

TRANS ACTIVISM AGAINST DISINFORMATION ON SOCIAL MEDIA: COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES OF ADVOCACY ORGANIZATIONS ON INSTAGRAM IN SPAIN

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This article examines how three trans organizations in Spain—Plataforma Trans, Euforia. Familias Trans-Aliadas, and Chrysallis—addressed disinformation and hate speech on Instagram during 2023. Through a content analysis of 383 posts, the study identifies predominant themes, the framing of hostile narratives, and the communicative strategies deployed in response. Findings reveal that organizations perceive disinformation and hate speech as a unified field of hostility, prioritizing the defense of human rights over systematic fact-checking. The results suggest that the limited use of explicit verification is not a deficiency but a strategic adaptation: organizations prioritize confrontation, pedagogy, and community support to challenge what they frame as the “epistemic violence” of disinformation. By highlighting how digital activism constructs counter-narratives that empower the trans community and mobilize allies, the article engages with broader debates on the tension between activist logics and journalistic verification norms.

Disinformation and hate speech represent two of the most pressing communicative challenges facing contemporary societies. Although distinct phenomena, in practice they often intersect and reinforce each other, especially in digital environments characterized by the viraliza-

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tion of content and the lack of editorial filters. Historically marginalized communities, such as LGBTQ+ people, are frequent targets of these hostile narratives, understood here as discursive framings that often portray the community as a threat to social order, minors, or women's rights, which aim to delegitimize their claims, reinforce prejudices, and perpetuate exclusionary structures. In Spain, the passage of the 2023 Law for the Real and Effective Equality of Trans People and the Guarantee of LGTBI Rights (the so-called "trans law") intensified these dynamics, fueling a polarized climate marked by falsehoods, stigmatization, and hate speech. In this context, trans organizations acquired unprecedented visibility and emerged as prominent communicative actors, articulating rights-based discourses and positioning themselves against disinformation in digital environments.

Building on this scenario, the present study examines how three trans advocacy organizations in Spain—Plataforma Trans, Euforia. Familias Trans-Aliadas, and Chrysallis—addressed disinformation and hate speech through their Instagram posts during this pivotal year. Rather than focusing on the effects of these messages on audiences, the analysis centers on the communicative practices and discursive framings developed by the organizations themselves in response to stigmatizing narratives. Accordingly, the research is guided by the following question: How do trans advocacy organizations in Spain frame and respond to disinformation and hate speech on Instagram during a period of heightened political and media visibility?

In addressing this question, the article focuses on identifying dominant communicative patterns and discursive strategies through which these organizations respond to antagonistic framings in digital environments.

1. Theoretical framework

1.1. Disinformation and Hate Speech

Research on disinformation has produced multiple approaches to conceptualizing a phenomenon that, while not new, has intensified in recent years (Parra Valero & Oliveira, 2018; Sánchez-Duarte & Magallón, 2020). Among the most influential is the framework proposed by Wardle and Derakhshan (2017), who distinguish between misinformation (false or inaccurate content shared without harmful intent), malinformation (genuine information deliberately shared to

cause harm), and disinformation. The latter, in their model, refers to intentionally false messages designed to cause harm, whether to generate profit, gain political influence, or create disruption. Its growing presence in the public sphere poses a threat to democratic societies (McKay & Tenove, 2021), as it undermines deliberation within a hybrid media system (Chadwick, 2013) where traditional outlets have lost centrality and their role as intermediaries, contributing to a crisis of the public sphere (Palau-Sampio & López-García, 2022; Salaverriá & León, 2022).

The expansion of the internet, particularly social media, has reshaped information flows while consolidating these platforms as key sources of news consumption. Algorithmic recommendation systems privilege emotionally charged content, thereby amplifying disinformation (Marwick & Lewis, 2017; García-Orosa *et al.*, 2023). Classic research by Vosoughi *et al.* (2018) showed that false news spreads faster and wider on Twitter than factual reporting. In addition, digital environments have fostered echo chambers (Törnberg, 2018; Rhodes, 2022), where hoaxes and conspiracy theories circulate unchecked by verification mechanisms (Uscinski, 2018). The proliferation of pseudo-media outlets—sites that mimic journalism while injecting disinformation—has further saturated the digital sphere with fabricated content, often targeting vulnerable groups such as LGBTQ+ communities (Palau-Sampio & Carratalá, 2022).

Disinformation and hate speech are closely intertwined. Both rely on stereotypes, prejudice, and stigmatization, and both lack empirical grounding (Hameleers *et al.*, 2022). The defamatory nature of hate speech (Galop, 2021) frequently emerges in contexts marked by information disorder (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). In the United States, hoaxes have been strategically deployed to reinforce biases and attack minorities (Benkler *et al.*, 2018). As Farkas and Schou (2023) argue, disinformation serves as a framework that legitimizes exclusionary narratives, creating a symbiotic relationship between hate speech and fake news that sustains harmful disinformation ecologies (Kyaw, 2021; Segura, 2021). While disinformation and hate speech can be analytically distinguished, this study adopts a relational perspective that conceptualizes them as potentially constitutive of a single communicative phenomenon in contexts where falsehoods and stigmatizing narratives mutually reinforce one another. This perspective allows the study to examine not only the circulation of hostile content, but also the epis-

temological implications of how disinformation and hate speech are framed and addressed by activist organizations themselves.

In this equation, hate speech, defined as any expression inciting violence, hostility, or discrimination against individuals or groups based on race, religion, gender, or sexual orientation (Council of Europe, 1997), has expanded significantly in the digital age. Social media have become its primary channel, aided by anonymity, immediacy, interactivity, and permanence (Udupa *et al.*, 2020; Arcila-Calderón *et al.*, 2022). Compared with offline contexts, online hate speech faces weaker regulation and greater tolerance (Keen & Gerogescu, 2020). Data from Spain's Ministry of the Interior show that in 2023, 25.11% of recorded hate speech incidents occurred via social networks (Ministerio del Interior, 2024). Research also highlights a worrying correlation between the spread of hate speech online and the rise of hate crimes (Amores *et al.*, 2021).

1.2. Disinformation and Hate Speech Against LGBTQ+ People

Public discourse—and particularly that shaped by mass media—about the LGBTQ+ community has historically been marked by prejudice and negative stereotypes (Fejes & Petrich, 1993; Aliaga & Cortés, 1997). Such representations have reinforced two dominant framings: ridicule and condemnation of non-normative sexual orientations and gender identities (Albertini, 2012). This dynamic has been described as media violence against this social group (Martínez, 2016). In recent years, disinformation targeting LGBTQ+ people in the EU has proven persistent and increasing, organized around five recurring narratives: pathologization, association with pedophilia, violence, alleged advantages in sports, and conspiracies about indoctrination (Panizio & Canetta, 2023). These narratives not only disseminate false information but also operate as ideological devices that legitimize social rejection and political restrictions, reinforcing cisheteronormativity (Ventura, 2016). Thus, disinformation functions as a driver of hate speech by activating entrenched prejudices and reframing them as moral threats. Unsurprisingly, many LGBTQ+ organizations do not distinguish between disinformation and hate speech, viewing both as forms of discrimination and violence (Carratalá, 2023b).

The interconnection between disinformation and hate speech has been especially visible during recent health crises. During the COVID-19 pandemic, false claims circulated linking the virus to the lifestyle

and sexual practices of gay men, as denounced by several organizations (United Nations, 2020; Amnesty International, 2021; ILGA, 2021). Similarly, the 2022 monkeypox outbreak was framed in media coverage less as a public health issue and more as a disease of gay men, with an emphasis on the venues where transmission occurred (Canet, 2022). This homophobic discourse gained traction online (Chan, 2022; Czopek, 2022). Studies of social media responses on platforms such as Facebook and Twitter showed that stigmatizing coverage and pseudo-information fostered user comments that could be categorized as hate speech (Carratalá, 2023a; Carratalá, 2024b). Likewise, high-visibility events such as Pride celebrations have been targeted by disinformation seeking to delegitimize mobilizations through hoaxes and moralizing accusations, which in turn fuel hate speech (Martínez Valerio, 2022; Rivera Martín *et al.*, 2022; Carratalá, 2023b).

The debate surrounding Spain's 2023 Law for the Real and Effective Equality of Trans People and the Guarantee of LGBTI Rights (Law 4/2023, commonly referred to as the "trans law") also illustrates the role of disinformation in fostering hate speech. Media coverage often gave disproportionate space to false claims that the law would enable male abusers to escape gender-violence convictions, pose risks for cis-gender women, or encourage frivolous identity changes among minors (Carratalá & Peris-Blanes, 2023; López Trujillo & Díaz Moreno, 2023). Such narratives not only polarized public opinion—including divisions within the LGBTQ+ community itself (Carratalá & Iturregui-Gallardo, 2025)—but also fueled hate speech in pseudo-media outlets (Carratalá, 2025) and, above all, across social networks (Sánchez-Holgado *et al.*, 2023; Willem *et al.*, 2023; Colussi *et al.*, 2024), which became one of the main arenas for the polarized public controversy surrounding the "trans law" (Postigo Gómez & Galarda Fernández, 2021; Sánchez-Holgado *et al.*, 2023).

In this context, official data confirm a rise in hate speech targeting LGBTQ+ people in Spain. The Ministry of the Interior reported 58 incidents of hate crimes committed via the internet and social networks based on sexual orientation or gender identity in 2023—the highest figure recorded that year, matched only by ideologically motivated hate crimes—and a 35% increase compared with 2022 (Ministerio del Interior, 2024). Yet these figures likely underestimate the actual prevalence of anti-LGBTQ+ violence, as underreporting remains widespread. Data collected by independent observatories and civil society organizations

often point to hundreds of instances of online hate speech rooted in LGBTQ-phobia (Lambda, 2022).

1.3. Countering Disinformation Targeting LGBTQ+ People: From Activist Responses to Professional Fact-Checking

LGBTQ+ organizations in Spain, fully aware of the threat posed by disinformation about their community, address it through a combination of proactive and reactive strategies, with the former clearly predominating (Carratalá, 2023b). These include disseminating accurate, data-based information and emphasizing reliable sources as a counter to falsehoods; developing educational and awareness-raising initiatives in schools and community spaces to foster media literacy and visibility of diversity; and collaborating with supportive media outlets through interviews and the dissemination of research. When confronted with specific hoaxes, some organizations opt for public denunciation, while others deliberately avoid engaging to prevent amplification. Social media also plays a central role, allowing these organizations to act as trusted providers of high-quality information (Carratalá & Iranzo-Cabrera, 2025).

In parallel, professional fact-checking platforms such as VerificaRTVE, EFE Verifica, Maldita, and Newtral have invested considerable efforts in debunking hoaxes about LGBTQ+ people circulating in Spain in recent years (Carratalá, 2023b). Their work has included fact-checking on false claims related to the “trans law”, the monkeypox outbreak, and Pride celebrations, among other topics. For example, VerificaRTVE published a detailed piece entitled “We Debunk Hoaxes and Falsehoods About the LGBTQ+ Community” to coincide with Pride events in June 2023, which corrected, among other claims, misleading TikTok content about the recently approved law (Huwyler & Peña, 2023). EFE Verifica—part of a coalition of 40 fact-checkers collaborating on the Google-funded *Elections24Check* project—found that half of the false statements stored in this repository repeated a narrative also detected in Italy, Georgia, Bulgaria, the Netherlands, and Spain: portraying the LGBTQ+ community as a threat to children (Ocaña, 2024). The label “trans law” also functions as an organizing tool for retrieving hoax-related content on both Maldita and Newtral websites, both affiliated with the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN) (Rojas Caja, 2020).

The principles of independence, impartiality, and transparency advocated by these platforms have made them a recurrent object of study in research on professional fact-checking. A recent analysis of Maldita and Newtral's work on LGBTQ+ disinformation revealed a sustained increase in false claims about this community between 2019 and 2023, with spikes during key moments such as Pride Month and the approval of the "trans law" in 2023. These findings confirm that periods of high visibility for the community are exploited to intensify attacks. In Spain, the most frequent narratives focus on alleged "positive discrimination" stemming from inclusive laws and policies, alongside the continued pathologization of LGBTQ+ identities (Amondarain Moreno *et al.*, 2024).

1.4. The Internet as Both a Hostile Space and a Site of Activism for LGBTQ+ People

In its early stages, the internet played a pivotal role in the formation of LGBTQ+ communities, facilitating self-identification and the generation of social capital. Research has shown, for example, how digital spaces have been particularly decisive for transgender people, providing access to peer experiences and visual representations that help normalize their lives and feelings (Kosenko *et al.*, 2018). Social media, likewise, has become a vital refuge and source of support for LGBTQ+ youth (Berger *et al.*, 2022). These platforms allow young people to explore their identities safely before "coming out" offline, especially in unsupportive family contexts. They enable community-building, reduce isolation, and provide access to crucial information and content creators who act as role models, fostering pride and self-acceptance. For many, the digital sphere constitutes their primary affirming environment (Tiches, 2025).

At the same time, the circulation of discrimination and hate online makes the internet a double-edged sword (Fisher *et al.*, 2024). The increasing visibility of LGBTQ-phobic discourse on social media has rendered these platforms hostile spaces for many. A 2022 report by GLAAD found that 40% of LGBTQ+ adults—and 49% of trans and non-binary people—did not feel welcome or safe on these platforms. Moreover, in a safety index rated on a 100-point scale, none of the major networks reached a score of 50: Instagram (48), Twitter (45), Facebook (46), YouTube (45), and TikTok (43) (GLAAD, 2022).

Despite these challenges, the internet remains a privileged arena for activism. It has long been central to LGBTQ+ mobilization, offering visibility, fostering community, and facilitating transnational movements. Online petitions, particularly through platforms such as [Change.org](https://change.org), have transformed struggles for rights into accessible forms of collective action. Beyond their administrative goal, these petitions serve as communicative nodes that allow activists to articulate specific grievances and mobilize support outside traditional institutional channels. While sometimes criticized as low-commitment “clicktivism”, studies suggest that they represent conscious decisions of political support capable of generating alternative frames. Within the LGBTQ+ sphere, petitions often denounce discrimination, demand legal rights, or call for public recognition, functioning as essential tools to expand the social and political agenda (Carratalá, 2024a).

The COVID-19 pandemic further underscored the role of the internet, particularly Facebook, as a crucial tool for LGBTQ+ activism. Organizations used social media to provide psychological support, disseminate accurate information, and counter disinformation. They offered specific resources such as helplines, cultural and entertainment content, and promoted solidarity initiatives. They also acted as quality filters, amplifying the work of progressive and specialized outlets that highlighted the community’s heightened vulnerability. In this way, the internet became a site of resilience, emotional support, and continuity of the struggle for LGBTQ+ rights in a context of isolation and crisis (Carratalá & Iranzo-Cabrera, 2025). Following Strand and Svensson (2019), it is important to note that while social media undoubtedly plays a role in the production and circulation of fake news, it equally provides organized interests with a space where such narratives can be contested.

2. Research Objectives and Methodology

Building on the research question outlined above, this study advances an analytical expectation rather than a confirmatory hypothesis. Specifically, it assumes that trans advocacy organizations, beyond reacting to specific attacks, deploy communicative strategies that combine verification, pedagogical explanation, and forms of social mobilization, thereby constructing a repertoire of digital activism that transcends purely reactive logics. The study adopts an exploratory analytical design that prioritizes depth and contextual nuance over breadth or longitudinal comparison. By focusing on Instagram during a politi-

cally salient year, the research offers a situated examination of activist communication strategies in a specific platformed context.

To examine this expectation, the study adopts an exploratory mixed-method content analysis of Instagram posts published by three social organizations dedicated to defending the rights of trans people in Spain—Plataforma Trans², Euforia. Familias Trans-Aliadas³, and Chrysallis⁴—during 2023. This methodological approach allows for the systematic identification of dominant themes, discursive framings, tones, and response strategies in a period of heightened political and media visibility.

This general analytical aim is operationalized through a set of specific objectives that guide the study. First, the study seeks to identify the predominant themes in posts related to disinformation and hate speech, paying particular attention to how these phenomena are framed and problematized. Second, it aims to analyze the tone and types of responses adopted by the organizations, assessing whether strategies of confrontation, pedagogy, awareness-raising, or community support prevail. Third, the study explores the relationship between disinformation and hate speech, evaluating the extent to which they are articulated jointly and reinforce one another in organizational discourse. Finally, it investigates the causes and consequences attributed to these phenomena by the organizations themselves, to better understand how they conceptualize the dynamics of informational hostility affecting the trans population. With this approach, the research not only characterizes the discursive production of trans advocacy organizations on social media but also offers insights into how digital activism articulates counter-narratives to discrimination and hostility in online environments.

Content analysis is particularly suitable for addressing these objectives, as it enables the systematic examination of both manifest content and latent meanings within communicative practices (Krippendorff, 2019; Neuendorf, 2017). This methodological design is consistent with the study's aims, which do not seek to measure causal effects but to examine how activist organizations construct meaning and articulate relationships between disinformation and hate speech. In studies on

2 Instagram profile: @plataformatrans. URL: <https://www.instagram.com/plataformatrans/>

3 Instagram profile: @euforia_fta. URL: https://www.instagram.com/euforia_fta/

4 Instagram profile: @chrysallis_afijt. URL: https://www.instagram.com/chrysallis_afijt/

digital activism, this approach has been widely employed to identify strategic repertoires while remaining attentive to contextual dimensions (Petchler & González-Bailón, 2015; Riffe *et al.*, 2019; Coleman & Sorensen, 2023). Thus, by combining thematic identification with interpretive analysis of framing and tone, the proposed method enables the capture of both the discursive patterns and the relational logics underpinning activist responses.

The selection of the organizations under study was guided by criteria of relevance and representativeness within the field of trans activism in Spain. The analysis focused on the Instagram posts of three entities: Plataforma Trans, Euforia. Familias Trans-Aliadas, and Chrysallis—Asociación de Familias de Infancia y Juventud Trans. These organizations occupy complementary positions within the associative ecosystem. Plataforma Trans is a historic reference in the defense of trans rights, with a strong political dimension and a focus on public advocacy. Euforia emphasizes the role of allied families, playing a key part in education, awareness-raising, and the positive visibility of gender diversity. Chrysallis, in turn, is specifically oriented toward trans children and youth, offering a perspective grounded in the protection of rights and social pedagogy. The inclusion of these three organizations covers distinct forms of activism—from political mobilization to community support—thereby enriching the comparative analysis of their communication strategies.

The year 2023 was selected for both contextual and analytical reasons. In February of that year, Spain approved the Law for the Real and Effective Equality of Trans People and the Guarantee of LGTBI Rights (“trans Law”), a legislative milestone that placed the community at the center of public debate, simultaneously exposing it to intense disinformation campaigns and hate speech, both in the media and on social networks. Analyzing this period thus allows us to observe how organizations reacted to a polarized scenario shaped by hostile narratives and systematic attacks. Limiting the scope to a single year also facilitates the rigorous structuring of the corpus and ensures coherence in the interpretation of results, while laying the groundwork for future longitudinal studies comparing the evolution of these dynamics over time.

The focus on Instagram reflects its role as one of the primary digital communication platforms for trans organizations in Spain, particularly for the three entities selected in this study. Instagram has become a privileged space for activism visibility, especially among younger

generations who perceive it as a relatively safer and more affirming environment than alternatives such as X or Facebook. Moreover, the platform's inherently visual nature—based on images, carousels, and short videos—amplifies both the virality of disinformation and the circulation of counternarratives and fact-checking responses. This dual condition makes Instagram an ideal setting to observe how trans organizations confront disinformation and hate speech, as well as to analyze the communicative strategies they deploy in response to such dynamics.

The corpus for analysis was constructed by compiling all Instagram posts published by the three selected organizations during 2023, resulting in a total of 894 posts. The study analytically distinguishes between disinformation and hate speech, while not assuming that these categories are mutually exclusive. Instead, it explicitly accounts for cases in which falsehood and stigmatization operate jointly as part of a single hostile narrative. To identify relevant material within this corpus, a set of keywords was used as a heuristic tool for initial retrieval, reflecting the hostile ecosystem described in the theoretical framework (e.g., *bulo*, *mentira*, *falso/falsedad*, *fake news*, *desinformación*, *manipulación*, *discurso*, *odio*, *transfobia*, *ley trans*, *derechos trans*). The search combined a manual review of each organization's profile with filtering through hashtags and search terms, allowing the identification of both explicit references to disinformation and hate speech and posts implicitly engaging with stigmatizing narratives.

Subsequently, to ensure methodological rigor and analytical precision, strict operational definitions were applied through manual review. Posts were included in the final corpus only if they met at least one of the following criteria:

- **Disinformation:** Posts explicitly addressing or debunking factually false claims or hoaxes (e.g., fabricated news about the “trans law”).
- **Hate Speech:** Posts addressing expressions of hostility, insult, or dehumanization, even in the absence of specific fact-checkable claims.
- **Intertwined Narratives:** Posts responding to hate speech that is grounded in disinformative premises (e.g., framing trans rights as a threat to women based on manipulated data).

Posts that merely contained the keywords but did not fit these operational definitions (e.g., purely administrative announcements) were

excluded. This procedure yielded a corpus of 383 posts, distributed as follows: 45 from Chrysallis, 110 from Euforia, and 228 from Plataforma Trans. This quantitative disparity reflects the different levels of communicative activity among the organizations in relation to disinformation and hate speech. Consequently, all posts were retained in order to accurately represent the reality of each entity.

The analysis of the posts was conducted using a content analysis approach that combines quantitative and qualitative techniques. This methodological choice responds to the need to capture both patterns of frequency and distribution and the meanings and discursive nuances. On the quantitative side, a coding sheet was designed including dichotomous and polytomous variables such as the organization posting, date of publication, format of the content, number of “likes” and comments, and explicit mention of hate speech. On the qualitative side, variables included the main theme of the post, the type of disinformation addressed, the type of response deployed (revalorization of human rights, data and evidence, testimonies, emotional appeal), the predominant language and tone (confrontational, pedagogical, emotional), and the identification of actors responsible for spreading disinformation or hate speech.

The analytical categories were developed through a hybrid deductive–inductive process. Initial dimensions (such as types of disinformation, hate speech, attribution of responsibility, framing strategies, and response logics) were informed by prior research on information disorder, hate speech, and LGBTQ+ digital activism (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017; Hameleers *et al.*, 2022; Carratalá, 2023b). These preliminary categories were subsequently refined through an exploratory reading of 10% of the corpus, allowing specific indicators, such as the distinction between pedagogical and confrontational tones, to be adjusted to the empirical specificities of the material. To reinforce consistency, an intracoder reliability test was conducted: a 15% sample of the corpus was coded twice, with a two-week interval, yielding a satisfactory level of agreement (Cohen’s Kappa = 0.88) that supports the stability of the results. This procedure ensures that the findings of the research are both replicable and reliable, enhancing the robustness of the data analysis.

While the findings are not intended to be statistically generalizable, they provide analytically grounded insights into the communicative logics through which activist organizations articulate responses to disinformation and hate speech in platform-specific environments.

3. Results

This section presents the results of the content analysis, drawing on the coding categories defined in the methodological framework. The findings are organized around the main patterns identified in the corpus regarding how trans advocacy organizations addressed disinformation and hate speech on Instagram during 2023. Rather than following a rigid dimensional structure, the analysis foregrounds recurring themes, dominant response logics, and discursive tendencies that emerge from the empirical material, in direct relation to the study's research question and analytical objectives.

3.1. *Predominant Themes in the Posts*

Based on the thematic coding categories defined in the methodology, this subsection examines how the organizations prioritized specific issues when responding to a context of heightened hostility. As shown in Figure 1, the distribution of the 383 analyzed posts (42.8% of the total activity) points to a communicative orientation that privileges the community's own agenda over external institutional milestones.

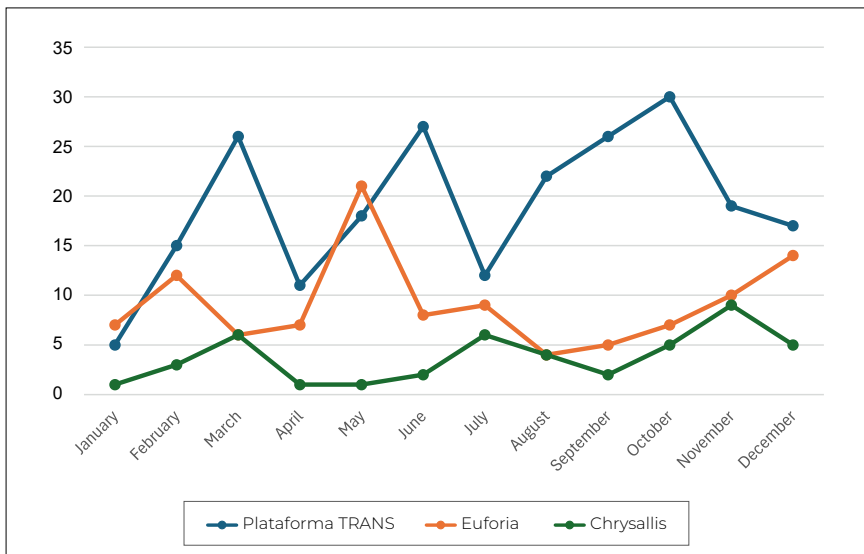


Figure 1. Distribution of posts analyzed across the three organizations during 2023. Source: Author's elaboration

Specifically, contrary to what might be expected from a purely reactive logic, February—the month when the “trans law” was finally approved by the Spanish Parliament—does not emerge as a peak moment for posts related to disinformation or hate speech. Instead, the organizations intensified their communicative activity in synchrony with key dates in the advocacy calendar, using these moments to counter antagonistic framings through a proactive strategy of affirmation. For instance, March—when Trans Day of Visibility is celebrated—stands out due to the significant number of posts published by Plataforma Trans, which also concentrated much of its activity in June (Pride Month) and October (International Day for Trans Depathologization). Similarly, Euforia registered a notable peak in May, coinciding with the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia, and Biphobia. This distribution suggests that while no unified publication pattern exists across the three organizations, all leverage their own commemorative dates to drive the conversation.

Most of the posts in the corpus were retrieved using the keywords *ley trans* (“trans law”) (34%), *derechos trans* (“trans rights”) (24%), *odio* (“hate”) (19%), *transfobia* (“transphobia”) (12%), and *bulo* (“hoax”) (4%). The remaining keywords were far less frequent. For example, the term *desinformación* (“disinformation”) appeared explicitly in only two posts across the corpus.

The topics addressed in the posts were diverse. The most common theme was the “trans law”, approved in February 2023, which was the focus of 28% of the analyzed posts. Other frequent themes included discrimination against trans people (16%), trans rights (16%), rollbacks of trans rights (8%), and the demonstration in defense of the “trans law” (7%). The latter was convened by Plataforma Trans on June 23 in Seville. As reflected in the organization’s Instagram post of June 9, the march was intended to celebrate and defend trans rights, emphasizing that “the trans community continues to be subjected to brutal violence, grounded in hoaxes, prejudice, and lies”.

3.2. Disinformation and Fact-Checking: Types of Response and Language

Regarding the communicative strategies—specifically the “response types” and “tone” variables defined in the coding scheme—this subsection examines how organizations addressed disinformation and hate speech in their Instagram communication. These categories were

developed through an inductive analytical process based on an exploratory reading of the corpus, which allowed the identification of recurrent response resources (such as the revalorization of human rights, the use of data and evidence, testimonies or emotive appeals) and dominant rhetorical tones (confrontational, pedagogical, and emotive). Rather than functioning as stylistic descriptors, these variables operate as indicators of the strategic orientation adopted by the organizations when countering hostile narratives.

Of the 383 posts that make up the corpus, nearly one quarter (23%) explicitly addressed hoaxes, false claims, or hate speech. Beyond this quantitative distribution, the qualitative analysis indicates a predominance of confrontational and pedagogical tones over neutral fact-checking approaches, pointing to a communicative orientation that privileges ideological reframing over technical verification.

Proportionally, posts addressing disinformation and hate speech were especially significant in the sample retrieved from Chrysallis (31%) and Plataforma Trans (25%), while representing a smaller share in Euforia's sample (17%). Engagement with these posts tended to occur more in the form of *likes* than comments. On average, the 89 posts linked to disinformation accumulated 88 likes and one comment each. The post with the highest number of interactions was published by Chrysallis on March 8, International Women's Day. That post, which disseminated a manifesto affirming that "Trans women are women" and denouncing "the savage criticism and hate messages" received from some feminist sectors, garnered 1,510 likes and 14 comments, well above the average interaction level in the corpus.

Most of these posts dealt with the "trans law" (25%), the problem of hate speech (22%), and the circulation of distorted narratives about the trans community (7%). In the majority of cases, references to disinformation were generic (62%) rather than addressing specific falsehoods about trans people. Nevertheless, the organizations occasionally responded to concrete disinformation narratives, such as biological or medical denials of trans existence (14%), messages criminalizing trans people by portraying them as dangerous or threatening (12%), claims about "gender ideology" as indoctrination (6%), or narratives centered on trans minors (6%).

The responses deployed by the organizations to counter disinformation and hate speech most often emphasized the revalorization of human rights, articulating trans rights as an inseparable part of that framework (37%). This strategic prioritization suggests a refusal to

engage in technical debates that might unintentionally legitimize the questioning of trans existence; instead, organizations shift the discursive ground to the ethical domain of universal rights. Fewer posts relied on data and evidence (16%) or on personal testimonies (13%), the latter providing lived experiences of trans people as a means to directly counter distorted discourses. Only 2% of posts that mentioned disinformation did not offer a specific response.

The language employed by the organizations was predominantly confrontational (defined as direct denunciation, moral condemnation, or pointing out the aggressor), a tone present in more than half of the sample (54% of posts focused on this issue). This prevalence indicates that, in the face of hostility, the primary objective is often affective mobilization and the reinforcement of group boundaries rather than persuasive dialogue. A representative example is Euforia's post of March 31, Trans Day of Visibility. This message, relatively lengthy, urged society at large to confront hate speech directed at trans people:

At this very difficult time, when megaphones of hate have taken root in Parliament, in the media, on social networks, in cafés or office conversations, from Euforia Familias Trans-Aliadas we call on cis people, families, allies, human rights defenders, feminists, to not look away. Now is the time to raise our voices and say enough—it is time to intervene and denounce these behaviors. Today more than ever, cis people have the obligation not to remain silent. (Euforia, March 31, 2023)

Following the confrontational tone, pedagogical rhetoric (characterized by explanatory or didactic language aimed at raising awareness) was the second most frequent (31%), followed by emotive discourse (11%), which relies on affect, personal narratives, and appeals to empathy.

Only 12% of the posts that referenced disinformation or hate speech employed explicit fact-checking strategies to refute or debunk falsehoods about trans people. This approach was present across all three organizations. In the case of Euforia, it appeared in five posts published in May to debunk messages concerning sex education. For example, one post (May 11) refuted the claim that “sex education seeks to ‘homosexualize’ students,” responding instead that “sex education creates spaces of freedom for everyone.”

Chrysallis adopted fact-checking strategies in two posts. One of them, published on August 18, took the form of a press release calling on the media to stop spreading disinformation: “Not everything goes. Enough of hoaxes and lies that put trans children and youth at risk”. This statement explicitly debunked a false story published by the pseudomedia outlet *Okdiario*—and replicated by nearly twenty national and local media outlets—about an alleged rape and pregnancy of a female inmate by a trans person. The story attempted to reinforce the false idea that the “trans law” created legal insecurity. Chrysallis’ statement identified the falsehoods and disinformation underpinning that narrative.

Plataforma Trans also incorporated fact-checking strategies in four of its posts. In two cases, the organization directly debunked stories published or broadcast by Spanish media. Under the series title “News to look at with a magnifying glass”, the federation sought to expose lies about the effects of the “trans law”. For instance, in a post published on December 12, accompanied by the label “Debunking HOAXES”, the organization refuted the claim—aired on the regional public broadcaster TeleMadrid—that “in Spain, people can change their sex from the age of 12, and at 16 without parental consent or medical reports”. As the organization noted in its post, the law does not permit surgeries for minors and added: “Spreading these FALSEHOODS [*sic*] violates the right to information and represents a serious misuse of a public media outlet with the perverse objective of attacking the human rights of a segment of the population.”

3.3. Interrelation Between Disinformation and Hate Speech

The analysis of the relationship between variables allows for the empirical identification of the “Intertwined Narratives” category operationalized in the methodology. The results show that organizations rarely treat disinformation and hate speech as isolated phenomena; instead, they frequently frame them as part of a shared hostile ecosystem. This pattern is reflected in the fact that nearly half (47%) of the posts addressing disinformation simultaneously identified it as a form of hate speech. This overlap illustrates the relational logic underpinning the organizations’ communicative practices, in which false claims and hostile representations tend to be articulated jointly.

This link is evident, for instance, in a video published by Chrysallis on Instagram on February 16. The post featured the Minister of Equality, Irene Montero, during her parliamentary defense of the law.

In her speech, the minister lamented that the preparation of the bill had been accompanied by a social debate “loaded with hoaxes and transphobia” and apologized for failing to prevent “those hate speeches” from gaining ground. A post from Plataforma Trans, published on March 2, relayed statements from the federation’s president regarding a forthcoming sports congress in Tenerife, where allegedly discriminatory voices against trans people would be given a platform. In her statement, the leader explicitly equated disinformation with hate speech: “admitting ‘so-called debates that are pulpits for hoaxes and hate toward trans people’ may constitute a ‘possible infringement’ of the Canary Islands and national *Trans Laws*”. Another message from Plataforma Trans, published on December 28, about LGBT-phobic attacks online, again underscored this link: “The most common type of aggression are mockery (40%), followed by insults (26%), together accounting for 66% of attacks. Hoaxes, lies, and fake news are also very common in hate speech and serve the purpose of dehumanizing victims.”

Beyond asserting this association, the organizations also emphasized that the expression and dissemination of such messages are far from harmless; rather, they often serve as a prelude to assaults and hate crimes. This was clear in a post from Plataforma Trans on June 28, reporting a meeting between its representatives and Spain’s Minister of the Interior, where the federation expressed concern about the circulation of such messages: “we conveyed our concern about the escalation of hate speech against trans and LGTBIQ people, which is translating into assaults in the streets”. Similarly, during the Pride march held later that month, Plataforma Trans reiterated this concern in a manifesto shared on June 27: “The demonization and persecution of trans people carried out from social media and many media outlets spreads forcefully thanks to impunity and is translating into assaults in the streets and in homes”. The explicit reference to the internet and the media highlights once again the blurred line between disinformation and hate speech. This was also stressed in another post from June 15: “The trans community is still subject to brutal violence. Rooted in hoaxes, prejudices, and lies”. The organizations also placed this phenomenon within a broader international context, pointing to its transnational dimension. As expressed in a post from August 23: “In many EU countries, hate rhetoric, polarized politics, and fallacious arguments have converged into a climate of insecurity and hostility”.

3.4. Identifying the Actors Responsible for Disinformation

Finally, the analysis of the variable related to the attribution of responsibility shows that the organizations' counter-narrative strategies frequently incorporated a dimension of political antagonism. Beyond merely correcting falsehoods, the activists systematically identified specific agents behind the hostility, thereby framing disinformation not as accidental errors but as the result of intentional actions attributed to political and social adversaries. Alongside denunciations of disinformation, the organizations did not fail to point out the actors responsible for generating hoaxes and falsehoods about trans people. In total, 53% of the posts addressing these issues (47 out of 89) explicitly attributed responsibility to specific actors. These attributions primarily targeted two distinct categories, which overlapped in a few instances (n=4).

First, 37% of the posts (33 out of 89) identified ideological adversaries as the central sources of hostility. Within this group, one prominent profile consists of trans-exclusionary feminists (TERFs). For instance, this was noted in Chrysallis' post of March 8 (the one with the highest engagement, over 1,000 likes), Plataforma Trans' April 23 post denouncing a "boycott attempt by TERFs", and Euforia's May 28 post explicitly mentioning "TERF discourse". Another key profile involves right-wing and reactionary political and social actors, manifested in various ways. Plataforma Trans referred to the far right in a June 9 post and to "fascism" in a June 23 publication. The federation also explicitly targeted the leader of the opposition and president of the Partido Popular, Alberto Feijóo, in a post dated June 7. In that case, the organization cited an interview in which Feijóo, according to Plataforma Trans, "displayed his disinformation" by asserting, for example, that "hormones must be administered by doctors, not decided by minors". Similarly, Euforia mentioned the far-right organization [HazteOir.org](https://www.hazteoir.org)—fined for hate speech against trans people—in a May 8 post, and on May 10 referred to the broader "anti-gender movement".

Second, 20% of the posts (18 out of 89) addressing disinformation and hate speech identified the media as co-responsible for the problem, framing them as necessary amplifiers of these hostile narratives. All three organizations made such references, although most prominently Plataforma Trans. In its June 28 manifesto, Chrysallis denounced "the use and targeting by some media outlets of trans people, their lives, and their families through programs and sensationalist false headlines." Plataforma Trans, in turn, referred to "media manipulation" in a

May 15 post about trans-runner Glenique Frank, and on September 14 addressed the media directly, urging them to “honor their commitment to truthful reporting, rather than seeking to disinform in order to deny trans people their rights.”

Taken together, these findings show that the organizations’ responses to disinformation and hate speech cannot be reduced to isolated acts of verification. Instead, they reveal a coherent repertoire of communicative practices that combines thematic prioritization, confrontational and pedagogical framing, the articulation of disinformation and hate speech as intertwined phenomena, and the explicit attribution of responsibility to identifiable political, media, and ideological actors. The following section discusses these patterns in relation to the study’s analytical objectives and situates them within broader debates on digital activism, counter-narratives, and the politics of disinformation.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

Rather than tracing long-term evolution, this study captures a critical moment in which trans rights were intensely politicized, allowing for a close examination of how activist organizations responded discursively to heightened hostility and disinformation. The analysis highlights the relevance of trans advocacy organizations in Spain as communicative agents who, operating within a hybrid media system (Chadwick, 2013), act as “challengers” capable of establishing alternative authorities in digital communication ecologies (Häussler, 2021) to actively contest information disorder rather than merely suffering it. Through their Instagram posts during 2023, these organizations not only denounced the circulation of stigmatizing narratives and falsehoods but also articulated responses that combined confrontation, pedagogical explanation, and the reaffirmation of human rights as central interpretive frameworks. The analysis shows how the digital activism of these organizations operates as a communicative repertoire that goes beyond purely reactive responses. While early literature on disinformation focused heavily on the effectiveness of professional debunking (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017), our findings suggest that activist actors operate under a different logic: they build alternative discourses aimed at making trans rights visible and legitimate, prioritizing group empowerment over technical correction in a polarized media and social context. This finding aligns with existing scholarship on digital activism, which has emphasized the centrality of moral framing, identity affirmation,

and counter-hegemonic discourse in the realm of contentious politics (Benford & Snow, 2000; Milan, 2015; Poell *et al.*, 2016).

The analysis also raises an epistemological question regarding the distinction between disinformation and hate speech. While much of the literature treats these phenomena as analytically separable, the findings suggest that, in the context of debates on trans rights, activist organizations frequently address them as a unified field of hostility. This empirical observation supports the theoretical argument advanced by Farkas and Schou (2023), who describe disinformation as a mechanism that legitimizes exclusionary politics. Furthermore, it aligns with Hameleers *et al.* (2022), who argue that both phenomena rely on stereotypes and lack empirical grounding, making them indistinguishable in the lived experience of the targeted community. Thus, the organizations' refusal to disentangle falsehoods from hate speech reflects a relational understanding in which fake news is perceived not just as an error, but as a component of a broader 'hostile narrative' aimed at dehumanization.

This perception explains why their responses are strongly framed within the human rights paradigm. By shifting the debate from facts to rights, these organizations avoid the trap of "bothsidesism" often criticized in media studies (Boykoff & Boykoff, 2004), conveying the idea that debunking falsehoods is a political endeavor aimed at defending democratic values. Here, the study contributes to the academic literature on disinformation by showing that communities directly affected by hostile narratives are not only victims but also active agents of contestation.

Another relevant finding is that explicit fact-checking strategies, though present, play a secondary role in the organizations' communication repertoire. This divergence reveals a structural tension between activist discourse and journalistic verification norms. In contrast to research centered on professional fact-checking initiatives (Lowrey, 2017; Graves & Amazeen, 2019), which focuses on dismantling false claims through empirical verification, this study highlights how activist actors operate under logic oriented toward political reparation and symbolic redress. For these organizations, engaging in detailed point-by-point debates with hoaxes carries the risk of amplifying hostile frames or legitimizing discussions that question their very right to exist. Consequently, the limited use of strict verification does not constitute a deficiency, but rather a strategic adaptation. Their contribution to the broader counter-disinformation ecosystem lies not in competing with professional verifiers, but in providing forms of affective and ideo-

logical protection that technical debunking alone cannot offer. From this perspective, fact-checking appears as a complementary resource, embedded within a broader mode of discursive activism that seeks to reframe transphobic attacks as violations of human rights.

The study also reveals differences between the organizations. While Plataforma Trans adopts a more confrontational discourse, Chrysallis and Euforia prioritize pedagogical and sensitizing approaches, with a strong emphasis on community support. This heterogeneity underscores that trans digital activism in Spain is not monolithic, but shaped by distinct organizational identities. However, despite these differences, all entities consistently attribute responsibility to media and political actors, highlighting the structural origins of disinformation. This echoes the findings of Benkler *et al.* (2018), who observed how hoaxes are strategically deployed to reinforce biases and attack minorities. By identifying these actors, the organizations frame disinformation not as an accidental information disorder, but as a deliberate political weapon.

This study has limitations that condition the interpretation of its results. First, the focus on a single year (2023) provides a snapshot of a highly polarized period (the approval of the “trans law”), which may accentuate the confrontational nature of the findings compared to less exceptional contexts. Second, regarding methodological constraints, it is important to acknowledge that content analysis captures the manifest output of communication but cannot fully reveal the internal strategic decision-making processes. Similarly, these methodological choices privilege the analysis of organizational self-representation and strategic discourse, but limit the ability to assess audience reception, interpretative effects, or the actual corrective impact of these messages. Consequently, the findings should be read as an examination of activist positioning rather than as a measure of persuasive effectiveness. Future research combining this approach with interviews or focus groups would allow for a deeper understanding of the motivations and dilemmas behind these communicative choices, while audience reception studies could shed light on their actual impact. Finally, the analysis is limited to Instagram. Expanding the scope to include platforms with different affordances, such as X (formerly Twitter) or TikTok would provide a more comprehensive picture of how these strategies adapt to different algorithmic environments.

Looking ahead, research on the intersection of LGBTQ+ activism, disinformation, and hate speech could move forward in several direc-

tions. Comparative studies across different European countries would help to understand how variations in political and legal contexts shape both hostile dynamics and activist responses. Likewise, further research should explore the collaboration between social organizations and professional fact-checkers, as both share the aim of countering disinformation but operate under different logics and priorities.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that trans organizations in Spain are not merely reacting to disinformation and hate speech, but actively reshaping the terms under which these phenomena are contested in digital spaces. By articulating a communicative repertoire that combines confrontation, pedagogy, and human rights framing, these actors challenge what can be understood as the epistemic violence embedded in hostile narratives. The findings underscore the need to move beyond purely technocratic understandings of counter-disinformation, showing that verification alone is insufficient when falsehoods operate as tools of political exclusion. Instead, a plurality of responses is required: one that recognizes activist organizations as key epistemic agents whose discursive interventions contribute to democratic resilience by affirming dignity, legitimacy, and collective rights in polarized communication environments.

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