



THE CULTURAL BATTLE ON YOUTUBE

Analysis of the Storytelling of the Five Spanish Political Influencers with the Most Subscribers

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the most popular videos of the five Spanish political influencers with the largest subscriber bases in the "News and Politics" category on YouTube. The technique of qualitative content analysis is employed to identify the main themes of the videos and describe the manner in which they are addressed, as well as the approaches and tone used. The findings indicate the presence of recurring themes, including feminism, economic liberalism, and media independence, among the most popular videos with the audience. However, there are also notable differences in the thematic and stylistic approaches of the YouTubers under study.

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1. Introduction

The advent of social networks has profoundly altered the mechanisms by which individuals access information and form opinions (Casero-Ripollés, 2018; Cinelli et al., 2021). In their agenda-setting theory, McCombs and Shaw (1972) posited that the media possesses the capacity to establish a thematic agenda and facilitate the audience's comprehension of specific public issues. In the contemporary era, political influencers have emerged as formidable rivals to the media in establishing the public agenda (Yi and Wang, 2022; Fischer et al., 2022). These digital opinion leaders target audiences seeking a thematic agenda that diverges from the traditional media (Manfredi-Sánchez and Ufarte-Ruiz, 2020) and even supplant it in the information diet of numerous users. In this context, their role is pivotal in catalysing, amplifying, and/or silencing content (Palacios-López et al., 2023).

Political influencers are distinguished from other content creators in their willingness to associate their influence with political and social causes (Goodwin et al., 2023). In accordance with Riedl et al. (2023), the status of a political influencer is contingent upon the context in which they operate. This encompasses both those who engage exclusively in the creation of such content and those who do so on an ad hoc basis. However, Finlayson (2020, p. 62) identifies a specialisation among these profiles, describing them as "ideological entrepreneurs" who make a living by promoting their particular political vision of the world independently of political movements and the media. Furthermore, some of these opinion leaders collaborate with each other and establish an "alternative influence network" (Lewis, 2018, p. 8).

One of the consequences of the informational use of social media is that it can limit the user's exposure to diverse perspectives. This is because these platforms facilitate the formation of polarised groups around shared narratives, which has been termed an 'echo chamber' (Del Vicario et al., 2016).

The formation of these echo chambers is due to selective exposure and confirmation bias (Nickerson, 1998), i.e. the user's tendency to seek information that reinforces their opinions (Del Vicario et al., 2016; Bessi et al., 2015). In this sense, Sunstein (2002) warns of the risk of echo chambers reinforcing existing opinions within a group and driving them towards more extreme positions. In a similar vein, Finlayson (2020) highlights the significance of platforms such as YouTube in facilitating the emergence of new political actors who previously lacked the capacity to reach large audiences and who disseminate extremist political ideologies. The paradigm shift favours the construction of narratives with alternative framings that influence the evolution of public debate (Casero-Ripollés, 2018), especially when it comes to polarising issues (Cinelli et al., 2021).

Furthermore, platform algorithms filter the information we access and reinforce the creation of these echo chambers by suggesting content that matches users' preferences (Pariser, 2011; Cinelli et al., 2021). Furthermore, in this environment characterised by a plethora of available channels, the increase in the number of channels has led to the emergence of a more specialised and partisan offer, which has in turn resulted in a more fragmented audience (Van-Aelst et al., 2017).

This new environment is characterised by other phenomena such as the loss of quality of political information caused by the growing competition of the media to capture the audience's attention and low editorial budgets (Van-Aelst et al., 2017). The deterioration of the news product has led to the creation of content with a tendency towards superficiality and sensationalism, to the detriment of other more relevant content that is more costly to produce (Davis, 2014). This circumstance is exploited by some alternative opinion leaders to position themselves against the traditional media, whom they accuse of practising sensationalism and using humiliation to suppress opposing points of view. In this way, they attract their followers to reactionary positions (Lewis, 2019).

The dispute for the audience favours the emergence of politainment or political infotainment, i.e., the creation of new formats that combine information and entertainment and that prioritise the objective of viralisation over reflection (Berdón-Prieto et al., 2023). Humanes et al. (2021) identify the coexistence of hybrid communication cultures, in which the expression of opinions, entertainment and the rational presentation of facts coexist. Furthermore, these contents are characterised by a predominance of the irrelevant, the individual, the personal and the emotional (Reinemann et al., 2012). In this regard, Tsubokura et al. (2018) note that more eye-catching and emotionally charged content tends to spread faster.

This phenomenon favours the phenomenon of disinformation. Cinelli et al. (2021) indicate that the greater the polarisation, the faster disinformation increases. Trepte and Scherer (2010) point to the

existence of uninformed opinion leaders who maintain high levels of credibility among their audience. Palacios-López et al. (2023) highlight the significant implications of early exposure to disinformation on democratic processes.

Another phenomenon associated with polarisation is the prevalence of more aggressive communication styles, including those employed by opinion leaders and users in their comments (Literat and Kligler-Vilenchik, 2021). Consequently, ridicule and exasperation prevail over reasoned discourse (Berdón-Prieto et al., 2023). In this context, Fischer et al. (2022) examine the methods employed by political influencers in disseminating their content, identifying a tendency towards ridicule and indignation when expressing opinions on a given issue, often in an emotional manner, and when criticising other political positions, including mainstream journalism. The authors conclude that videos that use these resources have a greater potential to appeal to the audience.

Finally, alternative channels of political communication are a way for a young and/or politically disinterested audience to access political issues and public affairs (Fischer et al., 2022). The popularity of news video consumption on the internet among younger users is noteworthy. Thus, 84% of adults aged 18-34 in Spain consume news-related videos on the internet on a weekly basis (Digital News Report, 2023).

This user profile is also more likely to adopt more extreme positions on political and social issues such as gender equality, migratory phenomena, or the rights of the LGTBIQ+ collective (Ruiz-Díaz and Danet, 2022). Likewise, Schmuck et al. (2022) examine the impact of political influencers on younger audiences, identifying a tendency to perceive politics in a simplified manner. This perception can fuel young people's political cynicism, but also stimulate their interest in politics.

1.1. Background and Justification for the Research

Recent research approaches the phenomenon of political influencers from different perspectives and on different platforms. Thus, Fernández Gómez et al. (2018) analyse the activity of ten high-impact Spanish influencers on Twitter. Specifically, they explore the subject matter of politically targeted tweets and their ideological spectrum. Palacios-López et al. (2023) examine the activities of the most influential Spanish political influencers on Instagram to identify various forms of disinformation in their content.

With regard to the role of political influencers on YouTube, Lewis (2019) analyses the micro celebrity practices employed by three prominent political YouTubers in the United States through a content analysis of their videos. More recently, Fischer et al. (2022) conducted a comparative content analysis of the YouTube channels of the most successful political influencers in English and German.

However, no previous studies have delved into the activity of Spanish political influencers on YouTube. Therefore, it seems necessary to carry out research to help us understand this phenomenon.

The choice of YouTube is relevant because of the permanence of the videos compared to other social networks whose content is more ephemeral. Additionally, the format of the video blog (vlogging) facilitates the creation of more elaborate narratives than other platforms such as X or Instagram, where brevity and immediacy are paramount. Furthermore, according to the Digital News Report (2023), YouTube is the leading platform for the consumption of news content, with 30% of Spanish adults utilising it on a weekly basis for this purpose. This places YouTube ahead of other platforms such as Facebook (27%), Instagram (21%), Twitter (17%) and TikTok (17%), and even ahead of all media websites and apps, whose use barely represents 23% of the adult population.

1.2. Purpose and Objectives of the Research

The overarching objective of this research is to enhance our understanding of the phenomenon of Spanish political influencers on YouTube. Our primary aim is to identify the content that elicits the greatest interest among their audience and to analyse their narratives, which on occasion challenge the discourse of traditional media. To achieve this, we will examine the recurring themes in their videos and their tone and approach. In particular, we have set out the following specific objectives:

OE1. The objective of this study is to describe the common features and differences between the channels analysed.

OE2. The second objective is to determine whether the discourse of YouTubers is based on reasoned argumentation or opinion.

OE3. The third objective is to analyse the rhetorical strategies of alternative discourse as an opposition to traditional media.

2. Methodology

In order to conduct this exploratory research (Del Río and Velázquez, 2005, p. 54), a qualitative methodology was employed, specifically content analysis. This method allows for the interpretation of the content of various documents, including audiovisual materials (Ruiz-Olabuénaga, 2012, p. 192).

The technique was applied to a sample of cases selected according to the following criteria. Firstly, the five channels with the most subscribers in the "News and Politics" category on the "Top 1000 News and Politics YouTube Channels in Spain" list, generated by the Hypeauditor database, were selected. It was ensured that the channel belonged exclusively to this category and that the content dealt with political, economic and/or ideological issues. Similarly, only those channels were selected whose primary genre was the video blog, which is defined as a channel in which a person performs a monologue in front of a camera (Aran et al., 2014). The channels analysed can be consulted in Table 1.

Table 1. Channel selection

<i>Youtuber</i>	Channel
Juan Ramón Rallo	https://www.youtube.com/@juanrallo
Wall Street Wolverine	https://www.youtube.com/@WallStreetWolverine
Rubén Gisbert	https://www.youtube.com/@RubenGisbert
A Straight White Uncle	https://www.youtube.com/@UnTioBlancoHetero
Begoña Gerpe	https://www.youtube.com/@begonagerpe7757

Source: Own elaboration¹

Secondly, YouTube Data Tools were employed to select the videos from the aforementioned five channels. Once the list of videos published on each channel in 2023 was obtained, the five with the most views were chosen. In this case, those videos that did not adhere to the format of vlogging were excluded, such as interviews or collaborations between YouTubers, whose duration greatly exceeded the standard format of 15-20 minutes, or shorts, i.e. videos that did not exceed one minute in length and that advanced some topics. Furthermore, those videos that did not address political, economic, and/or ideological content were excluded from the analysis. This included videos related to the Daniel Sancho case, which were among the most viewed on certain channels last year.

The application of these criteria yielded a sample of 25 videos, ranging in length from 8 to 31 minutes. A total of 427 minutes were analysed.

Following an initial screening of all the videos, the aim was to identify the themes and approaches used by the most subscribed-to YouTubers in their most popular videos in 2023. This was followed by the establishment of the categories of content analysis. These categories act as thematic areas and are not rigid but may undergo changes throughout the research process (García-Ortega, 2010). Consequently, some of the categories initially considered were subsequently reformulated or eliminated.

The data collection phase, which involved applying the category system to all the videos in the sample, provided the empirical basis for our research. The analysis of all this information yielded the results presented below, which have been organised by youtuber.

¹ The number of subscribers to these channels has continued to fall in recent months. This is evidenced by the figures for the beginning of March 2024: Juan Ramón Rallo, 678,000; Wall Street Wolverine, 620,000; Rubén Gisbert, 545,000; Un Tío Blanco Hetero, 497,000; and Begoña Gerpe, 410,000.

3. Results

3.1. *Juan Ramón Rallo, Evangelist of Economic Liberalism*

Juan Ramón Rallo holds a degree in Economics and Law from the University of Valencia and a PhD in Economics from the Universidad Rey Juan Carlos. He teaches economics at several universities and has written several books, including *Liberalismo: los diez principios básicos del orden político liberal* and *Anti-Marx: crítica a la economía política marxista*. Rallo combines his academic and intellectual activities with a significant media profile. He has published articles in *Libertad Digital*, *El Confidencial*, and *Voz Pópuli*, and he participates as an economic analyst on *esRadio*, *La Sexta*, and *Espejo Público* (Rallo, 2024).

The most recurrent theme in his videos is the analysis of politics and economics, in the light of the liberal creed. In terms of style, Rallo stands out for his academic and measured tone and is characterised by articulating his interventions as if they were a university lecture. He frequently poses rhetorical questions to provide context for his explanations, which consistently address two narrative planes: the benefits of implementing liberal policies and the negative consequences of interventionist state policies.

In his commentaries, he provides context and complementary information to achieve a high degree of dissemination. He uses resources such as newspaper front pages, press publications, or video clips from television or radio, which are his main source of reference. Rallo presents himself as a tempered opinion leader with a global vision that distances him from tribalism or trench influencer. His strength lies in his comprehensive vision of the multifaceted reality and in his prudent and cautious tone.

Discursively, Rallo acts as a preceptor instructing his subscribers in the supremacy of liberalism. He not only illustrates this creed, but also evangelises it to his audience. He leaves no room for doubt, and although the tone is respectful and circumspect, the conclusion is forceful and decisive: only liberalism can build a better world. This can be seen, for example, when he concludes that "liberalism is morally and economically superior to other ideologies." This conviction leads him to exhort and call economic agents to action in order to get involved in the battle to establish this socio-political model. "It is the responsibility of businessmen to defend this economic system [...] We need them" (Rallo, 2023c)².

In the past year, Rallo has conducted a significant number of analyses on the liberal economic policies of the new Argentinean president, Javier Milei. Of the five videos analysed for this study, three are dedicated to the liberal policies promoted by Milei. Rallo considers Milei to be "the moral lighthouse of the continent" (Rallo, 2023c). He posits that Milei's ideas are "very good and very inspiring" and lauds the fact that he makes his commitments to the electorate as soon as his government begins. He notes that it is "so striking when a politician begins his mandate by fulfilling a good part of his electoral commitments" (Rallo, 2023d).

In the video entitled "The most viewed interview in the history of Twitter: from Tucker Carlson to Javier Milei", Rallo abandons his usual sobriety and expresses great enthusiasm for the Argentinean leader. After noting that the interview has had more than 350 million views, he emphasises the importance and relevance of Milei's reflections. Furthermore, he appreciates the capacity to convey the positive effects of his preferred economic and social policies in a concise and accessible manner (Rallo, 2023c). This implies a recognition of Milei's ability to present compelling arguments that challenge the dominant narrative of the progressive left.

Although Juan Ramón Rallo does not typically disparage his opponents, he does strongly defend liberal principles. This can be observed in the video in which he analyses "Milei's masterstroke to privatise Aerolíneas Argentinas", an entity that has generated millions in losses. Consequently, he states: "The Argentine state cannot continue to bleed itself dry in the form of subsidies [...] It is normal that Milei wants to privatise them and wants to stop subsidising them at the expense of Argentine taxpayers" (Rallo, 2023e).

After elucidating Milei's strategy of transferring ownership of Aerolíneas Argentinas to its employees, eliciting their vehement rejection ("over our dead body"), Rallo employs a witty and biting sarcasm when he states,

If the employees are competent or highly competent, they will have no difficulty in reorienting the company in the market and reaping profits [...] However, this is not the case." It appears that

² A complete list of all the videos analysed in this research can be found in References.

the employees of Aerolíneas Argentinas prioritize the assurance of a fixed income, both in the short term and in the event of the company's insolvency. The optimal solution, therefore, would be to privatize public companies by transferring their assets to their public employees. (Rallo, 2023e)

Nevertheless, despite the apparent endorsement of Milei's policies by Rallo, the latter's views on economic liberalisation remain unchanged. In a statement that encapsulates his radical economic ideology, Rallo asserts that "If Javier Milei really wants to end up massively liberalising the Argentine economy and society, reducing the state to its minimum expression, of course many, many more measures in this same direction will be necessary" (Rallo, 2023d).

In terms of approaches, he consistently appeals to morality, asserting with conviction that liberalism is superior to any ideological and political system. Although he maintains a balanced, respectful and restrained tone, his conclusions are definitive and call for action by political and business actors. He refrains from denigrating or insulting his opponents, yet Rallo leaves no room for any ideological fissure. Either the liberal currents are supported at all costs, or a government will not be a legitimate representative of liberalism, even if it claims to be one.

The academic and professorial tone serves as a rhetorical strategy to convey the predicament as a libertarian evangelist. There are no internal contradictions in his discourse, and he usually resorts to authoritative arguments, with a profusion of references to liberal authors and credible sources, generally from bibliographies and prestigious journalistic media. He appeals to rationality and there is no evidence in the sample that he encourages polarisation. His discursive strategy promotes critical thinking. In this way, he is an exemplary prescriber who provides an argument to defend the proposition that "liberalism is morally superior to other ideologies" (Rallo, 2023c).

3.2. Wall Street Wolverine: Between Contempt and Moral Superiority

The Wall Street Wolverine channel, created by content creator Víctor Domínguez, deals with liberalism, economic, political and social current affairs. Domínguez is a prominent advocate of tax migration of YouTubers to Andorra. The most recurrent themes in the videos analysed are economic liberalism, media independence and, to a lesser extent, feminism.

With regard to the first axis of his discourse, economic liberalism, he asserts himself as a proponent of liberal ideas in opposition to statism and socialism, which he critiques with vehement and elevated rhetoric. In a manner analogous to Rallo, albeit in a more ordinary and disorganized manner, he displays his enthusiasm for the ascension of Javier Milei to power in Argentina. He is visibly jubilant, stating, "Long live freedom!" "In a formal sense, gentlemen, we have the world's first libertarian government president" (Wall Street Wolverine, 2023e).

Domínguez projects this scenario onto the reality of Spain, a country he claims "is a socialist paradise [with] a population dependent on the state [...]. This is how the socialists perpetuate themselves in power" (Wall Street Wolverine, 2023d). He adds: "If a country as infected by socialism as Argentina is, with so many clientelist networks, with such statism, so corrupt, has been able to vote for someone like Javier Milei [...] this is a light of hope for the world" (Wall Street Wolverine, 2023e).

He employs a pejorative tone when referring to pensioners, the unemployed, civil servants and workers in the Spanish public sector. "As the number of individuals reliant on state benefits increases, it becomes evident that the majority of public policies will be designed to benefit this particular demographic" (Wall Street Wolverine, 2023d). This final assertion reveals a covert strategy of polarisation, as it positions citizens in two distinct categories: those who benefit from state subsidies and those who espouse libertarian ideals. This dichotomy is exemplified by statements such as the following, in which he employs rhetoric reminiscent of warmongering: "At this moment in time in Spain, there is a power struggle between those who live off their own money and those who aspire to live off other people's money. This is the real struggle" (Wall Street Wolverine, 2023d).

The justification provided by those in favour of this position is simplistic, relying on clichés and appealing to primary emotions that can generate negative feelings. For example, they claim that those in power want to control the people. And what better way to have the people under control than to have them dependent on the state? (Wall Street Wolverine, 2023d). When he recounts his experience of living in Andorra in order to pay less tax than in Spain, he employs expressions with an aggressive and foul tone: "I'm going to be able to get up every day with the peace of mind that the government is not going to be busting my balls" (Wall Street Wolverine, 2023d).

Víctor Domínguez further intensifies his rhetoric when he nominally mentions left-wing political parties, going so far as to insult them. He attributes their role in bringing the country to ruin. After the 28M elections, in which the left obtained poor results, he states:

All Podemos ministers have ended up with a damaged image and have acted as Sánchez's smoke screen in many cases to distract. The bullshit of Irene Montero, the bullshit of Alberto Garzón [...]. The PSOE has also been affected by the influence of Podemos. (Wall Street Wolverine, 2023c)

Wall Street Wolverine also critiques the power of the mainstream media. He asserts that they are not independent and therefore contribute to the amplification of a dominant left-wing, statist political discourse. He states,

Whoever believes that the media machine and the opposition is going to be fair to Javier Milei is very wrong. Remember what happened with Bolsonaro, remember what happened with Trump. The media machine will be implacable from the outset of Javier Milei's government. (Wall Street Wolverine, 2023e)

He differentiates between lies and truth. And he places the role of the traditional media alongside the lie:

The parties of the system are treated differently than the new candidates. Because the parties of the system already have the media a little bit bought and the citizen already assumes that they are corrupt and that they are the system and that they are rotten. So, nobody expects anything from them (Wall Street Wolverine, 2023c).

Regarding feminism, the Wall Street Wolverine channel does not deal with it explicitly, as it is not its speciality. However, it does address the case of a misguided marketing campaign (Bud Light's collaboration with trans activist Dylan Mulvany) and takes the opportunity to criticise the woke ideology as one of the linchpins of identity progressivism.

With regard to the veracity of Víctor Domínguez's discourse, he repeatedly makes assertions without providing supporting evidence. His rhetoric appears convincing due to his assertive tone, yet he often limits himself to expressing his opinion without citing sources that could support or reinforce his ideas. This can be observed in the following statements:

Given the level of public debt in Spain, there is no capacity to implement a series of representative reforms that would benefit self-employed individuals. Instead, priority will be given to maintaining the satisfaction of civil servants and those who receive subsidies, rather than the interests of the general public. (Wall Street Wolverine, 2023d)

Regarding tax policy in Portugal, he states, "I'm telling you the truth: you can pay even less tax than in Andorra" (Wall Street Wolverine, 2023d).

Upon analysis of the internal coherence of Víctor Domínguez's discourse, it becomes evident that he espouses contradictory views. For instance, he criticises the socialist rulers and asserts that the most effective means of opposing them is to leave Spain. This, he believes, will result in

a reduction in their financial resources and an intensification of their own misfortune. When you decide not to contribute to this party, you are taking away the ability of these people to continue perpetuating all their clientelist networks and to continue perpetuating all this servility that they want to implant around the state. (Wall Street Wolverine, 2023d)

However, he subsequently criticises the fact that these rulers are destroying Spain. If citizens leave Spain to avoid paying taxes (as he does), this also destroys Spain.

Finally, and in consideration of the repetitive nature of his content, it can be observed that Wall Street Wolverine is a YouTuber who tends to revisit the same ideas repeatedly. While he attempts to present his content in a light-hearted manner, it is not uncommon for his videos to come across as crude and

disrespectful. He does not adopt a pedagogical approach, although he does seem to attempt to be didactic. Conversely, on numerous occasions, he displays a certain arrogance and contempt for those who think or act differently. His tone is characterised by irony, mockery and, at times, contempt, as evidenced by his criticism of young people who lack the courage to leave Spain and "grow professionally", a sentiment he himself has exemplified (Wall Street Wolverine, 2023c).

In essence, he assumes a messianic, enlightening role for his audience. He does not seek to impart knowledge, but rather to demonstrate his own superiority. As an example, he states,

I warn of all this because politics is like this and whoever believes that politics does not stain honest people, of course it does [...]. In politics, the one who makes a career is the psychopath, without principles, without ideas, without honesty, the one who manipulates. (Wall Street Wolverine, 2023e)

3.3. Rubén Gisbert, the Anti-Establishment 'Hero'

Rubén Gisbert is a lawyer, political analyst and president of the Junta Democrática (Democratic Board), a civil organisation that questions the current democratic system. Gisbert posits that Spain is a partidocracy, where power is exercised by party leaders, and advocates for the direct election of political representatives and a real separation of state powers. He believes that these changes are necessary because, in his opinion, the current system is not independent.

In the five videos comprising the exhibition, Gisbert addresses, in order of preponderance, issues related to the independence of the judiciary (lawfare), the independence of the media, Catalan independence and the Spanish political system. In general, he is a YouTuber who attempts to substantiate his analyses by resorting to national and international press clippings, as well as official documents (lawsuits, judgments, letters, etc.). It is evident from his analysis that he has a solid grasp of the issues under discussion and that he is able to apply legal and economic concepts with confidence.

As will be demonstrated below, Gisbert employs a confrontational discourse when critiquing the independence of the judiciary. This is evident in the video with the most views of 2023, entitled "The prosecution charges me with hatred for contradicting the government's version of events" in which, upon becoming involved in criminal proceedings, he makes a display of accusations without evidence, failing to provide any evidence, in order to denounce what he perceives to be "the harassment and legal savagery that is intended against me by the State Prosecutor's Office" (Gisbert, 2023a).

He assumes the figure of the hero-victim who is the target of political power, revealing, with certain histrionics, an alleged plan to annul him as an opinion leader. This is evidenced by the following statement: "This is the only way they can use to get me out of the way: to lock me up in prison, with criminal charges of incitement to hatred" (Gisbert, 2023a).

In his argument, he infers that this is a ploy to silence him, pointing out that this supposed hidden power is going to fail in its attempt. In a challenging and threatening tone, he addresses the camera and states,

If you believe that this will deter me from my political activism or impede my denunciations of the bias, servility, and grovelling of the political system in which I believe I live, and my advocacy for a country that is free and politically independent, you are mistaken. What you have done is to place your hand in a hornet's nest. (Gisbert, 2023a)

According to Gisbert, the object of the lawsuit is an accusation of spreading false news in the coverage of the war in Ukraine and acting as an "agent of political destabilisation", the *youtuber* denounces what he perceives to be an apparent judicial harassment of international dimensions because, according to his version: "This has been carried out simply because of the interest and effort of a prosecutor, in concomitance with the interests of other government agencies of other countries". And he concludes, without giving a single piece of information to support his accusations: "This is directed by an embassy or by a government with the interest of silencing me [...], because, as you know, we are in the midst of war propaganda" (Gisbert, 2023a).

These statements indicate that Gisbert holds himself in high regard, portraying himself as the target of a conspiracy involving the political and judicial powers of the Spanish state, as well as foreign powers. He ascribes to himself an unusual importance, rarely seen even in journalists who have endangered

their lives by denouncing serious cases (the GAL, the Roldán case, the Gürtel plot, the ERE in Andalusia, and a long etcetera), to the point of dramatisation by challenging these hidden powers:

But who do you think you are? You've stuck your hand in a hornet's nest. Furthermore, the individual in question believes that the possession of a shield, a badge and the wearing of a toga will intimidate the author and result in the latter's abandonment of their efforts to achieve an independent political regime for Spain. (Gisbert, 2023a)

He presents a narrative of libertarian heroism, of the leader who confronts power without fear and is willing to sacrifice himself for the good of Spain and the world. He states,

If you have what it takes [...] put me in prison for expressing an opinion in a respectful manner [he contradicts his tone]. Put me in prison, that's what you should do. Now [pointing a threatening finger at the camera], you are exactly what you say you want to fight. There is no democracy or freedom in Russia, just like in other countries in the world. But neither here [...]. All you are doing is redoubling my efforts to fight the mafia that the Spanish state has become. (Gisbert, 2023a)

At the end of the video, Gisbert denounces the "political and judicial corruption in Spain." Furthermore, he asserts with disdain that "the Spanish people are submissive and allow themselves to be exploited and dominated" (Rubén Gisbert, 2023a). This sense of superiority is also reflected in his portrayal of himself as an exemplary citizen, in contrast to the political class, whom he accuses of corrupt acts without making any distinction. "I pay my taxes, I don't steal from anyone, I don't commit any wrongdoing, I don't like drugs, nor do I consume prostitution like our dear politicians" (Gisbert, 2023a).

With regard to the media, he shares with the other YouTubers under study a negative view of their independence and reliability. This can be seen, for example, in the following opinions: "My decision to visit Ukraine was motivated by a lack of confidence in the Western press, as well as a similar scepticism towards the Russian press. I sought to gain a first-hand understanding of the situation in a conflict zone" (Gisbert, 2023a). "It is uncommon for the media in Spain to report on cases of corruption" (Gisbert, 2023e); "both the media and a significant proportion of the Internet are consumed by this topic" (Rubén Gisbert, 2023c). In contrast, Gisbert presents himself as an exemplar of the virtuous conduct expected of those engaged in the media sphere: "I have never in my entire life accepted conditions to stop saying what I think or to stop acting as I consider right or just" (Gisbert, 2023a).

Furthermore, he accuses the government of attempting to censor him for espousing the truth that the media are unwilling to acknowledge: "They have made clear their concern that in the media that are not under political control, opinions [...] that do not agree with the 'truth' in moral and political terms of this government are given" (Gisbert, 2023a).

With regard to Catalan independence, he proceeds directly to action, a hallmark of Gisbert, who not only engages in criticism but also intervenes in causes he considers just. In the video entitled "Complaint against Yolanda Díaz for her actions against Puigdemont" (Gisbert, 2023e), he outlines how, in collaboration with other legal professionals, he has filed a criminal complaint against the vice-president of the government, on the grounds that she may have committed a crime as a public official by meeting with the fugitive Puigdemont in Brussels. The lawsuit seeks the disqualification of Díaz.

Finally, with regard to the Spanish political system, Gisbert defends abstention and calls for "citizen disobedience", because he believes that in Spain there are no right-wing or left-wing parties. All parties are social democrats (Gisbert, 2023d). His approach to this question is framed in terms of truth/lies. "We are going to explain why they are myths and why they are lies and for what purpose they [false arguments] have been launched and constructed and are still being used" (Gisbert, 2023d).

From the content analysed on Gisbert's channel, it can be concluded that he has constructed an image of an anti-systemic hero who fights against the de facto and hidden powers that seek to silence him, both within and outside of Spain. He is also presented as an independent and honest disseminator of information, in contrast to the traditional media, who spreads the truth in order to challenge the political mafias that are destroying the country. His direct, assertive, self-assured and emphatic style is attracting an ever-increasing number of subscribers who share his ideological framework.

3.4. *A Straight White Male, Executioner of Identitarian Feminism*

Also known as UTBH, this is the pseudonym of *youtuber* Sergio Candanedo. His chosen moniker represents the white heterosexual male collective, albeit in an ironic manner, utilising terminology that he himself critiques on his channel. His content is critical of the politics that establish a dichotomy between oppressors and oppressed. He is renowned for his theatrical performances and, although he appears in his ordinary appearance on some live streams, he is popular for recording his videos in a white lycra mask and costume, black hoodie and sunglasses.

As he himself informed the newspaper *El Mundo*, he was previously a leftist, but "the internal conflicts of Podemos ended up disenchanting him". UTBH maintains: "I am neither sexist nor extreme right-wing," he states, and adds that his main objective is to question the prevalence of feminist arguments that are presented without being contrasted and without anyone questioning them. He claims to represent a collective that lacks a voice: "I verbalise what many think, but do not dare to say" (Somolinos, 2018).

Despite the performance and a style that often resorts to mockery, contempt and verbal aggression, he is a *youtuber* who uses bibliography, academic articles and, on occasion, interviews with renowned personalities in his argumentation.

The themes addressed by UTBH are, in order of preponderance, feminism, media independence and, to a lesser extent, economic liberalism. Criticism of feminism is present in four of the five videos in the exhibition.

He is particularly critical of the Integral Law on Gender Violence (1/2004), which, according to him, is based on a victimising stance that leads to a utilitarian narrative. Thus, he states:

All these stories that speak of a substantial difference between gender violence and other domestic violence are based on a narrative that is not supported by science, which studies violence in the sphere of the intimate partner. (Un Tío Blanco Hetero, 2023d)

In his view, challenging the

dominant narrative on gender-based violence carries the risk of being labelled a denier of gender-based violence. This label, he argues, is often perceived as an accusation of denial of abuse and murders of women. (Un Tío Blanco Hetero, 2023d)

He posits that this is a consequence of "so much ignorance," and, for this very reason,

it is complicated to position oneself among so much populism and demagoguery, especially when all this populism and all this demagoguery is articulated around something that generates as much social rejection as the mistreatment of women and when the debate is often based on emotional discourse that appeals to people's hearts, rather than on rational arguments. (Un Tío Blanco Hetero, 2023d)

He is also highly critical of the Trans Law, which he claims is discriminatory against men. He states,

If we lived in a system that did not discriminate on the basis of sex and in which we were all equal before the law, the whole gender self-determination thing would probably be irrelevant. However, since we do not live in such a system, we must accept it and put up with it. (Un Tío Blanco Hetero, 2023a).

He offers a scathing critique of the then Minister for Equality, Irene Montero, stating that "between the remarkable achievements of her legislation and the impressive growth and influence demonstrated by opinion polls, we remain uncertain about the limits of this woman's potential" (Un Tío Blanco Hetero, 2023a). The intensity of the attacks intensified in response to the consequences of the "Only yes is yes" law:

The release of rapists is not something the right wing brought to the campaign either. It is the result of the bungled policies that have come out of the Ministry of Equality and which have led to more than 2,000 sex offenders having their sentences reduced and more than 100 having been

released from prison, after six years of fuelling a campaign of sexual terror among women. (Un Tío Blanco Hetero, 2023c)

He accuses Montero of acting not only for ideological reasons, but also for economic reasons: "Let us consider the matter further. Irene, the reaction you have provoked is a consequence of your exploitation of the institutions for your own purposes. You have used public money to target specific citizens in your propaganda campaigns" (Un Tío Blanco Hetero, 2023a).

Finally, he criticises the minister and her secretary of state, Ángela Rodríguez 'Pam', for their legal ignorance: "You, since you don't know how to do anything useful outside of activism, you dedicate yourselves to twisting, lying, distorting very complex laws and technical legal aspects that you clearly don't master" (Un Tío Blanco Hetero, 2023b).

He employs a pejorative tone when referring to the feminist collective, deriding its members as "charos" and referring to them collectively as "charocracy". He displays a lack of respect when he uses derogatory expressions such as "team purple armpit" (Un Tío Blanco Hetero, 2023e). In his own way, he emulates the style of the director of esRadio, Federico Jiménez Losantos.

Upon the emergence of the Rubiales case, he condemned not only the actions of the player Jennifer Hermoso for modifying her account of the incident, but also those of the Association of Professional Footballers, known as FUTPRO: "A union for and by women with a voracious appetite for public subsidies and a penchant for diving headlong into political affairs, which, by the way, they managed to achieve" (Un Tío Blanco Hetero, 2023e).

The criticisms directed at the media are related to the organisation's main thematic axis: feminist ideology and its dominant and militant representation in the press, radio, television and digital platforms, especially on the left. At times, UTBH establishes a relationship between the media discourse (liar) and its own (truthful) discourse. Moreover, it insinuates that the media are in collusion with political power.

A first example is when he recalls his beginnings on YouTube:

A few years ago, when I began the channel, there was a dearth of criticism of these laws or these speeches [referring to gender violence] and it was practically impossible to see it on television. Now, as more and more of us challenge these policies, the louder and louder they scream and shout. But friends, smile [...] in the end the truth will win out, because only lies need state subsidies. (Un Tío Blanco Hetero, 2023d)

With regard to the theme of economic liberalism, a couple of mentions were noted. One related to the use of taxes for what it considers to be spurious purposes by the feminist sector: "That's how it's nice to pay taxes". He refers to the fact that the Women's Institute has earmarked 115,000 euros for a play. "I invite anyone I want to my stand, which I pay for with your money, and that's it" (Un Tío Blanco Hetero, 2023a). A similar argument is presented in the following demonstration: "This is about advancing the ideological agenda, saying things that sound good in prime time, getting in the photo, and continuing to benefit from public funding" (Un Tío Blanco Hetero, 2023e).

Ultimately, UTBH's tone oscillates between irony, sarcasm, satire and ridicule of the opponent. He also employs a condescending and sobering tone, which suggests a certain intellectual arrogance. In one of his videos, he addresses presenter, comedian and activist Inés Hernand as follows: "The problem is that you are a young woman who is a product of my generation and who missed a basic economics lesson in high school" (Un Tío Blanco Hetero, 2023b). Nevertheless, his style and message have ensured her considerable success on YouTube.

3.5. The Outraged Begoña Gerpe

Begoña Gerpe is a lawyer from the University of Coruña who specialises in criminal Law and family Law. As she states on her personal page, she is one of the pioneering lawyers in Spain in the use of social networks as a means of disseminating legal content and professional experiences (Gerpe, 2021). Since mid-2021, her channel has specialised in the creation of content critical of identity politics.

The issues Gerpe analyses in the sample are, first and foremost, those related to feminism. Secondly, she discusses economic liberalism, and to a lesser extent, the issue of media independence.

Gerpe typically selects a specific topic, which is typically related to current affairs. Gerpe's commentary on a range of contemporary issues, including the case of a person who underwent a gender transition process and regretted it, the dismissal of Rubiales, the trial of Dani Alves, and others, is characterised by an apocalyptic tone. She asserts that feminism devours everything, and that it is like a steamroller, like Attila's horse, and that wherever it passes, no grass grows back (Gerpe, 2023e).

Her style is characterised by a prophetic and catastrophic tone, which announces a devastating scenario. She states, "The feminism that is coming is much worse than the one we have had with Irene Montero.: here it is about castrating men, castrating men, and I refuse, I refuse, because for me men are not an enemy" (Gerpe, 2023d). She also emphasises: "I concur with your assessment that feminism has caused significant harm, but the most profound harm has been inflicted upon women" (Gerpe, 2023a).

Unlike the other four *youtubers* studied, she takes the criticism personally and provides information from her private life to demonstrate that she is affected by what she considers to be harmful feminism, citing her status as a mother as a rationale for this (Gerpe, 2023d). Her statements demonstrate her role as an influencer, characterised by a tendency to express outrage and disgust: "This is shameful". "This is feminism: twisting reality, changing what we see, seeking justification for the unjustifiable" (Gerpe, 2023d).

In her speeches, she emphasises her status as a woman and speaks on behalf of others who, like her, do not agree with equality policies.

Feminism does not have to tell me what is good and what is bad [...] because then we would be talking about women needing a guide in our lives, that we cannot think on our own [...] I don't need anyone to guide me: not a group of men, not a group of women. (Gerpe, 2023d)

The criticism of feminism is frequently accompanied by attacks on the former Minister for Equality, Irene Montero. In some instances, the rhetoric employed reaches the level of disrespect and insults. Montero is referred to as "bitch", "moron" and "scoundrel" (Gerpe, 2023c). Additionally, the minister's team is labelled as "the broads who accompany her in the Ministry of Equality" (Gerpe, 2023c).

His impassioned style of discourse distances her from a discourse that encourages critical thinking. In contrast, she articulates phrases imbued with a profound emotional charge, evoking a deep sense of anger, which effectively generates a rhetorical ethos resonating with an audience outraged by progressive policies. For instance, he states, "My stomach turns, I swear, my stomach turns. May God protect us from having such a person in the government again [referring to Irene Montero]" (Gerpe, 2023c). Or: "Sumar does not want this woman to be in government, and it is clear that nobody wants her, not even the feminist movement. Her partner is also a scoundrel" (Gerpe, 2023c).

Gerpe does not differentiate between the political and the personal, going as far as moral disqualification: "This woman [Irene Montero] is a clear example of what arrogance is." Gerpe portrays Montero as the epitome of moral depravity, declaring her "the cardinal sin made person" and "the worst thing that has ever happened in this country" (Gerpe, 2023c).

Gerpe's rhetoric also reveals a lack of respect for those who hold opposing views. She expresses bewilderment at the inability to comprehend the rationale behind such opinions, stating, "I don't understand it. Furthermore, the fact that there are still individuals who espouse the views of these individuals [referring to Podemos] it makes me want to vomit, it's disgusting [...]. It's shameful, really, it's shameful" (Gerpe, 2023c). is a source of profound disquiet. It is, in fact, a source of profound disgust. It is, in the most literal sense, a source of profound shame. The individual in question resorts to the use of foul language on numerous occasions, as evidenced by the following example: "But what kind of a shitty country is this? That people are still afraid to say publicly that this is not an aggression" (Gerpe, 2023d). She refers to the prevailing media discourse regarding Rubiales' kiss with Jennifer Hermoso as an act of aggression.

However, the disqualifications are not limited to left-wing politicians; they extend to conservative politicians as well, including the leader of the Partido Popular, Alberto Núñez Feijóo. One illustrative example is the following: "And now Feijóo is against the Trans Law, when he supported exactly the same in Galicia?" (Gerpe, 2023b).

The theme of economic liberalism is briefly alluded to, particularly in Gerpe's criticism of state intervention in matters such as child rearing and education, as well as public subsidies. For instance, she states, "Protect your children [...] and don't depend on the state" (Gerpe, 2023b). Or: "Those who are

most interested in voting are those who are paid by the state, those who are in favour of pensions, of the little allowance from the age of 18, of subsidies, of squatting" (Gerpe, 2023a).

Gerpe's stance towards the media is adverse and, at times, she makes an appeal to his audience: "What the press says, take it with a grain of salt" (Gerpe, 2023a). Conversely, she accuses reporters of being submissive, stating that those with a differing opinion do not defend it freely (Gerpe, 2023d).

With regard to approaches, her angry, indolent and derisive tone is protected by her status as a lawyer who gives her opinion from jurisprudence. However, she frequently drifts into conceptual simplification, often reducing reality to good guys and bad guys or to truth and lies. This can be observed in the following expressions: "I am on the side of truth, coherence and common sense. I'm on the side of the good guys" (Gerpe, 2023e). "I felt a mixture of rage, impotence, contempt for politicians and general shame for humanity. I think we are devolving as a species" (Gerpe, 2023b); "I am going to take a stand in this video, as a lawyer" (Gerpe, 2023e).

With regard to the reliability of her arguments, it is notable that, despite her expressions being imbued with verbal and bodily assurance, she does not typically rely on solid sources or provide objective data that can be contrasted. Instead, she tends to infer conclusions based on personal experience, and frequently makes accusations without evidence, which is striking for a lawyer who proclaims, as in the Rubiales case, that accusations must be proven.

Examples of this can be found in the following statements: "And what these women are doing is a disgrace. They have gone, at least in my eyes, from being World Cup winners to being scoundrels and sell-outs. What have they changed their minds in exchange for?" (Gerpe, 2023d); "those who follow football are mostly men. Those who followed women's football were also men" (Gerpe, 2023e); "no victim of aggression would joke about aggression" (Gerpe, 2023d);

I have seen it: people who have a lot of money and who hire the most prestigious lawyer, the most famous, and then that person, well, maybe that person has less idea about law than me. I have no idea who Dani Alves' lawyer is. (Gerpe, 2023a)

Finally, she engages in self-contradictions and criticises the same profession that she performs on her YouTube channel, through which she seeks to convince and influence. She states,

This is the advice that this girl had: the YouTube videos, the social networks of children who, like her, were confused and who are spreading information, their opinion, what they consider, convincing other children, diagnosing other children of what is wrong with them [...]. She is inspired by what someone else says on YouTube: Please contrast the information, for God's sake! (Gerpe, 2023b)

However, in another of her videos with more views, she states: "That is what I want to transmit on this channel: that we should be prudent, that justice should do its job and that we should try not to polarise ourselves, neither on one side, nor the other" (Gerpe, 2023a).

In short, Begoña Gerpe's discourse oscillates between rage and contempt. As a lawyer, she attempts to be pedagogical, yet her character evinces a proclivity towards the moralising prophet who judges good and evil and announces cataclysms, thereby tending towards propaganda rather than the didactic work that fosters critical thought.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

4.1. Discussion

The five Spanish *youtubers* with the most subscribers in the "News and Politics" category belong to an ideological spectrum that fits within the coordinates of liberalism and the right. They are highly critical of left-wing policies and engage in what can be described as a "cultural battle" against them. This trend is similar to that observed in other countries, as described by various authors. Therefore, it can be concluded that it is not a peculiarity confined to Spain. For instance, Lewis (2018, p. 3) describes the existence of *youtubers* who "try to reach young audiences by transmitting extreme right-wing ideas in the form of news and entertainment." Fischer et al. (2022) detect a predominance of right-wing ideology in a sample of *youtubers* from the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, and Austria.

A review of the videos revealed instances of collaboration and cross-referencing between some of these *youtubers*. This suggests the existence of a broader ideological community, comparable to the "alternative influence network" described by Lewis (2018). From some opposing sectors, they have

been labelled "fachatubers". An example of the interest they generate is the documentary entitled "La xarxa ultra", which was recently broadcast by TV3 (La Marea, 2024).

It can be observed that the content of the *youtubers* analysed incorporates several features characteristic of politainment or political infotainment. These include the hybridisation, to varying degrees, of information, opinion and entertainment (Berdón-Prieto et al., 2023; Humanes et al., 2021). In some cases, the predominant style includes impressions, interpretations and opinions expressed in a personal and passionate tone, accompanied by verbal and/or visual elements that appeal to the emotions (Reinemann et al., 2012).

Furthermore, the style of several of these *youtubers* shares some characteristics similar to those that Finlayson (2020) attributes to populism. Consequently, we observe tendencies to challenge the individual or group against political elites, the use of a rude and derogatory tone, and the anticipation of crises and threats. These observations lead us into the realm of disinformation and polarisation. Although it is beyond the scope of this study, we detect some of the types of disinformation identified by Palacios-López et al. (2023). The most common forms of disinformation identified in the literature include the use of satire and parody (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017), the presentation of inaccurate facts as legitimate, and the dissemination of biased narratives that foster division and polarisation.

4.2. Conclusions

The results of the study reveal a series of common features among the political influencers analysed, although we also found significant differences. From a thematic perspective, all of them coincide in articulating their content around three main axes: feminism (and other identitarian currents), economic liberalism and the independence of the media. Judicial independence is also present in their discourse, although to a lesser extent.

However, each profile focuses on a specific theme. Thus, as previously indicated, Juan Ramón Rallo's discourse is structured around the defence of the moral superiority of liberalism, as is that of Wall Street Wolverine. In contrast, Begoña Gerpe and UTBH specialise in criticisms of feminism, although both tangentially address economic liberalism. Gisbert, for his part, presents a discourse that is different from the rest, in which issues related to the independence of the judiciary (lawfare) predominate. The questioning of the independence of the media is a cross-cutting issue that allows these YouTubers to position themselves as a legitimate alternative to their subscribers.

One of the main differences between the YouTubers analysed is to be found in the elaboration and structuring of their discourse. In this sense, Rallo stands out above the rest in the construction of a consistent and precise narrative, argued through the use of data and aimed at encouraging critical thinking. UTBH is also distinguished by the strength of its discourse and its extensive use of sources. However, its messages contain a notable degree of verbal aggression. While Gisbert employs various documents to accompany his analyses, he occasionally makes accusations without providing evidence. He is particularly notable for his construction of an epic narrative of the "hero" who confronts the hidden powers. Gerpe and Wall Street Wolverine are characterised by their embodiment of indignation and anger. The discourse projected by these individuals is resounding, yet not particularly convincing, as it is based solely on their opinion. Their styles are the most populist of the five.

Consequently, it can be asserted that, in general terms, and with notable exceptions, opinion predominates over information. This leads to a tendency towards the construction of a narrative in terms of a cultural battle: libertarians against interventionist and identity-based policies that put liberal democracy at risk. The channels of these YouTubers function as trenches where ideological and narrative ammunition is fired in order to provide a useful and effective argument, thus enabling subscribers to pursue this struggle.

In this context, the discursive strategies observed tend towards conceptual simplification, whereby scenarios are constructed where good (liberals) and evil (progressives) are pitted against each other, as are truth (liberalism) and lies (socialism and communism), salvation (the free market) and hell (interventionism and statism). The absence of distinctions or nuances (one is either a friend or an enemy) results in highly emotionally charged messages that pit ideas and mental frameworks against each other, which favours political polarisation. Nevertheless, this study indicates that, as reflected in the audience data of these five YouTubers, their predicament is increasingly successful among the public. As the Spanish newspaper El País asserts, these individuals have emerged as the "new

columnists" and collectively constitute "a sufficient group to create currents of opinion similar to those of the traditional media" (Pérez-Colomé, 2023).

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