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MOROCCAN-SPANISH COUPLES' DECOLONIAL RESPONSES ON TIKTOK

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Introduction

In recent years, the use of social media has allowed migrants and other minority groups to communicate, obtain information, and build an identity through self-representation and content creation. The possibility to talk about their experiences, connect to other content creators and interact with the platform allows to decentralize the European narrative and offer visibility to other cultures. In this context, TikTok emerges as one of the platforms where traditionally marginalized populations narrate their experiences and enter public debates. This platform allows to build a community and promote a deeper understanding of mixedness (Travison, 2020). In this case, we study Spanish-Moroccan mixed couples who must face the cultural stereotypes derived from the geographical, historical, and colonial confluences between these two nations (Fernández-Parrilla & Cañete, 2018).

Theoretical framework

In the past, mixed couples between Spanish women and Moroccan men were considered a threat to colonial policies and the relationship between colonizer and colonized. These couples were completely forbidden as being a danger to the Spanish domination in Morocco (Zbida-Pol, 2020). Therefore, these couples have faced discrimination and unfair treatment due to their characteristics. According to Romero-Morales (2018) the values of these couples are still questioned today. The connective nature of TikTok affordances shows the reality of messages received, discourses challenged, and self-representation strategies. This study is focus on identifying the discursive strategies use by this group to face discrimination and spread forms of decolonial self-representations. Thus, this research will answer the following question: What are the characteristics of decolonial narratives on TikTok to face discrimination?

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Method

To carry out the study, a qualitative analysis was carried out by identifying TikTok videos using the hashtags #mixedcouples and #SpainandMorocco in their Spanish and English versions. We then identified other hashtags of interest that appeared together with these and found other videos of interest. We viewed a total of 8,653 videos and identified six profiles of interest from creators that self-identified as being part of a Spanish-Moroccan mixed couple and had more than 10K followers, which is the threshold at which TikTok begins paying creators (TikTok, 2020).

These accounts comprised a total of 1,369 videos. We watched all videos in each profile three times, a total of 4.107 views, to identify content that fit the following criteria: (1) discussed cultural aspects or topics related to the identity and integration of the members of the couple; (2) had more than 30K views. The final sample comprised a total of 146 videos from 6 accounts (20/25 from each account). We downloaded all the videos and coded them in Atlas. Ti. The codebook includes theoretically derived codes related to Islamophobia (Awan, 2016; Civil et al., 2020) and codes derived through an inductive approach that performs iterative rounds of coding to identify themes of interest derived from the data itself, namely those related to cultural aspects, specific decolonial narratives, and TikTok affordances.

Key Findings

The described analysis enabled the exploration of Moroccan-Spanish mixed couples with interesting insights related to postcolonial narratives. They do this through short, vertical videos and TikTok's mimetic nature, combining culture, love, and diversity in the face of increasing discrimination, Islamophobia, and oppression in Spanish society.

Responses to twofold attacks through 'answer-comment'

These creators engage in strategies to challenge attacks from both societies (Spanish and Moroccan). It is possible to suggest that this occurs because in the case of the couples analyzed, the female partner is Spanish and Muslim (a minority within the Spanish culture) and at the same time a minority or 'other' within the Moroccan culture, as a convert. On the other hand, the man is a foreigner and Muslim (in Spain) and for the members of his culture it can be seen as someone who prefers the Spanish culture and does not follow the culture or religious convictions. We observed that they use the answer-comment function to dismantle these ideas and, at the same time, build their own identity.

They develop their own TikTok language, providing informative and explanatory value to the comments they receive. The main functions of "answer-comment" are (1) to respond to stereotypes; (2) to inform about islam; (3) to explain personal decisions. These messages they challenge and answer contribute to decolonize mainstream ideas that are present on and offline and give visibility to their identity. Hence, they deploy creative strategies to face these discourses using a combination of TikTok affordances.

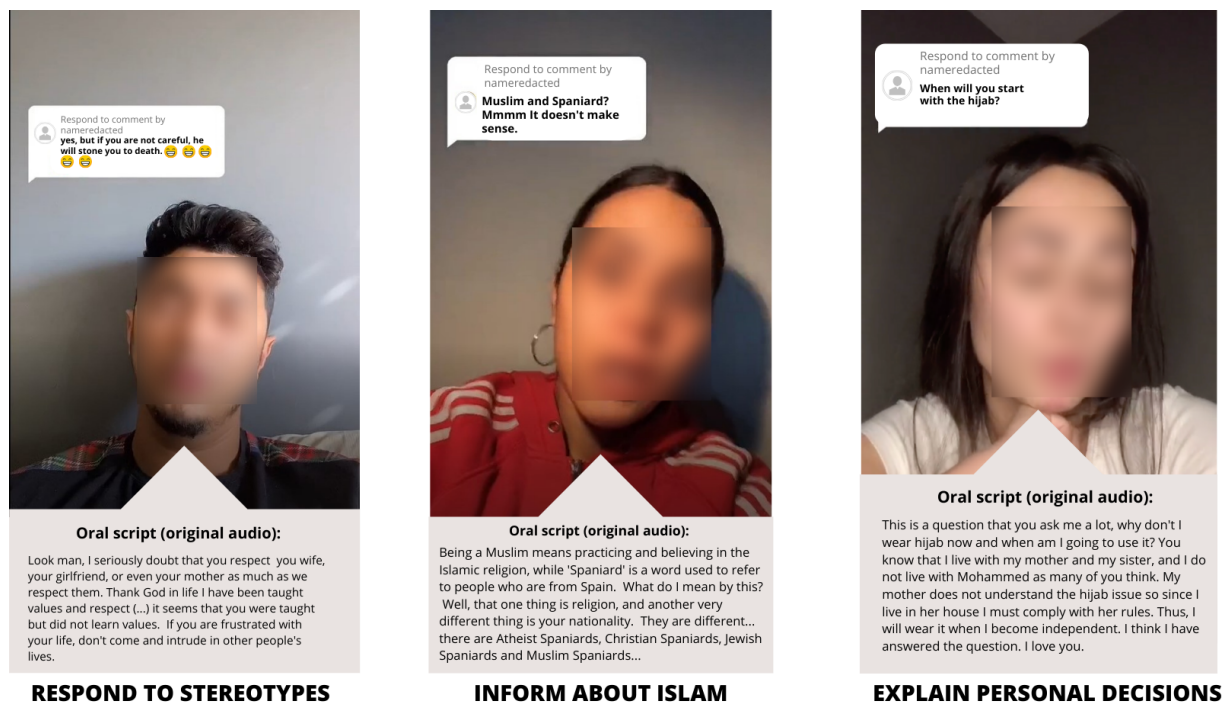


Figure 1. Respond to comment typologies among Moroccan-Spanish tiktokers

The strategy most used is based on users' negative discourse to make their own reality visible and make their identity known. They turn attacks into opportunities to eliminate certain ideas and position them through actions on TikTok. To gain visibility most of the videos using the answer-comment function include mainstream hashtags to make content findable, connect with related speech and attempt to be picked up by the *for you* page.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the option to respond to comments on TikTok enables mixed couples to establish their identity by aligning with or contradicting the comments they receive. Through this, they highlight the existing colonial discourses on the platform while promoting their right to exist through decolonial narrative practices that take advantage of the possibilities of creating TikTok content to make visible and validate their identity.

This analysis provides insights related to the limitations and difficulties faced by minorities and minoritized individuals who are discriminated due to their choices, in this case their romantic preferences. It reflects the difficulties faced by people who chose more intimate forms of integration and the existing colonial paradigms in terms of mixed romantic partners. At the same time, these creators exemplify the existence of points of encounter between seemingly opposite cultures and nationalities through their (self)representations and discourses on this platform, as well as the increased visibility they are achieving through their content and profiles.

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