**Universidad** de **Valladolid**

# Facultad de Filosofía y Letras

## Grado en Estudios Ingleses

# Gender and political identities in social media. An analysis of the discourse strategies used by the #Tradwives movement on Instagram.

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## ABSTRACT

This study analyzes some of the discursive elements present in the Instagram movement #Tradwives, focusing on identifying the semiotic resources used by this movement and their relation to the ideology, opinion, and values of the producer. The main objective is to examine the linguistic strategies employed by users (mostly women) to encourage the audience to join this movement and to observe how they contribute to the creation of an online community. The methodology used combines quantitative and qualitative approaches, including the analysis of the identities and frames that are activated, as well as the use of premodification, hypernymy, metaphor, and the recontextualization of political slogans.  The results reveal a variety of linguistic strategies present in the #Tradwives movement that contribute to identity creation and online community building, and it shows their alignment with a right-wing ideology that aims to change the role of women in society.

**Key words:** Critical Discourse Analysis, Systemic Functional Linguistics, #Tradwives, Social Actors, Ambient Affiliation, Community of Practice

## RESUMEN

Este estudio analiza los elementos discursivos presentes en el movimiento de Instagram #Tradwives, centrándose en la identificación de los recursos semióticos utilizados en dicho movimiento que revelan la ideología, el pensamiento, y los valores del emisor. El objetivo principal es examinar las estrategias lingüísticas empleadas por los usuarios (en su mayoría mujeres) para animar a la audiencia a sumarse a este movimiento y observar cómo contribuyen a la creación de una comunidad online. La metodología utilizada combina enfoques cuantitativos y cualitativos, incluyendo el análisis de las identidades y los marcos que se activan, así como el uso de premodificación, hiperonimia, metáfora, y la recontextualización de eslogans políticos.  Los resultados revelan una variedad de estrategias linguisticas presentes en el movimiento #Tradwives que contribuyen a la creación de identidad y a la construcción de comunidad online, asociadas a una ideología derechista que pretende cambiar el papel de las mujeres en la sociedad.

**Palabras clave:** Análisis Crítico del Discurso, Lingüística Sistémico Funcional #Tradwives, Actores Sociales, Afiliación Ambiente, Comunidad de Práctica

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## 1. Introduction

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is becoming more and more interested in the study of social media due to the increasing importance of online communicative practices. In fact, CDA pays attention to the different semiotic choices the speaker makes in discourse in order to identify the ideologies that are implied (Mayr & Machin, 2012). The ideas with which users interact online and the communities to which they affiliate also contribute to creating their identity. When a certain user posts a piece of discourse, the rest of the users can choose to ignore, react, or just align with those ideas. The analysis of the semiotic choices that are used to present an idea gives us information about the ideology, values, opinions, and/or morals of both the person who states them and of the person who chooses to react to them.

Following the premises stated by CDA (Mayr & Machin, 2012), the purpose of this study is to analyze the discursive strategies used by the #Tradwives movement on Instagram in order to see the underlying ideologies that they suggest and how they contribute to identity creation online. The #tradwives movement is a trend in which women who identify themselves as "traditional wives'' express their ideas and values on social media in terms of traditional gender roles and families. These values are based on the 1950's stereotype, which states that men are created to be the provider and protector of the family, while the role of women is to keep the house clean, cook, and take care of the children (Proctor, 2023). The aim of this movement is to create a reaction in the audience to encourage them into that way of living. This lifestyle is perfectly portrayed in the movie *Soft and Quiet* (Araujo, 2022), a movie in which the main character creates a group of women whose main purpose in life is to have children and build a family.

The aim of this study is to look at how the speaker uses the different semiotic resources that are available to them to see how their identity is revealed as part of the online antifeminist movement #tradwives. More precisely, this study seeks first to identify the most prominent social actor, the identities, and the frames that are activated in the hashtags in order to prove that this movement addresses mostly women, and that it is related to a more conservative ideology in terms of gender, politics, and religion. Second, we paid attention to

the different discursive mechanisms that are used and reflected on how they contribute to creating a community online and on how these are related to a shared knowledge.

This dissertation starts with a systematic review of previous literature written on the study of social media in terms of CDA, identity construction and community creation online. The next part corresponds to the methodological approach followed for this study. This study follows a corpus-based approach (Tognini-Bonelli, 2001) (Baker, 2023) and is divided into two parts. The first one is the compilation of the corpus and the second one corresponds to the analysis of the data. For the corpus compilation, we chose the 200 first posts that appeared on the top section on Instagram under the hashtag #tradwives, and we selected the first 202 hashtags with the highest frequency. Then, for the analysis of the data, it is divided in two: the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the data. In the former, we focused on the identification of the social actor (Krendel, 2020), the identities (Sunderland,2022), and the frames activated in the hashtags (Goffman, 1975); while in the latter, we paid attention to the discursive strategies that contribute to community creation (Georgakopoulou et al., 2020).

## 2. Literature Review

This dissertation is framed within the field of studies of Discourse Analysis (DA), which is concerned with how we refer to the ideas that are communicated through text as "discourse''. Discourse is "language in real contexts of use'' (Mayr & Machin, 2012:20), and it is one of the most important concepts in the Social Sciences and the Humanities as it is concerned with how language contributes to shape out interactions with other people.

While DA is interested in explaining how language works in the real world, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) also pays attention to the semiotic choices made by the producer of such discourse, and analysts seek to identify the underlying ideologies activated by those (Mayr & Machin, 2012). Different linguistic theories have been used as tools for the analysis within CDA (Richardson & Flowerdew, 2018). Amongst them, Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) is of particular importance, not only because it was widely used by most of the founding authors but also because it is prevalent in the study of social media discourse (together with corpus linguistics) (Zappavigna, 2019). SFL puts language at its core and intends to explain how meanings stem from different uses within the contexts in which they are produced (Zappavigna, 2011). The fact that different linguistic choices may result in different construals makes SFL useful for the identification of ideologically influenced worldviews (Mayr & Machin, 2012).

CDA has become increasingly interested in the study of social media. Social media services are web-based technologies that allow for online social relations among their users. Thanks to social media, connections are established between different accounts in the form of "friendship'' (Zappavigna, 2019). Usually, the connections between users of social networking platforms are made through "posts". These posts are used for a number of communicative functions, from sharing status updates about the user's activities to sharing feelings or opinions about a certain topic. Some examples of social media platforms are Instagram, Twitter, Linkedln, TikTok, or Teams (Page et al., 2022). Twitter is focused on short-form communication. Users communicate through tweets which are limited to 280 characters. It is often used for new updates and sharing opinions. The communication on Twitter is often fast-paced and users tend to engage in conversations and debates. Instagram is a visual social media platform that is focused on photos and videos. Users communicate

with each other through likes, comments, and direct messaging. The communication is mostly visual, and users engage with each other by reacting to each other's posts. TikTok is a social media platform that focuses on short-form videos. Users communicate with each other through comments, duets, and challenges. It is often used for entertainment, dancing and lip-syncing, and communication in it is creative and expressive. Lastly, LinkedIn is a professional social media platform that is focused on networking and job opportunities. Users communicate with each other through private messaging, comments, and posts. It is always used for sharing job updates and the communication on this platform is formal and professional (Page et al., 2022). All in all, each social media service has its own unique features that determine the type of communication that takes place on the platform and therefore the type of discourse that is portrayed and subsequent affordances.

Both when applied to social media discourse and other genres, CDA is a different approach to the study of communication in the sense that it focuses on how language is used by speakers to create society or community. In the case of social media, this occurs thanks to the fact that dealing with online discourse makes language searchable, and therefore it can be found by users at any time. Likewise, users can choose to react or affiliate with the ideas proposed in such posts creating community, as we will further explain in the following paragraphs.

The drive to make discourse searchable is becoming more and more prominent due to the increasing amount of online communicative practices (Zappavigna, 2015). The fact that online discourse can be searchable is, partly, thanks to the use of hashtags. These function as a linguistic marker that makes it easier to affiliate with the ideas and values expressed in the post in which they are found. This contributes to what Zappavigna calls "the searchable talk", which is online discourse whose main purpose seems to be "affiliation through findability'' (Zappavigna, 2011:2). This process, which Zappavigna denominates "ambient affiliation'', can be explained as a form of creating community among users, and mostly through hashtags. According to Vessey (2015), "ambient affiliation'' is a way of creating groups online to create relations among people who have not necessarily directly interacted online. What this suggests is that via hashtags social relations can be enacted and ultimately communities of users can be formed (Zappavigna, 2011: 2). So much so that in

some instances, hashtags may be hard to understand for those who fall outside of the said community. This happens because it is assumed by the members of the community that all of them share the same knowledge on the topic. Hashtags increase the projection of such discourses, and they increase the possibilities for those words to be found and ''followed'' by others (Solmaz, 2017). Thus, taking part in collective practices - with the use of the hashtag in this case- allows users to align with the ideas and beliefs of a certain audience and enables identity construction and, therefore, results in "ambient affiliation'' (McGlashan, 2019).

Following the premises of SFL, Zappavigna (2015) identifies three main functions which may be performed by hashtags: experimental, as they classify the post under a certain field or topic; interpersonal, as they work as a community-building marker among the users of these communities; and textual, as they work as a post-organizing tag, meaning that the hashtag shows that the data presented in the post is about other data, therefore it is metadata. It is important to note that these three functions, although described separately, co-occur during any communicative act. In fact, the three work together towards the social function of "ambient affiliation''.

While focus on hashtags has been prominent, social media discourses have been also studied with the aim of showing how different semiotic choices in these productions contribute to signifying things that might not be openly stated in the piece of discourse (Zappavigna, 2011). These choices might in fact suggest different identities or values (Mayr & Machin, 2012). Much of the focus of research on social media is on issues of identity (Zappavigna, 2019), especially on how social media practices can "enable identity construction and affiliation with a wider community of users'' (McGlashan, 2019:1). One clear way in which social media serves as a portrayal of the users' identity is the description of oneself in the profile's biography, which usually has to do with the user's origin, interests, hobbies, occupation, and even a profile picture sometimes (Zappavigna, 2019: 5). More examples of the user's portrayal of identity online include ethno-racial representation (Grasmuck et al. 2009), sexual identity (Duguay 2014), and gender (Albury 2015, all cited in Zappavigna 2019).

The concept of identity in linguistics has been studied from different approaches. Underlying most of them is the idea that identities are constructed through meaning-making (Zappavigna, 2019). Even in everyday language, what we say and how we say it says a lot about us, our thoughts, and our perspective of the world around us. The same happens when dealing with online discourse, with the difference that what we publish online stays there forever. Interactions between users in a virtual environment can give information about their interests, their social roles, shared norms, a sense of common history, and about their awareness of belonging to a certain community (Androutsopoulos, 2006).

The construction of identity on social media is directly related to the concept of "ambient affiliation'' mentioned above. While a wide variety of identities have been studied, of particular interest for this dissertation are those which look at how collective identities are built by groups which promote extremist socio-political values. Amongst them, it is remarkable the number of studies looking at the discursive strategies of the "manosphere'' which, according to Krendel, is "the online anti-feminist network'' (Krendel, 2020:608), and which describes itself as "discussion of sexual strategy in a culture increasingly lacking a positive identity for men" (Van Valkenburgh 2018:2). However, in contrast to the numerous studies on the manosphere, there is little research from a discourse analysis point of view on relatively similar online social movements like the anti-feminist movement "traditional wives'', which will be the object of this dissertation. These self-identified "trad wives'' are a group of women that write blogs and post on social media preaching about the traditional gender roles and traditional families in which men provide for and are the protector of the family, while women are in charge of having the children, keeping the house clean, and fulfilling the needs of the family. (Proctor, 2023).

The ideas posted online by these traditional wives create reactions in people that share the same ideas or values, which contributes to the creation of an online community of common interests. When users react or align with other's ideas online, they create groups with a shared identity. The online exchanges mentioned above go beyond geographical, regional, temporal, and linguistic boundaries to create the contexts in which users interact with each other and in which they align with the ideas of multiple audiences. This suggests that users from different geographical locations come together into groups that share common

interests. These groups are generally referred to as "online communities'' (Georgakopoulou et al., 2020), also formerly known as "virtual communities'' (Rheingold, 1993). These, Rheingold (1993:5) claimed, were "social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace''.

In spite of the various understandings by different researchers of what constitutes the definition of a community, there is an agreement on the fact that not all online interactions or assemblages constitute communities (Georgakopoulou et al., 2020). For this reason, sociolinguistic research has also focused on the analysis of online communities, for which they rely on the theoretical concept of communities of practice (Georgakopoulou et al., 2020).

According to Nicolini (2013), communities of practice are "communities of practitioners'' whose focus is to position themselves within an ongoing discussion or practice. This is also directly related to the notion of "ambient affiliation'' proposed by Zappavigna (2011) and explained above. As far as this dissertation is concerned, the process of construction of a community of practice can occur as a consequence of the member's alignment to a particular practice or idea, which contributes to the creation of online identities. In this sense, the community of practice results from the process of ambient affiliation; in other words, users affiliate with certain ideas online which leads to the construction of communities of practice. While broadly applied in sociolinguistics, this concept was first introduced by social learning theorists Etienne Wenger and Jean Lave in the 1990s. According to Wenger (1991), a community of practice is characterized by three key elements: a shared domain of interest, a shared practice, and a shared repertoire of resources and tools. The creation of communities of practice allows those people who belong to it to have the same knowledge on a certain topic and therefore understand some aspects that would be subject to interpretation for those who fall outside the community.

Along this same line, the identification of the different identities that are at stake in discourse as well as the social actors that are put into practice depend, on many occasions, on the interpretation that a piece of discourse is given inside the community of practice. (McGlashan, 2019). Studies on the creation of communities of practice online (McGlashan,

2019; Krendrel 2020) have shown that Van Leeuwen's concept of social actors is a useful framework for understanding the complex and diverse ways in which people and organizations participate in social life (1996). As mentioned above, belonging to a certain community of practice allows its members to identify the same social actors that are triggered, also resulting on a possible ambient affiliation among its members (McGlashan, 2019).

To sum up, Critical Discourse Analysis, and more precisely Systemic Functional Linguistics (Mayr & Machin, 2012), seek to analyze the semiotic choices made by users of social media platforms in order to identify certain ideologies that might not be overtly stated. These ideologies can be revealed thanks to the user's reactions online to different ideas, which contribute to the concept of ambient affiliation. Moreover, this creates online groups of shared interests that are called communities of practice that allow to identify the most prevalent social actors that are at stake.

### 3. Methodology

The aim of this dissertation is to analyze the different semiotic choices made in the Instagram antifeminist movement #tradwives to see the underlying ideologies that are depicted and how they contribute to the creation of online communities. This work is a corpus-based approach (Tognini-Bonelli, 2001) (Baker, 2023) to discourse analysis and focuses on the hashtag as the key discursive element under analysis. The methodology of this study has 2 parts. The first one corresponds to the compilation of the corpus, and the second is the process of analysis of the data.

The first part of this study corresponds to the compilation of data. For the purpose of this dissertation, the data collected are hashtags found in posts taken from the social media service Instagram. The manual process of collecting data has followed the common practice in social media research for those works which do not rely on API[1]s (Application Programming Interface) for the parsing of data. (Page et al., 2022). The selection process for these posts was the following: first, we searched for the hashtag "#tradwives'' in the Instagram search box. Then, we selected the first 200 posts that appeared in the ''top'' section. Because the focus of the study was related to identity construction in hashtags, we discarded those posts that appeared under the "top'' section that did not have hashtags on their post; therefore, we only selected those which did. After this, these 200 posts were stored in an Excel sheet with the following information: the username of the person who posted it, the date of publication, the caption text (if any), the hashtags, a description of the picture in the post, other tagged accounts in the post (if any), the number of comments (if any), and the link to the Instagram post so that this would be later checked, if necessary. For anonymity purposes, the posts were compiled and named with a code that will be used for citation, starting from "TW_001'' onwards. This reflects the abbreviation of the hashtag "tradwives'' and the number of the post compiled up to 200. Given the fragility of data on social media, in a word document we stored a compilation of screenshots of each post together with the code that corresponds to each according to the Excel sheet. Once the data was compiled, the

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[1] According to Page et al., an API allows software tools to communicate with the back-end database of a certain social media service. If the API is public, it can be used by developers to create custom applications that interact with the service's data feeds. This allows developers to download specific types of data from that service (2022:172).

second part of the study was carried out following the CADS (corpus-assisted discourse studies) approach to the study of language (Baker, 2023). This implies a quantitative, corpus-based analysis of the data, which is followed by qualitative explanation. Using the corpus manager Sketch Engine (Kilgariff et al. 2014), we created a wordlist with all the different types of hashtags and the frequency with which they appeared. The total number of tokens was 4.532, whereas the total number of types was 776. Following corpus linguistics terminology (Baker, 2023), tokens refer to the total number of hashtags compiled whereas types are the number of different hashtags that appear. Out of these 776 different hashtags, we selected those which had a higher frequency. This means that those which were repeated four times or more were kept. In total, we analyzed 202 different hashtags.

As explained above, we used corpus tools for selecting those hashtags that had more relevance. These were later classified and ascribed to one or more of the four different identities that had been identified in the literature as being related to the tradwives: politics, religion, gender, and ethnicity (Sunderland, 2022). Following previous work on the manosphere (Krendel, 2020), we identified the prevalent social actor in each hashtag, and we encountered that 98 out of the 202 hashtags had women as their represented social actor. After this, for each hashtag in which the social actor was women, we identified the frames that were activated. Goffman (1975) defines "frames'' as "schemata of interpretation'' used by speakers to understand the social world, and they are influenced by cultural background, historical contexts, and personal experiences and values. So as to maximize objectivity, we compared our interpretation of the frames with the semantic tags provided by UCREL (Rayson, P., 2008). Although in most cases the tag proposed by UCREL did fit in context, when this was not the case, this was changed. The interpretation in context was selected following common practice in the study of figurative language (Dancygier & Sweetser, 2014).

The third part of this dissertation corresponds to the qualitative analysis of these hashtags. Once we had all our data stored in the Excel sheet, including the different identities and the frames that were activated, we moved on to explaining the results we got from this data. The next step was to elaborate the qualitative analysis of the data, in which we analyzed

different discursive elements to see how they contribute to the activation of a shared knowledge and the creation of communities of practice (Wegner, 1991).

## 4. Analysis

### 4.1 Quantitative analysis

After compiling and codifying the different Instagram posts, we classified them in terms of three different issues: the social actor involved (Van Leuween, 1996), the identity traits that were shown (Sunderland, 2022), and the frames that were activated in each post (Goffman, 1975).

**Figure 1**

*Summary of the data.*

| Social actors[2] | |
|---|---|
| Gender – female: | 68.32% |

| [domain] | Identities | Frames activated |
|---|---|---|
| Religion | 55.94% | 13.86% |
| Politics | 35.6% | 12.87% |
| Gender | 70.30% | 24.25% |
| Ethnicity | 0.99% | n/a |

First, we started by identifying the social actors that were triggered in these hashtags. As we expected, we noticed that 138 out of 202 of the hashtags had women as their social actor, which corresponds to the 68.32%. This is so because the movement seeks to encourage women to take action and change their manners in favor of something different (#ladieslikeus, #antifeminism, #propatriarchy, #reformed), and to give visibility to these women that are already putting at practice the lifestyle they are promoting, so it is mostly addressed at women. The rest of the hashtags refer mostly not only to women but to society in general. They either intend to provoke a reaction from the public or to include everyone in

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[2] We only analyzed those hashtags that involved women as their principal social actor, therefore the results of the identities and frames are extracted only from those hashtags with women as their main social actor.

certain conservative and traditional practices. This can be seen, for example, in the hashtag "#prolife" or "#feminismiscancer". Even though the topic of these two does implicitly relate to women, the social actor of these is not explicitly presented as an individual entity.

Then, we moved on to identity traits. Following Sunderland, we addressed four: religion, politics (conservative nationalism), gender, and ethnicity (2022). We classified each post taking into account the different identities that were explicitly revealed. It shall be noted, however, that in some cases the same post revealed more than one identity at the same time. As shown in Figure 1, in terms of religion, we can see that 113 out of the 202 total of hashtags reveal this identity which corresponds to 55.94% of the total. This is activated by words such as "proverbs", "biblical" or "Christian" in the hashtags. This result implies that more than half of the hashtag address religion, which means that the movement "traditional wives" is linked to a religious dimension and tends to be associated with Christian values. Moreover, 35.6% of the hashtags compiled show a political affiliation. Although it is not as common as religion, it is still prevalent in the hashtags under analysis. This proves that this is not only linked to religion but also with conservative principles that are commonly associated with the right wing. Only 0.99% of the hashtags show ethnicity traits. This shows that the movement of "traditional wives" is not so much tied to the origin of people but to their values as we have seen before, and/ or that ethnicity is profiled through other means such as photographs and assumed shared knowledge rather than through the hashtags. Lastly, we can see that in terms of gender 142 out of the 202 hashtags show the identity of gender, which adds up to a 70.30%, and given that the hashtags are produced by women, this comes as no surprise since the "traditional wives" movement revolves around bringing back traditional women and all that this implies. All in all, these numbers show first that the movement "traditional wives" is very much linked to religious values since the Bible claims for submissive and serving women; then, that it is also related to conservative political values because the right wing has similar traditional morals to religion as well; and lastly, that the movement addresses mostly the issue of gender, more precisely of women, because, like we mentioned previously in the definition of "traditional wives", the whole purpose of the movement is to change the ways of women these days in favor of a more traditional and conservative behavior.

The third classification that was carried out was in terms of the frames that were activated in each case. Our interpretation of the frames was supported by the semantic tagger by UCREL (Rayson, P., 2008). One of the tags that appeared was related to religion. Religion was present in 28 out of the 202 hashtags, which corresponds to 13.86% of them. This result matches our previous explanation of religion as the second most revealed identity. Since religion is a very prominent identity feature, it is only natural that we find that the frame of religion is activated in many cases as well. For politics, the numbers are very similar. It appears in 26 hashtags, corresponding to 12.87% of the total. As expected, the frame of femaleness is by far the most frequent one, just as gender was the identity that had the most prominence in the first part of the analysis as well. The frame of femaleness is present in 49 hashtags, which corresponds to 24.25%. This result supports once again the fact that this social media movement refers especially to women and intends to create a reaction on them and convince to put that lifestyle into practice as well.

## 4.2 Qualitative analysis

While the previous data was extracted from the identification of the social actors, the identity traits, and the activated frames in the hashtags of our corpus, the next part of the analysis corresponds to the identification of remarkable patterns in the use of language and discursive strategies that contribute to the creation of an online community (Georgakopoulou et al., 2020), as well as the relationship between these patterns and the activation of a shared knowledge. As for the elements that contribute to the creation of online communities, which are similar to what Wegner called "communities of practice'' in 1991, in the hashtags of our corpus we can find an extended use of premodification, the use of hypernymy, and the presence of metaphorical expressions, as well as the need to activate a shared knowledge in order to understand certain hashtags that have been recontextualized.

First, in terms of premodification, as we can see in appendix 1, there is a prevalence of words, mostly adjectives, preceding nouns in the hashtags and working as premodifiers. Examples of this are #tradwives, #Christianwomen. #traditionalvalues, #Christianmarriage, #traditionalgenderroles, #godlywomanhood, or #submissivewomen. The extended use of premodification in these hashtags contributes to the discursive presentation of this online

community as having a number of features with which users can identify, hence creating a sense of belonging among the users. Following the UCREL semantic tagging (Rayson, P., 2008), we can see that the premodifiers in our corpus activate three different frames: religion, politics, and gender.

Contrary to what we expected, in the case of gender, we do not find many premodifiers that activate it. This is because the element in the hashtag that activates this identity trait is, in most cases, the noun that is being modified, like for example in the hashtag #traditionalhousewife. In this example, the word "traditional'' is premodifying "housewife'', which activates the frame of politics in terms of conservatism, as well as the frame of religion since the church is typically associated with tradition; while "housewife'' is the word that activates the frame of gender. Interestingly women are presented as belonging in the domestic space through the use of that noun. This same idea of domesticity can be observed in the very few instances when gender is activated via the premodifier, as for example in the hashtags #femininefamily and #momlife. Moreover, in other cases, it is necessary for users to activate the shared knowledge in order to understand what frames are being activated by some premodifiers. This is the case for example in the hashtag #prolife, where "pro'' is premodifying "life'' If we look at the hashtag without any context, we cannot know that it is in fact related to a political slogan in the field of abortion that stands against those who want to legalize abortion.

The use of premodification in hashtags, as well as the activation of a shared knowledge in some cases, allow people to react or align with the ideas or values expressed in them, in this case in terms of religion, politics, and to a lesser extent, gender. This is what Zappavigna (2011) named ambient affiliation, and it contributes to the creation of online communities in social media.

Moreover, according to the Collins dictionary, hypernymy can be defined as "the semantic association of being part of a higher class'' (HarperCollins, 2019). However, in order for hypernymy to be effective, a certain shared knowledge is required. Such is the case in hashtags like #ladieslikeus. "Ladies'' are a type of woman, and the user is required to activate a shared knowledge in order to understand the message implied with this categorization. Without the activation of the shared knowledge, users cannot know what

"ladies'' refers not to all women but to a group of women who are feminine, who are normally traditional, and in some cases, to women who belong to a higher social position. Moreover, the inclusive deictic use of the pronoun "us'' contributes to identity construction in the sense that it encourages people to feel part of the community.

Along the same line, in the hashtag #makemanlymenagain we have a hashtag that expresses a concrete feature or trait of men that allows us to classify "manly men'' into a group under the hypernym "men''. However, this expression goes further than semantically speaking. It does not only show a defining trait of a particular group of men, but it also activates the frame of politics, which can only be known thanks to shared knowledge. In fact, the hashtag #makemanlymenagain resembles Trump's slogan "make America great again'' and therefore intertextually links this hashtag and this user with the conservative ideas proposed by Trump's campaign, which can go unseen for those who fall outside of the community.

Similarly, the hashtags #stayathomemom #sahm #sahw #stayathomemomlife address different groups of women. What is particular about these hashtags is not only that we are presented with a different type of women, which are mothers and wives, but also with a particular group of those, which are stay at home mothers and wives. In other words, mothers and wives are hyponyms of women, while stay at home moms and wives are hyponyms of mothers and wives as well. For those who belong to the community, the shared knowledge is put to work and the frame of conservative political ideas is activated, as well as the frame of gender in this case. The activation of a shared knowledge is particularly important in the case of the initials (#sahm, #sahw), which stand for "stay at home mom'' and "stay at home wife'' respectively. The same happens with the hashtag #proverbs31women, which refers to proverb 31 (Proverbs 31:10-31, New International Version) that says, among other things, that women are in charge of the affairs of the household. This hashtag provides a trait for women, and users can only know the implications of this feature if they understand the meaning of the frame of "religion" which is activated (Rayson, P., 2008). The use of this premodifier emphasizes the religious and traditional features that are expected from women.

As in the case above, the use of certain premodifiers in some hashtags suggests a defining property for a category that allows a classification into groups. This is the case for

example of #Christianmarriage, #traditionalvalues, #biblicalwomanhood, #traditionalgenderoles. In these hashtags, the frame of religion (Rayson, P., 2008) is activated. Moreover, the premodifier in these hashtags contributes to emphasize that, according to the members of this community, true marriage, values, and womanhood are only those which comply to the standards of Christianity. Thanks to the shared knowledge, users can understand the implications of a Christian marriage, what traditional values imply, what characterizes biblical women, and what traditional gender roles are.

Metaphors have a similar function in the traditional wives' movement. While hypernymy allows to classify concepts into groups, metaphors contribute to understanding one conceptual domain in terms of a different conceptual domain (Kövecses, 2002). The conceptual domain from which we draw the metaphorical expression is the source domain, while the conceptual domain that is understood is the target domain (Kövecses, 2002). In the hashtags of our corpus, we can spot different target domains. First, in the hashtag #runtherace, the target domain that is at stake is Christianity (religion). The expression "run the race'' is in fact present in several Bible verses, and what it means is to follow the path (the race) that God has planned so that they can reach their goal (Heaven) (Hebrews 12:1, New International Version). This information is only known by those who belong to this community of practice (Wegner, 1991) thanks to the activation of the frame of religion. Nevertheless, in the case of those who do not belong to the community or lack shared knowledge, "run the race'' can also be interpreted as a metaphor referring to life as a journey.

Another source domain present in these hashtags is the domain of diseases, more specifically, cancer. In the hashtag #feminismiscancer, feminism is compared to cancer so that feminism is portrayed as something bad, negative, harmful, and something we should get rid of. The use of such a powerful word to evaluate feminism gives the audience a very strong impression of what feminism is, which again intends to make people align with these ideas and contributes to shaping the identity of the traditional woman.

In addition, the existence of two opposing perspectives in terms of traditional gender roles and political values is sometimes presented as a war, which is another target domain present in our hashtags, for example in #revoltagainstthemodernworld or even in #counterculture. Not only that, but these hashtags also activate the frame of politics in the

sense that they implicitly oppose to left-wing (modern) political ideas, which can also be a way of addressing the audience to react and align to these values and encourage them to be part of the community.

The metaphor "red pill'' is very commonly used by the members of the "manosphere'' (Krendel, 2020), and we can also see the connection between the traditional wives' movement and such groups in the hashtags #redpill and #redpilled. This term was inspired by the movie *The Matrix* (Lana Wachoski, 1999), in which a red pill was given to those who wanted to see the reality instead of continuing living in a dream. This is used among members of the manosphere to imply that they live in a world that is dominated by women in which men are the victims and only those who have the red pill can see the reality of the world that surrounds them (Tudury, 2021). This metaphor also activates the frame of politics by criticizing the alienation of society, but it can only do so if the shared knowledge is activated as well.

The target domain of the ''home'' is very productive as well, as we can see in hashtags like #homemakers, #homemaking, and #homemakerlife. What is understood by these hashtags is that moms/wives make a home. This contributes to romanticizing the idea of the stay-at-home woman by depicting them as the essential person to build a home, and by visually showing how much better that lifestyle is in contrast to those who prefer to work outside the household. Examples of this can be seen in Figure 2.

**Figure 2**

*Posts of a stay-at-home mom by the user @solieolie*

Lastly, in the hashtag #lionsnotsheep, the source domain that is at stake is the domain of animals. In this case, this metaphor is combined with an activation of knowledge related to the frame of religion. This hashtag refers to the Bible, meaning that some people are lions (leaders) and others are sheep (followers). Within the movement of the #tradwives, this hashtag encourages the audience to go their own way to avoid being influenced by other people or other values. Moreover, this hashtag can also be interpreted as a comparison

between traditional wives and feminists. In this simile, "lions'' would refer to the traditional wives meaning that they build their own path as they are faithful to their values, while "sheep'' refers to the feminists in the sense that they follow the path established by society without questioning.

The creation of online communities is linked to the idea of shared knowledge (Page et al., 2022). This is because without a shared knowledge, there are several elements in the hashtags with a figurative potential that can be misunderstood in the case of those who fall outside the online community. As we have seen, in the case of our hashtags, the use of premodification, the metaphorical use of language and the presence of hypernymy contribute to the activation of shared knowledge.

Moreover, there are some hashtags that have been recontextualized and that therefore require the activation of shared knowledge in order to be fully understood. In the hashtag #thefutureisfamily, although apparently it only shows the importance of family, thanks to the activation of a shared knowledge we can see that it in fact resembles the slogan used by feminists: "the future is female''. The domain of family serves to make the ideas proposed by the user more appealing to the audience, but because of all the contextual elements mentioned before and the shared activation of knowledge, the frame of politics can be also inferred in their mocking of a political slogan to express an idea contrary to what the original slogan intended to express. Similarly, in the hashtag #maga, shared knowledge needs to be activated as well so that users can know that these initials stand for ''make America great again'', which is also a political slogan related to Trump's election campaign.

As the qualitative analysis has shown, the use of premodification, hypernymy, and metaphorical expressions, as well as the recontextualization of hashtags, help us explain what aspects of the world are profiled by the tradwives movement. This analysis shows that users tend to use hypernymy and metaphorical expressions to show their identity, which requires the activation of shared knowledge, hence determining how the underlying message is interpreted. The activation of such shared knowledge allows the audience to react or align with the ideas or values expressed through particular linguistic choices, mostly related to the frames of religion, politics, and to a lesser extent, gender. This also contributes to what

Zappavigna (2011) named ambient affiliation, and subsequently to the creation of the #tradwives community of practice in social media.

## 5. Conclusion

In this final section, we will answer the premises stated in the introduction in order to point out the main ideas of this study. Moreover, we will suggest potential further research on the discursive construction of identities in social media. Such premises mainly seek to analyze the different discursive elements used in the #Tradwives movement that allow us to identify the underlying ideology, and also to see how they contribute to the creation of online communities.

In the case of the hashtags analyzed in this dissertation, we can observe that the social actor, the identities, and the frames that are activated reveal that the ideologies shown in the #Tradwives movement were the ones associated with right-wing principles that advocate a return to the values at stake during the 50's. More precisely, these values refer to more traditional principles in terms of politics, religion, and gender, and they target women in the sense that they are in favor of submissive women who stay at home while men work outside the house, contrary to the modern view of feminism (Proctor, 2023).

Also, this study shows that users tend to construct their identity by using premodification, hyperonymy, and metaphorical expressions. The use of these discursive resources triggers the activation of a shared knowledge, which is necessary to understand certain references. Shared knowledge not only contributes to the construction of an identity but also to the creation of an online community since understating those expressions means belonging to the community.

Moreover, this study reveals how relevant discourse analysis is, not only in social media but also in daily communication. More than that, it shows the importance of discourse analysis to understand the world around us, in the sense that it allows us not only to understand social structures that are shaped by language, like the #Tradwives movement, but also to identify the underlying messages in language.

Finally, as we have said, this study demonstrates that the creation of the online #Tradwives community is the result of a combination of discursive elements that encourage the audience to become involved with the ideas proposed by the movement. However, a further study that could be carried out is the analysis not only of the hashtags used in social

media like we have done in this dissertation, but also of the importance of visual elements like images or videos for the creation of online communities.

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**7. Appendix 1**

|  | **Religion** | **Politics** | **Gender** | **Ethnicity** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Hashtags** | #tradwife #proverbs31woman #biblicalwomanhood #christianwife #christianity #marriage #traditionalvalues #reformedwife #stayathomemomlife #christian #proverbs31 #momlife #patriarchy #christianmarriage #christianmom #proverbs31life #proverbs31wife #traditional #proverbs31women #modesty #godlywife #momstyle #stayathomemom #holyliving #feedthepatriarchy #biblicalfeminity #counterculture #biblebelievingchurch #traditionalfemininity #conservative #traditionalism #traditionalgenderroles #runtherace #femininenotfeminist #antifeminism #traditionalwomen #housewife #christianwomen | #tradwife #proverbs31woman #biblicalwomanhood #christianwife #christianity #marriage #traditionalvalues #reformedwife #stayathomemomlife #christian #proverbs31 #momlife #patriarchy #christianmarriage #christianmom #proverbs31life #proverbs31wife #traditional #proverbs31women #modesty #godlywife #momstyle | #tradwife #proverbs31woman #biblicalwomanhood #christianwife #christianity #marriage #traditionalvalues #reformedwife #stayathomemomlife #christian #proverbs31 #momlife #patriarchy #christianmarriage #christianmom #proverbs31life #proverbs31wife #traditional #proverbs31women #modesty #godlywife #momstyle #stayathomemom #holyliving #feedthepatriarchy | #Blackconservative |

| #propatriarchy #feminineenergy #biblicalmarriage #theprettyconservative #prolife #genderroles #patriots #women #masculinity #traditionalliving #tradwives #homemaker #homemaking #thegospel #reformedtheology #traditionalmarriage #homesteading #antifeminist #tradwifelife #trad #biblicalfemininity #thefutureisfamily #makemenmanlyagain #thefutureisnotfemale #traditionalwoman #wife #manlymen #tradtionalfemininity #feminism #antifeminismo #homemakers #menleadwomenfollow #promale #homemakerlife #traditionalhousewife #conservativewomen #family #soluschristus #thereformedwife | #stayathomemom #holyliving #feedthepatriarchy #biblicalfeminity #counterculture #biblebelievingchurch #traditionalfemininity #conservative #traditionalism #traditionalgenderroles #runtherace #femininenotfeminist #antifeminism #traditionalwomen #housewife #christianwomen #propatriarchy #feminineenergy #theprettyconservative #prolife #genderroles #patriots | #biblicalfeminity #counterculture #biblebelievingchurch #traditionalfemininity #conservative #traditionalism #traditionalgenderroles #runtherace #femininenotfeminist #antifeminism #traditionalwomen #housewife #christianwomen #propatriarchy #feminineenergy #biblicalmarriage #theprettyconservative #prolife #genderroles #patriots #women #masculinity #traditionalliving #gender | |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | #godlywomanhood #christianwoman #godlywoman #christianwomanhood #christianfemininity #godlyfemininity #church #godlymarriage #proverbs #antiabortion #catholic #thetradwivesclub #sahm #traditionalwife #conservativememes #submissivewomen #sahw #wifelife #tradlife #traddienotbaddie #traditionalfamily #prolifegeneration #homemakingministries #submissivewife #rejectmodernityembracetradition #returntotradition #traditionalist #lionsnotsheep #abortionkills #christiandating #embracetradition #patriarchal #christianparentingtips #christianparenting #jesusisking #theology | #masculinity #traditionalliving #tradwives #homemaker #homemaking #traditionalmarriage #homesteading #antiabortion #gender #femininity #republican #antifeminist #trad #thefutureisfamily #makemenmanlyagain #thefutureisnotfemale #antifeminismo #family #conservativewomen #tradlife #returntotradition #traditionalist | #motherhood #relationships #femininity #simpleliving #antifeminist #trad #thefutureisfamily #makemenmanlyagain #mom #mommy #momblogger #momsofinstagram #instagrammom #instamoms #instamom #instamommy #lovelylittlesquares #solideogloria #feminine #setapart #tradwifelife #biblicalfemininity #maga #tradwives #thefutureisnotfemale #traditionalwoman #wife | |

| | | | #manlymen |  |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | #tradtionalfemininity |  |
| | | | #thereformedwife |  |
| | | | #godlywomanhood |  |
| | | | #christianwoman |  |
| | | | #godlywoman |  |
| | | | #christianwomanhood |  |
| | | | #christianfemininity |  |
| | | | #godlyfemininity |  |
| | | | #thetradwivesclub |  |
| | | | #sahm |  |
| | | | #traditionalwife |  |
| | | | #conservativememes |  |
| | | | #submissivewomen |  |
| | | | #sahw |  |
| | | | #wifelife |  |
| | | | #parenting |  |
| | | | #dating |  |
| | | | #aproncladarmy |  |
| | | | #femininewomen |  |
| | | | #femininefamily |  |
| | | | #ladieslikeus |  |
| | | | #thedarlingacademy |  |
| | | | #housewifeblogger |  |

| | | | #hypergamouswoman #hypergamouswomen #wifey #feminismiscancer #babies #empoweringwomen #homemaker #homemaking #thegospel #reformedtheology #traditionalmarriage #homesteading #antifeminismo #family #conservativewomen #tradlife #feminism #homemakers #menleadwomenfollow #promale #homemakerlife #traditionalhousewife | |

| | | | #soluschristus | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | #church | |
| | | | #godlymarriage | |
| | | | #traddienotbaddie | |
| | | | #traditionalfamily | |
| | | | #theology | |
| | | | #softness | |
| | | | #nature | |
| | | | #health | |
| | | | #blissfullyfeminine | |
| | | | #woman | |
| | | | #womanhood | |
| | | | #polarity | |
| | | | #single | |
| | | | #revoltagainstthemodernworld | |
| | | | #ripfeminism | |
| | | | #genderequality | |
| | | | #homecooking | |
| | | | #kag | |
| | | | #mybodymychoice | |