

## Immersive narratives and 360° video to raise awareness of violence against women and LGBTQIA+ people

*Narrativas inmersivas y video 360° para sensibilizar sobre la violencia hacia las mujeres y personas LGBTQIA+*

*Narrativas imersivas e vídeos em 360° para sensibilizar sobre a violência contra mulheres e pessoas LGBTQIA+*

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Immersive narratives (virtual reality and 360° videos) foster empathy towards victims of gender-based violence. A content analysis of 12 Spanish immersive experiences (2016-2018 and 2024) was conducted to compare productions addressing violence against women and LGBTQIA+ individuals. Distinct strategies were identified: experiences focusing on women adopt multiple roles as witness or victim and include support resources, whereas LGBTQIA+ experiences prioritize an observer role and visibility without specific intervention tools.

**KEYWORDS:** Immersive narratives, gender-based violence, LGBTQIA+, virtual reality, social awareness.

*Las narrativas inmersivas (realidad virtual y video 360°) facilitan la empatía hacia víctimas de violencia de género. Mediante un análisis de contenido de 12 experiencias inmersivas españolas (2016-2018 y 2024), se compararon producciones sobre violencia hacia mujeres y personas LGBTQIA+. Se identificaron estrategias diferenciadas: las experiencias sobre mujeres adoptan roles múltiples de víctima o testigo e incluyen recursos de ayuda, mientras que las experiencias LGBTQIA+ priorizan un rol observador y la visibilización sin herramientas de intervención específicas.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Narrativa inmersiva, violencia de género, LGBTQIA+, realidad virtual, sensibilización social.

*As narrativas imersivas (realidade virtual e video 360°) facilitam a empatia para com as vítimas de violência de gênero. Por meio de uma análise de conteúdo de 12 experiências imersivas espanholas (2016-2018 e 2024), compararam-se produções sobre violência contra mulheres e pessoas LGBTQIA+. Foram identificadas estratégias diferenciadas: as experiências sobre mulheres assumem múltiplos papéis de vítima ou testemunha e incluem recursos de apoio; as experiências LGBTQIA+ priorizam um papel de observador e a visibilidade, sem ferramentas de intervenção específicas.*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Narrativa imersiva, violência de gênero, LGBTQIA+, realidade virtual, sensibilização social.

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## INTRODUCTION

Immersive narratives, those employing technologies such as 360° video and virtual reality (VR), allow audiences to gain a deeper understanding of the story being told. These narratives are grounded in the influence that a story's content and structure exert on the viewer, creating a psychological state of absorption or presence (Elmezeny et al., 2018).

Elmezeny et al. (2018) explain that viewers can turn in any direction, while a fixed, linear story unfolds around them. “These measures, when combined with specific narrative elements, can elicit a greater response from viewers compared to the traditional video format” (p. 10).

Viewers can experience situations from different perspectives: passive observers, active witnesses, or victims. Dhiman (2023) explains that virtual reality makes it easier for users to adopt different perspectives by placing them in simulated environments, allowing them to perceive and interact from another person's point of view, thereby promoting a deeper understanding of others' thoughts, feelings, and challenges (p. 6).

The research by Seinfeld et al. (2018, p. 2) demonstrates how immersive technology facilitates perspective-taking, allowing male participants to experience domestic violence situations from the position of the female victim, fundamentally altering their empathic understanding of the phenomenon.

The neurological basis of this perspective-taking has been documented using functional neuroimaging. De Borst et al. (2020) combined VR exposure with functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI, a technique that measures brain activity in real time). They demonstrated that when a person experiences a scene of domestic violence from the victim's perspective, their brain processes the virtual body as if it were their own. Furthermore, under that same condition, the amygdala—a brain structure linked to fear processing—became progressively more synchronized among participants as the aggressor approached, a pattern not observed when the same scene was viewed from an external perspective (De Borst et al., 2020).

Alongside this neurobiological evidence, communication studies have experimentally compared the superiority of the immersive format

over conventional media. Sundar et al. (2017), in an experiment with 129 participants assigned to three conditions –a VR headset, 360° video and text–, found that participants exposed to VR and 360° video scored significantly higher on sense of presence, interaction, and realism, and showed greater empathy for the characters and a greater intention to share the content than those who read the same story in text format (p. 677). The technical characteristics of the immersive format used determine this differential capacity.

Thus, the potential of immersive VR as a tool for generating empathy and perspective taking in contexts of violence is demonstrated, which could be applied to raising awareness about violence against women and the LGBTQIA+ community.<sup>2</sup>

This immersive technology generates a sense of presence at different degrees of freedom depending on the level of immersion. Virtual reality and 360° video, the format analyzed in this research, support three degrees of freedom (3DoF). Unlike 6DoF, which allows full spatial exploration, 3DoF:

fundamentally means that the viewer will visualize the virtual environment from a fixed point ... they cannot move around or interact with the environment, although they can move their head or turn to adjust their field of vision within the 360° environment (Gamonal Arroyo & Rubio Tamayo, 2024, p. 68).

Immersive narratives were employed in some media outlets in 2016. One of the pioneers in producing content in line with this trend was Nonny de la Peña, who coined the term “immersive journalism” and for whom the fundamental idea was to allow the participant to enter a virtually recreated scenario as a visitor or from the perspective of characters, accessing the sights, sounds, and emotions of the story (De la Peña et al., 2010).

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<sup>2</sup> We employed this acronym to refer to lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, intersex, asexual people and all those whose sexual orientation is not included in the preceding letters.

In Spain, the use of immersive technology intensified in 2018 with projects developed by public institutions, NGOs, and universities, and has re-emerged in 2024 to raise awareness about violence against the LGBTQIA+ community. Ventura, Cárdenas, and Baños (2021) showed that after viewing 360° videos in which users experienced harassment of women firsthand, their empathy increased. Participants “were able to recognize the circumstances in which women feel uncomfortable, and they now try to alleviate female suffering by avoiding those behaviors” (p. 25).

In complementary research, Ventura, Cárdenas, Miragall et al. (2021) directly compared the effects of a 360° video with a text-based narrative task among 44 men, finding that the immersive format produced significantly higher scores in perspective-taking and sense of connection with the victim of sexual harassment. Additionally, participants who viewed the 360° video first scored significantly higher in perspective-taking during the subsequent narrative task, suggesting that the immersive experience enhances the effectiveness of complementary narrative interventions (pp. 261-263).

In line with these findings, studies such as those by Colás-Bravo and Quintero-Rodríguez (2020) and Vázquez Parra (2020) provide evidence of the effectiveness of awareness campaigns using immersive technologies in promoting empathy towards victims of gender-based violence, demonstrating greater empathy and reflection among adolescents after these experiences. While this immersive technology, acting as a new way of telling a story, is effective in raising awareness about violence against women, it is also effective when it comes to violence against the LGBTQIA+ community.

The United Nations (1995) defines gender-based violence as any act based on sex that results in physical, sexual, or psychological harm. Violence against women is defined as “any act of violence directed at the female sex and gender, aimed at the arbitrary deprivation of liberty and human rights” (Valdés Barraza et al., 2023, p. 2). According to the World Health Organization (2021), 30 % of women worldwide have been victims of some type of abuse.

Violence includes physical, psychological, social, and economic manifestations. Pérez-Martínez and Rodríguez-Fernández (2024)

identify that “the main psychosocial effects are linked to the loss of support from family and friends, generating the absence of protective factors against the risk of experiencing this violence” (p. 145). Valdés Barraza et al. (2023) identified that symbolic violence represents “behavior of supremacy by men, involving domination, inequality and discrimination”, while economic violence constitutes “male domination based on limiting women’s economic freedom of action” (p. 10).

In a broader context, gender-based violence also extends to the LGBTQIA+ community, which suffers from LGBTQIA+ phobia, a form of discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression, often expressed through verbal, physical, and social violence.

Torres-Castro and Morales-Villena (2025) explain that “the concept of gender is a social construct that categorizes people within the binary spectrum of man/masculine and women/feminine, leaving no space for other ways of expressing gender” (p. 14). This binary gender construct affects how people with different identities are perceived, giving rise to violence and discrimination.

Martínez-Ventoso (2024) highlights that violence against the LGBTQIA+ community takes forms ranging from spontaneous aggression to extremely serious acts, affecting their safety and well-being, accentuating discrimination and exclusion (p. 121). Likewise, Rivera Martín et al. (2022) indicate that “people who make up the LGBTQIA+ community are among those most affected by hate crimes” (p. 216).

Addressing this issue requires efforts at the academic, political, and educational levels. Immersive narratives play a crucial role by allowing an in-depth understanding of the issue, immersing viewers in the lived experiences of women victims of violence or people from the LGBTQIA+ community.

Therefore, this research analyzes the characteristics of immersive experiences produced in Spain between 2016 and 2018 and 2024 to raise awareness about violence against women and the LGBTQIA+ community, and to provide relevant information for researchers and institutions seeking to generate social change through immersive experiences that promote respect and equality.

## OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this study is to analyze the characteristics of immersive experiences carried out in Spain between 2016 and 2018 and 2024 to raise awareness about violence against women and the LGBTQIA+ community. Specifically, it aims to:

1. Identify the characteristics of immersive productions created to combat violence against women.
2. Identify the characteristics of immersive productions created to combat violence against the LGBTQIA+ community.
3. Determine the differences and similarities between immersive productions aimed at raising awareness about violence against women and those focused on violence against the LGBTQIA+ community.

## METHODOLOGY

For this research, a qualitative content analysis of 12 immersive experiences was conducted to examine the characteristics of these productions and identify differences and similarities among them. This methodological approach seeks to reveal patterns that can be considered in the design of future immersive narratives oriented toward raising awareness about gender-based violence and violence against the LGBTQIA+ community.

As the main research technique, qualitative content analysis was employed on 12 immersive experiences viewed on a computer in 360° video format. Videos were selected from awareness campaigns by Spanish public institutions, such as the Ministry of the Interior, the University of Malaga, and various city councils.

The selection of the four campaigns that make up the corpus is based on a search across digital platforms, institutional repositories, and specialized databases during the period 2016-2024. The 12 experiences analyzed constitute the total documented and verifiable production of Spanish public institutional output immersive 360° format with the explicit objective of raising awareness about gender-based violence,

as no additional experiences were identified that simultaneously met the criteria of: a) Spanish public institutional production or financing, b) immersive 360° or VR format, c) explicit objective of raising awareness about gender-based violence, and d) verifiable public availability.

Krippendorff (2022) states that content analysis is “a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data in their context” (p. 21). This method is particularly useful for identifying narrative patterns and structures in complex social phenomena, such as immersive experiences intended for social awareness.

To analyze immersive experiences, a content analysis framework was designed focusing on four main dimensions: a) general data and context, b) technical characteristics of the immersive narrative, c) content and message, and d) technological dimension. This instrument was applied uniformly to the 12 immersive experiences analyzed, guaranteeing systematic comparability between productions aimed at both communities.

The first category, “General data and context”, gathers the essential indicators for characterizing each immersive experience. This includes the project name, the responsible institution, the year of production, the duration, the distribution platforms used, and the age group of the protagonists. Additionally, the main objective of the experience is considered, which can range from awareness and prevention to education, intervention, and victim support. The context of use is also examined, namely, whether the immersive experience is part of a public campaign and whether it includes other awareness-raising actions.

The second category, “Technical characteristics of the immersive narrative”, addresses how technology and the narrative focus are used to immerse the viewer in the experience. It is mainly analyzed through four key indicators. The first type of immersion distinguishes between 3DoF experiences (three degrees of freedom, such as 360° video) and 6DoF experiences (virtual reality environments that allow spatial exploration and greater interaction). The second indicator, user role, contemplates various positions in which the viewer may be placed, whether as a witness, as an abused person, or even as an aggressor. The narrative perspective refers to the approach from which the story unfolds, which can be subjective (a character speaking in the first person)

or objective (an external narrator). Finally, the level of interaction is divided into passive (the viewer only observes) or active (the viewer is given choices to direct actions within the narrative).

The third category, “Content and message”, focuses on the content and messaging of immersive experiences. It assesses how violence against women and the LGBTQIA+ community is addressed. The analysis is structured around eight key indicators. The first, type of violence, examines whether the narrative is centered on physical, psychological, economic, digital, or symbolic violence. The second indicator, context of the violence, analyzes the family, work, digital, social, or educational environment. The story’s approach was evaluated, whether it is based on true events, recreations, statistical data, or testimonies, which defines the authenticity of what is told.

The analysis examines elements that can foster empathy, considering whether narrative techniques enable the viewer to empathize with the victim. The indicator for persuasive elements evaluates the use of emotional devices, such as music, images, and testimonies, to reinforce the message’s impact. The call to action assesses whether useful information on helplines or resources for victims is provided. In terms of diversity and inclusion, the analysis considers whether diverse gender identities and sexual orientations are represented authentically and respectfully. Finally, the eighth indicator focuses on ethics and gender perspectives, examining whether the experience avoids revictimization and the use of graphic images without reflection or context. It also considers whether the experience reproduces stereotyped gender roles or engages in unnecessary emotional manipulation, ensuring that the content is handled with sensitivity and respect for individuals.

The fourth category, “Technological dimension”, assesses the technical features that impact the effectiveness and accessibility of immersive experiences. Accessibility is assessed by evaluating the availability of experiences on free public platforms and whether features such as subtitles or audio descriptions for people with disabilities are included. Compatibility assesses the range of viewing options available (e.g., computers, mobile devices, or VR headsets). The user experience is evaluated in terms of user-friendliness, loading time, graphic quality, and the presence of navigation elements that facilitate understanding and use of the immersive experience.

To validate the content analysis, Aiken's V method was applied. This statistical technique assesses the content validity of items in an instrument, based on the judgment of a panel of three experts in immersive narratives and audiovisual media analysis. Each expert assessed the categories and indicators in the analysis table for relevance on a scale of 1 to 5, and, based on these assessments, the V coefficient was calculated for each item. The results showed Aiken's V values above 0.80 across most dimensions, with perfect scores ( $V=1.0$ ) in key indicators such as narrative focus, empathy generation, ethics, and gender perspective. Satisfactory values were also achieved for the dimensions of technical narrative characteristics ( $V = 0.83$ ) and types of violence depicted ( $V = 0.94$ ). This process has ensured that the instrument used to analyze immersive narratives is robust and methodologically sound.

The sample comprises 12 immersive experiences or scenes from four awareness-raising campaigns: two focusing on violence against women, and two centered on violence against the LGBTQIA+ community. This research sample comprises experiences from public campaigns targeting a diverse audience. The experiences range in length from 37 seconds to 6 minutes, and priority has been given to experiences that address violence from various perspectives, including the victim's and witnesses' perspectives. These experiences are summarized in Table 1.

## RESULTS

The results obtained through the content analysis of the 12 immersive experiences address the set objectives, providing a comprehensive overview of the specific characteristics of productions aimed at raising awareness of violence against women and the LGBTQIA+ community. The analysis also identifies similarities and differences between the two approaches. The findings are organized according to the following established dimensions: general data and context, technical and narrative characteristics, content and message, and the technological dimension.

The analysis revealed significant differences in titling strategies, depending on the target audience. Productions aimed at raising awareness of violence against women addressed the viewer directly as a potential

TABLE 1  
ANALYZED IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCES ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND THE LGBTQIA+ COMMUNITY  
(2016-2018 AND 2024)

Theme	Responsible institution	Title of the experience	Year	Duration	Number of scenes	Link
Violence against women	Ministry of Equality and Ministry of Interior	<i>No mires a otro lado</i>	2018	5:10'	3 videos	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch">https://www.youtube.com/watch</a>
Violence against women	University of Malaga and Malaga City Council	<i>Ponte en su piel</i>	2016	4:49'	4 videos	<a href="https://youtu.be/NL9VnRCRR2A?feature=shared">https://youtu.be/NL9VnRCRR2A?feature=shared</a>
Violence against the LGBTQIA+ community	Government of the Canary Islands, Directorate-General for Diversity	<i>LGTBQIA+VR Diversidad</i>	2024	2:58'	4 videos	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bwvvEaZN4dg">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bwvvEaZN4dg</a>
Violence against the LGBTQIA+ community	Polytechnic University of Catalonia	<i>Gafas LGTBQIA+: Abre los ojos a la LGTBQIAfobia</i>	2024	0:37'	1 video	<a href="https://youtu.be/WtIHvVnKpoI?si=g-xD1KW8v4RLSIB4">https://youtu.be/WtIHvVnKpoI?si=g-xD1KW8v4RLSIB4</a>

Source: The authors.

TABLE 2  
CONTENT ANALYSIS TEMPLATE FOR IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCES

Category	Indicators	Description / Variables to be analyzed
General data and context	Project name	Identification of the immersive document
	Responsible institutions	Ministry, Council, NGO, Universities, and other public or private institutions
	Production year	Year of release
	Length	Total minutes of the immersive experience
	Distribution platform	Website, social networks, VR glasses, mobile
	URL	Link to the experience
	Age group	Adolescent (13-17), young adult (18-27), adult (28-50), older adult (50+)
	Focus of the awareness	Prevention, education, intervention, victim support, and entertainment with an awareness-raising approach
	Context of use	Public campaigns, educational programs, and awareness events. Museums, film or documentary festivals, abuser rehabilitation campaigns, and training for technical professional staff
Technical features of the immersive narrative	Type of immersion	3DoF experience (e.g., 360° video) or 6DoF (explorable virtual reality environments with more interaction)
	User role	Witness, role of the abused person, role of the aggressor (first-person or third-person experience)
	Narrative perspective	Subjective (user in first person) or objective (external narrator)
	Level of interaction	Passive (observation only) or active (choice of actions)

Category	Indicators	Description / Variables to be analyzed	
Content and message	Type of violence addressed	Does it focus on physical, psychological, economic, digital, and symbolic violence against women and the LGBTQIA+ community?	
	Context of violence	Does it occur in the family, workplace, digital, social, educational, or other settings?	
	Focus of the story	Based on true events, reenactments, statistical data, and testimonies?	
	Generation of empathy	Are narrative techniques used to increase user empathy? (e.g., putting yourself in the victim's shoes?)	
	Persuasive elements	Does it have emotional resources, such as music, images, or testimonials that reinforce it?	
	Diversity and inclusion		Does it include representation of diverse gender identities and sexual orientations without falling into clichés or exoticization?
			Does the immersive experience incorporate diverse cultural or ethnic perspectives?
			Does it address the specific characteristics of violence against the LGBTQIA+ community and women?
	Call to action	Does it offer information about helplines or resources for victims?	
	Ethics and gender perspective		Does the experience avoid revictimization or the use of raw images without reflective context?
Does the experience avoid reinforcing gender roles or narratives that blame the abused person?			
Does it avoid emotionally manipulating the user with unnecessarily shocking images or sounds that do not contribute to awareness?			

Category	Indicators	Description / Variables to be analyzed
Technological dimension	Accessibility	Availability on accessible platforms (public, free): is it accessible to people with disabilities and to those with different levels of digital literacy (easy to understand)? Subtitles, audio description
	Compatibility	Viewing on computer, mobile, or VR headset
	User experience	Ease of use, loading time, and graphic quality. Usability buttons, such as navigation arrows and explanatory text

Source: The authors.

witness to violence. Examples of this can be seen in campaigns such as *No mires a otro lado* (Don't look away) and *Ponte en su piel* (Put yourself in her shoes). By contrast, campaigns targeting the LGBTQIA+ community employed explicit titles that directly identified the vulnerable group, such as *LGTBIQIA+VR Diversidad* (LGTBIQIA+VR Diversity) and *Abre los ojos a la LGTBQIAfobia* (Open your eyes to LGBTQIA phobia).

Responsibility for production mainly fell to government bodies—specifically the Ministry of the Interior, the Malaga City Council, the University of Malaga, the Government of the Canary Islands, and the Polytechnic University of Catalonia. All productions were carried out by private companies with public funding, using mass distribution strategies on YouTube to ensure ongoing access after the launch of the awareness campaigns.

A distinct temporal distribution reflecting public awareness campaigns was identified: videos addressing violence against women, produced between 2016 and 2018, ran 5:10 and 4:49 minutes respectively, coinciding with a surge in media coverage of gender-based violence. In contrast, productions aimed at the LGBTQIA+ community were developed in 2024 and were shorter, ranging from 2:58 to 0:37 minutes, reflecting the more recent incorporation of these issues into institutional agendas.

The campaigns adopted various approaches to representing different age groups and spatial contexts. Campaigns addressing violence against women covered an age range of 18-50+ years in various settings (public spaces, homes, and workplaces). In contrast, LGBTQIA+ campaigns focused on young and university students (aged 13-27) in educational settings. The recreated settings corresponded to everyday spaces, a strategy designed to make violence more recognizable and relatable.

The analysis revealed differences in the types of violence addressed. Accounts of violence against women included psychological abuse, physical violence, and harassment in public spaces and workplaces, yet economic forms of abuse went unaddressed. In contrast, productions aimed at the LGBTQIA+ community centered specifically on harassment, discrimination, and exclusion based on sexual and gender identity. These works depicted mockery, insults, and symbolic violence, adopting more specialized and activist approaches.

Significant differences were identified in how the user's role was constructed and the strategies used to generate empathy. In experiences addressing violence against women, users adopted different roles, alternating between witness ("Don't look the other way") and direct victim, addressing the camera with statements such as "Put yourself in her shoes". This alternation allows users to experience violence from multiple perspectives, fostering identification through confrontation and immersion techniques designed to generate an experiential understanding of suffering. The LGBTQIA+ experiences consistently positioned the user as an observing witness, rather than a victim of violence. This approach primarily generates empathy through empathic observation, rather than confrontation.

All experiences used 3DoF technology, allowing users to view the environment in all directions while remaining stationary. This employed a subjective first-person perspective, eliminating the need for external narrators to provide context for the events. This narrative strategy enhances the immersive experience by removing interpretative intermediaries and encouraging direct identification with the depicted situations.

The strategies for emotional engagement and the support resources available differed substantially between target groups. Content addressing violence against women incorporated persuasive elements such as music and sound effects, along with messages designed to encourage witnesses to take action and report incidents. Practical tools were also provided, including guidance on reporting incidents, support for victims, and help resources with specific contact numbers. LGBTQIA+ productions used background music with tempo shifts to mark emotional climaxes and uncomfortable silences in situations of discrimination. However, they prioritized raising awareness and promoting acceptance of diversity over explicit calls to action or clear intervention guidelines.

Representation of cultural and ethnic diversity was limited in both types. Content addressing violence against women focused on cisgender, heterosexual women. At the same time, LGBTQIA+ productions showcased diversity in sexual identities, yet failed to adequately represent racialized individuals, migrants, and those from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds.

In the analysis of revictimization, while most videos avoid blaming victims, some videos depicting violence against women include messages such as “How long are you going to put up with this?”, which implicitly shifts blame onto the victims. This issue warrants greater attention in future productions.

## DISCUSSION

The findings reveal significant variations in narrative approaches and awareness-raising strategies, depending on the target group. Immersive experiences addressing violence against women covered psychological abuse, physical violence, street harassment, and partner control. These experiences challenged bystander passivity in the face of violent acts. However, economic violence, which is defined as domination exercised through financial control in intimate partner relationships (Valdés Baraza et al., 2023, p. 10), was not incorporated into these productions. This omission limits our understanding of the phenomenon as a whole.

Accounts relating to the LGBTQIA+ community primarily focus on the harassment, discrimination, and social exclusion individuals experience due to their gender and sexual orientation. These accounts recreate instances of LGBTQIA+ phobic aggression to highlight the resulting suffering, particularly within educational settings. This portrayal sheds light on the discrimination this community faced during their early years at school and university. Similarly, experiences of violence against women demonstrate that harassment in public spaces is not an isolated incident, but rather something that can occur at any time and in any place, thereby denouncing the normalization of such violence.

The narrative centered on observing violent events, rather than allowing active interaction where users could decide or alter the outcome. This could be explained by the need to confront users with everyday situations and force them to witness or experience violence, in order to raise greater awareness.

The elements used to elicit empathy are supported by Colás-Bravo and Quintero-Rodríguez’s (2020) study, in which adolescents showed greater empathy and support for victims after watching *No mires a otro lado* (p. 194). This effect may be attributed to the type of

immersion employed, whereby the viewer is placed in the role of a witness and explicit acts of violence are recreated, allowing them to be observed up close. Emotional resources, such as background music and sounds, further amplify the emotional impact of the scenes.

Stories about violence against the LGBTQIA+ community predominantly depict psychological violence, portraying scenes of bullying, mockery, and discrimination in school and public settings. However, this captures only part of the abuse experienced by this community. Official data reveals a troubling trend of hate crimes motivated by sexual orientation and gender identity: 466 in 2021, 459 in 2022, and 522 in 2023. These crimes are the second most frequent after those motivated by racism or xenophobia (Ministerio del Interior, 2024, p. 9).

By delving deeper into the mechanisms that generate empathy, a comparative analysis can identify two distinct psychological processes. Experiences of violence against women employ a strategy of empathy through embodiment—whereby the user inhabits a virtual body as if it were their own. This places them primarily in a first-person perspective, seeking to generate a direct, experiential understanding of suffering. This is in line with the embodiment processes documented by De Borst et al. (2020) as triggers of neurobiological responses. In contrast, productions aimed at the LGBTQIA+ community adopt a strategy of empathy through reflective recognition, in which observing everyday microaggressions invites critical reflection rather than an immediate emotional response. This generates discomfort that can trigger behavioral change without provoking the defensive resistance often caused by confrontation.

These differences in empathy also result in different narratives. Accounts of violence against women depict progressive, escalating violence, ranging from microaggressions in public spaces to more serious incidents. By contrast, LGBTQIA+ narratives depict a variety of everyday discriminatory situations of similar intensity.

Another significant difference lies in the inclusion of support resources at the end of the content. While 100 % of content on violence against women includes specific calls to action, such as emergency numbers and guidance on reporting incidents, only 20 % of content aimed at the LGBTQIA+ community provides equivalent information. From a communication design perspective, this asymmetry limits the

transformative potential of LGBTQIA+ experiences, reducing them to mere awareness-raising tools without follow-up action. In contrast, experiences focusing on women combine awareness-raising with intervention. This emphasizes the importance of standardizing the inclusion of specific support tools in all immersive productions, regardless of the target group.

Representing cultural and ethnic diversity remains challenging in both experience types. Despite addressing universal themes, both types of experiences were set in homogenous social contexts featuring characters predominantly from a Spanish cultural background. The perspectives of other ethnic groups were not included. Specific issues faced by racialized women or LGBTQIA+ individuals from different cultural backgrounds were not addressed, thereby limiting the representation of violence in different contexts.

The potential of virtual reality as a tool for addressing violent behavior extends from public awareness to therapeutic settings with clinical populations. Barnes et al. (2024) document the implementation of VR programs for offenders convicted of intimate partner violence in Catalanian prisons, demonstrating that immersive technology can serve as a safe, customizable, and cost-effective alternative to traditional therapeutic methods. This is achieved by enabling offenders to experience the victim's perspective in a controlled environment, fostering emotional recognition and perspective-taking (Barnes et al., 2024).

## CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of immersive experiences developed in Spain between 2016-2018, and again in 2024, to raise awareness of violence against women and the LGBTQIA+ community, reveals significant findings that contribute to the fields of communication and social intervention strategies. The results demonstrate that the strategies employed vary by target group. Experiences focusing on women tend to adopt a more comprehensive approach, involving multiple roles and intervention tools, whereas those aimed at the LGBTQIA+ community prioritize raising awareness without providing specific resources for immediate action.

TABLE 3  
COMPARATIVE SYNTHESIS OF NARRATIVE STRATEGIES BY TARGET GROUP

Dimension	Experiences of violence against women	Experiences of violence towards the LGBTQIA+ community
Types of violence	Physical, psychological, street harassment, and workplace harassment	Psychological, symbolic, discrimination, and social exclusion
User role	Witness and direct victim	Observing witness
Empathic strategy	The user experiences violence in the first person	The user observes discrimination from the outside and reflects
Narrative structure	Progressive, escalating violence	Multiple everyday discrimination situations of similar intensity
Audience and context	Aged 18-50+, diverse settings (home, work, street)	Aged 13-27, educational and family contexts
Call to action	100 % include support resources (lines 016, 091, 062)	Only 20 % include support resources
Represented diversity	Women in Spanish cultural context, no ethnic diversity	Diversity of sexual identities, no ethnic diversity

Source: The authors.

These differences stem from distinct approaches to evoking empathy: works focusing on women place the viewer within the context of violence, enabling them to experience it first-hand. In contrast, LG-BTQIA+ productions position the viewer as an observer of accumulated everyday discriminations, favoring reflection over direct confrontation.

However, the research highlights significant limitations in both types of immersive experience, undermining their transformative potential. Notably, there is a lack of cultural diversity, with insufficient representation of perspectives from racialized individuals, migrants, and LGBTQIA+ individuals from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. Moreover, a trend towards individualistic approaches fails to adequately

address the structural causes of violence. Experiences aimed at women also exhibit significant thematic omissions, such as the absence of economic violence.

The absence of specific support resources and clear calls to action in experiences designed for the LGBTQIA+ community greatly restricts their capacity to effect change beyond raising initial awareness. This shortcoming stands in stark contrast to the more established practice of including contact details and intervention resources in experiences addressing violence against women. This highlights the need to standardize the incorporation of support tools in all immersive productions aimed at women.

The findings of this research have significant implications for the future development of immersive experiences aimed at social change. Future productions must integrate the specific social and communicative characteristics of each type of violence, while incorporating intersectional perspectives that reflect the real diversity of those affected. Achieving this will require interdisciplinary collaboration among professionals in communication, technology, psychology and social movements.

To transform awareness-raising experiences into comprehensive tools for prevention and intervention, all immersive experiences must systematically incorporate tailored support information, dedicated contact numbers, and intervention guidelines tailored to each group. Furthermore, fostering active intervention skills requires moving toward models that enable greater interactivity and transcend the current limitations of 3DoF technology.

To maximize the long-term educational impact and connect individual awareness with collective social transformation, immersive experiences must be complemented by structured educational programs that examine the structural causes, systemic consequences, and prevention strategies of violence.

This research makes a valuable contribution to the field of immersive communication for social change by identifying distinct design and implementation patterns that vary according to the type of violence addressed. The findings provide an empirical basis for developing specific theoretical frameworks and differentiated evalu-

ation methodologies that recognize the unique characteristics of each form of violence.

Future research should include the following: a) experimental studies comparing the effectiveness of the two identified empathy strategies—embodiment versus reflective recognition—depending on audience profile and type of violence addressed; b) research into the long-term impact of narrative structures involving progressive escalation versus accumulation of everyday discrimination to determine which generates more lasting attitudinal change across different groups and audiences; c) analysis of integrating 6DoF (six degrees of freedom) technologies to create experiences in which users can make decisions within the narrative, thereby overcoming the limitations of 3DoF, and d) development of specific impact assessment models for immersive media aimed at social change.

These findings are significant not only in academic contexts but also in practical terms, since they offer guidance to producers, public institutions, and social organizations committed to combating gender-based violence and discrimination against the LGBTQIA+ community. In doing so, they contribute to the development of more effective communication strategies in today's digital society.

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