

Social Research Call

Title: *Optimal counter-speech for Spanish adolescents: challenging racist hate in a national experiment*



Acronym: COUNTERACT

Project leader: Jehonathan Ben

Host organisation: Universidad Pontificia Comillas

Main purpose of the project: COUNTERACT will identify the most effective strategies for countering hate speech among Spanish adolescents. It will use these strategies to activate adolescents as upstanders in disrupting the 'license of silence' on online hate, and to enhance capacities to respond across schools and police units.

Design/methodology/approach: The project uses participatory co-design to create a novel national experiment with adolescents, educators and law enforcement. It bridges a gold-standard RCT with a culturally resonant co-creation approach anchored in the lived complexity of Spanish adolescents.

Potential results: COUNTERACT will generate robust evidence on which counter-speech strategies work best, for whom, and in which racist scenarios, including granular effects across gender, age, and migration background. Results will be distilled into an open-access national dataset, an adolescent upstander guide, educator pedagogical modules, police de-escalation protocols, and an institutional implementation roadmap.

Social relevance of the research: Online racist hate speech is a growing threat to social cohesion and well-being, often triggering offline violence. This project will equip adolescents, educators, and law enforcement to effectively challenge racism, helping transform digital spaces into safer and more respectful environments.

Originality/value of the project: The project features four major innovations: 1) a strategic shift from victim-offender frameworks to adolescent upstander action, decoding the 'DNA' of effective counter-speech; 2) the first national RCT testing which strategies curb online hate among Spanish adolescents; 3) mapping effectiveness across interpersonal/group-based racism and group-specific narratives; and 4) a co-created Evidence-to-Action blueprint for frontline deployment.