

# Language-specific digital ethnographic report

Spanish-, English-, German-speaking contexts

Florencia García-Rapp



Climate, Inequality & Democratic Action:  
The Force of Political Emotions



Funded by  
the European Union

### **Disclaimer**

This project has received funding from the European Commission under the HORIZON Research and Innovation Actions Grant, No 101132327. The document reflects only the authors' views. The European Union is not liable for any use that may be made of the information contained herein.

### **Dissemination level**

PU – Public

### **Type**

R – Document report



**CIDAPE**

Climate, Inequality, and Democratic Action: The Force of Political Emotions

# **Language-specific digital ethnographic report**

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**Deliverable 3.1**

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**Due date:** December 2024





## Executive Summary

This document is meant to provide an overview of the research design and aims, including the theoretical and empirical landscape to which it will contribute to. It indicates the types of topics, data, and contexts that are currently being examined within the Work Package 3 (WP3) of the CIDAPE project. This report serves as an essential introduction for stakeholders, academics, and other actors and offers a foundational understanding of the qualitative side of WP3 for the consortium as we move forward.

When analysing social media communication on climate change in English, Spanish, and German, we seek to bridge quantitative and qualitative approaches. In a joint effort that parts from our defined expertise and is based on our extensive research experience in these fields, the work carried out in the framework of this project unites quantitative, computational approaches and a qualitative, ethnographic dimension.

This report focuses on the latter and follows the qualitative research principle of using a first-person perspective in her accounting of research practices.

Through an interdisciplinary approach blending several research fields, our aim for the qualitative dimension of Work Package 3, is a better understanding of digital discursive dynamics mirroring broader societal notions. This can **aid theorization in media anthropology, digital cultures, audience research, and sociology. Socio-cultural aspects of digital communication practices will be analysed, to help us put ordinary media use around climate change into context.** WP3 will provide **relevant ethnographic insights plausible of being exported and contrasted to various other social media and offline contexts and communities.** These include users' engagements and contextualization of hashtags, memes, and concepts such as *eco-anxiety*, *utopian futures*, or *radical hope* underlying posts and textual comments.



## 1 General epistemological orientation

As qualitative social scientist working from constructivist and interpretive epistemologies, my broader aim throughout my work is to acknowledge subjectivities and embrace both similarity and alterity within global media landscapes. Part of the methodology is an **anthropological axiology** that prioritizes **local voices instead of the researcher's** own, practices **self-reflexivity**, and values **cultural relativism**. Reflecting on academic hierarchies about research worthiness and relevance, I foreground the anthropological stance of regarding human experiences, even entertaining ones, as inherently relevant (Elliot, 2013; Baym, 2000; Guilluy, 2018). I approach users, platforms, fandom, and research itself from an inclusive, empathetic perspective. This involves looking at both generalizable (global, etc) and vernacular notions (local, emic).

Following an “undisciplined” research approach (Truman, 2022), I build on concepts and theories from **sociology** such as social constructionism, ontological security, domestication of technology, and identity building (Thompson, 1995; Giddens, 1991; Morley, 2007; Silverstone, 1994; Hartley, 1999), **British cultural studies** and its proposal of ethnographic fieldwork towards a “*non-media-centric media studies*” (Morley and Silverstone, 1991; Morley, 1998, 2015), as well as **celebrity studies and influencer research** for insights on traditional stardom and its development into current platform-based practices (Marshall, 2006, 2014; Redmond, 2014; Abidin, 2021; Marwick, 2015; García-Rapp, 2017). In terms of **audience research**, I draw from work **prioritizing viewers** (Livingstone, 2005; Schellewald, 2021; Bechmann and Lomborg, 2013), who are at the same time users, followers, fans, and citizens (García-Rapp, 2022), instead of industry-centred, top-down approaches. Relatedly, I work within transnational understandings of media fandom (Chin and Morimoto, 2013; Hills, 2002).

## 2 General methodology and empirical contribution

My main contribution is always empirical and anthropological: a mid-level or micro-theory about how some small part of the world works. This involves ethnographically exploring the configuration of **legitimacy, reciprocity, well-being and affect in digital communities**, identifying overlapping trajectories and complex dynamics of media texts as arenas of **sociality, pleasure, and entertainment** as well as examining contemporary **socio-cultural dimensions of online communication practices**.

During digital fieldwork, I collect audiovisual and textual data use iterative strategies of qualitative *textual analysis* from *grounded theory* (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978; Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Charmaz, 2006) and eclectic coding (Saldaña, 2009; Creswell, 2013), always following **anthropological** aims, epistemology, and axiology (Wolcott, 2010; Fetterman, 2010; Markham, 2009; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2008). This implies, as introduced before, foregrounding self-reflexivity, cultural relativism, emic perspectives, and recognizing the inherent partiality and incompleteness of any research (Livingstone, 2003; Baym, 2009).

## 3 Our methods in practice

Through qualitative, digital ethnographic research (Lange, 2009, 2023; Boellstorff et al, 2012; Pink et al., 2016) the study will examine textual (**online posts and comments in Spanish, German and English** including hashtags) and visual content (clips and emojis). We will focus on content produced by popular accounts such as those by journalists, activists, comedians, as well as eco-influencers. The amount of data is not defined a priori, since it will depend on iterative phases of the constant comparative method and theoretical sampling, as developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and later updated by Strauss and Corbin (1990). However, considering my previous research on YouTube and TikTok, I estimate collecting and qualitatively analysing a total of **1.000 videos and 10.000 comments** on TikTok and Reddit **in each language**. The analytical procedure involves alternating inductive and deductive phases (Merriam, 2009; Charmaz, 2006; Bazeley, 2013) and includes first and second cycle coding phases. The former aims to reduce, index, and tag data applying verbatim, descriptive, or versus codes while the latter establishes interrelationships between categories to develop overarching themes (Saldaña, 2009).



Following ethnographic principles, we part from -and prioritize- emic, vernacular, mundane and local meanings in our descriptions to advance to an interpretation including more encompassing, overarching, comparative, and global notions. Together with the hired pre-doctoral researcher we will first look for patterns of **(dis)continuities of themes and discourses**, as proposed by me, to develop a critical awareness towards it. This will afford them to then independently choose own analytical paths. We will develop **overarching themes and interrelations between categories and codes**, focusing on audiovisual social media content and textual comments, in an ongoing, back-and-forth, collaborative process. Key in qualitative epistemologies is that beyond aiding with analysis, both researchers will impact conclusions through their creative, critical, and analytical input to the project.

Collected data such as videos and comments and their attributes will be listed (Figure 3.1) to be clustered by using filters and colours to establish comparisons, contrasts, and make patterns explicit. Each spreadsheet row includes, besides the title with an embedded link to the online comments or videos, metrics such as likes, shares, views and number of comments, as well as hyperlinks to locally saved screenshots. During analysis, we can order posts by most liked/shared/commented, analyse threaded replies between users as well as quickly search and find key words and filter by them.

**Figure 3.1 CODING SHEET AS SPREADSHEET WITH DATA AND ATTRIBUTES**

username	language	video url	description	views	likes	comment	shares	hashtags	video_description_researcher
aleja_econsciente	ES	<a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@aleja_econsciente/video/7049630222149594944">https://www.tiktok.com/@aleja_econsciente/video/7049630222149594944</a>	Benito a ti te mezo thy #badburrypr #recetas	13.863	1.303	20	1	[ty, 'recetas', 'badburrypr']	
aleja_econsciente	ES	<a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@aleja_econsciente/video/7049650324866122313">https://www.tiktok.com/@aleja_econsciente/video/7049650324866122313</a>	Si viven en una zona caliente pueden darles hasta tres baños al día 8YCE» #germinado #legumbres #vegana #recetasveganas	47.526	2.321	5	37	[vegana, 'legumbres', 'germinado', 'recetasveganas']	
aleja_econsciente	ES	<a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@aleja_econsciente/video/704880053404117389">https://www.tiktok.com/@aleja_econsciente/video/704880053404117389</a>	Esta mezcla es siempre un salvavidas para cuando voy a estar fuera de casa 8Y 2#recetas #lentijas #recetasveganas #vegana #recetasfaciles	36.879	4.923	52	170	[vegana, 'lentijas', 'recetas', 'recetasfaciles', 'recetasveganas']	
aleja_econsciente	ES	<a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@aleja_econsciente/video/704880053404117389">https://www.tiktok.com/@aleja_econsciente/video/704880053404117389</a>	No lo mencioné en el video pero ese producto de alives está 10/10 8Y» #recetasfaciles #basadoenplantas #aguacate #recetasveganas	6.821	824	7	4	[aguacate, 'recetasfaciles', 'recetasveganas', 'recetasveganas', 'basadoenplantas']	
aleja_econsciente	ES	<a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@aleja_econsciente/video/704939532346647864">https://www.tiktok.com/@aleja_econsciente/video/704939532346647864</a>	La receta del tofu birmano está en el perfil de @Laura Reales 8YCE» #recetasfaciles #lentijas #basadoenplantas #recetasveganas #bowl #almuerzo saludable	12.162	1.027	13	9	[bowl, 'lentijas', 'recetasfaciles', 'recetasveganas', 'almuerzo saludable', 'basadoenplantas']	
aleja_econsciente	ES	<a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@aleja_econsciente/video/704939532346647864">https://www.tiktok.com/@aleja_econsciente/video/704939532346647864</a>	Estas con guacamole, hummus o un urubile uf uf uf 8Y» #recetasfaciles #recetasveganas #maiz #desayunosveganas	5.290	310	4	7	[maiz, 'recetasfaciles', 'recetasveganas', 'desayunosveganas']	
aleja_econsciente	ES	<a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@aleja_econsciente/video/704939532346647864">https://www.tiktok.com/@aleja_econsciente/video/704939532346647864</a>	Siempre podemos aprovechar el agua residual 8Y's fecotip #legumbres #plantas #ecofriendly	8.756	842	7	6	[ecofriendly, 'plantas', 'legumbres', 'ecotip']	
aleja_econsciente	ES	<a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@aleja_econsciente/video/704939532346647864">https://www.tiktok.com/@aleja_econsciente/video/704939532346647864</a>	¿Saben cuál es una de las formas de empezar a disminuir nuestro impacto ambiental? EXAAACTO, cuestionandonos lo que comemos 8YCE» Hagámonos muchas preguntas y hagamos cambios dentro de nuestras posibilidades :) #alimentacion #impactoambiental #medioambiente #diadetierra #earthday	608.602	17.989	28	53	[earthday, 'diadetierra', 'medioambiente', 'alimentacion', 'impactoambiental']	
aleja_econsciente	ES	<a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@aleja_econsciente/video/704939532346647864">https://www.tiktok.com/@aleja_econsciente/video/704939532346647864</a>	No las dejen casi quemar como yo plox, solo dorar jajajaja #semillas #recetasfaciles #psdecoquina #cocina #ayama #calabaza	378.890	15.318	165	424	[cocina, 'calabaza', 'semillas', 'ayama', 'recetasfaciles', 'psdecoquina']	
aleja_econsciente	ES	<a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@aleja_econsciente/video/704939532346647864">https://www.tiktok.com/@aleja_econsciente/video/704939532346647864</a>	La pueden hacer pelando o sin pelar las almendras antes de licuarlas 8Y's #bebida vegetal #almendras #recetasfaciles #leche de almendras #leche vegetal	7.827	586	2	13	[almendras, 'recetasfaciles', 'leche de almendras', 'bebida vegetal', 'leche vegetal']	
aleja_econsciente	ES	<a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@aleja_econsciente/video/704939532346647864">https://www.tiktok.com/@aleja_econsciente/video/704939532346647864</a>	La mejor parte es Cata intentando hablar 8Y', #picante #siracha #reto #tendenciaglobal	9.218	325	7	5	[reto, 'siracha', 'picante', 'tendenciaglobal']	
aleja_econsciente	ES	<a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@aleja_econsciente/video/704939532346647864">https://www.tiktok.com/@aleja_econsciente/video/704939532346647864</a>	La pueden agregar otras especias y variar la receta a su gusto :) #hummus #recetasfaciles #recetasveganas #hummus #pimientos	5.506	457	6	17	[hummus, 'recetasfaciles', 'recetasveganas', 'hummus', 'pimientos']	
aleja_econsciente	ES	<a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@aleja_econsciente/video/704939532346647864">https://www.tiktok.com/@aleja_econsciente/video/704939532346647864</a>	He escuchado que también les dicen pimienta morrón 8Y Ustedes como lo conocen? #pimenton #pimiento #psdecoquina #cocinafacil	12.932	591	7	19	[pimiento, 'cocinafacil', 'pimenton', 'psdecoquina']	
aleja_econsciente	ES	<a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@aleja_econsciente/video/704939532346647864">https://www.tiktok.com/@aleja_econsciente/video/704939532346647864</a>	Si no saben como preparar la soya texturizada, esta receta es top 8Y. El secreto está en dejarlas dorar a fuego lento y ya 8Y's #recetasfaciles #recetasveganas #carne vegetal #carne #soyatexturizada #lentijas #proteina vegetal	110.925	5.503	21	342	[carne, 'lentijas', 'recetasfaciles', 'recetasveganas', 'proteina vegetal', 'carne vegetal', 'soyatexturizada']	

There are additional cells for description and memos to the right, to include quotes, text summaries, and arising thoughts. Keeping a record of researcher memos aids not only in the building of a trail to audit data collection, but also as a meaningful way of advancing analysis (García-Rapp, 2019).



## 4 Theoretical and empirical development

**Figure 4.1** COLLAGE OF RELEVANT TIKTOK VIDEOS UNDER ANALYSIS



Our work will draw from previous research on climate change in Spain (Alonso-Jurnet and Larrondo-Ureta, 2022), German-speaking Europe (Shim, 2023), and in other contexts (Murphy, 2021; Shockley, 2020; Mayes and Center, 2022) to update perspectives on users' (citizen) engagement as well as the discourses and visual aesthetics of climate change communication.

At the same time, we will build on current research on TikTok and climate change (Basch et al., 2021; Zeng, et al., 2020; Hautea et al., 2021; Huber et al., 2022), TikTok popularity (Abidin, 2021; García-Rapp and León, 2024, García-Rapp, 2024) and eco-celebrity (Murphy, 2021; Haastrup, 2022; Haastrup and Marshall, 2024), as well as TikTok communities more generally (Jaramillo-Dent et al, 2022) together with gender and intersectionality (Alvermann et al., 2021) on the platform.

When it comes to memes, we will analyse, interpret, compare and contrast conclusions proposed by other scholars in relevant literature (Johann et al., 2023; Zhang and Pinto, 2021; Ross and Rivers, 2019; Kovacheva et al., 2022) to explore the power of humour when contextualizing everyday emotions and practices.

Doerr and Langa (2024) discuss contrasts between popular environmental movements such as FFF (Fridays For Future) Germany and FFF Argentina, who make use of confrontational, apocalyptic protest narratives, and other Latin American formations that propose “non-human everybodies” (p. 45) as well as human-nature relationships as important sources of citizen engagement. Similarly, instead of denunciatory storytelling approaches that position nature as passive and victim of human destruction, images fostering affective (re)connection with nature and animals are often seen on Instagram profiles of Spanish eco-influencers (San Cornelio et al., 2021). In line with our preliminary observations “on the field” (TikTok), this sort of content is blended with calls for peaceful, nostalgic, romantic, contemplation and admiration for wilderness based on posthumanist imaginaries, inter-species dialogue, as well as positive, hopeful narratives of daily, individual changes (San Cornelio et al., 2024). Besides a rupture with anthropocentrism and extractivism, these popular creators promote a calm but decided approach foregrounding practical advice to being part of the solution. Instead of fear-





inducing images, they create emotionally resonant narratives that motivate to respond and act, promoting individual engagement while feeling part of a wider movement. Something that is already happening, under motion, to which we can contribute to.

After preliminary empirical observations, we have defined **three main analytic themes** to look at **sustainable strategies, solutions, habits and lifestyles that are being suggested, contested, defended, (de)legitimized**. This will allow us to **interpret community implicit norms, rules, and expectations** as well as to compare and contrast with other platforms and users.

**CONTENT:** TikTok, will later expand to Reddit, posts and comments in Spanish, German and English, including visual (videos/memes, emojis) and textual content (concepts, hashtags #, keywords).

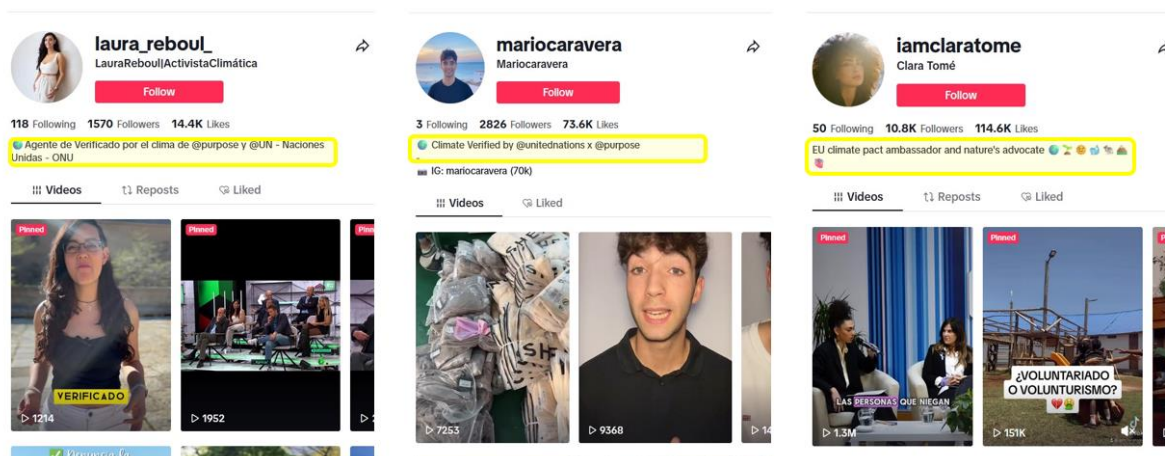
**MEANING:** Analyse and interpret discourses, symbolic boundaries, memetic humour, role of influencers/ambassadors/activists (content creators).

**INTERACTION:** Audience/user/citizen reception and response, dialogue with creators through comments.

## 5 Research plans

An interesting avenue to explore in our research is that, in Spain, we have since last year several **officially verified, UN climate ambassadors** acting as eco-influencers on TikTok. These scientists, journalists and activists are part of a new joint program between the NGO Purpose, TikTok, and the UN (Figure 5.1).

**Figure 5.1** SPANISH TIKTOK ACCOUNTS OF VERIFIED UN CLIMATE AMBASSADORS



This goes hand in hand with similar recent platform developments: Since April 2023 there have been a series of launches and adjustments to TikTok policies with the goal of representing a reliable source of information and curbing climate misinformation (Wired, 2023). This includes the **prohibition of publishing videos with false or erroneous information about climate change**. Following this, any content that attempts to “undermine the well-established scientific consensus” on the climate crisis will be removed from the service. What is more, **users searching for content related to climate information will be redirected to official sources** or independent fact-checking companies previously selected thanks to TikTok's partnership with the United Nations (UN). **We will explore how this works in practice in the different languages and regions.**

Relatedly, the platform has **an official account, @tiktokforgood**, defined as their "global social impact hub sustainability content to drive positive impact". They motivate users to contribute by following, sharing and commenting content: "When it comes to making our planet an even better place, every action counts. Join our #ClimateAction campaign on TikTok and be part of the change by sharing your creativity and inspiring meaningful change". In addition to the mentioned joint-program, TikTok has their own "network of climate





messengers with the credibility and experience to share life and planet-saving information", who are known as "verified champions" (TikTok, 2023), which is also **relevant for our WP to examine**.

## 6 Ethics and data management

We applied, and have been granted, data access for research purposes through platforms' official channels, in this case TikTok and Reddit, to make use of their automated channels, APIs, and store anonymized data without personal identifying information.

Through the TikTok Research API, we can request data about posted content for a list of pre-defined accounts or a list of specific keywords. We can further collect comments for specific posts or meta-information for accounts. The data is stored at secure cloud storage provided by the University of Vienna.

The study keeps with the guidelines of the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR), which suggests a contextualized, case-based approach considering eventual or probable harm and risk, grade of vulnerability, and respect for persons (Franzke et al., 2020; Markham and Buchanan, 2012).

Attending to any copyright restrictions, we will publish our research open access and also deposit in institutional repositories for long-term digital preservation.



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