

Thematic dossier: *International Relations and Social Networks* (July 2021)

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EDITORIAL

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND SOCIAL NETWORKS¹

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This thematic dossier systematizes the main lines of reflection presented in the International Relations panel of the II International Congress on Communication and Social Media in the Information Society, which took place at Universidade Autónoma de Lisboa between 31 March and 1 April 2021.

The common denominator that guided the debate highlighted the role of information and communication technologies as a vehicle for action on a large scale. The construction of this globalizing web cemented strong interdependence of the economic, political and communicative powers among countries and blocs.

Zygmunt Bauman², with the acumen that characterizes him, considers this process to be one of the irreversible features of our time, when we all depend on everyone. Decisions

¹ Editorial translated by Carolina Peralta.

² See the interview given by the sociologist to the project *fronteiras do pensamento*; <https://www.fronteiras.com/artigos/zygmunt-bauman-especial>



and events that take place in the “world culture”³ can produce multiple direct, indirect, immediate, distant effects (even if certain societies may appear to be impervious to a set of phenomena).

This situation underlies an intensive digitalization of our lives, exposed to a continuous flow of information and frequent sharing. The rapid circulation of networked information shapes incessant opinions, in a public debate increasingly marked by issues of a globalizing nature. Aware of this situation, public agents (governments, political agents, interest groups and corporations) give primacy to the communicative phenomenon as a strategic “arsenal” for negotiation and domination.

We glimpse an relinquishment of the perception of communication as a soft power⁴ instrument, having increasingly become a hard power instrument. The Cambridge Analytica⁵ phenomenon, of common knowledge and which would be difficult to summarize here, would be the illustrative paradigm of the use of communication as a definition of power relations in the international scene. This is the starting point for this thematic issue. The articles that comprise this dossier address this issue in several significant aspects.

A first group discusses the importance of digital tools at the service of what is advocated as “cyber-diplomacy”. A first consideration addresses the scenario of technological migration to the 5G reality, which opens up fierce disputes between States, taking into account the security and defence issues that it raises (Text 1; Muñoz-Satre, Rodrigo-Martín and Rodrigo-Martín). A second text assesses Qatar's communication strategy to rehabilitate its international credibility. The procedures operated from a crisis management situation are discussed, after this country of the Arabian Peninsula was accused by its neighbours of supporting terrorist causes, becoming the target of international sanctions (text 9; González).

A second set discusses misinformation issues. Text 3 (Guzmán and Rodríguez-Cánovas) comprehensively analyses the strategies used by States to spread false information with the clear intention of gaining political dividends. This issue materializes in a more concrete way in the reflection that proposes a look at the existing tension between the European Union and the misinformation attacks conducted by the Chinese and Russian agendas (text 6; Benedicto).

Text 10 by Magallón-Rosa and Sánchez-Duarte relates misinformation issues in the context of the pandemic, comparing southern European countries. It bridges the gap between the topic of misinformation and the current pandemic context we are experiencing. This is the third guiding axis of this issue of Janus.net, e-journal of international relations, which includes two more texts to complement the reflection on the epidemic. An article addresses the communication mechanisms used by European and Portuguese entities that oversee the management of vaccines, to communicate the vaccination plan (text 11; Santos et al). A second article looks at the phenomenon of

³ Lipovetsky, G., & Serroy, J. (2010). *A Cultura-Mundo. Resposta a uma sociedade desorientada*. Lisbon: Edições 70.

⁴ Wendzel, R. (1985). *Relações Internacionais: o enfoque do formulador de políticas*. Brasília: Universidade de Brasília.

⁵ <https://www.netflix.com/pt/title/80117542>



tourism, marked by a strong scenario of fluctuating information and global uncertainty (text 13; Caldevilla-Domínguez et al).

A fourth group of articles discusses the role of social media as a political communication instrument; by the Spanish and British royal houses (text 2; Rodríguez, Vázquez Jorquera), by the Trump administration (text 8; Costa), and as a communication instrument of the Portuguese and Spanish Catholic Church in the relationship as power interlocutors (text 12; Sabaté and Chiva).

A fifth group of papers closes this debate, proposing three perspectives on the use of digital resources as enhancers of human rights awareness. The first scrutinizes public discourses about disability in the Spanish context, seen through the viewpoint of international guidelines that propose more inclusive societies (text 7; López-Cepeda, Maña-Viniegra and Vivar-Zurita). A second (text 5; Bernabé) studies the communicative strategies adopted by an organization such as Amnesty International, in its recurrent stance on issues of a humanitarian nature. The third perspective examines how commercial corporations incorporate civil rights issues into their advertising approaches. In text 4, Díaz-Bajo and Martínez-Borda analyse an advertising campaign for a world-brand, which proposes a modelling strategy for a commercial identity based on gender and racial equality issues.

These are the five guiding axes of this thematic dossier, which contain texts that reveal a better understanding of a hyper-communicated world⁶, marked by corporate possibilities that simultaneously dispute each other in relations of permanent competition and tension.

Happy readings!

How to cite this editorial

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⁶ Constantinou, C., Richmond, O., & Watson, A. (2008). International Relations and the challenges of global communication. *Review of International Studies*, 34, 5-19.

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL NETWORKS IN CYBER-DIPLOMACY IN THE CONTEXT OF 5G

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Abstract

The implementation of the 5G network has led to one of the most serious diplomatic clashes in recent years. The commercial war between the United States and China to lead the development of the fifth generation of mobile Internet is being fought, among other battlefields, on social networks. Our research analyzes the role of these communication tools in the framework of this international conflict. It examines the use of social networks and their value in the development of what is known as cyber-diplomacy. At the same time, we look into the decisions taken by both states aimed at banning the activity of certain social networks in their respective territories. The study shows the importance of social networks in the transmission of messages between the contending parties and how they use them to attack and defend their respective interests.

Keywords

Cyber-diplomacy; social networks; 5G; United States; China

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THE ROLE OF SOCIAL NETWORKS IN CYBER-DIPLOMACY IN THE CONTEXT OF 5G¹

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Introduction

The unstoppable digital transformation underway since the beginning of the 21st century is not limited to the incorporation of technological tools and processes in all areas of life—from the industrial to the domestic sector, including everything related to governance. This process is shaping a new world order, with new balances and imbalances. It is a race full of opportunities for states that have hitherto played a secondary role on the international scene, while posing new threats to the traditionally dominant countries. The battle to drive this change began with the imposition of trade restrictions through heavy tariffs, thus aggravating tensions and escalating the risk of confrontation between those states aspiring to lead the international order.

The World Economic Forum already warned about the role of new technologies in this reconfiguration of the world scene in its Global Risks Report 2018 (World Economic Forum, 2018: 7). It pointed to the cybernetic sphere as a source of tensions leading to potential conflicts in a context of new alliances and market configurations. Three years later, the Global Risks Report 2021 lists digital power concentration and digital inequality among the seven main global risks for this year (World Economic Forum, 2021: 14). The World Economic Forum also warns that political confrontation between states may affect the activity of some companies (World Economic Forum, 2021: 65).

The importance of technology in international relations is best illustrated by the escalating confrontation between the United States and China over technological leadership, and in particular the development of the fifth generation mobile Internet (5G). China's growing economic, military and technological power has led to a rebalance of power in a world order hitherto dominated by the United States. That is why some authors focus on their bilateral relation as the most relevant for the 21st century (Sutter, 2011: 1). Their ongoing struggle has prompted other governments to implement measures such as tariffs on technological products (Natixis, 2018). The development and deployment of 5G networks goes beyond the realm of technology and enters into geopolitics (Morozov, 2020).

¹ Article translated by Frutos Miranda Traductores.



The ill feeling between the United States and China is not new, nor did it originate with the arrival of 5G. Disagreements have been going on for a long time and in recent decades tensions between the two countries have been constant. The Clinton administration already threatened the Asian giant. However, the intervention of some of the most prominent American companies with interests in China helped to defuse the tension—which again escalated during Trump’s presidency. Some analysts consider that this confrontation goes beyond a specific moment or context, and that it will underpin all future relations between both countries, since “anti-China sentiment runs deep in both parties in Congress. Tariffs have become normalized weapons. That will continue to push Washington and Beijing on a collision course, no matter who occupies the White House” (Chon, 2020).

The novelty of the current contention lies in the increasing role and use of social networks in institutional relations, leading to so-called digital diplomacy or cyber-diplomacy, analyzed among others by Maccarthy (2015) and Manfredi Sánchez, according to whom, “digital diplomacy provides an opportunity for political participation, activism and agenda setting” (Manfredi Sánchez, 2014: 352). The presence of social networks in the diplomatic sphere has become commonplace, whether through accounts belonging to public agencies or to political leaders: “Social networks are part of the communicative reality of today’s international society and are undoubtedly becoming the battlefield of the 21st century” (Rodríguez Cela, Parras-Parras and Romero-Vara 2019: 723).

The study of how social networks affect international politics becomes even more interesting due to the intense activity of President Trump during his term in office. Trump’s regular use of Twitter to make public announcements of all kinds through his personal account @realDonaldTrump (including the dismissal of staff, threats to other countries’ leaders, and his opinions on different current issues) made this social network one of the most important references to know the intentions of the American president. Furthermore, these publications made by Trump throughout all these years provide a historical document for the assessment of his administration.

The use of social networks raises the following issues:

- Analyzing the use of social networks in cyber-diplomacy regarding the implementation of 5G.
- Understanding the intent of the messages published on official government accounts.
- Determining the main concepts included in these messages.
- Studying the decisions of both governments regarding the activity of different social networks in their respective territories.

This study is part of a broader project on the deployment of 5G networks, which began in 2018 to assess the impact of this new technology on different environments—including digital social platforms (Muñoz-Sastre *et al.*, 2019). This paper focuses on the role of social networks, and specifically Twitter, in the confrontation between the United States and China over the global implementation of the fifth generation of mobile Internet. All the above leads to the following initial hypothesis:



H1. The agreements and disagreements between the US and China aired through social networks in recent years regarding the implementation of 5G bring a new scenario for international relations—that of cyber-diplomacy—with social networks as a key player.

Methodology

The time frame of the study covers Trump's presidency, between 20 January 2017 and 20 January 2021, which includes the moments of greatest tension between the US and China. This period coincides with the beginning of the works for the implementation and commercial exploitation of 5G networks. We focus on Twitter because it registered the highest activity concerning 5G from official accounts linked to the US and China, or some of their main leaders (see Table 1).

Table 1. List of Twitter accounts analyzed

ACCOUNT	COUNTRY	LINK
@WhiteHouse	US	https://twitter.com/WhiteHouse
@realDonaldTrump	US	https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump
@StateDept	US	https://twitter.com/StateDept
@SecPompeo	US	https://twitter.com/SecPompeo
@USA_China_Talk	US	https://twitter.com/USA_China_Talk
@zlj517	China	https://twitter.com/zlj517
@MFA_China	China	https://twitter.com/MFA_China
@ChineseEmbinUS	China	https://twitter.com/ChineseEmbinUS
@chinascio	China	https://twitter.com/chinascio

Source: own compilation.

For the selection of the study sample, we reviewed all messages published by these accounts directly linked the subject matter, obtaining a sample of 275 messages (133 from Chinese accounts and 142 from US accounts). Subsequently, we carried out a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the messages. This retrospective study is observational, analytic, and explanatory, without any manipulation of the variables. We analyzed the publications in depth to identify their effects on the relations between these two world powers. The research consists of three stages as shown in Table 2:

Table 2. Research stages

STAGE	SCOPE	OBJECTIVES
1	Theoretical framework	Approach to the object of study
		Contextualization and conceptualization
2	Message analysis	Study sample selection
		Sample analysis
3	Discussion	Search for answers
		Findings

Source: own compilation.



Taking into account the objectives and hypothesis of this study, the variables considered are:

- The number of messages published on the different accounts.
- The tone used in those posts.
- The decision-making by both governments.

New forms of diplomacy

From traditional diplomacy to cyber-diplomacy

Diplomacy, defined by Kissinger (1955: 8) as “the art of relating states to each other by agreement rather than by the exercise of force”, is a practice that dates back to antiquity. It has undergone major transformations throughout history. Initially, it had an itinerant nature, linked to a specific contact or negotiation between states. It then became permanent in the 15th century through the diplomatic practices implemented by the Holy See and later developed by the Italian states—mainly Venice, considered the forerunner of modern diplomacy (Calduch Cervera, 1993).

However, until World War I, relations and agreements between states remained secret. It was not until January 1918, ten months before the end of the conflict, that US President Woodrow Wilson delivered a speech to the Congress outlining his proposals to ensure peace, begin the reconstruction of Europe, and establish a new international order. In his *fourteen points*, Wilson advocated “open agreements and no secret diplomacy in the future” (Cátedra de Derecho Internacional Público de la Universidad Católica de la Plata, 2010).

This statement marks the beginning of what is known as public diplomacy, an approach to international relations that involves citizens in the agreements and disagreements between countries. Professor Gilboa (2008) addresses the study of public diplomacy from a multidisciplinary perspective, ranging from the field of diplomacy to that of communication, including international and public relations. In one of his works, Gilboa (2000) incisively reflects on the relationship between current diplomacy and the media, presenting six conceptual models to study this connection.

Technologies such as the radio, the television or the Internet have played a major role in opening diplomacy to the public. In particular, the Internet is essential in the ongoing transformation of international relations. Indeed, cyber-diplomacy is defined as the digitalization of this field of politics. In the words of Prof. Rafael Rubio, we face “an extension of public diplomacy allowing states to participate in distributed information networks” (Rubio, 2011: 44).

The role of social networks in cyber-diplomacy

For some time now, social networks have become increasingly relevant in the field of diplomacy. As pointed out by Rodríguez Gómez (2015: 926), “This 2.0 universe of social networks provides the ministries of foreign affairs with tools that should be used for their socializing and globalizing potential, as well as for their bidirectionality and, therefore,



their feedback capacity.” Manfredi Sánchez (2013) also refers to the centrality of social networks in diplomacy: “Social networks provide new opportunities for the participation of non-state actors, paving the way for public diplomacy and the achievement of political objectives.” In a similar vein, Grossman (2006) considers that social networks offer an opportunity to advance international relations beyond the meeting of politicians or leaders to an understanding between people.

The presence of governments and leaders in social networks has gradually increased in recent years. Since 2018 Twitter is considered the social network of choice for governments and world leaders (Burson Cohn & Wolfe, Ltd, 2018). According to the Twiplomacy study 2020, 98% of UN member states are present on social networks. Only four countries (Laos, North Korea, Sao Tome and Principe, and Turkmenistan) lack accounts on that social network (Burson Cohn & Wolfe, Ltd, 2020). As far as leaders are concerned, Donald Trump heads the list of world leaders with the largest number of followers on Twitter, over 88 million according to the last figure registered in his personal account on the day it was suspended (Brown, 2021).

Aware of the potential impact of messages posted on social networks, several governments and supranational institutions have developed regulations for their use in the field of cyber-diplomacy. See, for instance, the *Council Conclusions on Cyber Diplomacy*, adopted by the Council of the European Union (2015), or the digital diplomacy plans drawn up by countries such as France (*Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères*, 2017) and Spain (*Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, Unión Europea y Cooperación. Gobierno de España*, 2015). All of them provide guidelines on the use of these new technologies, including social networks, in the field of diplomacy.

The US-China conflict via Twitter

As already mentioned, US-China relations are among the most relevant elements from the point of view of diplomacy in the first decades of the 21st century, with moments of greater and lesser tension in these last years. During this time, the US has regarded China as a strategic partner on some occasions and as a strategic competitor on others. Despite these differences, many experts agree that these two countries are doomed to understand each other (Bustelo and Soto, 2003).

However, the development of the fifth generation of mobile Internet has heightened the tension between both powers over the control of a technology with infinite capabilities that has become key in shaping the new world order. Both the US and China acknowledge the importance of 5G, although with some differences in their respective positions. As pointed out by Jinghua (2020), this is a race that America must win, while for China it represents a major leap in the field of information and communication technologies.

The governments and some leaders of both countries have taken this rivalry to social networks, particularly Twitter. Nine official accounts, two personal accounts and seven institutional accounts directly linked to these administrations show an important activity in terms of messages about 5G.

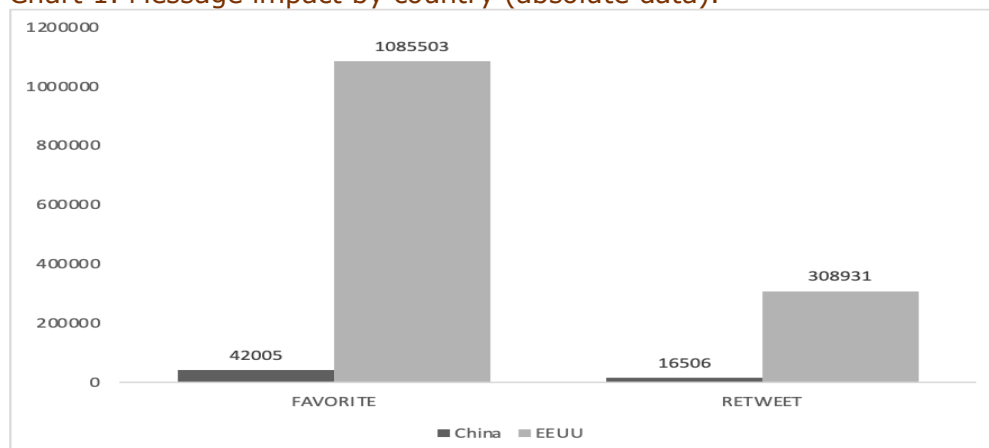
A total of 275 publications on the fifth generation of mobile Internet were published by the most prominent official accounts of both countries. Most of these messages are written in English (83%), and only those published by the US Embassy in China are



written in the language of the Asian giant. It is worth noting that most publications post original content created by the account owners (84%), while the rest (16%) are retweets from other accounts. US profiles show the highest number of retweeted messages. Also relevant is the message impact analysis, which shows a significant difference between posts from US and Chinese profiles (Chart 1).

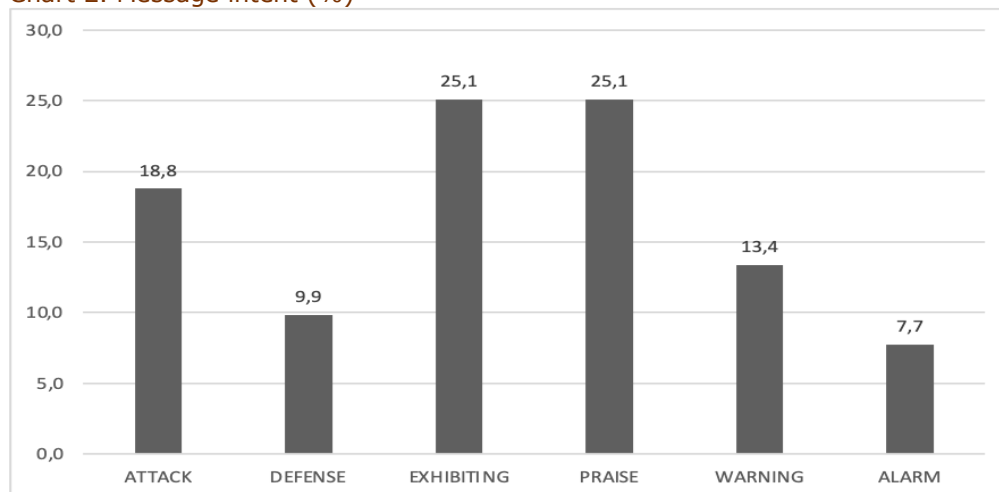
When it comes to the intent of those publications, most of them seek to extol the capacity, technological power and influence of each country, or to present their achievements, whether technical or diplomatic. See for instance the *Clean Network*, a US-led initiative that brought together an alliance of countries opposed to the implementation of Chinese-backed 5G technology. The analysis of the sample messages showed a third objective: to attack the opponent (Chart 2). When analyzed by country, it can be seen that US messages mainly seek to warn about the risks associated with Chinese technology and to undermine its interests. On the other hand, messages from accounts linked to the Chinese government essentially aim at defending against such attacks and praising the technological capacity of the Asian giant (Chart 3).

Chart 1. Message impact by country (absolute data).



Source: own compilation.

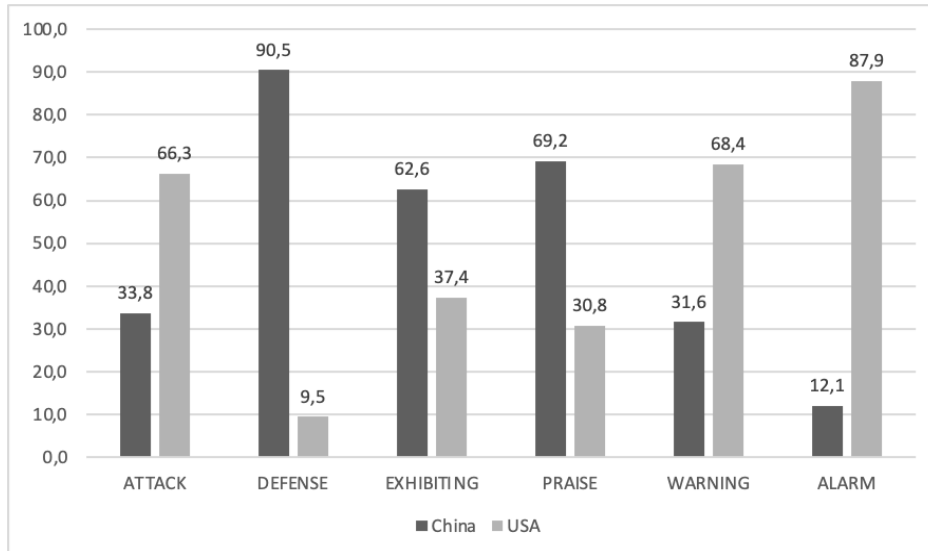
Chart 2. Message intent (%)



Source: own compilation.



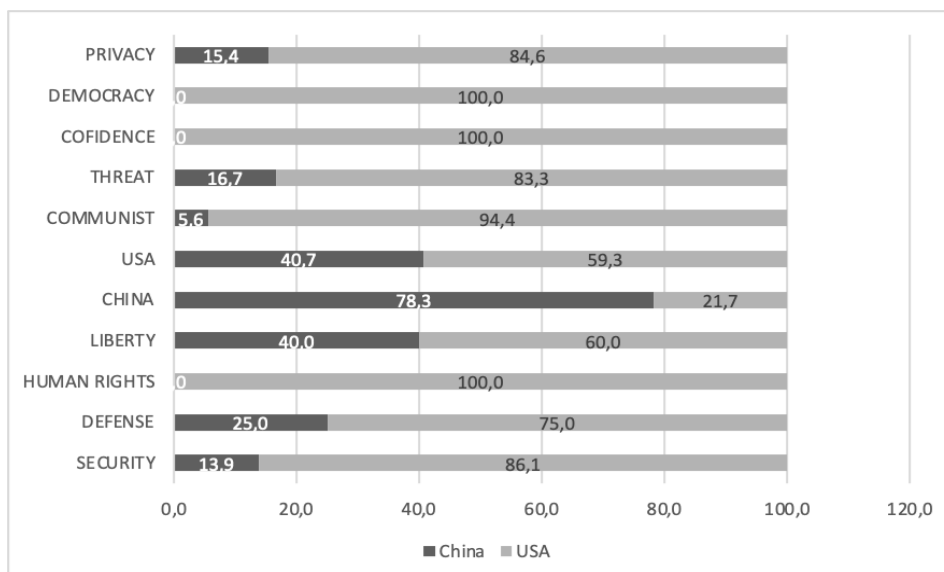
Chart 3. Message intent by country (%)



Source: own compilation.

Security and privacy issues are among the most mentioned in the analyzed posts, only after direct references to China and the US—almost ubiquitous. Behind them are other topics such as the alleged threats posed by the implementation of 5G networks, references to communism or the Chinese Communist Party, and to human rights. Notions such as trust, democracy or human rights only appear in messages from US accounts—as opposed to references to China, the US, and freedom, that prevail in Chinese posts (Chart 4).

Chart 4. Concept relevance by country (%)

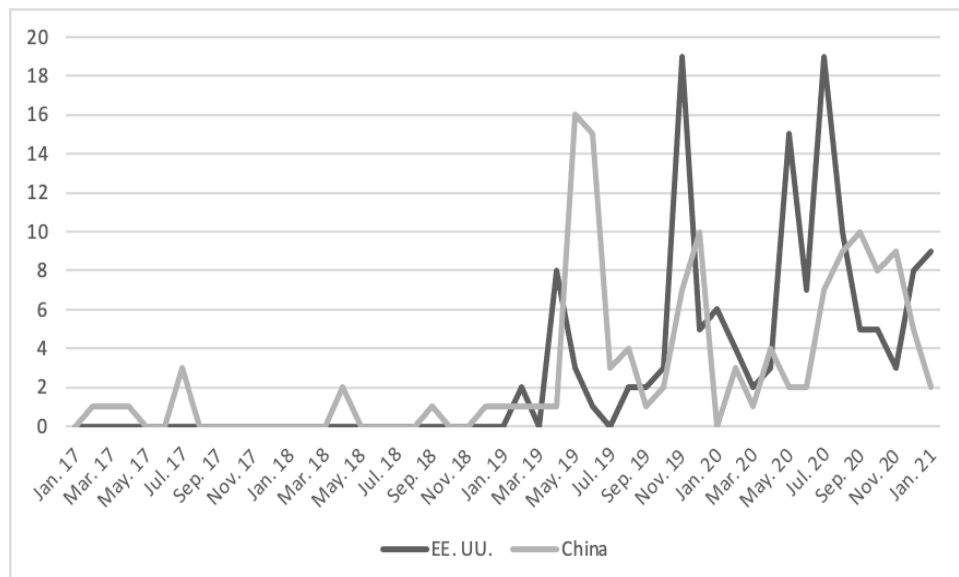


Source: own compilation.



Also remarkable is the evolution of publications related to 5G over the reference period. According to our study, it was not until the spring of 2019 that the messages on the fifth generation of mobile Internet increased exponentially. In April and May of that year, both countries intensified their activity on Twitter with different purposes: extolling their own technological capacity, questioning their opponent's technology, and accusing each other of bad practices. The online confrontation subsequently escalated in November and December 2019, as well as in May and July 2020 (Chart 5). Another spike was recorded at the end of 2020 and in the first weeks of 2021, coinciding with the final days of Trump's presidency—prompting the researchers to extend the study to include that period.

Chart 5. Evolution of publications (absolute data)



Source: own compilation.

The messages posted during those three periods of particular intensity have similar purposes and refer to the same concepts. However, the second spike shows several publications regarding the arrest in Canada of Huawei's deputy chair and CFO—Huawei being the leading Chinese technology company and 5G champion. In that period there are also messages about the possible banning of Chinese apps such as TikTok in the US. In the third period of maximum intensity there are constant messages from the US about the *Clean Network* international alliance. Figure 1 shows some messages to illustrate this tension between both countries.



Figure 1. Example of diplomatic confrontation between the US and China.



Source: Zhao (2020) and the US Department of State (2020).

Finally, the study provides a detailed analysis of each profile by number of publications on this technology:

- @chinascio is the official account of the State Council Information Office of China, active since September 2015, with around 44,500 followers. During the analyzed period, it published a total of 67 messages regarding 5G technology—65 of which with own content and 2 retweets, receiving 488 “likes” and 206 retweets. Most of its messages are expository and praise China’s technological potential.
- @zlj517 is the official personal account of the spokesman and deputy director general of the Information Department of China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He joined Twitter in May 2010 and has over 879,900 followers. This account has published 49 messages related to the fifth generation of mobile Internet, 47 of which are own content and 2 are shared from other accounts. It is the Chinese profile with the most followers and responses to its publications, most of which defend Chinese interests and attack US comments and measures, once even launching a warning. He insistently repeats the names of both countries.
- @USA_China_Talk is the account of the US Embassy in China. Active since 2009, it has approximately 1,147,000 followers. It is the only account analyzed that posts its messages in Chinese. Of its 46 publications on the subject matter, most are retweets from accounts linked to the US administration. The tone of its messages is mostly aggressive and warning, and after the name of both countries the concepts most mentioned are security and privacy.
- @SecPompeo is the profile of the US Secretary of State during Donald Trump’s presidency. This account was opened in April 2018, it has just over three million followers and it has remained inactive since the end of Trump’s term in office. With 41



messages on 5G, all of them his own, it is arguably the most active US profile on this social network and, after President Trump's, the one that generates the greatest response from Internet users with more than 315,600 "likes" and 89,500 retweets of its publications about that technology. These messages are mostly of an expository nature, extolling US capabilities and attacking the Asian giant. Security is among the most mentioned issues in Pompeo's posts.

- @StateDept is the official account of the US State Department and has been active since 2007. It has more than 6 million followers and during the period analyzed it published 37 messages related to 5G, all of them its own. However, in terms of impact, these posts did not reach the response elicited by the messages published by the head of the department on his personal account. Most of the messages are attacks against the Asian rival and warnings both to China and third countries. References to security, communism and privacy are common.
- @realDonaldTrump is President Donald Trump's personal profile. It is among the most followed accounts, with 88.7 million followers, and one of the most controversial, to the point that Twitter decided to suspend it in January 2021, twelve years after its creation. Although it is not the account with the highest number of posts related to 5G (only 13), they get the most reactions of the entire study, with about 682,000 "likes" and 188,000 retweets. In these publications, Trump mainly warns China and other countries to follow Washington's indications and exposes US technological potential. Among the most frequently used terms are those related to security, the very name of the United States and communism.
- @MFA_China is the official account of China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Created in October 2019, it has just over 247,500 followers. During the analyzed period, it published a dozen messages linked to 5G, all of them its own. They have little impact, with just over 3,300 "likes" and 744 retweets. Most of these messages are intended to defend against accusations or attacks from the United States or to warn against attacks on China's interests. Words such as China, United States or security are the most repeated.
- @ChineseEmbinUS is the profile of the Chinese Embassy in the United States, created in 2019 and with about 83,000 followers. It published seven messages about 5G, four of which are retweeted content from other sources. It elicited fewer responses than the rest of the accounts studied, with 313 "likes" and 89 retweets. Its posts on the fifth generation of mobile Internet seek to extol China's technological development potential.
- @WhiteHouse: is the official White House account. It was opened in 2016 but, like the President's official one (@POTUS), it is archived every time the tenant of the US presidential residence changes. During Trump's four years in office, five messages related to 5G were published from this account, all of them its own and fundamentally aimed at praising the capacity of the US. Unsurprisingly, the name of the country is the most repeated.



Discussion

In light of the analysis carried out, social networks are not mere communication tools within the field of diplomacy. Rather, they are key instruments for the development of international relations. By enabling citizen involvement in these relations, social platforms are a perfect embodiment of open diplomacy and cyber-diplomacy.

In the case of 5G, this openness is illustrated by the type of messages published by the Chinese and US administrations or by some of their most prominent leaders. The initial hypothesis is fully confirmed, as can be seen in the message exchange between both powers through different Twitter accounts.

From the gathered data, there is a noteworthy difference in the nature of the messages published by accounts from each country. While Chinese posts are more defensive or aimed at praising the country or advancing its interests, those from the US are mostly in a warning and threatening tone. This is also the case with the most repeated terms. While US accounts insist on concepts such as democracy, trust or human rights, the terms most often mentioned in Chinese publications are China, the US, and freedom. All this closely reflects the policy approach of each government.

Conclusions

This study shows how the diplomatic use of social networks makes it possible to analyze the political agenda in the context of the relations between two or more countries. Hence, issues such as US actions against Huawei or the restrictions that the Trump administration intended to impose on networks such as TikTok burst into the digital scene and become not only political issues but also matters of public debate.

On the other hand, one of the essential purposes of cyber-diplomacy is to influence international public opinion, as shown in this case by the intent and content of the messages. This study shows that social networks, and specifically Twitter, are used to attack the opponent, to defend against his accusations, for self-congratulation, as well as to warn of possible consequences or alleged risks. Issues such as security, defense, privacy, freedom or human rights are raised in a large number of the messages analyzed. None of these terms and concepts go unnoticed by citizens and they have a great mobilization capacity around certain causes.

Finally, the message impact analysis leads to another conclusion: the personal nature of Trump's presidency. Even if he is not the one who tweeted the most about 5G during these years, the messages from his personal account are the ones that get the most "likes" or retweets. This fact highlights the personification of diplomacy, until now not so visible to society, but nonetheless a reality within the currently developing model of cyber-diplomacy—thus paving a new way for conducting international relations in the 21st century.

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STUDY OF THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA BY THE ROYAL HOUSES OF SPAIN AND THE UNITED KINGDOM FOR DIPLOMATIC PURPOSES

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Abstract

As means of communication and citizen participation, social networks are undoubtedly also today a way for the exercise of diplomacy. Therefore, we undertake this research with the aim of verifying how the highest diplomatic institutions in Spain and the United Kingdom are integrating the use of new technologies and, specifically, social platforms to connect with society, transmit transparency and proximity, manage their reputation, and exercise their role as national and international representatives of these States. Specifically, we compare the Spanish case with the British Royal Family, because it is the most popular reigning European monarchy among netizens. To do so, we analyse the adoption and use of social media by both royal houses. We identify the official profiles linked to them. We catalogue and study the content published by each institution. And we compare the practices carried out by them, finding that, although both institutions release institutional messages and leave a record of their diplomatic actions, the British Royal Family has been able to give a more personal, affable, and relaxed tone, acquiring a style more in tune with the participants of the networks.

Keywords

Diplomacy, Royal House, Spain, social media, United Kingdom.

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STUDY OF THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA BY THE ROYAL HOUSES OF SPAIN AND THE UNITED KINGDOM FOR DIPLOMATIC PURPOSES¹

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1. Introduction

1.1. Diplomacy today: public, digital and social

There are many definitions of the concept of diplomacy by renowned authors such as Cahier, Martens, Pradier-Fodéré, Rivier, Satow and Vilariño, among others. Although each of them expresses differentiating nuances, by keeping their similarities in mind and framing them in today's reality, we can define diplomacy as the activity of representation and negotiation between subjects of international law who look after their interests, while establishing and maintaining prosperous relations among themselves, through peaceful negotiations.

We speak of subjects of international law because, as Professor Rubio (2014) explains at length, we find ourselves in a context in which power is no longer the exclusive preserve of states - to whom diplomatic practice was traditionally confined. On the contrary, new actors have appeared, both groups and individuals, with authority and political influence, both national and supranational.

In sum, states are not the only players on the chessboard. They lead foreign policy actions, but they are not the most important ones. Other actors have begun to participate in the international arena by developing an intense foreign policy, whether or not this is the usual term. Regional governments, multinationals, NGOs, lobbies, cities and individuals participate in and influence decisions affecting international policy. They make moves to defend their own interests in the international arena. (Rubio, 2014: 13).

Diplomacy has existed for as long as there have been relations between organised human groups. However, we have been talking about modern diplomacy since the Treaty of Westphalia was signed in 1648. Nevertheless, diplomacy is undergoing a real revolution

¹ Article translated by Cristina López García.



due to the progress of ICTs, which requires the practice of public and digital diplomacy. Hocking and Melissen (2015) reflect on this issue, explaining how the DNA of diplomatic practice has changed, in terms of both its processes and its structures. In the current hybrid environment - marked by the blurring of the boundaries between the digital and physical ecosystems - diplomacy is exercised in a network, involving many more stakeholders who maintain horizontal relations with each other. In this regard, Casado (2017) notes that "this is the most important transformation of diplomacy since the Second World War". Communication being an indispensable tool for the exercise of foreign policy, as the author points out, the current context demands higher levels of dialogue, interaction, and reciprocity, as well as transparency, flexibility, and immediacy. The web has increased the dissemination of all kinds of messages, including those that concern us in this research. Contact between the official source and the citizen is now possible and convenient. However, the content must be relevant.

In order for the public to follow our websites and social networks, we must provide them with added value: quality, clear, rigorous, careful and interesting information. It is not enough to communicate corporate content: most current government information is limited to conveying official positions or points of view. We need to get out of the "bureaucratic bubble" and interact intelligently on current issues. Our obligation is to be aware of society's concerns, as an antidote to irrelevance. We must strive to listen, converse and engage people in the business of governing the public, which is their business. We have to design an attractive, fast, close, flexible and visual communication. Informing, but also exciting. A digital communication that is "popular", but not "populist". (Casado, 2017: 3).

Social networks are an excellent two-way communication tool through which to combat citizens' disaffection with the institutions. However, this demands the implementation of a truly integrated communication policy adapted to social uses. In other words, it is not enough to use them as a simple means of dissemination. On the contrary, it is imperative to adapt the narrative to their tone, codes, forms, and formats, in order not only to transmit information, but also to engage in reciprocal, enriching and strategically oriented conversations.

The digital and diplomatic reality requires a qualitative leap, a true digital transformation. "Diplomacy 3.0" requires more than just informing. It is necessary to interact and converse with citizens. It is necessary to weave alliances and complicities with governments and civil societies through the Web. This requires accommodating structures under a basic premise: integrating digital diplomacy into the diplomat's work. Countries that better train their diplomats in the subtle art of digital diplomacy will more easily achieve their foreign policy objectives. (Casado, 2017: 5).

Indeed, today, e-diplomacy must be part of the daily work of all diplomatic agents. All of them and their cabinets must master the use of social networks and integrate them into their communication to achieve their objectives.



1.2. The language of networks: eminently visual.

"Social networks have become referents for access to audiovisual content" (Ramos and Ortega-Mohedano, 2017: 707). And, in this sense, as the evidence shows, the language used in them is eminently visual, perhaps due to its implicit quality of immediacy. "In human behaviour it is not difficult to detect a propensity for visual information. We seek visual support for our knowledge for many reasons, but above all because of the directness of the information and its proximity to actual experience" (Dondis, 1976: 14).

We must be aware that the audiovisual messages published by the institutions we are going to analyse on their networks are intentionally composed. They are not casual. On the contrary, they are completely planned, from the styling of the protagonists to the symbols that appear in the image, the lighting, the framing, the type of shot, etc. And all of this is repeated in the transmission of meaning. "Content is fundamentally what is being expressed, directly or indirectly; it is the character of the information, the message. But in visual communication, content is never separated from form" (Dondis, 1976: 123).

This makes it absolutely relevant to study not only the textual content of social publications, but also the composition and realisation of the accompanying still and moving images.

1.3. Heads of State in Spain and the United Kingdom

The highest diplomatic institutions in Spain and the United Kingdom are the Heads of State of both countries. Although, we are aware that the Head of State is normally a unipersonal body exercised, in this case, by King Felipe VI in Spain and Queen Elizabeth II in the United Kingdom, we have analysed the diplomatic work of all the members of both royal families present in their official social communication, due to the functions they exercise as representatives of their respective States and the impact and influence they can have on the generation of engagement and the management of the reputation of both nations.

Thus, as indicated on the royal.uk website, the members of the British Royal Family, in addition to Queen Elizabeth II, are the Duke of Edinburgh, the Prince of Wales, the Duchess of Cornwall, the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, the Duke and Duchess of Sussex, the Duke of York, the Duke and Duchess of Wessex, the Princess Royal, the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester, the Duke of Kent and Princess Alexandra.

According to information published by Ibbetson (2020) based on YouGov² data, the five most popular members of the British Royal Family are: Prince William or Duke of Cambridge (75%), Queen Elizabeth II (73%), the Duchess of Cambridge (67%), Princess Anne (50%) and Prince Philip or Duke of Edinburgh (49%). These popularity ratings are also evident in the question posed by the same platform, in October 2020, about the continuity of the monarchy. Two thirds of Britons are in favour of it. And 68% of those

² International company dedicated to market research and data analysis of the Internet, to extract information about the habits and opinions of Internet users.



polled consider that the couple formed by the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge will be the most influential in the coming years.

For its part, the Spanish royal family is currently made up of King Felipe VI, Queen Letizia, the Princess of Asturias, the Infanta Sofía and the emeritus kings Don Juan Carlos and Doña Sofía.

As for the opinion of citizens, even though no questions have been asked about the monarchy in CIS surveys since 2015, according to information gathered by the social research and market research institute IMOP Insights in 2019, only half of those interviewed would support this model of State. And among all the members of the Royal Family, Doña Sofía would be the highest rated (6.7), followed by Don Felipe (6.3), Don Juan Carlos (4.9) and Doña Letizia (4.8). However, due to recent events, these ratings may have undergone changes in the present day.

Beyond popular acceptance, it should be noted that, although both are constitutional monarchies with parliamentary governments, the British monarchy is much older than the Spanish one. Moreover, Elizabeth II has been in office since February 1952, making her the longest-reigning queen in Europe, while Felipe VI was proclaimed king 62 years later, on 19 June 2014. And, in general terms, the British royal house has always been more inclined to incorporate new media and technologies into its communication, as was evidenced by George V's first radio Christmas speech (1932), the speech made by a young Princess Elizabeth during the Second World War (1940) or the first televised Christmas message in which she starred as Queen in 1957.

2. Design and Method

Retrospective, exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory research, based on the analysis of the publications issued on the official social profiles linked from the websites of the Spanish (www.casareal.es) and British (www.royal.uk) royal houses.

Objectives:

- O1. To verify the degree of digital socialisation achieved by the royal houses studied, by comparing the social networks in which they are present.
- O2. To verify whether they publish content related to diplomatic actions on their social profiles.
- O3. Carry out a comparative analysis of the use that both royal houses make of social platforms to communicate their diplomatic actions.

To achieve the aforementioned objectives, we resorted to a qualitative research method commonly used in the social sciences, specifically, content analysis. In this way, we collected, studied, and interpreted the communicative messages constructed and issued by the entities under study. Subsequently, we proceed to compare the data obtained from the two royal houses, considering three aspects: (1) construction of their social profiles, (2) use and performance of these for diplomatic purposes, (3) typology of still and dynamic images disseminated through these social accounts.



3. Fieldwork and data analysis

To undertake this study, we first reviewed the social accounts linked from the websites www.casareal.es and www.royal.uk, checking which social profiles were linked from the websites of both institutions. In this way, we saw that the Spanish royal house centralises all its activity in a single profile and two social networks (YouTube and Twitter), while the British royal house has three groups of agents with representative functions of the State - The Royal Family, Clarence House and Kensington Royal - active on four digital platforms (Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and Instagram).

Table 1. Social profiles of the Spanish and British royal houses

Casa Real	YouTube	https://www.youtube.com/user/casarealtv
	Twitter	https://twitter.com/casareal
The Royal Family	Facebook	https://www.facebook.com/TheBritishMonarchy
	YouTube	https://www.youtube.com/user/TheRoyalChannel
	Twitter	https://twitter.com/RoyalFamily
	Instagram	https://www.instagram.com/theroyalfamily/
Clarence House	Twitter	https://twitter.com/ClarenceHouse
	Instagram	https://www.instagram.com/ClarenceHouse/
Kensington Royal	Twitter	https://twitter.com/KensingtonRoyal
	Instagram	https://www.instagram.com/kensingtonroyal/

Source: Own elaboration.

Below, we compile all the publications disseminated on the profiles between the first of October and the 31st of December 2020, totalling 1,418 publications.

Table 2. Quantification of publications issued by the official social profiles linked from the websites of the Spanish Royal Family and the British Royal Family

Network	Casa Real	The Royal Family	Clarence House	Kensington Royal	Total
Facebook	-	78	-	-	78
YouTube	120	22	-	-	142
Twitter	277	299	263	144	983
Instagram	-	66	81	68	215
Totals	397	465	344	212	1.418

Source: Own elaboration.

As can be seen in the table above, all the subjects studied have a Twitter profile and make intensive use of the network, with Kensington Royal being the account with the lowest number of accumulated tweets during the period analysed. Regarding Instagram, the only entity that is not present on this network is the Casa Real. However, it does have a YouTube channel, with many videos (120). The Royal Family is also on the platform, but with a much smaller amount of content (22). Finally, it should be noted that only The Royal Family has a Facebook profile.



Among all these contents, we selected those related to diplomatic issues, verifying that, of the 397 total publications of the Spanish royal house, 26% deal with diplomatic issues. Meanwhile, of the 1,021 social profiles associated with the British Royal Family, only 10% deal with this type of issues. To conclude, we studied this selection from the point of view of the use given to each social platform by both heads of state, as well as the performance achieved on each of them, and the syntax of the image, both still and moving, that they disseminate on these profiles.

4. Results

4.1. General information on the social profiles of the Spanish and British royal houses. Analysis of their profile and cover images

The starting point for this analysis is the websites of both institutions. Although we are not going to analyse them in detail, we must say that both sites are adapted to the size of the screens of the devices from which they are viewed. In terms of design, royal.uk is a more modern and dynamic site, thanks to the proportion of images-text, as well as the quality, size, and colour of the images. Moreover, in terms of the subject that concerns us, the British site shows the links to the social profiles in a preferential place: they are anchored to the left margin of the page, so that, even when scrolling, they are always present on the screen, increasing their accessibility. On the other hand, to find the links to Casa Real social profiles, it is necessary to navigate to the middle-bottom area of the website. The texts on casareal.es are abundant and are written in reduced font sizes. On the other hand, the photographs offered on this site are entirely institutional, while on the British royal website the more formal images are intermingled with more endearing and apparently more spontaneous ones.

As for the profile and cover images of their social networks, those related to the British Royal Family have been sharing the same cover image since 12 November 2019. This features hundreds of citizens with state flags, celebrating an event, such as Remembrance Day. The profile pictures also share similarities. In all of them, the members of each family are dressed in shades of blue, a colour traditionally associated with royalty because of its meaning related to honour and nobility. However, the cover image of the Spanish royal family's Twitter account is a photograph of the Zarzuela Palace. And that of the YouTube channel is the computer graphic composition shown below:

Image 1. Header of Casa Real YouTube channel



Source: <https://www.youtube.com/user/casarealtv>



Moreover, the profile picture on both networks only shows the coat of arms of King Felipe VI on his usual crimson red background.

Finally, before analysing the use of social networks for diplomatic purposes, it seems important to point out the main data concerning these profiles. According to the date of creation of each network, we summarise below the most important information about the accounts of both royal houses on them:

The Facebook page @TheBritishMonarchy was created on 10 September 2010, and currently has a community of over five million followers. As we have seen in the tables above, Casa Real has no presence on this network.

Continuing with YouTube, the @casarealtv channel was created on 26 October 2011 and today has 109,000 subscribers and more than 55 million views. The @TheRoyalFamilyChannel, which dates to 5 October 2007, has 704,000 subscribers and more than 177 million views.

As for Twitter, the only platform on which we found profiles of all the royal representatives analysed, @RoyalFamily has been present since April 2009 and has more than four million followers. The next highest number of followers is @KensingtonRoyal, with two million. However, the account was not created until five years later, in September 2014. @KensingtonRoyal has one million fans. It also joined the network in 2014, during the month of May. And, finally, we find @ClarenceHouse with its almost nine hundred and forty thousand followers. Although it is true that it was the last profile by date of creation (November 2014).

We end this first part with Instagram, a network on which the Spanish royal family does not have an account. But @theroyalfamily has been publishing content on it since March 2014, accumulating 8.6 million followers. Although the first account related to the Windsor Household was @ClarenceHouse (October 2012), which today has 1.3 million followers. However, the most popular is @KensingtonRoyal, with 12.3 million like-minded internet users, who have been following the profile since its creation in January 2015.

4.2. Analysis of the use and performance of social platforms by the Spanish and British royal houses for diplomatic purposes

Comparing the percentage of content related to diplomatic issues indicated in section 3, the Casa Real uses its social profiles more frequently to disseminate its actions in this regard. On YouTube, during the period analysed, more than 40 videos have been published that bear witness to the King and Queen's international trips, the King's speeches at various summits, the presentation of credentials by various ambassadors and bilateral meetings with presidents of other nations, among others. The average length of the videos is four minutes and ten seconds, although there are some really long videos (up to 18 minutes) in which Don Felipe's complete speeches are reproduced. Practically all of them are accompanied by long descriptions explaining each of the acts they include and highlighting some of the King's or Queen's words.

On Twitter, they also publish many messages on these issues. All of them include some kind of audiovisual content, with the most popular option being the publication of several



images (80%), compared to 15% of videos and 5% of single images. They do not use emoticons or hashtags, but they do mention other accounts. The average number of likes obtained is around 1,100. And the language of publication is always Spanish.

When we analyse the social presence of the accounts associated with the British Head of State, we see that they publish less diplomatic content. On Facebook, we find messages of condolences, videos, and images of virtual audiences of the Queen with multiple ambassadors, remembrance of historic days and dissemination of activities carried out by other members of the Royal Family, especially by the Prince of Wales. They use hashtags and incorporate links to other websites and YouTube videos, a platform they do not emphasise, but on which they achieve a good number of average views (around 20,000). Twitter, however, is a preferred network for all the families linked to the British royal family. In this case, it should be noted that they use emoticons to reinforce their messages. Regarding the subject matter in question, the incorporation of the miniature of the flags of the countries to which they refer stands out. On the other hand, they also use other emoticons such as cameras or video cameras to indicate the authorship of the images published or arrows to highlight links. They also use hashtags and, on specific occasions, mention other accounts.

On Instagram, @theroyalfamily account often posts carousels of images beginning with a snapshot of the Queen. Clarence House uses the network to highlight the Prince of Wales, who is often shown in a relaxed and friendly manner. Although condolences and formal acts are also published. In addition to using English, this profile does include messages in other languages such as German and nods to other cultures, for example, by congratulating him when the Hindu festival known as Diwali. Carousels of images predominate, followed by videos.

The Kensington Royal profiles are the ones with the fewest publications on diplomatic issues, but they also issue some messages of this type, following the style of the other accounts associated with the British head of state.

Finally, it should be noted that the accounts of The Royal Family disseminate content from both Clarence House and Kensington Royal, although more emphasis is placed on Clarence House. And, in general terms, the accounts that achieve the greatest number of positive reactions are those of The Royal Family and Kensington Royal.

4.3. Analysis of the still and moving images disseminated by the Spanish and British royal houses on their social media profiles for diplomatic purposes

After studying the audiovisual production of the selected social publications, we must say that, in general terms, the profiles with the best production are those of Kensington Royal and Clarence House. These are followed by those of The Royal Family. And, finally, we find those of the Casa Real.

When analysing the treatment of the image, two totally different styles are evident:

Casa Real is dominated by a journalistic language, typical of reportage, a consequence of the recording of videos with a shoulder-mounted camera without a stabiliser or post-



production stabilisation, as well as the capture of images typical of photojournalism. On the other hand, cut or fade-in editing is used. They often use a type of video edition to make spatial or temporal ellipses. But it is sometimes misapplied because it does not change space or time. The lighting is of a naturalistic type, as no artificial light source is added for reinforcement, resulting in overexposed or underexposed shots and photos, for example, excessively bright or dark images. And the lenses used are wide-angle or normal lenses. Moreover, in many shots, the focus is imperfect, and, in others, the framing could be improved. On several occasions, only the foreshortening of the queen is visible, while another person is framed. Or there is an overuse of the slightly overlapping shot, the result of the use of the shoulder camera by operators who do not bend down to take the frontal shots that would be appropriate. As for the type of shot, most of them are open shots. The medium shot is rarely used, but there are American shots, as well as long general shots, some of them slightly aberrated, which is unusual and even inappropriate because this causes a sensation of instability in the scene. Occasionally, the king is given medium shots with more neutral lighting, but the framing is not correct because he is not in the centre but is displaced to the left of the viewer.

As for the UK, the photographs and videos are more careful, both in terms of lighting and framing. In fact, most of them respect the law of thirds and are very well composed. They use a wider variety of lenses (normal, wide angle and telephoto) and play with depth of field, achieving more striking and attractive images. Also, they use cameras with more dynamic range, on tripod and/or with stabiliser. Although some videos are more journalistic and testimonial (recorded with a hand-held camera), in these cases, they try not to move the device and only use one or two shots. The lighting is always equalised, so we infer that in photographs they use flashes and post-production. And in the recording of the videos, they have screens that do the filling. The lights are soft and diffuse. Short shots predominate, especially medium-short shots, with frontal or contrapposto angles. In terms of composition, it should be noted that in all their photographs and videos they make it clear that the protagonist is the member of the Royal Family who appears; this is achieved through the choice of the frame. In contrast, in the images of the Spanish royal family, the framing conveys a lack of planning. Thus, on many occasions, we see Queen Letizia foreshortened, and it is even difficult to recognise her. On other occasions, she appears in a large general shot, where her figure is seen in very small dimensions, surrounded by other people, among whom she is somewhat lost, and she even appears at the edges of the image, not in the centre, and out of focus.

On the other hand, in the videos in which they make a video call, in the case of the Queen of England the multi-screen is shown, allowing all the participants to be seen, while in the cases in which this occurs in Spain, only the King is seen. Continuing with the differences, the Casa Real videos never contain subtitles, even if they are spoken in another language. However, many of the videos of the British Royal Family do include subtitles, even though they are in English.

With regard to the length and editing of the videos, those of the Spanish royal family are considerably longer, while those of the British royal family are much shorter. Although the transitions used are the same in both cases, the use they make of them is notably different. In Spain, the ellipsis through the chained fade-out is often misused, because,



as we have said before, they remain at the same time or space. In the United Kingdom, on the other hand, although they also resort to cutting or chain fade, they do it to move to blocks of images (which are usually made up of photographs in which a slight zoom in, zoom out or sweep movement is used) in order to avoid the jump cut³. Although not entirely orthodox, the result is much more aesthetically pleasing than in the case of the Spanish royal house videos.

Table 3. Comparative table of the use of audiovisual resources in social media publications related to diplomatic actions of the Spanish and British royal houses

	Spain	UK
Value of the plane	Generale plane.	Medium shot.
Angulation	Lightly chopped.	Frontal or counter-dive.
Lighting	Naturalist (without artificial lighting).	Indirect, diffuse and equalised.
Lens	Angular and normal.	Wide, normal and telephoto.
Camera	To the shoulder (of reportage).	Wide dynamic range with stabiliser.
Mounting	Cut and fade chained (to make temporal or spatial ellipses).	A chained cut and fade (to move to resource blocks and avoid jump cuts).
Duration	Medium and long.	Briefs and media.
Subtitles	Never.	Occasionally.

Source: Own elaboration.

5. Conclusions and Discussion

As we have seen, in the United Kingdom, in addition to the official social accounts associated with the head of state and the publications featuring Queen Elizabeth II, there are also those of the families of her direct heirs: Clarence House, headed by the Prince of Wales, and Kensington Royal, headed by Prince William. In contrast, in Spain, there is only one social profile through which the Head of State and the other members of the Royal Family communicate. Therefore, the Spanish Royal Family has far fewer diplomatic representatives than the British Royal Family and the Spanish Head of State before the abdication of King Juan Carlos I in 2014. This decline, due to the events related to different members of the Royal Family, has undoubtedly affected its general communication and also its diplomatic action. Although, in the case of the British Household, we have seen how this work is carried out by three family groups (Royal Family -comprising Queen Elizabeth II and the Duke of Edinburgh-, Clarence House -with the Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall-, and Kensington Royal -comprising the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge and their children-), in Spain, only King Felipe VI, Queen Letizia, Princess Leonor and the Infanta Sofía have an official presence on the social networks, under the same profile of a markedly institutional nature, which is evident from the choice of profile and cover images on the different networks. While the British networks contain personal images, Casa Real accounts feature State symbols such as the

³ Film editing technique that consists of eliminating a part of the footage, generating a time jump effect.



Coat of Arms or the Zarzuela Palace. This aspect results in a more distant communication, which makes it difficult to generate empathy among Internet users.

If we look at the usernames, we see that those of the accounts belonging to The Royal Family are the most different from each other, especially the Facebook page ("TheBritishMonarchy"). This can be explained by the dates of creation of the different profiles. However, despite these discrepancies, the name used in all the accounts is The Royal Family. Casa Real incorporates the abbreviation for television (tv) into the name of its YouTube channel: "casarealtv". Clarence House and Kensington Royal show no disparity.

On the other hand, we find it significant that the Casa Real has only a Twitter account and a YouTube channel. We believe that its incorporation into a more visual network frequented by young audiences, such as Instagram, could be beneficial for its communication. We also believe that it would be favourable for them to adapt to the codes of the networks, in terms of the use of emoticons, hashtags and concise messages, to be more attractive, dynamic and generate higher levels of engagement.

As for the use of their social profiles for diplomatic purposes, we conclude that the publications of both institutions have an eminently testimonial character. They serve as a reflection of the ceremonies undertaken, like an album of memories or an audiovisual diary that testifies to the daily activity of their members. However, they do not delve into the underlying diplomatic issue, nor are they used as tools for effective negotiation. They are used as platforms to record the tasks undertaken by the members of the royal houses, from a more aesthetic, protocol and ceremonial point of view.

From the point of view of the semantics of the image, we consider the Windsors' use of the shots to be much more coherent, since, as opposed to the slightly sharply angled shots, common in images of Casa Real, which transmit inferiority or weakness, the close-ups typical of the British Royal Household exalt the figure and power; and to these are added the frontal shots to communicate closeness to the spectator. Continuing with these issues, we can affirm that the technical deployment made with the British royal house is greater. This can be seen in the cameras, the choice of lenses, the use of stabilisers, etc. It is evident that the staging is more careful, but this is counterbalanced by a correct angulation and correct shot values, which transmit closeness. In this way, they achieve aesthetically beautiful, carefully planned images, but with a correct shot meaning. Whereas, in the Spanish case, we could consider that they seek to transmit naturalism, verisimilitude and the absence of manipulation of the content, but the shot values and framing go against their message.

For all these reasons, and taking into account the objectives of the research, we conclude that both royal houses have a presence in social media. Although, the British one stands out above the Spanish one, both for the number and variety of networks in which it is present (Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and Instagram), and for the profiles associated with the representation of the monarchy (three groups of representatives -The Royal Family, Clarence House and Kensington Royal- as opposed to one -Casa Real-). Meanwhile the Spanish royal house uses its networks more assiduously for diplomatic purposes, its communications are not adapted to the language of social platforms. In addition, their messages are too institutional and tend to generate coldness.



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DISINFORMATION PROPAGATION IN SOCIAL NETWORKS AS A DIPLOMACY STRATEGY: ANALYSIS FROM SYSTEM DYNAMICS

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Abstract

Disinformation on social media has positioned itself as a strategy of diplomacy to intervene in the decisions of sovereign states through the use of fake news, misleading content, hate speech and deliberate falsehoods, information errors, among others, in order to mobilise their citizens, and thus change both public and state policies and rulers, generate social pressure on socio-economic systems, etc. Having said that, the analysis of this strategy in terms of the process of disinformation propagation has been characterised as biased as it involves multiple actors with different levels of decision-making; hence the aim of this paper is to analyse the propagation of disinformation as a diplomatic strategy in social networks through a systemic approach. The results show a generalist model of causal loops, which provides evidence of how disinformation is disseminated, based on the various elements documented in the literature on this diplomatic strategy. Concluding on the potential nature of disinformation and the role that the state and the social networks themselves should play in preventing and mitigating this phenomenon, which is currently affecting nations across the board and which has become popular through the use of diplomatic agents.

Keywords

Disinformation, diplomacy, model, system dynamics.

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DISINFORMATION PROPAGATION IN SOCIAL NETWORKS AS A DIPLOMACY STRATEGY: ANALYSIS FROM SYSTEM DYNAMICS¹

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Introduction

Social networks have been conceptualised as the spaces which allow interaction between online users, and whose main purpose is to facilitate the exchange of information and to encourage collective discussion among a group of interconnected contacts (Forteza, 2012). That said, in recent years this means has become the most direct mediator of relations between governments and citizens (Jahng, 2021; Lazer *et al.*, 2018), because it allows the circulation of information of a massive nature, as well as debate about it (Carlo Bertot *et al.*, 2012). Consequently, this has resulted in a new scenario of two-way communication that significantly affects the way in which the communication process between states and their stakeholders has been conducted (Guzmán *et al.*, 2020).

In this scenario, diplomacy has not been an exception to the changes generated by the implementation of this communication channel, which has led to closer contact between the international agent and the local recipient of the information. (Cull, 2019; Graffy, 2009), and, which has resulted in a wide variety of benefits among which stand out, firstly, the creation of loyal communities due to the approach with foreign citizens (Graffy, 2009); secondly, the decrease in communication costs, since they are usually lower than other traditional means such as the press or television (Rashica, 2018); thirdly, the development of more effective communications with citizens due to the variety of content that can be generated in such a network such as videos, 3D photos, images, web publications, etc. (Gebhard, 2017); among others.

However, despite the benefits of the use of these networks in the context of diplomacy, some states have made use of this communication channel to propagate disinformation, understood as any deviant or untruthful information intended to mislead a target audience (Innes, 2020), with the aim of meddling in the decisions of sovereign governments by influencing the opinion of citizens, in order to fulfil some of their international policy purposes (Lazer *et al.*, 2018; Cull, 2016).

Thus, in recent years the use of disinformation as a strategy of diplomacy in this area has become more common. An example of this was the Lisa Affair case, documented by

¹ Translation by Cecilia Carabaja



La Cour (2020), in which a group of Middle Eastern migrants were accused of raping a woman of German-Russian origin through a video on social networks. This situation led to anger and internal debate among German citizens about the state policy on immigration and refugees, provoking mass demonstrations against Muslim populations in that country. However, this turned out to be false and directed by the Russian government, with the aim of causing riots and reducing the German government's support for migrants and refugees from the Middle East.

Another example was the Russian interference in the US elections in 2016, where systematic disinformation campaigns were used to influence the opinion of the US electorate, allowing Donald Trump to win the presidency. (Office of the Director of National Intelligence, 2017). More recently, and stemming from COVID-19, the Russian and Chinese governments have been accused of systematic misinformation about the pandemic. As Milosevich-Juaristi (2020) identified in the way the Russian media RT and Sputnik reported the origin of the virus, claiming that it had been created in NATO laboratories, or that the United States had created it to destabilise the Chinese economy, such disinformation sought to create panic and confusion in order to prevent people from accessing accurate information about the virus and public health provisions. Such disinformation sought to generate panic and confusion in order to prevent people from accessing accurate information about the virus and public health provisions, which may have led to some extent to the high levels of disease in Europe and the US.

Taking these examples as a reference, and others documented by multiple authors (e.g. Fjällhed, 2020; Lanoszka, 2019), the use of this strategy has regained importance today, more than for the channel or the message itself, it has done so because of its capacity for mass propagation and the impact it can have on citizens, which is why disinformation as a strategy of diplomacy has become one of the main problems in the defence of states (Pamment *et al.*, 2017). Hence the importance of studying this strategy and its effects. However, previous research has focused on understanding the use of this strategy and its consequences, rather than its propagation (Fjällhed, 2020). This is largely due to the difficulty of tracing the origin of this type of information, as well as the complexity of the relationships between the actors involved in its dissemination.

Taking into consideration what was previously explained, this article aimed to analyse the spread of disinformation as a diplomatic strategy on social media through a systemic approach. It is structured in four sections. The first presents the theoretical framework and the background to the problem under study; the second, the methodology used; the third, the results of the research; and the fourth, the conclusions.

Diplomacy

The meanings of diplomacy have been characterised by being broad and having diverse epistemological and methodological frameworks (Hart and Siniver, 2020), which is why it is considered a dynamic field of study, in which a single, multifunctional definition is useless, especially in the current disruptive scenario in which international relations have gone from being a private act between governments to a public act, involving the general public.



That said, this article frames diplomacy as a systematised process in which international actors seek to achieve foreign policy objectives (Cull, 2019; Cull, 2016), through mechanisms not related to warfare, but rather through a series of actors charged with managing the international approach (Cull, 2008). These actors can be a state, a multinational, a non-profit organisation, or any actor on the global stage.

In this context, diplomacy takes on two connotations, as Cull (2008) argues. The first refers to traditional diplomacy in which actors try to manage the international environment by means of a specific commitment or pact with their counterparts, usually of a private nature; and the second, which corresponds to public diplomacy in which the state and international actors manage their environment through the commitment of foreign citizens. Thus, the use of social networks is part of the latter type of diplomacy.

Public diplomacy has thus been characterised by its methods of operation, which seek to influence public opinion by communicating with the other. Thus, multiple authors argue that in this respect, states strive to promote their interests to the citizens of another nation in order to achieve their foreign policy objectives. (Pratkanis, 2009; Potter, 2002). It is in this promotion of interests that this type of diplomacy makes use of the mass media to influence a much wider public and in which the use of social networks has a place. (Pajtinka, 2019).

In this context, and as a result of the evolution of public diplomacy in the 21st century, this has presented a series of twists and turns, which have allowed the consolidation of disinformation in social networks as a strategy of diplomacy. These changes include: the democratisation of diplomatic agents; the new communication mechanisms used in the framework of diplomacy, especially the web and social networks; the consolidation of globalised information; among others. (Fjällhed, 2020; Cull, 2019; Cull, 2008; Melissen, 2005).

Disinformation as a strategy of diplomacy

Before referring to disinformation as a strategy, it is necessary to clarify the concept of strategy. Thus, nowadays it is often referred to in multiple fields, including business, religion, culture, politics, among others (Contreras, 2013), so diplomacy is no exception. That said, in the context of this article, strategy is understood as a series of actions carried out by an agent of diplomacy to fulfil a state's foreign policy objectives. This definition is based on Cull (2019, 2008) and Fjällhed (2020).

In this context, disinformation as a strategy of diplomacy aims at the deliberate dissemination of false information with the objective of unbalancing foreign governments by confusing and deceiving their citizens (Gerrits, 2018; Lazer *et al.*, 2018), whereby the sender of the message seeks to benefit from the social disagreement generated, change state policies, as well as increase its international presence and fulfil its foreign policy objectives (Cull, 2016).

Although one might think that disinformation has only recently been used by states as a strategy of diplomacy, it dates back to the end of the First World War, when it was used to influence the positioning of the political and economic system of capitalism and socialism in many nations. (Gerrits, 2018). This first stage of disinformation, which could be called "before the internet", was characterised using traditional channels such as



television, radio, newspapers, flyers, etc. However, because of the evolution of the strategy, it has been incorporated into the internet and social media, which has meant an increase in its potential, giving rise to the era of the "digitalisation" of disinformation. This change of means derives from the mechanisms that social networks possess, which allow the message to be amplified, such as bots, trolls, echo chambers, organic and paid reach, etc., resulting in a greater exposure of citizens to disinformation. (Bjola, 2018).

In this context, the study of disinformation as a strategy of social media diplomacy has gained interest in recent years, both by governments and the academic community. Thus, studies have concentrated on case studies seeking to understand the use of such a strategy and its consequences, especially the strategies implemented by Russia and China. (ex.: La Cour, 2020; Lupion, 2018; Kania and Costello 2018), due to the difficult relations with Western countries. Such studies have highlighted the ability to interfere in democratic processes such as elections and state powers (La Cour, 2020; Bayer *et al.*, 2019); the polarisation of citizens' opinion through the exacerbation of radical and supremacist thinking (Faris *et al.*, 2017); and the loss of credibility of the media (Bennett and Livingston, 2018).

Despite the progress made, the difficulty in analysing this strategy of diplomacy is acknowledged and has limited the scope of action of researchers to the identification of case studies, due to the challenge of tracing the origin of disinformation, which makes it impossible to attribute and study from the origin of the message (Gerrits, 2018). It is therefore necessary to explore other aspects of this strategy, such as the propagation of disinformation, building on existing theory and thus clarifying other aspects that have not been addressed.

Methodology

Aims of the study

To achieve the objective of this study, which is to analyse the propagation of disinformation as a diplomatic strategy in social networks, the following specific objectives were set out:

1. To identify the actors and mechanisms involved in this social media diplomacy strategy.
2. To establish how these actors and mechanisms relate to each other in the propagation of disinformation on social media as a strategy of diplomacy.
3. To provide a model of causal loops that explains how this strategy of diplomacy operates.

Methods and approaches

With the purpose of fulfilling the proposed objective and specific objectives, a multidisciplinary approach was chosen, which encompassed diplomatic studies and strategy theory. Thus, on the diplomatic studies side, the main references were Der Derian (1987), Murray (2008) and Sharp (2009), while in the case of strategic theory Chamberlain (2010). These theoretical references have diplomacy, politics, and conflict



as their intercepts, so the approach to disinformation in social networks was in line with both theoretical currents. However, to unify the perspectives of the aforementioned approaches, systems thinking was used, given the potential of this type of modelling to establish the causes and feedback of phenomena based on the elements that make up a system (Richmond, 2001), which allows for a complete understanding of its behaviour based on the conceptual delimitation and approximations made by the modeller. Thus, the causal loop diagram (CLD) was used as a modelling method.

In this context, the study followed a qualitative approach, starting with a review of the literature, which sought to identify the elements and relationships between the elements of the system that make up the strategy of disinformation in social networks from diplomacy, so previous research in the field of international relations was traced, which allowed us to understand how disinformation spreads, this being the basis for the development of the model. In this sense, an integrative approach was used for this review in order to synthesise the literature on the subject under study (Torraco, 2005).

The decision to use this type of review arose because of the emerging research topic itself, which breaks with traditional approaches to the study of diplomacy and social networks. Thus, Snyder (2019) highlights the role of this type of literature review in the development of initial or preliminary theoretical models, rather than revising old models, and where the aim is not an exhaustive review of previous studies, but the combination of perspectives for the construction of a new one. Although it does not require a specific process like the systematised reviews (Torraco, 2005), the following phases were followed for its execution:

1. The articles were searched for in SCOPUS and WOS, as well as in Google Scholar, using keywords such as disinformation, social networks, diplomacy, international relations, fake news, case studies, among others; this phase was carried out in both Spanish and English.
2. With the documents found, we proceeded to identify the elements involved in misinformation and the relationship between them.
3. With the findings, a synthesis of the information found was made, making use of the inductive method and reference tables in which information such as the objective, the methodology used, the main findings, the actors of diplomacy, etc. was located.

However, regarding the development of the CLD, the findings of the literature review were used to establish the feedback loops and balance of the disinformation system as a strategy of diplomacy. For this, the procedure established by Richardson and Pugh (1981) as well as Kim (1992) was executed as showed in the summary below.

1. The assignment of variable names (elements), the possible relationships between them and their directionality was carried out.
2. The potential adverse effects related to the construction on the CLD were identified.
3. Causal loops were classified according to their nature as either feedback (R) or balance (B).
4. The loops created were revised to be as specific as possible.



Finally, the computational work on the model was developed in Stella Architect Software version 1.9.5.

Results

Considering the advances from previous studies, models of disinformation propagation have focused on other areas of knowledge not directly related to diplomacy, so the construction of these models lacks some elements that are incorporated in the use of this strategy by governments, which causes the overall behaviour of the propagation system to vary, as represented in Figure 1, in the feedback and balance loops defined.

Said that, it is necessary to remember that disinformation is intentional in nature (Gerrits, 2018), so its use in diplomacy is planned, which leads to the development of a strategy to maximise the effects of the message (Vosoughi *et al.*, 2018). Thus, social media accounts created by government agencies seek to attract the largest possible target population (Hollenbaugh and Ferris, 2014) and therefore use organic, paid and invitation-only outreach to attract the largest possible audience and turn them into the disinformation susceptible population (SP) (B1) (Buchanan and Benson, 2019), who are the people who will view the disinformation and interact with it. In this sense, it is recognised that the organic reach of disinformation accounts will decrease as the susceptible population increases (B2).

By linking the SP to the social media accounts of the disinformation agent, disinformation is propagated using organic reach (Buchanan and Benson, 2019), paid reach (Helmus *et al.*, 2018), bots (Helmus *et al.*, 2018; Office of the Director of National Intelligence, 2017) and trolls (Starbird, 2019), with the aim of systematically exposing the SP to the message, and thus consolidating the disinformed population (DP) (B3). This is synthesised in the visualisations of the message, to ultimately decrease the population susceptible to misinformation. Taking the latter into consideration, the incorporation of organic and paid reach is derived from the dynamics of the social network, especially the algorithm, since through these elements the message can be displayed under the conditions of use of the communication channel, however, as the number of uninformed people grows, the effect of organic reach will be less (B4). Whereas bots and trolls are used to amplify the message outside the conditions of the platform. These two elements were incorporated in the Russian interference in the US elections, where they were used to amplify the disinformation message (Helmus *et al.*, 2018). in concordance with what previously stated, and from a more holistic view of the case of the US elections, it was detected how the IRA group (belonging to a Russian agency) had African-American populations as its disinformation audience, in which after consolidating the SP it proceeded to pay for disinformation content (representing 66% of the activity), as well as bots and trolls, resulting in disinformation on the Facebook social network alone of 11,200,000 people (Office of the Director of National Intelligence, 2017).

The diagram illustrates a conceptual model of the dynamics of disinformation. It features several interconnected nodes and feedback loops. The nodes are: Possible audience, Adoption, Organic reach, Display disinformation, Disinformed population, Engaged level, Display accurate information, Informed population, and Unsubscribed population. External factors include Paid reach, Invitation reach, Bots, Trolls, and Correction rate. The model includes five feedback loops labeled B1 through B5 and a reset loop labeled R1. A correction rate also influences the Informed population.

However, the PD is involved in a systematic exposure to misinformation, so that by interacting with the various misinforming messages, the echo chamber effect is generated in which the ideas and beliefs resulting from the exposure to misinformation are amplified due to the repetition of the same or similar content, which reinforces the misinforming message (Bessi *et al.*, 2015; Garrett, 2009). This leads to the existence of a higher level of *engagement* on false information, representing for the DP the difficulty of accessing truthful information, which means that the informed population (IP) is low (R1) (Quattrociocchi *et al.*, 2016), consolidating one of the ultimate aims of disinformation as a strategy of diplomacy. Finally, the individual's ability to seek additional information, usually from media such as television, radio, and the press, is recognised as a final element, leading to a correction rate that results in a decrease in PD (Chiang and Knight, 2011; Entman, 2007). Hence, the IP must make the decision not to engage with the disinforming agent, by ceasing to follow the disinforming account, or to continue its relationship and remain part of the SP (B5).

Several conclusions have been reached in this study. The first is the fulfilment of the general objective, which was to analyse the spread of disinformation as a diplomatic strategy in social networks, through a systemic approach. Thus, it must be recognised that disinformation because of diplomacy strategy is a complex phenomenon in which various elements interact, which are arranged by both the disinforming agent and the social networks. Considering the latter, the proposed model allows us to recognise through the establishment of dynamic hypotheses (causal loops) the way in which disinformation spreads in this communication channel. In this scenario, the study



constitutes a first precedent for the systemic analysis of disinformation as a strategy of diplomacy, given that the advances developed have concentrated on case studies and on the effect of its use on citizens, so that both the model proposed, and the review carried out provide researchers with new tools for understanding this phenomenon.

With respect to the model proposed, it was possible to define the mechanisms that the disinforming agent must contact the PO, which are not necessarily the same as those used to disinform. An example of this are the bots and trolls that, given the cost they represent, are used to propagate the message in the SP and thus disinform. Subsequently, the way in which the message is propagated through its visualisation was identified. In turn, it is the citizen or user of the network who decides whether to interact with the publication to reaffirm their ideals and beliefs. It is in this aspect where the algorithm of the social network begins to create an echo chamber that prevents the visualisation of truthful information, making it difficult to create an IP and counteract disinformation.

This model reaffirms the potential of social networks to misinform, in this case through diplomacy, so that both states and the managers of these networks should focus their efforts on defining effective mechanisms for the prevention and mitigation of this phenomenon, based on an understanding of the elements involved in this strategy, as well as the systemic approach presented in this paper. Finally, for future research, it is suggested that dynamic models be developed to configure patterns of how it propagates, as well as to evaluate the role of the elements and their impacts.

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**SPORTS CELEBRITY AS AN INTERMEDIARY AND CULTURAL INSTRUMENT OF
FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS AND ETHNIC-RACIAL EQUALITY.
A STUDY OF THE CORPORATE CAMPAIGN "COMMON THREAD", PUBLISHED BY
THE SPORTS BRAND NIKE ON INSTAGRAM**

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Abstract

Corporate brands play a social role through the discourses they broadcast on their social media. The sports celebrity acts as a cultural intermediary and communicating instrument in the value system that the brand brings together in defence of social, cultural and ethnic diversity (Turner, 2004; Erdogan, 1999; Marshall, 1997).

From this perspective, the aim of this proposal is to detect the socio-cultural elements that articulate the discourse constructed by the Nike sports brand in defence of racial and ethnic equality in sport.

Methodologically, the content analysis approach is adopted (Krippendorff, 2013).

The data consists of 3 short films that make up a campaign created by the sports brand Nike called "Common Thread". The criterion for their selection was the discursive projection that the brand emits in favour of socio-cultural equality on Instagram.

In order to define the model of analysis, the classical studies of Greimas (1976) and McCracken (1989) is taken as a starting point.

The results show that the brand manifests itself on social media as a social agent that promotes equality and racial-ethnic rights for the black sports community through sport and culture.

Keywords

Brand; values; celebrity; discourse; social media.

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SPORTS CELEBRITY AS AN INTERMEDIARY AND CULTURAL INSTRUMENT OF FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS AND ETHNIC-RACIAL EQUALITY. A STUDY OF THE CORPORATE CAMPAIGN "COMMON THREAD", PUBLISHED BY THE SPORTS BRAND NIKE ON INSTAGRAM¹

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1. Introduction

The most classical sociological contributions have, over the last few decades, delved deeper into the symbolic character and the cultural meaning that underlies consumption practices and the communicative interactions that revolve around this phenomenon (López de Ayala, 2004; Semprini, 1995).

The Nike corporate brand acquires a social function in its own Instagram account, through the discursive broadcasting of values with a social and cultural character. The sports celebrity acts as a mediator and communicating instrument of a symbolic field that has been constructed and distributed by the brand (Turner, 2004; Erdogan, 1999; Marshall, 1997).

From this perspective, the research questions are as follows:

- What are the socio-cultural values underlying the symbolic field constructed by the brand?
- What narrative patterns articulate the discursive instrumentalisation produced by celebrities and athletes?

In order to answer the questions posed by this research, we take as a starting point the classical studies by Greimas (1976) and McCracken (1989). We have initially relied on these two theoretical models to design a methodological strategy that allows us to identify the narratological elements that articulate the discursive emission of socio-cultural values.

¹ Article translated by the autor and reviewed by Carolina Peralta.



Finally, we will show, through the results, that the brand manifests itself in social media as a social agent that promotes equality and fundamental rights of black sports communities through sport and culture.

1.1. The social function in consumption processes

The most classic line of sociological research has focused on the symbolic character that underlies the consumption process, from which the structured character of this phenomenon in modern societies can be explained. It has been the more contemporary sociological approach that has accentuated the impact that the cultural meaning of consumption practices generates in the processes of social and individual identity construction of audiences (López de Ayala, 2004). This assertion implies two different perspectives: first, the concept of consumption transcends the utilitarian function expressed by classical economics. And second, the discursive and symbolic exchange that takes place between different social subjects is recognised in this context.

In relation to a symbolic interaction between corporations and the public, Holbrook (2001) postulates that social subjects interact under ideas, images and symbols to reconfigure individual or social identity projects. They use this social interaction to disseminate specific socio-cultural contexts. Thus, postmodern consumption and its communication processes become an activity that transcends the exchange of commercial value. This symbolic meaning that is transferred through the interaction between social agents acquires a new social function that goes in two directions: outwards, constructing a particular cultural world. And inwards, contributing to the construction of the individual concept of self-identity (Elliott, 1998).

In order to delve deeper into this symbolic perspective that characterises the communicative interaction between subjects, we rely on the structuralist approach that defends the analysis of the hidden structures that sustain social action and manifestations. This is why the use of semiology becomes essential in order to highlight these structures that govern the systems of signs and communication.

Based on these approaches, structuralists conceive the communication process as a social practice through which social subjects express themselves and communicate under symbolic parameters. For Baudillard (1976), the leading exponent of this intellectual approach, the consumption of signs, has replaced necessity in modern societies. The practical utility of consumer objects and interaction with corporations has evolved into an immaterial and discursive exchange that acquires a social and cultural character.

This approach is essential to understand the role played by symbolic fields in the communication processes between corporations and publics. If we rely on the perspective offered by López de Ayala (2004), we could postulate the use of a system of signs endowed with social significance by brands and corporations. In this line, advertising or corporate communication is detached from use value, and the consumption process is conceived as a world of representations and cultural signs. From this moment on, consumption and the communication that are produced around this phenomenon have a social function that transcends the economic objectives of companies. The author Bocock puts it in the following terms: "in the postmodern world, consumption serves to establish the sense of identity of who we are", "Consumer goods have become a crucial element



in the establishment of meanings, identities and gender roles in postmodern capitalism" (Bocock, 1995: 141).

This is why corporations play a decisive role in the creation and discursive projection of values, beliefs and ideas associated with a given socio-cultural context.

1.2. The symbolic discourse of branding

In relation to this context, corporate brands construct and project cultural symbolic fields. This approach responds, as Semprini points out, to the following convergence: "The modern brand does not belong to the world of commerce but to the world of communication" (Semprini, 1995: 19).

Establishing a global definition that encompasses in depth the object and functions of the brand phenomenon is a truly complex task. In our argument, we are inclined to propose the nature of the brand phenomenon as an instance and semiotic engine that confers meaning and attribution in an ordered, structured and voluntary manner.

In this communicational transition, the corporate brand comes to generate greater freedom of discursive action. Organisations implement a new symbolic and discursive weight to their communication processes. This fact gives the brand a leading role in this mission, as it acquires a social function in the creation and distribution of social and cultural meanings. Therefore, the brand generates a specific universe of meaning that it creates and disseminates discursively.

Consistent with this postulate, it is important for the development of our research to highlight the role of social values as motivational constructs that relate people's beliefs about desirable goals to be achieved over time and according to different contexts. There are deterministic developments that shed light on the relationship between values and individual behaviour, especially when it comes to core values that influence a person's conception of social identity and self-concept (Verplanken & Holland, 2002).

1.3. The sports celebrity as a mediator of discourse

From the above context, we identify the use of sports celebrities as a mediating instrument of a given universe of social and cultural significance.

One area where it is essential to recognise the differentiation of discourse and meanings is through the use of celebrities in sport. David Marshall (1997) argues that in those industries that are associated with celebrities, communicative particularities originate according to the typology of the industry, and, therefore, different types of meanings are also generated. Furthermore, the author also argues that semiotic and discursive rules are generated around the celebrities, produced through diverse systems that privilege different groups of discourses.

The construction of meanings in sports occurs under the influence of certain social values that are considered exemplary. The sports celebrity is a particularly interesting case, because as David Giles (2004) points out, sport is one of the few areas of public and social life that is truly meritocratic. Sports celebrities can prove that they are the best,



so their cultural prominence can be seen as deserved. Celebrities represent subjective positions that audiences can adopt or adapt in their formation of social identities. A celebrity, then, is an embodiment of a discursive field about norms of individuality and personhood within a culture.

In the same vein, the sports celebrity is a moderator especially articulated by achievement, excellence and transcendence, often explicitly linked to socio-cultural definitions of nationality and ethnicity.

It is precisely in that process whereby a celebrity is mediatised that the most productive social and cultural functions that the celebrity, and his culture, seem to perform today are generated. The fact that the celebrity extends his identity to the public image means that he conducts some kind of social function in relation to audiences. This social function exercised by the brand, and the staging of the celebrity, reveal new aspects of how brands now generate meaning and significance through the media and advertising industries.

2. Design and method

2.1. Methodological approach

We adopted the content analysis methodology (Krippendorff, 2013) through discourse (Gee, 2014). This technique has allowed us to analyse, structure and objectify the object of study in the different contents (Neuendorf, 2002).

In relation to the methodology provided by Gee (2014), we have used the discourse analysis of the celebrity in certain contents of the Nike brand on Instagram. The most relevant element we have relied on, based on this theoretical approach, is how the discourse has been instrumentalised by the celebrity for the construction and projection of a particular field of socio-cultural significance.

2.2. Type of analysis

In order to define the model of analysis, the classical studies of Greimas (Greimas, 1976) and McCracken (McCracken, 1989) are taken as a starting point. In a first phase, we have approached some variables specific to both authors (table 1). In a second phase, we have designed a model of analysis with certain categories that allow us to respond to the objectives of this research (table 2).

Table 1: Analysis model with authors' variables.

Greimas model variables (1976)	McCracken (1989) variables
Subject: actant who desires an object	Culturally constituted world
Object: what you wish	Media / advertising
Helper: guides the subject	Consumer goods
Opponent: oppressive force	
Sender: set of facts and motivating forces	
Receiver: people who benefit	

Source: own compilation.



To further our objectives, we have synthesised both approaches and defined a model (table 2) that helps us to associate the categories of analysis with the most important thematic units in our object of study:

Table 2. Methodological model design

Culturally constituted world	
Subject: Actant desires an object	Celebrity and black athletes
Object: What you want	Goals and achievements in defence of cultural equality and diversity
Helper: Guides the subject	The Nike brand
Opponent: Oppressive force	Sociocultural barriers and difficulties
Sender: A set of desired facts or motivating forces	Achieving fundamental rights and equal opportunities
Receiver: Who benefits	Black athletes
Media / Advertising	
Brand content on its Instagram account. Analysis of the "Common Thread" campaign	

Source: Prepared by the authors. Created from the approaches of Greimas (1976) and McCracken (1989).

This system allows us to delve deeper into the main narratological elements that articulate the discursive projection in defence of equality and cultural diversity. On the other hand, this system enables us to identify the social meaning transfer process that occurs in the creation of a cultural world determined and discursively articulated by the sports celebrity.

We consider that the transfer of social meaning arises from a culturally constructed world, through six narratological categories and through the Instagram social media.

In relation to these variables, this proposal aims to identify, describe and compare the fields of symbolic signification and socio-cultural values that the brand seeks to project discursively through the staging of celebrities and young black sportsmen and sportswomen.

3. Data analysis

Nike's Instagram account has 774 publications created by the brand itself in the last phase of our analysis (December 2020). It is relevant to highlight that the Nike sports brand publishes corporate or advertising content through the section called "Publications". Of all the content created by the brand on its own account since 2011, we have focused on analysing 3 videos that belong to the campaign called "Common Thread". These contents were published by the brand from 17/02/20 to 29/02/20. The main criterion for choosing the sample was the staging of sportsmen or sports celebrities



who act as cultural intermediaries and communication tools for the audiovisual content created and published by the brand.

The brand has created a corporate communications campaign to celebrate Black History Month 2019, which is celebrated in some Anglo-Saxon countries such as England and the USA. The athletes featured in the "Common Thread" campaign are celebrities and young black athletes. The athletes come from different sporting areas and diverse socio-cultural backgrounds. The celebrities narrate part of their own life experience to describe those socio-cultural aspects that have an impact on their lives and the communities to which they belong. In the same way, celebrities and athletes tell the way they experience their sport's practice in a given sociocultural context. In all three videos, we can detect the use of recurrent discursive elements that articulate the projection of values to empower equality and ethno-racial diversity. To carry out the analysis, we need to understand the discursive elements involved in the construction of the symbolic field as a system that articulates the message.

The data collection period ran from 1 September 2020 to 31 December 2020. Below, we show the name of the content, the format, the duration, the date of publication on Instagram and the URL where the content is located:

Table 3. Main content data

Title Content	Content format	Playback time	Date of publication	URL
Common Thread Episode 1: Ingrid & Alex, Narrated by Serena Williams	Video 1	3:35	17 FEBRUARY 2020	https://www.instagram.com/p/B8rO4zqg0Zw/
Common Thread Episode 2: Crystal, Debra & Kairaba	Video 2	3:44	21 FEBRUARY 2020	https://www.instagram.com/p/B81iLqrA1-b/
Common Thread Episode 3: Vashti, RunGrl & Asra	Video 3	3:58	29 FEBRUARY 2020	https://www.instagram.com/p/B9KI0D2HHe7/

Source: <https://www.instagram.com/nike/?hl=es>

For this particular project, we have decided to use the QuickTime Player application for the IOS operating system as an analysis tool. This tool allows us to work with text, photographs and video at the same time, and to analyse texts, images and audio simultaneously, without the need to create descriptions. We transcribed the speeches and dialogues that we considered most representative for use in the research results. In this way, we were able to triangulate the extracted data in order to interpret the results in a narrative and conceptual way (Lacasa, Martínez-Borda, & Méndez, 2013).

Once again, we insist that the approaches to the data, as well as the models of analysis, are interwoven in an integrated way in our interpretation. This is because our aim is to explain the keys that articulate, generate and enable the reproduction of a given socio-cultural symbolic field through discourse.



4. Results

Two questions guide the research presented in this article and the results allow us to answer them. Firstly, we analyse the presence of digital content created and published by the Nike brand on its own Instagram account. Our object of study focuses on the analysis of the three videos belonging to the "Common Thread" campaign. These contents are analysed with the aim of describing and identifying the socio-cultural values that the brand projects in defence of equality during the commemoration of Black History Month 2019, in countries such as England and the U.S. Secondly, the narrative instrumentalisation that projects the sports celebrity as a cultural intermediary is shown.

A first observation of the data shows how the narratives of the short films respond to narratives starring black sportsmen and sportswomen who practice different sports in different socio-cultural environments. We find in the contents a thematic unit that is transversal in the three short films: the practice of sport by black men and women in specific socio-cultural contexts. All the concepts and references used discursively are oriented towards strengthening the equality and unity of black sports communities as a motivational object.

Following our methodological strategy, we contextualise our analysis in the narratological categories: subject, object, helper, opponent, sender and receiver. We find it relevant in relation to our object of study to prioritise the categories that in our opinion have a greater impact on the projected socio-cultural symbolic field: object, sender and receiver.

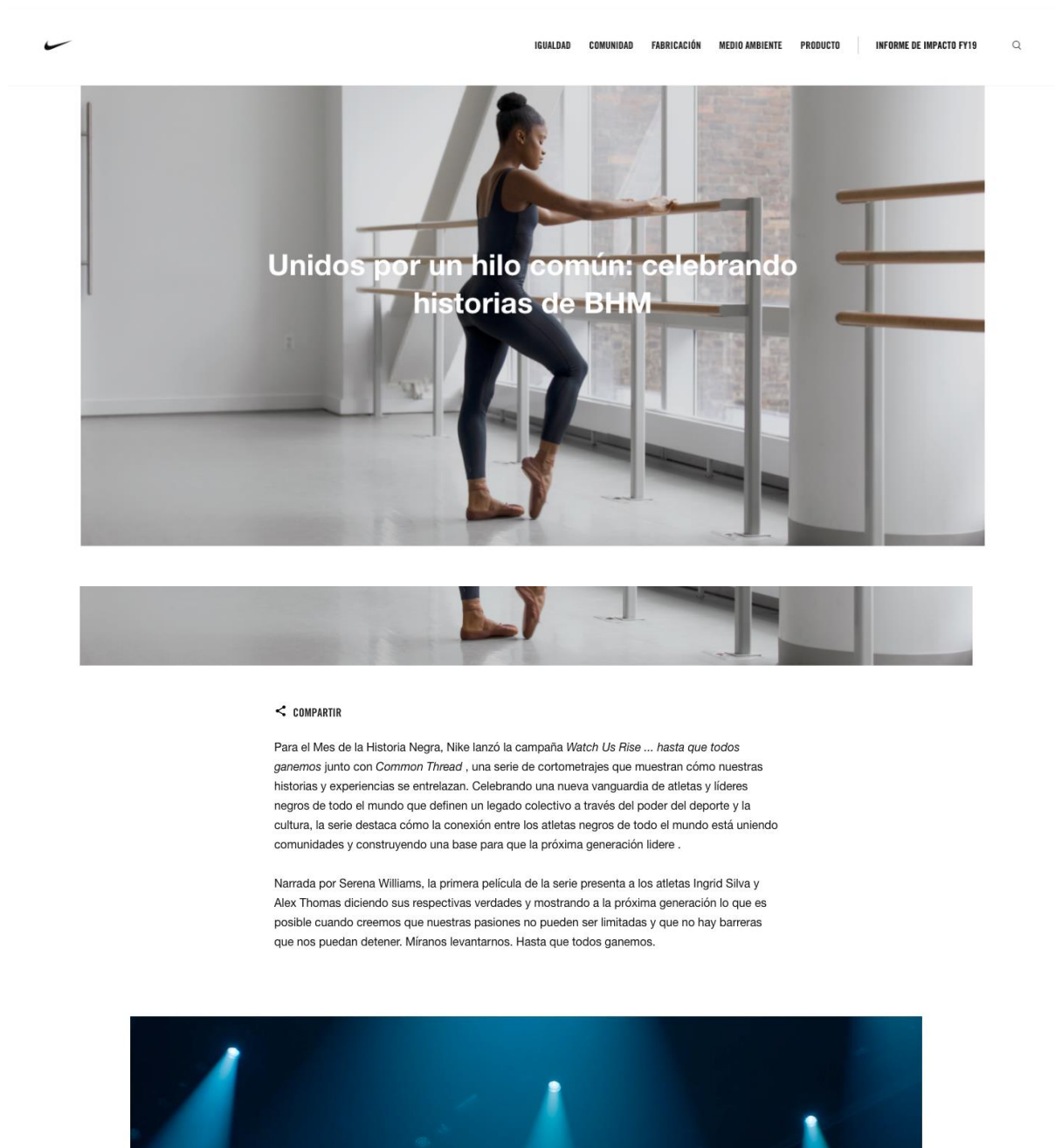
In this way, we hope to comprehensively reconstruct the narrative patterns that structure the projection of values recurrently in the three contents.

4.1. Category 1. Object or desire to be achieved: to build a legacy for future generations.

The need to contextualise the object of achievement projected by the brand through the celebrity makes it necessary to devote a complementary analysis to other communication channels belonging to the brand. In order to understand the social objective to be achieved, there is nothing better than relying on a communication channel that belongs to the corporation at the time of the analysis, in which the specific purpose of the campaign is expressed:



Figure 1: Nike Campaign - United by a common thread



Source: <https://purpose.nike.com/common-thread>:

For Black History Month 2019, Nike launched the Watch Us Rise... Until We All Win campaign alongside Common Thread, a series of short films showcasing how our stories and experiences are woven together. Celebrating a new vanguard of Black athletes and leaders around the world who define a collective legacy through the power of sport & culture, the series highlights how the connection between



Black athletes across the world is uniting communities and building a foundation for the next generation to lead.

Narrated by Serena Williams, the first film in the series features athletes Ingrid Silva and Alex Thomas speaking about their respective experiences and showing the next generation what is possible to achieve when we believe our passions cannot be limited, and no barriers can hold us back. Watch us rise. Until we all win.

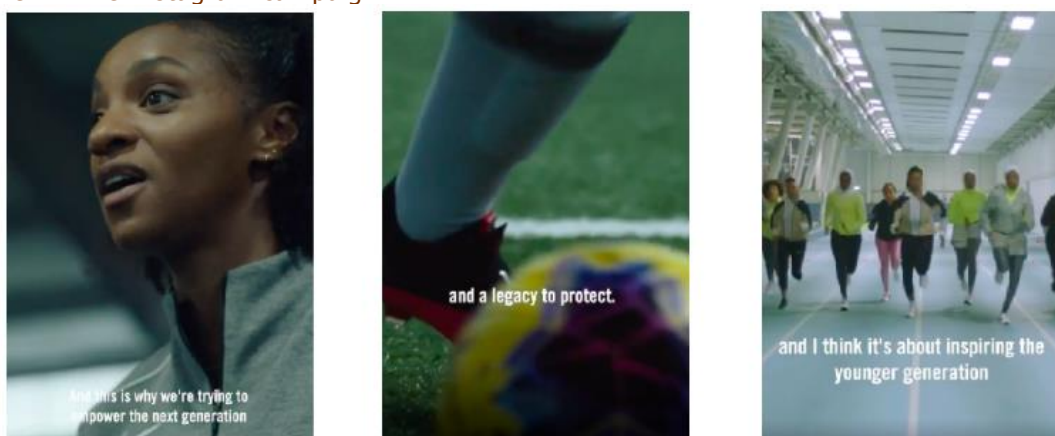
In this transcription, the specific context in which the corporate campaign is framed becomes clear. Undoubtedly, the social objective that the brand intends to promote through the instrumentalisation of black sportsmen and women can be seen.

Despite the fact that the object of achievement of all the narratives is oriented towards building and sharing a legacy for the black athletes of the future, it is relevant to analyse the way in which each protagonist expresses it discursively from different disciplines or sporting practices. Taking figure 2 as a reference, we exemplify through three frames with the inserted transcript, the projection of the social object that is intended to be achieved in the community of black sportsmen and sportswomen. In all three examples, the sportswomen express their desire to inspire future generations. The images help us to interpret how the black sportswomen contribute through sport to the strengthening of the individual and social identity of their community.

Crystal Dunn tells part of her life experience to become a professional player and expresses some of the barriers she has faced as a person of colour. She also says how important it is for the black sports community to jointly protect a legacy for the future.

In the case of Ashlee Lawson Green, co-founder of the RunGrl Sports Club, we see the athlete practising her sporting discipline alongside peers from similar backgrounds and diverse socio-cultural origins. She states that one of the purposes of her own club is to empower and inspire the next generation.

Figure 2. Nike Instagram campaign I



Source: Nike Instagram account (Video 2: (<https://www.instagram.com/p/B81iLqrA1-b/>;
Video 3: <https://www.instagram.com/p/B9KI0D2HHe7/>)



To demonstrate that the social objective of the brand is recurrent in all the campaign videos, we show a transcript of video 2, in which the narrator says the following:

*Whether the story begins in South London, where a young woman uses the power of football to bridge the gap between a new generation and the old guard.
You know, I can honestly like take a page out of you all's books.
For me, my parents moved me out to where soccer was more visible, and I just started playing.
But for you guys, you really took an initiative.
A lot of people don't do it.
And this is why we're trying to empower the next generation to take that initiative and you guys have already done that.
To go fast, we have to go together.
To lead the way, we have to lead together.
Making a future we can believe in,
and a legacy to protect.*

Category 2. Target or set of desired facts or motivating forces: to use sport to enhance racial and ethnic equality among the present and future generations.

The next step in our paper is to delve deeper into the motivational aspects that lead the protagonists to use sport as a driving force for social values. In the narration of Serena Williams (video 1), we identify the desire of two young dancers to make their way in the artistic discipline:

*This story begins with a prodigy from Brazil, who goes from her local dance center to become the face of modern ballet. And it continues with the rising young dancer from Florida inspired by those who paved the way to uplift anyone who sees him move.
Together, they channel the beauty of motion, making space for others just like them*

In the same video, dancer Ingrid calls for equal opportunities in the recruitment of dancers of colour. She also shows how motivated she is to have overcome socio-cultural barriers in her experience:

*Directors have to take the first step in hiring dancers of color, so the stage looks like what the rest of the world looks like, so people can feel represented on stage. I think the greatest lesson ballet has taught me is that there is no limit to be who you want to be.
I think also as a dancer, we hear so many "no's" or "you're not good enough" or "you can't do enough", but just to be on the stage with so many people and represent something larger than ourselves, that's so fulfilling.*

Similarly, the following transcript of video 2 exemplifies how professional football player Crystal relates the desired set of facts and the motivating force that mobilises two young black sportswomen located in different geographical locations. Their names are Debra Nelson and Kairaba Ali-Danbukar, and they are two young female football players. We



can identify the importance for these sportswomen of an equal context in which to play football:

Whether the story begins in South London, where a young woman uses the power of football to bridge the gap between a new generation and the old guard.

Or in the Bronx, where a teenager can't find her team for girls her age in her borough, so she finds one on her own, traveling wherever it takes to join her pride.

Or on Long Island, with a young woman who comes back stronger than ever, representing her country and all girls who see themselves in her when they turn on the TV.

This is a dialogue of their shared experience.

This is their common thread.

In video 3 (figure 3), audiovisual sequences are interspersed to describe the athletes' shared experience of what drives their individual and social identity:

Figure 3. Nike Instagram campaign II



Source: Nike Instagram account. (Video 3: <https://www.instagram.com/p/B9KI0D2HHe7/>)

Similarly, in video 2, Debra describes the power of football to overcome socio-cultural difficulties and to impact positively on the development of individuals and society:



Trying to get girls to play football in like the inner city of London it's quite hard because of like my cultural stereotypes or like just safety issues, and I think providing them with a safe place to play football is the biggest thing. Soccer is so powerful. It's fun, you're learning how to communicate, you're learning how to manage your emotions, you're learning how to build positive relationships and, I think if we want to carry on building a positive Society you have to start with the next generation, and I think football is the easiest thing to use to encourage positivity in society.

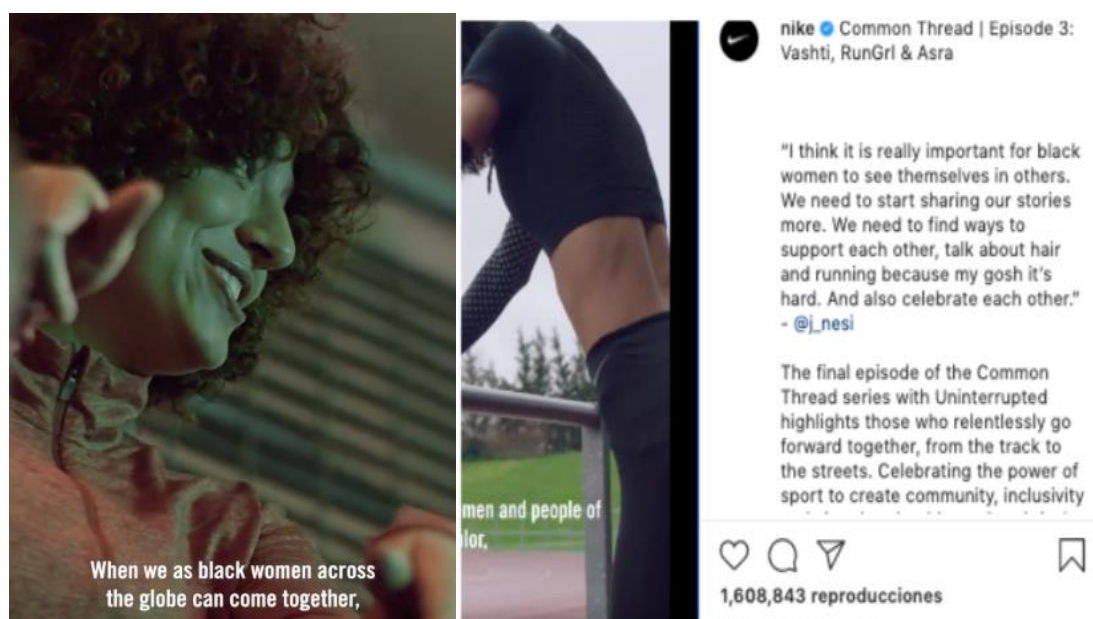
Category 3: Recipient or beneficiary strengthen the black sportswomen's union.

In this last category, we have identified a cross-cutting theme that runs through the entire narrative of the campaign: building a legacy of equality and unity for the black sports community. We felt it was important to show how the protagonists seek to spread a cultural legacy for the benefit of future generations of black athletes.

In Figure 4, female athletes (professional athlete Vashti Cunningham is the narrator of this video) show their support and desire for current black athletes to inspire each other. In these examples, we can identify how the social purpose of the campaign is directed for the direct benefit of black sports communities. In all of the narratives, there is a call for equal opportunities for black athletes from all geographic backgrounds.

In these examples, the founders of the women's athletics teams RunGr! and Asra relate the importance of encouraging the practice of their sporting disciplines together with other sportswomen from the same socio-cultural backgrounds in order to strengthen the unity of black sports communities around the world.

Figure 4. Nike Instagram campaign III



Source: Nike Instagram account. (Video 3: <https://www.instagram.com/p/B9KI0D2HHe7/>)



We rely again on the transcript of video 2 to show how sportswomen are committed to achieving their goals if they stick together and unite.

*You know, I can honestly like take a page out of you all's books.
For me, my parents moved me out to where soccer was more visible, and I
just started playing.
But for you guys, you really took an initiative.
A lot of people don't do it.
And this is why we're trying to empower the next generation to take that
initiative and you guys have already done that.
To go fast, we have to go together.
To lead the way, we have to lead together.
Making a future we can believe in,
and a legacy to protect.*

5. Conclusions and discussion.

The results allow us to compare this study with the previous findings mentioned in the introduction. Conclusions will be shown in relation to the questions that are at the origin of the study.

The data corroborate that the Nike brand acquires a social function in the discursive and symbolic projection of socio-cultural values through the creation and distribution of the corporate campaign "Common Thread", published on its Instagram account. In relation to what has been shown in the analysed data of the three contents, it can be evidenced that the brand adopts a leading role in the construction of a specific socio-cultural symbolic field. The social objective that the brand aims to project is discursively instrumentalised through the experience of different sportsmen and celebrities. As seen in the data through the discourse analysis, the athletes promote narratives aimed at strengthening the individual and social identity of the community of black athletes from different places and geographical locations. In all cases, the data reveal motivational aspects that lead the protagonists to use sport as a promoter of fundamental rights and socio-cultural values. Moreover, underlying all three contents is a cross-cutting narrative that seeks to promote equal opportunities for young athletes, as well as to strengthen communities of athletes from different geographical, ethnic and racial backgrounds.

From this perspective, we rely on the second question to identify narrative patterns that recurrently articulate the discourse in the campaign analysed. The discursive proposal of the contents is structured through actantial elements that modulate a common narrative in the projection of specific socio-cultural values. This transversal structure helps to clearly channel the social and cultural values that the brand intends to evoke. As the audiovisual data analysed shows, all subjects (celebrities and athletes) manifest the pursuit of a common object and desire: to build and strengthen a legacy for future generations of black athletes. This object of social achievement is pursued through the forces and motivational constructs that proliferate from the practice of sport. With this perspective in mind, sport would function as a driving force for racial and ethnic equality that enables these communities to achieve a common goal for the benefit of present and future generations of sportsmen and sportswomen.



In summary, the results of this work have shown that branding plays a determining role in using socio-cultural values in defence of equality and fundamental rights. The symbolic projection that is emitted is discursively instrumentalised through the live narratives of black athletes and celebrities who belong to different sporting disciplines and come from diverse ethnic and racial contexts.

Far from conceiving the brand phenomenon as a result in itself, the aim of this study is to delve deeper into the concept of the brand as an issuing entity and producer of discourses of a social and cultural nature. We have based our research on various theoretical approaches that have studied the communicative function of corporate brands from different disciplines of the social sciences: psychology, sociology, anthropology and linguistics. However, in this case, we have been mainly approached our object of study from the semiotic nature of the discourse of the brand. This fact has helped us to elucidate the abstract conception of the brand phenomenon as a concrete and defined discursive utterance.

The main strategy of this research has been based on revealing the social function played by the discourses created and distributed by a given corporate brand. From this perspective, our questions have focused especially on identifying and describing the role that a corporate brand plays as a discursive emitter of values of a social and cultural nature. In this context, we hope that this contribution will allow us to develop this line of research from other perspectives and academic disciplines. Similarly, we hope that this study will serve to raise new questions aimed at identifying the impact on audiences of the creation of digital content that projects specific symbolic fields.

In relation to this context, we propose to discuss and delve deeper into the function that sports celebrities exercise in these contexts. In our view, it is relevant how sports celebrities become "signs", embedded semiotic systems with axiological meanings to be read and actively interpreted by their audiences. In this vein, we argue that celebrities are interpreted as texts that are discursively constructed. The meanings they generate are the product of a "structured polysemy". This refers to the multiplicity of meanings and affects they embody, as well as the intention to structure them in such a way that some meanings are foregrounded, while others are masked or displaced.

Therefore, through the analysis of the "Common Thread" campaign, we propose to highlight the productive social function of sports celebrities through the social instrumentalisation of values that enhance equality and fundamental rights, which, in turn, act in the social construction of the communities within which many of us live. This approach responds to what various authors think of as "real emotional attachments" to figures we only know through their media representations.

In this line, the results have allowed us to interpret the socio-cultural context where the athletes' narratives are developed. In relation to this context, sports celebrities become a "place" for the elaboration and construction of individual and social identity in the community of black athletes. At first, a celebrity is perceived as a legitimate source of information, as an important social process, through which relationships, identity and social and cultural norms are shared. Its expansion through media content has embedded celebrities in processes of social and personal identity formation.



Therefore, it is suggested that the mediatised sports celebrity operates at the very heart of culture, as it resonates with conceptions of individuality, which are the ideological foundation of Western culture. If we support our argument on the postulate proposed by Marshall (1997) in relation to celebrity, then sports celebrities could play a crucial ideological function in the instrumentalisation of the discourses created and distributed by a corporate brand.

This perspective helps us to discuss how corporate communication processes are shaped in the construction of certain symbolic fields. The types of messages that the celebrity passes on to the public are semiotic elements that shape individual identification, social identity and the universality of values through a given universe of signification.

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SOCIAL MEDIA AS A TOOL FOR COMMUNICATING HUMAN RIGHTS. CASE STUDY: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

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Abstract

This text analyses the importance of social networks for one of the most important non-governmental organisations in the world in terms of the defence of human rights at a global level, Amnesty International, through its Spanish section.

To do so, it moves from the general to the specific, starting by addressing the importance of communication as a fundamental element for development cooperation, the defence of human rights and the environment. It moves on to a general analysis of the social networks used by Amnesty International, arriving at a specific analysis of their use during the first 15 days of January 2021 by the organisation. It ends with the drawing of conclusions with the intention of opening a space for debate, which can increase the growth of knowledge about the usefulness of social networks and new technologies as key tools for the defence of human rights.

Keywords

Human Rights, Social Networks, Amnesty International, International Communication.

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SOCIAL MEDIA AS A TOOL FOR COMMUNICATING HUMAN RIGHTS. CASE STUDY: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL^{1 2}

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this research is to analyse the use of social media as a tool for communicating human rights, through the case study of Amnesty International³.

The first objective is to determine the definition of communication for development, communication for human rights and communication for the environment (COMDEDEHUMA), as an integrated communication space, in which communication for human rights is inserted as a protagonist at a global level. The second objective is to find out how Amnesty International, through its Spanish Section, uses social networks as a tool for communicating human rights and achieving its objectives. The third objective is to make visible how this organisation uses these social networks in a concrete way, in a period of time that covers the first 15 days of January 2021. The fourth objective is to generate a space for debate and reflection based on conclusions that set out the present and some future scenarios of the link between social networks and human rights on a global scale.

This work is part of a qualitative research project and will be undertaken in three phases. The first of these will establish the background to human rights communication, explaining a newly created term by the author (COMDEDEHUMA) as a dynamic of international communication and a line of communication applied to the Sustainable Development Goals. In the second phase, the use of social networks by Amnesty International will be analysed, through the work of its Spanish Section; this will be done in two ways: a) by collecting information directly through interviews with its media officer; b) through the collection of data on its social network activity during the first 15 days of January.

Methodologically, this research is approached using descriptive and analytical methods, as their combination provides the necessary explanatory elements to reach the most pertinent conclusions. The bibliographical review of primary and secondary sources, such

¹ Article translated by Javier Bernabé Fraguas with the supervision of Nina Wormer Nixdorf.

² This text is one of the results of the project "La información internacional como herramienta de inserción laboral para el alumnado de Relaciones Internacionales", approved in the Innova-Docencia 20-21 call for proposals; project leader: Javier Bernabé Fraguas; funding entity: Universidad Complutense de Madrid.

³ <https://www.es.amnesty.org/>



as reports, documents or research papers published by academic journals and think tanks has been used, especially for the first part. The interview and data collection have proved to be instruments that have been presented as great tools for deepening the object of study. The information obtained has made it possible to capture those aspects which are most significant and to provide, after their systematisation, an approach to Amnesty International's work, which will give meaning to the study and will be very relevant for the analysis and conclusions.

The main premise of this work is based on the following statement: social networks are an extremely important tool for human rights communication, both in terms of disseminating messages, interacting with interested people and raising funds for non-governmental organisations specialising in human rights.

2. Communication by non-governmental organisations at the international level

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that work in the international arena usually do so in one of four thematic areas: international development cooperation, humanitarian action, defence of human rights, and defence of the environment. These four areas form an area of work within international relations that is led by some very particular actors, which emerge from organised civil society, and express their concern to improve the living conditions of the most disadvantaged populations in the international arena. These manifestations take the form of various types of action on the ground, including awareness-raising, denunciation, research and applied research, most of the time. The 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals are the roadmap to follow, and their 169 goals are the roads on the map to reach the right destination. Communication is central to all of this, and NGOs understand that without it they cannot achieve what they set out to do.

Communication, therefore, stands out as something essential, in all its complexity, from the relationship with traditional media, to interaction in social networks and the use of new technologies to communicate, as well as internal communication with partners and members of the organisations.

Not all the work of these NGOs is carried out in what we might call the countries of the South, but a very large percentage of it is. And the information that NGOs offer to international audiences about these countries would constitute a counterweight to the disinformation that the media provides about the South. Therefore, they are shaped as sources of information or producers of information, given their knowledge on the ground, their specialisation and the body of experts that generally support their work. However, this is not yet the case, because there is often a misperception in development, human rights and environmental NGOs. On the one hand, forgetting or ignoring what the media are, wanting them to adapt to the needs of these organisations; and on the other hand, limiting their communication activity to fundraising.



2.1. Approaching communication for development, human rights and the environment

The academic literature on communication for development, communication for human rights and communication for the environment (COMDEDEHUMA, from now on) is extensive when it considers the three strands separately, but scarce when it must consider the common elements of what this author considers COMDEDEHUMA.

The three spaces mentioned above, separately, are identified with the Millennium Goals, in a way that is equivalent to what this COMDEDEHUMA identifies with the SDGs.

It would therefore be the communication that is developed to denounce, investigate and report on the problems, and to promote communicative solutions to the challenges posed by the 17 SDGs and their 169 targets, from non-governmental organisations, international bodies and the media.

One of the key elements of this discipline, though not the only one, is to find out how journalism is linked to development, human rights and the environment. To know what it does not yet contribute, what it can realistically contribute, and whether it is possible that the current negative balance, in which misinformation wins, can change at some point.

Non-governmental organisations, international organisations (especially those belonging to the United Nations) and the media complete the triangle of entities that lead COMDEDEHUMA's work on a global scale.

We can affirm that this communication work is premeditated when the final objective is to make a contribution through communication and information to improve the living conditions of humanity. NGOs, international organisations and some media (small and specialised in these issues) are generally the protagonists of this premeditated contribution. Such a contribution is unpremeditated when, despite reporting on the three issues in question, it has other objectives as its main purpose, generally economic and corporate profit. Most of the major generalist media are at the forefront of these contributions.

Since Sean MacBride in the 1970s spearheaded the Theories of Information Dependency, especially between 1977 and 1980 at the International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems, many years have passed, but little real change has come about in the North-South communication imbalance through the mainstream media (MacBride, 1980).

The introduction of social media into the equation changes the final result in two ways: a) the first is that there are many, many more sources of information thanks to social media; b) the second is that young audiences use social media on a massive scale, not using the general media for information. The Mac Bride Report is still valid today in terms of the description of the problem caused by these generalist media, as there is still a clear inequality of information flows and an image promoted by these media from the North, which do not provide sufficient elements to have complete information, neither from the North nor from the South.



The general media expose realities that are too partial, marked by spectacle and by the supposed interest of the audience, which the media themselves decide, where explanations and analysis are difficult to find.

UNESCO set a goal in the field of communication for development, which the author of this research believes can be extrapolated to COMDEDEHUMA, making this goal broader, more realistic and more ambitious:

To encourage the free flow of information at the national and international levels; to promote the widest and most balanced dissemination of information without hindrance to freedom of expression; and to develop all appropriate means to strengthen communication capacities in developing countries in order to increase their participation in the communication process (UNESCO, 1989).

However, communication applied to development, the environment and human rights has been gaining ground in Spain since the 1990s, above all through the work carried out by NGOs and some media professionals. Even so, this discipline can be considered the "poor sister" within development studies in our country, if we take into account the economic, human and material resources dedicated to it in comparison with other disciplines, both at governmental and non-governmental level.

The paradox is that the positive results obtained by international organisations based in Spain, non-governmental organisations or Spanish governmental entities dedicated to development, are presented with interest by those in charge, through their communications departments, in order to obtain maximum economic and image benefits.

In the field of the environment and human rights, the issue has been dealt with in a different way, with NGOs dedicated to these issues giving high importance to their communication areas, as from the beginning they saw that their presence in the media through journalistic materials was fundamental, as well as raising awareness in society through campaigns, currently with social networks as the main protagonists. Some examples are Greenpeace and Amnesty International, organisations that are already a point of reference for the media, which give them important spaces both when they present reports and specific investigations, as well as on a day-to-day basis.

The definitions of communication for development put forward by authors such as Javier Erro and Begoña Ballesteros should be noted at this point. Erro starts from the idea of a communicational perspective in which communication, education and culture converge, understanding communication itself 'as development', where NGOs should not only inform about the problems of the South, but also educate in order to promote citizen decision-making. In Erro's vision, it is necessary to evolve to a concept of communication that transcends information - the transmission of data - to recover the essence of communicating, "The communicative is associated with teaching, sharing, living, recognising, meeting and learning with the other. It is a matter of accompanying learning, of assuming that the other is not only a destination point, but above all a meeting point" (Erro, 2002: 28).



The author of this research agrees with Erro on the need for communication to transcend information, but not only in the field of development, but also in the field of human rights and the environment, thus being in line with the SDGs.

This idea is complemented by the definition of Ballesteros, for whom communication for development refers to "recourse to a horizontal and participative communicative conception that permeates and cross-cuts a development process regardless of whether or not communication tools, technologies and media are used during it" (Ballesteros, 2005).

Once again, the author of this research dares to affirm that this conception can be extrapolated to the field of human rights and the environment. He concludes at this point that the communication to which he refers must try to produce a democratic and participatory relationship, being itself a democratic and participatory process, making these two values not only the final goal but also the path to be followed in order to reach it.

3. Amnesty international and social media as tools for communicating human rights⁴

In its own words, "Amnesty International is a global, independent organisation of more than 10 million people who take action against injustice by defending human rights around the world" (Amnesty International, 2021).

In order to carry out this task, the use of social networks has become essential in this organisation. In this section we are going to analyse which social networks are most used by the Spanish Section of Amnesty International in its global work, what they are looking for, what results they are getting, and how all this affects the general work of communicating human rights that the organisation carries out.

It should be specified that there is careful verification of the information Amnesty International transmits on social networks, for the organisation it is essential to be credible and trustworthy.

To enhance these good practices, the organisation has implemented tools and spaces such as the Citizen Evidence Lab, which "...was originally created as a space to keep abreast of the best innovations by sharing advice, tools and good practices on disciplines such as video verification, remote sensing and weapons analysis" (Amnesty International, 2019).

We can consider "citizen evidence" to be materials that show, in any format, human rights violations in the world, collected by people who are not engaged in professional research in this field. These materials, which usually provide many details of the human rights violations they document, are disseminated through social networks, which is precisely why it is important to ensure that they are not sources of disinformation.

⁴ The content of this section arises from the analysis of the information obtained in the interviews conducted by the author with Ángel Gonzalo, media officer of Amnesty International, Spanish Section, on 9 and 12 February 2021; and from the verification of the data obtained on the website of the organisation: <https://www.es.amnesty.org/>



This Citizen Evidence Lab helps to maintain verification of what it disseminates on networks:

The site includes guides to tools and techniques for verifying publicly available video and images, and highlights Amnesty International case studies that show how methodologies such as remote image sensing and weapons analysis can reveal human rights abuses. It also details and builds on innovative projects involving thousands of volunteers to sift through data on a massive scale. There are tutorials on techniques such as reverse image searching, preserving data from social media to avoid losing it, and using other data sources - such as satellite imagery - to verify when and where events took place (Amnesty International, 2019).

Building on this initiative, Amnesty International launched the Digital Verification Corps (DVC) in 2016, one of whose objectives is to "collate and verify the overwhelming amount of digital content that exists in the world today, some of which depicts human rights abuses" (Dubberley, 2019).

The DVC is made up of six universities: University of California, Berkeley; Cambridge; Essex; Hong Kong; Pretoria; and Toronto. They train student volunteers to verify videos and photos of possible human rights violations around the world. The results support Amnesty International's research teams to do rigorous and verified work on social media (Dubberley, 2019).

Indeed, in the words of DVC director Sam Dubberley:

When uncomfortable truths lead public authorities to cry 'fake news', or when content posted on social media claims to show something it does not, we are prepared to respond based on rigorous and methodical methods of investigation and verification (Amnesty International, 2018).

It is this verification work that gives exceptional value to the materials disseminated on the social networks by this NGO, a work that is not normally known, not seen, and which adds great value to the organisation's image, to its credibility as a reliable source.

3.1. Social networking teams

The social media area is made up of a full-time community manager and a group of 12 support staff, who are volunteers. It is integrated into communication technology, which is managed by a webmaster, who is hierarchically higher up the hierarchy and is also the person responsible for the website. Therefore, the person responsible for social media is accountable to the webmaster; and the webmaster is accountable to the head of the Communication Department.

Social Networking also has a marketing support person, due to the large number of cyber actions that the organisation carries out on the Internet, for example, collecting signatures or requests for donations; this person is specialised in this type of action, and has a part-time contract.



Another person is added to the team, also on a part-time basis, who liaises with the campaigns area, giving it the activist focus that is necessary in all the organisation's activity according to its objectives.

The person responsible for social networks is a journalist and develops content for all the social networks in which the organisation is present. He or she writes threads for Twitter, makes Stories for Instagram, makes videos for Tik Tok, or develops general ideas that can be applied to all the networks by adapting the language. She then shares them with the person who is the liaison with campaigns, to give them the right tone if they intend to mobilise or carry out activist actions. In the case of a donation request, linked to one of these actions, it is coordinated with the marketing liaison person.

We can see how the strength of the organisation's social media area is really the team made up of its three members, who combine the generation of ideas, their translation into a type of material or language appropriate to the specific network they use, and the achievement of the objective set. Practically all their actions coordinate the three areas.

A concrete example of this type of work is that carried out for the release of Loujain al Hathloul, a Saudi Arabian activist who had been imprisoned for three years for defending women's rights. Amnesty International campaigned for 3 years, developing several phases: a) the first was to call for her release as soon as they learned of her imprisonment, in traditional or general media; b) the same work is done on social networks, taking advantage of the latter to mobilise the population; c) the marketing team enters into the equation. All this is done in a coordinated way: traditional or generalist press, social networks and marketing; all at the same time, at different times, with the work teams coordinated. Social media becomes a spearhead.

3.2. Workload of the social media area

The organisation can run at least one campaign per week per year, with some weeks having two. They manage an average of 70 campaigns per year. They do not conceive of any campaign that is not supported by the social media area. And there is no social network in which they do not have a presence. Adding all the social networks together, they have more than one million followers.

They make use of the data of people who have already expressed interest in the organisation's content and given their permission to do so. In addition to this, they use the database of people who have signed a cyber action, which means they have more than 10 million people in Spain alone.

When someone signs up in support of a campaign, their details are stored and as soon as there is a human rights violation similar to the one that a person has signed up for before, that person or group is approached. That work is done by email, or by social media. For example, if they are journalists, they use Twitter, which is the network that gives them the best results with that professional group; if they target the general public, they use Facebook; if the segment is a younger audience, they use Instagram or Tik Tok. They work according to the population group, the professional group and the objective they have set.



3.3. Interaction with users

The interaction of social media users with the organisation reaches high volumes. The job of the person responsible for networks is not only to inform or create content; 50% of their time is dedicated to responding to comments, requests, mentions, etc. According to the organisation's code of conduct, they do not respond to insults or disqualifications. They do respond to negative opinions, because they consider that constructive criticism is useful for the organisation. On some occasions they have encountered 40,000 opinions against them, many of which were trolls or *haters*. The campaign by the Spanish section of Amnesty International for the release of "the Jordis" in Catalonia is a clear example of this. When they consider that there is a "popular outcry" against one of their campaigns, they have to respond.

Among other things, this is why the social media person works full time, with his two part-time support staff, because he spends much of his time responding to and interacting with network users and distributing the work.

Sometimes there are media appeals to Amnesty International that come through social media, especially Twitter, as it is a common tool for the journalistic profession. Journalists often seem to find it more difficult to phone the media officer, and find it easier to send a tweet, or a DM (direct message) on Instagram, or contact in any other way using a social network, depending on the day-to-day experience at Amnesty International.

3.4. Usefulness of networks

The organisation is finding the greatest use of the networks to carry out mobilisation actions and achieve great results. The latest example is the campaign for the non-imprisonment of Pablo Hasel, in which in one day they collected 40,000 signatures, the vast majority through social networks, and they only launched a Twitter thread. Users can sign in support of any campaign using any network, that's what the Webmaster is there for, the person who has the complete technological structure, and has done the relevant programming so that these signatures can be collected from any social network, and so that the data is interconnected.

Everything is done through Amnesty International's own software, specifically designed by a company to meet the organisation's needs. It is also used, by crossing the relevant data, to send press releases by the media officer, automating the change of format by the aforementioned software, for any social network. If when they upload a news item to the organisation's website, they want to share it on Twitter, Instagram or WhatsApp, there is an automatic conversion for these networks. The economic investment made by the organisation in this software allows them to have the capacity to collect, for example, those 40,000 signatures in one day, with the localisation of the relevant data.

They also use it in what they call "urgent actions", through which they mobilise a large number of people in a very short time. They could generate a WhatsApp message to gather 40,000 people at a specific point. And the computer system could support many, many more.



The record number of signatures collected by the Spanish Section of Amnesty International is 9,600,000 in the case of Amina Lawal in 2003, when this tool did not exist. Its development has been progressive, it is 6 years old, and has permanent updates; the tool is the Spanish Section's own. But there is a system that allows them to share technical knowledge which is also permanent, both with the International Secretariat of Amnesty International (based in London) and with other national sections in different countries.

It is impossible for Amnesty International to run a campaign without social media, and some are even only activated through social media. The reason is that it works best for them. Nigerian singer-songwriter Yahaya Sharif-Aminu, 22, wrote a song in February 2020 and shared it via WhatsApp; after being arrested and tried, he was sentenced to hang for blasphemy because, according to Islamic law, it contained derogatory comments about the Prophet Muhammad. Fear of Boko Haram was in the background. On 21 January, an Appeals Commission ordered the case to be reheard before a different judge because of a lack of legal representation throughout the previous trial. This was a triumph for Amnesty International, although it continues to fight for his final release. A triumph that was achieved exclusively using social networks, where the campaigns of people with names and surnames, specific cases (and general thematic causes), have a lot of impact, for this case they have 200,000 signatures. It was a case in which the organisation was not successful in the media, where Amnesty International's reports are more popular.

The first death sentence handed down through Zoom occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic in Singapore. On 20 May 2020, a spokesperson for the Singapore High Court confirmed that a Malaysian man had been sentenced to death after being convicted of drug trafficking charges. The decision was delivered "by video conference" on Friday 15 May 2020. The convicted man's lawyer confirmed that this sentencing hearing was held via the Zoom platform. The difficulty for the media to cover the situation was enormous, but in networks it was the opposite for this NGO. They used Twitter to tell the story and connected with people who, for the needs of their work, used Zoom on a daily basis, making them realise that the death sentence could also be carried out on that platform. This was another campaign they launched solely on social media.

Amnesty International also uses clickbait, which according to Ana Isabel Sordo is "... a writing technique that consists of creating sensational headlines and descriptions in a link. Its purpose is to attract visitors and incite them to click to open that content" (Sordo, 2021).

An interview can be done by the media relations team and passed on to the person responsible for social media to adapt it to this tool. This ensures that the interview is disseminated in a different way, adapted to a different format (for example, to the web, WhatsApp and Telegram), and that it has a great impact on a user public that either only or mostly uses social networks, to the detriment of traditional media.

3.5. Distribution of user public

Facebook is where they have the most users. But for mobilisation actions, the most important for them is Twitter, although Instagram is gaining ground every month. All this forces them to change their formats.



The Youtube channel is the one that is working the least for the organisation. When they do make live connections, each public event is streamed via Facebook Live, which is what gives them the most followers. This reconfirms that: a) to access a more general audience, Facebook is their main tool; b) Twitter for journalists, opinion leaders and authorities; c) younger users through Instagram and Tik Tok.

The support volunteers are constantly coordinated and are located in many parts of Spain. Each territorial group has its own network leader, who coordinates with the leader of the Spanish Section.

Amnesty International's key messages come from the International Secretariat, from its headquarters in London, and each national section adapts it to its audience. The same happens from the Spanish section to the country's territories, if necessary. Key international messages work perfectly for them once they have been adapted, the case of the Saudi activist Loujain al Hathloul is a clear example of this. When she was released, the Spanish section found out about it because an investigator in charge of the case reported the event, and from that moment on, each national section worldwide tells the story as it will be best received by its national audience.

3.6. Economic impact

The traditional way of recruiting members has disappeared in times of pandemic, everything has been done through social networks and new technologies. And Amnesty International has fared much better than expected in a disastrous economic moment, in which the first thing people do without is non-essential expenses, and being a member of an NGO, for many people, can be considered a dispensable expense. They currently have 90,000 members compared to 17,000 in 2003, which shows the growth in membership driven by the networks. The indicators of the objectives to be achieved through social networks can be swept up in one day with 40,000 signatures, and those of media impact also through Twitter with 400 in the same 24 hours.

Their marketing experts assure them that social media works better than membership and street donations did: in terms of impact and results, membership growth and one-off donations.

4. Analysis of the use of twitter, facebook and instagram by amnesty international's spanish section

Within the framework of the project "International information as a tool for job placement for students of International Relations", approved in the Innova-Docencia 20-21 call for proposals, for which the author of this research is responsible, and whose funding entity is the Complutense University of Madrid (UCM), an analysis exercise was carried out on three of the social networks used by the Spanish Section of Amnesty International as part of its communication strategy.

The exercise was designed by the author, and the students of group 4.8. of the subject "International Information and Communication" of the Degree in International Relations of the UCM participated, especially in the collection of information. Its objective was to find out how this organisation dedicated to Human Rights uses social networks to achieve



its objectives as an entity. The criteria used for the analysis were oriented towards the general metrics of the profile to know its reach (number of followers, number of publications and frequency of publication), the type of information published (complaints, campaigns, life stories, etc.) and the positive interactions (support) and/or negative interactions (criticism or insults, for example) generated in these forums based on the information published. The period analysed was from 1 to 15 January 2021.

The three social networks were: Twitter (@amnistiaespana), Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/amnistia.internacional.espana>) and Instagram (@amnistiaespana).

4.1. Facebook

Amnesty International's Facebook profile was created on 22 May 2009, has more than 430,000 followers (specifically, as of 20 January 2021 at 13:47, 436,818 people like the page and 430,669 followers). They publish content on a daily basis, with two posts per day in the period analysed. The Facebook page provides direct access links to their other platforms: website, Twitter and Instagram, as well as to their telephone number and email, offering an immediate point of contact from this social network to attract potential members and/or people interested in the activity they carry out. This, added to the fact that donations can be made to the organisation from the Facebook profile itself, demonstrates how important it is for Amnesty International to generate a channel for the 'call to action', with the aim of taking advantage of the opportunity of a single click in the "moments of truth" with the public interested in Human Rights and thus reducing the risk of abandonment of possible donations.

Despite the high number of followers (even more so if we compare it with other related organisations such as Human Rights Watch Spain or Transparency International Spain), the interaction received by its publications is low, very few reach 1,000 reactions, with the most interaction being those aimed at more "controversial" issues such as the death penalty, abortion, gender or the LGBTIQ community. Most publications consist of an image or video and an explanatory text. In other cases, only an image and a strong sentence appear, as in their latest post, in which they announce that the 'tampon tax' has been eliminated in the UK with an image and add: "Access to tampons is a right. Full stop. In addition, almost all of them are accompanied by a hyperlink to their official website where more information can be accessed, in other cases they also use direct links to signature campaigns.

The denunciation of human rights violations, through information relating to specific situations or more structural problems, is the aim of a significant number of the publications analysed on Facebook. For example, there is a post denouncing the sentencing to death of a Nigerian musician for blasphemy and inviting people to collect signatures to prevent his death. Beyond the denunciation, a trend identified is the use of current events to raise awareness, launch campaigns and generate debate on structural issues relevant to the SDGs and the defence of human rights. As an example, a publication on 15 January consists of a video of a doctor who walked 17 km to get to the hospital where he works, thus linking the specific case to the importance of public health. It thus takes advantage of the opportunity offered by current events by being used to ask for support/donations to "armour public health" and also to reinforce public pressure



on the Spanish authorities to invest more in the public health system. Another example is the case of a publication in the form of a denunciation and pronouncement calling for the release of Aleksei Navalny (Russian opposition leader), linking his detention to the violation of the right to freedom of expression.

This type of publication is combined with others related to major human rights issues, even if they are not newsworthy, and which articulate Amnesty International's permanent action; For example campaigns "For a 2021 free of gender violence in all its forms" through which Amnesty International reiterates its commitment to the eradication of gender violence, recalling that in 2020 the number of women who died at the hands of their partners has decreased; or also the collection of signatures to ask for protection for victims of human trafficking, the defence of the rights of immigrants, campaigns against the death penalty and executions. There are also campaigns with a strong social character such as the petition for freedom for women who fight for their social rights in countries such as Saudi Arabia, for families living in the Cañada Real to have electricity or campaigns for vaccination against COVID for all groups.

In addition to this content, Facebook stories are only available for 24 hours. In this alternative mode, they repost content from other people or entities, promote their own publications and even publish memes related to their complaints.

In terms of the interactions generated, positive interactions outweigh the negative ones, which may lead one to think that the public that follows this account is close to or mobilised towards the defence of human rights. The majority of the publications receive positive interactions, giving the option to 'Like' or sharing the content; for example, the publication on the 'Human Rights Goals for 2021' has been one of those that has generated the most interactions on Facebook and communicates the objectives that Amnesty International proposes for the year. On the contrary, negative interactions are more present in publications related to more controversial or politicised content, for example, the collection of signatures for the victims of Francoism and the civil war which saw a number of negative interactions due to some comments referring to the fact that this petition for signatures was to reopen wounds in the history of Spain that had 'already' been closed.

From the publications analysed in the Facebook profile of this NGO, it can be concluded that communication is closely related to current issues, generating a link between the major issues and goals of the organisation in favour of the defence of human rights and the everyday life of citizens. This makes communication very close to the people, aimed at raising awareness and mobilisation, using a current, concise and accessible narrative. They avoid long texts that most people would not read. In addition, with some of the shorter publications, with simple but powerful posters, they manage to make an impact on users, as well as getting them to share them. This promotes the organisation in a simple and emotional way.

4.2. Twitter

The Twitter account is under the username @amnistiaespana, and its description includes the slogan that summarises the organisation's mission: "At Amnesty International we act for human rights around the world. HT and RT ≠ support". The link in its description



redirects to its privacy policy and also to its website. Since its creation on 28 May 2009, it has posted a total of 28,600 tweets.

The account has been operational since 28 May 2009 and currently has 162.2 thousand followers. In turn, they follow 17.8 thousand users on Twitter, among them scientific staff, platforms and NGOs, and personalities and celebrities who support social causes.

The user image is permanent and is a version of their logo in yellow and black on a candle surrounded by barbed wire; the cover photo changes periodically, during the days analysed the cover photo corresponded to an image of two grandparents embracing and a message of encouragement to a group severely affected in the COVID crisis with the slogan "I ask for dignity for my grandparents".

In terms of the frequency of publication on its wall, we observe that it uploads content regularly, on a daily basis, and the range of tweets goes from 2 on some days to 8 on some occasions, which refers to the intense activity that the organisation has on its Twitter account. The type of information it publishes refers to denunciations of certain situations of human rights violations, collection of signatures, awareness-raising campaigns and support for causes, and informative threads. The way it collects this information is through photographs, videos of testimonies or press articles, in order to raise public awareness of situations that violate human rights.

It highlights the use of threads based on newspaper articles to explain situations in more detail. An example of this is the first thread of the year, which includes some of the most important achievements in terms of human rights in 2020, such as access to education for Rohingya children in Bangladesh or the new non-discriminatory minimum wage in Qatar. The publications do not have many interactions, and in most cases the comments are supportive, although there is also criticism, for example, criticism of the tweet posted about the celebration of the legalisation of abortion in Argentina as a triumph for human rights. It is worth mentioning how tweets for the protection of HR usually bring with them rejection from what we can identify as Internet "trolls", as they rarely have a profile picture or name.

On the other hand, and no less important, is the use of people's testimonies and announcements about appearances on issues of special interest that Amnesty International fights for. Among the most relevant testimonies we find that of Alika, talking about how she had to be subjected to prostitution; and another, and being of special interest nowadays after the COVID-19 pandemic and the Filomena storm, the testimony of Álvaro talking about the precarious situation of health workers having to go to their place of work with more than 15 cm of snow. On these testimonies, although not all of them, people who follow his account are urged to join in the collection of signatures to denounce the situation.

Despite the intense activity on the Twitter account, it seems relevant that explanatory tweets tend not to be shared (likes and retweets) as much as those that link to an article or mention specific people. The post with the most interactions of the whole period refers to the news that Julian Assange will not be extradited to the US, with all replies celebrating this result.

In the analysis carried out, Amnesty International's capacity to bring up current issues and connect them with the values and actions that the organisation holds stands out.



They have a very collaborative work with other delegations (as can be seen in the retweets they have, often coming from regional delegations) as well as a very careful and aesthetic structure.

4.3. Instagram

The Instagram profile has 1,292 posts and 46,000 followers (as of 15 January 2021). Its profile description reads "More than 50 years working for human rights". Amnesty International Spain posts daily on current issues around rights campaigning, both in the form of stories (which it highlights) and posts.

Among the publications analysed, in the "featured stories" section, the content is divided into three different types. The first refers to quizzes to raise awareness of different topics among followers and to let them evaluate how much knowledge they have about them; in the period analysed, quizzes on education, devolution and migration were carried out. The second type of content is awareness-raising campaigns based on specific cases; for example, the story highlighted under the slogan "Save Yahaya", which explains the situation faced by a 22-year-old Nigerian boy sentenced to death in his country for composing and sharing a song on a WhatsApp group for allegedly defaming the Prophet Mohammed. The complaint is accompanied by a collection of signatures against this injustice. Another example of a featured story includes the testimony of three women victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation.

The publications on the Instagram account include relevant topics in terms of Human Rights. Not only are specific cases that require intervention by Amnesty International published, but the organisation also publishes images of denunciation, gratitude, awareness, reflection or data relevant to Human Rights. Moreover, these publications are not limited to a specific theme, but cover a wide range of issues from all parts of the world. The publications are presented in the form of images or videos, either real or explanatory drawings, with text added in the graphic part or in the caption, usually with a brief explanation of the issue related to the publication. The information in the publications has the theme of Human Rights as a common link and the specific topics are very diverse and in many cases take advantage of current news, such as the defence of public health, human rights in residences, the necessary reforms for women in Saudi Arabia and their freedom, climate change, LGBTI pride, denouncing the gag law, refugee and COVID, attacks against women for defending the Amazon rainforest, etc. It should be noted that, in addition to publishing videos and striking illustrations to publicise the story, denounce the situation and make it visible, they also propose solutions and invite users to be part of them, either by signing petitions or by sharing and commenting on the content.

The publications on Instagram, although they coincide with the themes used on the other networks, have a different language in order to relate to a younger audience, regular users of this social network, and to get them interested in international issues from a more particular point of view. With this type of communication activity, the organisation seeks to raise awareness and involve young people in the defence of human rights.



5. Conclusions and discussion

Amnesty International's Spanish Section has an imbalance of staff dedicated to traditional media (3 full-time) compared to those dedicated to social media (1 full-time and 2 part-time), which opens a debate regarding short-term results and the staff dedicated to achieving them. However, the organisation's impact on opinion leaders or decision-makers still comes more widely through its presence in the media. And even this is also changing (evolving or devolving, depending on how you look at it), since we have seen leaders using especially Twitter as a communication tool, dismissing the media; or at the very least, using this social network to respond and/or propose policy initiatives.

The trend is becoming mixed, the media will not be able to continue without the constant use of social networks such as Twitter, the newsrooms are made up of digital natives who are setting this trend, and the communication areas of non-governmental organisations are no different on this point. And therefore, their relationship is marked by this reality.

It is essential for NGOs to have systems for adapting formats if they want to continue to produce compelling content that has space and visibility on social networks, in order to avoid the temptation to produce empty messages.

Based on the data collected and its analysis, it can be concluded that the use of social networks to communicate human rights is effective and achieves the objectives that the organisation sets itself, with a high impact, not only in terms of visibility, but also in terms of attracting economic resources.

The coordination of three areas of work (content building, campaigns and marketing) has proven to be a key to the success of Amnesty International's Spanish Section's social media presence. And the design of specific software to cover their communication needs through the networks has been the other key to achieving efficiency.

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THE EU AGAINST THE DISINFORMATION OF CHINA AND RUSSIA DURING THE COVID-19. THE NEED FOR GREATER EUROPEAN NARRATIVE PROACTIVITY AT THE INTERNATIONAL LEVEL

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Abstract

Disinformation has been used by third countries to weaken the EU and its institutions; erode democracy and create social division. In the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, Russia and China have been in the spotlight for their influence operations in Europe. In the article we will analyse the concept of disinformation in the EU; external threats and the new role played by China and its use of social networks to improve its image and impose its alternative model of governance with sharp power techniques. Finally, the European strategy to defend itself against fake news will be evaluated and the need for the EU to be more proactive in creating frames that allow it to launch a narrative at international level and improve its public diplomacy.

Keywords

Disinformation, China, Russia, European Union *sharp power*, Covid-19

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THE EU AGAINST THE DISINFORMATION OF CHINA AND RUSSIA DURING THE COVID-19. THE NEED FOR GREATER EUROPEAN NARRATIVE PROACTIVITY AT THE INTERNATIONAL LEVEL¹

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Introduction

The European Union has been suffering from the phenomenon of disinformation since 2015. After the illegal annexation of Crimea by Russia, Moscow has not stopped using this type of tool to destabilize different European countries, especially during electoral campaigns, causing social polarization and a decrease in trust in institutions and democracy. 73% of European internet users were concerned about disinformation during election periods; 85% of those surveyed perceive fake news online as a problem in their country and 83% as a problem for democracy in general (Flash Eurobarometer 464, 2018).

To curb these threats, the EU put in place instruments to combat fake news with relative success during the European Parliament elections in May 2019. However, the Covid-19 pandemic has shown that the measures were not enough. Technology and social platforms change, attacks are increasingly sophisticated and aggressive. In addition, countries like China, although with different objectives than the Russians, as we will see, have also targeted the phenomenon of disinformation in Europe.

1. Methodology and fieldwork

This article examines as actors outside the EU, like Russia and China, have launched interference and misinformation processes during the pandemic. We have analyzed the reports of the EU External Action Service (EEAS) since March 2020 to see what the interference of the Kremlin and Beijing-controlled media has been. Due to the importance of social platforms, we have also reviewed the Hamilton 2.0 panel², a project of Alliance for Securing Democracy and the German Marshall Fund, which provides an analysis of

¹ Article translated by Miguel Ángel Benedicto.

² Hamilton Dashboard 2.0 <https://securingdemocracy.qmfus.org/hamilton-dashboard/>



the narratives and topics promoted by Russian, Chinese and Iranian officials on social media and media funded by those countries.

The novelty of the Chinese case in the use of disinformation in the EU has also led us to analyze the action of China's Foreign Ministry on twitter from February to April 2020, the toughest months of the pandemic in the EU. For the fieldwork we have collected 266 tweets from the official account of the Chinese Foreign Ministry uploaded between February and April 2020, which is when the pandemic hit hardest in Europe during the first wave. We have analyzed how many tweets have been written in relation to Covid-19 during those months, which countries have been most cited by that ministry within and outside the EU, which institutions are the most named and the type of coronavirus information that China has uploaded on twitter.

Likewise, the measures that the EU has put in place against disinformation, before and after the pandemic, are analyzed.

2. Theoretical considerations about *Soft power* and *Sharp power*

During the coronavirus crisis, European institutions suffered attacks from Russia and China. Moscow has been using disinformation campaigns for years in various EU countries with the aim of weakening its institutions, creating social division and eroding democracy. In contrast, Beijing had not used such actions until the emergence of Covid-19 with the aim of presenting its own narrative on the origin of the pandemic, improving its image in the EU through mask diplomacy³, or supporting countries related to the New Silk Road⁴ (BRI).

Both countries have been equipped with instruments to implement coordinated actions aimed at democratic states to violate their institutions through political, economic, military, civil means or information related. Russia and China use soft power to attract foreign audiences, but under that guise are disruptive operations that can be described as sharp power; used by some countries to crack democratic systems such as the EU.

The concept of soft power is attributed to Joseph Nye (2004: 5) who defines it as a form of non-coercive power that has the effect of "getting others to want the outcomes you want" through the "ability of attraction, [which] leads to acquiescence."

The decline of the state monopoly for the benefit of shared sovereignty in economic and communicative matters raises the need to rethink traditional diplomacy. It does not seem possible to return to a closed international system monopolized by state activity, but rather a more open diplomacy, more mediated by the media, in which civil society plays an increasingly important role. Public diplomacy according to Nye (2008) "is an indispensable tool for promoting the soft power of a country". In this sense, Van Ham (2005: 47) explains that it is "used by states to turn hard power into the soft power of legitimacy, credibility, cultural superiority, and normative dominance. The wheels of hard

³ It is an attempt to improve China's image abroad as the country from which the virus had come through medical assistance or the shipment of sanitary supplies or masks by Beijing, donations from companies or Chinese communities abroad.

⁴ It is a geopolitical project that seeks to integrate Asia, Europe and Africa into a market with an intercontinental transport network.



power alone can work smoothly with the soft power lubricant, of which public diplomacy is a key element."

However, when Russia or China use diplomacy to undermine the political system of another country, Walker and Ludwig (2017a) do not speak of soft but of sharp power. A concept that they coined in *Foreign Affairs* magazine as the use of manipulative diplomatic policies by one country to influence and undermine the political system of another country. According to Walker (2016) "authoritarian regimes exploit the opportunities that globalization provides and create an undemocratic toolkit". This includes NGOs controlled by governments, the use of investment and foreign aid and they use traditional and online media. They create an alternative model that reduces the political space of civil society by building an infrastructure, working together in existing or newly created international organizations, which allows them to challenge democracies and their values.

Walker and Ludwig argue that Moscow and Beijing's efforts in public diplomacy are not based on attraction or even persuasion, but on manipulation. Sharp power seeks to "penetrate or pierce" the political information and environments of the selected countries. It is a power that uses policies that help authoritarian regimes to coerce and manipulate opinions abroad. The corrosive effects of sharp power are evident in the spheres of culture, academia, the media and publications, sectors that are more vulnerable due to their financial insecurity (Hala, 2020). Open and accessible democracies like the EU are vulnerable to that sharp power.

China wants to play a more important role at the global level and to do this it promotes its ideas, rules and models of government through censorship or manipulation to undermine the integrity of independent institutions. According to Nye (2021) "China must realize that most of a country's soft power comes from its civil society rather than from its government." China's problem is that the actors involved in its public diplomacy depend on the control of the communist party (Walker, 2018). The repressive system of the Chinese government nullifies non-state actors and turns its soft power and public diplomacy into a sharp power that seeks to manipulate or coerce opinions abroad (Benedicto, 2020).

3. Activities of Russia and China during the first wave of Covid-19

COVID-19 has given rise to what the WHO calls an "infodemic"⁵, which in the lockdown was aggravated by the massive use of social networks to access information. During the coronavirus crisis, the situation has become more complex with false information about the virus, attacks on ethnic or religious groups as the origin of the pandemic, consumer fraud, conspiracy theories, cybercrime and selective disinformation campaigns by of foreign or national agents who seek to undermine democracy and the credibility of the EU and national or regional authorities (European Commission, 2020a).

⁵ Excess information on a matter, but also disinformation or conspiracy theories that create confusion and mistrust and prevent an effective response to the problem. https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/situation-reports/20200305-sitrep-45-covid-19.pdf?sfvrsn=ed2ba78b_4



In this article we focus on the challenge that third countries, such as Russia and China, have undertaken with disinformation campaigns about COVID-19 in the EU and its neighboring countries, with which they seek to undermine the democratic debate and exacerbate social polarization, thereby improving their own image in relation to the pandemic. Moscow and Beijing took advantage of the fact that the EU's initial response to the coronavirus was late and unsupportive. The ban on exporting medical supplies by France or Germany to a needy Italy was a serious blow to the image of the EU. China and Russia deployed a strategy of public diplomacy, with the shipment of medical supplies. The EU, which does not have health competencies, saw how China with "mask diplomacy" filled the gap in European leadership and coordination; and got Italy, Spain or Serbia to thank and even ask Beijing for help.

The European Commission reacted later by opening transport corridors so that medical supplies could reach any EU country that needed them. EU also offered assistance to candidate countries in the Western Balkans, but the initial image of lack of solidarity had already been set.

3.1. EEAS reports on Moscow and Beijing activity

In the first EEAS report (2020a) the attacks on Brussels were highlighted due to the low support for its Member States; while countries like Italy were assisted by China or the Schengen area was broken. Russia's objective was to generate mistrust in authorities and national and European health systems, international institutions and scientific experts.

For its part, China spread information about the great work done by Xi Jinping to contain the coronavirus; while the West and the United States worked too slowly and are now in total disarray from the virus.

In the second report of the EEAS (2020 b) of the end of April, it is concluded that both Russia and China, to a lesser extent, have disseminated conspiracy and disinformation theories directed both to the public of the European Union and of neighboring countries.

Russian state media carry out a coordinated campaign with the dual aim of undermining the European Union and its response to the crisis, and of sowing confusion about the origins and health consequences of COVID-19, even if it contradicts WHO official guidelines and social media content policies.

From mid-February to the end of March 2020, Beijing was characterized by questioning the origin of the virus, restricting references to Wuhan or sowing doubts by attributing the start of the virus to the American military; and highlight the role of China as a world leader in the response to coronavirus led by Xi Jinping (Recorded Future, 2020). According to the Daily Telegraph (2020), some Chinese state media circumvented the rules on political advertising on social media and launched campaigns praising China's handling of the virus and attacking the United States.

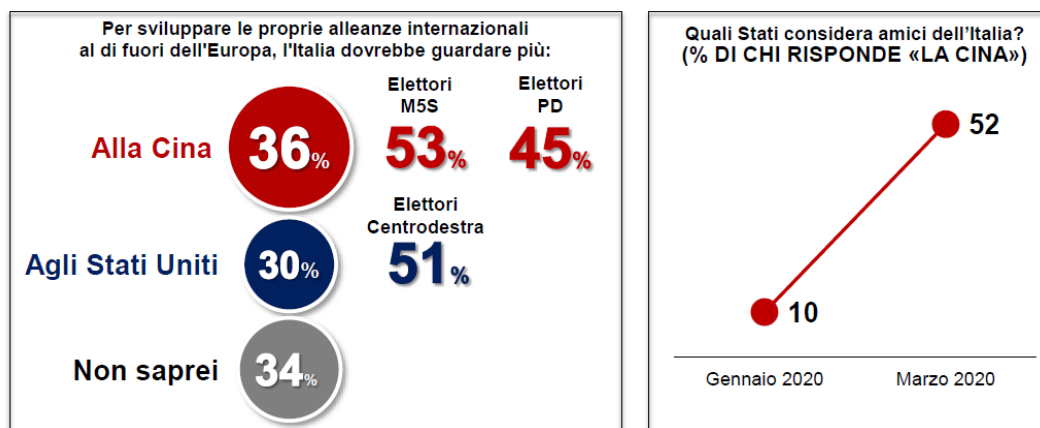
China diverted any possible responsibility for the outbreak of the pandemic and did not stop publicizing the bilateral assistance, which it provides to some European countries, highlighting that Beijing has been more helpful than the European Union in the fight against the pandemic. The strategy worked in Italy where 52% of respondents by polling



company SWG in March considered China a friendly country of Italy, a 42% increase from January 2020. However, the percentage of respondents who trusted the European Union fell to 27% in March 2020 from 42% in September 2019. As for China's strategic partners outside Europe, 36% believe that China should be looked at compared to 30% that they think they should look at the United States.

Figure 1. "International alliances: China recovers credit among Italians and is now preferred to the United States"

Alleanze internazionali: la Cina recupera credito tra gli italiani e ora è preferita agli Stati Uniti



SWG

NOTA INFORMATIVA: valori espressi in %. Date di esecuzione: 1 - 3 aprile 2020. Metodo di rilevazione: sondaggio CATI-CAMI-CAWI su un campione rappresentativo nazionale di 800 soggetti maggiorenni.

Tutti i diritti riservati 13

Fuente: Magazine Formiche.

Formiche magazine (2020) detected a coordinated Twitter bot operation in Italy to broaden the reach of messages from the Chinese embassy praising their country and to attack the European Union. Also countries in the Eastern neighborhood of the EU, on the southern shore of the Mediterranean and the Western Balkans, receive information showing Europe divided or weak in dealing with the crisis effectively (EEAS, 2020 b).

In the third EEAS report (2020c) in May, "Russian controlled television channels promoted disinformation narratives about the collapse of Western values and China has tried to control the narrative about COVID-19 and deflect any criticism to be portrayed as a responsible and transparent actor during the pandemic and a role model for other countries."

According to Freedom House (2020), since March 2020, coordinated and covert attempts have been detected by actors linked to China to manipulate information about Covid-19 in countries such as Italy or Serbia, among others, with content in local languages. Beijing increasingly adopts the Russian style and no longer only censors the criticism it



receives, but also starts to sow doubts and use conspiracy theories with a strong proactivity of officials on social networks called wolf warrior diplomacy.⁶

In the fourth report of the EEAS (2020d) of December 2020, disinformation decreases and focuses on vaccines. Russia praises Sputnik V with a triumphant speech and China highlights its response to Covid-19 as a commitment to multilateralism and the rapid reopening of its economy.

3.2. Chinese Foreign Ministry twitter analysis

The dissemination of messages on these platforms aims to ensure China's discursive power in the world, which is one of the most important goals of increasing its soft power (Zhao, 2020). According to the analysis, which we have carried out on the tweets in English uploaded in the account of the Chinese Foreign Ministry, during the first three months of the first wave of the pandemic in the EU, 78% had to do with Covid-19. The first month was the one with the most intensity on the social network, especially to try to hide the origin of the virus and divert attention with conspiracy theories and accusations of racism. Beijing also appreciated the solidarity of countries such as Pakistan, Serbia and ASEAN partners.

In February, the country most cited on the Twitter of the Foreign Ministry was Pakistan and in Europe, Italy was the first and curiously, small countries like Serbia and Montenegro ranked fourth and fifth. They all have something in common: their membership in the Chinese geopolitical project of the New Silk Road. As for the most cited institution, it is undoubtedly the WHO with which Beijing wants to demonstrate its commitment to multilateralism. In the early stages of the outbreak, official Chinese messages focused on solidarity, human interest stories and Beijing's efforts to respond to the crisis such as the video of the construction of the Wuhan hospital.

But in March, as the virus spread rapidly to Europe and the United States, that focus shifted, criticizing the Trump administration's handling of the virus and highlighting the chaos of democratic systems. Beijing began to question the origin of the virus in Wuhan. China began to designate the American military as the inoculators of Covid-19; and to highlight the role of China as a world leader in the response to the coronavirus and underline that the Chinese supply chain remains active. In addition, Beijing did not stop propaganda about his assistance to European countries such as Italy and Serbia, while highlighting the inaction of Brussels.

In April, the number of tweets rose and the most cited country was the United States, which is accused of manufacturing the virus in a laboratory in the former USSR. This conspiracy theory about American biological laboratories was tweeted on more than one occasion by the official account of the Chinese Foreign Ministry and covered by its official media.

⁶ It is characterized by the use of confrontational rhetoric by Chinese diplomats by denouncing criticism of China and being combative in interviews and on social media.



Table 1. China on twitter

Months	February 2020	March 2020	April 2020
Total tweets MFA China	125	63	78
Tweets about the Covid-19	103	42	63
Most cited country outside Europe	Pakistan 11	USA 7	USA 8
Most cited European country	Italy 4 France 2 Germany 3 Serbia 2 Montenegro1	Italy 2 Serbia 2	France 2
Most cited institution	WHO 10	WHO 7	WHO 8 ASEAN 2
Issues that most concern China related to COVID	-Complaints about information about the origin of the virus in a Chinese laboratory, racism and conspiracy theories. -Thank you for the solidarity of Pakistan, Serbia and ASEAN. -Video of the construction of Wuhan Hospital -Solidarity with Japan and South Korea.	-Don't call it Wuhan virus -Support for countries such as Italy or Serbia -Chinese supply chain operates despite Covid	-Laboratories of USA in the former USSR as the source of the virus. -Threat of not sending medical equipment to Netherlands by changing Taiwan's official name -WHO experts rule out that the virus comes from a Chinese laboratory. -Criticism of the attempt to destabilize the relationship between China and Africa. -Defense of the Director-General of WHO for racist attacks. -Tweets sending doctors, masks or medical equipment to Pakistan, Serbia, Nigeria Kazakhstan, USA, ASEAN; Djibouti, Russia, Myanmar, Cambodia, Bangladesh, and Taiwan.

Source: Own elaboration according to the official Twitter account of the Chinese Foreign Ministry

In addition, campaigns were launched praising China's management of the virus and attacking the United States. Beijing diverted its responsibility for managing the virus at the beginning of the pandemic and stressed that the WHO ruled out that it was created in a Chinese laboratory. Likewise, he did not stop tweeting information about the shipment of medical supplies, doctors and masks to different countries of the world, giving rise to the so-called mask diplomacy and improving his image in Italy or Serbia.



4. EU strategies against disinformation

4.1. Disinformation: a broader concept than fake news

The phenomenon of disinformation in the EU goes beyond the term 'fake news' as is apparent from the report made for the European Commission by the High-Level Expert Group (HLEG), which defines disinformation "like all forms of false information, inaccurate or misleading designed, presented, edited or promoted to intentionally cause public harm or to profit" (European Commission, 2018 to p.3). Trolls and hackers use big data⁷ and algorithms to identify each person's unique weaknesses and trends for producing stories consistent with them and help bots spread⁸ them. They use these stories to reinforce the prejudices of those who believe in it to exacerbate the cracks in society and pierce the democratic system from within. (Brahms, 2019).

4.2. How to combat disinformation

Russia has a budget of between 3 billion and 4 billion for disinformation measures (McCauley, 2016) and as Roig explains (2018) uses instruments such as Russian information agencies RT and Sputnik abroad. It controls almost all national televisions, uses the Internet Research Agency (IRA) to flood social media, and generates sophisticated and massive disinformation operations. Some 15,000 people work on these disinformation tasks (McCauley, 2016) and Sputnik and RT, providing stories to be spread through social media.

A study on information manipulation conducted by the French government (Vilmer *et al.*, 2018) states that 80% of the European authorities consulted attribute interference in Europe to Russia but they also do so to other states (mainly China and Iran) and non-state actors (jihadist groups, in particular ISIS). However, some academics have questioned this percentage on the basis that such volume is barely measurable "because there is no consensus on what exactly constitutes disinformation."

The cross-border dimension of disinformation has required a coordinated and long-term approach among EU Member States to meet this challenge. In 2015, the European institutions created [the East Stratcom \(Communication Strategy for the East\) Group](#), a pioneer against [fake news](#) to assist candidate countries and partners in the EU's neighbourhood in their efforts to counter hostile propaganda and disinformation activities (European Parliament, 2019). The Working Group disseminates thousands of examples of Kremlin-friendly disinformation and studies the techniques and intentions of Russian-origin campaigns on daily basis.

The EU adopted in 2016 a Common Framework for combating hybrid threats underlining the threat posed by massive disinformation campaigns, which uses social media to control political narrative or to radicalize, recruit and represent indirect actors. It is an issue which falls within the scope of national security and defence and the main

⁷ Person who uses social media to distribute *fake news* or posts to destabilize and influence public opinion.

⁸ Computer programs that mimic human interaction and automatically disseminate disinformation campaigns on social media.



responsibility lies with the Member States. However, common threats can attack cross-border networks or infrastructures and they are more effectively addressed with a coordinated response at European level (EuropeanParliament, 2016).

As part of the planned measures, the Hybrid Threat Fusion Cell was established at the EEAS in 2016 and one year after the European Centre for Combating Hybrid Threats was opened in Helsinki with the participation of 10 EU Member States, Norway and the US. The openness and collaboration between NATO and the EU were a sign that tensions with Russia over its campaigns of influence in the West could no longer be ignored.

The HLEG (European Commission, 2018a) conclusion report describes the harmful effects of disinformation due to increased institutional mistrust and increased social tensions, and the implications it could have for internal security if combined with cyberattacks or public policy making given its influence on public opinion. Disinformation could affect policies, social debates and behaviors in areas such as climate change, migration, public safety, health and finance; and can undermine confidence in science and empirical testing (European Commission, 2018b). In this document, it was pointed out that the platforms had barely taken measures against misinformation and it was doubted that they would protect their users well against the unauthorized use of their personal data by third parties.

In 2018, a Code of Practice against disinformation was launched, signed by platforms such as Facebook, Google, Twitter, Mozilla and Microsoft, which pledged to take action and the Commission to monitor its effectiveness on a regular basis. The European Commission also approved an Action Plan against disinformation, created a Rapid Alert System to have closer coordination between the EU and national authorities; and increased international cooperation with the G7 and NATO.

Before the European elections, the European Parliament (2019) approved a Report to sensitize the public opinion "about the disinformation campaigns of Russia, since they constitute the main source of fake news in Europe". The report's speaker (Fotyga, 2019) noted that "the dissemination of disinformation has become more sophisticated due to new tools (for example, private messaging applications, search engine optimization, manipulated sound or images) and more aggressive". The report condemned the actions of Russia, China, Iran and North Korea, which according to MEPs sought to undermine European democracies and the sovereignty of all Eastern European Partnership countries, as well as influence elections and support extremist movements. MEPs urged the EU to strengthen the East StratCom anti-propaganda group to combat attacks from Russia.

The measures adopted during the European elections helped to combat disinformation and preserve the integrity of the elections According to the European Commission Report (2019) "the available evidence has not made it possible to determine the existence of a clear cross-border campaign of disinformation from external sources and specifically targeting the European elections." However, they revealed ongoing and sustained disinformation activity by Russian sources with the aim of discouraging electoral turnout and influencing voters' preferences. Thus, democratic legitimacy of the Union was questioned; controversial public debates were exploited on issues such as migration and sovereignty. "This confirms that the disinformation campaigns deployed by state and non-state actors pose a hybrid threat to the EU" (European Commission, 2019a).



Cooperation with platforms improved, but not enough. "More than 600 Facebook groups and pages operating in France, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom, Poland and Spain have spread disinformation and incitement to hatred or have used false profiles to artificially promote the content of the parties or sites they support." (Graham-Harrison, 2019). Complaints from researchers, fact-checkers and civil society also served to detect other cases of large-scale attempts to manipulate voter behavior in at least nine Member States (Avaaz, 2019).

However, the coronavirus crisis has once again put on the table that it is necessary to continue working to avoid disinformation, especially in relation to third countries, such as China and Russia that have launched influence operations, as is clear from the communication of June 2020 from the European Commission (2020a). To avoid these external interferences, the EU seeks international collaboration with the G7, NATO and WHO and a more active role in communicating locally, especially in the use of social networks.

In the public consultation carried out by the European Commission (2020b), 69% of those surveyed were in favour of some type of regulation on disinformation and 57% supported the option of following the Code of Practices on Disinformation and combining it with some type of legal measure. After the consultation, the Action Plan for European Democracy was presented with tougher measures to prevent foreign interference in EU electoral processes and disinformation. The purpose of the European Commission Plan (2020c), which will be implemented until the European elections of 2023, is to move from self-regulation to "co-regulation" in line with the next Digital Services Act. According to the document, it seeks to reduce the economic incentives to spread disinformation and impose sanctions, although it is not explained how they will be, to the actors involved in operations of influence and foreign interference". In the proposal made by the Commission on the new Digital Services Act, the mechanisms to eliminate illegal content are improved and greater public supervision of platforms is introduced.

4.3. Creation of European frameworks

The EU has a public sphere under construction in which when it comes to fighting fake news, it has opted for fact checking instead of creating alternative frameworks at the European level (Tuñón, Oleart and Bouza, 2019). The commitment to fact checkers is reactive because their strategy is to deny the falsehoods that circulate in the public sphere, and in doing so the effect of disinformation is amplified by reproducing the frames that are used to debate. If we apply the theory of framing, we realize the importance of proactivity in communication, especially when establishing discursive frameworks. Following Lakoff (2004), the repetition of the disinformation framework extends it into the incipient European public sphere rather than defeating it.

During the coronavirus crisis, Russia and China have been active in setting frameworks and have used sharp power to do so. However, the EU was unable to use its public diplomacy or proactive narratives to create alternative frameworks at the geopolitical level. The EU has provided more aid to its states than it has received from China, however, the perception of European citizens at the beginning of the crisis was the opposite. As French President Emmanuel Macron explained, the EU and its member states



have been unable to display such mutual assistance in their public narratives (Mallet and Khalaf, 2020).

5. Conclusions

Russia continues with its disinformation campaigns in the EU with the aim of destabilizing, polarizing and diminishing the confidence of Europeans in its institutions and in democracy in order to avoid the enlargement of the EU and the Atlantic Alliance to its area of influence. A strategy that China has joined, especially since the first wave of the pandemic in Europe, to hide the origin of the virus and promote a positive image abroad and its governance model as opposed to Western democracy.

China saw in Italy and Spain or in the request for help from Serbia, its opportunity to turn around the global narrative on the coronavirus that placed Beijing as the origin, cover-up and accelerator of the pandemic and Covid-19 as the "Chernobyl" Chinese. Beijing turned the crisis into a geopolitical opportunity with a strong soft power campaign to fill the gap left by the US and the EU. Chinese officials have increased their presence on Western social media platforms. Thus, for example, the diplomatic corps uses Twitter more and more as a platform to influence world public opinion, with the paradox that it is blocked in China. Beijing has chosen to shape the global information environment beyond its borders. The proactivity of Chinese officials in social networks and foreign media points to a change in their foreign policy that is increasingly assertive as is their communication and public diplomacy, although it is full of sharp power.

China has opted for an international narrative that no longer passes only by censoring the criticism it receives, but by using disinformation and Russian-style conspiracy theories. Mask diplomacy has worked in the EU and in its neighborhood. In Italy, China's image improved at the beginning of the pandemic, and the inaction of Brussels served as Serbian President Alexander Vucik to ask Beijing for help. These examples demonstrate the need for the EU to strengthen and coordinate its strategic communication within and outside its territory to neutralize misinformation and stories such as its lack of solidarity during the pandemic. But it is not only necessary to strengthen strategic communication, but also to improve the public diplomacy of the EU delegations abroad in collaboration with the embassies of the 27 Member States. Internally, the offices of the European Parliament and Commission representations should also play a more active role in national debates at the media and social media level.

The EU should not only try to defend itself against third country operations, but it needs to be able to create alternative narrative frameworks at the geopolitical level as a road to combat disinformation in a weak and incipient European public sphere.

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FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES REFLECTED IN THE SOCIAL DISCOURSE OF THE MAIN DISABILITY ORGANISATIONS IN SPAIN

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Abstract

Ever since the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities took place in 2006, the promotion of fundamental rights for this group has been continuous, fostering social inclusion to reduce the stereotypes and prejudices that had prevailed until that time. The aim of this research is to analyse the discourse on social networks of the main associations, foundations, as well as public and private organisations with regard to disability in Spain on the International Day of Persons with Disabilities 2020, in order to identify the topics that generate the highest level of interaction among the different profiles on social networks. The results suggest that despite the limited reach of these organisations on social networks, their discourse is based on fundamental rights such as participation and inclusion, accessibility, individual autonomy, and equal opportunity, which provide greater knowledge and a positive vision of persons with disabilities to society as a whole, raising awareness about stereotypes, prejudices and hate speech that are still common.

Keywords

Disability, Human rights, Social media, Inclusion, Accessibility.

How to cite this article

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Introduction

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2006) was a milestone in the struggle against the exclusion suffered by people with disabilities within the UN human rights system, even though its recognition in subsequent agreements has only sometimes been comprehensive, often limited to formal statements (Skarstad and Stein, 2018). Today, there continues to be a clash between personal identity and the social construction of disability (Tsatsou, 2020). Stigma, discrimination, and social exclusion of this group has been continual from the point of view of societal aspects, health, transport, housing, education, employment, and public services, as well as the negative image transmitted through the media (Oliver, 2004).

Recognition of the social model of disability has allowed us to move beyond medical circumstances affecting people with disabilities to focus on the social, political, legal and attitudinal experiences affecting people with disabilities, which require a greater understanding of justice (Riddle, 2020). Although people with disabilities are now recognised beyond their disability, a stronger social model is needed to enable people with disabilities to prosper and be more active in order to change society and its values, to uphold the dignity of the lives of people with disabilities, and to reflect on the social values being sought through struggle, which are not always clear in many laws and reports related to this issue (Berghs *et al.*, 2019). Despite the consolidation of the right to a dignified life, society still has not achieved a high level of inclusion, not to mention the disadvantages that may or may not arise from disability (Riddle, 2020a), as well as from regulatory rulings that limit a positive connotation of group differences (which critical disability studies aim to eliminate), and prejudices that use dissimilarity to criticise

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disability (Vehmas and Watson, 2014). Both the social model of disability, or in other words, the social injustice and stigma associated with disability that can be eliminated, and the human rights model (disability policy), are actually complementary, with the latter having greater importance in the legal and policy-oriented context, yet both models focus the main problem on social factors outside the individual (Lawson and Beckett, 2020).

The use of adaptive ICTs has highlighted skills development for the independence of young people with disabilities (Pacheco, Lips and Yoong, 2019), although it has taken a very long time to bridge the disability digital divide through accessibility as well as inclusive, innovative design (Pullin, 2011). Thus, people with disabilities have had to adapt to techno-social standards, and infrastructure has had to undergo a redesign in order to accommodate this situation (Yu *et al.*, 2019), even though there is also digital exclusion that affects people based on the type and degree of disability, digital skills, and socio-economic circumstances (Dobransky and Hargittai, 2016). Specifically, the third-level theory of the digital divide focuses less on digital access and usability and more on the social, economic, and personal consequences of digital access (Ragnedda, 2017). In fact, young people with disabilities actively interact with adaptive technology in the same way as their non-disabled peers in their inclusion at the university level (Pacheco, Yoong and Lips, 2020).

Social networks have also enabled people with physical disabilities to gain instrumental and informational support, with positive effects on building social reinforcement, lower tendency toward symptoms of depression (Lee and Cho, 2018), and greater social integration of people who are more isolated outside the online environment (Banjanin *et al.*, 2015). Likewise, people with intellectual disabilities have had positive experiences on social networks in terms of friendships, social identity development, self-esteem and enjoyment (Caton and Chapman, 2016). Social support can be received structurally from the point of view of the extent and form of structural connections, or functionally, consisting of emotional, instrumental or practical help, informational support, and self-evaluation in relation to others (House, 1981; Sherbourne and Stewart, 1991).

Social networks also allow individuals to control how and when they disclose information about their disability based on their online relationships, or in other words, whether they choose to do so in a way that is open, safe, or limited (Furr, Carreiro and McArthur, 2015). However, it seems that the psychological benefits of using digital technology result primarily from the anonymity with which people with disabilities interact on the Internet and social networks (Tsatsou, 2020), although a person can build their identity in a positive way until they decide to disclose their disability (Bowker and Tuffin, 2002). The most recent studies conducted in medical centres have revealed that half of the patients surveyed who have intellectual and/or developmental disabilities do not use mobile devices (44.6%), and that the majority (86.8%) do not use social networks (Patrick *et al.*, 2020).

Consequently, this research aims to answer the following questions: How are the fundamental rights of people with disabilities disseminated on social networks that represent them? What social discourse is transmitted during the International Day of Persons with Disabilities? Which posts on social networks achieve greater interaction



depending on the informative, commemorative, or vindictory messages they disseminate?

Methodology

The overall objective of this research is to analyse the content published on social networks on the International Day of Persons with Disabilities 2020 in order to identify the social discourse of specialised organisations.

The specific objectives are as follows:

- Identify public and private organisations specialising in disability that generated posts on their social networks on the International Day of Persons with Disabilities 2020.
- Determine which fundamental rights are explicitly addressed in their social discourse.
- Identify what type of content attains the highest level of interaction.
- Compare the reach that the organisations obtain through the social networks they use.

The quantitative content analysis was carried out using on-demand computational tools that use the API of the four main social networks: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube. All the posts were collected for the date analysed and ranked according to the highest number of interactions they received, while the data on the interactions attained was recorded from their date of publication until 11 January 2021. A qualitative analysis of these posts was also carried out using Atlas.ti v.8.4.4 software, which has helped to reduce the number of redundant concepts that are present in social discourse (Benavides-Delgado, 2005).

The International Day of Persons with Disabilities was chosen based on its status as a day on which commemorative and vindictory discourses converge, so that specialised organisations communicate their priorities within their main areas of activity. The selection of the sample was based on the directory of public and private organisations that operate in Spain and specialise in people with disabilities. The directory has been developed within the framework of the *COMPENSA* R&D&i project (<https://proyctocompensa.es/datos>) and has involved the analysis of all the posts of the 18 organisations that have met the requirements of having operational social networks, or in other words, that have updated content, and that published messages on social networks on the International Day of Persons with Disabilities 2020. The directory includes the following organisations: *Asociación Empresarial para la Discapacidad* [Business association for disability] (*AEDIS*); *Asociación de Atención a Personas con Discapacidad Intelectual* [Association for the Care of People with Intellectual Disabilities] (*APSA*); *Federación Española de Enfermedades Neuromusculares* [Spanish Federation of Neuromuscular Diseases] (*ASEM*); *Confederación Española de Asociaciones de Atención a las Personas con Parálisis Cerebral* [Spanish Confederation of Associations for the Care of Persons with Cerebral Palsy] (*ASPACE*); *Asociación Española de Familias de Personas con Sordoceguera* [Spanish Association of Families of People with Deafblindness] (*APASCIDE*); *Asociación Proyecto Autismo* [Autism Project Association] (*ASPAU*); *Autismo España* [Autism Spain]; *Comité Español de Representantes de Personas con*



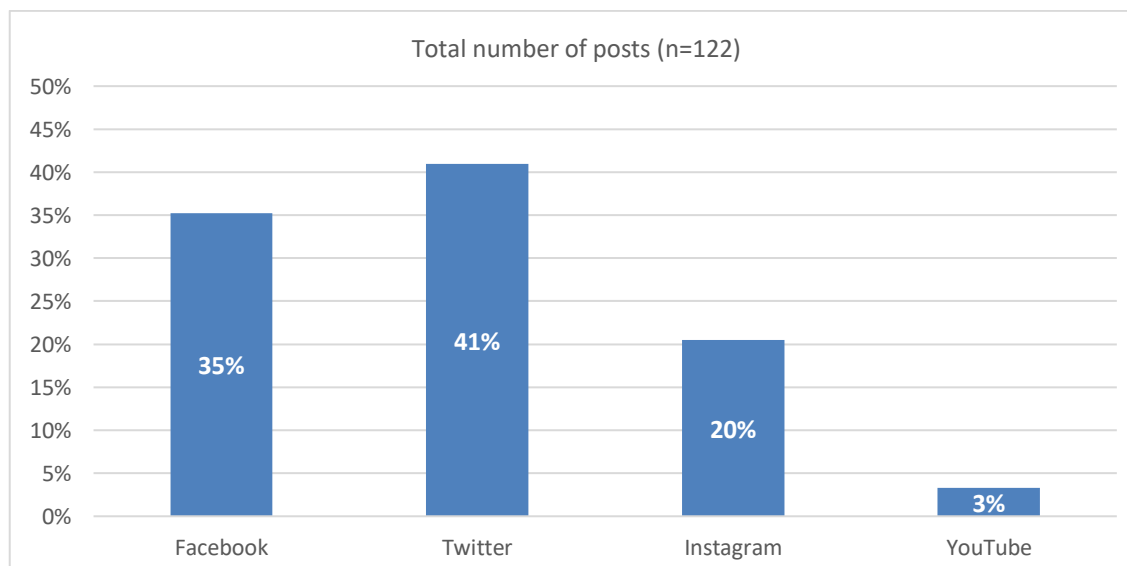
Discapacidad [Spanish Committee of Representatives of People with Disabilities] (*CERMI*); *Confederación Estatal de Personas Sordas* [State Confederation of Deaf People] (*CNSE*); *Confederación Española de Personas con Discapacidad Física y Orgánica* [Spanish Confederation of People with Physical and Organic Disabilities] (*COCEMFE*); *Down España* [Down's Syndrome Spain]; *Federación Española de Daño de Cerebral* [Spanish Federation of Brain Injury] (*FEDACE*); *Confederación Española de Familias de Personas Sordas* [Spanish Confederation of Families of Deaf People] (*FIAPAS*); *Fundación ONCE* [ONCE Foundation]; *Ilunion*; *Organización Nacional de Ciegos Españoles* [Spanish National Organisation of the Blind] (*ONCE*); *Plena Inclusión*; and *Servimedia*.

Results

Typologies, resources and scope of the posts

The 18 disability organisations that made up the final sample posted a total of 122 messages on social media on the International Day of Persons with Disabilities (Figure 1), excluding those that referred to news unrelated to disability: 43 on Facebook, 50 on Twitter, 25 on Instagram, and 4 videos on YouTube.

Figure 1. Total number of posts per social network



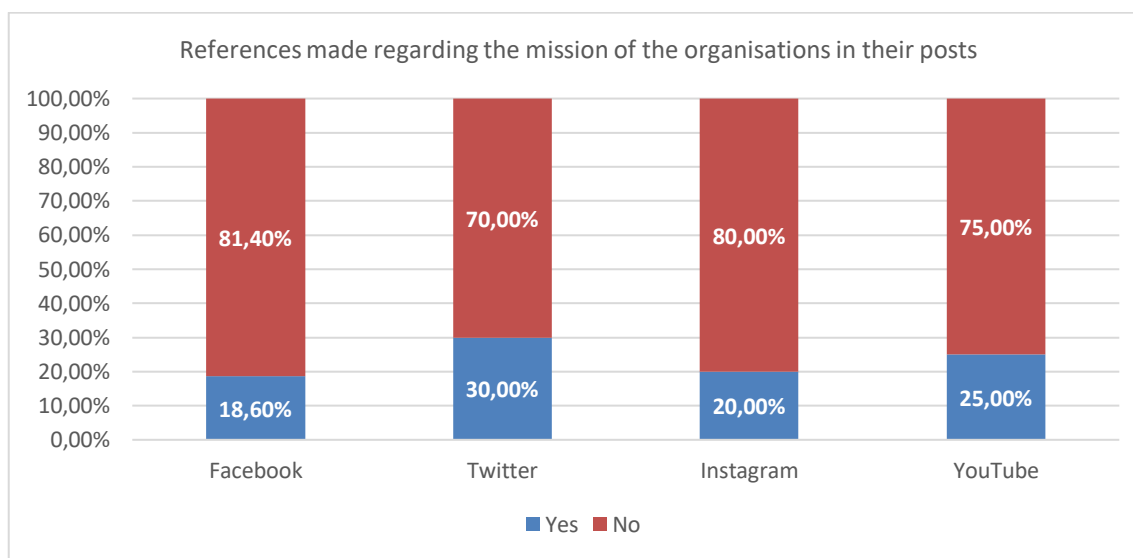
Source: Prepared by the authors

Organisations specialising in people with disabilities hardly make any reference to the specific purpose of their activity (Figure 2), beyond generalities with regard to providing care service or information about people with disabilities. Twitter is the site where the organisations make the most references to their objectives in their posts, accounting for 30% of the posts published, followed by YouTube (25%), Instagram (20%) and Facebook (18.6%). In this way, the opportunity to spread information about the specific problems affecting the particular group in which they specialise is lost, although one can observe



that there is a tendency for associations with less communicative resources to join larger and more representative organisations in order to show solidarity or support their initiatives.

Figure 2. References made regarding the mission of the organisations in their posts



Source: Prepared by the authors

With regard to the audio-visual resources used by the organisations in their posts (Figure 3), they fail to take advantage of the possibilities offered by these resources to facilitate access for people with disabilities, despite the specialised nature of these organisations. Thus, the use of accessible video with subtitles is low, even with sign language dubbing in the case of ONCE, ONCE Foundation, and Ilunion, and is only present in 16% of the posts on Twitter, 12% on Instagram, 11.63% on Facebook, and 50% on YouTube, the latter figure being influenced by the fact that the two videos are published by the largest organisation in the sector, which is the ONCE Foundation.

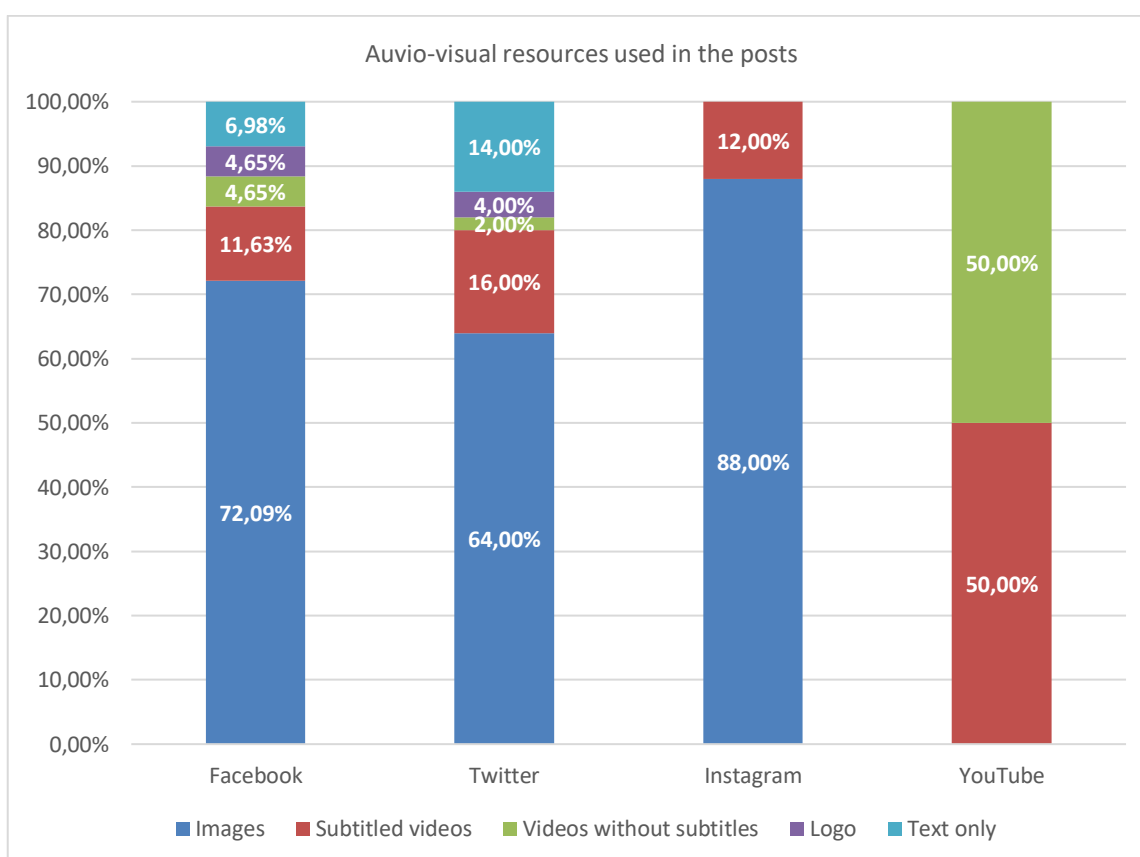
The other half of the videos on YouTube (even though there are only two) are not subtitled, which could entail accessibility problems for users with certain types of disabilities. The presence of these videos is reduced to 4.65% on Facebook and 2% on Twitter, with no cases identified on Instagram. The use of the organisation's logo, or an anniversary, as the only image provided occurs on Facebook (4.65% of the posts) and Twitter (4%), with text appearing as the only resource mainly on Twitter (14% of posts) and to a lesser extent on Facebook (4.65%). In any case, images are the visual resource most heavily used on the three main social networks, with a higher incidence on Instagram (88%) than on Facebook (72.09%) and Twitter (64%), despite the fact that no use is made of either tags or alternative text with descriptions that facilitate accessibility for all people with disabilities.

In the discourse on social networks of organisations specialising in people with disabilities, which is developed in the following section, there are frequent references to



the need for a digital transition in which technological innovation would foster inclusion and accessibility to information and communication. However, the use of technology is minimal, both in the resources used and in the discourse that emanates from the posts on social networks of these associations and foundations: QR codes, traditional audio-visual content (TV commercials, animated videos), Zoom video conferences, infographics with data, a live broadcast on Instagram on one occasion, an award-winning accessible app, and the setting up of a laboratory by people with intellectual disabilities.

Figure 3. Audio-visual resources used in the posts

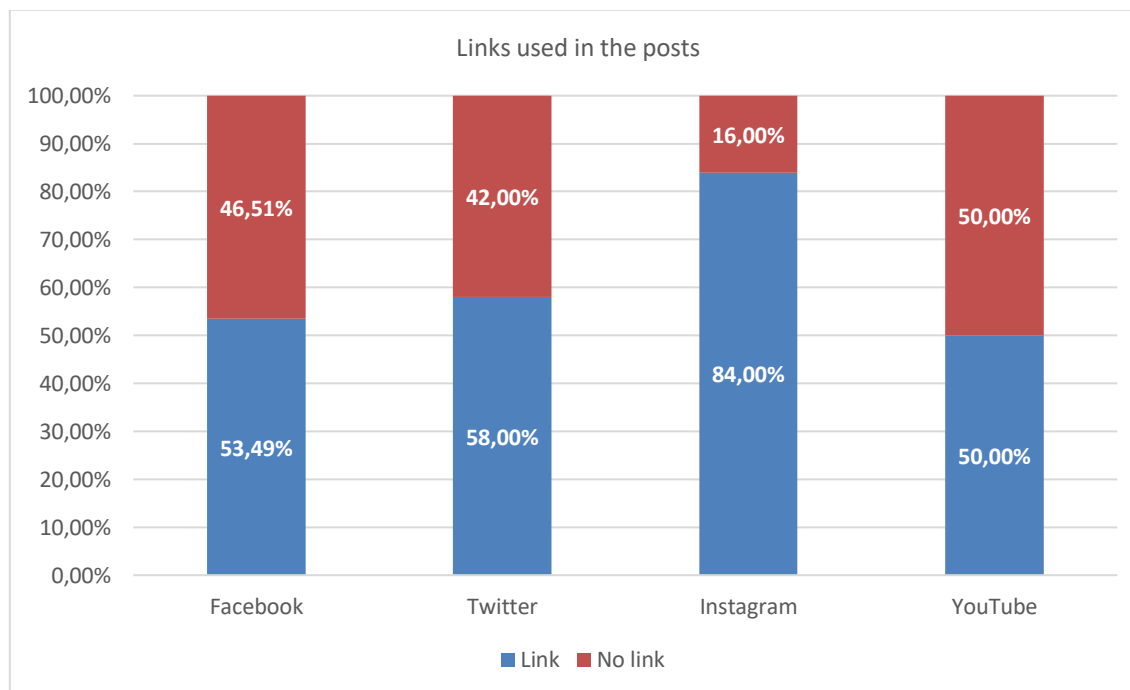


Source: Prepared by the authors

In relation to audio-visual resources, an analysis as to whether the information published is expanded through links has also been conducted (Figure 4). This question is relevant given the lack of accessible technological and audio-visual resources detected. However, in three of the four social networks analysed, the percentages of the posts that have a link are between 50% (YouTube) and 58% (Twitter), with an exceptionally high presence only on Instagram, where 84% of the posts include a link that usually leads to the text of the websites where associations and foundations have greater chances of providing accessible formats for the information produced.



Figure 4. Links used in the posts



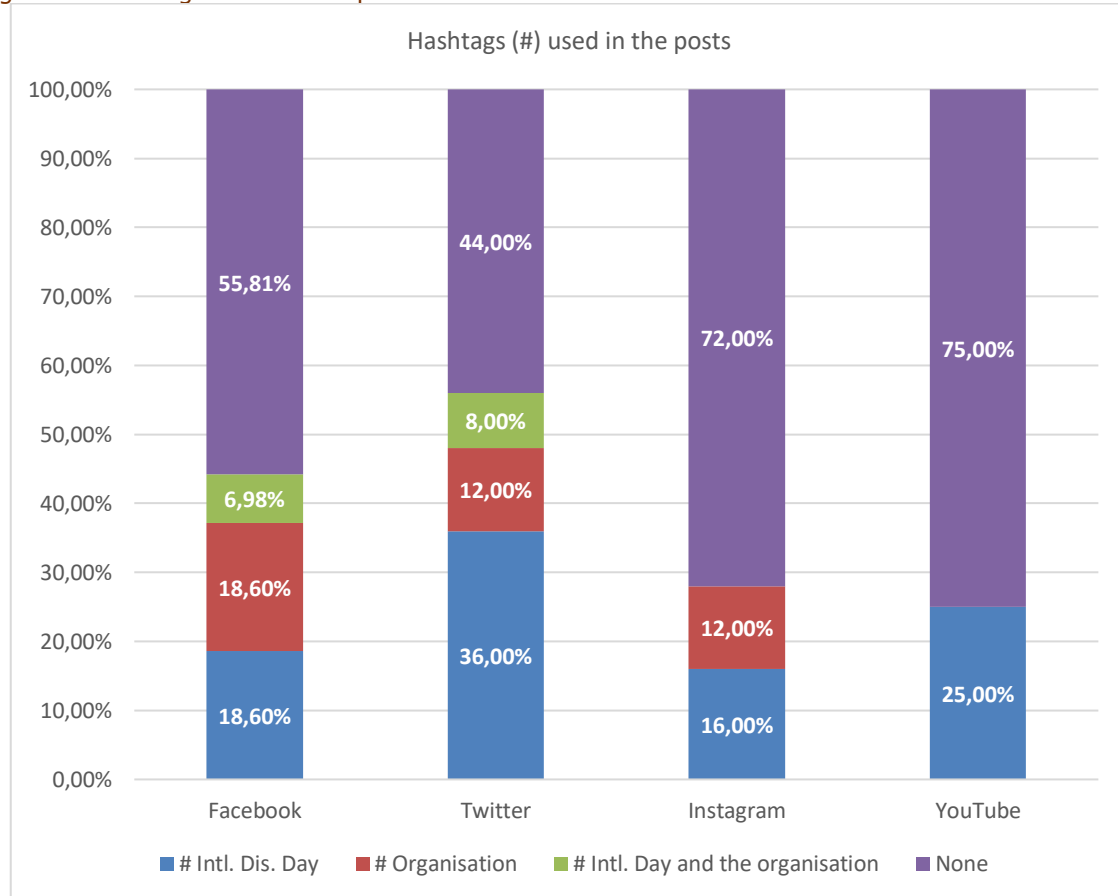
Source: Prepared by the authors

Disability organisations are also missing the opportunity to extend the reach of their posts by not using specific hashtags (#) (Figure 5) for the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, for the organisation promoting the publication, or both, which would be the most effective. In fact, the majority of the posts on all the social networks do not use any of these hashtags, especially on YouTube (absence in 75% of all posts) and Instagram (72%), in contrast to Facebook (55.81%) and Twitter (44%).

The hashtag for International Day is the most heavily used on all the social networks, although there is clearly no consensus on the use of a representative hashtag, as several names have appeared, sometimes according to the date, and at other times according to the name of the entire commemorative day, or a short version of it, which makes it even more difficult to achieve the desired reach of the posts. On Facebook, the hashtag of International Day and the of the posting organisations is present in 18.60% of the posts, whereas 6.98% use both hashtags. Twitter, however, is the social network where both the hashtag of International Day (36%) and the of the organisation itself (8%) are most used. On Instagram, the hashtag of International Day appears in 16% of the posts, yet never appears in combination with the of the organisation, and on YouTube, the hashtag of International Day appears in 25% of the posts, yet it never appears together with the of the organisation. On both Twitter and Instagram, the hashtag representing the organisation is present in 12% of the posts, while it is not used in any of the posts analysed on YouTube.



Figure 5. Hashtags used in the posts

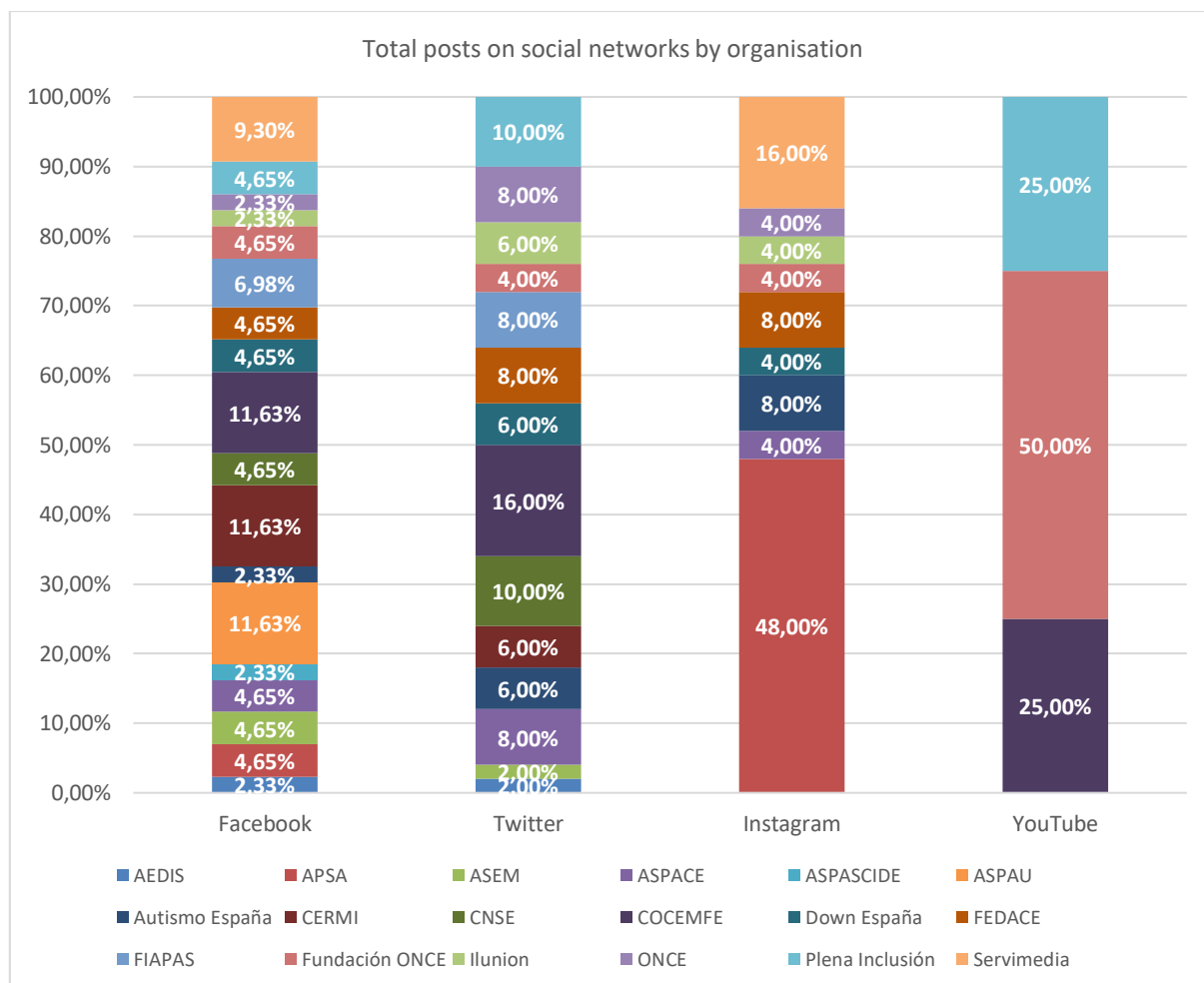


Source: Prepared by the authors

Facebook is the social network on which a higher number of organisations are present (Figure 6), and is similar for Twitter (18 vs. 14, respectively), precisely because they are the two most widely-used social networks among the older public, and consequently easier to manage for organisations that often have a shortage of specialised staff. The most active organisations on Facebook are *ASPAU* (11.63% of posts), *CERMI* (11.63%), *COCEMFE* (11.63%), *Servimedia* (9.30%) and *FIAPAS* (6.8%). The most active on Twitter are *CERMI* (16%), *COCEMFE* (10%) and *Plena Inclusión* (10%), while on Instagram and YouTube there is a greater concentration of larger organisations with more resources.



Figure 6. Total posts on each social network by organisation



Source: Prepared by the authors

However, the reach and interaction achieved by these organisations is uneven (Table 1). Although *ASPAU*, *CERMI*, *COCEMFE* and *Servimedia*, respectively, have been the most active in posting on Facebook, *COCEMFE* has the lowest percentage of interactions (0.03%) (Table 1), followed by *APASCIDE* (0.11%), *ASPAU* (0.14%), *CERMI* (0.26%), *Down España* (0.39%), and *COCEMFE* (0.49%). Consequently, despite having a high number of followers (*ASPAU* with 3.5 million and *COCEMFE* with 19,153), the number of reactions, comments or shares they achieve in relation to the number of people who see their posts is very low. The entities that get the most interaction are *APSA* (1.66%), *Ilunion* (1.56%) and *CNSE* (1.21%), despite being among those that posted the least.



Table 1. Interaction achieved on Facebook

Organisation	Followers	No. of posts	Reactions, comments, and shares	Commitment (%)	Interactions (%)
<i>AEDIS</i>	575	1	3	0.52%	0.52%
<i>APASCIDE</i>	922	1	1	0.11%	0.11%
<i>APSA</i>	7,787	2	259	3.33%	1.66%
<i>ASEM</i>	5,746	2	90	1.57%	0.78%
<i>ASPACE</i>	15,365	2	218	1.42%	0.71%
<i>ASPAU</i>	3.5 million	5	24,220	0.70%	0.14%
<i>Autismo España</i>	37,620	1	203	0.54%	0.54%
<i>CERMI</i>	7,774	5	102	1.31%	0.26%
<i>CNSE</i>	24,667	2	595	2.41%	1.21%
<i>COCEMFE</i>	19,153	5	467	2.44%	0.49%
<i>Down España</i>	52,457	2	404	0.77%	0.39%
<i>FEDACE</i>	8,893	2	97	1.09%	0.55%
<i>FIAPAS</i>	6,314	3	100	1.58%	0.53%
<i>Fundación ONCE</i>	32,479	2	301	0.93%	0.46%
<i>Ilunion</i>	16,436	1	257	1.56%	1.56%
<i>ONCE</i>	44,080	1	259	0.59%	0.59%
<i>Plena Inclusión</i>	57,770	2	568	0.98%	0.49%
<i>Servimedia</i>	4,696	8	11	0.23%	0.03%

Source: Prepared by the authors

The interaction data are nearly irrelevant in the case of Twitter, where *FIAPAS* reaches the highest level of interaction at 0.64%, with only four other entities obtaining an interaction of 0.10%: *COCEMFE* (0.25%), *ASEM* (0.19%), *CNSE* (0.17%) and *AEDIS* (0.14%). Instagram is the site where the percentage of interactions is highest, with standouts including *Ilunion* (5.63%), *ONCE* (3.74%), *APSA* (2.84%) and *Down España* (2.34%). On YouTube, the fact that only 3 organisations published 4 videos limits the analysis, but the number of views among the total number of subscribers to the *Fundación ONCE* channel is 8.75%, the *Plena Inclusión* channel attained 3.70%, and the *COCEMFE* channel had 1.92%.

Topics of the discourse posted by the specialised organisations

When structuring the discourse by topic in the posts on social networks on the International Day of Persons with Disabilities (Figure 7), the pattern on Facebook and Twitter is very similar, with a majority of posts combining commemoration and vindication (32.56% on Facebook and 30% on Twitter). In addition, one must add the use of the topic of commemoration of International Day (6.98% on Facebook and 10% on Twitter), as well as the demand for specific solutions or rights for persons with disabilities (6.98% on Facebook and 14% on Twitter). There is also a more positive topic combination that joins commemoration and acknowledgement (6.98% on Facebook and

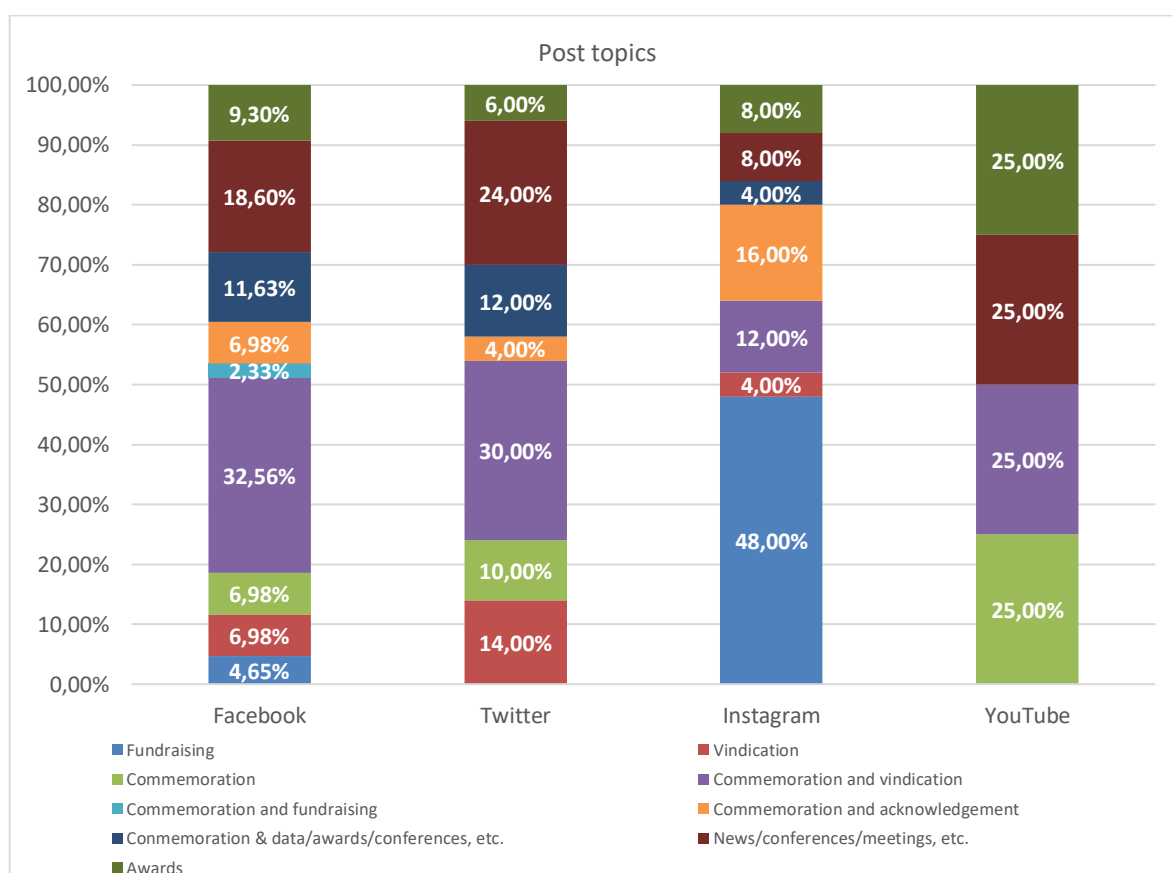


4% on Twitter), either for users, workers, volunteers, or society itself for its support and effort. Also noteworthy is the publication of news related to people with disabilities, the holding of conferences, meetings, round tables, etc. (18.60% on Facebook and 24% on Twitter), as well as the announcement of awards received by associations and foundations or granted by them (9.30% on Facebook and 6% on Twitter).

On Instagram, however, 48% of the posts are oriented toward fundraising, even though there is some distortion due to the fact that APSA accounts for 48% of the total number of posts on Instagram, all of which are related to the sale of a solidarity calendar. This social network differs from the others in showing a higher number of commemoration and acknowledgement posts (16%), with a substantial reduction in commemoration and vindication (12%) and most of all in vindication (4%), thus revealing the opportunities for topic specialisation that these organisations can adopt depending on the profile and characteristics of each social network.

In the case of YouTube, the four posts are equally distributed (25% each) among the following topics: commemoration; commemoration and vindication; news/conferences/meetings; and awards.

Figure 7. Post topics by social network



Source: Prepared by the authors



The rights of people with disabilities in social discourse

The rights of people with disabilities that specifically appear in the analysis of the discourse presented in the social network posts of the organisations specialising in this issue (Figure 8) are similar on all social networks, despite the greater intensity with which they appear depending on the peculiarities of each social network. The results of this section are not presented in percentages, because sometimes more than one right appears in each publication. Consequently, with regard to the rights included in the general principles of the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, held in 2006, reference is made to the number of times each of these rights is mentioned, which are structured as follows:

- a) Respect for inherent dignity, individual autonomy including the freedom to make one's own choices, and independence of persons;
- b) Non-discrimination;
- c) Full and effective participation and inclusion in society;
- d) Respect for differences, and acceptance of persons with disabilities as part of human diversity and humanity;
- e) Equality of opportunity;
- f) Accessibility;
- g) Equality between men and women;
- h) Respect for the evolving capacities of children with disabilities and respect for the right of children with disabilities to preserve their identities. (United Nations, 2006: 5)

Firstly, the right to participation and inclusion of people with disabilities in society stands out, with the highest number of mentions on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, although this right does not appear on YouTube. Of particular note in this section is the declaration by *CERMI*, which has been endorsed and supported by many other organisations in their posts and advocates the participation of people with disabilities in the social and economic reconstruction in the post-pandemic scenario, so as not to increase the gap that continues to exist with regard to the full inclusion of people with disabilities. Such participation and inclusion is also reflected in specific messages oriented toward commemoration of International Day, such as the slogan, "A day for all". The use of inclusive language (and specifically inclusive behaviour) is another expression of this right in the posts, as well as the necessary e-inclusion that must be adopted more decisively in education. These rights are even presented in a way that is interrelated when it is claimed that inclusive language should effectively promote the full participation of people with disabilities in today's society, and that doing so requires greater technological innovation to offer support for different types of disabilities, without ever forgetting the universal nature that inclusion must entail.

Accessibility is the second most frequently mentioned right in the discourse that has emerged from the posts on the four social networks analysed, especially on Twitter, Facebook and YouTube. Accessibility is presented by the organisations as a broad concept



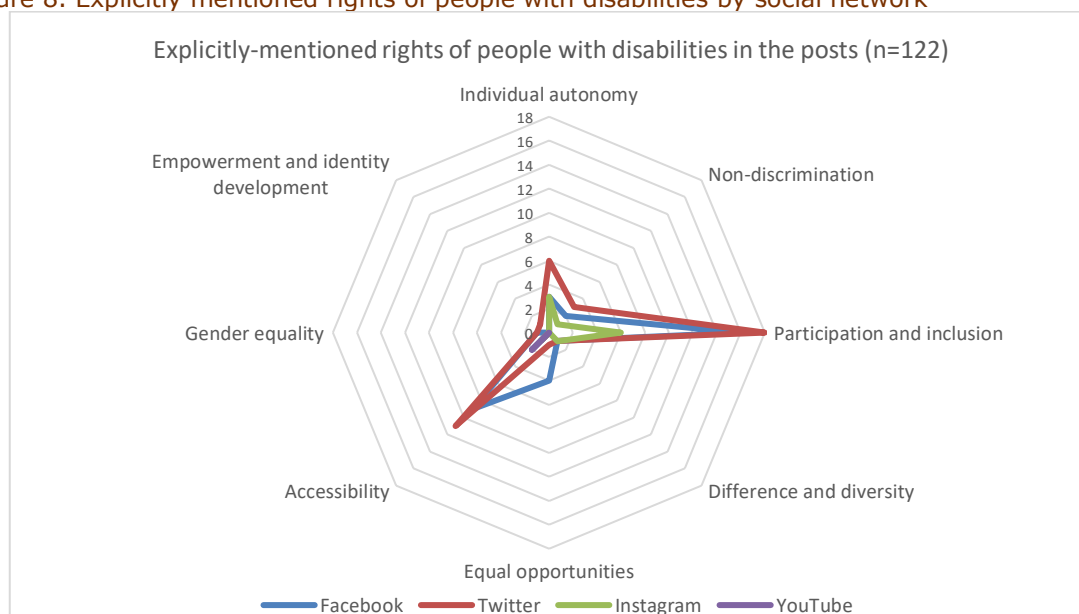
in which the removal of barriers stands out, sometimes referring to a physical issue, but on most occasions referring to the term in a more general way. The current nature of the health crisis can also be seen in the elimination of the barrier of masks for communication with people with hearing disabilities, or other types of barriers that have emerged in people with cognitive disabilities due to the restrictions imposed, which are issues related to other rights as well.

Individual autonomy also has a strong presence on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, from the perspective of both health and well-being, showing a clear reaffirmation of the dignity and dignified living conditions of people with disabilities and their families, and demanding quality care for them with real support that makes the former possible. With regard to individual autonomy, during the commemoration of International Day many organisations celebrated the news of the Spanish Parliament's decision to eliminate forced sterilisation of people with disabilities who were declared to be incapacitated by court order, which was a decision that these entities had been demanding for decades.

Substantially fewer mentions were made of both the right to non-discrimination and the right to equal opportunity. Regarding the right to non-discrimination for people with disabilities, the organisations focus on using constructive dialogue to fight against hate speech on social networks. On the other hand, equal opportunity is focused on employment.

With only three mentions, respect for differences and the acceptance of people with disabilities as part of human diversity and the human condition is related to the need for support and the preservation of dignity. With two mentions, the right to gender equality is presented from the perspective of gender-based violence with an emphasis on women with cerebral palsy. The only mention made of developing aptitudes and identity refers to the fact that a disability is not something that is suffered nor possessed.

Figure 8. Explicitly mentioned rights of people with disabilities by social network



Source: Prepared by the authors



The ten posts with the highest number of “Likes” (Table 2) are on Facebook (with the remarkable fact that ASPAU has 3.5 million followers), and Instagram. This order has been chosen considering the low level of interaction analysed. These ten posts stand out for their variety, and they are represented by six different organisations, with a majority presence related to the commemoration of International Day of Persons with Disabilities, the demand for participation and inclusion, accessibility, and autonomy.

Table 2. Posts with the most Likes among all the social networks

Social Network	Organisation	Post	Likes
Facebook	ASPAU	3rd DECEMBER, INTERNATIONAL DAY OF DISABILITY ❤️<3. Disability Day, because there is still a lot to do. quierequemucho.com	4,293
Facebook	ASPAU	The only truly dangerous disability is not having a heart. 3rd December. International Day of Persons with Disabilities	3,396
Facebook	ASPAU	To include means not only to let someone in, but to WELCOME them. ASPAU Autism Project Association	2,443
Facebook	ASPAU	3rd DECEMBER, INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES. That is what normality is all about. We all want to be on the inside, and not excluded. Even if it means hurting ourselves and causing harm. –Nacho Calderón Almendros–	871
Instagram	ONCE	ONCE and Telefónica, united by innovation for inclusion. 🧑🏻🔧 Today, on the #DíaDeLaDiscapacidad (Day of Disability), Paco, who is one of the sales vendors in our network of more than 19,000 guardians of #hope, tells us how the technology of his POS terminal helps him and others every day in their work. Full story on #PeopleFirst https://blogthinkbig.com/peoplefirst/terminal-accesible-once-telefonica #tecnologíaaccesible #accesibilidad #innovación #discapacidad	406
Instagram	Down España	From DOWN ESPAÑA (Down's Syndrome Spain), we want to take advantage of the opportunity on this International Day of Persons with Disabilities to advocate, together with @cermi_estatal, the universal acceptance of inclusion by providing support that is genuine, adequate, and individualised in all areas of life for people with disabilities, as well as the creation of an authentic social and health care space to act as a welfare provider and support network to guarantee assistance for decent living conditions for people with complex needs.	359
Instagram	Autismo España	People with #discapacidad (disabilities) are among the hardest hit by the #COVID19 pandemic. On #DíaInternacionalDiscapacidad (International Disability Day) we join the manifesto of @cermi_estatal and demand to be part of the economic and social reconstruction. +Info with #pictos #TEA #autism in 📄 Current events- www.autismo.org.es	299
Instagram	Ilunion	!! Today we commemorate the International Day of Persons with Disabilities (#Discapacidad) with the slogan 'A Day for All'. A day for everyone to show their appreciation, in this highly complicated year, for all the efforts and commitment of more than 15,000 people with disabilities who are part of #ILUNION	262



Instagram	<i>Autismo España</i>	👂👂 Parliament permanently outlaws forced or non-consensual sterilisation of people judged to be incapacitated by court decree. We celebrate this historic milestone that will especially benefit girls and women with #disabilities #TEA #autism We leave you +Info in Current events - www.autismo.org.es	240
Facebook	<i>CNSE</i>	The <i>CNSE</i> (State Confederation of Deaf People) and its associated network publicly announce this Declaration for the accessibility of deaf people. #SomosRedCNSE	233

Source: Prepared by the authors

Discussion and conclusions

Although the activity of the 18 disability organisations analysed was moderate on their social networks on International Day of Persons with Disabilities, with an average of 6.78 posts each on the four social networks, most of it was concentrated on Twitter (41% of the total number of posts) and Facebook (35%). These results seem consistent with the increased effort in social network management that requires visually appealing photography, in the case of Instagram, and quality video recording and editing, in the case of YouTube. Previous research on digital communication of non-profit organisations has already highlighted the minimal professional structure they have in this area, and the result is heavier use of Facebook and Twitter as the two networks are most familiar to older people, who are usually the ones in charge of multiple tasks within these organisations, even regarding charity work (de-Cos-Carrera and Mañas-Viniegra, 2018).

Only three organisations have more than 50,000 followers on Facebook, and only three have more than 1% of the interactions achieved by the total number of their posts on International Day, which clearly shows the effectiveness of posting less but with higher quality content that is more interesting for the audience. Previous studies carried out with this same methodology in other areas such as the digital press, sponsoring brands and museums have revealed the difficulty in achieving numbers of interactions higher than 1% on Facebook and Twitter, yet the numbers are higher on Instagram. (Mañas-Viniegra & López-Cepeda, 2018; Mañas-Viniegra, Sierra-Sánchez and López-Cepeda, 2019; López-Cepeda and Mañas-Viniegra, 2020).

This research has revealed areas of potential improvement for increasing this low percentage of interaction, such as the following: publishing specific messages related to the disability sector in which the organisation specialises; using topic-related hashtags about an organisation's activity that specifically identify the organisation (such hashtags are currently non-existent with highly dispersed terms); using audio-visual resources to address accessibility, either with images or video, along with subtitles, which are often not included; and finally, greater use should be made of audio-visual technology. This shortcoming in terms of accessibility can partially be overcome by expanding the information published on a website that is outside the social network, yet more accessible, through the use of links. This approach is particularly used on Instagram, with a presence in 84% of the posts. Similarly, the posts of organisations with fewer resources are diluted by relying on material generated and published by other organisations, and consequently they hardly generate any content of their own.



Commemoration and vindication took advantage of the social network discourse on the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, prioritising everything related to the human and fundamental rights of this group, with emphasis on the participation and inclusion of people with disabilities in society, accessibility, individual autonomy, and well-being. One can observe the way in which Twitter's own identity as a social network, which is more inclined toward protest and exalted discourse, also influences the more vindictory-oriented activity of these organisations, but always with an institutional tone. On Instagram, the activity has focused on fundraising through the sale of solidarity calendars by one of the organisations, although this approach has also been used by the rest of the organisations to show their appreciation for the volunteers, users, and families for their support.

The limitations of this study stem from the scarcity of organisations specialising in people with disabilities that are also active on social networks, as well as the limitations in terms of scope and percentage of the interaction of their posts. Another limitation is the lack of data that would allow for a comparative study to be carried out, either with other years or with the activity on social networks during the rest of the year. Similarly, it would be useful to determine whether or not the Spanish case is typical of the situation in other European countries. On the other hand, it seems that the anonymity on both the Internet and social networks that provides psychological benefits to people with disabilities (Tsatsou, 2020) is drastically declining due to the influence on personal identity exerted by visual social networks with preferences for beauty and fashion (Mañas-Viniegra, Núñez-Gómez and Tur-Viñes, 2020), an issue that has already emerged as a future line of specific research on Instagram through the use of neurocommunication techniques. There is also a need for a cross-cultural study that would help to compare differences, depending on whether society is more inclusive or more individualistic (Alsaleh *et al.*, 2019), and would also aid in understanding the use of digital skills by people with disabilities in promoting accessibility, and their own employability as well.

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DONALD TRUMP'S POLITICAL COMMUNICATION ON FACEBOOK - AN ANALYSIS OF THE PRE-ELECTION PERIOD (2020)

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Abstract

The media coverage of electoral campaigns has been reinforced by the massive use of social networks. The impact and dynamics associated with these contents are a unique object of study in the analysis of the political message transmitted by the candidates and in the study of its effectiveness. The digitization of politics and the transformation of traditional electoral campaigns implies the need to reinforce studies on the impact of social media during an election campaign. Using content analysis, in a qualitative and quantitative study, this article aims to address the presence of Donald Trump on Facebook in the last month of the 2020 presidential election campaign. Considering the proliferation of online information, it is important to study the content expressed by the Republican candidate and its impact on his followers. According to the purposes of the research, the expected results will allow us to understand the discursive dynamics and the communication adopted by Donald Trump in this social media, as well as to gauge the reactions to each publication, in a path that mixes the contributions of electoral and political communication studies.

Keywords

Political communication, Donald Trump; Facebook; US presidential elections; social media.

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DONALD TRUMP'S POLITICAL COMMUNICATION ON FACEBOOK - AN ANALYSIS OF THE PRE-ELECTION PERIOD (2020)¹

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Introduction

The approach to the presidential elections in the United States of America is one of the determining paths to understand the international political system and existing political communication forms. The emphasis given by the international media to this electoral process, as well as the impact of US foreign policy on the global order, constitute core aspects to understand the various political phenomena, as well as governance models at a supranational scale.

Likewise, communication strategies are a relevant source of analysis of existing trends in terms of the preparation and handling of electoral campaigns on a global comparative scale.

The study of leaderships has been based on a strengthening of the relationship between the political agenda, the media agenda and the way political actors seek to convey their message to the electorate. In this context, there is a significant change in the means and in the way of communicating, corresponding to a paradigm shift regarding traditional electoral campaigns.

The emergence of political leaders outside the traditional axis of the "party leadership" and other media stages, such as the world of television, the world of entertainment or business deals, requires reinforcing the scope of research in the field of the type of intervention and the impact of these new leaders on the general population. Similarly, the universalization of Internet access has led to greater concern on the part of political parties and their candidates to ensure a more effective presence on digital platforms, finding a new space to recover the importance of the political message and the connection with the electorate (Bimber and Davis, 2003). The alternative to traditional media allows political actors to challenge the rigidity of the political and media system, in a process that significantly changes the campaign strategy.

¹ Article translated by Carolina Peralta.



The growing interest in the analysis of digital electoral campaigns stems, precisely, from the engagement they provide, as well as the possibility of ensuring an inverse communication (bottom-up) from the electorate. This influences the discourse and the proposals presented by political actors. In this sense, Gunn Enli and Eli Skogerbø (2013) identify three central reasons for using social networks: marketing, mobilization and direct contact with voters. The latter is more evident in political systems centred on the image and action of the candidates, when there is strong personalization of the campaign (Gunn Enli and Eli Skogerbø, 2013: 758). In this growing media space, social media provide the tools that candidates need to assert themselves with the electorate, dispensing with or, at least, relegating the role of traditional media to a secondary level. This new centrality of digital communication and the mechanisms of continuous interaction between political agents and the electorate represents a new functionality to ensure the involvement of citizens in the political dispute (Carlisle and Patton, 2013). This impact was evident in the election campaigns of Barack Obama (2008 and 2012), generating mass involvement through simple and effective messages (Bode, 2012). Social media, more specifically Facebook and Twitter, “mark a new environment and a new form of communication with citizens and organizations in a multidirectional way, but with the commitment to interact, that is, to be a proactive user in virtual communities” (Túñez and Sixto, 2011: 1).

The advent of the Trump presidency (2017-2021) marks a relevant period of analysis of the use of social media, whether in terms of studying the content of the message sent, or in terms of civic engagement and comparative studies resorting to the social media used by other political leaders. One notices a greater appeal to emotion on the part of the Republican candidate, as well as a more intensive use of these communication tools for the affirmation of identity values (Costa and Khudoliy, 2019).

This new communication model appears as an alternative to the traditional media, in a direct call to emotion and contact with each user, allowing meaningful interaction, either with the candidate, or with thousands of followers.

In fact, the victory of Donald Trump in the presidential elections of the US in 2016 was characterised by a significant use of social media, which became an instrument of communication with the electorate and of support around the candidate. This fact was amplified by the high number of Trump followers on the various social platforms (Azari, 2016). In this sense, this paper aims to analyse the way Trump used the Facebook platform during the election campaign period in the 2020 elections.

This paper focuses on three core objectives: to understand the importance of the impact of the digitization of information in electoral campaigns; to analyse how Donald Trump used Facebook to convey his message; and to examine the impact of these messages on his followers.

The speed of the transmission of information is a challenge in any scientific analysis. We need to check the scope of the communication, the meaning of the words/expressions used, and to understand the existing interaction dynamics, in order to contribute to the study and understanding of the success or failure of an



electoral campaign. In fact, are we faced with an increasing role of the media and digital platforms for the electoral success or failure of a certain candidate or party?

Will we move towards an excess of personalization, in a process focused on the candidate at the expense of the proposals presented? This paper aims to contribute to the studies that link political communication, the use of social media and the handling of electoral campaigns, in an alternative process to in-person electoral campaigns.

Political communication and social media

There is growing debate about the impact and the typology of political communication expressed in social media, with this new communication model constituting an effective way of bringing together candidates and voters. The opening of an "unlimited" stage for citizens to express their opinions represents a direct mechanism for political participation, challenging traditional conceptions of participation. In fact, we can understand political participation as "the set of acts and attitudes that aim to influence, more or less directly and more or less legally, the decisions of those in power in the political system" (Pasquino, 2005: 50). However, involvement in social media implies a less conventional and less controlled model of participation by political actors. The proliferation of digital communication has eliminated intermediaries between political actors and citizens, which has advantages and disadvantages.

The greater possibility for intervention and the direct participation of citizens in the public debate may constitute valid alternatives for participation and constitute a new form of "control" of the action of public authorities, with the possibility of including social groups that were previously excluded in this debate. However, the quality of the debate can be affected by a wealth of information, which is difficult for all stakeholders to process. There is also the risk that political actors act in the face of social/media pressure at the expense of action based on reason (Dader, 2001 and Sampietro and Ordaz, 2015).

In addressing the political communication aspect, we are aware of the vast field of research in this field. Our approach reflects the concern to reconcile the scope of political communication in the field of social media in a specific context, the US presidential elections in 2020.

The personalization of the campaign, centred in a two-party context and involving an immediate choice between two governance options, reinforces the need to analyse the context of the electoral campaign and the message conveyed. The option to address the political communication associated with Donald Trump results from the impact of the Republican candidate on social media, as well as the fact that he uses digital platforms as an alternative to traditional media, in a path initiated in the first candidacy in 2016 (Azari, 2016). We bring together two central concepts, "communication" and "politics", bearing in mind that the democratic debate implies a way of conveying the message, this being facilitated and leveraged by the immediate access to information. The proliferation of social media and universal access to the Internet increasingly questions the role of



traditional media, but it offers an opportunity to deepen the relationship between candidates and voters.

We do not advocate the view that this substitution automatically corresponds to a reinforcement of communication or improvement of the democratic goals of a given country. We are aware of the importance of traditional communication for the functioning of democracy, and of the possibility of the proliferation of online communication to generate the increase in fake news" (Pepp, Michaelson and Sterken, 2019). This increase was evident during the electoral debates in the 2016 US presidential election (Farkas and Schou, 2018).

The weight of the political message must be measured according to its scope. Its presence on social media provides a broad set of indicators of the reach of each post. This analysis should be carried out in the context of the use of social media, and the interpretation should not be automatically extrapolated to electoral results.

In a comprehensive way, and using Mcnair's (1999) contribution, we can identify three central elements of political communication: the media, political organizations, where political representatives are included, and citizens. These elements are in constant interaction and the system is conditioned by permanent feedback, with the content of the message producing a volume of interactions between the different actors in the communication process. However, the reach and power of social media go beyond this triple analysis by allowing a more direct, regular communication free from a set of constraints, namely the issue of the "selective participation filter".

However, some studies indicate that the use of communication via Facebook is not so different from the behaviours that individuals have in offline communication. The individual's action is not marked by the creation of a "virtual character" distinct from political involvement in a face-to-face environment (Miller, Bobkowski e Maliniak, 2015). The biggest difference lies in the number of interactions recorded on social media, making the impact of each message less visible or perceptible in a more global approach.

In a context in which there is exponential growth of social media and online communication, there is a path that ensures the creation of differentiated content and maintaining a level of permanent public discussion. In this domain, the Facebook platform "has emerged as an important political portal in North America and in a more global context" (Elmer, McKelvey and Devereaux, 2009: 416), ensuring, since 2008, a set of partnerships with traditional media in electoral periods.

Another path that must be followed in the analysis of this topic is the ability of social media to shape and condition the view of public opinion. With a high level of interaction, will it be possible to find patterns of communication and understanding between users of social media? Or are we looking at platforms that validate previous ideas that individuals have about certain parties or candidates?

We cannot fail to mention the importance of analysing the "play on emotions" and the ability to achieve significant user involvement with the candidate through



messages, images or videos, as part of a communication strategy based on the appeal to the sentiment or the defence of moral and identity values. This “play on emotions” is decisive for the construction of group identity, whether in the context of defending the values and positioning of the candidate, or in attacking the opponent's candidacy (Sampietro and Ordaz, 2015). This analysis of a discourse that appeals to emotion or the adoption of a discourse based on rationality produce different contents and impacts, the option of each candidate/political actor being consistent with the campaign objectives.

The critical look at Donald Trump's actions on social media, specifically on Facebook, results from the very organization and dynamics of the functioning of international decision centres and the posture of the 45th President of the US. Donald Trump's leadership promoted the affirmation of a populist, anti-globalization and protectionist agenda, triggering a succession of significant cultural events and confrontations (Inglehart e Norris, 2016 e Mayda e Peri, 2017).

This intervention dynamism was fuelled by Trump's strong presence on social media, namely on Facebook and Twitter, ensuring a considerable civic engagement in these domains (Ott, 2017 and Ross and Caldwell, 2020). It is important to highlight that this presence was more evident in periods of electoral competition. Still, the use of digital platforms of the fact checking model and verification of the veracity of the information can question the exposed contents, reducing or mitigating the message's impact.

The importance of observing the relationship of political communication within the scope of social media is core in the analysis of current electoral campaigns. The change in the traditional model of communication with the electorate and the involvement of thousands of citizens in the public debate produce significant changes in the theoretical models of analysis of campaigns and electoral results, with the inclusion of a set of variables and indicators in this analysis.

Research design, methodology and data collection

This research focused on the analysis of the political communication of Donald Trump on Facebook immediately before the US presidential elections in 2020 (held on 3 November 2020). The research design makes it possible to ask a central research question: what was the communication model adopted by Trump in the period before the presidential election? Likewise, we resort to two derived questions to deepen the analysis: what were the characteristics and elements used in the candidate's publications as a whole? What was the impact of the publications on the followers of Trump's official page?

In the vast literature we identify two relevant paths: studies that focus on the influence and impact of the media on electoral results and the functioning of democracy (Ansolabehere, Behr and Ivengar, 1991; Graber 2004 and Lange and Ward, 2004) and empirical studies focusing on the impact of social media and communication models associated with everyday political life (Elmer, McKelvey and Devereaux, 2009; Farkas and Schou, 2018; Thorson, Cotter, Medeiros and Pak, 2019; Ross and Caldwell, 2020; Linden, Panagopoulos and Roozenbeek, 2020).



We chose the second path as it allows to decode the communication codes associated with Trump's strategy in an attempt to ensure his re-election, as well as to gauge the impact of each publication on the network of followers. The option for Facebook is justified by the number of followers that the candidate has (more than 35 million followers on 3 November 2020), as well as by the dimension of the platform, widely disseminated and recognized in the context of digital platforms².

The study uses content analysis of publications on Donald Trump's official Facebook page, from 1 October 2020 to 3 November 2020. All publications from the month before the elections, as well as the days in November prior to this election, were aggregated. It should be noted that the electoral process is continuous, with a record amount of early votes registered in these elections³.

This approach allows us to know what kind of topics were included and to analyse the impact (reactions) to each post, enabling interpreting Trump's communication and electoral strategy.

From a methodological point of view, the research focused on content analysis. It used the quantitative and qualitative approach, with a category basis, and considered the number of publications and their typology. The use of content analysis is in line with studies on the analysis of messages published on social media and the approach to the online political communication strategy.

In addition to content analysis, we used the semiotic communication model in the same way, with the aim of analysing and understanding the meaning of the messages of the Republican candidate in the period preceding the electoral act.

This approach is in line with the contributions of Berelson (1952), Bardin (1977) and Krippendorff (2004), with a special focus on the descriptive analysis of the content expressed in the media (Semetko, and Valkenburg, 2016). This strategy corresponds to a classic approach to the use of this research technique, combined with its adaptation through the specificity of the phenomena to be observed, associating a quantitative aspect with a qualitative aspect with a category and inferential basis.

During the selection of the number of messages, we framed the study in an analysis model composed of six categories and respective variables: William Benoit's political discourse functional theory (acclaiming; attacking; defending); Aristotelian rhetoric; (logic; customs; emotion); the action request (donation; vote; involvement); the topics covered; the structure of the publication (video, image, text, hyperlink) and the impact of the publication (number of reactions, shares and comments).

² Facebook is the most used digital platform/social media in the world. In: <https://datareportal.com/social-media-users>, accessed on 10 January 2021.

³ Over 100 million voters voted in advance, removing a significant impact from the face-to-face vote on 3 November 2020. In: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/02/us/politics/a-staggering-100-million-americans-voted-early-suggesting-a-record-turnout.html>, accessed on 12 January 2021.



Table 1. Analysis Model

Categories	Variables
Benoit's Functional Theory	Acclaiming
	Attacking
	Defending
Aristotelian Rhetoric	Logic
	Customs
	Emotion
Action Request	Donation
	Vote
	Support/Involvement
Topics Covered	
Structure of Publication	Video
	Image
	Text
	Hyperlink
Impact of Publication	Reactions
	Shares
	Comments

This analysis model allows us to take a global and comprehensive approach to communication strategies, as well as Trump's options in using this social network. In a schematic way, it should be noted that the functional analysis theory has been regularly used to analyse electoral debates and the various contents of political communication (Benoit et al., 2002). The objective is to structure the type of campaign and language used according to the aspirations of each candidate.

In a second segment of analysis, we framed the publications according to Aristotle's rhetorical art, structuring registered publications as "appealing" to logic, emotion, customs or traditions (Rohden, 1997). In a third segment, we structured the publications according to the action request, which may involve a request for donations, a call to vote or a request for support/involvement in the campaign. The analysis also focuses on the core campaign topics exposed in each of the publications in the period under study. The fifth and sixth segments deal with the format of the publication (text, video, image or use of hyperlinks) and the respective impact, considering the number of shares, the comments generated and the number of reactions.

The data is organized based on this category framework. The central objective was to address the communicational intentionality associated with each publication in this social media. The use of content analysis and the semiotic model of communication allows to group the collected information and structure the contents in processes of codification, categorization and inference (Espírito Santo, 2008). The selected model starts from a set of predefined variables, in order to frame the publications registered in that analysis.



Corpus Analysis

This paper examined the period between 1 October 2020 and 3 November 2020. It studied the publications in the official account of Donald Trump on Facebook in the period immediately prior to the Presidential elections, also characterized by a high record of early voting (by mail and in person).

A total of 215 publications made in 34 days (average of 6.3 publications per day) were extracted and analysed using the NodeXLGraph software. The categorization process thus ensures the conditions for the scientific validation of the time and thematic cut-off of this study, in a process based on the objectivity of the information and the adequacy of the methodology to the studied contents (Bardin, 1977).

1. Results

The analysis of the data collected took into account a set of *a priori* conditions: the publications occur in the middle of the electoral campaign period, but simultaneously in the process of voting, given the size of the early vote in the last North American elections. The publications appear on President Donald Trump's official Facebook account (<https://www.facebook.com/DonaldTrump>) and were collected the day after the elections (4 November 2020). The fact that the United States' political system is strongly marked by a dichotomous, two-party perspective, which increases the polarization of the political debate, must be highlighted.

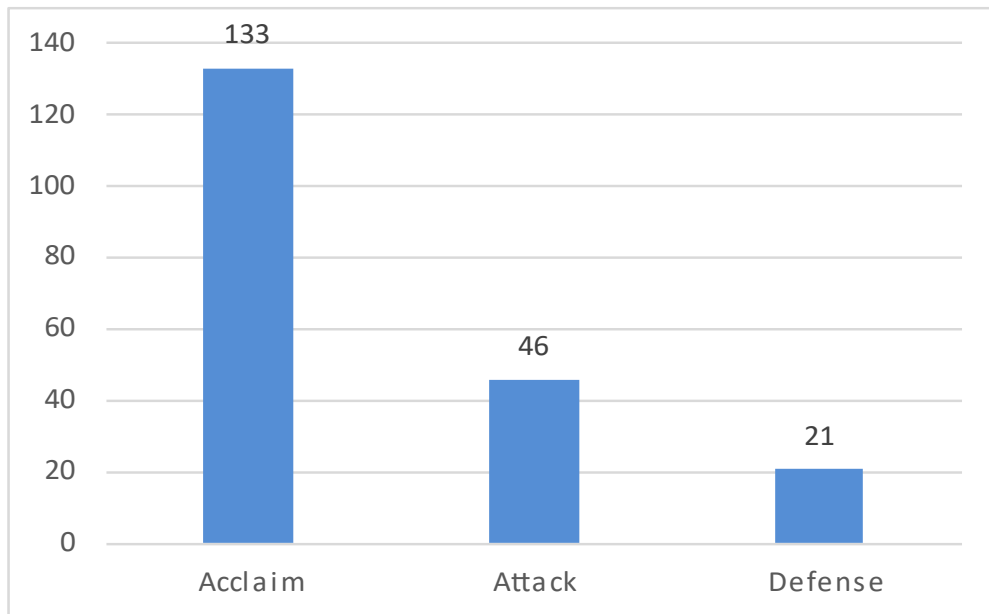
Functional theory of political discourse

The functional theory model is directly related to the communication strategy of each candidate and to the potential associated with each communication platform, in this case social media (Facebook). The model determines the classification of publications in three dimensions: submission of proposals (legislative/thematic) or announcements of the candidate's acclaim; attack speeches (to opponents, other actors involved in the electoral debate or other institutions) or defence speeches (in the face of previously confirmed attacks).

It should be noted that this analysis takes into account the number of publications ($n = 215$), but several publications combine acclaim, attack and defence content, as seen in the other categories. The same publication may contain elements that allow framing it in multiple variables. It should be noted that more than half of the contents corresponded to acclaim messages from the candidate or presentation of political proposals, despite being of a general scope, that is, of proposition in relation to certain topics or demonstration of intentions in public policies.



Chart 1. Theory of functional analysis of political discourse



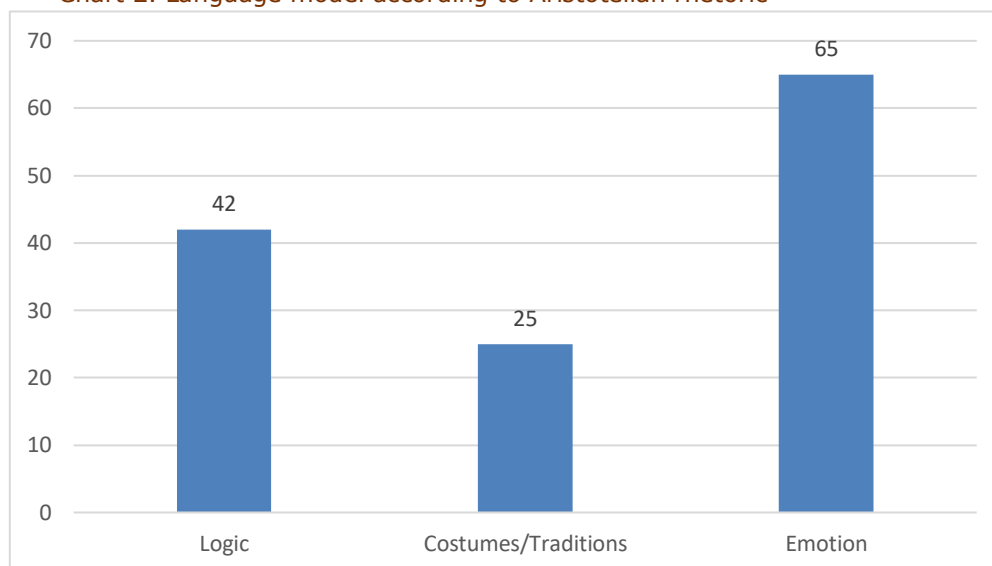
This approach also reflects the fact that this acclamation was made with the systematic use of the broadcast of Trump and Mike Pence rallies live on Facebook (79 publications, that is, 37% of all publications). In turn, there is a considerable number (21%) of publications that substantiate attacks, namely on the Democratic candidate, Joe Biden, and on the media. The attacks are dispersed, involving Joe Biden's tax plan, measures on the legalization of immigrants, the reinforcement of lockdown due to the health pandemic or the attack on the media by disclosing certain electoral polls.

Aristotelian Rhetoric

In the political discourse analysis model presented on Facebook, the publications fit into three types of discourse, according to the Aristotelian rhetoric model. There is an interpretation of these contents in the light of the defence and promotion of logical reasoning based on the evidence or data presented, a second model of communication based on the valuing or presentation of North American customs or traditions and a third model of communication based on emotion and the direct involvement of users with their candidate.



Chart 2. Language model according to Aristotelian rhetoric



In this regard, mention should be made of the primacy given to emotional speeches/content, calling for a reinforcement or a deepening of the symbiosis between Trump supporters and the Republican candidate. These contents reflect a message of “struggle” on behalf of the candidate and on behalf of the country. There is also regular use of positive adjectives by American citizens (ex: “proud”, “great”) and the dissemination of Trump images surrounded by crowds of supporters, creating a population “support” for the Republican Party campaign.

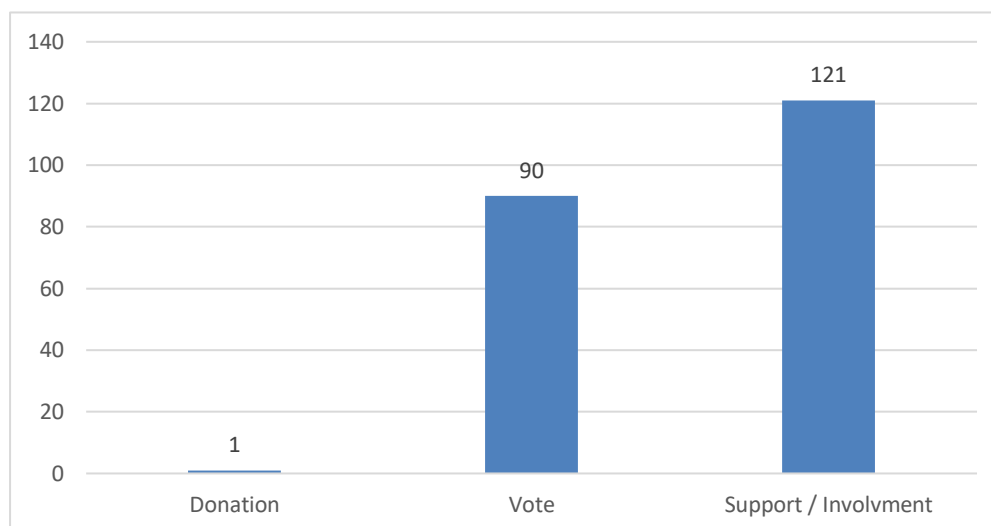
Action Request

Political communication is often based on a direct request for support or involvement from users (voters) in the electoral campaign. When examining the publications during this period, we checked if there were any requests for donations, traditional in North American campaigns, any direct or indirect call to vote and calls for support and involvement in campaign actions.

From the data analysis, despite the strong investment required to launch a presidential campaign in the US, there is only one publication related to requests for or references to donations, which may be related to the fact that the analysis focuses on the final part of the electoral campaign.



Chart 3. Action requests



The communication was based on calls for direct involvement in campaign actions (in person or online) and direct references to voting, namely with the creation of an incentive for users to send a message to a campaign number with the word “vote”. This allowed the campaign team to create a wide network of contacts/database of potential voters. Thus, the requested involvement focused on creating greater monitoring of online initiatives (engagement on social networks) or requesting a direct call to vote.

Topics Covered

In this category, we chose to identify the topics covered in each publication, creating a thematic “script” of Trump’s communication structure. From the analysis carried out, there is a significant diversity of contents, and it is not possible to unveil a coherent thematic line of action during this period.

Table 2. Main topics covered

Topics							
Economy	Media	Religion	Covid	Polls	Health	Industry	Energy
21	7	6	6	6	4	4	3

In the middle of a pandemic, in terms of communication priority was given to economic issues, precisely the aspect where Trump sought to capitalize his action in the White House, namely with emphasis given to economic indicators and the recovery period experienced after the second half of 2020. These contents were strongly related to publications associated with the industry and energy sector and job promotion in the country.

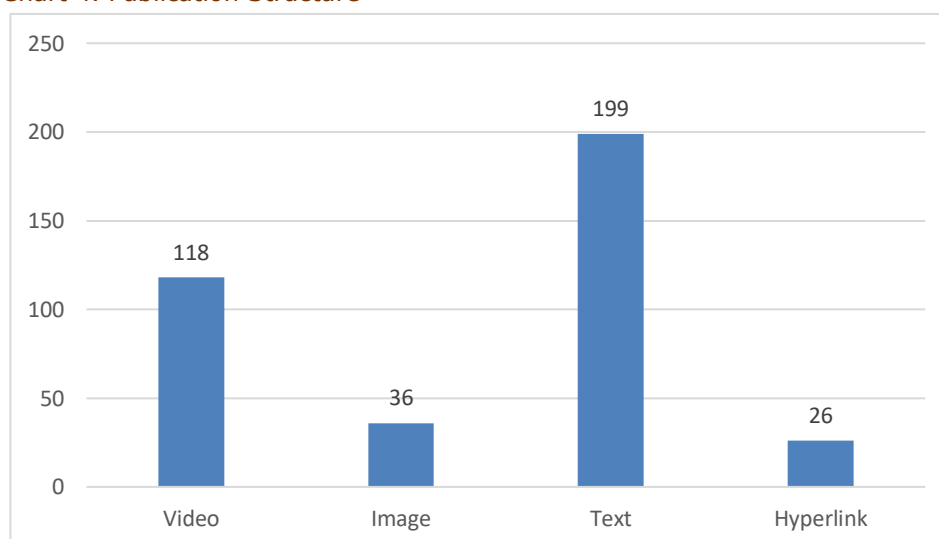


Also worthy of note is the regular reference to the media and polls, in a strategy of playing down and attack the media during the campaign, as well as the broadcast of religious content (live prayers on Facebook), in a direct appeal to the catholic and evangelical vote.

The references to Covid-19 were made in order to defend the testing capacity of the US and to attack the possibility of promoting the closure of services or economic activity. It was a topic with little impact on the communication dynamics on Facebook.

Publication Structure

Chart 4. Publication Structure



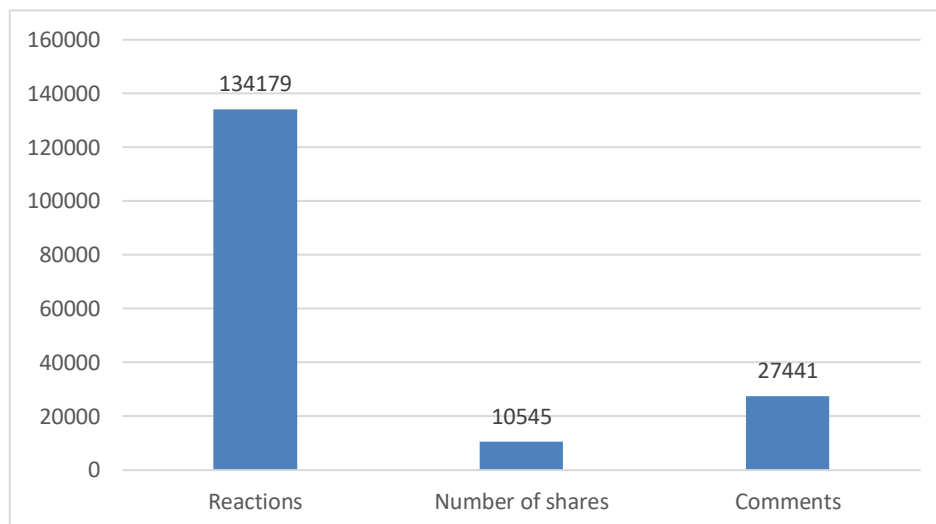
Almost all publications had at least two formats, the most recurrent being text communication. Alongside this option, there was live broadcast of several campaign events, including rallies by Donald Trump and Mike Pence, as well as the broadcast of some programmes by Trump's campaign team. The regular publication of videos (live or recorded) allowed greater user engagement and the establishment of synchronous comments, in a process of systematic politicization of the shared content. Less usual was the use of hyperlinks, which corresponds to the objective of directly publishing information without the need to "force" users to access other electronic addresses. This option, of simultaneous use of video and image alongside the text, attests the effectiveness of the image and the permanent interaction in the live content. The power of the image was decisive for the effectiveness of the political message and for inviting the reactions of users.

Publication Impact

With regard to the impact of publications, the number of reactions, shares and comments that each publication triggered were analysed. It also enabled seeing the contents that generated greater adherence on the part of users.



Chart 5. Impact (average of reactions, shares and comments)



The figures reflect a significant dynamic of Trump's official website, with a disparity in the impact of each publication. Graph 5. shows the averages of the number of reactions, shares and comments, but it is important to check the content that produced the most impact, paving the way for greater understanding of the content with the greatest impact.

Regarding the sharing of publications, the most shared content was a cover of the "New York Post" newspaper, with a quote from the American rapper 50 Cent, with the statement "I don't want to end up 20 cent", in a criticism of the tax plan defended by Joe Biden. This publication was shared by 162,000 users. The second publication with the highest number of shares (118,000) was the release of a video with images of Donald Trump and Joe Biden rallies, with the first recording a considerable crowd and the second having a small number of participants, due to the campaign strategy adopted in times of pandemic. The third most shared publication (104,000) was a video of a set of Trump supporters "escorting" a Joe Biden campaign bus in the State of Texas, with the video's description: "I love Texas".

In terms of comments, the publications with the greatest impact were the presidential debate between Trump and Biden, which was broadcast live on 23 October 2020, with a total of more than 290,000 comments; the final campaign message, written on 3 November, had a total of 224,000 comments and reflected Trump's thanks to his supporters ("To all our supporters: thank you from the bottom of my heart. You have been there from the beginning, and I will never let you down. Your hopes are my hopes, your dreams are my dreams, and your future is what I am fighting for every single day") and the debate between the two vice president candidates, Mike Pence and Kamala Harris, on 18 October 2020 (118,000 comments).

In terms of the typology of reactions, we opted for a global approach, taking into account that most of the reactions were positive (like "like" or "love"). The publication with the highest number of reactions was precisely the final campaign acknowledgment text set out above, with a total of 1.515,469 reactions (more than 98% of the reactions were



positive). The second publication with the greatest impact was Trump's statement after recovering from Covid-19, on 6 October when he wrote on the platform a short text stating that he felt great. This publication generated a total of 1.476,929 reactions (more than 96.6% positive reactions). The other publications with the greatest impact addressed the issue of education (approval of legislation to prevent indoctrination in schools), with a total of 803,000 reactions and the transmission of the campaign motto adopted in 2016 and replicated in 2020 "Make America Great Again", with a total of 745,000 reactions.

Simple messages were more successful and there was greater dynamism of social media with live content, promoting greater participation of followers of Trump's official page. Thus, the use of a direct communication model was confirmed, using the publication of face-to-face events on Facebook and content to promote user involvement and participation dynamics in campaign actions. The option lied in content linked to appreciation and promotion of Trump, as well as the use of content promoting sentimental/emotional links around the candidacy.

From a strategic point of view, there was regular use of messages to attack political opponents and the media, using a combination of text and video publications. A significant variety of topics were covered, with emphasis on economic issues. The official page records a significant level of engagement, with thousands of comments, shares and reactions. The content was simpler and more objective, along with the broadcast of campaign debates, which provoked a higher level of reaction on the part of users.

Although Trump was defeated in the elections, this level of enthusiasm and presence on social media may be associated with an improvement in the vote compared to 2016 (Trump got 10 million more votes in 2020 than in the first election), as well as a more competitive performance compared to the forecast of electoral studies.

Conclusions

The research around the strategic communication options of political leaders directly intertwines with the analysis of the electoral results and with the voters' perception of the charisma and action of each political actor. Although the importance of analysing the impact of physical presence, namely the role of candidates in electoral debates or at rallies, continues to be confirmed, the proliferation of social media and their daily use by voters indicates the need to examine their use for political purposes, both by political actors (message senders) and users (message recipients).

This research enabled understanding Donald Trump's campaign strategy regarding the use of Facebook, as well as analysing the engagement of its users, in a period strongly marked by political and social instability in the US due to political polarization and strong electoral mobilization.

The analysis of electoral campaigns implies a multidisciplinary view and a critical stance at the multiple variables that influence voters' behaviour and their perception of candidates and the central topics in the decision-making process regarding the vote. The use of social media represents one of the paths of this research process, considering the growing access to these platforms and the progressive replacement of institutional communication with daily communication on social media.



The advent of online communication adapted to political content opens the opportunity to broaden electoral studies, as well as theories to explain voters' behaviour. In this context, the reasons associated with the use of social media (marketing, mobilization and direct contact) are part of the strategy and the path followed by the Republican candidate.

By focusing the analysis on the publications made in the period immediately prior to the election, we were able to unveil political communication in the most intense phase of the campaign on Facebook, where Trump has the largest number of followers.

The data presented allow us to characterize Trump's strategy on Facebook. His presence was marked by the publication of several daily messages and the use of a simple, objective and focused discourse in an attempt to ensure the immediate adhesion of users to his political message. Likewise, the analysis of this social media shows the impact and importance of social media in the campaign strategy, ensuring the creation of a wave of enthusiasm around the candidacy, in a period when the face-to-face events decreased due to the pandemic.

The communication processes during the electoral campaign period focused on topics that reflected the voters' concerns. However, this does not mean an immediate adhesion of the candidate to a hierarchy of topics presented or defended by the electorate. The discourse was centred on Trump's political agenda and his objectives of attacking the proposals presented by Joe Biden. This process determines the need to deepen the research around the content expressed in each publication and in the associated comments, allowing future research (causal relations) between communication and the users' perception of the various topics addressed.

In a context of significant growth in the use and potential of online communication, it is important to deepen the study of the means, techniques and strategies used to promote political participation, opening up a range of opportunities for public discussion outside the traditional channels of debate. The partisanship and polarization of social media are one of the most relevant objects of study in the near future, in a rediscovery of forms of communication and in an analysis of the dimension and reach of the digital platforms on politics. With this study we seek to map future analyses on the relationship between the media and politics, based on the theoretical articulation between communication and political science.

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QATAR'S COMMUNICATION STRATEGY AND THE RESOLUTION OF THE DIPLOMATIC CONFLICT IN THE GULF

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Abstract

On the 5th of June 2017, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt and Bahrain announced the rupture of diplomatic relations and the closure of borders with Qatar in response to its alleged support for terrorist activities destabilising the region. In order to revert the situation, 13 demands were made, which Qatar refuses to meet.

Qatar was isolated within the Gulf Cooperation Council and its international image was damaged, particularly after the Trump Administration backed the blockade. In these trying circumstances, Qatar has managed to resist by developing a public diplomacy that integrates the analogue and digital environments in which communications play a vital role. Qatar has protested its innocence before regional and international public opinion, and it has denounced the anti-Qatar campaign and fake news stories that flooded social media, particularly Twitter, before and during the first months of the crisis.

It has developed a communication strategy showing its willingness to open dialogue, respect for international bodies where it defended its cause, together with diplomatic activities reinforcing its positions before very diverse actors such as the United States, international bodies, Kuwait and Turkey. Qatar used this strategy to transform its *online* influence into *offline* diplomatic influence until it succeeded in getting Kuwait to act as mediator, with the support of the United States, in order to put an end to the blockade, which was the top goal of its foreign policy.

Keywords

Communication; blockade; digital diplomacy; Qatar; public diplomacy.

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QATAR'S COMMUNICATION STRATEGY AND THE RESOLUTION OF THE DIPLOMATIC CONFLICT IN THE GULF¹

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1. Introduction

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) was created in 1981 and it is formed by: Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Kuwait, Oman and Qatar. It is a political and economic alliance with the goal of fostering cooperation in all areas. The presidency of the GCC rotates every year and it is headquartered in Riyadh. The highest decision-making entity, the Supreme Council of Heads of State, meets annually.

The GCC constituted an example of cooperation for the Arab world until the 2017 crisis. From an economic point of view, it is the Arab space with the highest degree of integration, its highest achievement being the creation of a common market that came into effect on the 1st of January 2008. This involved the free movement of people, goods and capital. Despite some failed initiatives such as the creation of a single currency in 2010, the GCC has succeeded in connecting the electrical grids of the six countries and started a project in 2009 to connect railway networks transporting both passengers and goods. The diplomatic crisis changed the outline of this project created to connect Saudi Arabia and Qatar, which was later expanded to the rest of the countries (Keynoush, 2020)².

Cooperation in the area of Defence came into effect with the creation of the *Peninsula Shield Force* in 1984, with headquarters in Saudi Arabia, and was expanded in 2004 with the signature of a pact for sharing intelligence. The Shield Force has been deployed numerous times, the most significant occasion taking place in 2011 when the Bahrain government requested help in order to control the strong protests in its territory.

The diplomatic crisis undoubtedly marks a before and after for the GCC and puts into question the entirety of the cooperation carried out throughout 36 years. It also casts doubts on the possibility of making more progress in the area of political and economic integration. In addition, it has affected the geopolitics of the Middle East and generated new alliances and alignments, which have effects that are difficult to predict.

¹ Article translated by Najual Traductores & Intérpretes.

² <https://insidearabia.com/gcc-railway-project-held-up-by-financial-problems-and-qatars-exclusion/>.



This article aims to offer a perspective on how Qatar has used public diplomacy (PD) in the digital environment. The objective is to analyse how Qatar's PD has managed communication and determine the basis on which its PD has created an official narrative for defending its case before the international community, both in traditional media as well as in social media, especially on Twitter. The ultimate goal was to end the blockade without meeting the demands of the countries that imposed it. In order to achieve this goal, Qatar needed to translate its *online* influence into *offline* influence.

1.1. Milestones of the diplomatic crisis in the Gulf

The announcement of the rupture of diplomatic relations took place on the 5th of June 2017. Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt and Bahrain unilaterally declared the closure of land, air and maritime borders with Qatar, as well as the interruption of trade in goods and services. These actions were followed by the expulsion of all the Qatari residents that were present in their territories and the immediate recall of all their citizens that were residing in Qatar.

On the 8th of June, the quartet³ published a joint declaration including a list of 59 people and 12 foundations in Qatar that were linked to terrorism. On the 22nd of June, it published a list of 13 demands for putting an end to the crisis, which included the closure of the television chain *Al Jazeera*, the end of Iran's diplomatic missions in Qatar, as well as the closure of the Turkish military base that was under construction in Qatar. If Qatar accepted these demands, a period of ten years would begin in which the quartet would audit *in situ* whether these conditions were met or not.

Qatar did not accede to these demands since it considered that they compromised its sovereignty, and thus faced an unprecedented financial boycott aggravated by its geographical location. Qatar is a peninsula with a single land border with Saudi Arabia, and its main supply lines are the container ships moored on the ports of the UAE. In addition, the closure of the neighbouring airspace of the GCC grounded a large part of Qatar's air fleet. Qatar was forced to look for alternatives in order to secure supplies, air routes and security. Moreover, it had to defend itself before the international community against what it considered to be infringements on the rights of its citizens and companies, and it had to protest its innocence at being accused of promoting terrorism in the region. All these actions came at a great financial and reputational cost that cast doubts on, among other things, the country's suitability to host international events such as the FIFA World Cup in 2022.

For three years and seven months, Qatar managed to survive the blockade, forge new alliances and restructure its economy by means of an active foreign policy in which communications have played a vital role. The end of the diplomatic crisis was announced on the 4th of January 2021 when Kuwait's Minister of Foreign Affairs officially announced that Saudi Arabia was opening its air space and its borders with Qatar that same afternoon. The following day, the fortieth summit of the GCC began on the Saudi city of Al-Ula, where the reconciliation between the countries of the Gulf was confirmed.

³ The terminology used by Qatari media in English referred to the group of countries as "the quartet" or *the blockading countries*. They were often mentioned as a group led by Saudi Arabia.



1.2. Public diplomacy in the digital era

The term public diplomacy (PD) appeared in the United States in 1965, coined by Edmond Gullion. Its definition has evolved alongside international relations, particularly since the end of the Cold War. (Manheim, 1994) defined PD as "the actions that the government of a nation takes in order to influence the public opinion and the elites of another nation with the aim of making the foreign policy of said government favourable to it". More recent definitions state that PD consists of "indirectly influencing the behaviour of a foreign government by exerting influence on the attitudes of its citizens" (Noya, 2006: 6). It is important to point out that PD aims to influence not only foreign policy matters but also any matter that may affect a country's national interests. In this regard, (Lee & Hocking, 2010: 11), recognise that PD is concerned with promoting a state's strategic objectives.

Since it wants to exert influence on a foreign public with certain goals in mind, PD can be mistaken for propaganda. The difference is that PD is "a two-way street" that in addition to exerting influence on a foreign public, it also establishes a sort of dialogue with it (Melissen, 2011: 18). Similarly, (Hayden, 2012) states that in a digital environment, audiences are active agents, so this diffuses the boundaries between PD and traditional diplomatic activities, which include communication.

At this point it is necessary to mention the term digital diplomacy (DD), which relates to the use of digital technology and social media for diplomatic ends. Currently there is not a unified definition of DD nor a unified focus of research (Manor, 2017). Some authors state that DD is just diplomacy that uses digital technology media and involves changes in the exercise of diplomacy but no changes to its objectives. In this regard, (Hocking & Melissen, 2015:9) declare that the digital revolution produces fundamental changes in diplomatic functions, including negotiation, representation and communication. In the digital era, DD must be capable of building a network of networks of followers and influencers, as well as knowing how to link the effects of DD with tangible foreign policy outcomes in order to convert online influence into offline diplomatic influence (Bjola, 2018).

In this context, the communication function of PD experiences a type of hybridisation between the environments of new media and diplomatic channels. According to (Hocking & Melissen, 2015: 11), this results in an adaptation between analogue and digital, so that traditional media are adapting to new ways of conceptualising, sharing and viewing news. According to (Rubio, 2015 :16), PD has expanded its scope to global public opinion, and this transformation "has been accelerated by digital media (Twitter), the rise of international television stations (CNN and Al Jazeera) and the advent of transparency in our lives (Wikileaks)". Nowadays, almost no one questions that PD practices on social media influence the perception of a country by target audiences, although measuring their impact is complex (Sevin & Ingenhoff, 2018). The conclusion applied to DD in the United States that "network technologies give the power back to the nation-state and to large institutions" (Ross, 2011) is more debatable, though interesting.



2. Communication as a new battlefield in this diplomatic crisis

Like a product of its time, this conflict had one of its battlefields in cyberspace, where cyberattacks, disinformation, the use of bots and campaigns in social media were carried out in favour and against the countries involved. When reviewing the literature related to communication management by official bodies during this crisis, it becomes apparent that there are not many studies published, and that qualitative analyses of communications in social media are predominant though with two different focus.

The first group studies the content of the messages of public bodies in social media as a DD tool, while the second group focuses on analysing the *hashtags* of the most popular tweets during the first months of the crisis. Among the first group, (Mitchell, 2019) does an outstanding qualitative and quantitative analysis of the digital discourse in the six countries of the GCC during the diplomatic crisis, which is centred around sensitive topics such as the FIFA World Cup in 2022, the role of women, and the demarcation of borders. This author concludes that "the politicisation of the online public sphere in the region does not represent a fundamental change in the diplomacy of the region but rather a new battleground for old regional rivalries."

One of the most complete studies was carried out by (Al-Mansouri, Al-Mohannadi & Feroun, 2021) that analysed the communications on Twitter by the ministers and the ministries of Foreign Affairs (MFA) of the four GCC countries involved in the crisis during the period between the 5th of June and the 13th of September 2017. The study is limited to messages in Arabic and on Twitter, since it considers it the only social media platform used by the Gulf States for their PD activities addressed to the public in the region. These authors note that the minister and the MFA of Qatar are the second most active in the number of tweets published, and that the predominating subject is the visits and meetings with their counterparts from other countries, followed by terrorism. The focus on the latter is radically different from the rest of the countries involved in the conflict, since it always highlights Qatar's commitment to fighting international terrorism. These authors compare their conclusions with the analysis carried out by (Akdenizli, 2018) based on the tweets in English published by the government bodies in the Gulf. According to these authors, there are differences in the frequency, wording of the statements, target audience and subjects discussed.

In addition to the above-mentioned analyses, (Jones, 2017) studies the use of bots and considers it proven that 20% of the Twitter accounts posting anti-Qatar content were bots. The same author expands the scope of his research (Jones, 2019) and highlights the anti-Qatar propaganda using tweets with tags against the emir and his "regime", against Al Jazeera, and those linking Qatar with terrorist groups or with Iran. This author casts doubt on the use of Twitter "as a tool to generate valid discussions about public opinion, even though it is a very important tool for sharing news". In a similar way, (Leber & Abrahams, 2019), consider proven the manipulation of discourse on the internet and the mass production of messages using bots with the goal of earning supporters.

The second group of analysis focuses more on the topics that support *people to people* communications, among which (Allagui & Akdenizli, 2019) should be highlighted, which studies the information war and the role played by media and new technologies as tools to divide people and propagate the crisis. The authors conclude that "either voluntarily or by force, social media users backed the positions of their governments". This backing



loses significance in light of the threats that the majority of the States levied against the citizens that backed the propositions of the opposing countries.

Among this second group there is also an article published in the Singaporean newspaper *The Straits Times*⁴ about the content of the tags featured in messages that appeared during the first days of the crisis on Twitter, Facebook and Snapchat. This article is useful for reflecting on and remembering the reactions of the users supporting their countries or making references to matters such as the celebration or potential cancellation of the Football World Cup in Qatar. It is interesting to note that many expatriates originating from numerous countries, and particularly Asian countries, also participated in the discussions that took place on social media.

In spite of its limitations, peer-reviewed literature shows that the countries involved in the crisis used social media as a PD instrument. However, it seems that the messages published on social media aimed at the regional public had a purpose more related to propaganda. In the case of Qatar, it involved showing national unity and support for its leaders, refuting accusations and showing a prominent activity abroad as proof that the country was not isolated.

As for the messages published in English on social media by official government bodies or media, these reflect the official narrative, and they are an additional media channel trying to influence international public opinion. In the case of Qatar, taking into consideration the centralisation of official government communications and that most of the media is owned by the state, it can be stated that communications on social media reflect the official narrative and they are another tool of PD. As a result, faced with the technical limitations involved in analysing the contents on social media of all of Qatar's official government media and their international impact, the analysis of news published in English on the websites of government media for the international community can serve for the purposes of this analysis. This indirect way of studying both the content of the narrative as well as the priority target audience makes it possible to understand the core ideas on which the Qatari version of the crisis has revolved around, and get a perspective about the organisation of the communications used to achieve the objectives of its PD.

3. Analysis of Qatar's official government communications during the crisis

All matters related to official government communications in Qatar are handled by a government body called The Government Communications Office ([GCO](#)). This body answers to the prime minister and it is the main source of official government news. As a guide for this study, the timeline of the crisis that appears on the website of the GCO has been followed, which reflects the most significant events for Qatar. Similarly, the news published in English by official government media have been used, mainly Al Jazeera, but also by the MFA and the QNA. In addition, evidence of the impact that some of these news had on international media and institutions was sought.

⁴ <https://www.straitstimes.com/world/middle-east/qatar-crisis-spills-onto-social-media>.



This section is divided into three blocks. The first one details Qatar's version of what transpired before the official announcement of the rupture of diplomatic relations, and it is obviously a retrospective view of events. The second one focuses on presenting the relevant facts to Qatar and that have an international impact when it comes to seeking support. This section has a subsection dedicated to U.S. related news and another subsection making reference to sharing news related to Kuwait and Turkey. The conclusion of the analysis is detailed in a third section presenting how the end of the diplomatic crisis was communicated.

3.1. Presenting the relevant facts before the crisis

The official timeline of the GCO presents three relevant facts that took place before the crisis. The first one is the publication of an article in a U.S. media outlet, which is not mentioned by name, on the 20th of April 2017. According to the GCO, it is the first in a series of thirteen articles with unfounded accusations aimed at smearing the reputation of Qatar in the U.S.

The second one is the summit in Riyadh between the U.S. and the countries of the Muslim World League, in which Qatar commits to fight terrorism together with the countries of the GCC. In addition, Al Jazeera⁵ highlights in its chronicle of the summit the differences between the respectful speech about Islam given by Trump at the summit and the measures taken by his Administration "against several Muslim majority nations and his previous comments about Islam". Moreover, it highlights the signature during the summit of the biggest arm sales contract in the history of the U.S., which was agreed with Saudi Arabia.

The third relevant fact was the hacking of QNA's web and the social media accounts of other governmental institutions on the 24th of May 2017⁶. One year later, Al Jazeera⁷ reported that the attack was carried out by a "pirate cell" working from inside a Saudi ministry. These attacks consisted of publishing false statements attributed to the emir or the QNA on social media in order to start a smear campaign that would reach its highest point during the diplomatic crisis of the 5th of June. It also highlights that before and after the day of the rupture of diplomatic relations, Saudi Arabia and its allies created 187 Twitter accounts.

3.2. Narrative of the facts relevant to Qatar during the crisis and their international impact

Once the crisis was declared, the measures of the blockade began to be enforced. Thus, on the 19th of June 2017, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the UAE ordered their citizens residing in Qatar to immediately return to their countries of origin and banned any Qatari citizens from entering or remaining in their territories. That same day, Qatar denounced

⁵ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/5/21/riyadh-summit-discusses-ways-of-rooting-out-terrorism>,

⁶ Days later, an article published in the U.S. press did not give credence to the statements attributed to the emir of Qatar nor to a fake interview of the QNA declaring that, among other things, Iran was the great stabilising power in the region: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/06/01/whats-going-on-with-qatar/>

⁷ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/6/4/qatar-state-news-agencys-hacking-linked-to-riyadh>.



these unilateral measures before the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights of the UN⁸ For the GCO, these measures represented a violation of fundamental rights since they “divide families, interrupt studies or force businesses to close”⁹.

On the 8th of January 2018, Al Jazeera¹⁰ shared the news that a report of the UN concluded that the blockade was illegal. This report was based on the conclusions of a representative of the High Commissioner for Human Rights of the UN, who travelled to Qatar in November 2017. The statement of Ali bin Smaikh al Marri, chairman of the Committee for Human Rights of Qatar, is transcribed in the same news story, highlighting that “the blockade not only seriously affects diplomatic relations and it is not only an economic boycott, but its measures are also unilateral, abusive and arbitrary, and they affect Qatari and expatriate citizens.”

This news story was widely shared in numerous international media and institutions throughout 2018. The reaction of the U.S. media is detailed in point 3.2.1. In turn, Amnesty International¹¹ condemned the damage caused to thousands of people in the Gulf. Additionally, it rejected the coercion exerted on the citizens of the States imposing the blockade, which included threats of prison sentences to anyone who expressed sympathy for Qatar and to those who had not left the country. The Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor also published a report denouncing the measures of the blockade as “a flagrant violation of human rights” (Euro-Med Monitor, 2018).

Concurrently, Qatar began legal actions via government channels to denounce that the blockade breach international agreements related to human rights or free commerce. Each one of these complaints was echoed in mainstream and social media. Table 1 shows the most significant requests before international bodies.

One of the most remarkable cases that was taken before the WTO was the pirating of BeIN Sports, a company with the rights to broadcast Premier League matches in the Middle East and North Africa. Al Jazeera¹² reported that the hack was carried out in an operation called “beoutQ”. The WTO created a panel to investigate the complaint. Another interesting case was Qatar Airways’ request of international arbitration against the four states of the blockade on the 22nd of July 2020. It claimed \$5 billion in damages for the closure of airspaces and the cost overrun of having to trace longer routes.

Table 1. Qatar's requests before international bodies

Action	Date	Resolution	Date
Qatar requests starting proceedings against Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the UAE and Egypt before the ICAO for the blockade of airspace, which infringes on article 84 of the International Convention of Civil Aviation.	30/10/17	The ICAO accepts Qatar's request.	29/06/18

⁸ The United Nations Human Rights Training and Documentation Centre for South-West Asia and the Arab Region has been headquartered in Doha since 2009.

⁹ The public body Doha International Family Institute (DIFI, 2018) published a about the consequences of the blockade on Qatari families and on other families of the Gulf.

¹⁰ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/1/8/qatar-un-report-proof-saudi-led-blockade-illegal>.

¹¹ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2018/06/one-year-since-gulf-crisis-qatar-bahrain/>.

¹² <https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2018/12/18/wto-to-investigate-saudi-rights-breach-over-qatars-bein>



Dispute with the UAE before the WTO due to the measures restricting commerce and the rights of intellectual property.	23/10/17	The Dispute Settlement Body of the WTO accepts Qatar's request and creates a panel to study the complaints. The panel is created. Qatar withdraws from the dispute	22/11/17 28/05/19 19/01/21
Qatar requests provisional measures against the UAE before the ICJ for violating the Convention against all kinds of racial discrimination.	11/06/18	The ICJ orders provisional measures. The ICJ dismisses the case	23/07/18 04/02/21
Appeals presented by Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the UAE and Egypt before the International Court of Justice against the decision of the ICAO.	04/07/18	The appeals are rejected and Qatar's right to continue its procedure before the ICAO is recognised.	14/07/20
Legal action taken against Saudi Arabia before the WTO for blocking BeIN Sports' network and pirating its contents.	10/18	The WTO accepts investigating Qatar's accusations.	18/12/18

Source: author's own research (WTO: World Trade Organization. ICAO: International Civil Aviation Organization. ICJ: International Court of Justice).

3.2.1 Relevant news for Qatar related to the United States

Trump's initial show of support for the countries promoting the blockade seemed to affect bilateral relations. In the days after the announcement of the diplomatic rupture, some U.S. media reported on the humanitarian tragedy caused by the blockade and presented the arguments put forth by Qatar's official government communications detailed on section 3.2. An article in *The Washington Post*¹³ described the panic felt by all the residents in Qatar, not only Qatari nationals, at the possibility of running out of supplies, and detailed specific cases of people affected. *Los Angeles Times*¹⁴ also highlighted the situation of the citizens of the four countries of the Gulf affected by these measures and mentioned the reactions of the international bodies.

There are three facts in relation to the U.S. that are mentioned in the timeline of the GCO. The first one is the signature of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on the 11th of July to cooperate against international terrorism and its financing, which the MFA reports in detail. Other news published in the two months following the announcing of the blockade cast doubts on whether bilateral relations had been affected¹⁵.

The second milestone highlighted by the GCO was the inaugural United States-Qatar Strategic Dialogue meeting, held on the 30th of January 2018. This was interpreted as a new mechanism for strengthening bilateral relations. Some experts believe that this meeting was the first message sent to the boycotting countries that their goal of isolating Qatar had failed (Kabalan, 2018)¹⁶.

¹³ https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/qatari-capital-brims-with-fear-uncertainty-and-resilience-as-arab-crisis-intensifies/2017/06/10/bf1b2060-4d4b-11e7-987c-42ab5745db2e_story.html

¹⁴ <https://www.latimes.com/world/middleeast/la-fg-qatar-blockade-20170619-story.html>.

¹⁵ On the 24th of July works began to expand the Al Udeid military base hosting 11,000 American troops, and on the 2nd of August the Minister of Defence of Qatar visited the U.S.

¹⁶ http://arabcenterdc.org/policy_analyses/the-us-qatar-strategic-dialogue-messages-and-implications/.



The third fact in the Qatari timeline took place in Washington when the emir of Qatar was welcomed by Trump on the 10th of April 2018. It appeared that Trump's position was now "more impartial and supportive of finding a solution to the crisis" in the Gulf (Kabalan, 2018). The subsequent meetings of the Strategic Dialogue on the 13th of January 2019 and the 18th of September 2020 strengthened bilateral relations and supported Qatar's good reputation in the international sphere.

3.2.2 Narratives affecting third countries

This section makes reference to two countries that are key for Qatar's cause for very different reasons, though there are no news stories that made reference to them in the GCO's timeline. Kuwait was mentioned especially in communications by government bodies such as the MFA in matters related to the U.S. The news of the signature of the MoU on the 11th of July 2017 also confirmed Qatar's support for Kuwait's role as mediator. From that moment on, each news story asserting Qatar's bilateral relations with the U.S. included a reference to Kuwait's mediation in solving the crisis via diplomatic means. Al Jazeera also recognised Kuwait's role as mediator¹⁷.

As for Turkey, in the first weeks of the blockade the government media highlighted its military support and provision of supplies. One year after the crisis, Al Jazeera published a long article detailing that bilateral relations had been strengthened¹⁸. Qatar is now the second biggest investor in Turkey, has backed the Turkish currency when it fell against the dollar, and it is planning to expand its investments. Turkish companies increased their exports to Qatar and were given contracts for projects related to the FIFA World Cup for over \$11 billion. An outside observer can see that one of the "bothersome" alliances for the blockading countries has strengthened its ties with Qatar across every field. Government media also covered the official visits made by the emir and the Turkish president in the last two years.

3.3. Presenting the reconciliation

The GCO featured a single piece of information about the summit of the GCC at Al-Ula¹⁹. The content was quite neutral in tone and highlighted that the goals of the summit were promoting good-neighbourliness, "emphasising the illegality of infringing on the sovereignty of any of the member states", in addition to not interfering in their internal affairs. Al Jazeera did not publish too many news stories either about the end of the blockade, and the matter was treated, indirectly, through the opinions of experts. An example is (Aboueldahab, 2021)²⁰, who highlighted that in order to move on, the Gulf region must recognise the social and political damage caused because "the fissures in the Gulf social fabric cannot be reverted nor forgotten so easily." This expert suggested putting into place a process of transitional justice²¹.

¹⁷ Particularly in the news story about the death of the emir of Kuwait. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/9/29/sheikh-sabah-the-gcc-has-lost-his-voice-of>.

¹⁸ <https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2018/8/16/turkey-and-qatar-behind-the-strategic-alliance>.

¹⁹ <https://www.gco.gov.qa/en/top-news/41st-gcc-summit-al-ula/>.

²⁰ <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/1/20/mending-the-gulf-rift-calls-for-reconciliation>.

²¹ This process includes reparations, compensations, researching and unearthing the truth about what took place, applying criminal liabilities among other measures.



Therefore, reconciliation must go beyond merely restoring diplomatic relations and opening the borders. Al Jazeera's²² web page published a podcast summarising the consequences of the blockade for the population of the Gulf and the economic burden it has entailed. It also highlighted how the blockade strengthened Qatar's cooperation with Iran and Turkey. This piece of media does not omit a single offence, and neither does it leave any sensitive topic aside.

4. Outcomes

The analysis of the previous section shows that the narrative constructed by Qatar to explain the facts that took place before the diplomatic rupture is based on the idea that it was "a plot orchestrated wilfully and with the clear intention of damage Qatar's image". This plot involved all kinds of dishonest actions such as the hacking of government websites and the spread of fake news promoting the idea that Qatar supports international terrorism.

As for the narrative used during the crisis, it was based on two core ideas that try to prove that Qatar was treated unfairly and that it was a victim of the quartet:

1. The blockade is a violation of the fundamental rights and the security of the population residing in the four Gulf countries involved.
2. Qatar is a loyal ally of the U.S and has strengthened its cooperation with it in order to maintain the stability in the region and fight against terrorism.

The first core idea is aimed at the international community and it has two ideas that derive from it. The first one is that the blockade is illegal because it violates the fundamental rights of the Qatari people and the citizens of the other three countries of the GCC implicated in the conflict, as well as those of expatriates. Qatar defends before the international community the rights of the people that were forced to leave their place of residency. The defence of the expatriates with lower incomes received some coverage in Asian media, especially at the beginning of the blockade, since it put at risk even their food security. The second idea is related to the complaint before international bodies about the breach of international agreements by the countries of the blockade, which affect Qatari companies. The underlying idea is that Qatar respects international agreements and takes the international institutions it belongs to seriously.

The second core idea aims to show that bilateral relations are still alive in spite of the crisis. Qatar hopes to earn the sympathy of part of the U.S. public opinion and show the different attitudes of their Administrations regarding the conflict. The dichotomy between the U.S. Ministry of Defence and Trump's attitude until September 2018 is very remarkable. From that date on, the U.S. supported the diplomatic solution and Kuwait's mediation.

²² <https://www.aljazeera.com/podcasts/2021/1/13/why-the-blockade-against-qatar-is-ending-now>.



5. Conclusions

In light of the facts, it seems evident that the Qatari PD met its objective of putting an end to the blockade without meeting the demands and achieved it through diplomatic means.

Qatar has centralised the construction of its narratives. This has facilitated spreading the message through official government channel, both in traditional and social media.

Qatar has created strong narratives that have convinced their target audiences. These were international institutions and the U.S. public opinion.

It has earned credibility thanks to its arguments and a stance that was both firm yet always open to dialogue, without making unwarranted retaliations. Using international institutions to solve its problems in the framework of international legality has given Qatar an image of transparency and legality.

This smart strategy has allowed Qatar to convince the reluctant Trump Administration and show the world that the accusations that gave rise to the blockade were part of a smear campaign. Qatar has been the champion of *fair play* while subtly showing, at the same time, that it has found other alternatives for ensuring its security across every field. After many of the arguments of its opponents have fallen apart, the end of the blockade represents the beginning of a new stage in the relations of the GCC.

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INFORMATION VERIFICATION DURING COVID-19. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS IN SOUTHERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

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Abstract

Disinformation poses a challenge for democracies, especially in exceptional periods such as electoral processes but, above all, as a consequence of a global health crisis with no clear end date. The objective of this research is to analyse the type of hoaxes identified during the COVID-19 pandemic in southern European countries (Portugal, Spain, Italy and Greece). To this effect, 936 pieces of disinformation reported by the main verification organizations in those countries were examined between February and August 2020: *Observador* and *Polígrafo* (Portugal), *Newtral*, *Maldita* and *EFE verifica* (Spain) *Facta*, *Open*, *Effecinque* and *Pagella Política* (Italy) and *Ellinika Hoaxes* (Greece). As a final conclusion, the presence or absence of a common pattern in the four countries is examined based on the topic of the hoaxes, their distribution channels and how viral they spread abroad. Two axes of disinformation were established: one health-preventive and the other in terms of political polarization.

Keywords

Disinformation, fact-checking, COVID-19, polarization, Europe.

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INFORMATION VERIFICATION DURING COVID-19. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS IN SOUTHERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES¹

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1. Introduction²

The crisis arising from COVID-19 has been a challenge health wise, and also regarding economic and social terms and management of (dis)information. The objective of this work is to analyse the hoaxes identified during the first six months of the pandemic in southern European countries (Portugal, Spain, Italy and Greece). The selection of these countries was due to the fact that they share the same relationship pattern between the political and media systems (Hallin and Mancini, 2004; Brüggemann *et al.*, 2014; Büchel *et al.* 2016).

In this regard, authors such as Humprecht point out that these types of countries stand out due to their comparatively high levels of social polarization, populist communication and high use of social networks for news consumption. Similarly, countries in this group tend to have lower levels of trust in the media (Humprecht *et al.*, 2019).

In Portugal, the first cases were registered on 2 March 2020. Two weeks later, the government closed the border with Spain and decreed a state of emergency (between 17 and 18 March). In Spain, the first case was reported on 31 January. On 12 February, the Mobile World Congress in Barcelona was cancelled and a month later, on 12 March, the Government announced the first measures to stop the pandemic.

On 14 March, the state of alarm was declared alongside the lockdown of the population. In Greece, the first case was registered on 24 February, and the closure was decreed on 23 March. Italy was the first European country hit by COVID-19. The first cases were registered on 30 January 2020. On 8 March, the quarantine was extended to cover the

¹ Article translated by Carolina Peralta.

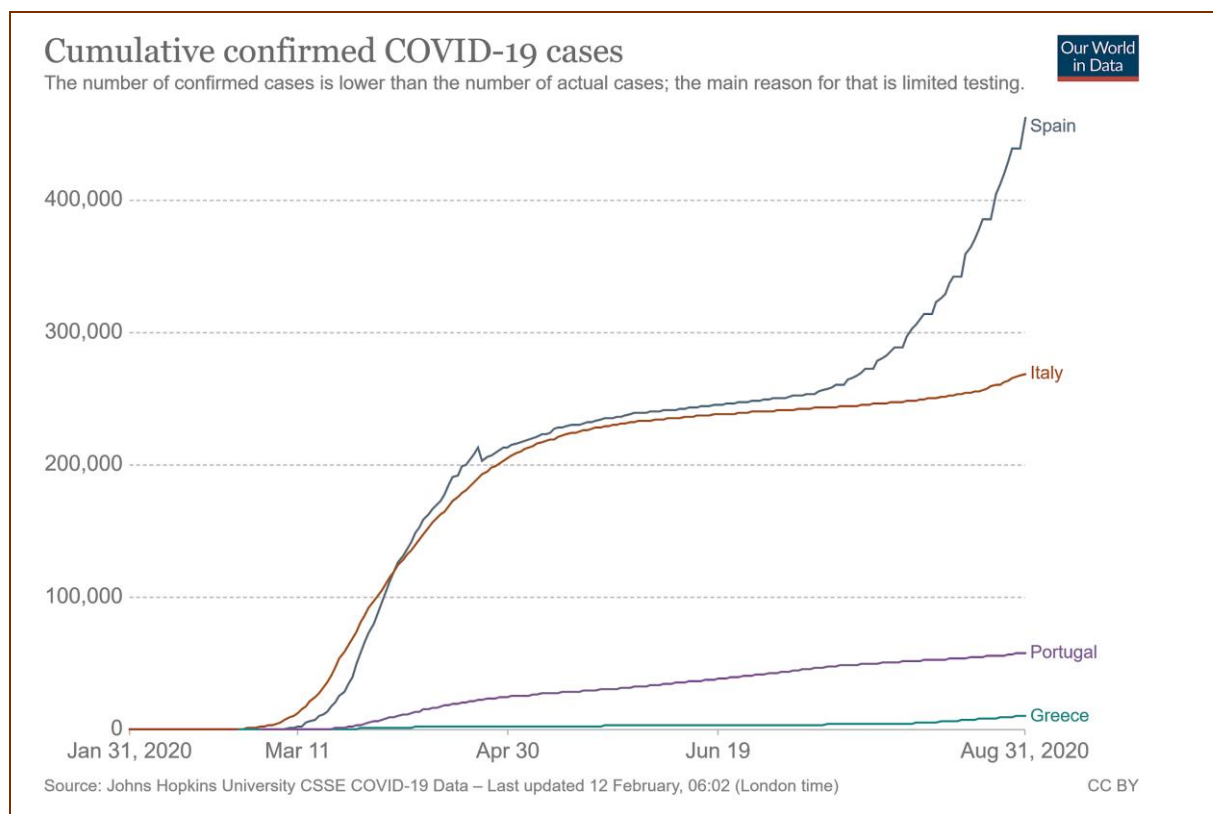
² This work has been carried out thanks to a Research Grant signed with The Poynter Institute for Media Studies ("Poynter"). By accessing the #Coronavirusfacts database of the International Factchecking Network (IFCN), we have been able to carry out this comparative study.



entire Lombardy region, in addition to 14 northern Italian provinces (Peña-Ascacibar *et al.*, 2021).

On 31 August 2020, 462,858 cases were confirmed in Spain, 10,317 in Greece, 269,214 in Italy and 58,012 in Portugal.

Graph 1. "Cumulative confirmed COVID-19 cases"



Source: Our World Data.

Infodemic (Nielsen *et al.*, 2020), tsunami of misinformation or information saturation (Tangcharoensathien *et al.*, 2020) are some of the concepts and problems that were linked to media and information consumption during the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic (Brennen *et al.*, 2020; Papapicco, 2020). From an information point of view, these studies have had an impact on the relationship between risk communication and communicating risk (Lozano, 2008), but also on information saturation or fatigue.

As indicated by the WHO, such fatigue can be described as: "the lack of motivation to follow the recommended protective behaviours that appears gradually over time and is affected by various emotions, experiences and perceptions, as well as by the social, cultural, structural and legislative context".³

³ See: <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/335820/WHO-EURO-2020-1160-40906-55390-eng.pdf>



It is not new that, in periods of high information intensity and unforeseen events of indeterminate duration, citizens urgently need to expand their data and obtain details about the events narrated in the news. What is new is that social networks, instant messaging systems and the use of political actors who use lies as tactic and deception as a strategy have developed an information ecosystem that is often off the radar of the media and complementary to the latter as manager and producer of information (Sánchez-Duarte and Magallón-Rosa, 2020a, López-Pan and Rodríguez-Rodríguez, 2020, Vizoso & Vázquez-Herrero, 2019).

In this sense, the approach to the phenomenon of disinformation (Wardle and Derakshan, 2017) has become increasingly specialized and global, compared to the first research that sought to take a still photograph of a historical event in permanent motion. Claire Wardle and Hossein Derakhshan published a report in September (2017, 5) entitled *The Information Disorder: Towards an Interdisciplinary Framework for Research and Policy Making*, in which they stated:

We refrain from using the term 'fake news', for two reasons. First of all, it is woefully inadequate to describe the complex phenomenon of information pollution. The term has also begun to be appropriated by politicians around the world to describe news organisations whose coverage they find disagreeable. In this way, it is becoming the mechanism by which the powerful can clamp down, restrict, undermine and circumvent the free press.

From this point of view, it is necessary to point out that the disinformation cycle is adaptive and linked to eventual and opportunistic niches based on confusion, media deficiencies and information saturation.

Beyond the lack of coordination between administrations, the rise of conspiracy theories (Uscinski *et al.*, 2020) and the development of anti-vaccine campaigns, perhaps the most relevant fact has been that the pandemic has acted as a catalyst for polarization in many countries. In this sense, the first research works are showing how belonging and affinity to certain political options is related to having a position in favour or against COVID-19 vaccination. At the same time, the first works that link polarization, disinformation and the predisposition to vaccinate have been published (Loomba *et al.*, 2021).

According to Brennen's work (2020), disinformation from well-known promoters such as politicians, celebrities, and other prominent public figures accounted for 20 percent of his analysis but made-up 69 percent of total social media interactions. Therefore, and despite the initial anonymity and the impossibility of often identifying the origin of hoaxes, their extreme viral spread is caused by recognized promoters who consciously or unconsciously spread the messages.

Authors such as Sánchez-Duarte and Magallón-Rosa (2020b) established a typology of hoaxes that circulated in the first months of the pandemic based on four categories: infections, status and evolution of the pandemic; forms of prevention and cures; measures (public and private) adopted in the fight against the pandemic and to alleviate its effects and others.



Table 1. Typology of hoaxes.

Typology of hoaxes	Examples
Contagion	Condition and evolution of those infected, numbers, contagion areas, specific situations of localities with contagious sources, evolution of the disease, situations of chaos, characteristics and symptoms.
Prevention	Forms and methods of prevention, cures, drugs, etc.
Measures (public and private) adopted in the fight against the pandemic and to mitigate its effects	Closure of spaces, control and restriction measures, orders by government and political parties, prohibitions, presence of the army, actions taken by companies, etc.
Other	Issues related to security (burglaries, computer security, scams (phishing)), theories about the origin of the virus, predictions about the arrival of the pandemic, information on specific population groups, etc.

Source: Sánchez-Duarte and Magallón-Rosa (2020b).

They also analysed the origin and distribution channels of the hoaxes (social networks, instant messaging or the media), the intent of the hoax (deny or expand information), their possible viral spread in other countries and whether it was possible to identify the promoters of the hoaxes.

From this point of view, a study on southern European countries is essential for two reasons. In the first place, because of the predominance of studies on Anglo-Saxon countries compared to other languages and cultures and because of the traditional polarized nature of southern European countries.

Regarding the information gap related to studies on disinformation, it should be noted that the work by Seo and Faris (2021) highlights that 62.8% of the academic works published between January 2015 and October 2020 were carried out with data from the US. In quantitative terms, computational social science methods, experiments, and surveys were the dominant approaches. The experiments accounted for 23.8% of the articles analysed, followed by computational social science methods (18.1%), surveys (15.2%), interviews or focus groups (14.3%), human-based or textual analysis coded content analysis (11.4%) and meta-analysis or secondary data analysis (9.5%). Other methods (7.7%) included image analysis, ethnography, and case studies. Thus, the combination of methodologies for the analysis and study of fact-checking (López *et al.*, 2020; Freiling *et al.*, 2020), disinformation (Aguado and Bernaola, 2020; Apuke and Omar, 2020) and regional characteristics and individuals from each country are essential to conduct a comparative analysis capable of establishing analogies, relationships and, of course, knowledge.



2. Method

This research is focused on describing the disinformation identified by the verification organizations of Portugal, Spain, Italy and Greece in the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic (March- August 2020).

The choice of these countries is justified because since the beginning of the health crisis, and with different intensities depending on the waves of contagion:

- 1) They share a region (southern Europe)
- 2) They share the relationship model of the political and media systems (Hallin and Mancini, 2004)
- 3) They present different levels of incidence of the pandemic. This internal divergence between the most affected (Spain and Italy) and the least (Portugal and Greece) allows us to identify, in a descriptive way, the extent to which disinformation had greater impact in situations and geographical contexts with more accentuated crises.

For the analysis, the disinformation pieces reported by fact-checking organizations from these countries to the verification platform of the International Fact Checking Network (IFCN)⁴ were selected.

This network, dependent on the Poynter Institute, was created in 2015 with the aim of "bringing together data verification initiatives by promoting and exchanging good practices". During the COVID-19 pandemic, the IFCN launched the #CoronavirusFacts Alliance initiative, bringing together more than 100 verifiers from around the world to "share, translate and publish" new coronavirus data"⁵.

In the same way, this alliance has made it possible to monitor in real time and simultaneously - in very different countries and completely antagonistic information cultures - how hoaxes, rumours, erroneous information, propaganda or false information circulated. It also enabled analysing in a much more complete way how the narratives circulated disinformation worldwide (Marin, 2020) and adapted to national, cultural and local contexts (Naeem and Bhatti, 2020; Salaverria *et al.*, 2020).

Based on the IFCN database, 936 pieces of disinformation reported by the main verification organizations in Portugal, Spain, Italy and Greece were selected: *Observador*, *Polígrafo*, *Newtral*, *Maldita*, *Open*, *Effecinque*, *Facta*, *Pagella Política* and *Ellinika Hoaxes*. The number of hoaxes in each of the countries was distributed as follows:

⁴ See: <https://www.poynter.org/ifcn/> [Accessed on 09/02/2021]

⁵ See: <https://www.poynter.org/coronavirusfactsalliance/> [Accessed on 09/02/2021]



Table 2: Number of pieces of disinformation in Portugal, Spain, Italy and Greece between March and August 2020

Country	Number of pieces of disinformation
Portugal	88
Spain	574
Italy	209
Greece	65
Total	936

Source: International Fact Checking Network.

After being identified, these pieces of disinformation formed a data matrix organized according to the following variables:

- Evolution by months: hoaxes in the four countries (between March and August).
- Subject categories: authorities (information related to political or government actions), causes, symptoms and cures (information focused on health aspects), conspiracy theories (hoaxes that addressed the origin of the pandemic and its management based on conspiracy theories), propagation (evolution in regions, cities, expansion by geographical areas, etc.) and others (category with diverse and personalized disinformation in each of the countries in the presence of celebrities, questions about security, etc.).
- Qualification of disinformation: false (complete false disinformation) or misleading (disinformation with aspects that did not conform to reality or half-truths).
- Degree of viral spread in other countries: disinformation replicated or not in other countries.

Based on these variables, a descriptive analysis of the disinformation identified in the four countries was carried out. Although this technique has certain limits, it is relevant when exploring trends and laying the groundwork for future research.

3. Results

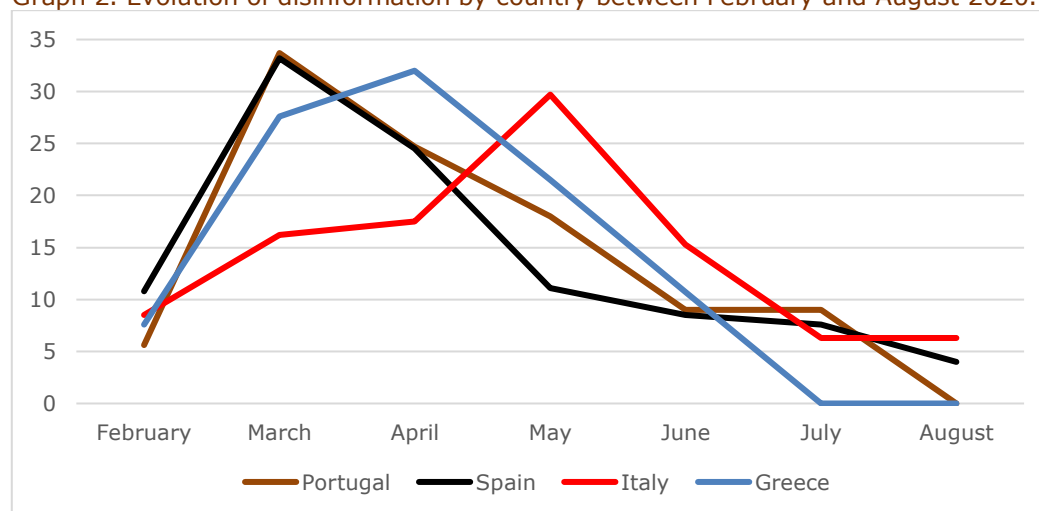
From the comparative analysis presented here, we can establish some clear results and learnings. The months of March and April were the most active from the point of view of disinformation, and consequently, of the verifications made by the fact-checkers.

In Portugal, they account for 58.4% of verifications, in Spain 57.7%, in Greece 59.6% and the only exception is Italy where only 33.7% of verifications were recorded.

In Italy, the month of May stood out, when 29.7% of circulating hoaxes were identified.



Graph 2. Evolution of disinformation by country between February and August 2020.



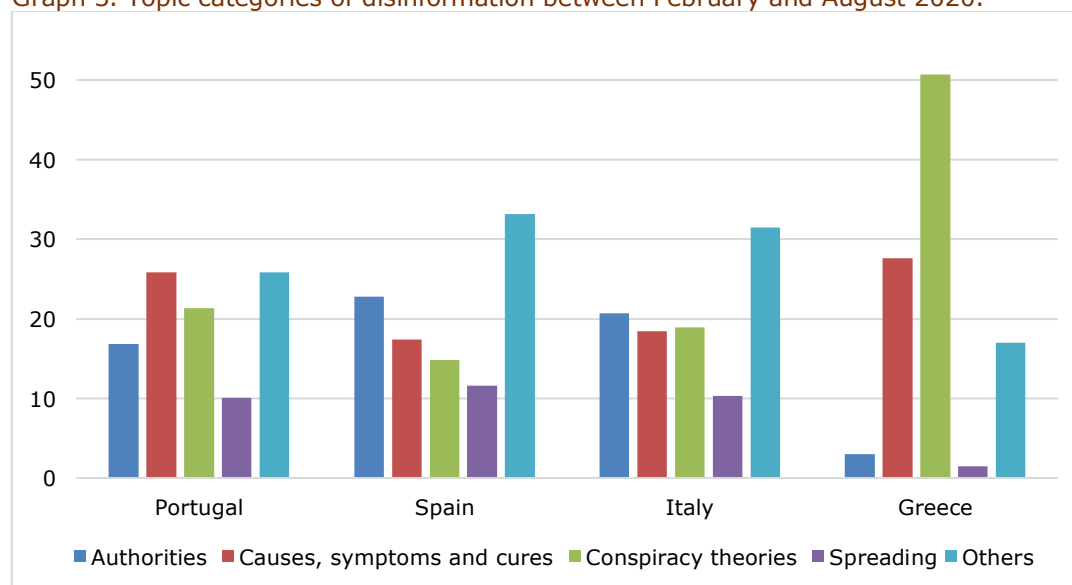
Source: International Fact Checking Network.

The second objective was to analyse the preferred topics during the period in question. From the point of view of the topic categories of disinformation, those related to causes, symptoms and cures were the most frequent in general terms. In Greece they represent 27.6% and in Portugal 25.8%.

For their part, verifications related to authorities were the most frequent in Spain and Italy, coinciding with the fact that they were the most polarized countries during the pandemic.

In the case of Greece, a particularity is also identified that should be examined in subsequent studies. Up to 50.7% of the hoaxes were related to conspiracy theories.

Graph 3. Topic categories of disinformation between February and August 2020.

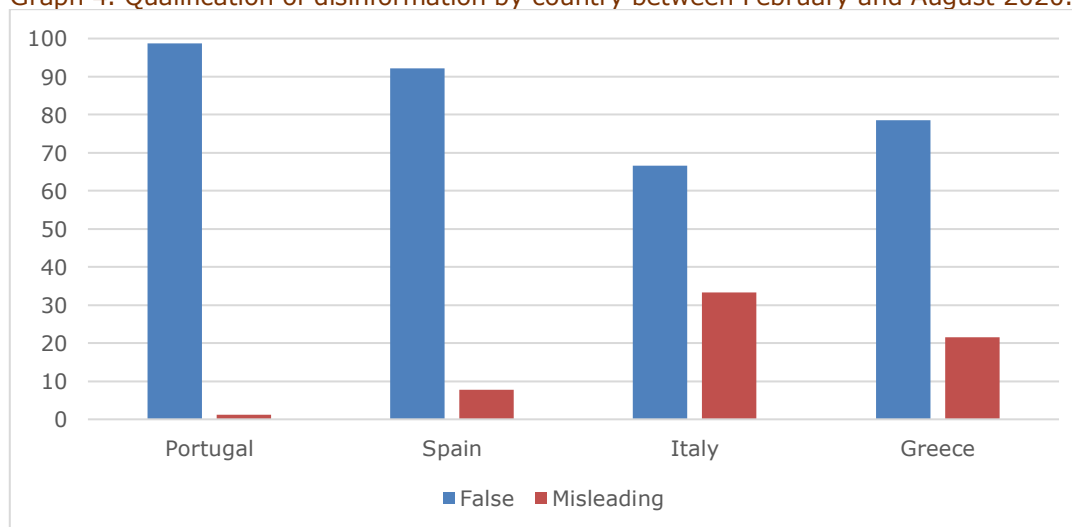


Source: International Fact Checking Network.



Another element of analysis was the rating, by fact-checkers, of the verified content: the options could be divided into false or misleading. In Portugal and Spain, more than 90% were identified as false compared to Greece and Italy, where this type of disinformation accounted for 78.5 and 66.6%, respectively.

Graph 4. Qualification of disinformation by country between February and August 2020.



Source: International Fact Checking Network.

From the point of view of the viral spread of hoaxes in other countries, Spain clearly stood out with 17.7% of hoaxes and Italy with 5%. Neither Greece nor Portugal identified patterns of disinformation replicated in other countries.

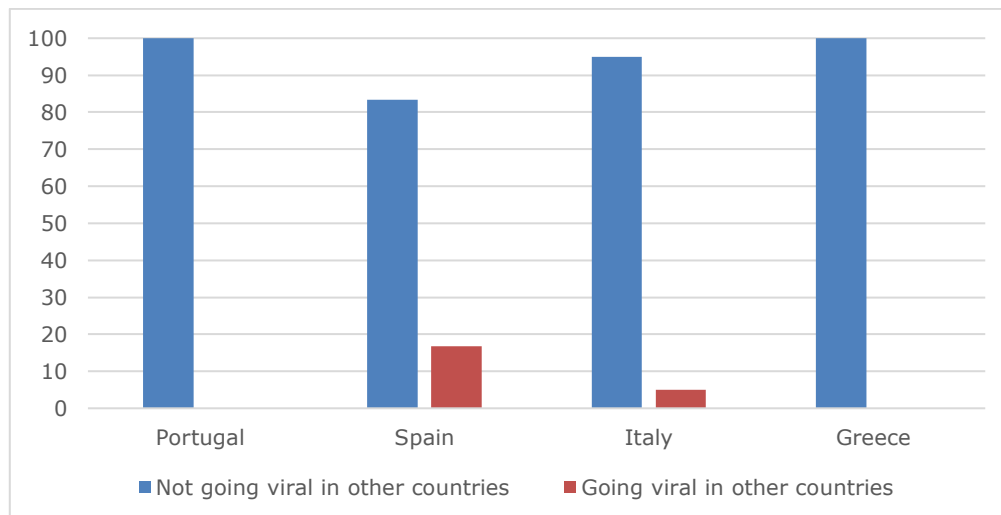
Thus, Spain comes across as an exporter of hoaxes. At first this could be assumed to be because its hoaxes are replicated in South America. However, their disinformation (in terms of format, content, etc.) reached the whole world: China, the US, etc.

In this regard, it would be interesting to continue delving into this type of analysis to see which categories, formats and narratives are more likely to be exported.

On the other hand, it is important to note that 34% of the hoaxes denied by all fact-checkers in these four countries were refuted by *Maldita* and 20% by *Newtral. Facta* in Italy with 12.7% and *Elinika Hoaxes* in Greece with 6.8% ranked third and fourth in quantitative terms. This also indicates the professional attitude of these fact-checkers within IFCN and their relevance in giving early warnings of disinformation.



Graph 5. Viral spread of disinformation abroad by country between February and August 2020



Sources: International Fact Checking Network.

4. Conclusions and discussion

The normalization of disinformation processes has been one of the most significant lessons from this pandemic. During the first months, the disinformation focused on 3 main themes from a temporal point of view: the forms of contagion and cure of the virus, the opening measures and political management of the different countries and the issue of vaccines.

Thus, months after the pandemic and disinformation set in permanently - although with different intensities- throughout the world, the different academic works continue to analyse and create theories, correlations, typologies and topics of disinformation related to COVID-19.

Our work confirms previous studies: the greater the information intensity, the greater the disinformation (Paniagua *et al.*, 2020). March was the month with the highest number of hoaxes and the information that reached fact-checking organizations was mostly false.

In this context, Spain stands out, with 61.32% of hoaxes that circulated in these countries that were verified by fact-checkers. In second place comes, Italy with 22.32% of disinformation, Portugal with 9.4% and Greece with 6.94%.

In this regard, and as a first conclusion, it should be noted that during the first 6 months of the pandemic, 3 out of 5 hoaxes that were denied by the fact-checkers of these four European countries were verified by Spanish fact-checkers. According to First Draft, 17.3% of the disinformation analysed during the first six months of 2020 related to the pandemic was in Spanish, compared to 8.8% in Portuguese.

From this perspective, those countries with the highest incidence, and also the largest in terms of territory and population, such as Spain and Italy, were the ones that had to deny most of the hoaxes.



Second, March and April were the most active months from the point of view of disinformation. About 3 out of 5 hoaxes were refuted in Portugal, Spain and Greece during these two months.

Third, there are two axes when identifying the topic categories of disinformation: those related to causes, symptoms and cures were the most frequent in Greece and Portugal. Those related to authorities were the most frequent in Spain and Italy, which were more polarized during the pandemic. Thus, we can highlight a health-preventive axis and another polarized political axis.

In the case of Greece, it is important to note that up to 50.7% of the hoaxes were related to conspiracy theories.

Fourth, the qualification of the denials by fact-checkers stands out, with the options being divided between false or misleading. In Portugal and Spain, more than 90% were identified as false compared to Greece and Italy, where this type of disinformation reached 78.5% and 66.6%, respectively. In this regard, it would be interesting to analyse in detail the internal verification dynamics of fact-checkers in these countries to identify the fact-checking cultures of this type of organization.

Fifth, and from the point of view of the viral spread of hoaxes in other countries, Spain clearly stands out with 17.7% of hoaxes, and Italy with 5%. Neither Greece nor Portugal had patterns of disinformation replicated in other countries.

We consider that there are two factors that helped Spain exporting hoaxes. On the one hand, the language makes it possible to export hoaxes to Latin America and, on the other hand, the importance of *Maldita*, and to a lesser extent *Newtral*, as fact-checkers when it comes to refuting hoaxes at global level.

Based on these results, it could be interesting to continue delving into these typologies to see which categories, formats and narratives are most likely to be exported.

Sixth, we should assess these data with caution as they can measure the effectiveness of verification partnerships rather than the impact of hoax dynamics in different countries. In this regard, it is important to note that 34.5% of the hoaxes refuted by all fact-checkers in these four countries were disproved by *Maldita* and 20% by *Newtral*, which indicates the relevance of these two verifiers at European level but also the competition dynamics between them.

In conclusion, it should be noted that in Spain there has been a much higher number of hoaxes reproduced than in other countries, because it is a country with many cultures and it is a highly politicized country.

The data also indicates the professional stance of Spanish fact-checkers within IFCN to place themselves as references that send early warnings of disinformation to the rest of the organizations.



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THE COVID-19 VACCINATION AGENDA. EUROPEAN AND PORTUGUESE OFFICIAL SOURCES' PERFORMANCE IN FACEBOOK, INSTAGRAM, TWITTER AND LINKEDIN

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Abstract

The authorization for the vaccine against Covid-19 and the beginning of the vaccination in the European Union represent a very singular moment in several dimensions, including strategic communication. In the context of a pandemic and an infodemic - an epidemic also recognized by the World Health Organization (WHO) characterized by the abnormal increase of information on a given subject carrying the risk of severe disinformation phenomena - the need for authorities (both Portuguese and European) to convey accurate information and to maintain a communicative proximity is crucial. In these circumstances, online social networks represent ineluctable channels to deliver official information. In this article, we analyze how the European Commission, the European Medicines Agency (EMA), the WHO Regional Office for Europe, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, the Representation of the European Commission in Portugal, the Portuguese Government, the Portuguese Directorate-General of Health, and the Portuguese National Health Service have used Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn to communicate the vaccination during one month since the EMA's authorization (21st December 2020). All posts from the referred sources on the four social networks (719 occurrences) were collected and content analysis methods were then applied. The results show that both Portuguese and European official sources use social media to convey authoritative information about the vaccination against Covid-19: more than one third of the posts analyzed link to institutional websites and more than half the publications have an informative framing. On the other hand, the analyze suggests that there is a strong political capitalization of the *momentum* of hope. This exploratory study case shows the importance of social media analysis in the context of the Covid-19

Keywords

Covid-19; Vaccination; social media; Disinformation; European Union

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THE COVID-19 VACCINATION AGENDA. EUROPEAN AND PORTUGUESE OFFICIAL SOURCES' PERFORMANCE IN FACEBOOK, INSTAGRAM, TWITTER AND LINKEDIN¹

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1. Introduction

It was quite surprising when European Commissioner Thierry Breton, in May 2020, speaking on a debate promoted by the Regulation Center in Europe, said that disinformation was "the disease of the century". In the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, the statement was likely to sound misfit, to say the least. Nevertheless, we can be quite sure that we are globally dealing with a *syndemic*, a concept developed by Merrill Singer (2009) that refers to complex epidemics implying disease interactions. Along with and fueled by Covid-19, an infodemic has developed worldwide. Coincidentally enough, the term "infodemic" was coined by David Rothkopf in 2003² in relation to the flood of information accompanying the SARS-CoV-1 (the "first" coronavirus) outbreak. An infodemic, as defined by the World Health Organisation (WHO), is an "overabundance of information – some accurate and some not – that occurs during an epidemic. It can lead to confusion and ultimately mistrust in governments and public health response"³. The dimension of this infodemic (and consequent syndemic, according to Santos *et al*, 2021) is amplified by the unprecedented massive use of technology and social media. Researchers (eg Cinelli *et al*, 2020) are using variants of standard epidemic models to simulate the spreading of information on social media.

In fact, one of the fundamental dimensions of this global crisis is digital dependence. Digitalization and digitization made it possible to overcome many of the restrictions the world had to face. Lockdowns obviously increased the time spent online and changed

¹ Article translated by the authors and reviewed by Carolina Peralta.

² <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/2003/05/11/when-the-buzz-bites-back/bc8cd84f-cab6-4648-bf58-0277261af6cd>, accessed January 21 2021.

³ <https://www.who.int/teams/risk-communication/infodemic-management>, accessed January 21 2021.



digital habits. According to the Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2020, and not surprisingly, the use of online and social media substantially increased in most countries. In this aspect (as in others) the Coronavirus disease is unprecedented: it is “the first pandemic in history in which technology and social media are being used on a massive scale to keep people safe, informed, productive and connected. At the same time, the technology we rely on to keep connected and informed is enabling and amplifying an infodemic that continues to undermine the global response and jeopardizes measures to control the pandemic”⁴. In early May 2020, the European Commission registered daily more than 2.700 articles with “fake news” related to Covid-19 on social networks, including false or misleading publications.

In October 2018, several platforms and companies – including Facebook, Twitter, Google and Mozilla – signed a “Code of Practice”, under the umbrella of the European Commission, that includes a wide range of commitments to fight online disinformation. Since then, the signatories have been producing periodic self-assessment reports on the measures undertaken “from transparency in political advertising to the closure of fake accounts and demonetisation of purveyors of disinformation”⁵. The declared aim is to “contribute to a fast and measurable reduction of online disinformation”⁶.

According to the report from Facebook for December 2020⁷, over 401 thousand pieces of content on Facebook and Instagram were removed for containing misinformation that might lead to imminent physical harm, such as content relating to fake preventative measures or exaggerated cure, and 40 thousand pieces of content related to Covid-19 and which violated the platform medical supply sales standards.

The war against infodemy is particularly relevant to prevent and control the effects of the syndemic. As Josep Borrell, Vice-President of the European Commission put it: “Disinformation in times of the coronavirus can kill. We have a duty to protect our citizens by making them aware of false information and expose the actors responsible for engaging in such practices”⁸.

1.1. “Information disorder”

Following UNESCO’s recommendations (Ireton and Posetti, 2018), we will not use the popular term “fake news” to refer to information disorders. Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) dismiss the utilization of this expression for two reasons: on the one hand, because it has been used by politicians to describe news coverage that they find “disagreeable”; on the other hand, because they find that it is “woefully inadequate to describe the complex phenomena of information pollution” (Wardle and Derakhshan, 2017: 5). In plus, as several other authors point out, the term “news” presumes information that is delivered after a process of professional verification – which is not the case for “fake news”. The referred authors coined the expression “information disorder”

⁴ <https://www.who.int/news/item/23-09-2020-managing-the-covid-19-infodemic-promoting-healthy-behaviours-and-mitigating-the-harm-from-misinformation-and-disinformation>, accessed January 21 2021.

⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/STATEMENT_18_5914, accessed February 3 2021.

⁶ *Idem*

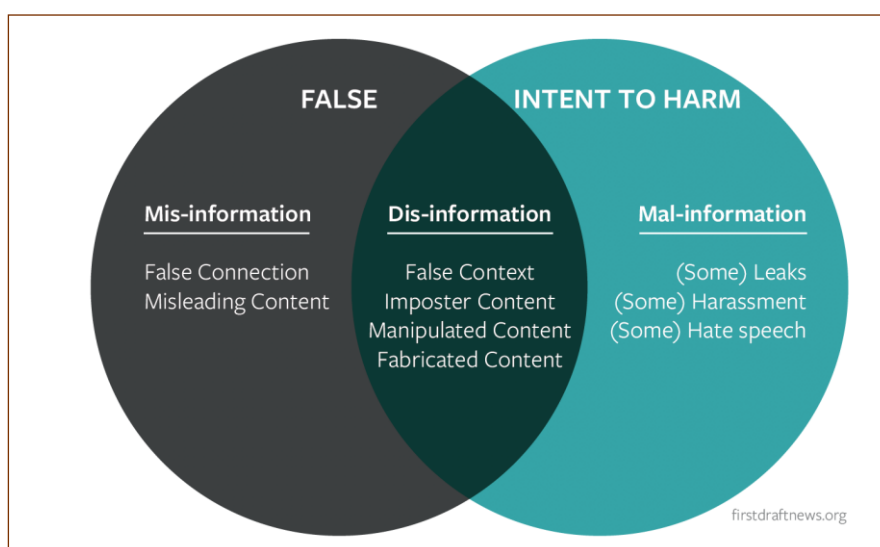
⁷ <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/latest-set-reports-and-way-forward-fighting-covid-19-disinformation-monitoring-programme>, accessed January 20 2021.

⁸ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_1006, accessed February 3 2021.



to describe a much more complex phenomenon considering two dimensions: falsity and intention. "Information disorder" includes three types of "toxic" information: misinformation, disinformation and mal-information. Misinformation and disinformation are both characterized by falseness. The difference according to Wardle and Derakhshan is that misinformation has no intention to harm while disinformation is conveyed with malicious intentions. Disinformation might include different forms of willingly forged content and context, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Concepts of misinformation, disinformation and mal-information



Source: Ireton and Posetti (2018).

Mal-information though mischieving, is based on reality. True facts or partially truthful facts are used but in most of the cases, it is not the whole story and the narrative is purposefully used to "inflict harm on a person, organisation or country" (Wardle and Derakhshan, 2017: 46).

In the Covid-19 syndemic context, the information disorder combined with the already referred unprecedented usage of social media create an humungous challenge for authorities that need to keep the population accurately informed about the virus and the disease and to disseminate important health messages. Previous epidemic crisis during the 21st century have shown how harmful and even lethal the information disorder can be (eg Oyeyemi, Gabarron, Wynn, 2014, Knobler *et al*, 2004). It adds up that given the uncertainty in much that is related to the virus and the disease, "distorted versions of concepts and scientific facts proliferate, employing extraordinarily plausible narrative and rhetorical forms that flourish in the midst of the scarcity of contents recommending biosafety practices during a pandemic" (Vasconcellos-Silva and Castiel, 2020: 2). The same authors claim that fact-twisting – emerging as misinformation, disinformation or mal-information – proliferates in the absence of the official narrative. As the WHO puts it in the context of the 1st WHO Infodemiology Conference, held on June and July 2020, "like pathogens in epidemics, misinformation spreads further and faster and adds



complexity to health emergency response”⁹. The WHO recognizes the difficulty to find trustworthy sources and reliable guidance. And “even when people have access to high-quality information, there are still barriers they must overcome to take the recommended action”¹⁰.

The usage of social media by governments and other official entities can be regarded as part of evolving practices of digital governance. As Magro (2012) underlines after analysing several case studies, using social media in disaster management is an important role for governments. According to Dadashzadeh (2010), using social media in governance might prompt many benefits such as: improving social and economic conditions of citizens, providing access, engaging, and educating all citizens, improving Government accountability by increased transparency, or improving the effectiveness of initiatives and providing citizens the opportunity to “talk back”.

1.2. Health communication: the Covid-19 vaccination campaign

The vaccination campaign against Covid-19 that started in every member state of the European Union (EU) on the 27th December 2020 represents a very singular moment in several aspects. Firstly, because of its institutional, concerted, transnational, political and scientific character as a response to “the most formidable challenge to humanity in a century” (Jeyanathan *et al*, 2020). As far as communication is concerned, a vaccination campaign occurring in the midst of the pandemic and infodemic increases drastically the need for official sources to disseminate accurate and reliable information. Vaccination is actually the theme of one of the most well-known case studies on the effects of information disorder. In 1998 Andrew Wakefield published an article in the prestigious medical journal *The Lancet* that linked mumps, measles, and rubella (MMR) vaccine and autism. The journal eventually retracted the paper in 2010 because the findings were discredited but its message had already reached many people (Arif *et al*, 2020) namely through subsequent news. Online, both information and information disorders remain (and remain). As the referred authors conclude, counteracting disinformation about vaccines by health authorities is part of the solution. Political and health authorities face many challenges as current public health communications about vaccines may not be effective and may, in fact, “increase misperceptions or reduce vaccination intention” (Nyhan *et al* 2014: 2013). The authors claim that more studies of pro-vaccine messaging are needed, and that vaccination messaging should be carefully tested before making it public.

A study conducted by Neumann-Böhme *et al* (2020) has shown the willingness of Europeans from seven countries (Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Portugal, the Netherlands, and the UK) to be vaccinated against Covid-19. The results show that 73.9% of the 7664 participants stated that they would be willing to get vaccinated. The willingness ranged from 62% in France to approximately 80% in Denmark and the UK. Only 7.2% stated that they do not want to get vaccinated. France, Portugal and Germany present the highest rate of respondents that stated their uncertainty towards the vaccine.

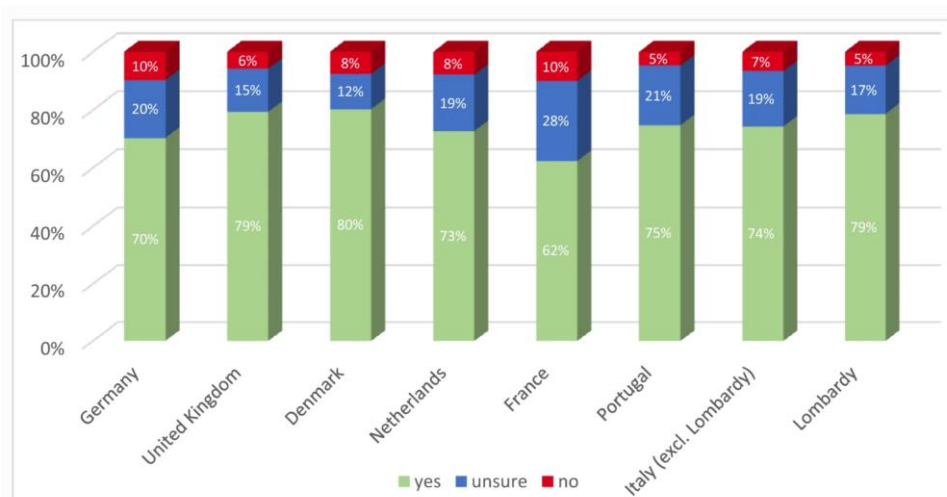
⁹ <https://www.who.int/news-room/events/detail/2020/06/30/default-calendar/1st-who-infodemiology-conference>, accessed on January 20 2021.

¹⁰ Idem.



When asked about the reasons for being unsure, more than half (55%) said they were concerned about potential side effects of a vaccine. Around 15% of respondents stated concern about the vaccine safeness.

Figure 2: Willingness to be vaccinated against the coronavirus by country



Source: Neumann-Böhme et al (2020)

In this context, it is crucial to recognize the importance of health communication, which has emerged as one of the most important public health issues in this century (Ishikawa and Kiuchi, 2010). Furthermore, several authors agree that it is a key factor in fighting the Covid-19 pandemic (Finset et al, 2020, Fielding, 2020). Indeed, the sudden appearance of SARS-CoV-2 has highlighted the importance of health communication and health literacy within infectious diseases, and the constant evolution of the virus and the science surrounding it makes people seek health information in order to adapt their behaviors (Paakari and Okan, 2020), see their questions answered, and limit transmission.

Therefore, it comes as no surprise that the infodemic surrounding Covid-19 “poses a serious problem for public health” (Zarocostas, 2020), since an adequate level of health literacy is required to deal with both misinformation and disinformation. In that sense, the Covid-19 pandemic has brought to light the underestimated public health problem of low health literacy (Paakari and Okan, 2020). Indeed, “providing the population with evidence-based scientific data is beneficial and necessary but does not necessarily lead to individuals correctly understanding or interpreting the information” (Biasio et al, 2020). Several studies recognize the importance of health literacy as a determinant of health outcomes and a driver of unnecessary costs (Parker and Ratzan, 2010; Berkman et al, 2010; Paasche-Orlow and Wolf, 2010), as well as pointing out the association between literacy skills and the engagement in health-related decisions, such as the management of a chronic disease or the compliance with health-promoting and disease-preventive behaviors (Rudd et al, 2012, Zarcadoolas et al, 2006). Vaccination is one of those disease-preventive behaviors that can be seriously affected by low health literacy



levels, along with dis- and misinformation. Vaccine hesitancy – the reluctance or refusal to vaccinate despite the availability of vaccines – is recognized by the WHO¹¹ as a major threat to global health. Moreover, the rapid production of Covid-19 vaccines and all the information surrounding vaccine development and implementation as well as safety and efficacy may be challenging for individuals to gather and process (Vanderpool *et al*, 2020).

Hence, news media play a central role in the promotion of health since they are often the primary source of information to the lay public. During a public health crisis people depend on the news media to convey accurate and up-to-date information that allows them to make informed health decisions. Equally important is “training scientists and government agencies to discuss in plain language the benefits of a future Covid-19 vaccine with the media” (Schiavo, 2020: 74). The medical-scientific language is one of the problems traditionally identified by journalists in health and science communication and all strategies that can improve the individual skills of sources to communicate with different audiences, including journalists, are welcome. Therefore, the intervention and expertise of communication professionals, who understand the media routines and master efficient health communication strategies, is very important (Magalhães, 2020).

Health authorities and political leaders are responsible for mitigating the potential information disorder around the vaccination through communication. Social media provide the possibility to communicate in a “disintermediated environment” (Vicario *et al*, 2016), the exact same environment that can foster confusion, encourage mistrust and allow communicative proximity, and convey accurate and authoritative information.

The vaccination campaign in the UE provides a precious momentum to analyze how official sources use social media to encourage vaccination, to dismiss doubts and apprehension about the safety of the vaccines and to disseminate reliable facts counteracting against possible information disorders.

2. Research design and methodology

Social media are in contemporary communication dynamics the main vehicles of disinformation, misinformation and mal-information (Newman *et al*, 2020). Fracturing themes become permeable to the instantaneous construction and rapid dissemination of conspiracy theories and little grounded perspectives, motivating, in the context of a pandemic like Covid-19, over and under reactions (Pennycook *et al*, 2020). These reactions call into question the safety of the individual, but in this specific case, the safety of the community itself, making it difficult to control the disease and its global effects. In a joint and global effort, strategies have been developed to combat the proliferation of false or distorted news around Covid-19 from a communication/journalistic and legal point of view, as also by the social media platforms, showing themselves to be more aggressive than they were on political topics (Radu, 2020, Nunziato, 2020).

According to Reuters Digital News Report 2020, Portugal, along with Finland, is the country, out of 40 analysed, that trusts the news the most, but less than 3 out of 10

¹¹ <https://www.who.int/news-room/spotlight/ten-threats-to-global-health-in-2019>, accessed on January 18th 2021.



Portuguese say they trust news spread by social media and three quarters of the sample shows concern about the legitimacy of online content. If Facebook is the main network for news consumption (50.2%), it is interesting to see how in a pandemic context instant messaging apps (eg Whatsapp) have gained relevance, boosting the dissemination of disinformation (Cardoso *et al*, 2020). At the same time, because of their reach and spreadability potential, social media are also powerful weapons to fight back against information disorders, playing an important role in policy announcement and health education (Tsao *et al*, 2021), allowing sources to deliver authoritative information directly to the receivers. In this sense, the use of social media by official sources as a vehicle of excellence to reach a wide and widespread audience has grown, showing itself as a potential step towards dealing with misinformation (Butcher, 2021).

Passing on the information that vaccines are safe is a new challenge in managing communication on pandemic issues, therefore, the present study¹² sought to understand the use of social media in building credible and reliable information on the subject. We selected four social media platforms – Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn – and collected all utterances concerning vaccination posted by the European Commission (EC/EU), the European Medicines Agency (EMA), the World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe (WHO/ROE), the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDPC), Representation of the European Commission in Portugal (REC/PT), Portuguese Government (Gov/PT), Portuguese Directorate-General of Health (DGS), and Portuguese National Health Service (SNS) during one month, starting from the authorization of the first vaccine in the EU (21st December 2020).

The relevance of digital communication in the current media and information landscape is undeniable (Neuman, 2016; Reyna *et al*, 2018), so the official sources are increasingly betting on this type of communication, through the promotion of their websites and their pages in digital social networks that are more active and closer to the public. The choice of social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn) was based on an exploratory analysis of the platforms most used and promoted by the elected official authorities. According to data presented by Statecounter/Global Stats¹³, for the period between January 2020 and January 2021, Facebook had a usage of around 77%, followed by Pinterest (10.3%), Twitter (7.2%) and Instagram (2.1%). With a view to large-scale communication, the sources analyzed used the three social media platforms of mainstream interaction (Facebook, Twitter and Instagram), to which was added LinkedIn, a professional platform with almost 740 million members (166 million in Europe)¹⁴, showing signs of growth, both in terms of access and in terms of interaction.

¹² [This is part of a wider project that aims to study the communication about Covid-19 vaccination through a twofold analysis: the media coverage of Covid-19 vaccination in the Portuguese news media and the strategic communication of official news sources, both Portuguese and European.](#)

¹³ <https://gs.statcounter.com/social-media-stats/all/europe>, accessed on February 14th 2021.

¹⁴ <https://news.linkedin.com/about-us#Statistics>, accessed on February 14th 2021.



Table 1: Number of followers of the official sources on each platform in January 2021 (M-Million; m-thousand)

	Facebook	Instagram	Twitter	LinkedIn
European Commission	1.2M	557m	1.4M	1M
WHO Regional Office for Europe	611m	81m	155m	6.3m (no publications)
European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control	243m	N/a	75,1m	32m
European Medicines Agency	N/a	N/a	68,9m	154.2m
Portuguese Government	77.4m	71.8m	166.3m	5.3m
Portuguese Directorate-General of Health	701.4m	22.5m	47m	2.6m (no publications)
Infarmed, IP	16.5m	N/a	6.3m	42.3m
Portuguese National Health Service	266.3m	173m	30m	N/a
European Commission - Portuguese Representation	61.4m	25,2m	23.4m	N/a

Source: Prepared by the authors

3. Case study and data analysis

The corpus consists of 719 posts corresponding to all utterances on the subject of or referring "vaccination" published between December 21st, 2020, and January 21st, 2021, by verified public pages of the above-mentioned official sources on the selected social media platforms¹⁵.

¹⁵ After coding and using the application Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) the posts were submitted to content analysis using the following variables:

V1. Social Media [Indicates the platform where the post was published]

1. Facebook

2. Instagram

3. Twitter

4. LinkedIn

V2. Official source [Indicates who authored the post]

1. European Commission

2. WHO Regional Office for Europe

3. European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control

4. Portuguese Government

5. Portuguese Directorate-General of Health

6. Infarmed, IP

7. Portuguese National Health Service

8. Representation of the European Commission in Portugal

V3 and V4. Multimediality [Indicates the media formats used in the post, up to 2]

1. Text

2. Photo

3. Photo gallery (more than one photo)

4. Video



-
- 5. Audio
 - 6. Graphic
 - 7. Poster
 - 8. Animation
 - 9. Live
 - 10. Infographics
 - V5. Hypertext [Describes the landing pages or platforms to where the post links to]
 - 1. Developed information in sites (other than the source's)
 - 2. Further information in the platform where the post was published
 - 3. Other national sources (sites)
 - 4. Other international sources (sites)
 - 5. Other social media
 - 6. Source's site
 - 7. Repost [when the post is simple repost with no other format (V3 or V4)]
 - 8. Other resources
 - V6. Hashtags [string variable that collects all the hashtags used in the post]
 - V7. Geography [Indicates the geographical approach]
 - 1. National
 - 2. International
 - 3. Both
 - V8. Frame [Analyses the post's discourse aiming to assess the motivation/intention of the post and post's author]
 - 1. Informative
 - 2. Pedagogical
 - 3. Persuasive
 - 4. Defensive
 - 5. Positive
 - 6. Other
 - V9. Theme [Indicates the main theme of the post; the list of potential themes was adapted from a project on health communication] (Lopes *et al*, 2013, Araújo, 2016).
 - 1. Research development
 - 2. Ribonucleic acid
 - 3. Clinical trials
 - 4. Vaccine validation
 - 5. Vaccine administration
 - 6. Difficulties in administration
 - 7. Adverse effects
 - 8. Deadlines
 - 9. Priority groups
 - 10. Distribution
 - 11. Storage
 - 12. Deadline failure
 - 13. Distribution problems
 - 14. Storage problems
 - 15. National portraits
 - 16. International portraits
 - 17. Political decisions
 - 18. Health officers' decisions
 - 19. Political reactions
 - 20. Economy
 - 21. Protests
 - 22. Vaccine security
 - 23. Professional situations
 - 24. European success
 - 25. Generic approach
 - 26. Authorization
 - 27. Technical/scientific information
 - 28. Acknowledgment
 - 29. Fact check
 - V10. Actor [Indicates the main actor/s in the post; if the post is a repost, the actor is the author of the original post]
 - 1. Source's official representative
 - 2. Expert
 - 3. Celebrity
 - 4. Politician
 - 5. Citizen(s)



The posts were collected in the four platforms during the period of analysis (from the 21st to the December 2020 to the 21st of January 2021). The objective was to gather all the posts produced by the sources that are being studied.

We computed the data using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences). Then, we run a descriptive analysis of all variables, crossing results when considered interesting for getting some insight.

4. Findings and discussion

From all sources analyzed, the most prolific was the Portuguese National Health Service, authoring 31% of all posts, followed by the EC, with 24% of the posts.

Table 2. Number of publications by source

Source	Frequency
European Commission	172
WHO Regional Office for Europe	33
European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control	67
Portuguese Government	36
Portuguese Directorate-General of Health	17
Infarmed, IP	21
Portuguese National Health Service	223
European Commission's Portuguese Representation	99
European Medicines Agency	51

Source: Prepared by the authors

Twitter was the most used social media platform with 56,9% of all posts, followed by Facebook with less than all the amount of posts (22.5%). All sources (except the Portuguese

Directorate-General of Health) used more Twitter than the other social media (Table 3).

6. Several (when more than one of the other actors in this list)
7. Health professional(s)
8. Other official source
9. Other



Table 3: social media used by each source

Source	Social Media			
	Facebook	Instagram	Twitter	LinkedIn
European Commission	34	28	88	22
WHO Regional Office for Europe	6	3	24	0
European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control	8	0	57	2
Portuguese Government	6	5	25	0
Portuguese Directorate-General of Health	8	4	5	0
Infarmed, IP	5	0	9	7
Portuguese National Health Service	74	56	93	0
European Commission's Portuguese Representation	21	18	60	0
European Medicines Agency	0	0	48	3
Total	162	114	409	34

Source: Prepared by the authors

During the time period that was analyzed, the days with more posts (more than 5% of the total) coincide with: 1) the authorization of the first vaccine in the European Union (21st December 2020); 2) a public meeting held by the EMA about the vaccine (8th January 2021); 3) the beginning of vaccination in every member state of the EU (27th December); 4) the day before the beginning of vaccination in the EU (26th December 2020); 5) the authorization of the second vaccine (6th January 2021) (Table 4 and Graphic 1).

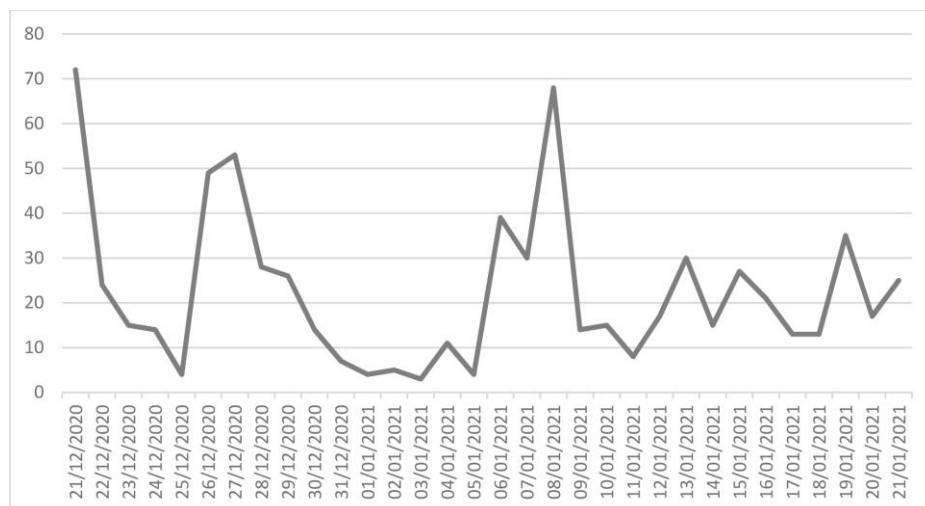
Table 4: Number of posts per date

Date	Frequency	Percentage	Date	Frequency	Percentage
21.12.2020	72	10,0	06.01.2021	38	5,3
22.12.2020	24	3,3	07.01.2021	30	4,2
23.12.2020	15	2,1	08.01.2021	68	9,5
24.12.2020	14	1,9	09.01.2021	14	1,9
25.12.2020	4	0,6	10.01.2021	15	2,1
26.12.2020	49	6,8	11.01.2021	8	1,1
27.12.2020	53	7,4	12.01.2021	17	2,4
28.12.2020	28	3,9	13.01.2021	30	4,2
29.12.2020	26	3,6	14.01.2021	15	2,1
30.12.2020	14	1,9	15.01.2021	27	3,8
31.12.2020	7	1,0	16.01.2021	21	2,9
01.01.2021	4	0,6	17.01.2021	13	1,8
02.01.2021	5	0,7	18.01.2021	13	1,8
03.01.2021	3	0,4	19.01.2021	35	4,9
04.01.2021	11	1,5	20.01.2021	17	2,4
05.01.2021	4	0,6	21.01.2021	25	3,5

Source: Prepared by the authors



Graphic 1: Number of posts per date



Source: Prepared by the authors

When crossing the date with the theme for those five days, we find that the most prominent themes were "Vaccine administration", "Authorization", "Generic approach" and "Vaccine security" (Table 5).

Table 5: Themes on specific dates

Theme	Date					Total
	21.12.2020	27.12.2020	28.12.2020	06.01.2021	08.01.2021	
Research development	0	0	0	1	0	1
Ribonucleic acid	1	0	0	1	3	5
Clinical trials	2	0	0	0	1	3
Validation	1	0	0	0	5	6
Vaccine administration	2	38	11	9	16	76
Adverse effects	1	0	0	0	0	1
Priority groups	0	1	0	0	0	1
Distribution	0	3	0	0	0	3
International portraits	0	3	2	0	0	5
Political decisions	0	0	0	0	3	3
Health officers decisions	0	0	1	0	0	1
Vaccine security	15	2	0	0	7	24
Professional situations	0	0	1	0	1	2
European success	4	3	0	0	0	7
Generic vaccine	3	2	5	5	26	41
Authorization	41	0	1	22	1	65
Technical/scientific information	1	0	2	0	5	8
Acknowledgments	1	1	5	0	0	7
Total	72	53	28	38	68	259

Source: Prepared by the authors



The posts about "Vaccine administration" focus on the beginning of the vaccination process in every member state of the EU and particularly in Portugal (as far as the Portuguese sources are concerned). The National Health Service has carried out a campaign showing vaccines being inoculated in several institutions outside the capital and main cities. The European sources also used this kind of approach but being less prolific. One interesting remark is the use of the hashtag #EUVaccinationDays. The theme "Authorization" refers mainly to posts focusing on the announcement of the authorization of the vaccines (Pfizer/BioNTech, on the 21th December 2020, and Moderna on the 6th January 2021). The "Generic approach" theme is registered when the vaccine is mentioned generically, without any specific thematic or when several themes are addressed in the same post, none of them being sufficiently prominent to be identified as "the" theme of the post. "Vaccine security" identifies normally reassuring content about the safeness of the vaccine, thus showing understanding citizens' main concern.

These four themes account for 79.5% of all themes in the referred dates. If we include all dates (Table 6), we will find that "Vaccine administration" is present in 34.8% of the posts, followed by "Generic approach" (19.7%) and "Authorization" (12.2%). We should also underline the 8.5% of posts devoted to "Vaccine security", published by European official sources and by the EC Representation in Portugal.

Table 6: Themes

	Frequency	Percentage
Research development	10	1,4
RNA	13	1,8
Clinical trials	7	1,0
Validation	13	1,8
Administration	250	34,8
Adverse effects	1	0,1
Priority groups	10	1,4
Distribution	32	4,5
International portraits	17	2,4
Political decisions	7	1,0
Health officers decisions	4	0,6
Political reactions	1	0,1
Economy	3	0,4
Vaccine security	61	8,5
Professional situations	2	0,3
European Success	18	2,5
Generic vaccine	142	19,7
Authorization	88	12,2
Technical/scientific information	24	3,3
Acknowledgments	10	1,4
Fact check	6	0,8
Total	719	100,0

Source: Prepared by the authors



As far as multimodality is concerned, the most used format is text, present in nearly 80% of the posts. The posts that do not present texts are reposts (not identified as having text authored by the official source). Posters, a category that identifies a sort of billboard that uses both photography and typography, and sometimes even illustrations, very similar to advertising signs, account for 28.4% of all formats used in the posts. Crossing multimodality with sources, we find that the Portuguese National Health Service uses this format in 133 posts (out of 223, representing the presence of this kind of resource in 59.7% of all posts). The Representation of the European Commission in Portugal also relies on this format in 29.3% of its posts and the European Commission uses it in 12.8% of its posts.

It should be noted that the posters used by the Representation of the European Commission in Portugal are often the same used by the European Commission (translated into Portuguese).

Table 7: Multimodality

Multimodality	Frequency
Text	575
Photo	48
Photo gallery	31
Video	77
Graphis	1
Poster	204
Animation	14
Live	3
Infographics	36

Source: Prepared by the authors

Video is used mainly by the European Commission (present in 20.3% of all posts), being the second most used format by this source (after text) and by its Representation in Portugal (24.2% of all posts).

Regarding hypertext in the posts, the most frequent is reposting (used in nearly half the posts with hypertext), what relates to the wide use of Twitter and the habit of reposting in this platform. Given this result, we crossed hypertext with the actors (Table 8) to find that the reposts are mainly authored by other official sources (namely the ones identified in this article, both national and international) and by the source's official representative.



Table 8. Hypertext and actors

	Developed information	More information inside the social media	Hypertext				Repost	Total
			Other inter-national plat-forms	Other social media	Source's official sites	Other resources		
Official source's representative	2	0	1	11	33	2	46	95
Expert	0	0	0	1	10	0	2	13
Politician	0	0	0	0	0	1	5	6
Citizen(s)	0	0	0	0	3	0	1	4
Other	0	0	0	0	5	1	1	7
Several	0	0	6	3	40	0	17	66
Health professionals	0	0	2	0	19	0	14	35
Other official source	1	0	10	7	12	0	70	100
Total	3	2	19	22	122	4	156	326

Source: Prepared by the authors

Linking to the source's official sites is done in 37.4% of all posts where we can find links. It is interesting to notice that hypertext is present in 60.8% of all posts (not in all of them actors can be identified). The sources that use this feature the most are the European Center for Disease Control and Prevention and Infarmed, IP (only one of their posts does not have hypertext). The Portuguese Government uses hypertext in more than 90% of its posts (Table 9).

Table 9: Hypertext and sources

	Frequency	Hypertext	Percentage of hypertext usage
European Commission	172	80	46,5
WHO Regional Office for Europe	33	28	84,8
European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control	67	66	98,5
Portuguese Government	36	34	94,4
Portuguese Directorate-General of Health	17	12	70,6
Infarmed, IP	21	20	95,2
Portuguese National Health Service	223	123	55,2
European Commission's Portuguese Representation	99	49	49,5
European Medicines Agency	51	25	49,0
Total	719		

Source: Prepared by the authors

Many posts refer several actors simultaneously, namely UE citizens and health professionals, what occurs frequently when the theme is the administration of the vaccine. When adding up official sources and representatives of the source that authors the publication or other official sources, official sources prevail (Table 10).



Table 10. Actors

Actor	Frequency	Percentage
Official source's representative	113	15,7
Expert	19	2,6
Politician	6	0,8
Citizen(s)	20	2,8
Other	10	1,4
Several	198	27,5
Health professional(s)	47	6,5
Other official source	111	15,4
Total	524	72,9

Source: Prepared by the authors

Regarding the discursive frame of the messages, the results show that the majority of the posts (55.4%) are informative, conveying uncluttered and objective information. The themes with more informative frame are "Vaccine administration" (43.7% of all posts labeled as informative) and when the vaccine is generically approached (in 17.1% of the informative posts) (Table 11). These are also the themes where a more positive discourse is constructed. A pedagogical approach is used when posting about the vaccine safety and about several aspects of the vaccine and vaccination process (Generic approach).

Table 11: Themes and message framing

	Informative	Pedagogical	Persuasive	Defensive	Positive	Other	Total
Vaccine Development	5	1	0	0	4	0	10
RNA	5	8	0	0	0	0	13
Clinical trials	3	1	0	0	3	0	7
Validation	10	1	0	0	2	0	13
Administration	174	0	14	0	62	0	250
Adverse effects	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Priority groups	8	0	0	0	2	0	10
Distribution	24	0	0	0	8	0	32
International portraits	1	0	10	0	6	0	17
Political decisions	3	0	0	0	4	0	7
Health authorities decisions	3	0	0	0	1	0	4
Political reactions	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Economy	2	0	0	0	1	0	3
Vaccine safety	23	18	9	5	6	0	61
Professional situations	0	1	0	0	1	0	2
European success	1	0	0	0	17	0	18
Generic vaccine	68	16	8	0	49	1	142
Authorization	40	3	1	0	44	0	88
Technical/scientific information	21	3	0	0	0	0	24
Acknowledgments	1	0	0	0	9	0	10
Fact check	5	1	0	0	0	0	6
Total	398	53	43	5	219	1	719

Source: Prepared by the authors



In absolute numbers, the most positive source is the European Commission, followed by the Portuguese National Health Service, which is the most informative source (Table 12).

Table 12: Sources and discursive framework

Source/Frame	Informative	Pedagogical	Persuasive	Defensive	Positive	Other	Total
European Commission	53	26	18	0	74	1	172
WHO Regional Office for Europe	13	9	0	0	11	0	33
European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control	37	2	2	4	22	0	67
Portuguese Government	28	0	2	0	6	0	36
Portuguese Directorate-General of Health	12	0	2	0	3	0	17
Infarmed, IP	18	0	0	0	3	0	21
Portuguese National Health Service	180	1	8	0	34	0	223
European Commission's Portuguese Representation	25	5	7	1	61	0	99
European Medicines Agency	32	10	4	0	5	0	51
Total	398	53	43	5	219	1	719

Source: Prepared by the authors

When weighing the frame used with the total amount of posts, we find that the Portuguese National Health Service is still the source with a higher percentage of informative posts (80.7%). The more pedagogical is the European Medicines Agency (31.3% of the posts), followed closely by the WHO Regional Office for Europe (27.3%). The persuasive frame is more used by the European Commission (10.5% of its posts) and by the European Commission's Representation in Portugal (7.1%). The defensive mode is practically only activated by the European Center for Disease Prevention and Control (6% of its publications). The most positive source considering weight of this frame on the total of publications is the European Commission's Representation in Portugal (61.8%), followed by the European Commission (43%).

Crossing frames with the social media platforms, Facebook is where the highest percentage of informative posts is published. In all platforms, informative and positive framing account a very high percentage of the total of posts (88% on Facebook; 89% on Instagram; 84% on Twitter and 85% on LinkedIn) (Table 13).

Table 13: Message framing in social media

Social media	Facebook		Instagram		Twitter		LinkedIn		Total	
Frame	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Informative	99	61	61	54	224	55	14	41	398	55
Pedagogical	9	6	2	2	38	9	4	12	53	7
Persuasive	10	6	9	8	23	6	1	3	43	6
Defensive	0	0	1	1	4	1	0	0	5	0,7
Positive	44	27	40	35	120	29	15	44	219	30
Other	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0
Total	162	100	114	100	409	100	34	100	719	100

Source: Prepared by the authors



5. Final remarks

The results show that Portuguese and European official sources (governmental and health authorities) are using social media to convey information about Covid-19 vaccination. In average, all sources together published 24 posts per day during the month of the study. The most prolific source in this study, the Portuguese National Health Service, published, in average, 7.4 posts each day.

Twitter is the platform where more posts are published by 8 out of 9 sources analyzed, even though it is not the one with the highest number of followers. The exception is the Portuguese General-Directorate of Health, whose number of total posts is scarce – 17 publications, representing 2.4% of the corpus. Although this source has played a very prominent role since the beginning of the pandemics in terms of communication, the vaccination campaign seems to have been delegated to the National Health Service. Adding up all followers of the official pages of the sources in the digital networks in this research (data accessed in January 2021), Facebook leads with 3.4 million, followed by Twitter with 1.9 million, LinkedIn with 1.2 million and Instagram with 931 thousand. A possible explanation for the 56,9% of all posts published on Twitter is that this platform is attended by many journalists and is claimed to be the preferred professional tool/source as far as social media are concerned (Parmelee, 2013). This possibility brings us back to a sophisticated and digitalized version of Lazarsfeld and Katz's theory of the "two-step flow of communication": using Twitter (and other social media), official sources might reach journalists in an unconventional, uncommitted way; sources are directly speaking to the general public knowing that the message will also target journalists. The apparently unmediated content gains the potential to be mediated through journalists playing their role as opinion leaders. In this version of the two-step flow theory, social media are in the beginning of the chain and legacy media on the other end.

This communication strategy also contributes to create a buzz marketing effect. The positive framing of the vaccine campaign (registered in 30.5% of all posts), especially in what concerns the European accomplishment, the authorization and the administration process starting on the same day in every member state, contributes to the emotional trigger that buzz marketing relies on. The effect depends on repetition and redundancy: administration and authorization in the EU account for 47% of the themes in all posts that constitute the corpus. Other explanation for the expressive usage of Twitter has to do with the platform's posting characteristics, privileging shorter and more frequent posting. Twitter shows, more than the other platforms, an articulation between European official sources with many cross referral and tagging, especially between the European Medicines Agency and the European Commission. Instagram, in turn, relies mainly in images and official sources use that specificity to channel the more promotional format and language, using the "poster" messages. The sources strategy takes into consideration the specific potential of each platform, and efficiently adjusts the formats. There seems to be some contempt regarding LinkedIn (with a considerable number of followers in some sources' page while other sources do not even have a page). Given the nature of this social network it could be an effective space to disseminate authoritative information, nourishing the "two-step flow".



With the death and disease tolls, after the lockdowns and under the shadow of a new wave of Covid-19, vaccination represents hope (a "light at the end of the tunnel", as was constantly repeated) and that hope was capitalized by official sources (mainly governmental, both European and Portuguese) also with strong political intentions. The *momentum*, especially in what concerns the authorization of the vaccine and the beginning of the vaccination process, was favorable to the appraisal of the European ideals of solidarity, working for common goals and attaining them. The European Commission and its Representation in Portugal are the most positive sources, reinforcing the importance of the European project in an adversarial context. This positiveness is enhanced by using abundantly the hashtags #EUVaccinationDays, #StrongerTogether and #UnitedAgainstCoronavirus.

Political twist and uplifting do not mean that the main concerns about vaccinations – assuring its security and providing authoritative information to mitigate information disorders – were not met though the communication practices in social media. In more than one third of the posts there are links developed information on the source's official websites. And it should be noted that informative framing is the most common one (in 55.4% of the posts). The strategy to convey authoritative information from reliable sources is thus enforced. Yet, it seems that a much broader task of disseminating this kind of information is entrusted to social media themselves, through several initiatives that Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and also TikTok have agreed to engage in.

This case study shows the importance of social media analysis in the context of the Covid-19 vaccination. It will be used as an exploratory study on official source's digital communication practices during the vaccination campaign in the EU.

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LEADERSHIP AND COMMUNICATION IN SPAIN AND PORTUGAL: THE CATHOLIC CASE

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Abstract

Leadership takes place when a member of a group modifies the motivation or abilities of others or when their attention is directed towards goals or to the path required to accomplish goals (Bass, 2008). Therefore, it would not make sense to limit the scope of leadership to business or politics, where the concept is most commonly referred to. Leadership is a practice that can positively impact many areas, including religion (Campbell, 2021; Díez Bosch, Micó and Sabaté Gauxachs, 2020; Hoover, 2016; Soukup, 2017). Additionally, during this present time of uncertainty and complexity, leadership is necessary for any type of organization. How is leadership approached by religious institutions? What is the role of the digital world in leadership formation? The objective of this study is to map the formation of religious leadership in Spain and Portugal in order to find initiatives and identify current necessities. The selected methodology follows a three-stage process. First, it includes a mapping of online initiatives regarding leadership in Catholic communities. Second, it includes a quantitative survey. Third, is a qualitative focus on groups and in-depth interviews (Busquet and Medina, 2019).

Through the findings of the study, the situation of leadership formation in religious institutions in both countries and the role communication plays in the matter are defined.

Keywords

Leadership; religion; Covid-19; communication; technology

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LEADERSHIP AND COMMUNICATION IN SPAIN AND PORTUGAL: THE CATHOLIC CASE¹

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1. Introduction

1.1. Context

These past years have seen a decrease in Catholic membership in many areas of Europe, including Spain and Portugal. Although these areas have Catholic traditions, numbers have been shrinking, which could cause concerns, especially in light of the downward curve shown by the data. Of the total population, the percentage of those who consider themselves Catholic believers has declined in comparison to former years (INE, 2020). For example, from 2012 to 2017 the percentage of Catholic Christians within the total population has decreased from 88.8% to 60% in Spain, and from 85.6% to 77% in Portugal (The Global Economy, 2013) (Pew Research Center, 2018). It is important to notice the downward trend that could potentially culminate in unfavorable results.

With this context in mind, it is thought that leadership could promote a more favorable environment to stabilize or even increase membership while also complementing and improving perception, performance, attraction and communion (Zsupan-Jerome, 2017).

In addition, the current circumstances brought on by the global Covid-19 pandemic further emphasize this to the extent where leadership has become a necessity to assess during these unprecedented times of uncertainty and ambiguity (Campbell, 2020). With this vulnerability and lack of predictability, a good leader emerges to provide assistance and guidance.

1.2. The Concept

A fundamental step in this study is to describe the concept of leadership. According to Bernard Bass, leadership has more than 350 uses (2008), which serves to acknowledge the field in which this study is developed. Due to this elevated number, leadership can be seen as a notion that is flexible, fluid and very adaptable to particular contexts (Díez Bosch, Micó Sanz and Sabaté Gauxachs, 2020).

¹ Article translated by Diana Clavería.



Nonetheless, it is accurate to say that there is an overarching meaning embedded in the concept, a principal idea that stands to be true in the face of particularities. Bass describes the practice of leading as an interaction between members of a group, involving the structuring or restructuring of situations as well as the perceptions and the expectations of its members. Leadership takes place when a member of a group modifies the motivation or abilities of others or when their attention is directed towards goals or to the path required to accomplish goals (Bass, 2008). Therefore, the comprehensive intention of leadership is directed by individuals who create links between goals, motivations and the members of a group. This direction should provide a change in the actions of group members, making them intensify their contemplation of the achievement of said goals. Hence, leadership requires capability. The ability to motivate, influence and awaken possibilities in individuals in order to fulfill their organizational objectives (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, Gupta, 2004).

It is important to note that this ability for leadership can be put into practice in a variety of ways. In other words, there are different types and ways to exercise leadership. This classification has been studied by a variety of authors. Daniel Goleman, Richard Boyatzis and Annie McKee, in their book "Primal Leadership", studied six distinct emotional leadership styles (Goleman, Boyatzis, McKee, 2002), which are:

- Visionary: leadership that coordinates the group members to work towards a vision. This approach provides optimal results when guidance or change is necessary.
- Coaching: leadership that develops and trains group members by encouraging them to improve their future. This approach provides optimal results when helping people grow on a long-term basis is necessary.
- Affiliative: leadership that links group members through emotions and harmony, creating strong bonds among them. This approach provides optimal results when it is necessary to mend gaps in teams or motivate members.
- Democratic: leadership that tries to find agreement and consensus by involving group members and creating a favorable environment to participate so their voices can be heard. This approach provides optimal results when creating consensus or getting insights is necessary.
- Pacesetting: leadership that sets high-standard steps in order to achieve excellence. This approach provides optimal results when getting quick results from a highly skilled team is necessary.
- Commanding: leadership that demands an action to be done and calls for immediate compliance. This approach provides optimal results in cases of crisis.

Each leadership style works differently with the aim to meet a goal and each one is suitable in different circumstances. The all-embracing condition that these three authors call attention to is emotion. Effective leaders are emotionally compelling and connect with their group members on a closer and more personal level, which results in a change in action and enhances engagement. (Greenleaf, 1998).



It can also be argued that values and integrity in leadership are needed in order to achieve group goals. To determine the values needed requires specificity. In some cases, values could even be dismissed. Nonetheless, one of the main reason's values are necessary is because the group members themselves often require it. For the Spanish and Portuguese Catholic Church, it is clear that it is essential for an effective leader to have values of faith that are shared within the religious community. These values can then be combined with emotions in order to lead.

In addition, in the Catholic Church there is another concept of leadership that is useful to analyze. Robert Greenleaf's servant-leadership is a popular theory among organizations that can be applied to this study. Servant-leadership is explained in the framework of two roles that are often seen as antithetical in our culture. There is the servant who, by acting with integrity and spirit, builds trust and lifts people up and helps them grow, and there is the leader who is trusted and who shapes others' destinies and leads by example (1970). The emphasis is on the combination of these two roles, which create an environment of trust and engagement while at the same time giving direction so the goals can be met.

Leadership involves direction, interaction, behavior and goals on a broader scale and specific emotions and values for each particular circumstance. If required, the practice of leading can also be combined with that of serving in order to be more effective in accomplishing the objectives.

Finally, it is important to consider the substantial association with authority in leadership. The status of leading implies a position of superiority in which an institution or an organization establishes hegemony within its domain, sector, or product. (Díez, Soukup, Micó, Zsupan-Jerome, 2017). This superiority is the power to direct and is an essential part of leadership.

In the Catholic Church, Paul A. Soukup S.J. relates the idea of *soft authority*. He explains that soft authority in religious groups may depend more on personal charisma, professional qualifications, individual knowledge, the practice of ministry, and personal witnesses (2017). To this he adds that authority not only depends on who has a position of authority, but on who has a voice, the ways in which people craft messages, the ways in which those messages fit into the environment, the frequency of relaying messages, and horizontal communication, which is how people interact with those around them, independently of how they interact with those at higher levels within the organization (Soukup, 2017). In this regard, the idea of directive power, whether it is authority, soft authority or leadership, must be accompanied by effective techniques of a leader.

Ultimately, authority in churches and religions is deeply connected with the kind of leadership used (Scharer, 2017) and engagement and directness highly depends on the practice of leading.

1.3. The Digital Approach

As mentioned earlier, the Covid-19 pandemic brought uncertainty and ambiguity, which are circumstances in which leadership has become necessary for guidance and directing.



Moreover, the pandemic regulations called for solutions to counterbalance the prohibition of gatherings and the closing of churches. As a result, technology and digital tools have been seen as a new way to interact and gather. Hence, religion has adapted to the pandemic in innovative ways (Campbell, 2020).

The role of communication is a core area in the matter. The challenges that this digital culture (Campbell, 2020, Hoover, 2016) brings to new leaderships and a redefinition of the concept of authority are very present in this study. The authority ascribed in digital practice is one earned in the process of interaction on specific topics or issues, a type of authority that is more common in oral-dominant communities than in the aloof, institution-based authority that most churches have carried into the third millennium (Horsfield, 2015). This actively demonstrates that, although leadership is needed in the current times, the digital world might become an obstacle in terms of the challenges the leader and the group face with interaction and perception.

1.4. Purpose and Objectives

These terms cause a critical question to emerge. Who are the Catholic figures that are leading in Spain and Portugal? In other words, who are the leaders of the Catholic Church in these two countries and how are they promoting their values? The concept inferred by these questions constitute both the genesis and the backbone of this study. Hence, the main objective is to better understand and map the formation of religious leadership in Spain and Portugal in order to detect initiatives and identify current necessities in the matter of leadership and recognize how they affect communication.

This serves as an initial exploration on the specific field of leadership in Catholic communities within Spain and Portugal. The purpose, therefore, of this study is an initial approach for further research on the topic.

An additional aspect of the study regards the impact of Covid-19 and the consequent pandemic and lockdown. As a necessity, has Catholic leadership been able to adapt to the digital world? This is also a topic of further research.

2. Design and Method

The design and method selected and developed for this study were chosen because this study is exploratory. Leadership initiatives that may be used to enhance communication with Catholic believers in Spain and Portugal is a premise that is introduced in order to be tested. As explained in the purpose and objectives, this study is a way to analyze and identify the current state of the issue in order to become the focus of further research.

The formal object to be studied is the leadership scenario of the Catholic Church within the Iberian Peninsula of Spain and Portugal. This phenomenon includes leadership initiatives, leadership formation courses and a variety of different leadership practices, some of them related to communication, management, and even coaching. These aid in understanding what is being done and where efforts are allocated in religious leadership.

A limited field of study was designed in order to provide clarity for the research. The groups researched were divided into the existing dioceses of Spain and Portugal. For



practical purposes, the territories were divided into smaller regions according to the jurisdiction of specific bishops. Spain has 70 dioceses and Portugal has 20. Hence, the study used these as a source of knowledge and included related organizations such as universities and foundations. The study began in August 2020 and finished five months later in December.

In order to gain the explanatory knowledge needed for this study, a specific methodology was used. The development stage, or phase zero, required a thorough and comprehensive understanding of the field of leadership itself and religion. A literature review was carried out and was a main contributor to the study. This stage was highly important to acquire the necessary underlying knowledge for the other methodological stages to be built upon. With this as the base, a three-step process followed. It began with a netnography (Kozinets, 2010) to objectively map and list existing leadership related initiatives of Spanish and Portuguese dioceses and similar organizations that could be found online. This provided a general idea on what is being done. Secondly, quantitative data was compiled using a survey that was sent to all 90 dioceses and related organizations found in the netnography. This survey was translated into Spanish and Portuguese. Thirdly, it ended with a qualitative analysis with 21 individual interviews and two focus groups, one for each country and language.

3. Field Work and Data Analysis

The field work commenced with a literature review on leadership. The main authors and publications analyzed were, Bernard Bass' "The Bass Handbook of Leadership: Theory, Research, and Management Applications" (Cambridge Free Press, 2008) and Robert House, Paul Hanges, Mansour Javidan, Peter Dorfman and Vipin Gupta's "Culture, Leadership, and Organizations: The GLOBE Study of 62 Societies" (Sage, 2004) were used to understand the concept of leadership. Daniel Goleman, Richard Boyatzis, and Annie McKee's "Primal Leadership" was used to comprehend different leadership styles and their connection to emotions. Robert Greenleaf's "The Servant as Leader" (Center for Applied Studies, 1970) provided a useful theory to apply to religious leadership. Míriam Díez, Paul Soukup, Josep Lluís Micó and Daniella Zsupan-Jerome's "Authority and Leadership. Values, Religion, Media" (Blanquerna Observatory, 2017) was helpful in grasping the foundation of authority in leadership. In addition, other authors and publications concerning the pandemic and religions moving into the digital world were examined. These included Heidi Campbell's "Digital Creatives and the Rethinking of Religious Authority" (Routledge, 2021), David Hoover's "The Media and Religious Authority" (Penn State Press, 2016) and Peter Horsfield's "From Jesus to the Internet: A History of Christianity and Media" (Wiley-Blackwell, 2015). These served to gain the base knowledge explained in the introduction and aided in creating the survey and conducting the interviews.

To map the scenario of what is being done in terms of leadership, a list of initiatives was compiled through netnographic research. The list shows the initiatives found along with information regarding their typology, whether they were formation courses, publications, spiritual retreats, personal accompaniment actions or others, how there are implemented, offline or online, pre or post Covid-19 as well as other relevant information including which dioceses or organization carried out the initiative. All in all, 285 initiatives



from Spain and 33 from Portugal were compiled. It is important to note that all initiatives that were somehow related to leadership were included.

For the quantitative survey, the questions used related to the existence of leadership formation initiatives, the skills required to be a good religious leader and the type of leadership needed in the Spanish and Portuguese Catholic Church. For this last question, it was useful to refer to Daniel Goleman, Richard Boyatzis, and Annie McKee's description of leadership styles, which have a different effect on people's emotions. These styles are visionary, coaching, affiliative, democratic, pacesetter, and commanding (Goleman, Boyatzis, McKee, 2002). Moreover, other questions focused on the reality of each survey-taker in his or her organization, together with personal opinions and perceptions. It is important to understand that the survey included both open and closed questions. This gave the survey-takers the opportunity to give their opinions and explain and clarify their answers, as well as their doubts when it was considered relevant.

All Spanish and Portuguese dioceses were contacted and each was given the survey in their respective language. In addition to these 90 entities, other related organizations that provide leadership initiatives found in the netnography were contacted as well. Close to 100 surveys were sent and 58 completed surveys were received: 31 from Spain and 27 from Portugal.

For the qualitative approach, interviews of 10 relevant actors in the field of leadership and religion who are impacting and contributing to the growth of leadership were planned. There were five interviews from Spain and five from Portugal. In light of the small amount of completed surveys received, the total number of interviews increased from 10 to 21, 12 from Spain and 9 from Portugal. These personal encounters provided in-depth and more developed answers to similar questions from our initial survey. The people interviewed are representatives from exemplary dioceses in terms of leadership formation, institutes and universities that motivate the knowledge and practice in the field as well as members from related foundations and key institutions in the religious scenario in both countries. Contributing to this, two focus groups were created with 11 people from Spain and 8 from Portugal. Some of the people in the focus groups had previously been interviewed individually. This was done as a way to discuss the topic simultaneously and in conjunction. The flow of the discussion brought critical topics to the table such as the concept that should be used to address leadership in the Church, the type of leadership needed in the Spanish and Portuguese Catholic Church, how this should take place, and the opportunities that this type of leadership represents.

4. Results

This study has provided key results that should be taken into consideration in order to understand the final conclusions of the research.

On the one hand, within the Spanish context and in terms of the survey, the initial element to understand is that the 73.3% of the organizations that answered the survey affirm conducting leadership initiatives, as opposed to a 26.7% who admit they do not. Of these, the most widely used style of initiatives are formations, occasional conferences or talks, retreats, and international experiences, which are listed in order of popularity. Concerning fundamental concepts, most survey takers agree that the style of leadership



necessary for the Spanish Catholic Church is a visionary one, closely followed by affiliative, democratic, and coaching. It is important to note that nobody thought that authoritative leadership is necessary. The skills most valued in a leader are communication skills, with 70%, the capacity to influence, inspire and motivate, with a 60%, conflict management, with 53.3%, and the capacity to establish goals, with 50%. The other proposed skills, which included resilience, personal knowledge, innovation, assertiveness, and result-orientation received lesser percentages, between 16.7% and 10%. Addressing the issue of Covid-19, 90% of the organizations believe that new leadership initiatives are necessary in times of crisis and gave the pandemic as an example.

Within the Portuguese context, the survey explained similar results. 70.4% of the respondents affirmed to conducting leadership initiatives within their organization. The most used are formations and occasional conferences or talks. Concerning leadership styles that the Portuguese Catholic Church ought to follow, the most popular one was affiliative, followed by visionary, democratic, and coaching. Again, none of the survey takers thought that an authoritative approach to leadership is necessary. Concerning the figure of a leader, the skills necessary to be an effective leader were said to be communication skills, with 81.5%, the capacity to influence, inspire and motivate, with 66.7%, the ability to innovate, with 40%, conflict management skills, with 37% and the capacity to establish goals, with 33%. This order appears to be the same as the Spanish survey results. Nonetheless, for Portuguese respondents, innovation is a skill perceived as being more necessary. Addressing the issue of Covid-19, a similar percentage thought that leadership initiatives are necessary in times of crisis, such as the pandemic. 81.5% of organizations believed this to be true.

Qualitative research results were collected using best practices examples. The institutions that are carrying out best practices in terms of development, encouragement and promotion of religious leadership in the Iberian Peninsula include dioceses and relevant religious organizations. They are:

- Diocese of Solsona, in Spain. This is a great example of constant leadership formation. Autem is the name of the program that this diocese is putting forward for the third consecutive year. It was conceived with two principles, that the parish needs transformation and that priests need to be ready to lead. This program forms leadership and teambuilding within the framework of the 21st century.
- Diocese of Leiria-Fátima, in Portugal. This diocese serves as another example of the importance of leadership formation within the Portuguese Catholic Church. Particularly, its school Razões de Esperança, offers a course that combines fundamental dimensions of the faith with enabling the performance of pastoral agents.
- The organization Pastores Gregis Christi, in Spain. They offer a course in leadership for priests who want to transform their parish. The course is taught by pastoral experts, psychologists, coaches, direction consultants and a priest. It offers four modules of formation as well as parallel personal accompaniment for the participants.
- The Management and Leadership for Ecclesiastic Forepeople Program, in Portugal. This is a program conducted collaboratively by the Portuguese Catholic University and the Lisbon Catholic School of Business and Economics. Its main objective is to develop leadership practices for the entities that are responsible for the functioning of the



Catholic Church in Portugal by stimulating entrepreneurial attitudes and improving the use of digital communication technologies. They also focus on team building, among other skills. This formation is for bishops, administrators, religious institutes, Catholic schools and other related groups.

- The group Alpha, in both countries. They are present around the world and focus on organizing sessions to discuss the fundamentals of Christian faith in a welcoming and deliberative way. They gather together those who are curious into a specific community and put them into what they call "Alpha Teams."

5. Conclusions and Discussion

First and foremost, this study found that the concept of leadership has a wide meaning. Although some organizations had a clear idea and a pre-existing focus on leadership formation, the research team had to be specific and reiterate the logics of leadership in religious organizations in order to approach and establish two-way conversations. This was useful to understand the situation of leadership in religious organizations in Spain and Portugal and was an initial approach to the final conclusion that there is still a lot to learn about the importance or benefits of leadership.

Further conclusions show that it is useful to divide them into challenges and proposals. Regarding challenges, when having to implement leadership initiatives, we have found that the main obstacle is the lack of time and the lack of internal and institutional coordination. These two aspects could also be related to the lack of clarity in the concept of leadership within religion. Moreover, the lack of human resources and investment are two other challenges that, although not as persistent as the aforementioned, should be considered as well.

Skepticism plays a role against leadership formation, which poses another challenge. Although there is skepticism, it cannot be denied that some organizations are pushing forward leadership formation and developing the leadership in Spain. For this reason, the last challenge relates to the two opposite realities that there is inequality in these initiatives. First of all, there is an evident inequality within organizations, as some assemble and are known for their trust in leadership and others look at it with skepticism. Secondly, there is also inequality within initiatives that should be considered and, although we measure initiatives in general, some are solid and consistent programs as opposed to others that are occasional, sporadic and infrequent. Additionally, a great majority of the respondents agree that leadership is necessary in times of crisis, however, this statement shows that, although the respondents are in agreement, only some initiatives are considered consistent and impactful.

To address these challenges in a general way, a study should be carried out that focuses on clarifying the concept of leadership, on investing and communicating ecclesiastic leadership, on improving human and spiritual formation, on improving time management, vision and coordination, and on uniting in action and accepting and being conscious of the fact that contributions of leadership do not go against the gospel and the faith. In addition, for in-depth proposals related to Covid-19, the proposed initiatives should focus on sharing experiences and reflections, as well as how to manage the mourning phase, accompaniment initiatives, conflict resolution, crisis management, the



capacity to create enthusiasm, the renovation and innovation of the service vocation, or to take advantage and make the most out of this situation, to name some examples.

All in all, it is not that Catholic communities in Spain and Portugal are not engaging in leadership practices, however, there is room for improvement. As a new field, concepts should be introduced that emphasize the positive impact of this practice. Moreover, it is important to remember that leadership formation is indeed something that exists and, therefore, can be taught and learned through various means. The initiatives that have already actively implemented leadership, demonstrate useful results for their participants. They understand that proper leadership can improve the relationship between the members of these religious communities and increase communication and engagement.

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SOCIAL NETWORKS AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS IN THE TOURISM SECTOR

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Abstract

Tourism is a social and scientific phenomenon. From here, its knowledge must be approached from a complete vision and not limited to a single discipline or set of them separately, since it is multidisciplinary. The role of international relations in tourism is a phenomenon with great economic, social, cultural, and environmental consequences, which can condition the behavior of tourists and the tourism sector as a whole. The pandemic caused by COVID-19 has affected the entire world population, the main economic engines of each and every one of the countries and international relations derived from the tourism sector. The coronavirus has not only affected the people who are under its effects, but it has also changed the global perception of reality just as the media have been forced to create a new way of communicating. Meanwhile, social networks have been the fastest and easiest way to disseminate all kinds of information and misinformation, adopting new formats and new anti-hoax measures (fake news). They have been effective and it is identified that thanks to the different platforms, citizens have found themselves somewhat more sheltered, understood and have received information about what is happening around their lives. Due to the closure of borders and the decrease in flights, worldwide tourism suffers serious consequences and for all this, the incidence of the coronavirus in the economy and international relations are protagonists of a difficult reality and a prompt and expected recovery.

Keywords

Comunicación; Turismo; Redes sociales; Relaciones internacionales; Covid-19.

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SOCIAL NETWORKS AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS IN THE TOURISM SECTOR¹

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1. Introduction

Tourism can be addressed in a multispectral way, from its social aspects, its cultural importance, its impact on the natural environment, and, of course, its economic strand (Caldevilla-Domínguez *et al.*, 2020). It is not even limited to be seen as an industry of the tertiary and free time sector, and tourism is the result of public and private, and governmental and popular actions. In spite of that, there is limited academic action regarding this field, thus leading to an analytical gap in the subject and its link to International Relations. Such gap can be filled with the multidisciplinary contribution derived from the study of local and/or national tourism, including its economic, cultural, and other strands, as a differentiating attractive aspect (Martínez-Rolán *et al.*, 2019).

There is also the gap linked to the influence of information and communications technologies (ICTs): since through their implementation in the tourism sphere, users with intermediate digital competences (Fernández-Cavia *et al.*, 2020, Chinchay-Villarreyes *et al.*, 2020) are influencing the industry, specifically by endorsing products or services via social networks (Matassi & Boczkowski, 2020). In the current digital context, relation ambits, which a priori have opposite origins, are linked (Ganga-Contreras *et al.*, 2017), anticipating the multidisciplinary climate that should characterize tourism research: The participatory culture of prosuming (Martín-Antoranz *et al.*, 2020) imposed by ICTs environment (ultimately, the Web is strongly related to various forms of consumption (González-Vallés *et al.*, 2020), the tourism industry and the International Relations linked to it. In the first one, there are practices like crucibles, the collective intelligence and the collaborative culture between users and threats such as the ones pointed out by Cáceres (2009) and Barrientos-Báez *et al.* (2018), while the second promotes the homogenization of productive processes, sacralizing profits and

¹ Article translated by Carlos Javier Rivas Quintero (University of the Andes, Mérida, Venezuela).



business concentration. The third is the maximization of the human relation science, expressed in its terms of greatest volume and consequences, but also more influenced by micro-managing. Between these three subjects of study there is a gray area. It is here where users with intermediate digital competences are influencing tourism industries, specifically by endorsing products or services via social networks (Matassi and Boczkowski, 2020, Araújo and González, 2019).

This work partially emerges from reflections on the new media ecosystem and its relation with one science field –the study of the tourism phenomenon- which has a component in and impact on International Relations.

In tourism science, the emergence of social networks changed the communicative paradigm (Caldevilla-Domínguez, 2014), transforming how people from all the countries and social classes access information, plan, and share their trips, allowing suppliers to interact dynamically and directly with users, thus facilitating the adaptation of their activity to the new realities with the implementation of effective feedback. However, various studies show there is still a lack of knowledge of how some initiatives can lead to a better use of social networks (Oliveira *et al.*, 2017, Hays *et al.*, 2013, Infante-Limón, 2014). Social networks gain strength from specific environments (Calderón *et al.*, 2017).

This article aims to contribute to a better understanding of social networks' potential in tourism and tourism's relation with International Relations.

2. Design and Method

This article is a narrative review aimed to search and retrieve documents concerning the implementation of ICTs in tourism promotion and tourism activities that can be linked to International Relations, to respond to the initial statement. To this end, various sources from relevant subjects have been consulted in books, articles, studies, and scientific journals. Criteria for information searching included: studies, articles, and monographs published until 2020, in Spanish or English, with open access to the full text (with the possibility of giving way to older material if it provided a relevant theoretical basis). The exclusion criteria included articles that were markedly opposite to a scientific source, such as opinion articles, or computer access material produced by users without being grounded in expertise. The search strategy was based on tourism, International Relations, and ICTs descriptors, relevant to the subject of study.

3. Development

3.1. Tourism

As a phenomenon, it can be affirmed that tourism has elements and manifestations prior to its generalization and recognition as a proper economic sector: having produced business branches very open to asymmetric communication (Navarro Celis *et al.*, 2020), such as cultural tourism (Araújo and Domínguez, 2012), or entering the thriving sustainability market (Barrientos-Báez *et al.*, 2020a, León-León *et al.*, 2018).



The implementation of tourism science with pecuniary purposes to reality has generated these branches, thus responding to a variety of audiences segmented by economic criteria (Caldevilla-Domínguez *et al.*, 2019). Due to these factors, tourism phenomenon is studied multilaterally, resulting in investigative subsections such as tourism psychology, tourism politics, tourism economy, and tourism sociology, as means to determine the segments and different types of demand and target audiences.

All this makes it impossible for the definition of tourism to be limited to its economic strand. A reductionist vision of the tourism theory only to leisure time underpinned by the fact that tourism requires its practitioners to have time and means to travel, driven by their searching for entertainment, being these conditioning factors necessary but insufficient for the study of the tourism social phenomenon.

In 1991, The International Conference on Travel and Tourism Statistics, approved by UNWTO (World Tourism Organization), signified the zenith of research efforts in the subject between 1975 and 1985, from both international organizations and interested countries, with Canada standing out. Basing on previous studies, WTO defined internal and international tourism, creating a classification of tourism activities. The basic definition was, "the activities of persons traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes not related to the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place visited (WTO, 1991). Furthermore, Goeldner (2000) defines it as "the processes, activities, and outcomes arising from the relationships and the interactions among tourists, tourism suppliers, host governments, host communities, and surrounding environments that are involved in the attracting and hosting of visitors". His approach limits the scope of analysis to the perspective from the country source of tourists, the relationships among them and the business entities providing services to them.

Regarding its characteristics, the tourism product is mainly "time" for sightseeing, staying in hotels, and travelling. It is also the product of "seasons", since certain dates increase the value of territories (Fernández-Paradas and Sánchez Guzmán, 2018). These time choices entail a "life section" that is different, enjoyable, and of a leisure or work nature, based on the enjoyment of experiences in places outside or different from people's usual environment. Like any other service, it is intangible and subjective from both sides of the service chain. The objective is to make the client feel sensations and emotions through new experiences; with the purpose of achieving that feeling of living something new, which is why it is essential for the business, and the Academy, to train those in charge of providing these experiences (Barrientos-Báez *et al.*, 2020b). It is not about offering people material goods but creating and meeting their expectations of the experiences awaiting them, the environment they will experience and the memories they will cherish. Especially, the unique selling proposition is satisfying the expectations that people were helped to generate. Using tangible goods is an essential part of the process to create the expectations the client seeks to experience such as those involved in transportation, the food available for visitors, accommodation amenities, and a very relevant aspect recently, the safety of the trip, which all combined determines the quality of the service enjoyed by the traveller. Now more than ever, the market is governed by clients' public opinions (Feijoo-Fernández and Guerreño-Cortés, 2018). Other characteristics of the tourism product that influence service quality are:



- Expiration: the inability of stocking a service. Service time: either you use it or lose it.
- Aggregability and modularity: tourism product is formed by “mixing” diverse “ingredients”, some of which can be replaced with other equal or similar ones.
- Subjectivity, individuality, and immediacy: it is subjective since it depends on clients and suppliers’ circumstances at the time of the tourism experience taking place. Based on such circumstances, the level and type of satisfaction will vary from one client to another.
- Production-consumption simultaneity: the client participates in finishing the product and is part of its final result.
- Heterogeneity: the product is made up of a myriad of factors, many of which are not foreseeable or programmable, thus the experience is never exactly the same; for example, due to the aforementioned simultaneity.
- It is not transportable: the client is transported, not the product.
- Seasonality: subject to fluctuations in demand due to the general and specific weather conditions.
- Interdependence: with the rest of its sector and related economic areas.
- Easily copied: it is extremely easy for anyone to gain a deep understanding of the product.
- High fixed costs: the necessary infrastructure to provide the service has to be constantly maintained in proper conditions, regardless of whether they are being used.

Therefore, we can affirm that the constituent parts of tourism are affected by the very occurrences and types of relationships that cause and surround trips: among visitors and entities managing these trips, service suppliers that allow and fill with content tourists’ stay, and legislation applicable in the origin, destination and internationally.

3.1.1. Travellers

WTO has an essential glossary that defines traveller as “someone who moves between different geographic locations, for any purpose and any duration.” The terms of international tourism that we have used here are defined by WTO (1991) as follows:

- Visitor: a traveller taking a trip to a main destination outside his/her usual environment, for less than a year, for any main purpose other than to be employed by a resident entity in the country or place visited.
- Tourist: A visitor who travels to a country other than that in which he/she has his/her usual residence for at least one night but not more than one year, and whose main purpose of visit is other than the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the country visited.
- Excursionist: a visitor who travels to a country other than that in which he/she has his/her usual residence and that is outside his/her usual environment, for less than 24 hours without spending the night in the country visited. His/her main purpose of visit is other than the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the country visited.



3.1.2. Analysis of tourism multidisciplinary

The different definitions of current tourism are product of constituent principles from various disciplines.

Precisely, the diversity of conceptual approaches concerning tourism has represented an obstacle to the creation of a comprehensible theoretical framework to understand and classify the issues regarding this subject. From economy, sociology, and tourism, there have only been discussions on the economic strand and the sociocultural impact. This is due to the preconception that scholars of this phenomenon have tools from other disciplines to understand it. But this leaves very little room to determine what tourism per se has to say, as a scientific discipline, about itself as such phenomenon. Studying tourism from this angle entails acknowledging it has innated means of analysis in those subjects that are inherent to it. However, as aforementioned, its scholars rely on a treasure of theories and methods that originated from various other disciplines of social sciences: politics, sociology, anthropology, psychology, ecology, geography, economy, history, etc., which are fields of study pertaining to other subjects (Tribe, 1997), and that are somewhat related to tourism: such as marketing, administration, leisure, and entertainment, directly linkable to the use of social networks (Parra-López *et al.*, 2014). Although tourism touches various facets of human life, the economic and commercial aspects have received a favorable treatment in this sense: probably because they have constituted a resource for the development of third world countries. A money-making machine in many economies. This preconception has sometimes become a reality, while in other cases is still no more than a false promise (Fiorello, 2010; Boccardi *et al.*, 2008). This has caused the field of economy to be the one in charge of generating the largest quantity of applicable theoretical-conceptual contributions. Tourism's socio-anthropological aspects, which we have also mentioned already, have not been immune to all this, causing terms related to "subject of tourism", "role" or "actor" of tourism, etc., to be coined. This multidisciplinary intervention in tourism-subject has promoted the emergence of the concepts of tourism geography, tourism psychology, tourism policy, or tourism legislation. The qualifier *tourism* operates, in this case, as the nexus that connects tourism, geography, and psychology; disciplines that are not epistemologically related to tourism, but which have had an enormous impact on the initial conception of professionals in the sector. The noun-adjective *tourism* must allude to what the whole name represents, and not partially linked realities. Tourism is a complex and human phenomenon (Tribe, 1997); hence it needs the participation of the aforementioned disciplines: not only in an aggregative sense, but also in a way that all the disciplines involved can benefit from the total contribution. Tourism is a phenomenon that extends to various sectors of human existence, individually and socially: if tourism has favorable financial effects upon an area, it would also influence, in one way or another, the social aspect. Hence, the participation of economy and sociology will be necessary to study its effects and characteristics. Therefore, it is essential to note how important the economic, social, political, and environmental configurations are in the creation of tourism's theoretical corpus: acknowledging that, in accordance with the context surrounding this phenomenon, it must be subject of a comprehensive study including all the applicable disciplines.



Acknowledging tourism as a subject of a multidisciplinary study must not entail that they would “confiscate” said subject and, with it, the exclusivity on knowledge regarding this matter. The sense of education in tourism is to understand, explain, and substantiate tourism knowledge, but as stated before, from a comprehensive and truly multidisciplinary perspective. All this without falling, to the extent possible, in partisan preconceptions associated to these multiple disciplines that, consciously or unconsciously, could hinder the ultimate goal of multidisciplinary. Tourism’s scholars must not limit themselves to the particular approaches of their fields but use the appropriate contributions of each discipline in a way that the subject under discussion (tourism) can be reformulated. This interdisciplinarity, of which we are constantly speaking, gets very close to the concept of hybridization: aiming that this subject cease to be supported only by a few chairs that are erected in “the” theoretical framework of tourism. These special academic needs derive from tourism being, in its origin, a subject of study essentially human, whose activity spectrum permeates diverse layers of the aforementioned humanity. These factors result in the necessity of disciplinary convergence in each one of these layers that allow forming an understandable applicable whole: to address aspects derived from free time, consumption, social trends and cultural context, individual motivations and views, as well as the very context of tourism activity. With the latter taking care of its policies, business models, and how they influence their social environments, its development regarding globalization, sociocultural characteristics, and the adaptation processes to the modernity of tourist destinations. To this end, the creation of conceptual-theoretical schemes that define the subject of study, called “tourism”, are necessary. It should not receive the title of science merely for its theoretical and practical framework combination, nor should its study be limited to an epistemological question, nor should it be proposed that it be limited to being an ordinary subject field exclusively oriented toward the execution of the activity and its ramifications in International Relations, since the main problem it faces is not only its development as business, but how to understand it and redirect it as an undisputed reality, aiming at the comprehensive development of destination countries and serving as a positive nexus to unite nations.

3.2 International Relations

They were initially conceived in an entirely historical-political light, but have increasingly taken into consideration the economic, cultural, and social components in recent times. After all, the science of International Relations addresses social relations, whether these are the relations that originate among individuals, groups of individuals or both, with the preeminence it gives to the relations between States. There is consensus (WTO, 1991) that International Relations address a living part of social reality, which makes them a social science. Arenal (1990) states, “International Relations are configured as an integration and synthesis discipline of the data provided by other disciplines, while the objective of its research provides superior content, which grants its special character to it at the core of social sciences,” implying that International Relations are not limited to the relations between States, extending to the interactions between people and groups located in different countries; relations between groups internationally, and not only between governments.



This perspective is relevant since practice has demonstrated the necessity to understand international events in essence, thus allowing attaining categorizations of the expectable or predictable behavior in International Relations. Some authors argue that International Relations must be studied as a specialized branch of political science, disregarding the study of other non-strictly political actors and areas, for example, the geographic constraints, the ideological phenomena, NGO, the state of public opinion, etc. Although they have certainly been considered a part of political science, now their interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary character tends to be highlighted.

The scope of International Relations encompasses International Political Economy, Law, Philosophy, Geopolitics, Sociology, Anthropology, Psychology, and of course, Tourism: with particular emphasis on the analysis and materialization of Groups-State foreign policy. Rodríguez-Torres and Puerta-Rodríguez (n.d.) state, "Hence, International Economic Relations are defined as the extension of national economic relations to the outside, which becomes a clear manifestation of its nature as Social Relations of Production" (p. 8). And "we must also consider that these Relations are directly influenced by the political relations that entail the existence of different States, hence they will also depend on the domestic and foreign economic policy implemented by countries, constrained at their basis by the different development levels of participants' productive forces" (p. 9). It is possible to affirm that economic relations on an international scale, based on their complex and multispectral nature and based on the sector in which they develop, are five: commercial, monetary, financial, collaborative/cooperative, and for economic integration. González-Gómez (1990) states "[...] the discipline of international relations emerges to satisfy the need of popular masses, on the one hand of governments, and on the other, to understand the complicated current international panorama [...], therefore, the discipline begins as a science of great powers and to serve their interests, although in fact it is of interest to all the nations in the world" (p. 3). Foresight studies of International Relations aim to support the decision-making processes that enhance the most positive developments of the international scene, minimizing the negative ones. International Relations, being a science, are not a normative science: their purpose is not establishing behavioral norms or principles of the actors involved or individuals per se, being the economic strand important.

3.3. Applied ICTs

According to Araújo and Domínguez (2012) the key to an effective digital communication lies in "searching ways of managing it and making it attractive to users", geared towards generating the need of consuming the product. Tourism is probably one of the activities that have been influenced the most by Information and Communications Technologies (Altamirano *et al.*, 2016) after teaching with regard to its previous establishment (Correyero, 2003). The action of new digital communication technologies permeates the very existence of travel thanks to the modern Orwellian telescreens: mobile devices with geolocation applications capable of assisting travellers with vital or minor aspects. Social networks affect how advertisements are perceived, by facilitating the contrast between the experience being advertised and the impression of thousands of travellers (Martínez-Sala *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, we can affirm that the traditional ways of obtaining information (and even of advertising) have been left behind, with the risks that hoaxes



entail, a blight on certain economic sectors such the hospitality industry (and certainly tourism) since sources must be compared and that is hardly ever made (Ruiz Rico, 2020).

The tourist 2.0 is an independent and technologically capable tourist promoter, since they rely on a collaborative digital community (Sarmiento & Terceño, 2018). Social networks are an ideal space to research the market and delve into the particularities of users, especially of digital native adults, from 18 to 30 years of age. "Knowing the personality of others is an essential ability to have successful relationships" (Martínez-Valerio, 2016), and within this digital communication context, social networks emerge like an open-door platform leading to the inner minds of these generations. The daily number of trends that appear on social networks from which brands could benefit is innumerable; but they must be assessed professionally to determine which ones concern their audiences and specific market niches. Tourism sector has made use of the Web 2.0, and especially, of social networks, making them promotional tools in everyday life, leading to the emergence of specific social networks for this sector: virtual communities launched by users. For any tourism institution or company, it is indispensable to know how to operate within the social networks environment to relate better with its users or potential travellers.

4. Results

The importance of tourism in International Relations is mainly perceived in how these disciplines are interrelated: something noticeable in the systemic approach and in the elements that are inherent to tourism: its multidisciplinary, aggregative, dynamic, and open nature.

The systemic approach is the most appropriate one to understand this "tourism system" for several reasons: first, because it highlights the interdependence in tourism; various relevant disciplines working towards achieving a common goal. There is also the open nature of tourism as a system, having a flexible, dynamic, and changing structure. New concepts and facts are constantly being implemented to tourism. Additionally, it is affected by multiple external influences leading to both negative and positive results on any subject that enters its contact sphere. It is also important to bear in mind the complexity and variety of the tourism discipline as seen in the varied offer of travel packages and types of tourism, and as it can be seen in the intense competitiveness within the sector, including the big companies worldwide.

The way how the COVID-19 phenomenon has boosted the implementation of ICTs and the even greater growth of Social Networks has generated the acceleration in this systemic interrelation: thus, enhancing tourism user communities (internationally cross-cutting communities, with English increasingly becoming the lingua franca) despite the logical recent decline in the king-strand concerning the study of tourism: the economic strand.

Therefore, at an international level, there have been digital exchanges of information in the tourism area, and it has been possible thanks to social networks. Due to them, a portion of the current pre-COVID international relations has permitted this relation sub-sphere in the tourism sector to keep on functioning despite the circumstances, promoting interest, demand, and information for the future. Here lies the importance of international



relations for the tourism discipline, as well as part of the added value provided by global digitalization to it.

5. Conclusions

The international nature of social relations is undeniable, regardless of whom their protagonists are and whether they take place within a State or, on the contrary, by breaking its limits. We are speaking of relationships among nations, groups, cities: between groups and individuals, and between individuals: being tourism a paradigmatic example of International Relations not directly linked to States of big groups. International Relations as a science, aim to support the decision-making processes that enhance the most positive developments of the international scene, minimizing the negative ones. They are not a normative science (but a science after all) since their purpose is not establishing behavioral norms or principles of the actors involved or individuals per se, being the economic strand important.

Meanwhile, tourism is both a newly developed social phenomenon and a science regarding how it must be studied and treated academically. Thus, knowledge here must be attained through a real multifaceted approach, without falling in preconceptions derived from a single field of knowledge; something that is much more effectively achieved with a systemic approach that allows perceiving how this phenomenon is related to the rest of reality and sciences. It should not receive the tittle of science merely for its theoretical and practical framework combination, nor should it be limited to an epistemological question, nor should it be an ordinary subject field exclusively oriented toward the practical ambit and its ramifications in International Relations, since the main problem it faces is not only its development as business, but how to understand it and redirect it as an undisputed reality, aiming at the comprehensive development of destination countries and serving as a positive nexus to unite nations.

The role of International Relations within this phenomenon and the tourism discipline bears a significant economic and social weight, although the current situation of the tourism-economic activity being at a standstill due to COVID-19 offers the unique opportunity of studying this phenomenon with relative independence from this variable.

Tourists 2.0 are now active subjects of the communicative process at an international level in the tourism industry: beyond their traditional importance as “clients”, their “digital” role now is to be advertisers, promoters, and critics of the products they consume, and the services being offered to them.

This change of paradigm regarding their inner “I” entails the need of rethinking the communication strategies based on the new digital environment, given the fact that the new publics in the sectors are native of it, and have created their own collaborative communities in it; communities capable of removing a large portion of the reputational control from the hands of companies, and to keep operating and exercising their influence during times of recession in the sector.



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