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## **Examining the efficacy of different counter hate speech messages towards migration in Italy**

Matilde Anna Benedetta Maria Devitini

Master in Psychology of Intercultural Relations

Supervisor:  
Doctor Rita Guerra, Auxiliary Researcher  
ISCTE - University Institute of Lisbon

October, 2022



CIÊNCIAS SOCIAIS  
E HUMANAS

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Departamento de Psicologia Social e das Organizações

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*“I diritti degli uomini devono essere di tutti gli uomini, proprio di tutti, sennò  
chiamateli privilegi”*

*Gino Strada*

*To my family, who constantly supports me and believes in me  
and to Nonna, to her Sunday calls and hand-written letters.*



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## Resumo

O presente estudo examinou o efeito de diferentes tipos de contra-discurso de ódio na sensibilidade ao discurso de ódio e nas atitudes em relação aos migrantes e à migração em Itália. Especificamente, examinou se mensagens de contra-discurso que induzam a empatia ou afiliação aumentam a sensibilidade à discurso de ódio, aumentam a empatia para com os migrantes, aumentam a abertura para com os migrantes e reduzem o apoio a políticas de migração restritivas. Os participantes italianos (N = 890), recrutados por amostragem de conveniência (ex., grupos do Facebook) foram aleatoriamente distribuídos por três condições (empatia, afiliação ou controlo). Os resultados não mostraram efeitos significativos da manipulação, ou seja, não houve diferenças na sensibilidade ao discurso do ódio, empatia para com os migrantes, abertura em relação aos migrantes e apoio a políticas de migração restritivas entre condições. As análises de correlação exploratórias mostraram algumas descobertas inesperadas: afiliação com o emissor da mensagem de ódio (i.e., salientar pontos em comum) esteve associada a uma menor empatia, e a um maior apoio a políticas restritivas. Apesar da falta de efeitos significativos da nossa manipulação, este estudo é, tanto quanto sabemos, um dos primeiros a testar o impacto de diferentes estratégias de contra-discurso e os resultados correlacionais sugerem questões importantes para investigações futuras.

Palavras-chave:

Discurso de ódio, contra discurso, empatia, afiliação, sensibilidade ao discurso do ódio, migrantes, Itália

Códigos PsicINFO:

2720 Linguística & Linguagem & Fala

2900 Processos Sociais e Questões Sociais

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3020 Processos de Grupo e Interpessoais





## **Abstract**

The present study examined the efficacy of different types of counter speech on hate speech sensitivity and attitudes towards migrants and migration in Italy. Specifically, it examined whether counter speech messages highlighting empathy and affiliation could increase sensitivity to hate speech, increase empathy towards migrants, increase openness towards migrants and increase support for restrictive migration policies. Italian participants ( $N = 890$ ) recruited through convenience sampling (e.g., Facebook groups) were randomly assigned to one of three conditions (empathy, affiliation, or control). Results showed no significant effects of the manipulation, that is there were no differences in sensitivity to hate speech, empathy towards migrants, openness towards migrants and support for restrictive migration policies between conditions. Exploratory correlation analyses showed some unexpected findings: self-reported commonalities with the speaker of the hateful message were associated with lower empathy and support for restrictive policies.

Despite the lack of significant effects of our manipulation, this study is to the best of our knowledge one of the firsts testing the impact of different of counter speech strategies and the correlational findings suggest important questions for future research.

Key words:

Hate speech, counter speech, empathy, affiliation, sensitivity to hate speech, migrants, Italy

PsycINFO Codes:

2720 Linguistics & Language & Speech

2900 Social Processes & Social Issues

3000 Social Psychology

3020 Group & Interpersonal Processes



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## Introduction

In the last decade, the Italian ground, along with Spain, Greece, Malta, and Cyprus, has been the scenery of a new migratory flow sailing from the coasts of northern Africa. Most of the people that attempt landing on European soil are running away from war, conflict, persecution, or poor condition of life, with the hope that the EU will grant them the condition of refugees. To reach safe shores, many migrants have to embark on a dangerous trip from their home country, mainly coming from Syria, Afghanistan and Eritrea to cite a few (*The Sea Route to Europe: The Mediterranean Passage in the Age of Refugees*, 2015). To reach Italy they first must arrive in Libya (*Rifugiati e migranti* - UNHCR Italia, s.d.), where they put themselves in the hands of smugglers that often leave them in the middle of the sea, not knowing if they will ever reach the other side of the Mediterranean safely. So far, many migrants made it, but many lives were lost at sea as well. Data collected since 2013 and last updated on the 3rd of January 2022, counts an estimate of 23.024 among deaths or missing people that were trying to reach Europe (Operational Portal, 2022).

Immigration to Italy is not a recent event. Indeed, since the '70s and '80s Italy has become a favorable destination for many from all over the world (Colombo & Sciortino, 2004). However, only more recently immigration has become part of both the political and public discourse with the rising of the arrivals from the Mediterranean in 2014 and the many incidents of sinking boats that costed lives as the the one in mid-April 2015 that recorded 800 deaths (UNHCR). Through the years, the topic of migration has cut itself an important spot in the major communication platforms of the country. It is important to note that the labels used to refer to people who were fleeing away from their countries changed throughout the years. The word "immigrant(s)" or "refugee(s)" were frequently, and interchangeably used, however in 2019 the term "migrant(s)" replaced and, somehow, included the other two (Barretta, 2019). Today, the most common label used in the public sphere is "migrant", an oversimplification that does not allow to disentangle the different reasons why people leave their country: economic, religious, war, climatic, or violation of human rights are some of them (*Rifugiati e migranti* - UNHCR Italia, s.d.).

From newspapers to social networks, from politicians to NGOs, the Mediterranean route has been commented, analyzed, and discussed from different lenses: human rights, economic, social, or political. The content of these discussions in the public sphere, particularly in the social media, became highly polarized and several European and national reports highlight the increase in the expression of hateful messages in social media involving migration. Recent

studies conducted for the European Parliament and for the European Commission supporting the initiative in tackling hate speech and hate crimes, show that the occurrence of hate speech has been rising in the past years, especially on social media (Bąkowski, 2022). Migrants and ethnic minorities remain the main targets of hate speech (FRA, 2022). Recent research shows that 'foreign affairs and migration' is the second most prevalent topic (47%) of all the hate topics identified as triggering violent reactions, and migrants are the most common target of discrimination (32%) (SWG-Parole ostili, 2017). The use of online hateful messages that ultimately can promote aggression and violence is commonly referred as online hate speech.

Research on hate speech is increasingly developing, cross-cutting different disciplines, i.e., law, political science, communication, and social psychology. Being a relatively new area of research, there is still no consensual definition of what hate speech is. There are generally agreed common characteristics of hate speech: it is a speech aimed at hurting one or more persons on the basis of social categories such as religion, sexuality, ethnic origin, etc.

(Davidson et al., 2017; de Gilbert et al., 2018; Fortuna et al., 2018; Nockleby, 2000).

Although there is no consensual definition of hate speech, there is consistent evidence regarding its detrimental impacts for the targets of the hateful messages as well as for general public exposed to it. Indeed, hate speech harms the self-perception of victims, increases prejudice against them, which can result in physical attacks, leads to the support of discriminatory laws and the detrimental impacts extend beyond the victims, as it leads to a general desensitization towards hate and hateful behaviour (Kuzawińska et al., 2018; Bianchi et al., 2017; Soral et al., 2018, 2020, 2022; Winiewsky et al., 2016).

Recently, scholars and practitioners highlighted the need to understand hate speech and find effective tools to tackle it, such as counter speech messages. Counter speech, and specifically online counter speech, refers to a response to hate comments that aims to counteract their malevolent effects and intentions (Benesch et al., 2016; Mathew et al., 2019). It can take different forms, such as the use of humor, alerting for the consequences of hate speech, emphasizing empathy towards the target, etc (Benesch, et al. 2016). Very few studies systematically examined the efficacy and impact of these different forms of online counter speech (see Mathew et al., 2019 for an exception). The few studies that examined the impact of counter speech used mainly computational/data science approaches. To the best of our knowledge only two studies used a social psychological approach to counter speech, showing that interventions inducing empathy can reduce hateful messages online (Reddit platform) (Bilewicz et al., 2021), and also increased sensitivity to hate (Soral, et al., 2022).

Building on these recent findings, the current thesis aims to examine the efficacy of different counter speech messages. Specifically, this research examines if being exposed to different counter speech messages inducing empathy or affiliation (i.e., ability to take someone else's emotional perspective or establishing a relationship with someone based on common features, respectively) increases empathy towards the targets of hate speech, sensitivity to hate speech in general, as well as support for inclusive migration policies and openness towards welcoming migrants. Examining the effectiveness of different counter hate speech strategies has the potential to advance existing knowledge on hate speech as well as to offer important insights for future interventions.



## Chapter I - Literature Review

### 1. Hate speech

Scholars have not yet agreed on a consensual definition of hate speech (Howard, 2019). A recent proposal defines it as an expression of hatred towards a specific group in a specific context (Howard, 2019). Others state that is a verbal attack towards a group, or person as reported by the Encyclopedia of the American Constitution, based on personal characteristics such as race, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, socio-economic status...with the aim of humiliate, insult and hurt, and with the intention of being derogatory towards a minority (Davidson et al., 2017; de Gilbert et al., 2018; Facebook; Fortuna et al., 2018; Nockleby, 2000; Twitter). Recently, the Council of Europe also proposed a more comprehensive definition: hate speech is understood as all types of expression that incite, promote, spread or justify violence, hatred or discrimination against a person or group of persons, or that denigrates them, by reason of their real or attributed personal characteristics or status such as “race”, colour, language, religion, nationality, national or ethnic origin, age, disability, sex, gender identity and sexual orientation” (CM/Rec/2022/16). In line with the latter, a recent review of online hate speech, defined it as “bias-motivated, hostile and malicious language targeted at a person or group because of their actual or perceived innate characteristics” (Siegel, 2020, p. 57).

Although there is no consensual definition of hate speech or online hate speech, there is agreement and consistent evidence on the negative consequences that exposure to this language has, whether as a victim or a bystander. For what concerns the targets of hateful comments and posts online, research reports that minorities exposed to these attacks have lower self-esteem and well-being, higher levels of depression and may even present symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder and are also more likely to have suicidal thoughts (Kuzawińska et al., 2018). Research also shows that targets of hate speech internalize those hateful thoughts themselves, like homophobic thoughts in gay people exposed to hateful labels (Bianchi, Piccoli, Zotti, Fasoli, & Carnaghi, 2017). Moreover, it has been shown that negative effects exponentially grow alongside exposure: the more hate speech is read the worse the effects can be. On this regard, a study on LGBT+ minority conducted in Poland showed that the LGBT+ participants who more frequently encountered hateful content directed to their community also showed more severe depression and recurrent suicidal thoughts, compared to the ones who were less exposed or experienced greater acceptance from their families (Soral, Bilewicz, Winiewski, & Bulska, 2020).

Hate speech may also erupt into physical attacks towards a target group or person (Lawrence III, 1990). Indeed, some authors include incitement to aggression and violence as a core feature of the definition of hate speech (e.g., Sellars, 2016). An anecdotal example is the rise of hate crimes towards Asian people that emerged associated with hateful theories on the spread of Covid-19 (BBC News, 2021). The question arises: what are the effects on the bystanders of hate speech then? Exposure to hate speech also increases stereotypes and social distance from the targeted minority, to reach the point of supporting policies that penalize them and limit and go against their human rights (Winiewsky et al., 2016). Exposure to hate speech also promotes dehumanization (Fasoli et al., 2016) of the targets, or mistrust in professionals belonging to stigmatized group (e.g., people exposed to hate speech targeting Black people find it harder to retrieve information about Black professionals' performance resulting in a lower evaluation of their skills) (Greenberg and Pyszczynski, 1985). Recent research has showed that the repeated exposure to hate speech may negatively affect the sensitivity to it, which also leads to stronger outgroup prejudice (Soral et al., 2018). Beyond the impact on victims and bystanders of hateful messages, hate speech held by politicians and public figures, has been associated with increased polarization as well as with extreme events like mass shootings, as the recent one at El Paso in 2019 (Piazza, 2020; Schäfer, 2021). The diffusion of hate speech is attributable to many different sources: politicians looking for supporting voters; social media in the name of freedom of expression; journalists, who may also be unaware of the power of their own words (Bortone, 2017).

Frequent exposure to hate speech may negatively affect the sensitivity to it, which will also lead to a stronger outgroup prejudice (Soral et al., 2018). So, to comprehend what sensitivity to hate (speech) is, is better to start off by defining what desensitization is: "a reduction in emotional or physical reactivity to stimuli that is achieved by such means as deconditioning techniques", as reported by the American Psychological Association dictionary. One of the main models that explains such effect is the model of desensitization from aggression which suggests that frequent exposure to different vehicles of hateful content and violence (television, videogames, social media, internet...) reduces the emotional response towards it, "normalizing" aggression whether physical and/or verbal (Bartholow et al., 2006; Krahe et al., 2011; Funk et al., 2004; Carnagey et al., 2007). Soral, Bilewicz and colleagues, have frequently researched this particular topic showing that exposure to hate speech significantly and negatively predicts sensitivity to it, and as suggested earlier, lower levels of sensitivity to hate speech have been associated with stronger prejudice against an

out-group. Therefore, those who are frequently subjected to examples of hate speech have difficulty perceiving it as offensive and abusive. It was found that even relatively brief exposure to hate speech could desensitize participants to its offensiveness (Soral, Bilewicz & Winiewski, 2018; Soral, Bilewicz, Winiewski & Bulska, 2020; Soral, Malinowska & Bilewicz, 2022). Particularly, these effects emerged only in subjects with existing neutral or negative attitudes, meaning that hate speech contributes to polarizing societal trends (Schäfer, Sülflow, & Reiners, 2021). In the case where political or religious leaders make frequent use of hate speech against minorities or immigrants it could imply the creation of a new norm of behavior, that is, the perception of such language as morally justified and legitimate (Bilewicz & Soral, 2020).

Given all the negative effects and consequences of hate speech and online hate speech, it comes naturally to think that the best solution would be to ban it and endorsing solutions like deleting the content containing this type of language or the profiles that are reported to be the most offensive. Scholars from different backgrounds have been discussing these solutions and, most of the time, end up in a conflict with freedom of speech. Freedom of speech is the liberty that people have to speak publicly and express themselves, and in democracies, implies the duty of the state to protect said right (Hornsby, 2016). In a recent review on hate speech, Howard (2019) raises three main points in “support” of keeping hate speech within the realm of freedom of speech. First, it should be the listener to process the message received, and then decide whether to disregard hate speech because of its nature, or whether to keep it in consideration. Secondly, respecting someone’s freedom of speech requires giving them full liberty, therefore we cannot expect to have them speak only when their views are “correct”. In democracies free speech is fundamental for self-government, in the process of creation of the laws that organize and support the well-being of the state. Hate speech is part of it, as it sparks debates and discussions, without which there would be no progress within democracy itself. Research has also shown that automatic banning or deleting hate speech messages endorsed by online platforms diminishes the amount of it, but it also results in people re-creating hateful content on different web pages (Siegel, 2020). It is clear then that a different strategy is needed. As reported in Mathew and colleagues: “counter speech is considered as the preferred remedy to hate speech as it does not violate the normative of free speech. While government or organizations rarely take part in counter speech, a large proportion of the counter speech is actually generated by the online users” (2019, p. 370).

## 2. Counter speech

It appears then that the total deletion of hate speech is not possible, and that, as shown by Baker “hate speech prohibitions will make other, more effective interventions against the development of a racist, genocidal culture or polity less likely or less effective” (2008, pg. 13). Drawing from the conclusion that a ban on expression would backfire in possibly more hateful actions and beliefs, many scholars reached the same solution: fighting speech with more speech. Here is where counter speech comes into play. Consensual definitions of counter speech are “a direct response/comment (not reply to a comment) that counters the hateful or harmful speech” (Mathews, 2019, p. 370), or “a response that takes issue with hateful, harmful, or extremist content. Counter speech is considered successful when it is followed by a favorable response from the Internet user or users to whom the counter speech was directed” (Benesch et al., 2016, p. 12). Although there is very limited research showing that counter speech in fact counteracts hate speech, scholars have been exploring different forms of counter speech messages. Indeed, there are some identifiable features of “styles” of counter speech messages, and some studies suggest which ones may be the most effective in tackling hateful speech.

In particular, Benesch and colleagues identified in their study of Twitter users (2016), and also reported in a study by Mathew and colleagues (2019), eight different strategies of counter speech online. The first one is presenting facts in corrections of misstatements; however, research shows that this may not be effective since it often faces strong convictions and may also backfire into the hate speaker(s) attaching even more to their beliefs (Nyhan & Reifler, 2010; Nyhan & Reifler, 2015). The second strategy is pointing out hypocrisy or contradictions, but research directly testing it was not found. One can speculate that alike the previous strategy, could result in ineffectiveness having the speaker rationalize the statement and justifying it. A more promising strategy is the warning of online/offline consequences, since it reminds of the possible consequences of words to the ones taking part in the online conversations, which are known to have a detaching-from-reality effect since they take place in a non-tangible space: the internet (Suler, 2004, p. 323). The consequences may consist of future unemployment for the hate speaker (Ronson, 2015), fomentation of offline hatred resulting in drastic actions, like the recent shooting in El Paso, and also negative repercussions for the victims of the negative comments, such as psychological and/or physical damage. A fourth promising strategy is affiliation, which in social psychology is regarded as “a cultural union with others, typically rooted in likeness or individual closeness instead of on

assumed material advantages” (Sam, 2013), in other words a connection with a person by sharing something like a point of view, religion, race, political opinion. This strategy has not been directly tested but research in behaviour and communication psychology suggests that it may be successful especially in the case of an ingroup member reprimanding the hate speaker as it is known to be more effective because considered more trustworthy than the outgroup (Tanis & Postmes, 2003; Kane, Argote, and Levine 2005). Another strategy is denouncing hateful or dangerous speech, and it can be helpful when is not the hate speaker to be counter-attacked but only the message itself. Images and videos are reported as a strategy helpful to counteract negative contents as they provide a reference that, especially online, helps the reader to keep better in mind the circumstances of the exchange and is generally more popular and liked (Mathew et al., 2018). For example, online, images result to be more influential than text alone as they “augment textual information via paratasis, that is, by being placed next to such information as a coordinate, supportive structure” (LaGrandeur, 2003, p. 124). Another strategy is the use of humor, which may help de-escalate a hostile discussion if expressed with a positive tone (Mathew et al., 2018). However, humor can also take the form of a provocation or aggression, depending on the tone. Finally, there is tone, and while in Benesch’s approach it is conceptualized as one strategy, in other research by Mathew and colleagues highlight the importance of valence of tone, differentiating between positive and hostile tone (2019). Whereas the first type of tone has proved to be quite effective when highlighting empathy, the second one may result in the deletion of the hateful comment or even the whole account but without the potential constructive part of an apology or reconsideration from the hate speaker. Finally, research also highlights five types of responses that could follow the counter speaker intervention: deletion of the comment or account, which may not be considered a success as it may conceal the fact that the hater has not made any reconsideration but has simply preferred to remove him/herself from the confrontation; apologize and/or retraction of what has been stated, this is considered to be one of the most indicative cases of success; escalation into more counter speech, which may be evaluated as non-successful; the interaction could continue in the form of simple civil conversation, which despite the positive tone the parties involved may not reconsider their positions; lastly, a successful outcome, mostly for the bystander audience, is more counter speech coming from more accounts (Benesch et al., 2016). Indeed, research suggest that even a small group of counter speakers can positively influence a much larger crowd when the latter’s opinion is not extreme (Schieb & Preuss, 2016).

Building on this idea, scholars have coined the term *golden conversation* – a “three step exchanges between at least two accounts, in which hateful speech was met by counter speech, followed by a sign of favorable impact on the first account or accounts. The last step could be an apology, a recanting, or a deleted tweet or account (the latter two were ambiguous signals, however)” (Wright et al., 2017, p. 58-59). In the current study we will consider the golden conversation features when manipulating different forms of counter speech. Specifically, we will use the most successful strategies and dynamics of counter speech: a hateful comment will be counter acted by empathy or affiliation sustained by a counter speaker, holding a positive tone and attacking the message but not the messenger, and the final comment will be an apology message issued by the hate speaker.

## **2.1 Empathy**

Empathy has been defined as the ability to feel what someone else is feeling (Strayer & Eisenberg, 1987, p. 391), it means taking the other person’s emotional perspective and understand their needs (Coke, Batson, & McDavis, 1978). Research has been showing that it involves compassion, tenderness, sympathy, and the like of the other (Batson, 1991). When describing empathy is important to consider its two different components: cognitive empathy (perspective taking) and affective empathy. Cognitive empathy implies the ability of understanding the other’s feelings by acknowledging their mental state, while affective empathy entails feeling what the other person is feeling (Batson, 2009).

As previously mentioned, hate speech has very strong and negative consequences, on the speakers of such language, on the victims subjected to it but also on the bystanders of such dynamics. To counteract some, if not most, of these consequences, empathy has been used as a strategy to elicit more positive feelings (Mathew et al., 2019). When elicited, empathy can increase the willingness to help and support others in need even if they are part of the outgroup (Batson, 2009; Batson & Ahmad, 2009; Stephan & Finlay, 1999). Empathy is easy and low cost to induce, two clear examples are books and movies; it can be vicariously elicited, which is an important point for this research. Empathy sparks altruistic motivations and mobilizes people in prosocial actions; and finally, it does not limit its effects on the single stigmatized subject, but it has the potential power to generalize to the entire group (Batson et al., 1997; Dziobek & Keller, 2013). Importantly, empathy is also a powerful tool for online interactions. Research shows that empathy reduces the inclination to spread hateful content and even increases the tendency to report it (Barlińska et al., 2013, 2015, 2018).

It has been shown that media has the ability of creating shared representations of others which then influence attitudes, behaviours and emotions (Quinsaas, 2014). This kind of contact done through social media is called mediated or vicarious contact, and research has shown that, if the content reported regarding the outgroup is negative, it will affect the readers' and viewers' perception of the others in a negative way (Visintin et al., 2017). Empathy is, in fact, one of the key psychological mechanisms that explain the positive effects of contact, both direct and indirect, by improving attitudes and behaviours towards the outgroup (Di Bernardo et al., 2017; Cocco et al., 2022)

This is in line with the general counter speech framework proposed by Benesch which highlights that “increasing empathy with members of other groups counteracts incitement, since it makes it difficult to see other people as subhuman” (2014, p.13). Indeed, recent research showed that both direct and indirect (vicarious) forms of contact (i.e., attending a workshop with a refugee guest and observation of contact between an ingroup member and an outgroup member) reduced hate speech proliferation and increased sensitivity to hate speech, precisely through increased empathy (Soral et al., 2022). Importantly, whereas empathy induced by direct contact was effective in both increasing sensitivity to hate speech and increased support to prohibit or use hate speech, empathy induced vicariously was less effective and did not impact the intention to ban hate speech (Soral et al., 2022). In line with these findings, research that employed a communicating bot that automatically created messages highlighting descriptive norms (disapproval message), prescriptive norms (abstract norm-inducing message), and empathy (empathizing message) in response to hate speech online, successfully managed to reduce the amount of verbal aggression posted by Reddit accounts (Bilewicz et al., 2021).

One effective way to sensitize people is, in fact, inducing empathy: some studies have used empathy in interventions aimed at tackling online hatred and cyberbullying, showing that subjects in whom empathy had been aroused tended to share the hateful content less and reported it more often compared to control groups (Barlińska, Szuster, & Winiewski, 2013, 2015, 2018). In sum, empathy, induced in different forms (e.g., via direct and indirect contact) has been shown to positively impact intergroup attitudes, emotions and also to be an effective strategy to reduce the detrimental consequences of hate speech.

Besides empathy, research has also suggested the other psychological factors that can impact hate speech, such as norms (Bilewicz et al., 2021), and affiliation (Mathew, 2019)

## **Affiliation**

Affiliation is, according to Byrne "...establishing, maintaining, or restoring a positive affective relationship with another person or group of people" (1961, p.660). Being part of an ingroup can be considered part of the fundamental needs of a human being, and affiliation has many basic benefits like offering protection, resources and general well-being (Buss, 1990, 1991; Duncan et al., 2007). Affiliation, intended as the "need to belong", is characterized by the frequent contact with the other and a (perceived) stable relationship, and it has implications for other psychological constructs. The need for belongingness influences behaviour in such a way that people seek to establish strong and lasting relationships. In doing so it also influences emotion (e.g., creating social bond creates positive emotions in the individual), and cognition by prompting people to interpret situations and events according to their implications for their relationships (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Another face of the coin, but that will not be considered in this research, is the "need for affiliation". Murray (1983), who coined the term, considered the need for affiliation as a personality characteristic that varied among people, and associated with other characteristics, would make up to a wide range of personalities (e.g., an individual high in the need for affiliation and high in need for nurturance would result very kind, but high in the need for affiliation and high in the need for deference would be extremely compliant). In addition to its positive effects on well-being and influence on people's characteristics, affiliation in the sense of being part of an ingroup also provides norms to guide the individual beliefs and behaviours (Turner et al., 1987). Indeed, norms shape attitudes and behaviours, and research on collective action shows that strong social norms may have the ability to push the community to act against hate speech, especially among who supports these norms and regards hate speech as unjust (van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008). People tend to give more credit to those who are part of their ingroup, and this is also true when it comes to counter discourse since they consider such sources to be more trustworthy, honest, loyal, cooperative, and valuable to the group, as mentioned in the counter speech section above (Kane, Argote, and Levine 2005). It can therefore be inferred from the research that once affiliation is elicited and made prominent, people will be more inclined to listen to those in their group and thus be more compliant to the norms that are highlighted in that moment by their ingroup fellow. Supporting this idea in a study by Mathew and colleagues, they reported an analysis of various types of counter speech regarding different targeted communities (Jews, LGBTQ+, African-American),



showing that affiliation appears to be effective in changing the stance of the hate speaker (2019).

In sum, considering previous research suggests that both empathy and affiliation can be used as counter speech strategies, in the current study we aimed at comparing its impact, relative to a control condition, focusing specifically on the online context.

### **3. The present study**

The current study aims at adding further insights to the hate speech/counter speech research. Building on the reviewed research, we examined whether certain types of counter speech are effective in increasing sensitivity to hate speech, as well as increasing empathy, support for welcoming migration policies and overall openness towards migrants. More precisely, the current research examined whether counter speech messages inducing affiliation (using a positive tone) or empathy, relative to a control condition, will trigger increased sensitivity to hate speech, increased empathy, and increased support for welcoming policies and openness towards migrants of the Mediterranean route. Importantly, when examining the effects of empathy and affiliation counter speech messages we will account for the potential impact of political orientation since it has been shown that leftist tend to be generally more positive and welcoming towards migrants, compared to right wing supporters (Dixon et al., 2018).

In line with previous research, we hypothesized that: participants in the empathy and affiliation conditions, relative to those in the control condition, would show higher sensitivity to hate speech, more empathy, more openness to welcoming migrants and less support for closed migration policies (H1).

## Chapter II – Methods

### 1. Participants and Procedure

Participants were recruited using convenience/snowball sampling via different social media platforms and word-of-mouth. They were selected according to the following criteria: they had to be Italian, identify themselves as such, and 18 years of age or older. Sample size was determined with G-Power assuming small effect size. In order to detect an effect of  $\eta^2 p = .10$  with 80% power in a one-way between subjects ANOVA (three groups,  $\alpha = .05$ ), G\*Power suggests we would have needed 323 participants in each group ( $N = 969$ ). A total of 1263 respondents was collected and after disregarding the incomplete profiles the final analysis sample was composed of 890 participants, of which 614 women, 236 men and 40 “other”, age ranging from 18 to 99 ( $M = 42,11$ ,  $SD = 15,49$ ).

All materials were subjected to ethical approval by ISCTE Ethical Committee (56/2022). A link to an online questionnaire on Qualtrics was sent to all participants. The first page of the questionnaire contained an informed consent briefly explaining the research, without disclosing the entire purpose of it, stated the anonymity, voluntariness, and confidentiality of the participation. We also provided information about the possible psychological discomfort of reading some of the study materials. If participants accepted to take part in the research, they were firstly asked to reply to some sociodemographic questions, then randomly exposed to one of three conditions of the experiment that involved carefully reading a fictional Facebook post and its comments and reply to different questions measuring sensitivity to hate speech, empathy, openness towards migrants, migration policy making opinion and control questions. The specific measures and manipulations will be presented in the following sections.

At the end of the survey participants were debriefed with a very detailed explanation of the study procedure, and of the detrimental impacts of hate speech for victims and bystanders. We followed APA Code of Conduct recommendation to offer reasonable steps to correct any misconceptions that participants may have of which the researchers are aware, and of personal and external contacts for people to address any unpleasant experiences/outcomes related to the study. We provide both the researcher email and different websites either to report racial discrimination incidents (UNAR - Ufficio Nazionale Antidiscriminazione Razziale), or to learn more about the dangerous consequences of hate speech and how to counteract it (Gagliardone et al., 2015; United Nations General Assembly on Promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, 2019).

## 2. Materials and Measures

All the scales were retrieved in English and later translated in Italian by the researcher, and some of them adapted to the specific target discussed (migrants in Italy). A specific explanation of the use of the term *migrant(s)* was provided in the questionnaire after the sociodemographic section and the rest of the survey to allow a better understanding of that concept. The definition given was: “migrant refers to anyone fleeing from their country via the Mediterranean route”. It was inspired by the definition given by the International Organization for Migration: “an umbrella term, not defined under international law, reflecting the common lay understanding of a person who moves away from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons.” (*Who is a migrant?*, n.d.)

***Sociodemographic questions.*** The demographic data was assessed through self-assessing questions which were the following: Age, Nationality, National identification with 7-point scale (from 1=*strongly disagree* to 7=*strongly agree*) measuring the statement “I identify with Italian people”, Gender, Political Orientation with 7-point scale (from 1=*left* to 7=*right*) answering to the question about where the subject would place him/herself politically, *Yes* or *No* question about whether they use social media to get news about Italy and, if *Yes*, how often on a scale from 1=*rarely* to 5=*always*, and finally a multiple choice question listing different social media from which the subject usually gets update on the news.

***Sensitivity to hate speech.*** Based on Soral and colleagues (2018), we used six examples of hostile language towards migrants were asked to be evaluated on a 7-point scale (from 1=*extremely inoffensive* to 7=*extremely offensive*,  $\alpha = .92$ ) in order to evaluate sensitivity to hate speech. Higher values indicate a higher sensitivity to hate speech.

***Empathy.*** Empathy toward migrants was measured with the scale developed by Soral and colleagues ( $\alpha = .82$ ,  $M = 4.51$ ,  $SD = 1.16$ ) that measured both perspective-taking and empathic concern (i.e., affective empathy) towards refugees (2022). In the current study the label “refugee” was replaced with “migrant”. Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with the six statements using a 7-point scale (ranging from 1=*definitely disagree* to 7=*definitely agree*), with the higher values indicating higher empathy towards migrants.

***Openness towards welcoming migrants.*** To assess participants’ openness towards welcoming migrants in Italy we asked the question “Italy should welcome migrants arriving

from the Mediterranean route” which was replied on a scale from 1=*strongly disagree* to 7=*strongly agree*, which was taken from Captari and colleagues (2019).

***Support for restrictive migration policies.*** We adapted the nine items by Reijerse and colleagues (2015). Subjects were questioned about preferences regarding immigration policy, citizenship policy and integration policy through a 7-point scale (1=*strongly disagree* to 7=*strongly agree*,  $\alpha = .89$ ). Higher values indicate a stronger support for policies that do not allow easy entry for migrants to Italy.

The questions were displayed in the following manner: after the informed consent the sociodemographic questions were presented in the same order for all participants, then one of the three manipulations, the remaining scales were then presented in a randomized way, finally followed by the debriefing.

### ***Manipulation checks***

Manipulation checks consisted of three different questions. One question assessing empathy (“How much empathy do you feel for migrants who arrive in Italy”) on a 7-point scale (1= *none* to 7= *a lot*), higher values indicating higher empathy. Two questions assessing affiliation (“I can acknowledge the opinions of people who post hateful content” and “I can see some commonalities or shared features with people who post hateful content”) on a 7-point scale (1= *not at all* to 7= *very much*), higher values indicating higher affiliation with the hate speaker.

### **3. Manipulation.**

The manipulation consisted of a Facebook post inspired by real comments found online. The post was made of an image taken from Ansa, the Italian national associated press agency, depicting the Sea Watch 3 and Ocean Viking, two humanitarian non-governmental ships dedicated to the search and rescue in the Mediterranean region, with migrants on board and the headline stating: “Migrants: more rescues, now 800 on Ocean Viking and Sea Watch 3”. A fictional conversation was created based on the rules of the *golden conversation* (Wright et al., 2017, p. 58-59), as explained in the literature review, following an A-B-A structure, in which A was the hate speaker stating the following in each of the three conditions (control, empathy and affiliation): “This is a Muslim invasion! They should stay at their place, they are just criminals that want to come to Italy to live the good life. They should be left at sea.” And the last comment from A was a recantation of the hateful position and promise of delating the

previous statement (“You are right...my sorry for the hateful comment, I will delete it.”). B contained an example of counter speech in two of three conditions, empathy and affiliation, highlighting each and only these constructs. The control condition included the first comment by A and nothing more.

The content of the hateful comment was inspired by real comments found under a Facebook post by Matteo Salvini, the leader of Lega which is a right-wing anti-immigration Italian party, who used the same image on August 2<sup>nd</sup> 2021.

The comments expressing counter speech (B), were inspired by the research previously reviewed in this paper that highlights the efficacy of empathy and affiliation against hate speech (Batson & Ahmad, 2009; Soral et al., 2022; Kane, Argote, and Levine 2005). To elicit empathy case B stated: “Hi A, sorry to hear that you see it this way. So many of these people are fleeing from terrible life situations, they are just seeking refuge. Leaving them at sea would mean condemning them to certain death, not only men but also women, children and the elderly. Imagine if it were your own family. If there was an ongoing war in Italy or you were starving, you too would want to find a safe place.” In affiliation condition the message read: “As an Italian and a Christian like you I understand your fears A. But as religion teaches us, to welcome the other is a great act of faith and kindness. And remember that not all migrants are Muslims, there are also many Christian brothers among them. Be careful what you write online, for comments like this we Italians are seen as disrespectful of European values of human rights and dignity. We Italians are better than this!”

### Chapter III – Results

The latest version of the statistics-software IBM SPSS Statistics (28) was used to test the hypotheses and for the exploratory analyses.

#### *Preliminary analyses – manipulation checks*

First, to test the efficacy of our manipulation we ran three one-way between-subjects ANOVA with the three conditions as independent variables (empathy, affiliation, control), and the three manipulation checks as dependent variables. The first ANOVA examined differences in the empathy manipulation check (“How much empathy do you feel for migrants who arrive in Italy?”) ( $F(3, 882) = .21, p = .89, \eta^2 = .001$ ). Contrary to expectations, there was no significant effect of the experimental condition, and empathy scores did not differ between conditions (see Table 1). Similar findings were found for the other two manipulation checks. Regarding the affiliation items: “I can acknowledge the opinions of people who post hateful content” or affiliation knowledge ( $F(2, 695) = .69, p = .50, \eta^2 = .006$ ), and “I can see some commonalities or shared features with people who post hateful content” or affiliation commonalities ( $F(2, 839) = 2.80, p = .06, \eta^2 = .002$ ). As presented in Table 2, there were no differences between conditions, suggesting that our manipulation of affiliation was not successful.

**Table 1**

*Means and Standard Deviations on Empathy Manipulation Check as a Function of Condition*

Condition	<i>n</i>	Empathy score	
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Empathy	290	4.90	1.53
Affiliation	290	4.87	1.51
Control	305	4.98	1.56
Total	885	4.92	1.53

**Table 2***Means and Standard Deviations on the Measures of Affiliation as a Function of Condition*

Condition	<i>n</i>	Affiliation Knowledge score	
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Empathy	279	3.58	2.35
Affiliation	272	3.58	2.31
Control	291	3.98	2.37
Total	842	3.71	2.35

Condition	<i>n</i>	Affiliation Commonalities score	
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Empathy	226	2.32	1.90
Affiliation	229	2.17	1.76
Control	243	2.37	1.84
Total	698	2.29	1.83

***Main analyses***

We conducted 4 One-way ANCOVAs with Condition (empathy, affiliation and control) as a between subject factor, and sensitivity to hate speech, empathy, closed policies and openness towards welcoming migrants, as dependent variables, while controlling for political orientation<sup>1</sup>.

Results showed that, contrary to the hypothesized (H1) there was no significant main effect of the experimental conditions on sensitivity to hate Speech ( $F(2, 878) = 1.97, p = .14, \eta^2 = .004$ ), empathy ( $F(2, 877) = .10, p = .91, \eta^2 = .000$ ), closed policies ( $F(2, 879) = 1.42, p =$

<sup>1</sup> Since Age and Gender correlated with other variables (see Table 4) we ran a 4 One-way ANCOVAs with Condition (Empathy, Affiliation and Control) as a between subject factor, and Sensitivity to Hate Speech, Empathy, Closed Policies and Openness Towards Welcoming Migrants, as dependent variables, while controlling for Political Orientation, Age and Gender. Results showed no significant changes from the one reported in the Main analyses (see Table 3); therefore, it was not reported in the paper.

.24,  $\eta^2 = .003$ ), and openness ( $F(2, 876) = 1.46, p = .23, \eta^2 = .003$ ) (Table 3). Thus, we can conclude that, Hypothesis 1 was not supported.

**Table 3**

Dependent Variables:	<i>Sensitivity to Hate Speech</i>	<i>Empathy</i>	<i>Closed Policies</i>	<i>Openness</i>
Condition	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>
Empathy	5.73 (1.56)	5.01 (0.98)	3.15 (1.22)	4.97 (1.82)
Affiliation	5.74 (1.41)	5.02 (0.99)	3.18 (1.23)	5.08 (1.70)
Control	5.90 (1.40)	4.99 (1.03)	3.08 (1.27)	4.92 (1.87)
Total	5.79 (1.46)	5.00 (1.00)	3.14 (1.24)	4.99 (1.79)



### *Exploratory analyses*

Zero-order correlations between the variables of interest were then examined (see Table 4).

Of all correlations we were particularly interested in exploring the association between self-reported empathy (the manipulation check) as well as affiliation commonalities and affiliation knowledge (manipulation checks) and our main outcomes of interest.

As expected, empathy was positively and significantly correlated to sensitivity to hate speech, openness, and negatively and significantly associated with closed policies. That is higher levels of empathy towards migrants was related to increased sensitivity hate speech, increased openness to welcoming migrants, as well as to reduced support for closed migration policies. Self-reported affiliation knowledge was only significantly related to empathy, but not to our main outcome variables. Unexpectedly, affiliation commonalities was negatively and significantly related to sensitivity to hate speech and openness towards migrants, and positively related to support for closed policies. That is the more participants reported commonalities with the speaker, the lower their Sensitivity to hate speech, the lower their openness towards welcoming migrants and the more they supported closed migration policies.

**Table 4**

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Sensitivity to Hate Speech	5.79	1.45	-										
2. Empathy	5.00	1.01	.334**	-									
3. Closed Policies	3.14	1.24	-.570**	-.472**	-								
4. Openness	4.99	1.79	.524**	.426**	-.779**	-							
5. EmpathyMCheck	4.92	1.53	.470**	.558**	-.672**	.627**	-						
6. AffiliationKnow	3.74	2.35	.007	.082*	-.003	-.023	.089**	-					
7. AffiliationComm	2.32	1.85	-.130**	-.067	.155**	-.189**	-.129**	.391**	-				
8. Use of SocialMedia	1.22	0.41	-.017	-.051	.046	-.065	-.074*	-.066*	-.013	-			
9. Age	42.11	15.50	-.122**	.101**	.183**	-.198**	-.162**	.070*	-.025	.076*	-		
10. Gender	.72	.45	.029	.102**	-.010	.013	.113**	-.021	-.042	-.031	.087*	-	
11. Political Orientation	3.32	1.62	-.443**	-.355**	.676**	-.554**	-.501**	.006	.121**	.036	.032	-.085**	-

*Note.* \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

*Note.* Gender was coded as a dummy variable, 0 = Male, 1 = Female

## Chapter IV – Discussion

Italy has been one of the main docking points for migrants' boats, whether led by NGO or smugglers, since the beginning of the refugee crisis (International Rescue Committee, s.d.). Along with the growth of migrants' arrivals, their presence in the public debate has also increased. The annual analysis of the Italian media content done by Carta di Roma proves, year after year, that this minority group is one of the major targets of hate speech in the country (Milazzo, 2020). One platform that appears to have the most detrimental results by carrying hateful content is social media such as Twitter and Facebook (Kuzawińska et al., 2018; Bianchi, Piccoli, Zotti, Fasoli, & Carnaghi, 2017; Soral, Bilewicz, Winiewski, & Bulska, 2020; Castaño-Pulgarín et al., 2021). Considering the increase in online hate speech targeting migrants, and the well know consequences of being the target of hate speech (Bąkowski, 2022; Soral et al., 2018) it is important to understand and examine possible tools to reduce it. The current study tested the impact of two forms of counter speech: empathy and affiliation on sensitivity to hate speech, empathy, closed policies, and openness towards welcoming migrants.

Overall, contrary to the hypothesized, our findings did not show any impact of our manipulations on the outcomes of interest. Specifically, contrary to previous research showing that induced empathy increased sensitivity to hate speech (Soral et al., 2022), in the current study we found no differences in participants reported empathy, sensitivity to hate or attitudes towards welcoming migrants and support for restrictive migration policies exposed to the empathy counter speech. The same pattern of findings was found for the affiliation condition, with no differences emerging between this and the control or empathy conditions. When examining the manipulation checks, it is clear that the scenarios were not effective at triggering empathy or affiliation.

Thus, it seems reasonable to speculate that the lack of significant impact on the outcomes of interest were due to the inefficacy of the manipulations. Despite the fact that the used manipulation was based on previous research (Bilewicz & Soral, 2020) and real online material (Matteo Salvini's Facebook profile), it did not increase empathy nor affiliation, neither any of the expected outcomes. Recent research testing interventions inducing empathy using direct and indirect contact showed that the use of indirect, vicarious contact, was less impactful (Soral et al., 2022). That is, the intervention employing vicarious contact to improve empathy towards refugees and to examine the attitudes towards hate speech led to an increase in sensitivity to hate speech but did not affect intentions to ban its use, unlike the

intervention using direct contact which proved to be more successful doing so (Soral et al., 2022). Thus, we can speculate that the efficacy of vicarious interventions, such as the one used here may be less powerful and need to be administered more than once to boost its efficacy.

Another possible explanation for the lack of significant effects of the manipulation of empathy is the fact that self-reported empathy was quite high in all conditions, and this could be related to the composition of the sample: 69% women. Research shows that women, compared to men, are less accepting of hate speech and tend to hold the speaker accountable more often than men do, and being taught to be more sensitive since infancy it is more likely for them to empathize with the victims of hateful content (McClelland & Hunter, 1992; Cowan & Hodge, 1996; Inman & Baron, 1996; Cowan & Mettrick, 2002; Cowan, Resendez, Marshall, & Quist, 2002; Cowan & Khatchadourian, 2003).

On the other hand, self-reported affiliation with the hate speaker was rather low in both manipulation checks. This could be related with the content of the manipulation and how affiliation was induced: the counter speech priming affiliation leveraged on religion and “Italianness”, which may not be the most significant points that form the identity of the Italian sample. Alternatively, it could also be related to characteristic of the convenience sample. Indeed, the majority of participants positioned themselves towards the left. As the sample is mostly composed of left-wingers which are known to be more open and welcoming towards migrants (Dixon et al., 2018), one could speculate that it was harder for them to associate themselves with the hate speaker.

Overall, considering the lack of significant effects it is crucial that future research further examines the impact of counter speech messages aimed at eliciting empathy and affiliation, using different procedures and more balanced samples.

As the main analysis reported no significant effects, we conducted some exploratory analysis.

As expected, political orientation negatively correlated with openness, empathy, supporting the idea that subjects that tend towards the left politically are prone to be more overall welcoming and accepting of migrants (Dixon et al., 2018). Being politically oriented towards the left was also associated with sensitivity to hate speech meaning that they also better recognize hate speech and condemn it as offensive and abusive. These results are in line with previous research. For instance, Rasmussen found that “people on the left displayed a higher willingness to restrict hate speech particularly at the higher levels of severity and for

some target groups” (2022, p.24). Additionally, these findings are also in line with a framework that sees hate speech as a generator of intolerance and discrimination, indeed left-wingers show particular intolerance for people that threaten others’ rights (Crawford, 2017), and show stronger negative emotions in the face of moral violations compared to right wing people (Walter and Redlawsk, 2019).

Importantly, as expected, self-reported empathy as well as the empathy manipulation check were positively associated with the main outcomes of interest (sensitivity to hate speech, empathy, closed policies, and openness towards welcoming migrants). This is in line with previous research showing that empathy can increase the willingness to help and support both ingroup and outgroup members in need (Batson, 2009; Batson & Ahmad, 2009; Stephan & Finlay, 1999), it sparks altruistic motivations and mobilizes people in prosocial actions (Dziobek & Keller, 2013), and it reduces hate speech proliferation and increase sensitivity to hate speech (Soral et al., 2022).

However, these exploratory correlational analyses showed a surprising pattern of relations between affiliation and the main outcomes of interest. Indeed, whereas the aim to induce affiliation in the experiment was to positively increase sensitivity to hate speech, openness and empathy, self-reported commonalities with the speaker were associated with less sensitivity to hate speech, less openness and less empathy manipulation check, but positively to support for closed policies. This could be related to the idea that affiliation is a very complex and multidimensional construct, and it is driven by the desire of different social rewards such as positive affect or stimuli associated with interpersonal closeness and fellowship, attention or appreciation, reduction of negative affects through social contact, and social comparison (Hill, 1987). Social comparison may help interpreting our results since it entails seeking information about opinions and beliefs, in this study the ones on migrants. When it comes to a relevant matter to oneself, when there is no objective input that can help in the creation of a personal opinion, people rely on ingroup’s peers to form one (Festinger, 1954). The people’s tendency to conform to the ingroup and its norms is then an obvious consequence of affiliation, and, in this case, affiliation with the hate speaker entails lowering one’s own sensitivity to hate speech, and to be less empathic and open towards migrants.

## **Limitations and future research**

As already mentioned, one limitation was the unbalanced nature of the sample, where there was an over representation of women and left-wing participants, which have likely influenced the results. Future research should use a more balanced sample that best represents the Italian population at the time of the research.

Since hate speech has been proved to worsen its negative effects on people that are more often subjected to it (Soral, Bilewicz, Winiewski, & Bulska, 2020), this effect might reciprocate when it comes to frequent exposure to counter speech. Therefore, it would be interesting to see whether results would change if the experiment exposed the subjects to multiple examples of hate speech tackled by counter speech (e.g., multiple Facebook posts instead of only one like in the present study). Considering the lack of efficacy of the manipulations, it is important to further test different ways to induce empathy and affiliation in counter speech messages. For instance, change the content of the manipulations by highlighting affective empathy but not cognitive empathy (Batson, 2009), since it might be hard for Italians to put themselves in the shoes of a migrant crossing the Mediterranean Sea. Further research should be conducted to find better ways to prime affiliation in the Italian population since, as previously noted, arguments about religion and the feeling of being Italian, may not have been perceived as representing “Italianness”.

As referred, due to its complexity, affiliation is very hard to induce and manipulate, because it is hard to control with whom to affiliate (hate speaker or counter speaker). Based on Kane and colleagues’ findings that suggest that people tend to trust more in their ingroups (2005), we propose that future research could also control for that, maybe by asking “do you affiliate more with speaker A or speaker B?”, A being the hate speaker and B the counter speaker.

Benesch and colleagues (2016) identified, in their study of Twitter users, four different dynamics, or vectors as they call them, that distinguish the quality of the interactions on the base of how many people are involved: One-to-one; One-to-many; Many-to-one; Many-to-many. The outcomes of employing any of these structures are uncertain, therefore it would be interesting to test which one(s) may have a more successful impact in countering hate speech online.

The use of a different experimental design using a pre-test/post-test could also be a good option to reduce the error associated with between-subject designs and offer a more accurate look at the impact of the manipulation within individuals.

Finally, an important demographic characteristic: education level, was by mistake not included in the questionnaire. Education has been shown to affect attitudes towards migrants (Haegel, 1999). The level of education is usually associated with people's attitudes towards social matters: well-educated people tend to hold more open-minded views, be more supportive of equality and more tolerant of racial differences (Apostle et al. 1983; Hyman and Sheatsley 1964; Hyman and Wright 1979; Hyman, Wright, and Reed 1975; Quinley and Glock 1979; Schuman et al. 1997). However, other studies suggest that high-educated Whites are no more prone to support egalitarian policies compared to less-educated ones, arguing that education is just a tool for majoritarian groups to be aware of social differences and gives them the tools to stay at the top of that hierarchy (Jackman 1978; Jackman and Muha 1984; Schuman et al. 1997). Thus, it would have been important to check whether well-educated and less-educated Italian people were more or less prone to help and empathize with migrants, more or less sensitive towards hate speech, and control for education level when testing our experimental effects. It would certainly be interesting to investigate into which of the two theories the Italian population lies.

## **Chapter V – Conclusion**

The present study examined whether counter speech messages inducing affiliation (using a positive tone) or empathy, relative to a control condition, triggered increased sensitivity to hate speech, increased empathy, and increased support for welcoming policies and openness towards migrants of the Mediterranean route. Overall, our results were inconclusive showing no impact of the two counter speech messages. Yet, they highlighted some interesting correlations suggesting that induced affiliation and, specifically, self-reported commonalities with the hate speaker were not beneficial for sensitivity to hate speech, openness and empathy but actually were associated with detrimental consequences (lower empathy, lower sensitivity, etc.). This points out the complexity of affiliation and the need to deepen the research on it and its use as counter speech strategy. This research advances the little existing social psychological research on hate speech and counter speech, highlighting the need to further examine what social psychological factors can be used, how to manipulate them and their potential effects.



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## **Appendix A – Informed consent**

### INFORMED CONSENT – English version

This study is part of a thesis research project taking place at Iscte – Instituto Universitário de Lisboa. The study aims to evaluate people's perceptions and beliefs towards social media content. The study is conducted by Matilde Devitini (mabmd@iscte-iul.pt), who you may contact to clear up any doubts or share comments. Your participation in the study, which is highly valued as it will contribute to the advancement of knowledge in this field of science, consists of reading some social media content (i.e., Facebook posts and the comments underneath) and answer to some questions. It will take no more than 10 minutes. There are no expected significant risks associated with participation in the study, but some social media content may include strong content that can potentially cause some discomfort for some participants. If that happens you can contact the research team. Participation in the study is strictly voluntary: you may choose freely whether to participate or not to participate. If you have decided to participate, you may stop your participation at any time, without having to provide any justification. In addition to being voluntary, your participation is also anonymous and confidential. The obtained data are merely intended for statistical processing and none of the answers will be analysed or reported individually. At no point of the study will you be asked to identify yourself.

I declare that I have understood the aims of what was proposed to me, as explained by the investigator, that I was given the opportunity to ask any questions about this study and received a clarifying reply to all such questions and accept participating in the study.

I accept

I deny

## CONSENSO INFORMATO – Italian version

Questo studio fa parte di un progetto di ricerca di tesi che si svolge presso l'Iscte - Instituto Universitário de Lisboa. Lo studio mira a valutare le percezioni e le convinzioni delle persone nei confronti dei contenuti dei social media. Lo studio è condotto da Matilde Devitini (mabmd@iscte-iul.pt), che potete contattare per chiarire eventuali dubbi o condividere commenti. La vostra partecipazione allo studio, che è molto apprezzata in quanto contribuirà all'avanzamento delle conoscenze in questo campo scientifico, consiste nella lettura di alcuni contenuti dei social media (cioè i post di Facebook e i commenti sottostanti) e nella risposta ad alcune domande. Non ci vorranno più di 10 minuti. Non sono previsti rischi significativi associati alla partecipazione allo studio, ma alcuni contenuti dei social media possono includere contenuti forti che possono causare disagio ad alcuni partecipanti. In tal caso, è possibile contattare il team di ricerca. La partecipazione allo studio è strettamente volontaria: potete scegliere liberamente se partecipare o meno. Se ha deciso di partecipare, può interrompere la sua partecipazione in qualsiasi momento, senza dover fornire alcuna giustificazione. Oltre a essere volontaria, la vostra partecipazione è anche anonima e confidenziale. I dati ottenuti sono destinati esclusivamente all'elaborazione statistica e nessuna delle risposte sarà analizzata o riportata individualmente. In nessun momento dello studio le verrà chiesto di identificarsi.

Dichiaro di aver compreso gli obiettivi di quanto mi è stato proposto, come spiegato dallo sperimentatore, di aver avuto la possibilità di porre qualsiasi domanda su questo studio e di aver ricevuto una risposta chiarificatrice a tutte le domande e di accettare di partecipare allo studio.

Accetto

Nego la partecipazione

## Appendix B – Questionnaire English version

### Sociodemographic

Age (please use numbers to represent years)

Nationality

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statement:

“I identify with Italian people”

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Somewhat disagree 4. Neither agree nor disagree  
5. Somewhat agree 6. Agree 7. Strongly agree

Please indicate the gender you identify with:

Woman

Man

I identify my gender as (please specify):

In politics people sometimes talk of “left” and “right”.

Where would you place yourself on this scale, where 1 means the left and 7 means the right?

Left							Right	Don't know
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	77	

Do you ever use social media to get news about Italy?

Yes

No

How often?

Rarely							Always
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

On which social media do you gather your information from?

- Facebook
- Instagram
- Twitter
- LinkedIn
- Youtube
- Other

### **Introduction to next task**

Next you will see different posts taken from Facebook about migrants in Italy. Migrants refers to anyone fleeing from their country via the Mediterranean route.

Please read carefully the entire content shown, further questions will be asked after.

### **Facebook posts**

Empathy condition:

User A: This is a Muslim invasion! They should stay at their place, they are just criminals that want to come to Italy to live the good life. They should be left at sea.

User Z: Hello A, I am sorry you see it this way. A lot of these people are actually running away from horrible situations, they are just looking for refuge.

User B: Z is right, try to put yourself in their shoes: if there was a continuous war in Italy or you were starving, you would want to find a safe place as well.

User Y: Leaving them at sea would mean to condemn them to certain death, they are not only men but women, children and elders. Think if it was your family.

User A: You are right...my sorry for the hateful comment, I will delete it.

Affiliation condition:

User A: This is a Muslim invasion! They should stay at their place, they are just criminals that want to come to Italy to live the good life. They should be left at sea.

User Z: As an Italian and Christian like you I understand your fears A. But as our religion teaches us, welcome the other who is in trouble is the greatest form of faith and kindness.

User B: A, non all migrants are Muslims, there are a lot of Christians among them.



User Y: Beware of what you write online. Because of comments like these Italians are seen disrespecting European values of human rights and dignity. We Italians are better than this.

User A: You are right...my sorry for the hateful comment, I will delete it.

Control condition:

User A: This is a Muslim invasion! They should stay at their place, they are just criminals that want to come to Italy to live the good life. They should be left at sea.

Empathy condition:

# Migranti: altri soccorsi, ora 800 su Ocean Viking e Sea Watch 3



👍 Mi piace

💬 Commenta

**Utente A**

Questa è un'invasione musulmana! Ma che stiano a casa loro, sono solo criminali che vogliono venire a fare la bella vita in Italia. Andrebbero lasciati in mare.

Mi piace Rispondi Visualizza traduzione 3 g

**Utente Z**

Ciao A, mi dispiace sapere che tu la veda così. Tante di queste persone stanno in realtà scappando da situazioni di vita terribili, cercano solo un rifugio.

Mi piace Rispondi 3 g

**Utente B**

Ha ragione Z, prova a metterti nei loro panni: se ci fosse una guerra continua in Italia o stessi facendo la fame, vorresti anche tu trovare un posto sicuro.

Mi piace Rispondi Visualizza traduzione 3 g

**Utente Y**

Lasciarli in mare significa condannarli a morte certa, non solo uomini ma anche donne, bambini e anziani. Pensa se si trattasse della tua famiglia.

Mi piace Rispondi Visualizza traduzione 3 g

**Utente A**

Avete ragione...mi scuso per il commento odioso, lo cancello.

Mi piace Rispondi Visualizza traduzione 3 g

izza un altro commento


Scrivi un commento...




Affiliation condition:

## Migranti: altri soccorsi, ora 800 su Ocean Viking e Sea Watch 3



 Mi piace

 Commenta

**Utente A**

Questa è un'invasione musulmana! Ma che stiano a casa loro, sono solo criminali che vogliono venire a fare la bella vita in Italia. Andrebbero lasciati in mare.

Mi piace Rispondi Visualizza traduzione 3 g

**Utente Z**

Da italiano e cristiano come te capisco i tuoi timori A. Ma come ci insegna la religione, accogliere l'altro in difficoltà è un grande atto di fede e bontà.

Mi piace Rispondi 3 g

**Utente B**

A, non tutti i migranti sono musulmani, ci sono anche tanti cristiani tra loro.

Mi piace Rispondi Visualizza traduzione 3 g

**Utente Y**

Attento a ciò che scrivi online. Per commenti come questi noi italiani siamo visti come irrispettosi dei valori dei diritti umani e di dignità Europei. Noi italiani siamo meglio di così.

Mi piace Rispondi Visualizza traduzione 3 g

**Utente A**

Avete ragione...mi scuso per il commento odioso, lo cancello.

Mi piace Rispondi Visualizza traduzione 3 g

izza un altro commento


Scrivi un commento...




Control condition:

# **Migranti: altri soccorsi, ora 800 su Ocean Viking e Sea Watch 3**



 Mi piace

 Commenta

**Utente A**

Questa è un'invasione musulmana! Ma che stiano a casa loro, sono solo criminali che vogliono venire a fare la bella vita in Italia. Andrebbero lasciati in mare.

Mi piace Rispondi Visualizza traduzione 3 q

## Sensitivity to hate speech

Q15

Please indicate to what extent you find the following statements offensive or inoffensive:

	Extremely inoffensive	Moderately inoffensive	Slightly inoffensive	Neither offensive nor inoffensive	Slightly offensive	Moderately offensive	Extremely offensive
"Migrants come to Italy and steal our jobs"	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
"Migrants rape/harass Italian women"	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
"The invasion has to stop, migrants should stay in their own countries"	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
"Migrants are all terrorists/criminals"	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
"Migrants illegally live thanks to our minimum income guaranteed by the state"	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
"Italians are suffering because of migrants' invasion"	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## Empathy

Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
If I heard that a migrant person was upset, and suffering in some way, I would also feel upset	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If I saw a migrant person being treated unfairly, I think I would feel angry at the way they were being treated	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If a migrant person I knew was feeling sad, I think that I would also feel sad	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe I have a good understanding of the way migrants view the world	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I think I could "put myself in migrants' shoes"	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I understand how it is to be a migrant in Italy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## Openness towards migrants

Q13

Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statement:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Italy should welcome migrants arriving from the Mediterranean route	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## Migration policy preference

To what extent do you agree with the following statements about migration issues?

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Overall, our country's migration policy is too open.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Generally, it is too easy for migrants to attain full citizenship in our country.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Our government should set strict rules and conditions, which must be met, before migrants can attain full citizenship.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would prefer migration to our country to decrease.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would support a migration policy that allows in very few migrants.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Our government should make more of an effort at integrating migrants into our society.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I think migrants should be offered a naturalization programme, but only on a voluntary basis.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I think our government should actively protect migrants against discrimination.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Our government should start up programmes, specifically for migrants, which help them to increase their chances of getting a job.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## Manipulation checks

Q17

Please answer to the following question on a scale from 1 - None to 7 - A lot

	1 - None						7 - A lot
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
How much empathy do you feel for migrants who arrive in Italy?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q18

Please answer to the following questions on a scale from 1 - Not at all to 7 - Very much

	1 - Not at all						7 - Very much
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I can acknowledge the opinions of people who post hateful content	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I can see some commonalities or shared features with people who post hateful content	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Debriefing

### DEBRIEFING/EXPLANATION OF THE RESEARCH

Thank you for having participated in this study. As indicated at the onset of your participation, the study is about perceptions and beliefs towards social media content. Specifically, the study tested different strategies to tackle online hate speech. We examined if exposing people to different counter speech examples, depicted in the Facebook post interactions, increased the sensitivity to hate speech, as well as empathy towards migrants and attitudes towards migration policies in Italy. To do so, we used a common procedure in psychological research, where some participants are randomly allocated to see different information. In this case, all participants saw a hateful comment that was retrieved from existing Facebook pages of openly anti-migrant profiles. Then, some did not see any reply to this hateful message (control condition), others saw different replies, highlighting empathy or affiliation. The goal was to examine if people who see these replies to hateful content become more sensitive to hate speech and more positive towards its victims.

It is crucial to highlight that hate speech has many negative consequences, and several studies show that exposure to hate speech can increase stereotypes, social distance from the minority and support for discriminatory policies (Winiewsky et al., 2016). It can promote dehumanization (Fasoli et al., 2016), mistrust in professionals belonging to stigmatized group (e.g., people that hold anti-Black beliefs would not hire a Black attorney) (Greenberg and Pyszczynski, 1985) and the repeated exposure to hate speech may negatively affect the sensitivity to it (Soral et al., 2018). If, after taking this survey, you perceive any of these effects or experience distress please use the contacts listed below to obtain support.

We remind that the following contact details can be used for any questions that you may have, comments that you wish to share, or to indicate your interest in receiving information about the main outcomes and conclusions of the study: Matilde Devitini (mabmd@iscte-iul.pt).

Are you a victim of discrimination yourself, know someone who may need support or want to learn more about racial discrimination? Consult UNAR (Racial Antidiscrimination National Office) at <https://unar.it/portale/>

If you want to know more about the detrimental consequences of hate speech and how to counter it: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000233231>

<https://www.undocs.org/Home/Mobile?FinalSymbol=A%2F74%2F486&Language=E&DeviceType=Desktop>

Once again, thank you for your participation.



## Questionnaire Italian version

### Sociodemografico

Età (insierire la cifra numerica)

Nazionalità

Indicare quanto si è d'accordo o meno con la seguente affermazione:

“Mi identifico con le persone Italiane”

1. Fortemente in disaccordo 2. In disaccordo 3. Più o meno in disaccordo 4. Né in disaccordo né d'accordo 5. Più o meno d'accordo 6. D'accordo 7. Fortemente d'accordo

Per favore, indicare il genere con cui ci si identifica:

Donna

Uomo

Mi identifico come (per favore specificare):

A volte in politica le persone parlano di “sinistra” e “destra”.

Dove vi collochereste in questa scala, dove 1 significa sinistra e 7 significa destra?

Sinistra							Destra	Non so
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	77	

Utilizza mai i social media per ottenere notizie sull'Italia?

Sì

No

Quanto spesso?

Raramente							Sempre
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

Su quali social media raccoglie le informazioni?

Facebook

Instagram

Twitter

LinkedIn

Youtube

Other

### **Introduzione al compito successivo**

A seguire vedrete diversi post tratti da Facebook sui migranti in Italia. Per migranti si intende chiunque fugga dal proprio paese attraverso la rotta del Mediterraneo.

Si prega di leggere attentamente l'intero contenuto mostrato, dopo verranno poste ulteriori domande.

## Post di Facebook

Condizione empatia:

# Migranti: altri soccorsi, ora 800 su Ocean Viking e Sea Watch 3



Mi piace

Commenta

**Utente A**

Questa è un'invasione musulmana! Ma che stiano a casa loro, sono solo criminali che vogliono venire a fare la bella vita in Italia. Andrebbero lasciati in mare.

Mi piace Rispondi Visualizza traduzione 3 g

**Utente Z**

Ciao A, mi dispiace sapere che tu la veda così. Tante di queste persone stanno in realtà scappando da situazioni di vita terribili, cercano solo un rifugio.

Mi piace Rispondi 3 g

**Utente B**

Ha ragione Z, prova a metterti nei loro panni: se ci fosse una guerra continua in Italia o stessi facendo la fame, vorresti anche tu trovare un posto sicuro.

Mi piace Rispondi Visualizza traduzione 3 g

**Utente Y**

Lasciarli in mare significa condannarli a morte certa, non solo uomini ma anche donne, bambini e anziani. Pensa se si trattasse della tua famiglia.

Mi piace Rispondi Visualizza traduzione 3 g

**Utente A**

Avete ragione...mi scuso per il commento odioso, lo cancello.

Mi piace Rispondi Visualizza traduzione 3 g


izza un altro commento


Scrivi un commento...



# Migranti: altri soccorsi, ora 800 su Ocean Viking e Sea Watch 3



 Mi piace

 Commenta

**Utente A**

Questa è un'invasione musulmana! Ma che stiano a casa loro, sono solo criminali che vogliono venire a fare la bella vita in Italia. Andrebbero lasciati in mare.

Mi piace Rispondi Visualizza traduzione 3 g

**Utente Z**

Da italiano e cristiano come te capisco i tuoi timori A. Ma come ci insegna la religione, accogliere l'altro in difficoltà è un grande atto di fede e bontà.

Mi piace Rispondi 3 g

**Utente B**

A, non tutti i migranti sono musulmani, ci sono anche tanti cristiani tra loro.

Mi piace Rispondi Visualizza traduzione 3 g

**Utente Y**

Attento a ciò che scrivi online. Per commenti come questi noi italiani siamo visti come irrispettosi dei valori dei diritti umani e di dignità Europei. Noi italiani siamo meglio di così.

Mi piace Rispondi Visualizza traduzione 3 g

**Utente A**

Avete ragione...mi scuso per il commento odioso, lo cancello.

Mi piace Rispondi Visualizza traduzione 3 g

izza un altro commento


Scrivi un commento...




Condizione controllo

# Migranti: altri soccorsi, ora 800 su Ocean Viking e Sea Watch 3



 Mi piace

 Commenta

**Utente A**

Questa è un'invasione musulmana! Ma che stiano a casa loro, sono solo criminali che vogliono venire a fare la bella vita in Italia. Andrebbero lasciati in mare.

Mi piace Rispondi Visualizza traduzione 3 q

## Sensibilità ai discorsi d'odio

Per favore indicare quanto si ritengono offensive o inoffensive le seguenti dichiarazioni:

	Estremamente inoffensivo	Moderatamente inoffensivo	Un po' inoffensivo	Né offensivo né inoffensivo	Un po' offensivo	Moderatamente offensivo	Estremamente offensivo
“I migranti vengono in Italia a rubarci il lavoro”	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
“I migranti stuprano/attaccano le donne italiane”	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
“L'invasione deve finire, i migranti devono stare nei loro paesi”	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
“I migranti sono tutti terroristi/criminali”	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
“I migranti vivono illegalmente grazie al reddito di cittadinanza”	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
“Gli italiani soffrono a causa dei migranti”	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## Empatia

Per favore indicare quanto si è d'accordo o in disaccordo con le seguenti dichiarazioni:

	Fortemente in disaccordo	In disaccordo	Un po' in disaccordo	Né d'accordo né in disaccordo	Un po' d'accordo	D'accordo	Fortemente d'accordo
Se sentissi che un migrante è turbato e soffre in qualche modo, mi sentirei anch'io turbato	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Se vedessi un migrante trattato ingiustamente, mi arrabbierei per il modo in cui viene trattato	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Se un migrante che conosco fosse triste, mi sentirei triste anche io	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Penso di avere una buona comprensione di come si senta un migrante	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Penso di potermi "mettere nei panni" di un migrante	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Capisco cosa significhi essere un migrante in Italia	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## Apertura verso i migranti

Per favore indicare quanto si è d'accordo o in disaccordo con la seguente dichiarazione:

	Fortemente in disaccordo	In disaccordo	Un po' in disaccordo	Né d'accordo né in disaccordo	Un po' d'accordo	D'accordo	Fortemente d'accordo
L'Italia dovrebbe accogliere i migranti che arrivano dalla rotta Mediterranea	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## Preferenze per politiche migratorie

Quanto si è d'accordo o in disaccordo con le seguenti dichiarazioni riguardo alle questioni migratori:

	Fortemente in disaccordo	In disaccordo	Un po' in disaccordo	Né d'accordo né in disaccordo	Un po' d'accordo	D'accordo	Fortemente d'accordo
Le politiche migratorie del nostro paese sono troppo aperte	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Generalmente, è troppo facile per i migranti ottenere la cittadinanza nel nostro paese	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Il nostro paese dovrebbe imporre regole e condizioni dure, prima che i migranti possano ottenere la cittadinanza	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Preferirei che le migrazioni nel nostro paese diminuissero	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Supporterei politiche migratorie che fanno entrare meno migranti	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Il governo dovrebbe fare uno sforzo per integrare i migranti nella società	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



Penso che ai migranti andrebbe offerto un programma di naturalizzazione, ma solo su base volontaria	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Penso che il governo dovrebbe attivamente proteggere i migranti dalla discriminazione	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Il governo dovrebbe creare dei programmi, specificamente per i migranti, che li aiutino a trovare un lavoro	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

### Controllo manipolazioni

Per favore risponda alla seguente domanda su una scala da 1 – Nessuna a 7 – Molta

1      2      3      4      5      6      7

Quanta empatia prova per i migranti che arrivano in Italia?

Per favore risponda alla seguente domanda su una scala da 1 – Per niente a 7 – Molto

1      2      3      4      5      6      7

Riconosco le opinioni delle persone che postano contenuti odiosi

Vedo alcune somiglianze o caratteristiche condivise con le persone che postano contenuti odiosi

## Debriefing

### DEBRIEFING/SPIEGAZIONE DELLA RICERCA

Grazie per aver partecipato a questo studio. Come indicato all'inizio della partecipazione, lo studio riguarda le percezioni e le convinzioni sui contenuti dei social media. In particolare, lo studio ha testato diverse strategie per affrontare il discorso dell'odio online. Abbiamo esaminato se esporre le persone a diversi esempi di contro-discorso, rappresentati nelle interazioni dei post di Facebook, aumentasse la sensibilità all'hate speech, nonché l'empatia verso i migranti e l'atteggiamento nei confronti delle politiche migratorie in Italia. Per farlo, abbiamo utilizzato una procedura comune nella ricerca psicologica, in cui alcuni partecipanti sono assegnati casualmente a vedere informazioni diverse. In questo caso, tutti i partecipanti hanno visto un commento odioso recuperato da pagine Facebook esistenti di profili apertamente anti-migranti. Poi, alcuni non hanno visto alcuna risposta a questo messaggio odioso (condizione di controllo), altri hanno visto risposte diverse, che evidenziavano l'empatia o l'affiliazione. L'obiettivo era quello di verificare se le persone che vedono queste risposte a contenuti odiosi diventano più sensibili ai discorsi d'odio e più positive nei confronti delle loro vittime.

È fondamentale sottolineare che i discorsi d'odio hanno molte conseguenze negative e diversi studi dimostrano che l'esposizione ai discorsi d'odio può aumentare gli stereotipi, la distanza sociale dalla minoranza e il sostegno alle politiche discriminatorie (Winiewsky et al., 2016). Può promuovere la disumanizzazione (Fasoli et al., 2016), la sfiducia nei professionisti appartenenti al gruppo stigmatizzato (ad esempio, le persone che hanno convinzioni anti-nere non assumono un avvocato nero) (Greenberg e Pyszczynski, 1985) e l'esposizione ripetuta ai discorsi d'odio può influenzare negativamente la sensibilità ad essi (Soral et al., 2018). Se, dopo aver partecipato a questo sondaggio, si percepisce uno di questi effetti o si prova disagio, si prega di utilizzare i contatti elencati di seguito per ottenere supporto.

Ricordiamo che i seguenti recapiti possono essere utilizzati per eventuali domande, commenti che si desidera condividere o per segnalare il proprio interesse a ricevere informazioni sui principali risultati e sulle conclusioni dello studio: Matilde Devitini (mabmd@iscte-iul.pt).

Siete vittime di discriminazione, conoscete qualcuno che potrebbe aver bisogno di sostegno o volete saperne di più sulla discriminazione razziale? Consultate l'UNAR (Ufficio Nazionale Antidiscriminazione Razziale) all'indirizzo <https://unar.it/portale/>.

Se volete saperne di più sulle conseguenze dannose dei discorsi d'odio e su come contrastarli: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000233231>

<https://www.undocs.org/Home/Mobile?FinalSymbol=A%2F74%2F486&Language=E&DeviceType=Desktop>

Ancora una volta, grazie per la vostra partecipazione.