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Semiotic Analysis of Hate Discourse in Spanish Digital News Media: Biden's Inauguration Case Study

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Abstract

This study analyzes hate in Spanish digital media from a semiotic standpoint by focusing on the coverage and discourse of Joe Biden's inauguration as the US President in January 2021 by *El País*, *La Vanguardia*, ABC, *El Mundo,* and 20Minutos in Spain on the X platform. The event drew significant attention from international and Spanish media. A qualitative investigation was conducted on the interactions, denotations, connotations, and semiosis related to hate in the Spanish media and their followers. The analysis, which is based on a semiotic matrix from Greimas and Courtés (1979), Greimas (1976), Barthes (1970), Kristeva (1969), and Lyotard (1979/2019), and was developed by the authors, covered 661 news items and 721 literal fragments and generated 2,074 interactions for examination. This study offers a semiotic framework for understanding how hate expressions are constructed and disseminated in digital media. It is crucial to recognize the narrative structures that promote the dissemination of hate expression in news content published by digital media on social media platforms. A scenario emerges in which fear, politically charged expressions, and terms aimed at accusing, discrediting, or undervaluing the recipients of such messages become tools for spreading content. Therefore, digital news media must review their content moderation practices to better manage the discussions generated concerning the news that they publish in the current digital landscape. This landscape is dominated not only by hostility rather than violence toward social groups represented by news protagonists but also by people who are used to promoting narratives filled with stereotypes and prejudices through dehumanization or demonization.

Keywords

digital news media; digital semiotics; discourse analysis; hate speech; social media platforms

1. Introduction

The semiotic structures in societies are complex, multifaceted, and deeply rooted in their diverse social, institutional, and communicative frameworks (Young-Jung Na, 2023). These underlying structures contribute to the dissemination and establishment of hate speech (Kahn, 2022), primarily because of the ubiquity of social media in the current digital environments in which communication occurs. In these contexts, power dynamics emerge that intertwine these structures in public opinion debates (Koval et al., 2019). Accordingly, the development of semiotic analysis of the dissemination of hate speech has become increasingly important. Hate messages are defined as messages of a public nature with the intention of humiliating, discriminating against, or even physically threatening an individual belonging to a group that is vulnerable because of their gender, race, ethnicity, ideology, religion, or other shared specific characteristics (Gómez-García et al., 2021). These analyses elucidate the semiotic strategies that integrate these terms into social discourse (Bianca, 2021). They also identify the various symbolic meanings embedded in the published digital content and facilitate an understanding of the mechanisms of propagation of these expressions and their subsequent characterization as exclusionary, threatening, or violent toward certain social groups (Erdogan-Ozturk & Isik-Guler, 2020; Gramigna, 2022; Riquelme et al., 2022).

Social media platforms contribute to the propagation of hostile and violent media environments. These platforms engender sentiments of anger, resentment, and opposition, which foster antagonistic or adversarial attitudes toward specific individuals or groups or promote the utilization of physical force or aggressive actions to inflict harm (Kim, 2022; Levin-Banchik, 2020; Walters & Espelage, 2020). The proliferation of hate speech of varying intensity in digital communication contexts likely serves as a foundation for reinforcing hostile rhetoric, which functions as a precursor and heightens the probability of social violence directed toward specific groups (Cover, 2022; Kim, 2022; Lee et al., 2022).

Users and participants in debates facilitated by digital media occasionally generate expressions that legitimize and normalize prejudices and stereotypes (Perreault, 2023). Algorithms typically govern such conversations (Kleis Nielsen & Ganter, 2018; Salonen et al., 2022). The limitations of existing moderation procedures have prompted efforts to develop mechanisms that ensure the effective management of these discussions and maintain a minimum standard of quality in the contributions of participating users (Lin & Kim, 2023).

The proliferation of hate speech primarily affects social media platforms, which are experiencing increasing polarization and the growing presence of hate speech and disinformation (Czopek, 2024). Political content is predominant in this dissemination (Falkenberg et al., 2024). Media organizations are considering withdrawing from these environments ("'La Vanguardia' dejará," 2024; Soni & Singh, 2024) because of the ineffectiveness of regulatory policies (Bergmanis-Koräts & Haidechyk, 2024; Center for Countering Digital Hate, 2023). The consequence is the promotion of an increasingly toxic and polarized communication context. Social agents and media entities must redefine their roles as traditional gatekeepers and consider new responsibilities that ensure positive and enriching dynamics in news dissemination, consumption, and discourse in contemporary social media landscapes (Kobellarz et al., 2022; Salonen et al., 2022).

A correlation between current events presented by the media and the prevalence of disinformation and hate speech in the ensuing debates has been observed, which is characterized by the utilization of textual and semiotic elements that construct hostile and violent narratives toward specific groups, such as politicians,

women, immigrants, and LGTBI+ (Erdogan-Ozturk & Isik-Guler, 2020; Rajan & Venkatraman, 2021; see also Hameleers et al., 2022). This necessitates understanding the visual and textual codes that legitimize and normalize prejudices and stereotypes toward these groups (Rajan & Venkatraman, 2021). These codes are addressed in this study, which aims to comprehend from a semiotic perspective how symbols, languages, and images are employed to transmit and disseminate expressions of hate within the debate contexts associated with information in digital environments. Specifically, this study focuses on the authors of these media platforms in Spain. The objective of this study is to advance the establishment of linguistic markers that facilitate a better understanding of hate speech (Määttä, 2023).

2. Literature Review on the Semiotic Analysis of Hate

There has been an increase in semiotic studies on digital communication, which encompass both textual and visual elements (Ghaffari, 2020). Despite this growth, the outcomes of the emerging field of "digital semiotics" remain limited (Berlanga-Fernández & Reyes, 2022) in regional studies, such as those conducted in Spain (Salaverría & Martínez-Costa, 2023) in specific domains, particularly cultural and literary topics (Castillo, 2022; Navarrete, 2019), and in contexts of particular significance, notably during the Covid-19 pandemic (Rubio-Pinilla & Candón-Mena, 2021). Hate speech propagation on social media platforms and its societal implications can be understood by analyzing these discourses' underlying symbolic and communicative structures (Vasist et al., 2023). The findings from such analyses will facilitate not only a more comprehensive understanding of the construction, dissemination, and perception of messages containing this type of expression but also their capacity to influence public opinion (Lilleker & Pérez-Escolar, 2023; Schäfer et al., 2022).

This semiotic perspective is multifaceted (multimodal). It examines social media's linguistic, emotional, and communicative dynamics in expressing and disseminating hate speech. These mechanisms enhance the persuasive power of the promoted narratives by combining verbal and iconic elements that involve rational and emotional cognitive components (Koltsova & Kartashkova, 2022). In Spain, this approach has focused on the study of the media framework, linguistic characteristics, and social events that have facilitated the shaping and dissemination of hatred toward immigrants (Gómez-Camacho et al., 2023; Lilleker & Pérez-Escolar, 2023). At the international level, this topic has become more comprehensive and multifaceted. Some of the manifestations of this approach include the identification of strategies, factors, and discursive elements to evade the action of media moderation mechanisms (Retta, 2023); the behavioral characterization of users and their psycholinguistic patterns (Perera et al., 2023); the exploration of mechanisms that enable multimodal, text, and image analysis (Chhabra & Vishwakarma, 2023); and the examination of media discourses employed by contemporary digital news media in favor of a more informed and balanced public opinion (Labiano et al., 2023).

This semiotic analysis of contemporary digital communication scenarios necessitates advancements in defining the interactions of users who comment. This entails a requisite review and adaptation of certain fundamental concepts in semiotics. Such an undertaking requires a process of adaptation and integration of concepts that serve as a foundation for developing the analysis process from a semiotic perspective.

This work has been progressing from a semiotic perspective in various geographical regions. This is exemplified by studies conducted by Fonseca et al. (2024) in Portugal, which focus primarily on identifying

the interaction patterns that aid in estimating the temporal occurrence of such messages within social media platform debates. Additionally, other research such as that conducted by Barth et al. (2023) has analyzed diverse communicative contexts in the United States, Finland, Great Britain, and Germany to assess the influence of these contexts on the interpretations associated with hate-expressing messages. Retta (2023) studied in Italy how insults and derogatory epithets reinforce polarization and strengthen values within social media platform user groups. Research by Phadke et al. (2018) concentrated on analyzing hate messages from the perspective of framing and propaganda in the United States. Furthermore, Määttä (2023) reported an absence of linguistic tools adapted to cultural contexts in Finland and France. This research is necessary for comprehending and identifying the discursive structures of hate-expressing messages and how they are legitimized in debates generated on social media platforms.

For these reasons, this study, in pursuit of its overarching objective, revisits the theoretical frameworks of Greimas and Courtés (1979), Kristeva (1969), Lyotard (1979/2019), and Barthes (1970) as conceptual resources that may contribute to the examination of hate expressions in contemporary digital environments. Although these scholars did not formulate their theoretical postulations from a digital perspective, the timeless nature of their semiotic principles, which focus on studying signs, symbols, and meaning-making processes, can be applied to digital communication with an efficacy comparable to that of traditional media. This allows us to adapt these theories to current digital communication scenarios where hate expressions are disseminated.

This discussion exemplifies Kristeva's (1969) concept of intertextuality, which entails conceptualizing linguistic structures as isomorphic or analogous to other systems, such as literature and politics (Alirangues, 2018). This concept applies to analyzing hate messages spread on social media platforms, particularly regarding their capacity to reference and influence one another (Barth et al., 2023).

Additional concepts pertinent to this analysis are message narratives and connotative characteristics (Barthes, 1970). The literal definition of a word or phrase (denotation) and its cultural and emotional associations (connotations) are included. Consequently, the comprehension of aesthetic and narrative elements (denotative) and cultural and emotional aspects (connotative) can contribute to the construction of meaning because of the capacity to generate a novel combination with the signifier, which subsequently becomes meaningful (Nöth, 2011).

Barthes's (1970) approach, when applied to the digital domain and focused on the study of hate speech, can facilitate the identification of messages containing hostile narratives toward specific social groups. This methodology enables the classification of various linguistic nuances (literal and explicit content, underlying implications, and emotional connotations) associated with such content. Furthermore, it contributes to understanding the impact of the interactions generated around these messages (Tontodimamma et al., 2022). This approach has been instrumental in highlighting the predominance of discursive strategies and underlying values that tend to be more connotative (Inwood & Zappavigna, 2023).

Greimas and Courtés' (1979) proposal of generative trajectories and Lyotard's (1979/2019) approach to the narrative of emancipation are of significant interest. The former, oriented toward the narrative analysis of the structural and semantic dimensions of messages, emphasizes the roles and functions of these elements (Hernández et al., 2023; Imbert, 2019). The latter, which was not originally conceived to analyze digital

communication scenarios, highlights the need to focus on the study of micronarratives. Micronarratives can elucidate transformations and issues in society through the recognition of the importance of situational perspectives that aid in assessing the legitimacy of various discourses promoted through language. This approach is particularly relevant when considering the capacity of digital spaces for user groups to share their narratives (Christian et al., 2020; Sanders et al., 2023). Both concepts can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of hate speech dissemination on social media because they facilitate a better understanding of the associated narrative dynamics (Fan et al., 2022) and their interconnected nature and evolution (Johnson et al., 2019). This study integrates these theories and their application to the semiotic and multidimensional analysis of hate speech on social media.

3. Methodology

This study investigates the dissemination of hate through digital news media in Spain (among users on the X platform) by employing a semiotic perspective. The research focuses on a case study: the coverage in five primary digital news media with user accounts on X regarding the inauguration of Joe Biden as president on January 20, 2021. The digital news media examined include *El País* (@el_pais), *El Mundo* (@elmundoes), ABC (@abc_es), 20Minutos (@20m), and *La Vanguardia* (@LaVanguardia). According to Statista (2020a, 2020b) and Miguel (2020), these outlets were selected based on their prominence at the time.

The event was selected for its international significance, as it generated extensive media coverage, partly due to preceding events (Trump's electoral defeat and subsequent allegations of electoral fraud in certain states and the assault on the United States Congress on January 6, 2021). These circumstances resulted in high polarization and increased journalistic interest in the event.

The following specific aims were established to accomplish the objectives delineated in this study:

- OE1. Assess the prevalence of hate speech in messages associated with news content published by the digital news media under investigation.
- OE2. Identify the dimensions of hatred presented in the content published in this digital news media.
- OE3. Establish the semiotic elements associated with hatred.
- OE4. Determine the relationships among hatred, denotation, connotation, and semiosis in the comments generated in response to the news content published by the selected digital news media.

The study employs a qualitative approach by utilizing an intentional sample that initially comprised seven news items published from the accounts of the selected digital news media in Spain on X and all of the comments generated in response to them until March 2024, the date on which this sample was collected (Table 1). These news items were published on the day preceding the speech (January 19, 2021) and following the event (January 21, 2021).

The acquisition of the informative content identified and utilized as a case study and the subsequent generated comments were achieved through the application of the API and the Airflow platform in X. To extract these cases, all informative content and associated comments from the five digital news media under consideration were obtained (Table 2).

Table 1. Informative content taken as case studies of the topic.

Media	Informational content URL	Informational content publication date	Posts	Number of associated comments
El Mundo	https://x.com/elmundoes/status/1351980993968799749	January 20, 2021	30	34
ABC	https://x.com/abc_es/status/1351924787703144455	January 20, 2021	41	349
20Minutos	https://x.com/20m/status/1351432082262794241	January 19, 2021	8	8
La Vanguardia	https://x.com/LaVanguardia/status/1352197277805400065	January 20, 2021	2	1
La Vanguardia	https://x.com/LaVanguardia/status/1351944823855575040	January 21, 2021	2	5
El País	https://x.com/el_pais/status/1351934637552107522	January 21, 2021	69	104
El País	https://x.com/el_pais/status/1352190043905994753	January 20, 2021	4	4

Table 2. Distribution of the total messages collected and analyzed in January 2021 in the media selected for the case study.

Media analyzed on X	Total number of information content collected	Total number of information content resulting from preprocessing
20Minutos	77,796	58,629
ABC	72,893	56,632
El Mundo	35,242	35,123
El País	56,901	43,582
La Vanguardia	42,970	42,965

The messages were preprocessed following the procedure applied by Ruíz-Iniesta et al. (2024), which included the removal of empty or duplicate texts; eliminating URLs, emojis, and user mentions; and cleaning and homogenizing the data. This standardization process involved converting text to lowercase; removing punctuation marks and additional blank spaces; eliminating numbers, stop words, and words with fewer than two characters; and tokenizing and lemmatizing the text and words comprising each message. The total number of informative content collected and cleaned was 236,931. Manual identification was conducted on this corpus to select the content relevant to the topic analysis proposed in this study. The resulting sample comprised 661 comments, including 156 news items published within the seven news items selected as a case study, and 505 comments generated in response to these items.

Among the 661 content (study sample), 721 verbatim or literal fragments were not only analyzed textually, specifically, fragments within this content, but also extracted for semiotic analysis based on the specific objectives delineated in this study (Figure 1). This analysis generated 2,074 interactions, which represented the various combinations of each word obtained, with the rest predicated on the categories established for analysis.
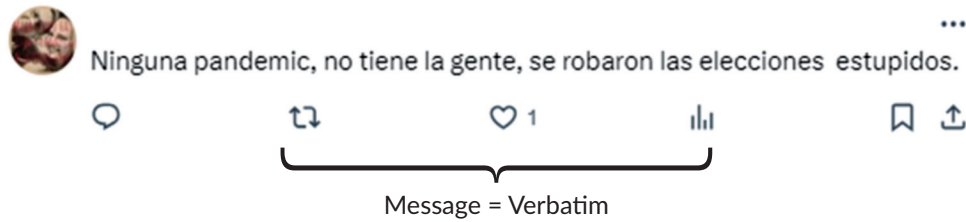
Figure 1. Identification of the verbatim content in the study sample.

An analysis matrix was developed for semiotic analysis on the basis of the theoretical frameworks presented by Greimas and Courtés (1979), Barthes (1970), Kristeva (1969), and Lyotard (1979/2019). This matrix is illustrated in Figure 2. Initially, the denotative and connotative aspects of the selected messages were examined. Furthermore, this study analyzed the emancipatory narrative applied to these messages and the speculative approaches associated with the narratives employed by users who participated in the discourse generated by the analyzed publications.

The matrix presented in Figure 2 proposes an analysis of the text and its accompanying image from both denotative and connotative perspectives, traversing the destructive/constructive domain to evaluate their capacity for semiosis generation. This analysis was conducted within the framework of the emancipation narrative, which posits that messages can be simultaneously independent and dependent. Essentially, the context in which a message expression occurs may either attempt to generate a metalanguage or respond to one. The matrix demonstrates the potential of primary and secondary messages, indicating that additional messages can be derived from a single text. This inherent complexity in the narrative necessitates thoroughly examining each internet user's input to determine the significance of the interactions.
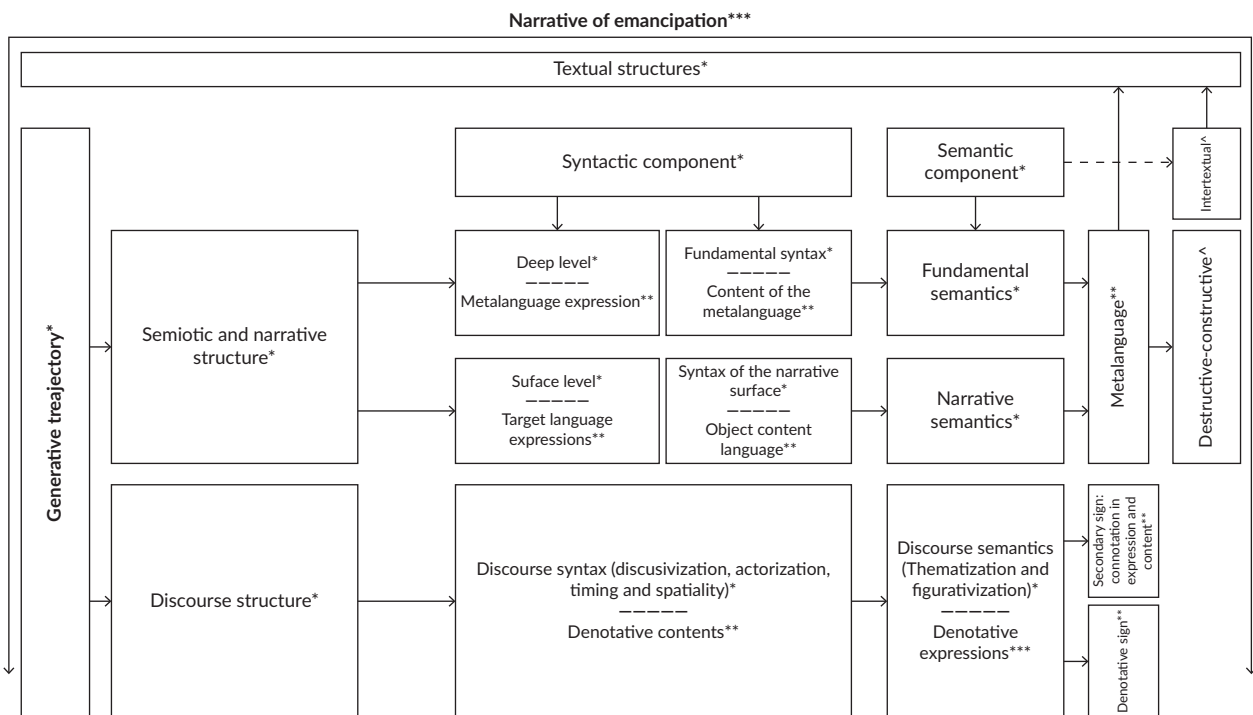

Figure 2. Semiotic analysis matrix applied to the analyzed messages. Note: Prepared by the authors based on *Greimas and Courtés (1979), **Barthes (1970), ^Kristeva (1969), and ***Lyotard (1979/2019).

Concerning the prevalence and intensity of hate speech observed in the corpus of the messages analyzed in this study, the following intensity levels were utilized as a reference framework (De Lucas et al., 2022):

- Intensity level 0: Communication exhibiting expressions of prejudice wherein a group or social collective is delineated or identified in a pejorative manner or through negative connotations.
- Intensity level 1: Communication containing expressions of prejudice utilized factually to stigmatize a specific group or social collective.
- Intensity level 2: Communication including discriminatory expressions of an abusive nature or conveyed with malicious intent to unequivocally attribute specific actions to promote an unfavorable perception of the members of a group or social collective.
- Intensity level 3: Communication involving expressions of animosity characterized by verbal aggression toward specific groups or social collectives.
- Intensity level 4: Expressions that allude to veiled or implicit threats, manifestations of satisfaction regarding violence directed toward a specific group or social collective, or the utilization of intimidating terminology.
- Intensity level 5: Statements that advocate for action or promote explicit violence against a specific individual or social group or where a clear intention is expressed for them to experience physical harm.

These six levels can be categorized into two primary groups (Kim, 2022; Levin-Banchik, 2020; Walters & Espelage, 2020). The first group with intensities of 0, 1, and 2 encompasses expressions of hate that foster a context of media hostility against vulnerable social groups. The second group of messages with expressions of hate have intensities of 3, 4, and 5 and promotes a context of media violence, with an implicit or explicit call to action, against the members of these social groups.

The Atlas.Ti application (version 23) was employed for the processing and semiotic analysis of all comments associated with the information content published by the selected media. Seventeen analysis categories were classified, including the theoretical construct of reference (Table 3).

Based on the traditional semiotic conceptual references in Table 3, this approach was applied to hate speech in contemporary digital contexts. This procedure has the potential to enhance current methodological approaches that utilize semiotics from a computational perspective, such as those that employ machine learning techniques and natural language processing (NLP) or the lexicon associated with these expressions (Arce-García & Menéndez-Menéndez, 2022; Lingiardi et al., 2019). From the perspective of cultural semiotics, semiosphere models (Lotman, 1996) have also been applied to social networks (Gramigna, 2022). These models focus primarily on understanding the impact of algorithms in selecting and disseminating content that promotes polarization and incites hatred. Barth et al. (2023) drew upon systems theories and concentrated on understanding the functions and consequences of hate speech in digital ecosystems. Both approaches offer methodological frameworks complementary to the one presented here, which aims to identify the linguistic patterns in hate speech on social media platforms.

Table 3. Analysis categories applied to the sample.

Reference author	Category	Indicator
Greimas and Courtés (1979)	Generative path	Representation of meaning in the message.
	Textual structures	Messages that seek narrativity.
	Semantic component	Parts of the semantic structure of the message.
	Semiotic and narrative structure	The narrative structure of the message.
	Discursive structure	Modalities within the types of discourse.
	Syntactic component	Rules of message structure.
	Surface level	Semantic construction of the message.
	Syntax of the narrative surface	Manipulation of state and action statements in the message.
	Deep level	When the character of the message is the one who expresses himself.
	Discursive syntax	The first enunciative level is the sentence's relationship with its subject, verb and predicate (example).
	Fundamental syntax	The role that words play in the message.
	Denotative sign	It relates to something directly indicated.
	Semantic component	What it implies to the surrounding world.
	Fundamental semantics	The denotative or connotative character of the language used in the message.
	Narrative semantics	The meaning of the text.
	Discursive semantics	The meaning of the message.
	Actorization	Refers to the presence and creation of an actor within the message.
	Figurativization	Refers to the presence of a figure that may have a public character.
	Thematization	Refers to the introduction of a topic in the message.
Barthes (1970)	Denotative expressions	They do not allow for ambiguity.
	Language object expressions	Refers to the objects of the message.
	Language object content	What the objects mean within the language.
	Metalanguage content	When the language can speak for itself.
	Metalanguage expression	The spoken topic is the language itself.
	Metalanguage	Language that is used to speak another language.
	Secondary sign	Not necessarily intended to communicate.
	Denotative sign	That which indicates and points out.
Kristeva (1969)	Intertextuality	Discursive relationships within the messages are taken as a sample.
	Destructive	Going beyond communicative language by deconstructing the text. Seeking destruction based on the message.
	Constructive	Going beyond communicative language by deconstructing the text. Seeking construction based on the message.
	Intertextuality	Relationship between messages.
Lyotard (1979/2019)	Narrative of emancipation	Totalizing and multi-encompassing speeches are those that can close a discussion.

4. Results

4.1. Presence, Dimensions, and Semiotic Elements of Promoting Hatred

A total of 92.4% of the interactions derived from the text extracted from the 661 news items and comments that comprise the sample contained expressions of hate. Such expressions were absent in the remaining 7.6% of the sample. Consequently, it can be concluded that users who propagate hate effectively use this platform to disseminate their narrative.

Joe Biden's inauguration as President of the United States was utilized as an event for disseminating various forms of prejudice, including misogynistic, political, racial, and xenophobic sentiments. These manifestations of bias were frequently predicated on the propagation of fear (e.g., plutophobia), the employment of politically charged terminology, and the utilization of language intended to accuse, discredit, or devalue the recipients of such communications.

The results generated from the semiotic analysis facilitated the description of three fundamental elements: semiotic interactions, hatred intensity, and hatred type. Figure 3 illustrates examples of hate relation typologies, where various levels are integrated, along with diverse semiotic elements, denotations, and connotations. These examples are derived from the user interventions in discussions on news content published by digital news media. Through these examples, this study aims to demonstrate how most of the messages analyzed in this work present exclusionary language associated with intensities 0, 1, and 2 considered in the methodological section. This observation reveals an underlying semiotic structure more
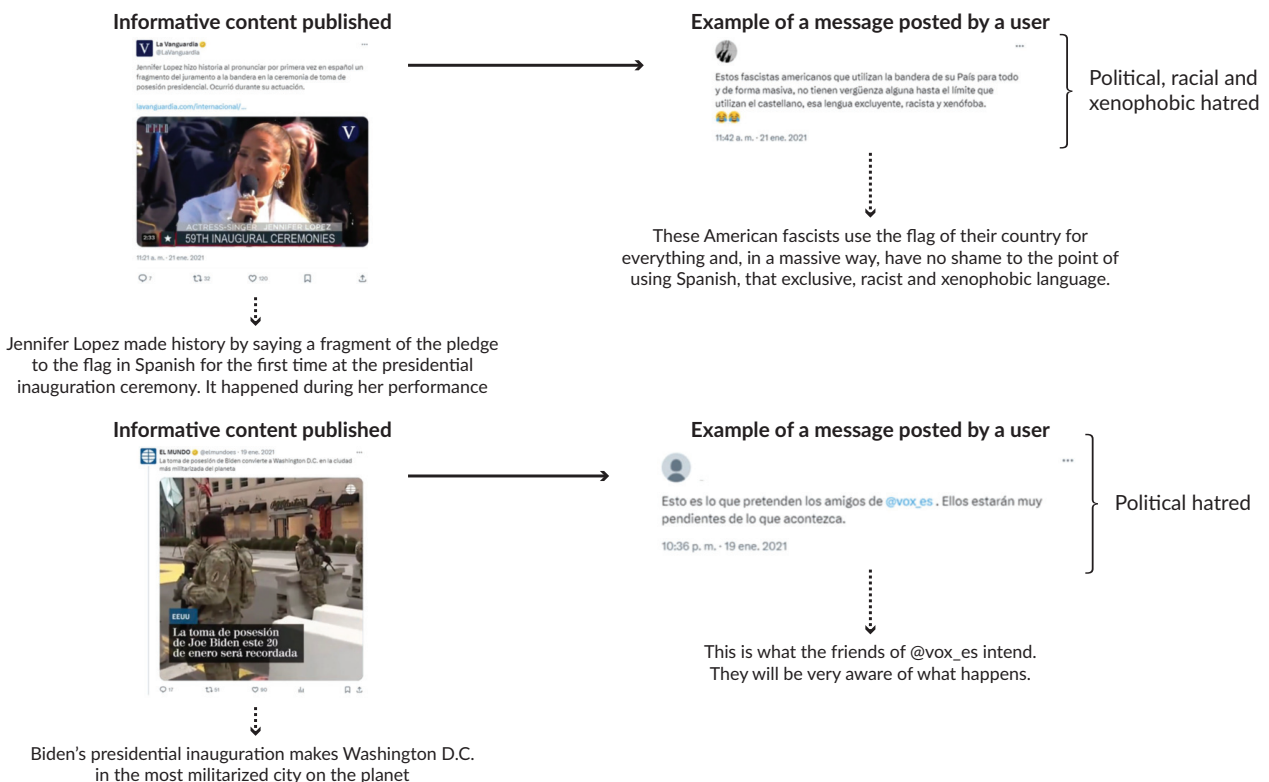
Figure 3. Examples of the types of hate promoted.

oriented toward promoting a hostile social framework aimed at legitimizing narratives laden with prejudices and stereotypes for political, racial, or other reasons against certain national social groups (in Spain) through news published by digital news media regarding Joe Biden's inauguration in the United States. The narrative from the metalanguage used in Figure 3, which seeks to produce semiosis around the connotations, can be interpreted from the image of J. Lo, suggesting that Americans, in addition to being fascists, utilize the flag indiscriminately, analogous to the actions of right-wing parties in Spain, and employ it as a symbolic element to connote affiliation toward policies more aligned with right-wing ideology.

In the case of the image of the military (Figure 3), the objective is to establish a correlation between the ideological policies of the right-wing party VOX and the behavioral affinities of the state's armed forces. Internet users seek to express this political animosity when articulating their opinions about the image of the military.

Among its many manifestations, hate speech predicated on racial, misogynistic, and ideological grounds is particularly salient. Within the semiotic relationship framework, these expressions seek to be established, engendering metalanguages that other users can adopt and utilize. This process of transmission and transformation of meanings is termed semiosis.

There are also narrative axes centered on fear and ideological positions. This is exemplified by the message in Figure 4: "These American fascists who use their country's flag for everything and massively, have no shame to the point of using Spanish, that exclusive, racist and xenophobic language." This statement demonstrates the relationship between exclusionary language and intertextuality and constructs new levels of animosity associated with parallel themes external to the news content provided by the media.

It is worth observing the concentration of hate message recipients around specific figures participating in Joe Biden's inauguration. This phenomenon is exemplified by *El País* and its coverage of Lady Gaga's participation in the event (Figure 4). Messages containing hate expressions exhibit exclusionary language and metalanguage, which are the fundamental elements of semiosis. In the case of exclusionary language, messages were used to exclude others. At the same time, metalanguage was employed using argued scientific language to render it accessible or "proximate" to other users participating in the debate generated from the news. In this instance, semiosis manifests through various representations that users generate (e.g., cultural alienation and patriotism) via messages or comments in response to a news item.

Figures 4 and 5 show several examples. The first pertains to exclusionary messages regarding Lady Gaga, which emphasize that the singer is associated with North American show business, which, from the metalanguage perspective, appears to be valid. This is contrasted with the situation in Mexico, where ceremonies incorporating folklore or Mexican artists are perceived to have diminished authority. The second example displays a reproduction of text from the ABC newspaper, which enumerates the artists participating in the inauguration ceremony. Internet users subsequently employ the images of these women to ascribe the connotations surrounding their figurativization and the factorization of their inclusion in the ceremony as part of the context.

The comment analysis also examined the factorization and figuration of hate messages within the debates generated in the digital news media accounts. Specifically, this refers not only to the capacity of language to
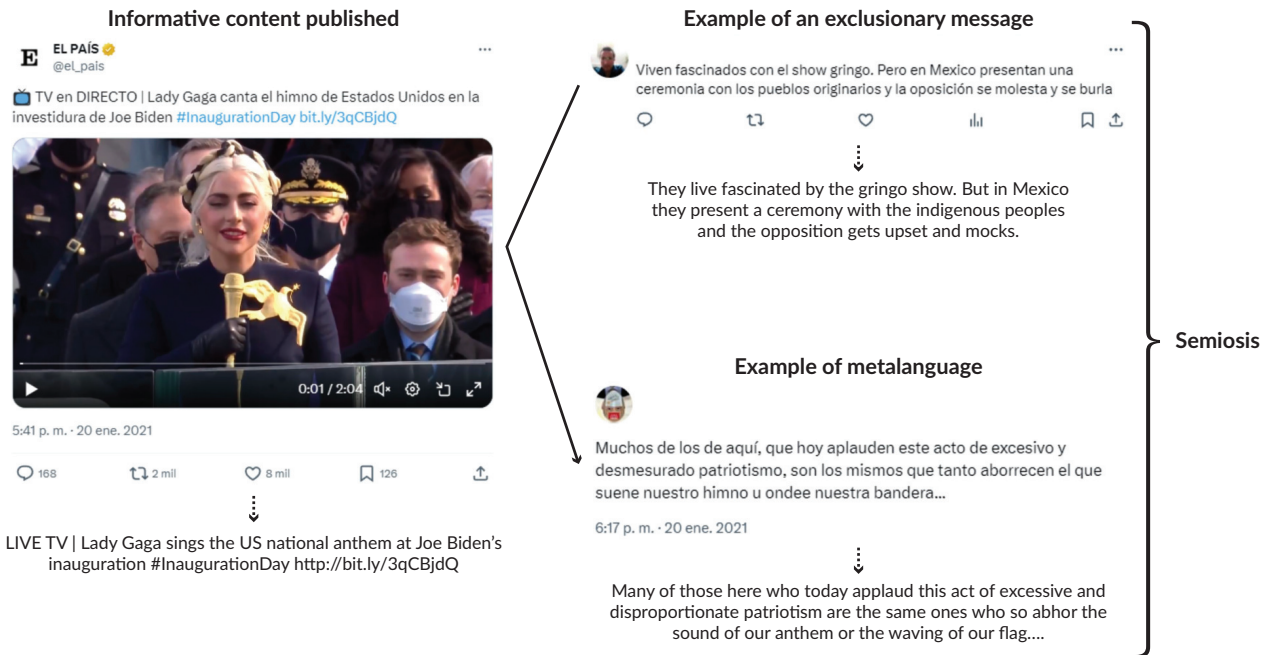
Informative content published

EL PAÍS ✓
@el_pais

📺 TV en DIRECTO | Lady Gaga canta el himno de Estados Unidos en la investidura de Joe Biden #InaugurationDay bit.ly/3qCBjdQ

5:41 p. m. · 20 ene. 2021

💬 168   🔁 2 mil   ♥ 8 mil   🔖 126

LIVE TV | Lady Gaga sings the US national anthem at Joe Biden's inauguration #InaugurationDay http://bit.ly/3qCBjdQ

Example of an exclusionary message

Viven fascinados con el show gringo. Pero en Mexico presentan una ceremonia con los pueblos originarios y la oposición se molesta y se burla

They live fascinated by the gringo show. But in Mexico they present a ceremony with the indigenous peoples and the opposition gets upset and mocks.

Example of metalanguage

Muchos de los de aquí, que hoy aplauden este acto de excesivo y desmesurado patriotismo, son los mismos que tanto aborrecen el que suene nuestro himno u ondee nuestra bandera...

6:17 p. m. · 20 ene. 2021

Many of those here who today applaud this act of excessive and disproportionate patriotism are the same ones who so abhor the sound of our anthem or the waving of our flag....

Semiosis

Figure 4. Examples of exclusive language, metalanguage, semiosis.

Informative content published

ABC.es ✓ @abc_es · 14 ene. 2021
Lady Gaga y Jennifer Lopez cantarán en la toma de posesión de Joe Biden ver.abc.es/wmiur1 Habrá más de 20.000 efectivos de la Guardia Nacional para hacer frente a posibles enfrentamientos violentos

abc.es
Lady Gaga y Jennifer Lopez cantarán en la toma de po... También se sumarán Bruce Springsteen, Foo Fighters y John Legend en streaming

💬 19   🔁 21   ♥ 48

Lady Gaga and Jennifer Lopez will sing at Joe Biden's presidential inauguration http://ver.abc.es/wmiur1 There will be more than 20,000 National Guard troops to deal with possible violent confrontations

Factorization example

Deep state en todo su esplendor

11:26 p. m. · 14 ene. 2021

Deep state in all its splendor

Informative content published

EL PAÍS ✓
@el_pais

Las soberbias intervenciones de Lady Gaga y JLo palidecieron ante la sobrecogedora lectura de quien se convirtió en estrella de la ceremonia: Amanda Gorman, la poeta más joven de la historia en participar en una investidura bit.ly/3bXIeew

9:45 a. m. · 21 ene. 2021

💬 15   🔁 35   ♥ 196

The superb interventions of Lady Gaga and JLo paled before the overwhelming reading of the one who became the star of the ceremony: Amanda Gorman, the youngest poet in history to participate in an investiture http://bit.ly/4bXIeew

Figuritization examples

Toda la izquierda caviar, enamorada de sí misma y con ganas de empezar con la ingeniería social para hacerse más ricos mientras creen que nos hacen más felices.

♥ 1

The whole caviar left, in love with itself and eager to start with social engineering to become richer while believing that is makes us happier.
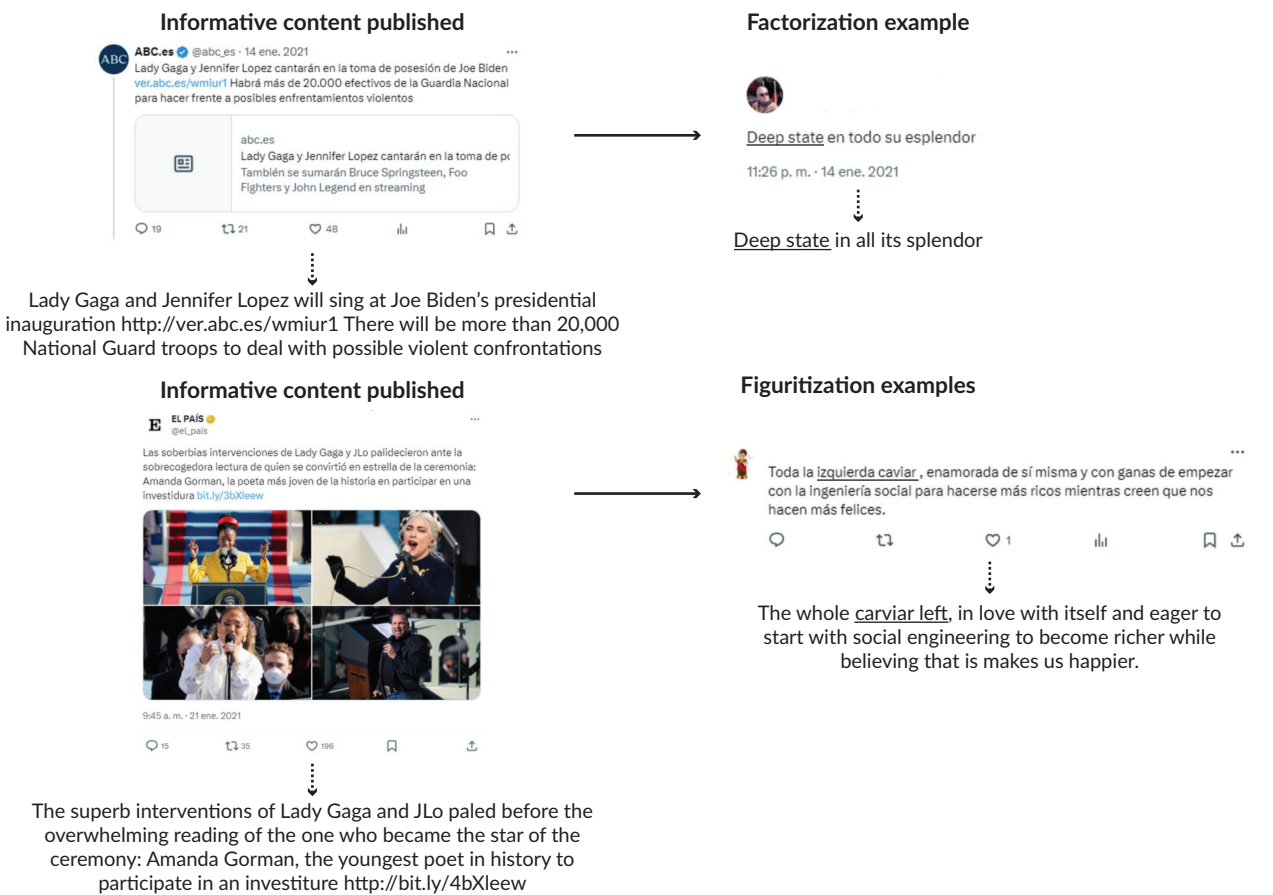
Figure 5. Examples of factorization and figurativization.

alter discourse by providing it with connotations beyond its narrative meaning but also to the attempt to attribute characteristics to individuals based on their social relevance (e.g., president of government). An illustrative example of this phenomenon can be observed in Figures 4 and 5, wherein concepts such as "deep state" and "caviar left" are employed for these purposes. The utilization of these concepts exemplifies how hatred can manifest in diverse forms, generating semiosis around a particular topic. This instance pertains to the ideological themes associated with the examined event that are employed to express hatred directed at figures or protagonists featured in Spanish digital news media content. Factorization and figuration appear to occur on a relatively broad scale, at least within the corpus of the messages analyzed in this research.

4.2. The Intensity of Hatred, Denotation, Connotation, and Semiosis of the Messages

Table 4 shows that most of the 2,074 interactions generated around the comments were categorized as "low intensity" hate. This classification was applied to intensity levels 0, 1, and 2 (De Lucas et al., 2022). The social consequence of this typology is, at a minimum, the establishment of a widely accepted negative prejudice against the targeted minority. Although it may not explicitly call for action, it constitutes a fundamentally anti-democratic, discriminatory cultural principle. Moreover, the promotion of a hostile environment toward these discriminated minorities not only fails to prevent but also may lead to tangible social actions that range from effective discrimination to violent acts. Indeed, detected and systematic hate speech campaigns focus primarily on disseminating low-intensity messages (Arce-García et al., 2024). This act could be interpreted as cultivating a "cultural" climate conducive to subsequent discriminatory or violent actions (Figure 6).

Table 4. Interactions generated around messages with detected hate speech.

By intensity of hate		
Exclusionary language (intensity 0, 1, and 2): 177	Violent language (intensity 3): 32	Threatening language (intensity 4 and 5): 5
By denotation		
Discursivization: 273		Actorization: 357
By connotation		
Thematization: 279		Figurativization: 371
By semiosis		
Metalanguage: 129	Destructive: 120	Intertextuality: 174

Figures 6, 7, and 8 present selected examples that illustrate the varying intensities of hatred. One instance pertains to the violent message directed at the poet Amanda Gorman, wherein she is pejoratively referred to as a "girl," and the term "sheep" is employed to depict her as part of a collective. Another category of language is exclusionary. In one case, this exclusion stems from misogyny—exemplified by the use of purple as a feminist color—or the use of red as a communist color. Additionally, hostile or threatening language is observed concerning the photograph of Biden, where he is explicitly labeled a "genocidal maniac." A notable example of connotative use derived from denotation is within the figure. This is evident in the out-of-context photographs of Sanders employed as a meme. In the initial instance on the left, Sanders is depicted in isolation wearing wool mittens, whereas, in the subsequent image, he is positioned at a table with a sculpture to convey a connotation of solitude. This visual manipulation augments the humor inherent in Sanders' posture while simultaneously connoting his isolation following his defeat in the presidential elections.
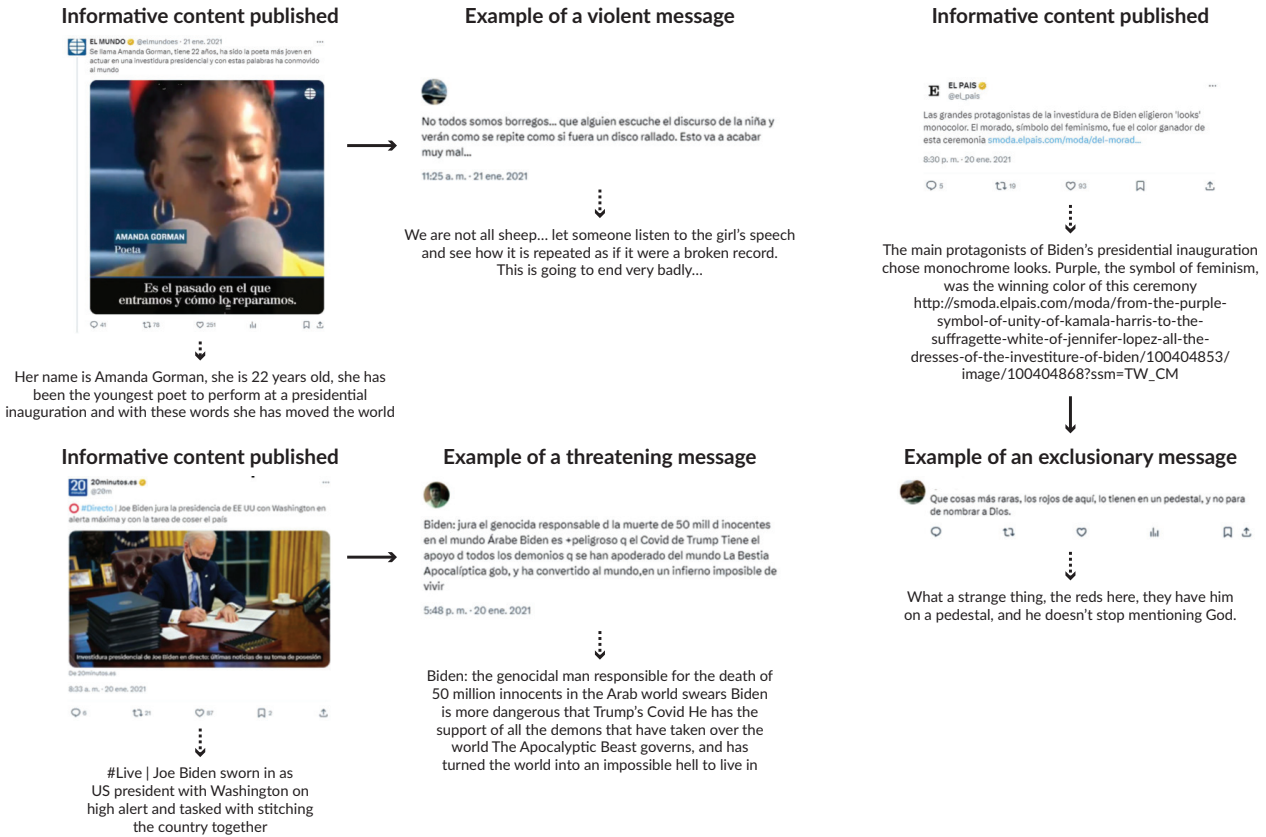
Informative content published

Her name is Amanda Gorman, she is 22 years old, she has been the youngest poet to perform at a presidential inauguration and with these words she has moved the world

Example of a violent message

We are not all sheep… let someone listen to the girl's speech and see how it is repeated as if it were a broken record. This is going to end very badly…

Informative content published

The main protagonists of Biden's presidential inauguration chose monochrome looks. Purple, the symbol of feminism, was the winning color of this ceremony http://smoda.elpais.com/moda/from-the-purple-symbol-of-unity-of-kamala-harris-to-the-suffragette-white-of-jennifer-lopez-all-the-dresses-of-the-investiture-of-biden/100404853/image/100404868?ssm=TW_CM

Informative content published

#Live | Joe Biden sworn in as US president with Washington on high alert and tasked with stitching the country together

Example of a threatening message

Biden: the genocidal man responsible for the death of 50 million innocents in the Arab world swears Biden is more dangerous that Trump's Covid He has the support of all the demons that have taken over the world The Apocalyptic Beast governs, and has turned the world into an impossible hell to live in

Example of an exclusionary message

What a strange thing, the reds here, they have him on a pedestal, and he doesn't stop mentioning God.

Figure 6. Examples of the interactions with hate speech by intensity.

Informative content published

LIVE | Bernie Sanders, today at the inauguration as president of Joe Biden, who was his rival in the race to become the Democratic candidate #InaugurationDay http://bit.ly/3qCBjdQ

Example of a message posted by a user

① A meme was built from the photograph of Sanders in the stands at the inauguration. It is a Metalanguage, of exclusive language (level 1), in which the character becomes Actorization, which produces Semiosis. In this case, we are talking about denotation.

② The two comments reinforce the actorization (Semiosis) and continue with the Metalanguage (as they deal with the same topic seen from other perspectives and, at the same time, they figuratively represent the messages by 'objectifying' the actor. In this case, we are talking about connotation.

Que soledad.

Así su aspecto es tan senil como sus ideas

What loneliness.

His appearance is as senile as his ideas.

Figure 7. Examples of the interactions with denotation and connotation.

Informative content published

20minutos.es
@20m

Cambio climático, veto a musulmanes, México... las primeras decisiones de Biden que revierten políticas de Trump | Por @pelayogades

Cambio climático, veto a musulmanes, México... las decisiones de Biden que r...
De 20minutos.es
3:56 p. m. · 20 ene. 2021

Climate change, Muslim ban, Mexico... Biden's first decisions that reverse Trump's polices | By @pelayogades

Example of a message posted by a user

Un país eclipsado, polarizado y muy pronto en caída como Potencia Mundial.

A country eclipsed, polarized and soon to fall as a World Power

The news is based on the metalanguage know and worked on by journalists around Trump's departure from power and Biden's arrival with the burden of the Obama government.
In the case of the Internet user's reply to the journalist's note, is not only a destructive 'eclipsed country' produced but also intertextuality in which the last two US governments are related by completing 'in decline as a World Power'. The semiosis is in the management by the internet user when treating his comment as 'eclipsed country, polarized (the two regimes of Obama and Trump) and the fall as a world power in contrast or response to the decisions that Biden must take after the Trump government.

Figure 8. Examples of the interactions with metalanguage, destructiveness, and intertextuality.

Figure 8 is particularly noteworthy, as it addresses metalanguage, destructiveness, and intertextuality. The photograph is significant: It depicts President Biden with the American flag, but the internet user's interpretation elicits multiple analyses because of the metalanguage employed. The user utilizes the phrase "a country eclipsed, polarized and very soon in decline as a World Power." This concise statement elucidates how Obama's former vice president was instrumental in the conflicts during the administration, references the narrow margin of votes between Trump and Biden, and alludes to the decline of a formerly dominant nation. These elements collectively characterize the image as exemplifying metalanguage, destructive language, and intertextuality when juxtaposed with the media outlet's post.

At both the denotative and connotative levels, it is evident that most of the hate speech messages focus predominantly on the actors or protagonists of the news (action and representation), namely, Joe Biden, Jennifer Lopez, Katy Perry, Lady Gaga, or Amanda Gorman, as well as prominent political representatives of the Democratic Party such as Nancy Pelosi, Bernie Sanders, and Barack Obama (Figure 9). This approach eschews discursivization and thematization within the identified hate speech messages. In essence, most hate speech messages employ a strategy that targets the actor or protagonist of the news and their actions within that context (e.g., the role assumed in this event) rather than addressing the speech or messages conveyed during the event. The example presented in Figure 5 demonstrates that messages containing hate expressions appear to be more closely associated with the subject of the news than with the news context itself.

The data presented in Table 4 facilitate the analysis of the semiotic processes in this context. The observed semiosis is destructive and primarily aimed at discrediting the opposing party by utilizing hate-based expressions within the messages. Furthermore, the data revealed an increased presence of intertextuality, or more specifically, the interconnected relationships among messages in a dialogical manner (Figure 5).

4.3. Relationships Among Hatred, Denotation, Connotation, and Semiosis

From the perspective of semiosis, Figure 9 shows the relative coherence and relationship between the types of metalanguage and destructive semiosis proposed by Kristeva (1969). This figure indicates a context wherein, when observing semiosis, metalanguage safeguards the destructive element. Consequently, this necessitates a broader context in which semiosis is generated.

From a denotative and connotative perspective, the characters—Trump and Biden—in their roles as public figures (actorization) and their participation (figurativization) ultimately become recipients of messages containing expressions of hate. The news event (thematization) is relegated to a secondary position. The significant aspect, the inauguration, which constitutes the news event (thematization) itself, assumes a subordinate role in the interactions generated by the commenters (Table 3). In essence, the news event and the topics addressed in the news content published by Spanish digital media on X appear to serve primarily as a vehicle for users propagating hate to promote stereotypes and prejudices (political, racial, or misogynistic) while attacking the protagonists for their role in the event.

Figure 9 shows how hate messages were directed at the Obama period without going beyond the exclusive language aimed at actorization-thematization-figurativization and with a destructive-intertextual approach. The denotative elements (actorization) and connotative elements (thematization and figuration) can be seen. They are placed in a secondary plane of interest in contrast to the relationship between the intensity of hate and semiosis; this is a result of the intertextuality that arises from the presence of Obama in his double role of former president and Nobel Prize winner. Above all, the users who promote hate speech revive the debate generated by Obama's presidency and the Nobel Peace Prize using a discursive axis of this type of shared message through the news content published by the examined digital news media in Spain.

Figure 9 shows how hate messages were directed at the Obama period without exceeding the exclusive language oriented toward actorization-thematization-figurativization and by employing a destructive intertextual approach. The denotative elements (actorization) and connotative elements (thematization and figurativization) are evident. They are positioned in a secondary plane of interest relative to the relationship that occurs between the level of hatred intensity and semiosis resulting from the intertextuality arising from Obama's presence in his dual capacity as former president and Nobel Prize laureate.

Another noteworthy example of these antagonistic relationships with semiosis is presented in one of the messages from users participating in news-driven debates (Figure 9). In this instance, within the narrative
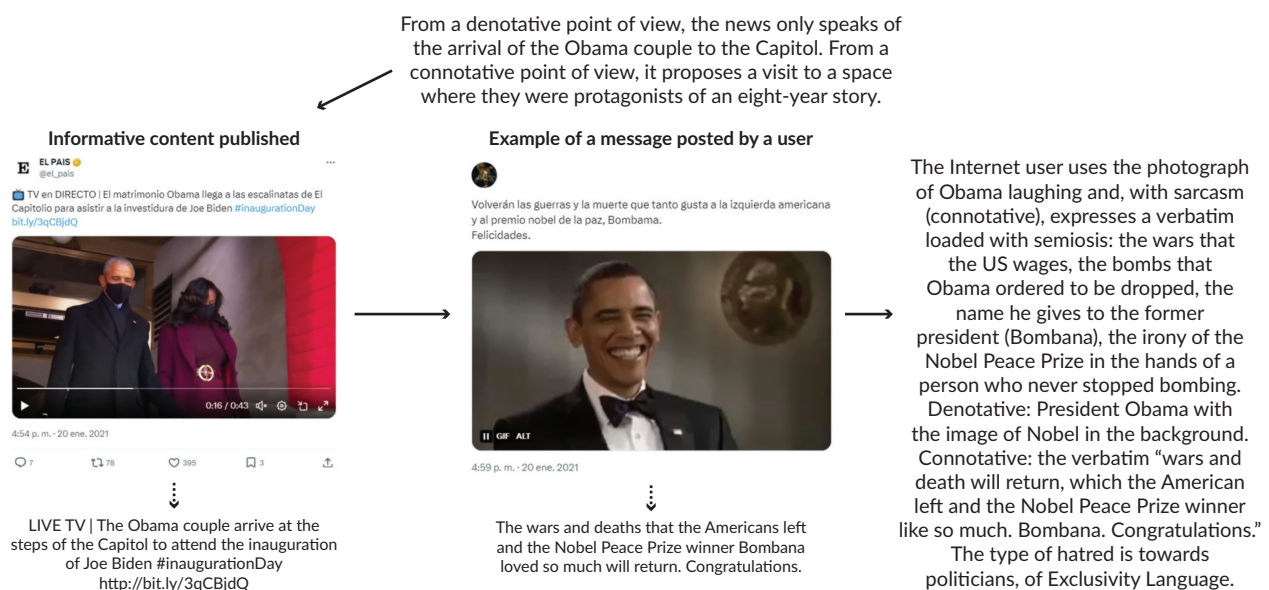
Figure 9. Examples of the relationships among hatred, denotation, connotation, and semiosis.

aspect, we observe discursivization, actorization, and the level of hostility and violent language; in the connotative aspect, there is figurativeness, and in semiosis, intertextuality appears. The message refers to Biden when he served as Vice President of the United States and ordered the bombing of Iraq in 2014, although the internet user employs the figure of Obama as the person ultimately responsible for the American Left. Notably, between the intensity of violent hostility and the semiosis "destructive," we are directed toward the figurativeness of Obama and his Nobel Peace Prize. This demonstrates how the central figures of the news analyzed in this work become a point of support for semiosis.

A comparable relationship is observed for the news content of the studied media. The example presented, associated with Joe Biden's inauguration, shows the relationships among violent, actor-like, thematic, and destructive hostility.

Former President Obama was not exempt from the interactions, as shown in Figure 9. Furthermore, users who disseminated hate speech attempted to propagate a narrative centered on associating Democrats with the warlike character that they are claimed to possess. This narrative is constructed through a relationship centered on actorization, destructive semiosis, violent expressions of hatred, and thematization.

5. Discussion

The analysis was conducted using a semiotic matrix based on approaches proposed by Greimas and Courtés (1979), Kristeva (1969), Lyotard (1979/2019), and Barthes (1970). When applied to contemporary digital scenarios, such as the one examined in this study, it potentially facilitates an approximation of the analysis of hate expressions disseminated within debates generated by news content published in digital media on X, particularly in Spain. This approach reveals significant semiotic conceptual coexistence. Although these authors predated the emergence of digital communication, their analytical frameworks remain applicable to digital media, particularly the X platform. Their postulates remain relevant as foundational contributions to semiotics in the latter half of the twentieth century. This relevance is particularly evident when their concepts are integrated into the semiotic analysis matrix employed in this study. Concepts such as metalanguage, connotation, and emancipatory narrative facilitate an exploratory approach to messages containing expressions of hostility in environments such as X. This approach extends to the interactions that users generate in response to news content published by digital media outlets in Spain that focus on national and international public interests, which serves as the basis for developing this research.

These findings on hate speech on social media platforms, particularly regarding the discourse generated by digital news media content, have implications for the public sphere and regulatory frameworks, including ethical considerations. The case study presented here demonstrates how specific semiotic indicators can facilitate the identification of patterns that elucidate the mechanisms of toxic content dissemination on platforms such as X. This platform is increasingly recognized as a primary vector for the propagation of hate speech and misinformation. Its influence contributes to establishing narratives that reinforce dichotomous, exclusionary, and ally-enemy paradigms in political discourse (Czopek, 2024).

This digital aspect is crucial for analyzing hate speech and disinformation (Falkenberg et al., 2024). A comparative study of nine countries (Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the United States) elucidates the bimodal nature of the political polarization promoted in

these countries (left–right) and the significant increase in the toxicity of their messages when disseminated among ideologically opposed groups of users or content. These processes form ideal polarization frameworks centered on displaying uncivil or malicious messages that narratively establish denigration and negative sentiments toward the recipients of their attacks. These vulnerable communities are represented by the protagonists of the content who are used to promote discourses that propagate prejudices and stereotypes and erode democratic values. In this scenario, the media (Spanish in this case) plays a significant ethical and regulatory role to the extent that it can mitigate this type of message. Their intermediation necessitates a different approach from the current one (gatekeeper). This is particularly relevant considering the rise of social media platforms in the dynamics of dissemination, consumption, and debate surrounding news shared in contemporary digital communication spaces (Salonen et al., 2022; Silver et al., 2022).

Several Spanish digital news media outlets (e.g., *La Vanguardia*) and international media organizations (e.g., *The Guardian* or CNN) have opted to discontinue their presence on platforms such as X ("'La Vanguardia' dejará," 2024; Soni & Singh, 2024). The information presented herein can facilitate reflection on the relevance and efficacy of the regulatory mechanisms employed in response to the proliferation of hate speech and disinformation generated in the discussions of their readers. This is particularly pertinent given the evidence of the limited effectiveness of applied regulatory policies, as corroborated by studies conducted by the Center for Countering Digital Hate (2023) and NATO (Bergmanis-Koräts & Haidechyk, 2024). Despite user complaints, both entities indicate a low or nonexistent message deletion rate containing such expressions.

Media organizations should evaluate and enhance moderation mechanisms within various social networks to mitigate the amplification of messages containing hate speech and misinformation that exploit discussions surrounding shared content in these environments. A combination of approaches may be necessary to enforce participation guidelines and restrict or block the dissemination of such messages. One potential strategy involves increasing the visibility of moderators on these platforms. Additionally, implementing artificial intelligence tools may facilitate early detection and informed decision-making in response to the proliferation of messages that exhibit semiotic characteristics similar to those analyzed in this study.

The proposed multidimensional approach to developing semiotic analysis facilitates the deconstruction of its fundamental components and examines how connotative and denotative meanings influence the dissemination of hostile narratives. The findings demonstrate a semiotic approach to analyzing hatred expressed in the content of a global news event across five Spanish digital news media outlets. Regarding OE1, the comments associated with the debate about the news contained a substantial number of verbatim expressions of hate. This situation fosters a hostile media climate. However, it did not promote violence when considering the proportion of words located at intensity levels 0, 1, and 2. These are notably more prevalent than intensities 3, 4, and 5, at least within the parameters established by other authors (Kim, 2022; Walters & Espelage, 2020).

The various dimensions of this promoted hatred (OE2) are characterized by hostile expressions stemming from misogynistic, political, racial, and xenophobic motivations. Predominant narrative strategies employ fear and arguments that accuse, discredit, or devalue the subjects of these news items. This dominant discursive strategy is generated through the debates involving news published by Spanish digital news media on X.

The narrative framework is oriented toward perpetuating stereotypes and prejudices against specific social groups (e.g., democratic politicians and women) based on the predominant semiotic elements (OE3). These elements were identified during the analysis: actorization (at the narrative level), figurativization (at the connotative level), the construction of meaning (semiosis) through metalanguage, the destructive nature of the messages, and the capacity of the messages to establish relationships between other messages in a dialogical manner (intertextuality). Accordingly, this comprehensive analysis contributes to understanding how hate messages are constructed and interpreted on social media platforms (Barth et al., 2023).

At the denotative and connotative levels, it is evident that most of the hate speech messages focus predominantly on the actor or protagonist of the news (actorization and figuration), namely, Joe Biden, Jennifer Lopez, Katy Perry, Lady Gaga, or Amanda Gorman, as well as prominent political representatives of the Democratic Party such as Nancy Pelosi, Bernie Sanders, and Barack Obama (Figure 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9). This strategy eschews discursivization and thematization within identified hate speech messages. That is, most of the hate speech messages analyzed in this study are predicated on a strategy against the actor or protagonist of the news and their actions within that context (e.g., the role assumed within this act) rather than on the discourse or messages that they impart during the event. Consequently, beyond being formal recipients of messages containing expressions of hate, these news actors (the protagonists) serve as narrative resources for the representation of stereotypes and prejudices toward what each of them represents, which originate from their association with specific social groups (e.g., women, Afro-descendant communities, politicians, etc.).

These semiotic elements are significantly interrelated (OE4). This interrelation facilitates the construction of a compelling narrative from the perspective of the authors who have informed the design of the semiotic analysis matrix (Barthes, 1970; Greimas & Courtés, 1976; Kristeva, 1969; Lyotard, 1979/2019). This interrelation demonstrates the capacity of these narratives to create a persuasive context that effectively influences public perception, thereby perpetuating the dissemination of impactful expressions of hate.

This exploratory approach has several implications for communication in digital scenarios. First, it facilitates the recognition of dominant semiotic elements that can contribute to developing debate moderation mechanisms through the linguistic patterns identified in this research (Kleis Nielsen & Ganter, 2018; Perreault, 2023; Salonen et al., 2022). Identifying the underlying semiotic structures (Kahn, 2022; Young-Jung Na, 2023) that enable the propagation of messages containing expressions of hate necessitates considering cultural and social dynamics and current events to identify the linguistic markers of hate (Määttä, 2023; Rajan & Venkatraman, 2021).

The semiotic analysis indicates that it can aid in identifying the elements necessary for the effective management of discussions, both in their iterations on social media platforms and institutional websites, in digital news media (Lin & Kim, 2023). This is particularly significant when considering that the corpus of the messages containing expressions of hate, as identified and analyzed in this study, reveals an underlying semiotic structure characterized by the prevalence of implicit meanings (connotations), the transmission and transformation of meanings (semiosis), and the predominance of exclusionary language. This language aims to promote a narrative that seeks social legitimacy through prejudices and stereotypes and fosters hostility rather than promoting a constructive social framework. Furthermore, the analysis reveals the application of a dominant narrative strategy predicated on the fear, accusation, discrediting, and devaluation of new

protagonists. These elements are utilized as resources to propagate stereotypes and prejudices directed at social groups represented by the protagonists (e.g., women, the LGTBI+ community, the Afro-descendant community, and immigrants). In this content, the news's subject matter appears inconsequential for its dissemination within contemporary digital communication scenarios.

6. Conclusion

This exploratory study provides a method that facilitates the analysis of explicit and implicit content in hate messages on social media platforms. The research was conducted within the limitations of the specific case addressed: Spanish digital news media with a presence on social media platforms and the spaces for debate aimed at their readership.

By applying a semiotic approach, this study provides an approximate framework that facilitates comprehending hate speech construction and dissemination within communication environments fostered by digital news media. This approach enables the identification of the underlying narrative structures, which are addressed in the results and discussion sections presented in this study. Furthermore, the findings may contribute to the development of diverse strategies to counter the proliferation of expressions of hate on social media platforms and institutional web spaces associated with digital news media.

The analysis of messages from the perspective of the semiotic structure inherent in them (Inwood & Zappavigna, 2023), with expressions of hate associated with a news event of particular social relevance in the digital news media in Spain, is a necessary step to develop analysis tools and strategies that detect and counteract the presence of this type of terminology. The specific analyzed case demonstrates a framework in which fear, the utilization of expressions with a clear political orientation, and the use of terms intended to accuse, discredit, or devalue the recipients of such messages ultimately become resources for the dissemination of this content. In this context, the protagonists of the news assume an operational function, as narratives laden with stereotypes and prejudices are promoted through the dehumanization or demonization of what each protagonist represents. The outcome supports the justification or rationalization of hatred from a persuasive context that aims to guide public perception through the debate spaces—in this case, the digital news media on X. This analysis can assist digital news media in reviewing their content moderation practices for the more effective management of discussions, both in their versions on social media platforms and institutional websites (Lin & Kim, 2023). This is particularly significant when considering that the semiotic analysis matrix aids in better assessing the climate of hatred promoted in a context in which hostility dominates more than the call (veiled or not) to violence and discrimination. This necessarily focuses more on control and practices to counteract the messages of "low-intensity hatred" that are the most prevalent and that can potentially render expressions of intense hatred more detrimental in the medium term.

This approach involves the issue highlighted in the discussion: it is imperative to advance research in similar studies whose applicability can be translated into "hybrid" interventions. These interventions could provide resources to professionals who moderate these debate spaces on social networks and equip them with indicators to mitigate the promotion of hostile media environments. This is particularly crucial when external actors exploit the spaces provided by the news media for this purpose. Such guidelines are predicated on the level of hostility intensity exhibited in comments concerning shared news articles and on the categorization of the protagonists involved (a mechanism to propagate fears, prejudices, and stereotypes

that transcends the individual and targets the social groups that they represent based on race, gender, or political orientation).

These moderation practices should be accompanied by additional measures to elucidate the underlying semiotic mechanisms identified in this study that are implemented at various levels of intervention. For example, the establishment of media literacy programs is essential. Educational initiatives can be developed to ensure that readers comprehend the significance of their role in mitigating messages containing hate speech. Furthermore, it is imperative that the professionals responsible for moderating these messages ensure that they possess adequate competencies to recognize the underlying semiotic structures in these messages, including identifying the utilization of exclusionary language, among other skills.

NLP techniques associated with artificial intelligence can serve as a resource for this regulation. These techniques could enhance the role of guarantors in the dynamics of the dissemination, consumption, and debate of news shared by media outlets. This enhancement stems from comprehending cultural and linguistic connections that are seemingly disparate but are associated with the messages (Demuru, 2022; Gramigna, 2022). Another level of practical utility is to aid the social agents (public institutions and third-sector actors) who are invested in combating such expressions on social media platforms within the previously outlined terms. The exploratory nature of this research is evident, and semiotic analysis represents an initial proposal aimed at fostering elements of academic discourse on hate speech from a semiotic perspective. This necessitates the development of further studies and the utilization of novel conceptual approaches according to authors such as Greimas and Courtés (1979), Kristeva (1969), Lyotard (1979/2019), and Barthes (1970), whose relevance persists, given the enduring nature of their contributions to the field of semiotics.

This research addresses a specific geographical and communicative context and is used as a case study. However, its results and discussion have implications beyond the case itself (and are analogous to how knowledge of oceans can be derived from analyzing a single water droplet). The political dimension does not diminish the significance of other factors when the dissemination of hate expressions on social networks is examined. It is imperative to advance comprehensive studies and novel approaches (for example, from a semiotic perspective; see Falkenberg et al., 2024; Kupferschmidt, 2024). Such innovative methods can transcend the analysis of specific studies (from a particular country) and facilitate an understanding of the semiotic structures underlying hate messages in a more global context. One potential avenue is the promotion of studies that investigate the same news event (such as the one considered here) of global interest, which serves as an articulating axis of common or differentiating aspects for each geographical area, communicative context, or temporal period (Määttä, 2023). These efforts will enhance the global reach and potential utility of the findings.

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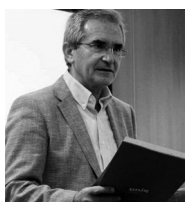
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