

# The Role of Emotion Discourse and Pathic Stigma in the Delegitimization of Consumer Practices

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Drawing on institutional theory and discursive psychology, this article elucidates how actors use emotion discourse to undermine the legitimacy of consumer practices. Based on an empirical investigation of the bullfighting controversy in Spain, our work shows how activists engage in the production and circulation of compelling emotional prototypes of their adversaries. Such emotional prototypes constitute the discursive foundations of a pathic stigma, which, once established, taints the identity of the social groups associated with the practice. Our work frames the centrality of pathic stigmatization as a cultural mechanism mediating the relationship between emotion discourse and the subsequent delegitimization of consumer practices. We make three key contributions to the literature: we advance a rhetorical perspective on emotions and their role in deinstitutionalization processes; we further develop the theory of marketplace sentiments by showing how sentiments operate downstream; and we provide evidence of the sociocultural mechanisms underpinning the emotional vilification, stereotyping and stigmatization of consumer collectives.

**Keywords:** legitimacy contests, delegitimization, stigmatization, emotion discourse, sentiments, rhetorical analysis

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## INTRODUCTION

The pluriverse of values shaping the fabric of contemporary consumer societies is inextricably linked with the possibility of disagreements and conflicts over the legitimacy of consumer practices. By implication, marketplace legitimacy is widely regarded as a fragile, temporary accomplishment, which is subject to contestation and change (Giesler 2008; Humphreys 2010a, 2010b). The actors partaking in marketplace controversies tend to anathematize their opponents by drawing a divide between the villains—they—and heroes or victims—us (Giesler 2008; Gopaldas 2014). For example, countercultural communities moralize their position by drawing a stark contrast between themselves and a stereotyped selfish, materialistic, and gullible “mainstream consumer” (Kozinets and Handelman 2004); local coffee aficionados legitimize their anticorporate views through disparaging depictions of politically and morally apathetic Starbucks customers

(Thompson and Arsel 2004); Hummer owners are exposed to morally reproving messages highlighting their responsibility for climate change, dangerous driving, or military interventions and conflicts over oil resources (Luedicke, Thompson, and Giesler 2010); and music downloaders legitimize their activities through the creation of marketplace dramas wherein they appear as morally superior characters fighting against greedy, totalitarian, and culturally alienating record companies (Giesler 2008).

Therefore, the earlier work demonstrates that delegitimization entails adversarial relations between marketplace actors, which tend to be accompanied by judgments concerning the moral and social worth of rivals. Complementing this observation, Gopaldas (2014) shows that marketplace ideologies cultivate not only potent moral meanings but also powerful sentiments of “contempt for villains.” To date, however, these processes have been primarily studied at the macro level, leaving aside questions about the way in which broad emotional categories operate downstream as the actors engage with specific political and moral issues. More specifically, we argue that there is a limited understanding of how marketplace actors are categorized as villains based on the emotions and feelings ascribed to them and the broader structuring effects that these emotional categorizations may have on markets. A close reading of participant quotes in the previous research concerning marketplace controversies (Giesler 2008; Kozinets and Handelman 2004; Luedicke et al. 2010; Thompson and Arsel 2004) suggests that, although the attribution of emotions and feelings to rival actors is a common feature of adversarial discourses, analysts tend to gloss over these issues, treating them as part of the general discursive background for other phenomena under study.

In this article, we turn toward the extant literature on emotions developed at the intersection of neo-institutional theory (Brown, Ainsworth, and Grant 2012) and discursive psychology (Edwards 1999). These literatures are widely based on a view of emotions as rhetorically oriented, discursive categories, which are deployed by actors to perform social actions in institutional contexts (Edwards 1997, 1999; Potter 1996; Potter and Wetherell 1987). Specifically, our research draws on the notion of *emotion discourse* (Edwards 1997, 1999), a discursive form of emotion work that is integral to the collective processes of moral reasoning through which institutions are created, maintained, and disrupted (Brown et al. 2012; Moisaner, Hirsto and Fahy 2016; Suddaby and Greenwood 2005). Through an empirical examination of the current debate on bullfighting in Spain, we show how antibullfighting activists (challengers) mobilize emotion discourse to articulate the following compelling emotional prototypes of their adversaries (custodians of the practice): the *psychopath*, the *bully*, and the *savage*. Such social categories are rendered possible by four performative functions of emotion discourse, namely, *labeling*, *stereotyping*, *demarcating*, and

*discrediting*, leading to the establishment of a *pathic stigma*. Once established, the pathic stigmatization of supporters serves to undermine the normative and relational legitimacy of the practice.

This article theorizes the role of emotion discourse as a structuring mechanism in delegitimization processes, which may operate alongside other cultural processes identified in the literature, including marketplace sentiments (Gopaldas 2014), semiotic shifts (Humphreys 2010a), moralistic work (Luedicke et al. 2010), or the creation of dramas (Giesler 2008). We, thus, pave the way for an integrative account of delegitimization that avoids a spurious separation between emotion discourse, marketplace sentiments, and shifting moral meanings. Our work makes three key contributions to the literature. First, this research advances our understanding of the emotion-based mechanisms through which market actors negotiate and ascribe membership to antagonistic social categories (e.g., heroes vs. villains), particularly in the course of legitimacy contests. As argued above, although earlier studies indicate that actors often attempt to disparage their opponents, relatively little attention has hitherto been paid to the specific role of emotions in these processes. Our research addresses this limitation by foregrounding how activists buttress their negative moral judgments through the production of rhetorically compelling emotional prototypes of their adversaries.

Linked with this, we incorporate an emotion-based explanation of stigma within the context of cultural consumer research. While the extant work has centered on the relation between stigma and moral meanings (Sandikci and Ger 2010), we draw attention to the fundamental role of emotion discourse in the process of stigmatization. Particularly, our work contributes by explicating how a variety of negative emotional dispositions, feelings, or levels of emotional competence are selectively invoked and ascribed—via emotion discourse—to portray the villains as morally deviant or inferior (Hopkins, Zeedyk, and Raitt 2005; Lutz 1996; Rezende 2008). These critical arguments highlight the need for consumer researchers to adopt a more reflexive stance toward emotion-based accounts of marketplace controversies, remaining vigilant to the ways in which the actors’ emotional rhetoric might contribute to stigmatizing their adversaries and foster the appearance of uncivil, bigoted, and intolerant behavior toward them.

Second, based on the above, our work articulates the notion of pathic stigma as a cultural mechanism mediating the relationship between activists’ mobilization of emotions in situated discourse and the subsequent delegitimization of consumer practices. Similar to other culturally oriented theorizations of market change (e.g., Giesler and Thompson 2016), these processes are recursively intertwined, affecting one another in nonlinear and context-dependent ways—rather than involving linear cause–effect relations. Therefore, while the implications of pathic

stigma are primarily concerned with the erosion of normative and relational legitimacy, we defend that there are spillover effects on other legitimacy pillars. In this regard, we demonstrate that the ability of a consumer practice to generate positive relational outcomes (e.g., self-worth, social identity, status, or dignity) (Sandikci and Ger 2010) can be undermined by systematically ascribing members of a social collective with negative emotional characteristics, which are subsequently aligned with various forms of moral deviance. We further argue that this loss of moral and relational legitimacy, in turn, disrupts other legitimacy pillars, including the regulatory and cognitive ones. Therefore, our research expands the current understandings of delegitimization in the cultural consumer research by illuminating the ways in which emotion-laden discourse lubricates marketplace controversies and contributes to the demise of the targeted consumer practices and their legitimacy.

Third, our work contributes by further expanding the literature on emotions in the context of cultural consumer research, particularly with reference to the theory of marketplace sentiments. This theory has established the role of sentiments at the macro level (Gopaldas 2014) by conceptualizing emotions as broad cultural dispositions that structure marketplace action. Comparatively, however, limited attention has been paid to the study of “emotions in action,” thus hindering our understanding of how broad marketplace sentiments operate downstream. Indeed, while the analysis of marketplace sentiments has hitherto prioritized “empathetic, nonjudgmental, and validating conversations that permit consumers to express their feelings” (Gopaldas 2014, 1011), we have adopted a different analytical stance that allows the unveiling of the strategic and rhetorical uses of emotions, as well as their performative nature, which are particularly relevant in the context of public debate and strategic argumentation (Edwards 1999; Moisander et al. 2016). More specifically, we develop an action-oriented account of emotion discourse to study marketplace sentiments “in the making,” rather than as ready-made entities. We also highlight the benefits of suspending our assumptions about how actors “really” feel, focusing instead on the ways in which they mobilize emotion discourse in naturally occurring interactions. This approach is particularly valuable insofar as it contributes to elucidate the mechanisms mediating between the situated forms of emotion discourse and the broader structuring role of marketplace sentiments argued in the work of Gopaldas (2014).

## EMOTION WORK, EMOTION DISCOURSE, AND DELEGITIMIZATION

The work of Gopaldas (2014) is predicated on the idea that marketplace actors are not passive recipients for

sentiments. On the contrary, consumers, corporations, activists, or NGOs are capable of consciously generating and utilizing emotions to further their causes. This link between marketplace sentiments and strategic agency resonates with recent developments in institutional theory. The latter starts from the premise that institutions “are ‘inhabited’ by people and their doings” (Hallett and Ventresca 2006, 215), and thus, institutional change/stability should be studied as a collective outcome of the institutional work carried out by actors at the microlevel (Lawrence, Suddaby, and Leca 2011). This agentic view of actors as “institutional entrepreneurs” is widely shared amongst the culturally oriented consumer research scholars (e.g., Scaraboto and Fischer 2013), whose insights have proven particularly valuable in framing the notion of institutional work as a suitable unit of analysis for studying delegitimization processes.

Amongst the different types of institutional work, our article specifically focuses on emotion work. We identify two approaches to emotion work in institutional theory. One such approach has focused on emotion work as a nexus between actors and institutional orders, represented by a set of culturally prescribed feeling rules (Creed et al. 2004; Hochschild 1979). From this perspective, emotion work encapsulates individuals’ efforts to manage their feelings as they seek to enact prescribed forms of actorhood within a given institutional regime (Hochschild 1979; Jacobsson and Lindblom 2013; Voronov and Weber 2016).

A second strand of the emotion work literature has advanced the idea of *emotion discourse* (Moisander et al. 2016; Toubiana and Zietsma 2017), focusing on the crucial role of emotion-oriented rhetoric in “the production of influential texts that change the discourses on which institutions depend” (Phillips, Lawrence, and Hardy 2004, 648). From this perspective, actors are skillful rhetoricians capable of strategically endowing institutional discourses with emotionally oriented rhetoric to persuade others about the legitimacy of their views (Brown et al. 2012). This research shows that, for example, actors typically rely on emotion-based arguments to resolve disputes concerning the legitimacy of institutional change (Suddaby and Greenwood 2005), incorporate emotional content within institutional frames (Jasper 2011; Voronov and Vince 2012), or use discourse to promote specific emotions that neutralize resistance (Moisander et al. 2016; Toubiana and Zietsma 2017).

Most significant for our purposes, emotion discourse has been argued to contribute to the social categorization of individuals and collectives (Billig 2002). Social categorization judgments depend on cultural exemplars and ideal prototypes, which embody the main characteristics used to define and demarcate the boundaries between different social groups (Hogg and Terry 2000). Actors can use emotion discourse to create and mobilize specific emotional prototypes, which allows them to differentiate between social

groups based on their allegedly distinct emotional characteristics. For example, binary gender categories have traditionally relied on discourses depicting ideals of hyperemotional womanhood versus hypoemotional manhood (Heesacker et al. 1999; Plant et al. 2000), and the construction of national stereotypes involves emotional prototypes, such as the emotional Brazilian (Rezende 2008). It is in this sense that emotion discourse operates as a mechanism for, *inter alia*, the creation of “emotional roles” (Parkinson 1996), “emotional stereotyping” (Mackie, Devos, and Smith 2000; Mackie, Smith, and Ray 2008), or even “emotional self-stereotyping” (Menges and Kilduff 2015).

A corollary to these arguments is that assigning social groups with distinct emotions, feelings, and affective states is decisive in the formation and consolidation of social categories, as well as the validation of moral judgments concerning actors and their practices. These arguments beg the question of how the categorization of adversaries through emotion discourse contributes to delegitimizing a practice. Legitimacy is a multidimensional construct comprising three pillars, namely *normative*, *cognitive*, and *regulatory* (Suchman 1995). The normative legitimacy of a practice is compromised when it becomes incongruent with the dominant moral norms and values (Kates 2004). A practice has attained cognitive legitimacy when it is taken for granted (Humphreys 2010b). So, actors can affect cognitive legitimacy by problematizing the alignment between a practice and the existing cognitive schemas (Humphreys and Latour 2013). Finally, changes in government rules and regulations can be enacted to undermine the regulatory legitimacy of the practice (Humphreys 2010b, 492). More recently, legitimacy scholars have foregrounded a fourth pillar, namely *relational legitimacy*, which arises when a practice “is perceived to affirm the social identity and self-worth of individuals or social groups, or to ensure that social groups are treated with dignity and respect” (Tost 2011, 693–694). Relational legitimacy is pivotal for our study insofar as this pillar comprises the various aspects of collective identity and social status upon which the continuation of a given consumer practice, in this case bullfighting, is justified.

Given these arguments, our framework allows for the identification of three axioms to analyze the role of emotion discourse in delegitimization processes. First, we argue that emotion discourse shall be primarily framed as a strategically oriented, discursive activity, for “emotions do not exist as wordless impulses, lying beneath social life, but are constituted within social, discursive interaction” (Billig 2002, 179). Adopting this perspective implies that “no clear distinction is drawn between emotion ‘discourse’ and emotions ‘themselves’” (Edwards 1999, 179), and thus, analysts are encouraged to suspend their assumptions regarding what actors really feel. Instead, they should direct their attention to “emotions in use” and the different

rhetorical functions performed by emotion-oriented accounts of events, experiences, or people (Edwards 1997, 173). Consequently, emotional prototypes should be approached as “fuzzy sets” (Hogg and Terry 2000, 123) that allow for rhetorical flexibility and discursive variability (Edwards 1999; Potter and Wetherell 1987).

Second, emotion discourse is central to social categorization processes (Billig 2002). Different social categories are established by selectively attributing—or denying—actors with different emotional dispositions, feelings, or levels of emotional competence (Hopkins et al. 2005; Lutz 1996; Rezende 2008). Consistent with our first axiom, a wide range of rhetorical resources can be used by actors to perform such emotional characterizations in the context of situated discourse (Edwards 1999; Potter and Wetherell 1987). The power of emotional prototypes to validate/undermine social categories lies in the prevalent cultural view of emotional life as offering a privileged window into an individual’s true self and inner nature (Lupton 1998). In other words, feelings and emotions are culturally perceived as being “generated from within the self” (Lupton 1998, 63), and as such, they are widely used by actors as reliable cues to infer someone’s true intentions, character, or personality.

Finally, our framework draws attention to the links between emotion discourse and (i)legitimacy. The categorization of actors-as-villains demands their construction as transgressors of normative and cultural expectations, with the subsequent loss of a positive group identity and social status. In other words, we argue that the vilification of the social groups most closely associated with a practice contributes to delegitimizing the latter by directly undermining its normative and relational legitimacy. This argument does not imply that other pillars of legitimacy (e.g., cognitive or regulatory) cannot be affected by the vilification of actors via emotion discourse. On the contrary, the previous research shows that the different legitimacy pillars typically interrelate and operate in conjunction with one another (Humphreys 2010a, 2010b; Humphreys and Latour 2013).

## BULLFIGHTING: A CONSUMPTION PRACTICE IN DECLINE

Bullfighting constitutes a tradition in which the utilization of bulls serves an array of symbolic purposes, emerging as a rich cultural tapestry that is colored by identity, fantasy, recreation, and drama (Mitchell 1991). In Spain, Douglass (1999) notes the existence of multiple bullfighting contests with a myriad of regional variations. Bullfighting is integrated into contemporary consumer culture, having been referred to by Pink (1997, 198) as a “big business,” which “participates as such in the market economy.” Indeed, the symbolism of bullfighting has been

widely used for nation branding purposes, turning the consumption of bullfighting into a widely recognized and distinct tourist attraction (Cohen 2014). Despite its seemingly enduring significance, bullfighting represents a consumer tradition in decline. Government data suggest that the number of bullfighting events in Spain has fallen by a sharp 24% relative to 2011 (SMECS (Spanish Ministry of Education, Culture and Spectacles) 2015). However, the research depicts a divided public opinion, with highly polarized views dominating the debate (María et al. 2017; SMECS (Spanish Ministry of Education, Culture and Spectacles) 2015).

The debate concerning bullfighting in Spain is affected by changes in the broader “context of contexts” within which the consumption of bullfighting is embedded (Askegaard and Linnet 2011), namely as follows: the rise of peripheral nationalisms and the contestation of the Spanish national identity; the cultural and political integration of Spain in the European Union; and the rise of animal rights movements and concern with animal welfare.

First, the institutionalization of bullfighting in Spain has played a key historical role in the configuration of a distinct national identity (Brandes 2009; Douglass 1999; Mitchell 1991). The growth of nationalist sentiments in different parts of Spain, particularly within the Basque and Catalan regions (Douglass 1999), and the rise of separatist movements in these regions have involved a rejection of many of the symbols traditionally associated with the Spanish national identity, including bullfighting (Perales and Thouverez 2014).

Second, some authors have related the demise of bullfighting in Spain to interlinked cultural processes of Europeanization and modernization (Brandes 2009; Douglass 1999). According to critics, the transformation of Spanish society by the forces of modernity was both late and insufficient (Ortega y Gasset 2015). Consequently, Spaniards have historically struggled to legitimize their position amongst Western European nations such as France, Britain, or Germany (Bailey 2007; Douglass 1999). From this perspective, the continuation of bullfighting in Spain has become associated with the country’s alleged failure to integrate itself within a modern Western European civilization—which is deemed as superior (Bailey 2007). Therefore, although Spain became a full member of the European Union in 1986, bullfighting is often depicted as an anachronistic cultural residue hindering progress toward a Pan-European project that is widely supported, especially amongst younger generations of Spaniards (Brandes 2009; Douglass 1999).

Finally, bullfighting is affected by changing attitudes toward animal cruelty and the growth of the animal rights movement. Bullfighting is an activity in which witnesses are confronted with scenes of explicit violence, blood, and *viscerae*, and where animal suffering manifests itself in forms that are both blunt and crude. This integral aspect of

bullfighting does not chime well with changing societal values and sensitivities toward animals (Franklin 1999). In Spain, concerns relating to animal welfare have grown quickly and substantially (María et al. 2017), particularly amongst the young (Díaz-Carmona 2012). A myriad of groups (e.g., Greenpeace, Ecologistas en Acción, or PETA) and individuals have been campaigning against bullfighting since the 1980s. The work of PACMA, the Animal Rights Political Party, has been crucial in agglutinating the antibullfighting sentiment and articulating it in political terms. In fact, antibullfighting campaigns have been at the center of PACMA’s activism and discourse since 2003, with various symbolic victories in the process.

Arguably, one of the most significant victories for antibullfighting campaigners in Spain was the ban of the Toro de la Vega (TdV) in 2016, which constitutes the context of this research. The TdV was a local bullfighting contest of medieval origin that used to take place in Tordesillas, a small town in the autonomous region of Castilla y León (Pitt-Rivers 2002). Every second Tuesday of September, crowds would gather behind fences as a bull was solemnly brought to the town center of Tordesillas. The arrival of the bull was awaited by hundreds of local men bearing traditional spears of approximately 8–10 ft in length. Once the bull was ceremonially released, a frantic pursuit on foot and horseback began. Contenders chased the running bull across an open field, and the first man to hunt down the exhausted animal would spear it to death. Once the bull had been killed, the testicles and tail of the animal were removed and awarded as a prize for the winner—who would typically exhibit these prizes pinned to the killing spear.

The public controversy concerning TdV spans the period of 2014–2016. Prior to 2014, protests against the TdV maintained a rather low profile in terms of media coverage, as they were primarily confined to the local level without having any wider political repercussions. One reason for this is that, historically, bullfighting has been deeply rooted in this region of Spain (Diario de Sesiones Parliament of Castilla y León, 8/06/2016, 2927). Bullfighting’s cultural embeddedness was legally reasserted in 2014, when the regional parliament of Castilla y León, with a conservative majority, passed a bill granting bullfighting the status of “Immaterial Cultural Heritage” (BOE no. 18 2014). The latter bestowed bullfighting events with special legal protections and privileges to ensure their preservation within this Spanish region. Critics across the country were angered by this decision, with antibullfighting protests escalating rapidly into a series of violent riots and clashes between TdV advocates and activists. Dramatic scenes of violence and tension flooded the media and the TdV controversy suddenly became the focal point of a broader national debate concerning the legitimacy of bullfighting as a whole (El País 14/9/2016).

This debate culminated in 2016, when the regional parliament passed a bill that banned the killing or injuring of

**TABLE 1:**  
DATA CORPUS SUMMARY (NEWS, BLOGS, AND COMMENTS)

	News entries	Blog entries	Comments news	Comments blogs
Attack on TdV				
2014	736	23	4,171	319
2015	1,309	19	1,227	226
2016 (January–April)	93	4	1	0
Delegitimization of TdV				
2016 (May–September)	1,506	66	1,648	245
Total	3,644	112	7,047	790

bulls in public sight (El Huffington Post 16/09/2016; El Norte de Castilla 16/08/2016). TdV supporters received these changes not only as a de facto termination of their tradition but also, most importantly, as representing the beginning of the end for bullfighting’s legitimacy across the country (El País 12/09/2016). This bill was legislated and passed by the same conservative party that, 2 years earlier, declared bullfighting a form of cultural heritage. In fact, at the time of writing, the ban remains in place and further regulatory changes affecting the status of bullfighting contests in different parts of the country are being debated by other regional parliaments (e.g., Balearic Islands). The [web appendix A](#) provides a detailed chronology of the events.

## METHOD

We chose to examine emotion discourse in the context of digital participatory media, as they have been proven to be fundamental arenas for legitimacy contests (Hofer and Green 2016). In contemporary digital media, the distinction between news producers and news consumers blurs (Manosevitch and Walker 2009), as audiences exchange arguments in a process of coproduction, interpretation, and formation of legitimacy judgments (Hofer and Green 2016).

Data collection begins with the “precipitating event” (Giesler and Thompson 2016)—in this case, the first violent clashes on September 16, 2014—and ends with the postcontroversy *status quo*—in this case, the first Toro de la Peña celebration following the TdV ban on September 13, 2016. The digital news reports were retrieved using Factiva, whereas different blog search engines (Blogsearching and Searchblogspot) were employed to collect blog-related contents within this timeframe. The keywords included in our search were “Toro de la Vega” and “bullfighting.” This data set comprises journalistic discourses ( $n = 3,644$ ) and audiences’ discourses—deployed in blogs and the comment sections of both media and blogs ( $n = 7,949$ ) (table 1). This data corpus was supplemented with the analysis of the minutes of the TdV discussion sessions held at the regional parliament between 2014 and 2016 ( $n = 3$ ), as well as the bill issued by the Regional

Parliament regarding the ban of the festival (BOCL no. 96 2016).

The analysis followed the basic tenets of emotion discourse analysis (Edwards 1997, 1999; Potter 1996; Potter and Wetherell 1987), focusing on the “rhetorical design and use of emotion categories” (Edwards 1999, 273) to vilify TdV supporters through the construction of different emotional prototypes. Drawing on Edwards (1999), it is important to clarify that the scope of the emotion discourse is not limited to the explicit use of words such as anger, fear, and surprise; rather, emotion discourse encompasses a rich set of figures of speech where emotion-related words may or may not be present (e.g., the *boiling* metaphor for anger). Equally, emotion discourse is multimodal and it includes images (Kress 2013). Given the nature of emotion discourse as a rhetorical social practice that can take on a myriad of subtle and implicit forms, the task of quantifying the frequency of emotion words or their intensity (as per in content and sentiment analysis) becomes problematic (Humphreys and Wang 2018; Potter 1996).

All the data were compiled and shared by members of the research team. The analytical strategy was emergent, involving several iterations of individual analysis and group discussions, during which the individual codes were cross-checked and refined.

The first part of the analysis focused on the audiences’ discourse (classified as challengers or supporters, hereafter). We privileged the study of the audiences’ discourse because the mobilization of emotion discourse is freer here than in other contexts (Brown et al. 2012). Furthermore, examining these micro-interactions allows researchers to examine the emotion discourse unfolding in naturally occurring conversations (Edwards 1999; Potter 1996).

Here, we identified the prototypes applying the two principles of emotion discourse analysis (Potter and Wetherell 1987, 168), namely variability and consistency. First, we searched for patterns in the data in the form of both *variability*—different in the content or form of accounts—and *consistency*—the identification of features shared by accounts. We searched for the specific patterns of speech and the shared emotional repertoires constituting such prototypes. This initial analysis showed that the challengers constructed the villain differently and this variability is

explained by the delineation of three main prototypes. There are similarities amongst them, namely aggressiveness, cruelty, and enjoyment of suffering. Yet, these features are accounted for differently by the challengers; on the basis of these differences, the three prototypes emerge. The three prototypes are labeled using the emic terms employed by the challengers in their comments. Consistent with an action-oriented, performative understanding of discourse (Potter 1996), we suspended our assumptions regarding whether the emotion discourse is reflective of the actors' real feelings toward TdV supporters, focusing instead on how emotion categories "are invoked and what kinds of discursive work such invocations perform" (Edwards 1999, 279).

Once the three prototypes were scoped and articulated, we turned our attention to the rhetorical devices used for their construction. We first identified the granular-level rhetorical devices (figures of speech, compiled in web appendix B), which were subsequently grouped into four broad rhetorical strategies. In the second stage, we focused on the journalists' and regulators' discourses to examine whether the prototypes were reproduced and then coded the rhetorical devices used for this reproduction.

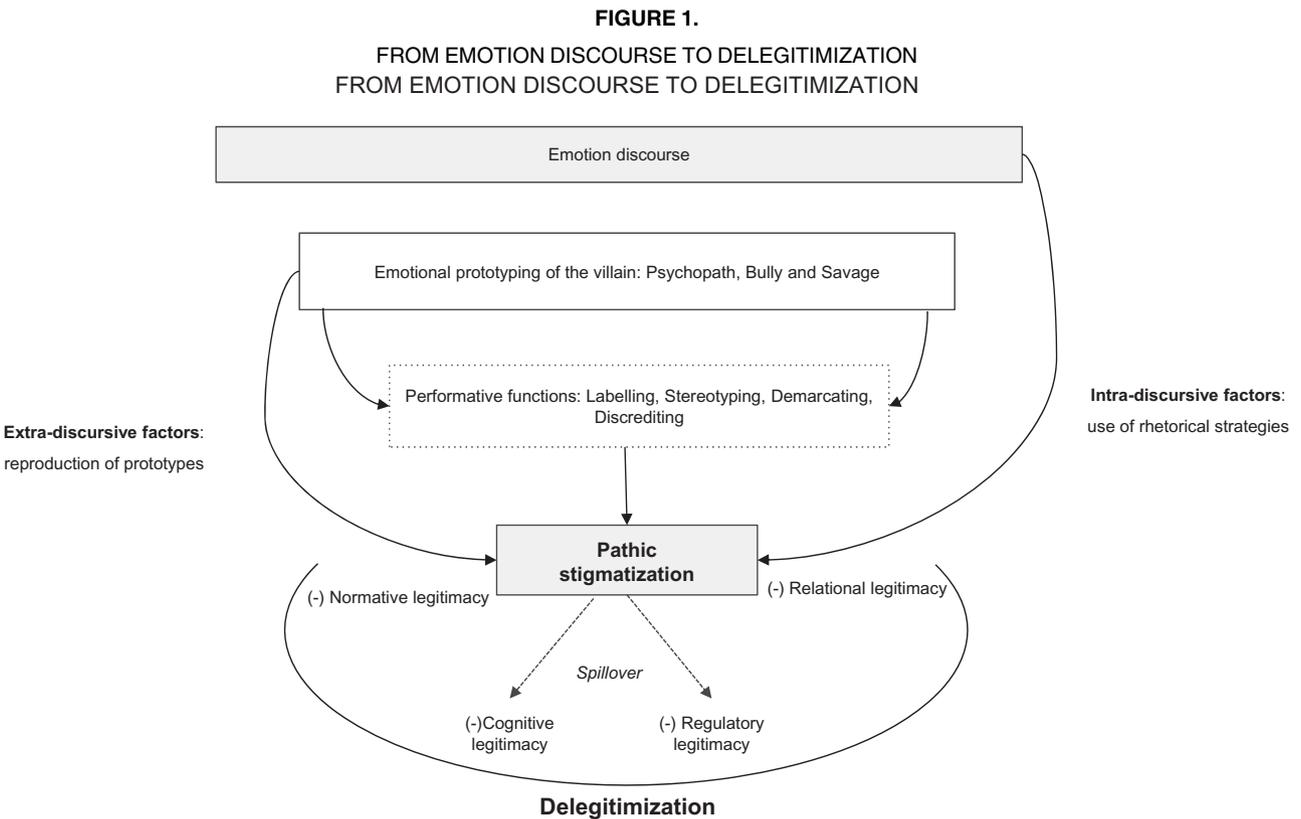
## FINDINGS

The following sections present the findings in two different stages. We first explain how the challengers' emotion discourse enables the social categorization of supporters as *psychopaths*, *bullies*, or *savages*. Second, we discuss the rhetorical strategies used for this categorization. Jointly, these rhetorical strategies perform four functions that serve to construct the TdV supporters as villains. Next, we explain how the journalistic and regulators' discourse reproduce and validate these prototypes, which cements a pathic stigma of TdV supporters (figure 1).

### Emotional Prototypes: The Psychopath, the Bully, and the Savage

The use of emotion discourse enables the challengers to build three main emotional prototypes of TdV supporters, namely the emotionally shallow psychopath, the Cowardly Bully, and the irrational savage.

*The Emotionally Shallow Psychopath.* The challengers' discourse draws upon an emotional repertoire closely associated with cultural depictions of serial killers and psychopaths, namely the idea of emotionally cold, calm, calculative characters who are capable of committing



atrocities without feeling guilt, remorse, or empathy for their victims. TdV supporters allegedly derive pleasure from the torment and killing of a bull because they lack the ability to experience moral emotions such as empathy, remorse, or compassion—“You have no shame . . . You don’t understand the word ‘compassion’” (comments to a blog entry on September 16, 2015). The challengers tend to overemphasize the agonistic aspects of bullfighting, which is commonly referred to as a “carnage,” while selectively diverting attention from any other potential motive or purpose, such as esthetic, tradition, or community.

Typically, these comments draw on hyperboles and equivalences between the TdV and a range of evil acts, such as “murder,” “torture,” “genocide” (comments to a news post on 14/09/2016), “crime” (comment to a blog post on 9/04/2015), or even the “Nazi Holocaust” (comment to a news post on 14/09/2016). Such discursive associations serve the challengers by reframing the expression of positive emotions toward bullfighting (e.g., joy, admiration, or pride) and utilizing them as evidence of the custodian’s general inability to feel empathy, pity, or compassion. Consequently, a villain prototype is established by depicting TdV supporters as psychopaths—emotionally shallow and “coldhearted people” (comments to a blog post on 1/09/2016)—who behave cruelly and sadistically due to the absence of moral emotions.

*The Cowardly Bully.* Emotion discourse is also used to construct bullfighting supporters as frustrated, weak, emotionally insecure men who act as bullies. In Spain, bullfighting has been culturally endowed with positive emotions such as braveness, toughness, courage, or virility, which are encoded within traditional masculine roles (Lutz 1996). Contrary to the latter, the challengers portray TdV supporters as a group of “pathetic insecure men” (comment to a blog post on 1/09/2016), who need to assert their masculinity by harming the weak and vulnerable—“we’ve had enough with their brutality to show how machos they are!” (comment to a news post on 14/09/2016). TdV advocates are also compared to domestic abusers and “wife beaters”—“don’t tell these guys [custodians] that hitting their wives has been made illegal. They’ll get upset when they find out” (comment to a blog post on 5/2016). Furthermore, the challengers’ foreground feelings of shame, anger, and resentment arise from their purported inability to sexually perform or “satisfy their women” (Their wives cheat on them with anyone because they had enough of their pub-like bullshit, so they just pick on a defenseless being to pay for their frustrations) (comment to a news post on 13/09/2015). Therefore, whereas the psychopath prototype emphasized the absence of moral emotions, the cowardly bully ascribes TdV supporters with feelings of shame, resentment, and inferiority arising from an allegedly unaccomplished sense of masculinity.

*The Irrational Savage.* As noted by Elias (1982), the civilizing process was accompanied with ever higher expectations of self-regulation and emotional restraint encoded in the form of good manners and social status. Contrary to this view, the irrational savage prototype depicts TdV supporters as feral, animal-like individuals who are incapable of exerting emotional self-restraint due to either their inferior intelligence, or their lack of education and proper manners.

The challengers characterize bullfighting as an act of blind rage—rather than an act of evil—and subsequently, those who support it are reduced to a mob of angry, uncontrolled, and low-class men. The latter are typically compared with Neanderthals and beasts in terms of their emotional development, as the following quote exemplifies: “[it] is beyond me how in the 21st century someone can act like a Neanderthal” (comment to a news post on 13/09/2016). Similarly, comments refer to TdV advocates as “animals” (comment to a blog post on 04/06/2016), “pack of hounds,” or “steers” (comments to news posts on 16/09/2014).

The challengers also emphasize the supporters’ intellectual and cultural inferiority with the use of terms such as “mentally retarded” (comment to a news post on 9/9/2016), “stupid and uneducated” (comment to a news post on 15/09/2015), “illiterate” (comment to a news post on 13/09/2016), “uneducated villagers” (comment to a news post on 16/09/2014), and “provincials” (blog entry on 13/09/2016). Therefore, TdV supporters are villainized by an alleged inability to control their emotional urges, basic emotions, and aggressive instincts, which indicates not only a flawed emotional and moral character but also their inferior cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984).

## Rhetorical Strategies in Challengers’ Emotion Discourse

*Pairings and Metaphors.* Challengers use metaphors to rhetorically associate—or pair up—TdV supporters with other culturally embedded social categories, such as “killers” (comment to a blog post on 13/09/2015), “sadists” (comment to a blog post on 21/08/2015), or “animals” (comment to a blog post on 04/06/2016). These categories, external to the domain of bullfighting, are already established as morally repulsive, evil, or inferior. The use of the metaphor offers an efficient resource for prototype delineation; it avoids detailed elaborations and argumentations on the part of the challengers and implies that the emotions and moral evaluations associated with villains are more easily pulled and transferred to their adversaries (Lakoff and Johnson 1999).

The pulled metaphors are thematically related to the extent that they ascribe supporters with a relatively coherent set of emotions and feelings that are typically associated

with villains, such as hyper-aggressiveness, absence of moral and social emotions (e.g., empathy, remorse, guilt, or shame), and sadism (e.g., deriving pleasure from inflicting pain on a sentient being). Despite their internal coherence, however, these metaphors also provide the challengers with great rhetorical flexibility, as they can be applied to a wide range of behavioral instances and exemplars related to the practice of bullfighting.

*Contrasts.* To amplify the emotional deviance of the villain, the challengers resort to contrasts to focus on the emotional differences between the villains and the victims/heroes. First, the challengers rhetorically augment the suffering and victimization of the bull. Counteracting the traditional depictions of the bull as a feral beast, the bull is anthropomorphized and portrayed as a defenseless and peaceful being with feelings and emotions. The challengers praise the beauty and bravery of the bull and highlight its innocence, vulnerability, and ultimately submissive attitude toward a cruel death. To do so, they use a set of figures of speech, such as *eulogy*, *elegy*, *enargeia*, *prosopopoeia*, and *similes* (web appendix B). Through these figures of speech, the challengers intend to show that feelings of empathy, compassion, and pity should be the rational and reasonable reactions toward the bull. The fact that the supporters do not show these emotions is argued as further proof of their emotional deviance.

Second, the challengers mobilize hyperbolic testimonies of their own feelings to highlight a contrast between their superior emotional sensibility, on the one hand, and the absence of emotions amongst TdV supporters, on the other hand. The challengers often provide detailed descriptions of their own emotions, including, for example, vivid expressions of empathy and compassion toward the bull, their joy and pride about taking part in “the good fight” (blog entry on 21/08/2015), or their sadness, shame, and guilt for not being able “to do more” to stop the practice (comment to a blog post on 21/08/2015).

In addition to the use of emotional differences, the challengers use contrasts to establish a divide between themselves and the supporters on the basis of the latter’s allegedly inferior cultural capital. For instance, the challengers exaggerate their use of formal language when they interact with supporters, with the intention of making a point about their cultural inferiority. In the thread of comments to a news article published in the national newspaper *El País* (16/09/2014), a supporter of TdV says the following: “They [bulls] do not suffer, do not experience pain, they do not complain, they simply fight and die, it is a good type of death but you [challengers] will never understand.” A challenger responds as follows: “How can you defend this barbarian argument that a bull does not suffer when stabbed? Could anyone be more ignorant and mendacious?” In his response, the commenter responds by using the formal use of “you” in Spanish (i.e., “usted”),

using correct punctuation and quotation marks, often ignored when writing in social media, and choosing a formal word, seldom used in informal conversations (mendacious). With these resources, his construction of the supporter as “savage” is more plausible.

*Selective Descriptions and Attributions.* The challengers’ comments tend to describe bullfighting supporters in ways that selectively focus on events or instances of behavior that confirm their emotional prototypes, while simultaneously omitting any information that could provide a more nuanced emotional portrait of the actors involved. The challengers’ accounts of violence tend to be one-directional. They frequently draw attention to aggressive behaviors or language used by TdV supporters, while violence amongst antibullfighting activists typically is systematically omitted, denied, or rationalized (“No animalist has ever used violence to defend their ideas,” comment to a blog post on 1/12/2015). To be certain, violence is not confined to the TdV supporters. In fact, both antibullfighting activists and TdV supporters have demonstrably employed physical violence to confront one another during demonstrations (*El Mundo* 17/09/2014), and the use of hate language on social media is bidirectional—as attested by the sheer volume of comments in which the challengers wish TdV supporters slow, painful deaths often by using *imprecations* and *anathema* (When you get to eat Rompesuelas [name of the bull] in the stew I hope he gives you deadly diarrhea . . . that no doctor in the world can remove his bones from your ass) (comment to a blog post on 11/09/2015). Nevertheless, when other commenters point to the fact that antibullfighting activists can also act aggressively or violently, the challengers tend to reframe such behaviors as acts of self-defense, isolated incidents, or even as morally justified and rational responses. For example, consider the following comment:

Usually those who do not respect animals, cannot respect people (. . .) I was there and I only saw people yelling at us because we protested against their festival, but I already said that some animalists may have misbehaved and I don’t like it either. (Comment to a news post on 13/09/2016).

This comment illustrates how support for bullfighting is used as evidence of a generalized lack of empathy (not only for animals but also for people) amongst TdV supporters, while at the same time, the aggressive behaviors by antibullfighting activists are downplayed (they misbehaved) and presented as an exception (some animalists) that does not represent the speaker as a challenger (and I do not like it). The key point here is that, through selective descriptions, violence perpetrated by the challengers is depicted as minimal, unusual, and morally justified, whereas the supporters’ acts of violence, anger, or blind rage are generalized and presented as common behaviors that demonstrate their alleged emotional flaws, for

example, their lack of empathy or inability to control their emotions.

*Semantic Reversals.* With this strategy, challengers select a central concept used by custodians to defend their position and reverse its meaning. This resignification is then invoked by challengers as further proof of the emotional deviance of supporters and is clearly seen in the semantic reversal of “medieval” and “culture.” The TdV supporters base their defense of the festival on its being a 400-year-old tradition. The supporters usually refer to it as “our medieval tradition” to emphasize that the festival is part of their cultural heritage and should be protected. Using irony, the challengers invert this meaning of “medieval” by invoking the negative connotations of the word, namely it being “dark,” “brutish,” and “uncivilized.” For instance, a commenter uses irony to say the following: “As these are medieval traditions, in Tordesillas they should start burning witches, legalize slavery, etc. The stones [reference to the stones thrown at animalists] are used to recreate the ‘medieval’ atmosphere” (comment to a news post 16/09/2014). By establishing the semantic reversal of “medieval,” the challengers implicitly suggest that only deranged or primitive individuals could defend a “medieval” tradition. Similarly, the supporters defend the festival for its being an expression of “culture,” with the intended meaning of a folk tradition, worthy of respect. The challengers resignify “culture” as “reason” or “civilization” and depict TdV as similar to other discontinued practices that were incongruent with a “civilized” society. For instance, they compare TdV to other “cultural” expressions considered untenable today, such as the *droits de seigneur* (comment to a news post on 16/09/2014). The fact that supporters defend the TdV as “culture” is argued as evidence of their being “unreasonable” and “uncivilized.”

### The Performative Functions of the Challengers’ Emotion Discourse

We have framed emotion discourse as a form of social action through which actors perform institutional work in the context of strategic debate and public argumentation—rather than a medium to express their inner feelings (Billig 2002; Edwards 1997). Thus, while a traditional approach would treat emotion-based discourse as an outcome of either individual feelings or collective sentiments, a performative orientation seeks to elucidate what the actors accomplish when they use emotion discourse rhetorically in the course of a controversy.

The rhetorical strategies found in the challenger’s discourse jointly perform the following four functions (Link and Phelan 2001): *labeling*, *stereotyping*, *demarcating*, and *discrediting*. *Labeling* concerns the use of discourse to impart emotions onto other actors, emphasizing either aspects

of hyperemotionality, namely the idea of the supporters’ behavior as being governed by passions and strong emotions rather than reason (“They are aroused by seeing the bull die,” comment to a blog post on 4/06/2016), or hypoeemotionality—to explain the TdV supporters’ behavior in terms of a limited or impaired capacity to experience emotions (“You don’t have a heart,” comment to a blog post on 16/09/2015).

*Stereotyping* involves a generalization of emotional characteristics—based on individual cases—to entire collectives. As shown above, the challengers’ emotion discourse seldom focuses on one single individual or event, but rather, they tend to direct attention to the allegedly shared and collective nature of a particular emotion or affective state. The third function is *demarcating*, which denotes the use of emotion discourse to establish intergroup differences and contrasts between the emotionally deviant and culturally inferior “them” and the emotionally appropriate and civilized “us.”

Finally, the fourth function of emotion discourse is *discrediting*. The challengers discredit the supporters by pairing them with other social categories already established as inferior, or by stripping out the meaning structures (e.g., protection of cultural heritage) on which the TdV supporter would build their positive distinctiveness as a group (Tajfel and Turner 1985). The construction of supporters as emotionally deviant provides a rationale and a justification for the rejection and exclusion conveyed, notably, in the *imprecations* and the *anathema* (web appendix B).

### Reproduction and Validation of the Emotional Prototypes

Having considered the work of the challengers as skillful rhetoricians, who use emotion discourse to prototype the TdV supporters as villains, a question remains with regard to how these prototypes are socially reproduced and diffused beyond microlevel interactions. The previous accounts of legitimacy have forcefully demonstrated that the media and regulators are not passive vessels of meanings; rather, they actively contribute to the semiotic shifts (Humphreys 2010a, 2010b) underpinning the construal of legitimacy judgments (Brown et al. 2012; Humphreys and Latour 2013; Moisaner et al. 2016; Scaraboto and Fischer 2013). Building on this, our analysis moves beyond the microlevel interactions amongst media users to show that the emotional prototypes also circulate within the discourse of both journalists and regulators.

Here, it is important to consider that “emotionality typically represents a decline in the standards of journalism and a deviance from journalism’s proper social role” (Pantti 2010, 170). Therefore, an explicit usage of emotion discourse by journalists can contravene the extant conventions governing the production of journalistic discourse. Despite this barrier, emotional prototypes effectively

infiltrated the journalistic discourse and circulated within the coverage of the TdV controversy, which was accomplished through various rhetorical moves, most notably the utilization of direct quotes by journalists. Using direct quotes from antibullfighting activists (in the headlines or through the story) and combining these with a more factual style of reporting the events, journalists were able to reproduce verbatim some of the crudest emotional prototypes of the TdV supporters without overtly breaching conventions of factual reporting. Direct quotes from the challengers included, for example, explicit references to the TdV as “murder” (*El Correo* 14/09/2016) and the participants as “killers” (*Europa Press* 7/9/2014), “ruthless murderers” (*Diario de León* 14/09/2014), or “savages and inhuman” (*Euronews* 13/09/2016).

Moreover, the use of emotion discourse was also evident in opinion columns, where, contrary to regular newspaper articles, the conventions of factual reporting tend to be more relaxed and authors are typically freer to employ emotionally laden language. For example, various columnists defined TdV as an expression of “sadism” and “cruelty” (*ABC Seville* 19/09/2014; *Editorial El País* 17/09/2014) or even more explicitly, they labeled the festival as a “social psychopathy” (*El País* 9/9/2014). In another example, a columnist stated the following: “TdV is an attack to our intelligence and to our deepest human condition capable of feeling piety and empathy” (*El Sur* 18/09/2014). Depictions of participants carrying the stuffed head of a bull reinforce the aforementioned prototypes by implying that they are psychopaths who keep souvenirs of their victims (*Agence France Presse* 13/09/2016). The portrayal of supporters as *Bullies* is stabilized when columnists speak of the TdV as a festival of “cowards” (*La Opinión de Málaga* 30/07/2016) or when the tournament is described as a “lynching” perpetrated by a mob (*El Periódico de Extremadura* 16/09/2016). Finally, in numerous instances, columnists characterize supporters as savages, by referring to them as “uncivilized yokels” (*Diario de León* 28/09/2016) or “redneck brutish” (*Diario de Mallorca* 14/10/2014).

In addition to journalists, regulators contribute to reproducing the emotional prototypes of TdV supporters. The minutes of the parliamentary sessions in which the TdV ban was discussed demonstrate that regulators also depict TdV supporters a violent, sadistic, uncivilized, and primitive collective. For instance, the TdV is explicitly labeled as “torture” by a liberal party representative (Izquierda Unida representative, *Diario de Sesiones Parliament of Castilla y León* no. 35, 2931–2932). Similarly, the representative of Podemos (another liberal party) defends the ban by arguing that the “savage” and “sadistic enjoyment” the festival represents cannot be accepted. Moreover, in his allocution, this representative uses the already described rhetorical strategies of semantic reversals and contrasts almost verbatim (Podemos representative, 2934–2935).

Even the governing (conservative) party defends the ban of TdV for its lack of fit with “modern Spain” (2928).

In addition to reproducing the emotional prototypes, the analysis of the media and regulators’ discourse shows that they also contribute to their validation. Here, validation refers to the rhetorical creation of a sense of social consensus around a particular legitimacy judgment (Bitektine and Haack 2015). The existence of a general consensus against bullfighting is a highly contentious issue, with most opinion polls and surveys typically indicating a rather ambivalent position amongst Spaniards (María et al. 2017; SMECS (Spanish Ministry of Education, Culture and Spectacles) 2015). However, the discourse of journalists and regulators frequently invoked a purported national consensus encompassing not only a rejection of bullfighting but also the negative prototypes allegedly associated with the taste for this practice.

Two rhetorical strategies create the impression of social consensus in media discourse. The first is the reproduction of quotes from high-status figures explicitly positioned against the TdV. For example, Pedro Sánchez, the current Prime Minister and leader of the Socialist Party at that time, explained in an interview that he was “ashamed of the TdV” (*Infolibre* 10/09/2015). Other examples include judges (*El Mundo* 26/09/2016), celebrities (*EfeVerde* 16/08/2014; *El Periódico de Catalunya* 14/09/2015), popular TV presenters (*Diario de León* 26/09/2016; *The Huffington Post* 16/09/2014), or sportsmen and women (*El Mundo* 14/09/2016).

A second strategy to create a sense of consensus is to appeal to, and speak on behalf of “the majority,” “the Spanish society,” or “the people” when making the case for the ban of TdV (*Europa Press* 14/09/2016). An impression of unanimity is most acutely conveyed in headlines such as “Spain ratifies the TdV ban” (*Deutsche Welle* 14/12/2016). Although the article refers to the decision of the Supreme court against the city council’s appellate procedure regarding the ban of the TdV, the sinecdoque conveys the idea that all Spaniards support the ban.

Similarly, the regulators’ discourse contributes to staging an impression of social consensus around the prototypes. During the parliamentary sessions (*Diario de Sesiones* no. 35 2016), the conservative ruling party defended the ban out of a need “to adjust the festival to the (...) contemporary social demands; what was morally acceptable hundreds of years ago, it is not acceptable today” (2928). This is also reflected in the wording of the bill, which justifies the ban as a legitimate response to “a persistent and growing social will” against the TdV and the need to regulate “without delay, the celebration of popular and traditional shows in line with the ethical demands of today’s society” (BOCL no. 96 2016). With this, the ruling party accepts that the challengers’ view is dominant in Spain and, therefore, the regional government should attend to their demands.

## The Creation of Pathic Stigma

As the emotional prototypes of the supporters are reproduced and validated by the media and regulators, a pathic stigma is gradually cemented and develops into an accepted cultural marker of social undesirability and inferior status (Devers et al. 2009). Goffman (1963, 3) defines stigma as a deeply discrediting attribute that reduces the bearer “from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one.” Building on this, we use the term *pathic stigma*<sup>1</sup> to denote a set of emotional characteristics, discursively constructed and rhetorically attributed to actors, which signals some fundamental flaw in their moral character (their vilification).

Emotional prototypes taint the TdV supporters by linking their group identity with various forms of so-called “emotion dirt” (McMurray and Ward 2014, 1134), namely “taboos and misplaced feelings (. . .) that threaten the solidarity, self-conception or preferred orders of a given individual or community.” In response to these associations, TdV supporters frequently complain that their position is “degraded” and “shamed” (blog entry on 08/2016), “insulted and scorned” (comment to a news post on 14/09/2016), defeated and “trampled over” (comment to a news post on 14/09/2016), “derided” (comment to a news post on 13/09/2016), marginalized, prosecuted, or even “lynched” (comment to a news post on 13/09/2016). The scope of this vilification is extensive, encompassing the whole town of Tordesillas, with residents reporting that living in Tordesillas became tantamount with being a “yokel” and a “sadist” (blog entry on 08/2016). The following comment illustrates this point:

It is a real shame that Tordesillas has become infamous across Europe for its brutality against the bulls and no-one remembers the archived treasures (heritage) preserved there. (Comment to a news post on 13/09/2016).

Pathic stigmatization is, therefore, the most significant performative effect of emotional prototyping and has wider social implications. The pathic stigma becomes cemented due to intra-discursive (i.e., the rhetorical flexibility and illocutionary force of the emotion discourse) and extra-discursive (i.e., its reproduction by high-power actors) factors. We have already explained how the reproduction of the emotional prototypes by high-power actors validates the vilification. We elaborate more on the intra-discursive factors below.

As we have shown, emotional prototyping encompasses a rich variety of emotional depictions, some of which may be overlapping, while others are digressing (TdV supporters are categorized as feeling too much—“savages”—or feeling too little—“psychopaths”). Either way, the

supporters are said to feel “deviant emotions,” depending on what specific prototype suited the discursive context. Here, the rhetorical flexibility of the emotion discourse is pivotal to neutralize the supporters’ defensive work, particularly insofar as any attempts at resisting stigmatization can be used by challengers to confirm and further reinforce the emotional prototypes. For example, if supporters react with sadness at the loss of their tradition, then challengers would use these reactions as proof of their cultural and intellectual inferiority, as well as their inability to manage their emotions, act rationally, and embrace modernity (thereby confirming them as irrational savages). Alternatively, if the supporters respond with anger, such reactions would be used to confirm their portrayal as emotionally frustrated bullies. Finally, when TdV supporters show indifference or aloofness toward the challengers’ attacks, this is typically used as evidence of their alleged inability to feel or express any emotions (which confirms the psychopath prototype). Therefore, there is limited room for TdV supporters to disprove the emotional prototypes because the latter’s plasticity allows challengers to constantly rework and adjust them to a wide range of emotional responses and defensive work carried out by their adversaries. An excessive emphasis on coherence and rigidity could make emotional prototypes vulnerable to a myriad of counterexamples and exceptions and could call their validity into question.

In addition to the rhetorical flexibility, the illocutionary force of the emotion discourse contributes to cement the pathic stigma. The intertextual relationship with broader cultural narratives (Oliver 1992) facilitates the cognitive acceptance of the prototypes (Suchman 1995). For instance, the rhetorical and discursive possibilities afforded by the savage prototype are reinforced by their connection with broader views concerning the modernization of Spain and its integration in the European Union (Bailey 2007); similarly, the construction of bullfighters as psychopaths or bullies is facilitated by the changing views on animal welfare within the country and abroad (Douglass 1999). Moreover, the emotional prototypes are rhetorically aligned with existing semiotic structures (Humphreys 2010b), in this case, other social categories from the broader cultural imaginary of “deviance” and “evilness” (e.g., Nazis, wife beaters, bullies, or yokels). This congruence with semiotic structures and identities that are already vilified is important because it facilitates the cognitive acceptance of the pathic stigma by endowing the latter with a sense of “taken-for-grantedness.”

## DISCUSSION

This study has articulated emotion discourse as a form of emotion work. In addition, it has shown the utilization of emotion discourse for the construction of villains. Its

<sup>1</sup> Pathic is used here as the adjectival form of the Greek noun *pathos* (*páthos*), meaning “suffering, emotions, or feelings.” Source: Etymonline.com.

rhetorical flexibility and performativity render emotion discourse as an effective device for social categorization. Second, this study has unveiled the role of pathic stigmatization as a mediating cultural process for the delegitimization of consumer practices. In the next section, we explain the implications of our research for three key conversations in the cultural consumer research. The key conversations revolve around (a) marketplace sentiments, (b) the delegitimization of consumer practices, and (c) the study of marketplace controversies.

### Toward a Rhetoric and Performative Approach to Marketplace Sentiments

The pioneering work of [Gopaldas \(2014\)](#) reclaims the study of sentiments as sociocultural constructs, paving the way for further theorizations concerning how emotions shape controversies over consumption practices, products, and identities. This author identifies three broad sentiments commonly associated with marketplace actors, namely contempt for villains, concern for victims, and celebration of heroes, which operate primarily at the macrolevel ([Gopaldas 2014](#)). In comparison, our work engages with the downstream implications of marketplace sentiments, providing a conceptual framework that illuminates how emotions are brought to bear at the mesolevels and microlevels of marketplace controversies. Three implications of our proposed framework are brought forward.

First, we emphasize that the rhetorical function of emotions cannot be discounted from the analysis of marketplace sentiments, nor can we assume a direct correspondence between actors' emotions and their discourse. Indeed, as we move away from the macrolevels of inquiry, we observe that the rhetorical and performative dimensions of emotions acquire greater relevance. This observation problematizes the assumption of a direct correspondence between the actors' emotional accounts and their actual feelings. In other words, the actors' accounts of emotions cannot be treated as signposts to their emotional states without problems arising.

Drawing on discursive psychology, our proposed methodological move is to suspend the distinction between emotions, on the one hand, and discourse, on the other hand. By implication, the task of the analyst is to bring to the foreground the ways in which actors construct what is culturally recognized as "sentiments," as well as the functions that such discursive constructions perform in the context of market controversies. One such key function of emotion discourse involves the social categorization of other marketplace actors based on their alleged emotional qualities. In this regard, we show how multiple emotional characteristics can be strategically ascribed to rivals to categorize them as villains, without necessarily assuming that they reflect their true feelings.

Second, we believe that emotional dispositions toward actors may not be as clearly demarcated and linearly attributed as the extant literature suggests. The fluid and open-ended emotional constructions of the villain suggest that the range of emotions potentially displayed toward them could be more numerous than the three sentiments originally argued. Our research suggests that the actors may intend to elicit a broader range of emotions toward villains, including anxiety and fear toward the psychopath, contempt toward the bully, or pity and disdain toward the savages. Presumably, this argument could be extended to the emotional construction of heroes and victims in marketplace controversies, albeit this observation would fall beyond our empirical remit. Given these arguments, our study warns against taken-for-granted understandings of "sentiments" as ready-made, superordinate categories characterized by a high degree of semantic coherence and internal structure. Our study also highlights the difficulty in seeking to establish permanent, universal, one-dimensional links between a particular emotion and a marketplace actor.

Our work serves to advance a more fluid perspective on the relationship between actors and marketplace sentiments. The actors' emotion discourse may temporarily accomplish a high degree of actor/sentiment coherence by associating different emotional prototypes with existing semiotic structures and broader cultural narratives, as identified by [Gopaldas \(2014\)](#). However, given that actor/sentiment coherence is ultimately contingent on the rhetorical work of the actors, we posit that the links and associations between the market constituents and specific sentiments are always 'in the making'—and thus, open to change and contestation. The latter become increasingly apparent as marketplace sentiments are moved downstream from the macrolevels to the microlevels and mesolevels.

Third, we defend the idea that emotion discourse precedes the formation of sentiments. Within the extant literature, sentiments are defined as shared emotional dispositions toward (already existing) marketplace actors, be they villains, actors, or heroes ([Gopaldas 2014, 998](#)). This view, which is also held by neo-institutional theorists ([Brown et al. 2012; Moisaner et al. 2016](#)), passes in silence over the prior role of emotions in the construction of the marketplace actors toward whom such sentiments are elicited. We address this gap by establishing that the actors must be socially categorized as villains before sentiments of contempt can be mobilized against them, as suggested by [Gopaldas \(2014\)](#). Emotion discourse plays a pivotal role in such processes of actor construction, emotional prototyping, and categorization.

Beyond contributing to the study of emotions in the cultural consumer research, our work seeks to initiate a productive conversation with the literatures on emotional stereotyping and intergroup emotions ([Mackie et al. 2000, 2008](#)). Despite agreeing with their view of emotions as

social mechanisms that regulate intergroup relations as they unfold within already existing group boundaries, our work also highlights that emotion discourse precedes the very formation of groups. In this regard, we suggest that it is rather limiting to assume that groups exist prior to the emotions that their members allegedly feel both within them and toward other groups. In fact, our work points to the need for interrogating the emotion discourse practices through which group identities are built, managed, resisted, and neutralized, and how the latter may gradually give rise to group boundaries and intragroup emotional processes.

### Emotion Discourse, Pathic Stigmatization, and Its Implications for Delegitimization

Our theorization of emotion work provides an innovative analytical framework for studying delegitimization processes, alongside other forms of ideological, moralistic, and semiotic work. The extant literature indicates that actors seek to legitimize their positions by mobilizing antagonistic ideological constructions (Kozinets and Handelman 2004), dramatic frames and narratives (Giesler 2008), cultural capital/taste distinction (Thompson and Arsel 2004), or moralistic discourses (Luedicke et al. 2010). Our work is predicated on the idea that emotion discourse is another form of institutional work deployed to affect the illegitimacy of a consumer practice. More specifically, we have demonstrated that the mobilization of emotion discourse ultimately leads to the creation of a pathic stigma.

We conceptualize pathic stigmatization as a cultural mechanism mediating the relationship between activists' mobilization of emotions in situated discourse and the subsequent delegitimization of consumer practices. With the establishment of the pathic stigma, the normative and relational bases that sustained the legitimacy of TdV were undermined. The construction of supporters as being emotionally deviant contributed to the perception that they are unfit to or incapable of respecting the prosocial logic on which normative legitimacy is grounded (Suchman 1995). Normative legitimacy is eroded by presenting TdV supporters as violators of moral principles, such as the care for life or the protection of victims. Simultaneously, the portrayal of the supporters as morally deviant undermines their social status and—if we credit supporters—even their dignity. The relational legitimacy of the practice is eroded, as the ability of the actors to derive a collective sense of identity and belonging, solidarity, and status from their participation in the practice is undermined by the establishment of negative emotional associations.

In summary, the pathic stigmatization of the supporters construes the members of the group as violators of social norms and unworthy of social respect. Their vilification further justifies calling for extreme punishments and retributions on the challengers' side. In this regard, the

challengers argue that TdV supporters deserve to be verbally abused, shamed, and repudiated by society. More extreme cases explicitly justify the use of physical violence or imprisonment, to list some of the punishments conveyed in the *imprecations* and *anathema* (web appendix B). Whether these are real or feigned, such verbalizations contribute to higher levels of incivility in social media interactions by turning the targeted group into a subhuman category (Haslam and Loughnan 2014).

Various spillover effects followed from the loss of the TdV's normative and relational legitimacy, the most significant of which impinged upon the cognitive and regulatory legitimacy of the practice. We have argued that, traditionally, bullfighting operated as “a generator of cultural specificity” (Mitchell 1991, 410) and a core element of Spanish national identity (Brandes 2009). However, with TdV being recast as backward, sadistic, and uncivilized, the practice became incongruent with new cultural schemes concerning the integration of Spain in the European Union and its place alongside other modern European democracies.

The vilification of TdV supporters also affected the regulatory legitimacy of the practice. Indeed, as the public endorsement of pro-bullfighting groups became tantamount to a public endorsement of psychopaths, bullies, and savages, their cause lost the traditional support of the main political parties in the country. Proof of this rapid change is that the 2016 ban of TdV was issued and implemented by the same government that had endowed bullfighting with special legal protections (as a form of local cultural heritage) in 2014. Therefore, even though the effects of emotion discourse manifested most directly on the TdV's normative and relational legitimacy, all the legitimacy pillars sustaining the practice were directly or indirectly undermined.

Hence, whereas the previous work underscores the centrality of normative, cognitive, and regulatory legitimacy in market making (Humphreys 2010a, 2010b), our work contributes by foregrounding how the latter are closely intertwined with relational legitimacy. The TdV lost its legitimacy when participation/advocacy of this practice was no longer perceived as contributing to a positive group identity or self-worth for individuals; on the contrary, it became a reason for shame, social derision, and exclusion, which in turn, impinged upon other legitimacy pillars. Indeed, previous consumer studies (Kates 2004; Sandikci and Ger 2010; Scaraboto and Fischer 2013) have discussed how marginalized consumers strive to gain relational legitimacy in markets by constituting themselves as socially worthy so that they “receive the outcomes commensurate with such entitlement” (Tost 2011, 694). Given our focus on delegitimization, our study shows a different process, namely how actors are constructed as deviant, deprived of social worth so that their practices are shunned and excluded from the market.

## On the Centrality of Actor Vilification via Emotion Discourse and Its Implications for the Study of Consumer Controversies

While the previous work has argued that consumer controversies unfold as sagas “of heroes, villains and victims” (Giesler 2008, 739), it is apparent that villains are placed firmly at the center of this process. Villains function as a catalyst for consumer activism (Gopaldas 2014); they focus blame, provide a clear target for collective action, and solidify adversarial group identities (Bergstrand and Jasper 2018). In this regard, Anker (2005, 26) concludes that “without a villain, there is no victim and thus no hero or heroic feat”. Despite villains being at the center of marketplace controversies, the rhetorical and discursive mechanisms whereby marketplace villains are constructed have hitherto received scant attention.

Our work addresses this limitation and contributes to our understanding of how the process of actor vilification occurs. A corollary for future analyses of marketplace controversies is that the latter should become more attentive to the connection between the rhetoric of actor vilification and its implications for the targeted collective. More specifically, we draw attention to the relations between the emotions that are attributed to an actor and the success/failure of that actor’s cause. For instance, Kozinets and Handelman (2004) showed that mainstream consumers are portrayed by activists simultaneously as “emotionless” (“robotic sleepers” and “couch potatoes,” 702) and as primal, emotion-driven individuals who are unable to control their impulses for buying an ever-increasing number of commodities (700). Traces of emotion discourse also pervade representations of commercial organizations, such as large record companies (Giesler 2008), wherein executives and managers are depicted by their opponents as emotionally frustrated, impotent bullies (“What a pathetic expression of impotence is it to sue children, you know, children? Or caring mums or folks who don’t even have a computer,” 747), as well as unempathetic, calculative, and coldhearted men (“... when the man’s million-zillion dollar teen slut might not make him the moolah he wants, they shut the shop up,” 746).

Our research demonstrates that emotion discourse is key to reinforcing activists’ moral judgments concerning other marketplace constituents. As rival actors are strategically endowed with emotional states, feelings, and dispositions, their subsequent vilification becomes increasingly plausible. In extreme cases, however, the negative emotional prototypes that are culturally validated by high-power actors, including academics, may consolidate into a pathic stigma, which allows latent forms of bigotry, intolerance, and prejudice toward the targeted collectives to surface. Therefore, even though a close inspection of the previous work corroborates our point that actors regularly depict their adversaries in emotional terms, it also emphasized the dangers

of treating emotion discourse unproblematically, particularly insofar as this may foster an unproductive complicity in the emotional categorization and potential caricaturing of certain marketplace constituents. To avert these concerns, our work advances a rhetorical and performative perspective that encourages a more reflexive consideration of the role of emotion discourse alongside other forms of ideological, moralistic, and semiotic work, such as ideological constructions (Kozinets and Handelman 2004), dramatic frames and narratives (Giesler 2008), or myth-based identity discourses (Luedicke et al. 2010).

## Future Research Lines

While our theorization is particularly relevant to explain the emotionally heightened market conflicts that relate to broader moral or identity issues, it is certain that other delegitimization processes may take on different forms or unfold differently, which could be the case for controversies over the pragmatic legitimacy of a given consumer practice, where moral and identity issues may recede to the background. Furthermore, our proposed conceptualization is restricted to contexts where actors publicly display their emotional accounts of opponents; as social media enables vilification of actors (Hmielowski, Hutchens and Cicchirillo 2014), our processual model of delegitimization is contingent on the penetration and use of social media in a given cultural context.

This research opens up new questions and areas of inquiry that could be pursued by future research. For instance, our work focused on a case in which emotional prototyping was successful and consolidated as a pathic stigma. Nevertheless, future studies could focus on cases in which attempts at emotional vilification backfire or fail. The latter would be helpful to choose a more appropriate scope and better understand the conditions under which emotional stereotyping can be resisted and overturned by the targeted collectives.

Furthermore, the study of emotion discourse may be fruitfully incorporated within the nascent literature on consumption-based offenses, namely the myriad of consumption acts perceived by other consumers as intentionally violating some prescriptive normative standard (Liu et al. 2019). While these authors argue that consumption-based offenses are intimately connected to the experience of anger (Liu et al. 2019), our framework highlights the importance of paying closer attention to the ways in which such anger accounts are rhetorically assembled by the allegedly “offended consumers,” how they are mobilized in public debates and conversations, and the functions performed by them (e.g., blame allocation or social categorization).

## CONCLUSION

We conclude by noting that consumer culture is inseparable from a contemporary shift in the political debate and public argumentation toward a new wave of populism. The latter combines a heavy use of social media with a marked appeal to sentiments, particularly anger, resentment, and frustration, as a means to galvanize disenchanted publics. Consumer controversies seem to be increasingly imbued with such populist overtones. In this context, our work draws attention to the importance of understanding how rhetorical battles over consumption practices unfold as different parties compete for the moral high ground. In particular, we have shown how emotion discourse plays a capital role in delegitimization processes precisely by contributing to categorizing, stigmatizing, and dehumanizing the targeted collectives. As such polarizing forms of emotion discourse become normalized, especially through social media, there is a risk that controversies over products, brands, or consumer practices would increasingly turn into fertile ground for the expression of hatred, bigotry, and prejudice.

## DATA COLLECTION INFORMATION

Data from media were downloaded by the third author with the help of a research assistant. Data from blogs and regulators were downloaded by the first author. The first and third author did the preliminary coding of data (prototypes and rhetorical strategies in challengers', journalists', and regulators' discourses). Once the first codes were identified, the three authors refined them together.

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