D'Ancona (2002), postulates that the measurement of attitudes needs the consideration of the three affected dimensions: the affective, the cognitive, and the behavioural, which would be the one that controls how the individual behaves in relation to the other two determining dimensions.

Beliefs are considered cognitive structures or association systems that act as a frame of reference prior to information processing and are established as the information that the subject has about the characteristics of the object (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2010). Within the development of this theory, beliefs would be the basis for attitude formation. Fishbein and Ajzen (2010) also differentiate between 3 types: descriptive or observational beliefs, which are those obtained from direct observation or interaction with a specific object; informative beliefs, which arise from the information that the individual receives from third parties about an object, concept, value or attribute; and inferential beliefs, which arise from the interaction established by the individual between previously established descriptive and informative beliefs, generating probabilistic relationships between them.

On the other hand, the evaluative dimension within the attitude construct refers to the affective valence that is associated with an issue, object, concept or behaviour, in a dimension of favour or disfavour, good or bad, like or dislike. Thus, based on this theory, it is assumed that people have pre-existing evaluations of the attributes that are linked to an object, in the process of forming beliefs. In this way, people come to have favourable attitudes toward objects they associate with positively valued attributes, and unfavourable attitudes toward objects they associate with negatively valued attributes.

From Frame to Attitude

Exploring the categorization carried out by Valdez *et al.*, (2019), where racist and xenophobic hate speech is classified according to the perceived tone of the messages and the symbolic representation of migrants and refugees that derives from news frames, we find that the categorization of these elements is comparable to the constructs of belief and evaluation within the attitudinal model of TRA. The connotative frames of migrants and refugees, being a symbolic representation that assigns characteristics to these actors, can show the beliefs underlying the attitudes of the senders, fulfilling a representative function through specific attributes that arise from direct interaction, information through media or the inference of situations. Similarly, the evaluative dimension is comparable to the tone, a category that established the classification parameter of the tweets according to the feeling they conveyed, based on the affective valence (being this positive, neutral or negative), offering an evaluation of the attributes assigned to migrants and refugees in the analysed messages.

Subjective Norm

This element of the TRA model refers to the social pressure exerted on individuals to perform or not perform a particular behaviour. The subjective norm is formed from normative beliefs, which would be the perception about the probability of approval of the behaviour by significant social referents; and, on the other hand, of the motivation to fulfil the perceived expectations. In other words, the subjective norm can be translated as a reasoning that reveals the social pressure perceived by the person who is going to carry out a behaviour towards the execution or not of that behaviour; and is determined by these two components: the perception that significant others approve of, expect, and desire the behaviour; and, on the other hand, the motivation of the subject to accommodate the expectations or desires of those people. In this way, the subjective norm together with the attitude towards the behaviour determines the intention to carry out the behaviour, and the stronger the perceived social pressure, the more likely it is that an intention to carry out a certain behaviour will be generated.

In addition, for the conceptualization of normative beliefs, Fishbein and Ajzen (2010) start from the considerations of perceived social pressure, which, in turn, are described from the bases of social power (French and Raven, 1959), and which differentiate between 5 different types:

1. *Reward power*: The social agent exerting pressure has the power to reward the desired behaviour.
2. *Coercive power*: The social agent may be able to impose penalties for non-compliance.
3. *Legitimate power*: Compliance with perceived social pressure may be based on the belief that the social agent has the right to prescribe behaviour because of their role or position in a particular group, network, or society.
4. *Expert power*: The individual can comply with the perceived social pressure due to the knowledge, experience, skills or abilities of the social agent.

5. *Referent power*: Compliance with perceived social pressure may derive from a sense of identification with the social agent; that is, the individual can comply because he wants to be like the agent.

However, in practice, these types of power are not analysed in isolation, but are brought together in two different constructs or categories. Thus, following the postulates of Meliá *et al.* (1993), which are condensed in the Bifactorial Theory of Power, it is established that social power is conceptualized as two-dimensional, structured in the basic dimensions of formal power and informal power, which can be factorially measured, isolated and defined. The *formal power* would group the *reward power*, the *coercive power* and the *legitimate power*. These three types of social powers are linked due to their close relationship with the hierarchical level that emanates from the formal structure of social groups. On the other hand, the *informal power* would bring together *expert power* and *referent power* in a category that is clearly dissociated from the formal structure of human groups and is essentially based on the existence of interaction dynamics where persuasion and interpersonal influences play the main role.

OBJECTIVE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

As has been pointed out, this work seeks to explore the cognitive bases that give rise to racist and xenophobic hate speech as behaviour, starting from the beliefs that give rise to attitudes and subjective norms regarding the migratory issue. With these premises, the main objective of this work is to identify the underlying beliefs in the messages about migrants and refugees in Spanish published on Twitter. In this way, we will try to determine what beliefs underlie the attitudes and subjective norms that lead to the expression of hate speech towards migrants and refugees, and thus generate an explanatory model of this behaviour from the cognitive dimension.

So, trying to fulfil this objective, starting from the review of the previous literature, and having concluded that there is not enough empirical background in this field and based on theoretical approaches of cognitive psychology that allows establishing accurate hypotheses, the following research questions are raised:

- RQ1. Are there beliefs underlying the attitude that motivates the racist and xenophobic hate speech transmitted through tweets about migration in Spanish? What kind are those beliefs?
- RQ2. Is there perceived social pressure underlying the subjective norms that motivate racist and xenophobic hate speech transmitted through tweets about migration in Spanish? What type is that perceived social pressure mainly?
- RQ3. Is there a relationship between the beliefs underlying the attitude and the perceived social pressure that is identified in the racist and xenophobic hate speech transmitted through tweets about migration in Spanish?
- RQ4. Is there a relationship between the beliefs underlying the attitude and the frames with which migrants and refugees are usually represented in

the racist and xenophobic hate speech transmitted through tweets about migration in Spanish?

METHOD

SAMPLE AND PROCEDURE

In this study, the unit of analysis is the short message published on Twitter in which hate speech towards migrants and refugees is transmitted. In specific, we used a sample of tweets derived from the development process of an automatic anti-immigration hate speech detection model, framed in the European project Preventing Hate Against Refugees and Migrants (PHARM), funded by the European Commission. Specifically, in the first phase of this project, we used the Python programming language to access Twitter's API v.2 and download a first initial sample of 2,000 tweets in Spanish and geolocated in Spain. The download was carried out between October and December 2020, at which time the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic had been overcome, and migratory flows began to have the media prominence that they had before the confinement. For that download, we used a filter dictionary that included descriptive words about the migrant and refugee groups, as well as possible indicators of racist and/or xenophobic hate and rejection (consult Arcila-Calderón *et al.*, 2022). Once that initial sample of tweets was downloaded and collected, all of them were manually classified by two independent annotators based on whether or not they contained racist and/or xenophobic hate speech, together with the subjacent sentiment. In this annotation process, total agreement was sought between both annotators to finally select each message as hateful. After this manual classification stage, the final sample that would ultimately be used for this research consisted of 635 reliably anti-immigration hateful tweets.

INSTRUMENT AND MEASURES

On the final sample, we carried out a content analysis with the aim of identifying the beliefs and perceived social pressure that underlie the expression of racist and xenophobic hate speech, as well as the frames with which migrants and refugees are represented in those messages, and the possible relationships between those elements. To do this, we designed an instrument that included the following variables:

A. Beliefs underlying the attitude

In this measure, descriptive, informative and inferential beliefs were considered, all of them mutually exclusive. Taking this into account, the following indicators are assigned to identify each of the beliefs underlying the attitude.

- *Descriptive beliefs* (1): the negative attribute assigned to the migrant/refugee in the text (the manifestation of hate) is the result of the interaction through a direct experience with him.

- *Informative beliefs* (2): the negative attribute assigned to the migrant/refugee is due to some type of information received from an external agent.
- *Inferential beliefs* (3): the negative attribute assigned to the migrant/refugee is due to the association between direct interactions and the information received from an external agent.
- No belief underlying the attitude perceived (0).

B. Normative beliefs underlying the subjective norm through perceived social pressure

Considering the theoretical framework developed, these types of beliefs are identifiable through the concept of perceived social pressure and following the classification of formal social power and informal social power. In this measure, the following indicators are considered to identify the items that build each type of social power, raised in a dichotomous way.

- *Formal power.* Formal social pressure is perceived if any of the following criteria is identified:
 - *Norm indicator* (0 = No / 1 = Si): the negative attribute assigned to the migrant/refugee seeks to comply with a socially established norm.
 - *Validation indicator* (0 = No / 1 = Si): the negative attribute assigned to the migrant/refugee seeks validation by a third party.
 - *Punishment indicator* (0 = No / 1 = Si): the negative attribute assigned to the migrant/refugee seeks to avoid punishment by a third party.
- *Informal power.* Informal peer pressure is perceived if any of the following criteria is identified:
 - *Identification indicator* (0 = No / 1 = Si): the negative attribute assigned to the migrant/refugee derives from a sense of identification with the social reference.
 - *Expert Indicator* (0 = No / 1 = Si): the negative attribute that is assigned to the migrant/refugee seeks to comply with the perceived social pressure due to the knowledge, experience, skills or abilities of the social referent.
- No social pressure perceived (0 = No / 1 = Si).

C. Connotative frames of migrants and refugees in racist and xenophobic hate tweets

For the analysis of the connotative frames about migrants and refugees present in racist and xenophobic hate tweets in Spanish, we adapted the instrument created and validated by Valdez Apolo *et al.* (2019). In this measure, the following indicators were taken into account for the identification of each of the frames.

- *Normalization* (1): it expresses approval of principles of equality and immigration policies, social rights and citizenship; talks about pro-migrant projects and initiatives; congratulates and recognizes activities of integration and insertion of immigrants; it is considered that thanks to immigrant labour the country advances, etc. This frame, since is the most positive one, will not be found in tweets expressing hate or rejection towards migrants and refugees.

- *Victimization (2)*: words such as death, illness, poverty, children, solidarity, rescues, etc. are mentioned. A solidarity, humanistic and compassionate approach is identified; it appeals mainly to the complicated and unfavourable condition of migrants and refugees, treating them as martyrs, innocents and needy victims. This frame is generally used when referring to children and women.
- *Burden (3)*: it is considered that the foreigner takes aid or social benefits from the state that they do not deserve or that correspond to the natives; migrants and refugees are considered to occupy jobs that would correspond to natives; migrants and refugees are considered a problem that the country does not have to assume.
- *Threat (4)*: displaced people are considered both a realistic and tangible security threat, and a symbolic one, at a cultural level; migrants and refugees are considered a danger to public or individual safety; foreigners are considered to increase insecurity in the country; foreigners are considered to cause loss of the values and the cultural and religious identity of the country; foreigners are considered to threaten the “race” or “lineage” of the country.
No connotative frame of migrants and refugees identified (0).

ANALYSIS

Before proceeding with the content analysis, the intercoder reliability of the instrument was checked, for which two independent coders analysed a random subsample of 101 messages, corresponding to 15% of the total sample. For this, the Kalpha (Krippendorff Alpha) macro for SPSS was used, as it is the most recommended reliability measure in social sciences. The results of this test showed reliability results above .70 for all items, except for the *punishment indicator*, which had a reliability of .66, and the *expert indicator*, which had a coefficient of .47. For this reason, analyses resulting from these specific measures should be treated with caution.

After checking the reliability of the instrument, analysing the sample and operationalizing the variables, the resulting data was analysed using the statistical program SPSS. First, descriptive statistics were extracted from the variables *underlying belief to attitude* and *perceived social pressure*, recoded into two categories corresponding to *formal power* and *informal power*. Subsequently, inferential analyses were established with the aim of responding to RQ3 and RQ4, for which the Chi square test was used.

RESULTS

From the content analysis developed, in the first place, and responding to RQ1, it can be resolved that there are beliefs that underlie the attitude in the tweets that express hate speech towards migrants and refugees, which support the manifestation of racist and/or xenophobic hate, with a total of 583 messages where the three types of beliefs were identified (91.8% of the total sample), compared to

52 messages where no type of belief underlying the attitude was identified (8.2% of the sample). The frequencies found (Table 1) in the different types of beliefs allow us to resolve that the *inferential* type is the most predominant in the messages, with a total of 493 (77.6%), followed by the *descriptive beliefs*, with a total of 61 messages (9.6%), and *informative beliefs* with a total of 29 tweets (4.6%).

Table 1. Table of frequencies of the variable belief underlying the attitude

| Belief underlying the attitude | | |
|--------------------------------|------------|------------|
| | Frequency | Percentage |
| No belief perceived (0) | 52 | 8.2 |
| Descriptive belief (1) | 61 | 9.6 |
| Informative belief (2) | 29 | 4.6 |
| Inferential belief (3) | 493 | 77.6 |
| Total | 635 | 100 |

Source: Own elaboration.

Regarding the beliefs present in the analysed messages, it was found that those of a descriptive or observational type are the most predominant, thus rejecting the proposition that the beliefs underlying the attitudes that most predominate in these discourses are of informational type. In relation to the subjective norm, which was measured through the recoded variable of *perceived social pressure*, a total of 482 messages were found where it was identified that there was some type of social influence on which the message was based (75.9% of the sample), compared to 153 messages where no social pressure of any kind was perceived (24.1%). Thus, responding to RQ2, it can be resolved that there is perceived social pressure in most of the tweets that transmit racist and/or xenophobic hate speech in Spanish.

With respect to the recoded *formal power* variable, a frequency of 331 messages was found (52.1% of the sample). Within this category, in the *norm indicator* a frequency of 281 messages was found (44.3% of the total sample), in the *validation indicator* a frequency of 78 messages was found (12.3%), and in the *punishment indicator*, a total of 2 messages were identified (0.3%). The recoded *informal power* variable presented a frequency of 261 messages (41.1% of the total sample). Specifically, within this category, in the *identification indicator* a frequency of 257 messages was found (40.5% of the total sample), and in the *expert indicator* a frequency of 30 messages was found (4.7%). Thus, responding to RQ2, it can be resolved that the most predominant social pressure in racist and xenophobic hate messages, which underlies the subjective norms that motivate this hate speech, is of a formal nature.

On the other hand, with respect to the connotative frames of migrants and refugees present in the analysed messages, it can be resolved that those of *threat* are the most predominant, as expected since this is the most negative, with a total of 322 (50.7%). This one was followed in frequency by the *burden frame*, with a total of 219 messages (34.5%), and by the *victimization frame*, with a total of 17 messages (2.7%). The *normalization frame* was not identified in any of the

analysed messages, as expected, since it is a frame of a purely positive nature. Lastly, there was a total of 77 tweets where no frame was identified (12.1%), which may correspond to explicitly offensive messages in which no type of attribute is associated with migrants and refugees.

Turning to the inferential analyses, with respect to the possible connection between *beliefs underlying attitude* and *formal power*, it was found that there is a statistically significant relationship between these two variables (χ^2 (3, N = 635) = 31.81, V = 0.22, p = .000). This analysis allows us to affirm, after observing the resulting cross table, that *informative beliefs* are the ones in which formal power is most perceived, with 69%, followed by *inferential beliefs*, with 56%, and *descriptive beliefs*, with 41 %. And in the opposite way, regarding the possible connection between *beliefs underlying attitude* and *informal power*, a statistically significant relationship was also found (χ^2 (3, N = 635) = 16.02, V = 0.15, p = .000). In addition, observing the results of this last cross table, it can be affirmed that *inferential beliefs* are the ones in which informal power is most perceived, with 45%, followed by *descriptive beliefs*, with 32.8%, the *non-perception of underlying beliefs* to attitude, with 26.9%, and *informative beliefs*, with 17.2%.

Regarding the possible connection between the *beliefs underlying the attitude* and *perceived social pressure*, a statistically significant relationship is also found (χ^2 (3, N = 635) = 38.73, V = 0.24, p = .000). And responding to RQ3, from the observation of the cross table (Table 2), it can be resolved that *inferential beliefs* are those in which there is more perceived social pressure, with 80.1%, followed by the *informative beliefs*, with 79.3%, by the *descriptive beliefs*, with 68.9%, and the *non-perception of the beliefs* underlying the attitude, with 42.3%.

Table 2. Cross table of beliefs underlying attitude and social pressure

| | | Beliefs underlying the attitudes | | | | | |
|---------------------------|--|----------------------------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------|
| | | | No perceived | Descriptive | Informative | Inferential | Total |
| Perceived social pressure | No Expected count % inside the beliefs underlying the attitude Corrected residual | Count | 30 | 19 | 6 | 98 | 153 |
| | | 12.5 | 14.7 | 7 | 118.8 | 153 | |
| | | 57.7% | 31.1% | 20.7% | 19.9% | 24.1% | |
| | | 5.9 | 1.4 | -0.4 | -4.6 | | |
| | Si Expected count % inside the beliefs underlying the attitude Corrected residual | Count | 22 | 42 | 23 | 395 | 482 |
| | | 39.5 | 46.3 | 22 | 374.2 | 482 | |
| | | 42.3% | 68.9% | 79.3% | 80.1% | 75.9% | |
| | | -5.9 | -1.4 | 0.4 | 4.6 | | |
| Total | % inside the beliefs underlying the attitude | Count | 52 | 61 | 29 | 493 | 635 |
| | | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | |

Source: Own elaboration.

Finally, regarding the relationship between the *beliefs underlying the attitude* and the *connotative frames of migrants and refugees*, responding to RQ4, it is resolved that there is also a statistically significant relationship between these two variables, moderately associated ($\chi^2 (9, N = 635) = 187.39, V = 0.54, p = .000$). In addition, from the observation of the cross table (Table 3), it can be affirmed that the threat frame is the one in which most *inferential beliefs* are found, with 55.4%, followed by *informative beliefs*, with 41.4%, and *descriptive beliefs*, with 37.7%. Regarding the *burden frame*, it is observed that the *informative beliefs* are the most predominant, with a total of 44.8%, followed by the *inferential* ones, with a total of 37.9%, and the *descriptive* ones, with 19.7%. Finally, regarding the *victimization frame*, the one by far less frequent, a predominance of *informative beliefs* is observed, with a total of 10.3%, followed by the non-perception of the belief, with 3.8%.

Table 3. Cross table of beliefs underlying attitude and connotative frames of migrants and refugees

| | | Beliefs underlying the attitudes | | | | | |
|-------|--|--|--------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------|
| | | | No perceived | Descriptive | Informative | Inferential | Total |
| Frame | No perceived | Count | 29 | 26 | 1 | 21 | 77 |
| | | Expected count | 6.3 | 7.4 | 3.5 | 59.8 | 77 |
| | | % inside the beliefs underlying the attitude | 55.8% | 42.6% | 3.4% | 4.3% | 12.1% |
| | | Corrected residual | 10.1 | 7.7 | -1.5 | -11.3 | |
| | Victimization | Count | 2 | 0 | 3 | 12 | 17 |
| | | Expected count | 1.4 | 1.6 | 0.8 | 13.2 | 17 |
| | | % inside the beliefs underlying the attitude | 3.8% | 0% | 10.3% | 2.4% | 2.7% |
| | | Corrected residual | 0.5 | -1.4 | 2.6 | -0.7 | |
| | Burden | Count | 7 | 12 | 13 | 187 | 219 |
| | | Expected count | 17.9 | 21 | 10 | 170 | 219 |
| | | % inside the beliefs underlying the attitude | 13.5% | 19.7% | 44.8% | 37.9% | 34.5% |
| | | Corrected residual | -3.3 | -2.6 | 1.2 | 3.4 | |
| | Threat | Count | 14 | 23 | 12 | 273 | 322 |
| | | Expected count | 26.4 | 30.9 | 14.7 | 250 | 322 |
| | | % inside the beliefs underlying the attitude | 26.9% | 37.7% | 41.4% | 55.4% | 50.7% |
| | | Corrected residual | -3.6 | -2.1 | -1 | 4.4 | |
| Total | Count | 52 | 61 | 29 | 493 | 635 | |
| | % inside the beliefs underlying the attitude | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | |

Source: Own elaboration.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This paper analyses racist and xenophobic hate speech as a human behaviour that can be studied within the framework of communication sciences, as well as from cognitive psychology and behavioural sciences approaches. Thus, starting from the theory of reasoned action, but also contemplating the postulates raised in the framing theory, as well as the bibliography available to date regarding the conceptualization of hate speech, in this work a theoretical triangulation has been generated, with the aim of partially explaining the subjective cognitive aspects that underlie those manifestations of explicit rejection towards migrants and refugees. The TRA model provides added value to the studies developed in this area to date, considering prior beliefs as a determining factor in the expression of racist and xenophobic hate speech spread online. This analysis of the beliefs identified in the anti-immigration messages themselves, based on content analysis, has made it possible to establish two key points: first, that the characteristics that are assigned to migrants and refugees and that are reflected in the messages (through the frames), are generated from the attitude and the beliefs that support it; and secondly, the influence that social pressure can have on the execution of this kind of behaviour, established as the subjective norm within the TRA model.

Thus, from this analysis it can be concluded that there are beliefs underlying the attitude in the messages that transmit anti-immigration hate, and that they are identifiable and susceptible to being quantified and measured. Specifically, inferential-type beliefs are the most predominant in the analysed messages. This type of category is formed through a syllogistic process in which the subject forms an association of attributes from a direct interaction with the object of belief and with information received from third parties. Considering this, we can conclude that there is an extensive elaboration in the messages in which this type of category was found. They relate situations experienced directly and are associated with some kind of story or information expressed by a third party. In this way, the attributes that are assigned in the belief are reinforced. A total of 493 messages with this type of characteristics were found, being 77.6% of the total sample analysed. Regarding descriptive type beliefs, a total of 61 messages were found. These types of beliefs are formed from direct interaction with the subject, object or situation, revealing that messages that refer to direct interactions of the issuers with migrants and refugees predominate.

In relation to the subjective norm, which was evaluated through the recoded variable of perceived social pressure, in a total of 482 messages some type of social influence underlying the message was identified, compared to 153 messages where no social pressure of any kind was perceived. In this regard, it can be concluded that there is perceived social pressure in the analysed messages. When reviewing the indicators through which the coding of this variable was carried out, a total of 281 messages were classified with the norm indicator, thus establishing a direct mention of legal and/or normative issues as justification against the execution of the racist and/or xenophobic hate speech as a conduct. Deportation was one of the most frequently mentioned legal issues in the

analysed messages. Regarding the validation indicator, 78 messages with this type of characteristics were found. These types of messages were related to the sender's intention to seek some kind of recognition through the similarity of his speech with some social institution, especially with political parties or opinion leaders. The punishment indicator is the one with the lowest score within the formal power variable. Therefore, the sender does not normally emit the message pressured by the possibility of receiving some type of coercion or punishment from their social referents.

On the other hand, the indicators that were used to recode the informal power variable presented lower frequencies than those used to recode the formal power variable. The recoded variable of formal power was found in a total of 331 classified messages, thus indicating that in 52.1% of the sample there is a formal or "official" pressure in the analysed messages, directly related to formal institutions and structures constituted by hierarchical levels and linked to pressure as a mechanism of influence. These types of institutions can be political parties or state entities with which the individual identifies. The recoded informal power variable was found in a total of 261 classified messages, allowing us to affirm that in 41.1% of the sample there is an influence due to interaction with social referents, where persuasion and interpersonal influences play a role in the pressure perceived by the sender of the message to carry out the behaviour. This type of influence is clearly dissociated from formal structures, and the referents in this case are situated as agents who are considered homogeneous with respect to the characteristics of those who perceive social pressure. It should also be noted that this type of interaction is based especially on social identification through categories established by the subjects that leads them to perform behaviours that they consider to be in accordance with their group and the implicit regulations that exist.

Considering the postulates of the TRA and establishing relationships between the beliefs underlying the attitude and the perceived social pressure, at a general level we find that the beliefs of the inferential type are those in which there is more perceived social pressure, with 80.1% of the sample, followed by informative beliefs, with 79.3%, and descriptive beliefs, with 68.9%. The relationship between inferential-type beliefs and perceived social pressure can be explained through the very nature of this type of belief. Inferential type beliefs are the product of a cognitive process of association, where the attributes assigned to objects arise from the confluence of direct interactions and information received, thus generating a higher character processing. Therefore, the relationship between the informative belief and inferential belief with the perceived social pressure variable is explained by the fact that social pressure itself is an interaction generated with a third party, which also has the property of being informative. We conclude then that there are relationships that are of interest with respect to the role played by formal organizations and the influence they can exert in the execution of this behaviour, the spread of racist and xenophobic hate speech through messages about migrants and refugees in Spanish published on Twitter.

On the other hand, observing that the attitudes underlying the attitude of a descriptive or observational nature are the most frequent in the sample, it can be

concluded that the direct interactions of people mostly support the expression of racist and xenophobic hate speech in tweets about migration. However, it should be noted that behind these interactions expressed or perceived as direct there could be a rather mediated interaction, apprehended from media information and contents. In this sense, in addition, we should state that the social identity from which the individual establishes the categories that are representative for the construction of his identity, is essential when relating to the people around him, since they establish borders in terms of apparently representative attributes between different groups, frequently within the same community. For this reason, in order to carry out a more in-depth study along these lines, in future analyses, it is important to take into account the construct of social identity. This will make it possible to study whether the direct interactions mentioned in the messages are the product of a categorization made by the sender based on the consideration of ingroup and outgroup.

Regarding the beliefs underlying the attitude and the connotative frames with which migrants and refugees are usually represented on news media and social media such as Twitter, the threat frame is the one in which the most inferential beliefs are found in this case, followed by the informative beliefs and descriptive beliefs. Referring to the burden frame, however, it is found that informational beliefs are the most predominant, followed by inferential ones, and descriptive ones. Based on these data, it is easy to affirm that the information that people receive is essential as a trigger and justifier for hate speech spread on this kind of social media. However, it is concluded that the negative connotative frames of migrants and refugees channel and serve as a medium through which to express racist and xenophobic hate. Specifically, it appears that hate expressed through threat frames is predominantly grounded in inferential beliefs, while hate conveyed through burden frames is largely grounded in informational beliefs, often derived from media and institutional sources. This may indicate that the inferential beliefs, those most actively generated by the individual himself, are the ones that lead to maximizing the information and negative attributes that can be received from third parties, to end up identifying migrants and refugees directly with different types of threat. From this it is concluded that the regulation of approaches that lead to cognitive channelling on specific aspects of individuals is key when proposing strategies that try to counteract violent, intolerant and polarized discourses.

Finally, certain limitations of this study should be noted. In the first place, in this work the motivation construct was not considered because the particular interest of the research revolved around the identification of the beliefs underlying the attitude and the perceived social pressure. In future works, it would also be convenient to consider this measure to complete the TRA model and thus be able to draw more complete explanatory conclusions. Another of the main limitations is primarily methodological, since the content analysis of the messages themselves has numerous weaknesses when it comes to successfully identifying the beliefs underlying the attitudes that led to transmitting those messages. Therefore, in future studies, the option of developing experimental studies is proposed, which allow a more in-depth explanation of the subjective

variables that underlie the spread of online racist and/or xenophobic hate. In addition, in this work a specific sample of tweets has been analysed, collected in 2020, and in the Spanish context, so it would be convenient to continue studying this phenomenon and extend the analyses to other temporal and geographical contexts and other digital platforms.

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