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Where do I go now? Migrants' emotional responses to online racism and hate speech in Chile

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Introduction: This study examines migrants' exposure to online hate speech and its emotional impacts in Chile.

Methods: Using a convergent mixed-methods design, we combine a survey of 1,020 migrants with 22 semi-structured interviews conducted in 2023.

Results: Quantitative results show that Facebook and Instagram are the platforms where migrants most frequently encounter hostile content, particularly in comment sections of migration-related news. Hate speech is primarily perceived as targeting national origin, physical appearance, and cultural background, reflecting racialized and nationalist forms of discrimination that vary among migrant groups. Across the sample, anxiety, worry, and disappointment emerge as the predominant emotional responses to online hostility. A moderate positive correlation between exposure to hate speech and emotional distress is observed [$r = .430$, 95% CI (.25, .57), $p < .001$; $n = 1,020$], indicating that higher levels of exposure are associated with greater emotional intensity. Qualitative findings complement these results by illustrating how persistent online hostility amplifies feelings of uncertainty, exclusion, and anticipatory fear, and in some cases prompts reflections on future migration trajectories.

Discussion: Taken together, the findings highlight online hate speech as a cumulative emotional stressor embedded in migrants' everyday digital environments, with implications for well-being and social coexistence.

KEYWORDS

Chile, digital racism, migrant emotions, migration, online hate speech, social media

1 Introduction

In 2020, the number of international migrants reached 281 million, accounting for 3.6% of the global population (Cecchini and Martínez Pizarro, 2023). Similarly, the number of migrants in Latin America and the Caribbean—both regular and irregular—rose from 14.3 million in 2020 to 17.5 million in 2024. This represents a 23% increase (UNDESA, 2024).

This sustained increment over the past decade is largely attributable to political and economic crises in the region. Venezuela and Haitian communities have been at the forefront of humanitarian migration flows, seeking better living conditions (UNDP, 2024).

A study by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB, 2024) conducted across seven countries in the region found that since the onset of the pandemic, tweets containing discriminatory language against migrant populations have increased by 70%. Hate narratives have also intensified towards other historically marginalized groups, including people with disabilities and LGBTQ+ communities, particularly in spaces where users interact on social media (Anti-Defamation League, 2021).

The increase in online violence against migrants may be associated with negative media portrayals and the proliferation of global anti-immigration sentiment (Ekman, 2019). Research indicates that online violence correlates with an increase in hate crimes worldwide (Müller and Schwarz, 2020). Some experts even suggest that online hate speech may serve as an early indicator of such crimes (Arcila-Calderón et al., 2024).

According to the 2024 census, 1,608,650 migrants are living in Chile, accounting for 8.8% of the country's population (INE-SERMIG, 2024). Most of this South-South migration is regional, with over 80% of migrants arriving from other Latin American countries. Venezuelans account for 38% of all foreign residents, followed by Peruvians (13.6%), Colombians (10.9%), Haitians (9.8%), Bolivians (9.4%), and Argentinians (4.3%). It is estimated that approximately 17.6% of the migrant population has an irregular status (INE-SERMIG, 2024).

Over the past decade, state and media discourses have increasingly framed migration as a threat or “invasion”, shifting away from earlier narratives of openness (Doña-Reveco, 2022). This perception is reflected in recent Chilean surveys (CEP, 2024; IDB, 2024). For example, the Bicentennial Survey (PUC, 2024) revealed that 91% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that immigration increases crime.

In 2022, an analysis of social media activity on Twitter and X identified 91,944 discriminatory mentions about migrants in Chile. These data, collected by Fundación Interpreta using social media listening techniques, showed that 61% of such mentions were classist, 23% cultural, and 16% racial (Rolle, Rojas and Lawrence, 2022). By 2023, Fundación Interpreta reported a further increase, identifying 137,894 xenophobic mentions on Twitter/X, primarily targeting Venezuelan migrants (58%) (HOLA America, 2023). At the same time, empirical evidence indicates that 92% of the migrant population in Chile uses social media (SJM, 2021), and that approximately one in three migrants participates in virtual communities (World Bank et al., 2022). While digital platforms serve as key spaces for information, interaction, and social connection, they also function as environments where migrants are recurrently exposed to discriminatory and racist content. In many cases, these platforms also serve as essential infrastructure for migrants' labor activities, further intensifying their exposure to online hostility (Bonhomme and Muldoon, 2024).

In this context, host societies generate affective climates toward immigrants that can be classified as positive or negative emotional profiles (Duque et al., 2024). These profiles are linked to intergroup contact (Allport, 1954; Arcila-Calderón et al., 2022), political predispositions, and perceptions of threat.

In Chile, these affective climates are also influenced by exposure to media content, particularly negative news. This contributes to framing migration as a national problem in public discourse (Scherman et al., 2022).

2 Online hate speech, racism, and emotions in migrant contexts

Throughout this article, a conceptual distinction is maintained between hate speech, understood as hostile communicative acts circulating in digital media; racism, conceptualized as a

structural and historical system of racialization; xenophobia, referring to affective and attitudinal rejection of migrants as foreigners; hostility, used to describe migrants' lived experience of aggression in online environments; and discrimination, understood as the practical and symbolic effects of these processes on migrants' lives.

2.1 The subjective dimension of migration processes

Several studies have examined the emotions involved in migration processes. Some have focused on those who remain behind (Piras, 2016), while others have examined transnational families (Hirai, 2009), homeless individuals (Navarro-Lashayas, 2014), and deported migrants (Montes, 2019). However, the emotional dimension of migration remains largely unexplored, particularly in relation to digital technology and social media.

Migration is not merely a legal-socioeconomic process; it is also an emotional experience shaped by policies, institutions, and everyday encounters that create emotional climates and frameworks of interpretation for migrants and host societies. Studies indicate that emotions such as fear, hope, and ambivalence arise during transit and mediate meanings, identities, and social bonds (Pace, 2024).

However, contemporary intergroup dynamics are much more complex. Positive interactions also occur, particularly through direct interpersonal contact (Meuleman et al., 2020). This is why analyzing migration and emotions in digital contexts is important.

2.2 Online hate speech and racism

Racism is defined as a set of practices and beliefs that perpetuate inequality based on prejudices related to skin color, ethnicity, customs, or nationality. These prejudices are often reproduced unconsciously and permeate digital contexts, where historical hierarchies and social asymmetries are rearticulated through everyday communicative practices (Braveman et al., 2022).

In recent years, this process has been reinforced by broader political and media dynamics. Ultra-conservative parties around the world have repeatedly exploited moments of social unrest and the affordances of digital platforms to disseminate anti-immigration narratives, thereby legitimizing exclusionary framings of migrants (Blanco-Herrero et al., 2023; Saridou et al., 2023). As a result, racist rhetoric has proliferated across online and offline arenas, gaining visibility and normalization within public discourse (Krzyżanowski et al., 2018; Stechemesser et al., 2021).

In this context, systematic reviews of hate speech and racism on social media emphasize the need to further examine how user practices and platform-level political and technological logics jointly shape contemporary forms of racism (Matamoros-Fernández and Farkas, 2021).

Racist discourse does not circulate solely through explicit verbal attacks; rather, it increasingly adopts diverse, evolving formats, such as memes (Lamerichs et al., 2018). These fake identities incite hatred (Farkas et al., 2018), online gaming spaces (Wells et al., 2025), and networks of racist influencers on YouTube (Murthy and Sharma, 2018). These forms contribute

to the ambivalent visibility of racism, allowing it to spread while remaining partially concealed behind humor, anonymity, or platform affordances.

In the Chilean context, [Tijoux \(2019\)](#) argues that racism is configured as a racial fiction that constructs an imagined identity of the national “us”. This “fictitious identity” ([Balibar and Wallerstein, 1991](#)) operates as a symbolic boundary that normalizes discriminatory practices and dehumanizes those positioned outside the imagined national community. Far from being confined to the past, these historical and symbolic logics are reproduced and intensified in digital environments, where they reinforce processes of exclusion and shape the conditions under which migrants experience hostility, discrimination, and unequal forms of belonging.

This racial fiction dates back to the formation of the Republic of Chile and perpetuates long-standing logics of racialization and sexualization. In contemporary contexts, these logics are rearticulated through narratives circulating on social media and other virtual platforms, where they acquire new visibility and communicative force ([Bonhomme and Alfaro, 2022](#)). Such narratives, grounded in stigma and discrimination against migrants, have tangible consequences, directly affecting migrants’ physical and mental health ([Cabieses et al., 2024](#)). These impacts reflect ongoing processes of racialization ([Stefoni et al., 2016](#)) that, over time, crystallize into experiences of structural violence ([Guizardi et al., 2025](#)).

Racism and hate speech are closely related yet analytically distinct phenomena. Racism refers to a broader historical and structural system of racialization that produces and legitimizes social hierarchies, inequalities, and processes of exclusion, often through cultural, national, and phenotypic markers rather than explicit biological categories. Hate speech, by contrast, constitutes a specific discursive expression of these structures, materializing racism through communicative acts that dehumanize, degrade, or depict individuals and groups as threatening based on their national, ethnic, or cultural belonging ([Gagliardone et al., 2015](#)).

In digital contexts, hate speech functions as a key mechanism through which structural racism becomes visible, normalized, and emotionally amplified in everyday interactions. Online environments facilitate the circulation of racist narratives through anonymity, humor, platform affordances, and algorithmic amplification, allowing discriminatory discourse to spread while remaining partially concealed or socially legitimized ([Krzyżanowski et al., 2018](#); [Stechemesser et al., 2021](#)). As a result, historical logics of racialization are not only reproduced but also intensified in digital spaces, shaping migrants’ experiences of hostility, exclusion, and unequal belonging.

2.3 Online hate speech and emotional effects

Hate speech is a concept with blurred boundaries ([Cabo and García, 2017](#)). It is generally understood as a hostile communicative act that uses pejorative language against individuals or communities based on characteristics such as origin, nationality, identity, culture, gender, or even political ideology ([UN, 2018](#)). On social media, hate speech is a form of expression that promotes either physical or symbolic violence against targeted groups ([Pohjonen, 2019](#)). It often reflects

extreme views adapted to different cultural and communicative contexts ([Gagliardone, 2019](#)).

Hate speech against migrants refers to messages that incite physical or moral violence against individuals or groups based on nationality or migrant status. Such expressions may involve threats of physical violence or moral violence, such as insults ([Miró, 2016](#)). Their underlying motivations often target the body ([Romo-Parra et al., 2023](#)), culture ([Rangel, 2020](#)), or nationality of migrants ([Valdez-Apolo et al., 2019](#)). They may be directed either at specific individuals or at migrant groups more broadly.

This dynamic is amplified by the affective nature of social media, which is perceived as a space where emotions — both positive and negative — are rapidly and openly shared ([Castillo-de-Mesa et al., 2021](#); [Panger, 2018](#)). Consequently, social media can exacerbate polarizing narratives, perpetuating discrimination and eroding the foundations of respectful social coexistence.

In Europe, hate speech against migrants is similarly prevalent. These narratives reinforce the perception of migration as an invasion, a source of crime, and a cultural threat ([Amores and Arcila-Calderón, 2025](#)). Meanwhile, existing negative media frameworks from print and television are transferred and amplified on social media.

In this regard, previous studies ([Amores et al., 2020](#); [Amores and Arcila-Calderón, 2019](#); [Valdez-Apolo et al., 2019](#)) have warned that the media’s negative framing of immigration is also present in anti-immigrant hate messages spread on social media.

According to [Bilewicz and Soral \(2020\)](#), frequent exposure to hostile discourse fosters desensitization, reduced empathy, and heightened discrimination. Greater exposure to hate speech has been linked to increased prejudice ([Soral et al., 2018](#)) and social polarization ([Abuin-Vences et al., 2022](#)). In this context, online hate speech can influence collective emotions and attitudes, which have implications for social coexistence and group relations ([Idham et al., 2023](#)).

These dynamics can provoke emotions such as worry and anxiety, particularly when interactions are marked by difference and exclusion ([Firat and Ataca, 2022](#)). Exposure to online hate speech in these situations may reinforce racism, contribute to desensitization, and deteriorate social relations.

Understanding people’s responses to hateful posts and their resulting emotions and perceptions helps to combat online hate speech in contexts of social conflict ([Megersa and Minaye, 2023a](#)) and to explore the various types of ethnic-based hate speech and the contexts in which they are embedded ([Megersa and Minaye, 2023b](#)). Additionally, hate speech disseminated through traditional and social media during election campaigns can influence voter attitudes and affect democracy ([Aondover et al., 2026](#)).

This study addresses this gap by examining the emotional and relational impacts of online hate speech on migrant communities in Chile. Using a mixed-methods approach, it explores how digital platforms mediate these experiences and shape broader dynamics of social coexistence.

3 Question and hypothesis

What are the characteristics and emotional impacts of online hate speech toward migrants, according to the perception of migrants in Chile?

H1: In Chile, some migrant nationalities are more exposed to hate speech on social media than others.

H2: The motivations for hate speech vary by nationality; racial arguments predominate.

H3: Some nationalities experience greater emotional distress from exposure to hate speech on social media than others.

H4: The more migrants in Chile are exposed to hate speech against migrants on social media, the more anxiety, worry, and disappointment they experience.

4 Methodology

To analyze the characteristics and emotional repercussions of online hate speech against migrants, from the perspective of migrants residing in Chile, these specific objectives are: a) identify how migrants receive and interpret hate speech on social media; b) characterize the types of messages migrants receive and their motivations; c) examine the emotional impacts of exposure to hate speech on migrants' lives and migration trajectories and d) investigate the relationship between the frequency of exposure to hate speech and emotional intensity.

4.1 Mixed-methods research design

This study employs a convergent mixed-methods research design (Creswell and Creswell, 2022), that combines quantitative and qualitative data. This approach is used to examine the experiences of migrants with online racism and hate speech, as well as the emotional impact of these experiences. This design enables the simultaneous collection and analysis of both types of data, which are then integrated at the interpretive level to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

The quantitative component identifies patterns of exposure to online hate speech, forms of discriminatory narratives, and the distribution of emotional responses across nationalities and platforms. The qualitative component deepens this analysis by exploring how migrants interpret these experiences, how emotions are negotiated over time, and how persistent online hostility shapes perceptions of belonging and migration trajectories. Integration is achieved through a dialogue between statistical findings and interview narratives in the results section, enabling the identification of convergence, complementarity, and tension between the two sources of evidence.

This mixed-methods strategy is particularly suited to the study of digital racism and emotions, as it captures both the measurable scope of exposure and its subjective, affective, and biographical meanings.

4.2 Instruments

The survey instrument was developed using the Delphi method (López, 2018) to ensure expert validation of its content and conceptual coherence. This process involved iterative rounds of consultation with seven experts, all of whom are researchers specializing in migration from diverse disciplinary backgrounds—including sociology, political science, communication studies, and

social work—affiliated with both public and private universities at national and international levels.

In parallel, preliminary exploratory interviews with migrants were conducted to identify salient emotional categories and to ensure that the instrument adequately reflected migrants' lived experiences and affective responses to online hate speech.

The key variables analyzed in this study are grounded in self-reported perceptions, capturing migrants' subjective experiences rather than objective or automated measures of online hate speech. Exposure to online hate speech encompasses both direct exposure, understood as hostile content addressed to the respondent, and indirect exposure, referring to content targeting migrant groups more broadly in public digital spaces, such as social media platforms or news comment sections. This distinction recognizes that indirect exposure can also generate significant emotional impacts, even when hostility is not personally addressed.

Emotional indicators were identified through exploratory qualitative interviews and informed by previous literature on migration, racism, and mental health. Emotions such as anxiety, worry, and disappointment are conceptualized as contextualized affective responses, closely linked to migrants' legal uncertainty, economic vulnerability, and perceptions of social exclusion in the host society. By integrating measures of exposure and emotional responses, the study conceptualizes online hate speech as a recurrent emotional stressor embedded in migrants' everyday digital environments, rather than as isolated or episodic encounters. Table 1 summarizes the construction and operationalization of the main analytical variables used in this study.

The quantitative instrument is organized around four analytical dimensions: reception of online hate speech, including the identification of platforms and frequency of exposure; perceptions of discrimination and racism, capturing how migrants interpret hostile narratives in relation to their identity and context; perceived emotional repercussions, focusing on affective responses to hate speech on social media; and the relationship between exposure frequency and emotional intensity, which allows for the examination of how repeated exposure relates to increased emotional distress. Table 2 summarizes the dimensions, indicators, and survey items used to structure the questionnaire.

To facilitate understanding, the questions about emotions were accompanied by definitions of each emotion and their links to common situations in the migration experience, for example: a) Worry is associated with economic and legal difficulties, b) Anxiety is related to adaptation and access to services, and c) Disappointment is linked to a loss of hope for the future. These approaches are based on the study by Jaseema and Shabeer (2024), which characterizes the consequences of migration on mental health.

To examine the statistical association between exposure to online hate speech and migrants' reported emotional responses, chi-square tests of independence were conducted. The results revealed statistically significant associations between levels of exposure and the emotions of anxiety, disappointment, and worry. Specifically, the tests yielded the following values: $\chi^2(4, N = 1,018) = 82.285, p < .05$ for anxiety; $\chi^2(4, N = 1,019) = 173.527, p < .05$ for disappointment; and $\chi^2(4, N = 1,019) = 220.897, p < .05$ for worry. These findings indicate that emotional responses vary significantly according to the frequency of exposure to online

TABLE 1 Construction and operationalization of key variables.

Variable	Analytical dimension	Conceptual definition	Indicators	Measurement	Use in analysis
Exposure to online hate speech.	Media consumption and reception of online hate speech.	Perceived exposure to hostile or discriminatory content targeting migrants or migration on digital platforms.	Platforms of exposure; frequency of exposure; perceived racist motivations (nationality, culture, physical traits, poverty).	Likert-type frequency scale grouped into low, medium, and high exposure.	Comparison across platforms and nationalities (H1–H2); association with emotional distress (H4).
Emotional distress related to hate speech.	Perceived emotional effects of exposure.	Negative emotional reactions triggered by exposure to online hate speech.	Anxiety; worry; disappointment.	Likert-type frequency intensity scale; emotions analyzed individually and collectively.	Differences across nationalities (H3); correlation with exposure level (H4).

TABLE 2 Dimensions, indicators and questions of survey.

Dimensions	Item	Indicators
1. Media consumption and hate speech reception	1	3.1 Frequency of hate speech reception Q.1 How often have you perceived (noticed, observed, or received) hate speech, that is, discriminatory or derogatory communication, toward migrants in the following digital media environments (platforms)?
2. Types of exposure to hate speech and motivations of racism	2	3.2 Frequency of perceived discrimination and racism Q.2 How often have you perceived (noticed, observed, or received) hate speech, that is, discriminatory or derogatory communication toward migrants in digital environments such as social media, news outlets, and digital platforms, for the following reasons (motivations)?
3. Emotional effects of exposure to hate speech on social media	3, 4	3.3 Frequency of emotions in the face of hate speech Q.3 How often do you feel emotionally affected when interacting on social media in Chile? Q.4 How often do you feel affected when exposed to hate speech against migrants on social media?
4. Level of exposure to hate speech and emotions	5	3.4 Relationship between frequency of exposure to hate speech and intensity emotions Q.5 How often do you experience the following emotions (anxiety, disappointment, and worry) when exposed to hate speech against migrants on social media?

This table shows the dimensions, indicators, and items, along with the survey questions. It is useful for understanding the questionnaire's internal organization. Own elaboration.

hate speech and support the relevance of conducting further statistical analyses to explore these relationships in greater depth.

These analyses are not intended as tests of validity or reliability of the instrument. Rather, they serve as an exploratory check of analytical coherence, assessing whether the observed relationships between exposure to online hate speech and emotional responses follow theoretically expected patterns. The significant associations identified suggest consistency between the empirical distributions and the study's analytical framework, but they should not be interpreted as evidence that the instrument measures underlying constructs. Thus, the analyses function as a coherence check that supports the relevance and appropriateness of the measure, rather than as substantive results of the study.

The qualitative instrument explored migrants' perceptions of social media and news platforms, experiences with online hostility, interpretations of racist narratives, and the emotional and practical consequences of repeated exposure, using a guide composed of 10 open-ended questions and 5 specific prompts. This instrument was also validated through cognitive testing interviews, which helped refine the wording, fluency, and clarity of the questions. Particular attention was paid to how emotions are linked to uncertainty, feelings of exclusion, and reflections on future migration trajectories.

4.3 Samples

This study employed two types of sampling strategies, corresponding to its mixed-methods design. The quantitative sample consisted of 1,020 migrants residing in Chile, as shown in Table 3. Participants were selected using non-probability quota sampling, ensuring diversity in terms of nationality, gender, and age. Respondents were between 18 and 40 years old (95%), had resided in Chile for more than five years (61%), and were primarily concentrated in the Metropolitan Region (70%). Inclusion criteria required participants to be foreign nationals, over 18 years of age, to speak Spanish (including Haitians), and to be active social media users.

The qualitative sample consisted of 22 migrants over the age of 18, selected through purposive sampling to capture a wide range of experiences and perceptions related to exposure to online hate speech. Participants came from Bolivia, Colombia, Haiti (Spanish-speaking), Venezuela, and Peru—nationalities with high levels of discrimination reported in the quantitative data. The sample was constructed with attention to gender parity and included individuals from diverse age groups, as shown in Table 4. Interviews were conducted both in person and online between September and October 2023 and were subsequently transcribed and coded.

TABLE 3 Distribution for country of the quantitative sample.

Country	N	Total	% Chile
Argentina	40	3.9%	4.3%
Bolivia	41	4.0%	9.4%
Colombia	165	16.2%	10.9%
Ecuador	38	3.7%	3.0%
Haiti	91	8.9%	9.8%
Another	111	10.9%	11%
Peru	120	11.8%	13.6%
Venezuela	414	40.6%	38%

This table presents the distribution, in percentages, of the quantitative sample in relation to the actual percentages of the migrant population in Chile. It serves to illustrate the scope of the survey within the migrant population. Own elaboration.

4.4 Fieldwork

Quantitative data collection took place between January and November 2023 in collaboration with the Catholic Institute for Migration (INCAMI), where most of the surveys were collected. Researchers also conducted outreach activities at public institutions such as the National Migration Service, the Civil Registry, and the Municipality of Estación Central, facilitating access to a diverse sample of migrant participants. Respondents took an average of 20 min to complete the survey. Interviews were conducted in person in the Metropolitan Region, including at INCAMI's offices, and lasted an average of 90 min. All participants were fluent in Spanish. The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and coded using NVivo for subsequent analysis.

4.5 Ethical considerations

All participants in the surveys and interviews provided informed consent, having previously received a document outlining the objectives of the study, their rights as participants, and the guarantees of confidentiality and voluntary participation. Members of the research team signed a confidentiality agreement to ensure the ethical handling of personal data. The study's ethical protocols were reviewed and approved by the ethics committee of the academic institution responsible for the project.

4.6 Analysis

The data were analyzed following a mixed-methods analytical strategy aimed at integrating quantitative patterns with qualitative interpretations, in line with approaches that emphasize dialogue between data strands rather than parallel analyses. Quantitative data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). This component involved descriptive analyses to identify patterns of exposure to online hate speech and the distributions of emotional responses, as well as bivariate and correlational analyses to examine statistical associations between exposure levels and emotional outcomes across groups. These analyses allowed for the identification of systematic relationships and differences, providing an empirical basis for further interpretation.

TABLE 4 Distribution of the qualitative sample.

Nationality	Gender	Sample
Venezuela	Female, 20	6
	Male, 20	
	Female, 22	
	Male, 24	
	Male, 32	
	Female, 60	
Colombia	Male, 25	4
	Male, 28	
	Female, 35	
	Woman 60	
Haiti	Female, 25	4
	Male, 30	
	Female, 40	
	Male, 45	
Peru	Male, 45	2
	Male, 45	
Ecuador	Male, 23	2
	Female, 30	
Bolivia	Male, 38	2
	Female, 50	
Argentina	Female, 27	2
	Male, 48	

This table presents the distribution, in numbers, of the qualitative sample, by gender and age. It serves to highlight the heterogeneity of the people interviewed. Own elaboration.

Qualitative data were analyzed using NVivo through thematic content analysis, combining inductive coding of interview material with deductive attention to analytically relevant dimensions identified in the survey (e.g., exposure, racism, and emotional responses). This approach enabled the identification of recurring patterns, meanings, and narratives through which migrants interpret and emotionally process online hate speech. The qualitative analysis was interpretive, contributing to the explanation of quantitative findings and allowing convergence, complementarity, and tension between the two data sources. Together, this integrated analytical strategy supports a more nuanced understanding of online hate speech as both a measurable phenomenon and a lived emotional experience embedded in migrants' everyday digital environments.

5 Results

The findings are organized according to the four main analytical dimensions: a) Media consumption and hate speech reception, b) Types of exposure to hate speech and motivations of racism, c) Perceived emotional effects of exposure to hate speech on social media and d) Relationship between the level of exposure to hate speech and emotions. For the statistical analysis, a frequency classification was established by grouping Likert-scale responses into three levels of exposure: high

(“always” and “almost always”), medium (“sometimes”), and low (“never” and “almost never”).

5.1 Consumption and hate speech reception: frequency exposure to hate speech

Quantitative results indicate that exposure to online hate speech occurs primarily on Instagram and Facebook, although the intensity of exposure varies notably by nationality. As shown in Figure 1, migrants from Venezuela and Ecuador report the highest levels of exposure on Instagram, while those from Bolivia, Haiti, and Peru report greater exposure on Facebook. In the cases of Colombia and Argentina, high exposure is reported on both platforms. These differentiated patterns confirm H1, demonstrating that exposure to online hate speech is not evenly distributed across platforms or migrant nationalities in Chile.

Interview data provide insight into how and why these platform-specific patterns emerge, revealing that exposure is closely tied to migrants' everyday digital practices. Migrants describe Instagram and Facebook not only as social spaces but also as essential infrastructures for work and survival, particularly for selling products, offering services, or accessing delivery applications. This functional dependence helps explain why platforms with higher exposure rates are precisely those that migrants find difficult to avoid, even when they are perceived as hostile environments. As one participant noted:

“The truth is, I’ve felt attacked many times, especially regarding the issue of insecurity. There’s so much hate on social media, particularly on Instagram. You don’t know whether to look at it or not, because many of us work with

social media; we sell our products there, others work on apps, but honestly, with so much hate, you just want to leave” (Venezuelan woman, 60 years old).

This narrative helps contextualize the high exposure reported on Instagram by Venezuelan and Ecuadorian migrants, showing that economic reliance on digital platforms magnifies vulnerability to racist expressions, as also observed in previous research (Bonhomme and Muldoon, 2024). Exposure, in this sense, is not the result of deliberate engagement with hateful content, but rather a byproduct of structural dependence on platform-mediated labor and communication.

Qualitative accounts further illuminate the specific mechanisms through which Facebook becomes a key site of exposure, particularly for migrants from Bolivia, Haiti, and Peru. Interviewees consistently describe Facebook as the platform where hostility escalates in response to the circulation of news content related to migration, especially when framed around insecurity or crime. These news posts often generate intense comment activity, creating a cascade of hostile interactions that amplify discriminatory narratives. As one interviewee explained:

“On Facebook, when a news story about migration appears — usually related to insecurity—, the negative comments start, and people seem to become more aggressive. You begin to see denigrating messages, [...] people laughing, the likes piling up, and comments on other comments[...] In the end, it all turns into hate and rejection.” (Colombian man, 25 years old).

Sensationalist media coverage and the chain reactions it provokes on social media may lie at the root of many

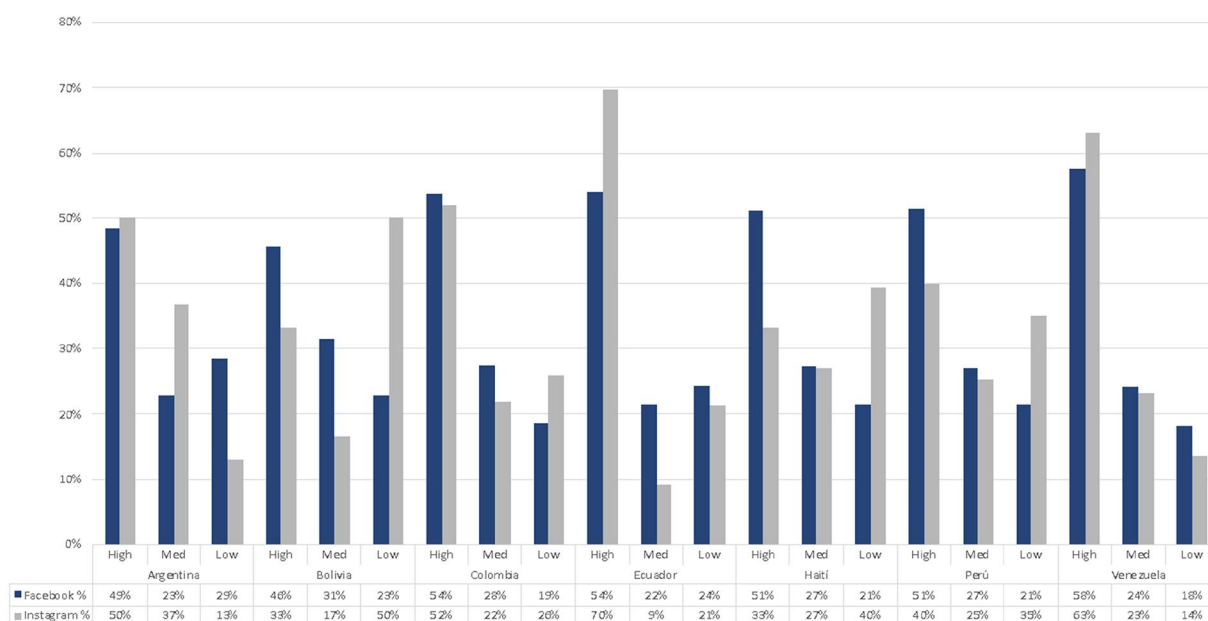


FIGURE 1

Level of exposure to hate speech by platform. Presents the level of exposure to hate speech, expressed in frequency indicators, classified as high, medium or low, and differentiated by platforms of greater exposure (Facebook and Instagram) Own elaboration.

expressions of hate speech. This dynamic not only fosters a lack of empathy, but also reinforces the perception of discrimination among migrants, particularly on certain platforms where these reactions are more pronounced:

“On Instagram, I saw pictures of the desert, —children’s toys, open suitcases, bodies lying around— and in the comments, people were mocking and even celebrating the deaths of those migrants. I felt really bad for several days after that” (Ecuadorian woman, 30 years old).

Survey results indicate that reviewing comments on news stories about migration—particularly on Facebook and Instagram—is a key source of migrants’ exposure to hate speech, especially when migration is framed in relation to insecurity or organized crime, reinforcing negative stereotypes and social rejection. Interview data align with this pattern, showing that exposure is predominantly indirect, corresponding to first-level perceptions of hate speech (Schmid et al., 2022) that emerge mainly in the comment sections of news articles portraying migration negatively. Across narratives, migrants report perceiving discrimination primarily based on physical appearance, cultural background, economic status, and national origin, highlighting the convergence between platform-level patterns identified in the survey and the lived experiences described in the interviews.

5.2 Types of exposure to hate speech and motivations of racism

Quantitative analysis indicates that hate speech targeting migrants on social media is primarily motivated by racialized markers, particularly national origin, culture, physical traits, and poverty, although the salience of these motivations varies significantly by nationality. As shown in Table 5, these patterns are not uniform and reflect differentiated forms of racialization affecting specific migrant groups.

Survey results show that among Venezuelan migrants, hate speech is most frequently attributed to national origin (59%) and cultural background (47%). For Peruvian participants, the most commonly perceived motivations combine nationality (62%), physical features (52%), and economic status (41%), pointing to overlapping national, racial, and class-based forms of discrimination. In the case of Haitian migrants, physical appearance (52%) emerges as the most salient factor, a pattern also observed among Bolivian migrants (44%). Meanwhile, for participants from Ecuador (47%), Argentina (60%), and Colombia (63%), hate speech is perceived primarily as being motivated by national origin.

Interview data converge with these quantitative findings by revealing how migrants interpret these motivations as manifestations of racism, which generate negative emotional responses and reinforce a persistent sense of unequal belonging in the host society. Participants frequently linked the discriminatory motivations identified in the survey to experiences of emotional harm that extend beyond individual incidents, framing hate speech as an attack on their dignity and that of their families:

“It breaks my heart and makes me sad to think about my children and how they also receive hatred and racism online from Chileans every time they surf the internet, just because they are of a different skin color and culture” (Bolivian woman, 50 years old).

These narratives help explain why physical traits and culture emerge as key perceived motivations among Haitian and Bolivian migrants, illustrating how racialized markers are experienced as deeply personal and emotionally damaging. At the same time, the interviews highlight how nationality-based discrimination, the most prevalent motivation across several groups in the survey, is closely intertwined with nationalist forms of racism enacted in symbolic and public contexts, including national celebrations. One participant described this dynamic as follows:

“For 18 September [Independence Day in Chile], Chileans on Facebook say “why are those Black people with a Chilean flag? That flag is not theirs’. I saw those comments on social media, and they even said them to me and my family when we posted photos celebrating the national holidays” (Haitian woman, 40 years old).

Such discourses reinforce boundaries of otherness and construct migrants as permanent outsiders. This is reflected in the experience of a Peruvian participant:

“Before, it was the Peruvians; lately, it’s been the Venezuelans [...] in the media and then on social media. They only show the bad side, and that’s not good, because you end up living on the defensive, waiting for an attack” (Peruvian man, 47 years old).

As a result, media framing is perceived by participants as a catalyst for online hate, generating mistrust toward the intentions behind media coverage: One interviewee questioned the role of the press in fueling discriminatory reactions:

“Being a foreigner, it bothers me just as much when the news emphasizes people’s nationality, because if you go on social media, the hateful comments are immediate [...] I don’t know what’s behind this, whether the media is trying to generate hatred, because these publications can incite real violence, or perhaps they want us to leave, but the problem is that many of us have nowhere to go” (Argentine woman, 27 years old).

In summary, migrants’ perceptions of hate speech reveal that these narratives are strongly linked to forms of cultural racism and online aggressive racism, through which people construct narratives of racial superiority in digital spaces (Bonhomme and Alfaro, 2022).

The triangulation of survey data and interview narratives demonstrates that hate speech against migrants is structured by interlocking forms of cultural, national, and racialized racism, which vary by nationality but consistently position migrants as socially inferior or threatening. These findings support H2,

TABLE 5 Type of discrimination in hate speech according to nationality.

Nationality	Exposure Level	Physical Traits (N)	Physical Traits (%)	Culture (N)	Culture (%)	Poverty (N)	Poverty (%)	Nationality (N)	Nationality (%)
Argentina	High	21	53%	22	55%	14	35%	24	60%
	Medium	7	18%	10	25%	14	35%	8	20%
	Low	12	30%	8	20%	12	30%	8	20%
	Total	40	100%	40	100%	40	100%	40	100%
Bolivia	High	18	44%	13	32%	12	29%	18	44%
	Medium	13	32%	13	32%	13	32%	15	37%
	Low	10	24%	15	37%	16	39%	8	20%
	Total	41	100%	41	100%	41	100%	41	100%
Colombia	High	84	51%	86	52%	66	40%	104	63%
	Medium	31	19%	44	27%	38	23%	34	21%
	Low	50	30%	35	21%	61	37%	27	16%
	Total	165	100%	165	100%	165	100%	165	100%
Ecuador	High	16	42%	16	42%	14	37%	18	47%
	Medium	9	24%	13	34%	9	24%	10	26%
	Low	13	34%	9	24%	15	39%	10	26%
	Total	38	100%	38	100%	38	100%	38	100%
Haiti	High	47	52%	41	45%	33	36%	46	51%
	Medium	20	22%	22	24%	29	32%	17	19%
	Low	24	26%	28	31%	29	32%	28	31%
	Total	91	100%	91	100%	91	100%	91	100%
Peru	High	62	52%	53	44%	49	41%	74	62%
	Medium	29	24%	29	24%	26	22%	30	25%
	Low	29	24%	38	32%	45	38%	16	13%
	Total	120	100%	120	100%	120	100%	120	100%
Venezuela	High	137	33%	193	47%	147	36%	243	59%
	Medium	89	21%	123	30%	108	26%	107	26%
	Low	188	45%	98	24%	159	38%	64	15%
	Total	414	100%	414	100%	414	100%	414	100%

Shows the levels of exposure to hate speech, classified as high, medium or low according to their frequency, differentiated by the motivations/arguments reported and the nationalities of the migrants. Own elaboration.

confirming that hate speech varies according to nationality and is predominantly expressed through racialized arguments. As a result, migrants report heightened mistrust toward media representations and social interactions, reinforcing feelings of exclusion, vulnerability, and anticipatory defensiveness in their daily lives. The convergence between quantitative patterns and qualitative accounts underscores how online hate speech operates simultaneously as a measurable phenomenon and a lived experience shaped by broader social and media discourses.

5.3 Perception of emotions in response to hate speech

Exposure to online hate speech elicits a range of negative emotional responses among migrants; however, quantitative data indicate that anxiety, disappointment, and worry are the most frequently reported emotions and reflect a broader shared emotional climate. As shown in Table 6, the intensity and prevalence of these emotions vary by nationality, suggesting differentiated emotional impacts shaped by both individual experiences and collective stigmatization. Worry predominates among Argentine (53%), Colombian (47%), and Ecuadorian (61%) participants, while disappointment is more frequent among Bolivian (37%), Haitian (47%), and Peruvian (50%) migrants. Among Venezuelans, worry (58%) and disappointment (57%) are reported by more than half of the sample, followed by anxiety (40%).

Inferential analysis further underscores this pattern. As detailed in Table 7, Wilson's 95% confidence intervals show that only in the case of Venezuelan migrants do worry and disappointment significantly exceed the 50% threshold, confirming that some nationalities experience greater emotional effects of exposure to hate speech than others, thus supporting H3. While these findings are exploratory, they align with prior research demonstrating an association between hate speech and negative emotions (Ghenai et al., 2025), including processes of affective manipulation (Igartua and Ballesteros-Herencia, 2026).

Interview data help explain the mechanisms underlying these quantitative patterns, particularly the prominence of worry and anxiety among Venezuelan migrants. Participants described these emotions as responses to collective blame and anticipatory exclusion, often grounded in the perception that migrants are recurrently scapegoated in Chilean society. As one Venezuelan participant reflected:

"I think that in Chile people are always going to blame someone else. Now we are the migrants; tomorrow it will be another group. But then you start thinking: Where do I go now? What should I do? That generates anxiety and worry" (Venezuelan woman, 22 years old)

This illustrates how, beyond the inherent challenges of adapting to a new country, migrants also face the emotional burden of persistent online hostility, which amplifies feelings of uncertainty and exclusion.

"Migrating is already difficult. If you add to that the fact that, in the place you have migrated to, all the media speak badly about migration and people hate migrants on social media,

it becomes an additional burden, and sometimes it becomes very heavy, difficult to bear, because you don't know what to say or how to defend yourself, you just think that maybe you should migrate again" (Ecuadorian man, 30 years old).

In addition to creating a threatening climate for migrants, hate speech intensifies a state of constant alert, especially in relation to possible changes in migration policy. One participant expressed this feeling of anxiety:

"You get stressed out, we live stressed out, anxious, because you think that a policy against all migrants is coming, that they are going to kick us all out, where will we go, while you fear being insulted on the street, just like they do on social media" (Argentine, woman, 27 years old).

Faced with this context, migrants develop various coping strategies and emotional self-regulation mechanisms to navigate the hostility they encounter in digital and social environments.

The interviews also reflect how hate speech triggers anticipatory fear and collective anxiety, particularly in relation to public discourse around crime and migration. As one participant shared:

"My mum prays that it is not a foreigner who is in the news about insecurity. You get alert, worried, because you think they are going to throw you out, that they are going to throw us all out. Maybe people don't realize the psychological harm they cause, but you start thinking about where to go again" (Colombian man, 28 years old).

Taken together, the convergence of survey results and interview narratives shows that emotional responses to hate speech are not isolated reactions, but part of a cumulative process that reinforces feelings of uncertainty, exclusion, and vulnerability. Recurrent exposure to online hostility shapes how migrants relate to their social environment, anticipate rejection, and, in some cases, reconsider their migration trajectories.

5.4 Relationship between frequency of exposure to hate speech and emotional intensity

A Pearson correlation was conducted to examine the relationship between the level of exposure to online hate speech and the intensity of negative emotional states. Although both constructs are derived from Likert-type items, the analysis relies on aggregated indices that capture underlying continuous latent variables, a practice widely accepted in social science research when ordinal items approximate interval properties (Carifio and Perla, 2008; Norman, 2010). Previous methodological research has shown that Pearson's correlation is robust to moderate departures from strict interval assumptions and yields reliable estimates when applied to summed or composite Likert-scale measures (Allen and Seaman, 2007).

Consistent with similar empirical studies (Ghenai et al., 2025; Miani et al., 2022), this analysis focuses on the strength and direction of association rather than on group comparison or causal

TABLE 6 Hate speech and emotions by nationality.

Nationality	Level	Anxiety N (%)	Disappointment N (%)	Worry N (%)
Argentina	High	15 (38%)	15 (38%)	21 (53%)
	Medium	11 (28%)	12 (30%)	9 (23%)
	Low	14 (35%)	13 (33%)	10 (25%)
	Total	40 (100%)	40 (100%)	40 (100%)
Bolivia	High	10 (24%)	15 (37%)	15 (37%)
	Medium	13 (32%)	18 (44%)	17 (41%)
	Low	18 (44%)	8 (20%)	9 (22%)
	Total	41 (100%)	41 (100%)	41 (100%)
Colombia	High	53 (32%)	74 (45%)	78 (47%)
	Medium	52 (32%)	45 (27%)	51 (31%)
	Low	60 (36%)	46 (28%)	36 (22%)
	Total	165 (100%)	165 (100%)	165 (100%)
Ecuador	High	17 (45%)	23 (61%)	23 (61%)
	Medium	10 (26%)	9 (24%)	9 (24%)
	Low	11 (29%)	6 (16%)	6 (16%)
	Total	38 (100%)	38 (100%)	38 (100%)
Haiti	High	31 (34%)	43 (47%)	42 (46%)
	Medium	32 (35%)	22 (24%)	22 (24%)
	Low	28 (31%)	26 (29%)	27 (30%)
	Total	91 (100%)	91 (100%)	91 (100%)
Peru	High	31 (26%)	60 (50%)	49 (41%)
	Medium	41 (34%)	37 (31%)	46 (38%)
	Low	48 (40%)	23 (19%)	25 (21%)
	Total	120 (100%)	120 (100%)	120 (100%)
Venezuela	High	165 (40%)	237 (57%)	239 (58%)
	Medium	113 (27%)	118 (29%)	117 (28%)
	Low	136 (33%)	59 (14%)	58 (14%)
	Total	414 (100%)	414 (100%)	414 (100%)

Table 5 shows the levels of exposure to hate speech, classified as high, medium or low according to their frequency, differentiated according to the emotions reported and the nationalities of the migrants. Own elaboration.

TABLE 7 Statistical summary of proportions (wilson 95% CI and binomial test vs. 50%).

Country (n)	Emotion evaluated	% (approx. count)	95% CI (Wilson)	P (binomial vs. 50%)	Differs from 50%
Argentina (40)	Worry	53% (21/40)	37.5%–67.1%	0.875	No
Colombia (165)	Worry	47% (78/165)	39.8%–54.9%	0.534	No
Ecuador (38)	Worry	61% (23/38)	44.7%–74.4%	0.256	No
Bolivia (41)	Disappointment	37% (15/41)	23.6%–51.9%	0.117	No
Haiti (91)	Disappointment	47% (43/91)	37.3%–57.4%	0.675	No
Peru (120)	Disappointment	50% (60/120)	41.2%–58.8%	≈1.000	No
Venezuela (414)	Worry	58% (240/414)	53.2%–62.6%	0.0014	Yes (>50%)
Venezuela (414)	Disappointment	57% (236/414)	52.2%–61.7%	0.0050	Yes (>50%)
Venezuela (414)	Anxiety	40% (166/414)	35.5%–44.9%	<0.001	Yes (<50%)

Shows the percentage of cases with the greatest significance in the sample according to their proportion. In this case, it indicates that the Venezuelan population sample has the greatest significance and therefore the highest statistical value in terms of the results. Own elaboration.

inference. The results show a moderate positive correlation between the frequency of exposure to hate speech and emotional intensity ($r = .430$), as shown in Table 8, indicating that higher exposure is associated with increased levels of anxiety, disappointment, and worry. While this analysis does not establish causality, it provides statistically grounded evidence of a meaningful relationship between online hostility and migrants' emotional well-being, warranting further multivariate and interpretive analyses.

Figure 2 illustrates the relationship between the frequency of exposure to online hate speech and the intensity of negative emotional responses—specifically anxiety, worry, and disappointment—among migrants in the full survey sample. Based on the analysis of 1,020 cases, the scatterplot shows a clear positive trend, indicating that higher levels of perceived exposure are associated with greater emotional distress. This pattern is confirmed by a moderate positive Pearson correlation [$r = .430$,

95% CI (.25, .57); $p < .001$], suggesting a statistically significant and meaningful association between repeated exposure to online hate speech and the intensity of negative emotions. While this relationship does not imply causality, it provides robust evidence that online hostility functions as a cumulative emotional stressor within migrants' everyday digital experiences.

The findings suggest plausible support for the four hypotheses, based on the convergence of quantitative patterns and qualitative interpretations. Survey results indicate that certain nationalities appear to be disproportionately exposed to hate speech on specific social media platforms, pointing to differentiated patterns of discrimination (H1), while variations in the perceived motivations of hate speech across national groups are consistent with the presence of distinct forms of racism shaped by nationality (H2). Similarly, the higher prevalence of negative emotions among Venezuelan, Ecuadorian, and Colombian migrants provides

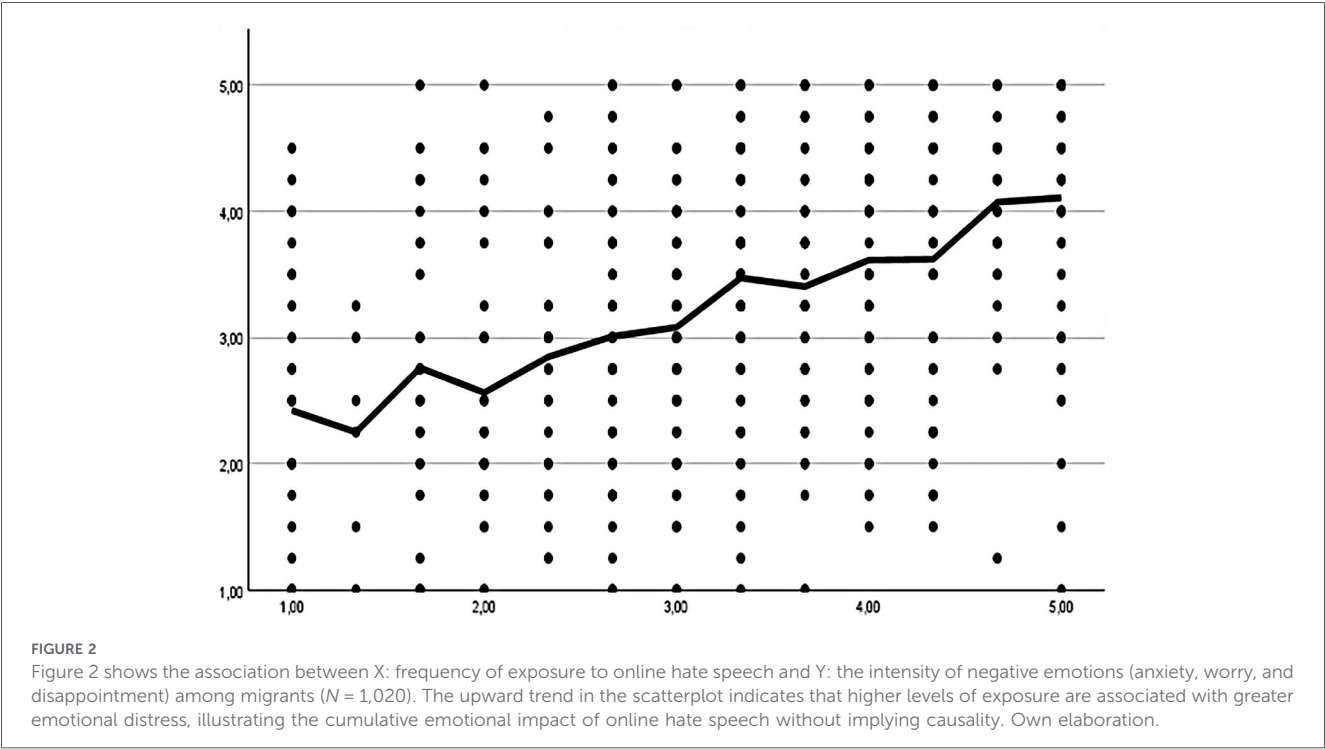
TABLE 8 Correlation between frequency of exposure to hate speech and intensity emotions.

Variables	Do ^a exhibition	Emotions: anxiety disappointment worry	
Do ^a exhibition	Pearson correlation	1	.430 ^b
	Sig. (bilateral)		0.000
	N	647	646
Emotions: anxiety disappointment worry	Pearson correlation	.430 ^b	1
	Sig. (bilateral)	0.000	
	N	646	1,020

Table 7 presents the correlation between the level of exposure to hate speech and the intensity of emotions reported by migrants. In this case, it is a moderate correlation of .430, which indicates that greater exposure to hate speech is more likely to increase feelings of anxiety, disappointment, and worry among migrants in Chile. Own elaboration.

^aHate speech.

^bCorrelation is significant at the 0.01 level (bilateral).



empirical grounds to consider that emotional impacts may vary across nationalities (H3). Finally, the observed association between higher levels of exposure and greater anxiety, disappointment, and worry among migrants suggests a meaningful relationship between online hostility and emotional distress (H4). Importantly, qualitative narratives further contextualize these quantitative tendencies by situating them within a broader social and media environment, illustrating how intensified polarization and hostile discourses are experienced by migrants as cumulative emotional pressures. These pressures extend beyond digital interactions, permeating migrants' perceptions of social acceptance in the host country and, in some cases, prompting reflections on future mobility trajectories and life plans.

6 Discussion

This study aimed to examine how migrants in Chile are emotionally affected by exposure to hate speech on social media. The findings can be discussed at three analytically distinct levels: migrants' self-reported perceptions and experiences, the statistical patterns observed in the data, and broader interpretations concerning the role of mainstream media and digital platforms in shaping and amplifying these dynamics.

At the first analytical level, the findings indicate that ethnic origin constitutes the most frequently perceived motivation for hate speech against migrants, particularly among Venezuelans (59%), Peruvians (62%), and Colombians (63%). Physical appearance also emerges as a salient trigger, especially in the cases of Haitians (52%) and Bolivians (44%). Together, these patterns suggest the presence of indirect and culturally mediated forms of racism, whereby hate speech operates through references to national origin and phenotypic traits rather than explicit biological categories. These findings are consistent with previous research by Bonhomme and Alfaro (2022) who argue that colonial racist logics not only persist in digital environments but are also amplified through new representational practices that portray migrants as “dirty” or as “carriers of disease”.

The interviews suggest that, while hate speech is primarily disseminated through social media, its origins often trace back to narratives promoted by mainstream media (Amores and Arcila-Calderón, 2025). These narratives typically circulate anonymously and without moderation on social media platforms, fostering processes of emotional polarization (Castillo-de-Mesa et al., 2021) that, when linked to physical traits and fictitious national identities (Balibar and Wallerstein, 1991), can manifest as digital racism. In this sense, hate speech stands as a significant obstacle to intergroup relations and peaceful coexistence, as has been the case in European digital contexts (Arcila-Calderón et al., 2022).

Beyond individual narratives, the quantitative data reveal consistent patterns that point to differentiated experiences of hate speech among migrant groups. Exposure to hate speech was found to occur mainly on Facebook and Instagram, and its emotional impact varies significantly across national and ethnic backgrounds.

Regarding emotional effects, worry and anxiety exceeded 50% among respondents from Argentina, Venezuela, Colombia, and

Ecuador, whereas disappointment reached its highest levels among Bolivians (37%), Haitians (47%), and Peruvians (50%). While these associations do not allow for causal inference, they reveal systematic trends that align with previous findings in other national contexts, such as the United States (Cinelli et al., 2021). Likewise, they are consistent with experimental studies conducted in Asia (Lee, 2021) and Canada (Ghenai et al., 2025), which demonstrate that exposure to hate speech on social media elicits negative emotional reactions such as fear, anger, and anxiety.

A third level of analysis concerns the structural and interpretive implications of these findings. The interviews suggest that although hate speech is most visibly encountered on social media, many of its underlying narratives originate in mainstream media discourses. As argued by Amores and Arcila-Calderón (2025), these narratives often migrate from traditional media into digital platforms, where they circulate anonymously and with limited regulation.

Within social media ecosystems, such narratives appear to foster processes of emotional polarization (Castillo-de-Mesa et al., 2021), particularly when they are articulated through references to physical traits and fictitious national identities. This dynamic resonates with the conceptual framework proposed by Balibar and Wallerstein (1991), in which racialization operates through cultural and symbolic markers rather than explicit biological categories. In digital contexts, these processes can manifest as forms of digital racism, in which colonial racist logics persist and are amplified through new representational practices that portray migrants as “dirty” or as “carriers of disease” (Bonhomme and Alfaro, 2022).

Taken together, these findings underscore the importance of understanding online hate speech not merely as individual acts of expression, but as part of a broader mediated ecosystem in which media narratives, platform affordances, and historical power relations converge to shape migrants' emotional experiences and social positioning.

These findings are consistent with experimental studies in Asia (Lee, 2021) and Canada (Ghenai et al., 2025), which show that exposure to hate speech on social media can elicit negative emotional reactions such as fear, anger, and anxiety.

Likewise, they converge with experimental research by Bilewicz and Soral (2020) in Poland, as well as with Igartua and Ballesteros-Herencia (2026) in Spain, who demonstrate that prolonged exposure to hostile narratives erodes empathy, fosters discriminatory attitudes, and promotes forms of emotional manipulation.

7 Conclusions

This study analyzes the characteristics and emotional repercussions of online hate speech against migrants, based on the perceptions and experiences of migrants residing in Chile. Specifically, the research aimed to: a) identify how hate messages are received, b) characterize the types of messages received and their motivations, c) examine the relationship between the frequency of exposure to hate speech and emotional intensity, and d) determine the emotional repercussions.

The findings show that nationality is a key factor in shaping exposure to online hate speech, with significant variation across

platforms. The motivations behind hate speech were found to be closely tied to origin, cultural identity, and physical appearance. This was particularly true for migrants from Venezuela, Peru and Colombia, which is consistent with patterns of digital racism documented in previous research (Bonhomme and Alfaro, 2022).

These discriminatory dynamics are mediated not only by digital platforms but also reflect broader patterns of symbolic exclusion and racialized otherness. These patterns are present in media frames that identify migrants as a threat to receiving countries (Amores and Arcila-Calderón, 2025) and produce narratives of affective manipulation (Igartua and Ballesteros, 2026).

Quantitative descriptive results showed that some groups are more affected by online hate speech than others. There are differences both in the reported level of exposure, how it is perceived, and the associated emotions. This suggests that the perception of hate speech and associated emotions may be linked not only to the level of exposure, but also to each group's cultural background.

A positive correlation was also observed between exposure to hate speech and emotional distress. This finding supports the argument that online social hostility has real-world consequences, particularly with regard to social acceptance (Arcila-Calderón et al., 2022) and the integration of migrants who are often forced to expose themselves to racism for work-related reasons that link them to these platforms (Bonhomme and Muldoon, 2024).

Meanwhile, qualitative analysis revealed that migrants frequently question the role of the media in amplifying negative representations of migration. Media portrayals, by linking migration with crime or insecurity, trigger hostile responses on social media, which reinforce polarization and hinders positive perceptions between groups (Meuleman et al., 2020). Furthermore, online hostility was found to lead to a reconsideration of migration trajectories, among other factors.

The main contribution of this research lies in providing empirical evidence on the affective and symbolic impacts of online hate speech, and in identifying how digital platforms and media logics contribute to the reproduction of racism and exclusion. These processes not only affect individual well-being but also the conditions for social coexistence, revealing the urgency of addressing digital discourse as part of broader migration governance.

Despite the contributions of this study, several methodological limitations should be acknowledged. First, the use of a non-probability sampling strategy limits the generalizability of the findings beyond the study participants. Second, the strong concentration of the sample in the Metropolitan Region may underrepresent the experiences of migrants residing in other regions of Chile, where media exposure, social dynamics, and institutional contexts may differ significantly. Third, the linguistic inclusion criteria—which required participants to speak Spanish—may have excluded particularly vulnerable migrant groups, especially within Haitian and other non-Spanish-speaking communities, whose experiences of online hostility and emotional distress could follow different patterns. Finally, the cross-sectional and correlational nature of the mixed-methods design constrains the inferential scope of the findings, precluding causal conclusions regarding the relationship between exposure to online hate speech and emotional outcomes.

Therefore, future research is recommended to disaggregate results by gender, region, and legal status in order to better understand differentiated vulnerabilities and coping mechanisms. Integrating an intersectional and comparative approach would be essential to deepen the understanding of how digital hostility interacts with structural inequalities in different contexts.

Addressing these dimensions in future research would strengthen the empirical basis for understanding the emotional and social consequences of online hate speech and further refine the insights generated by the present study.

Data availability statement

The datasets presented in this study can be found in online repositories. The names of the repository/repositories and accession number(s) can be found in the article/Supplementary Material.

Ethics statement

The studies involving humans were approved by Comité de Ética Institucional en Investigación Universidad del Desarrollo. The studies were conducted in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. The participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study. Written informed consent was obtained from the individual(s) for the publication of any potentially identifiable images or data included in this article.

Author contributions

NS: Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Supervision, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Resources. AA: Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. VZ: Data curation, Investigation, Software, Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

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Conflict of interest

The author(s) declared that this work was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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The author(s) declared that generative AI was not used in the creation of this manuscript.

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