



Communicative strategies on Facebook: personalisation and community building in the 2016 elections in Spain

Estrategias comunicativas en Facebook: personalización y construcción de comunidad en las elecciones de 2016 en España



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How to cite this article:

López-Meri, A.; Marcos-García, S. y Casero-Ripollés, A. (2020). Communicative strategies on Facebook: personalisation and community building in the 2016 elections in Spain. *Doxa Comunicació*, 30, pp. 229-248.

<https://doi.org/10.31921/doxacom.n30a12>

Received: 24/12/2019 - Accepted: 28/02/2020

Abstract:

Social media have become fundamental platforms of influence during election periods. They are forums where politicians promote their agendas and programs, encourage mobilisation, and call on the public to vote, although they rarely engage in dialogue with citizens. The aim of this study is to delve deeper into the case of Facebook and evaluate the functions that Spanish politicians attribute to this platform by using quantitative content analysis of all the posts published by the main political parties and their candidates in the 2016 Spanish election campaign. The results indicate that campaign events take up a significant part of the activity, and that interaction with the audience is low. There is also an upward trend in personalisation and community building, strategies that can help to gain influence by showing a more human side of the candidates and appealing to the values and ideology of the party.

Keywords:

Political communication; election campaign; Facebook; personalisation; community of followers.

Recibido: 24/12/2019 - Aceptado: 28/02/2020

Recibido:

Las redes sociales se han convertido en plataformas esenciales para ejercer influencia en periodos electorales. Son foros donde los actores políticos promocionan sus agendas y programas, animan a la movilización y piden el voto, aunque rara vez dialogan con la ciudadanía. El objetivo de este estudio es profundizar en el caso de Facebook y evaluar las funciones que le atribuyen los políticos españoles, mediante el análisis de contenido cuantitativo de todas las publicaciones difundidas por los principales partidos y sus candidatos en la campaña electoral de 2016. Los resultados indican que los actos de campaña copan el grueso de la actividad y que la interacción con la audiencia es escasa. Se aprecia, además, una tendencia al alza de la personalización y la construcción de comunidad, estrategias que pueden permitir ganar influencia mostrando el lado más humano de los candidatos y apelando a los valores e ideología del partido.

Palabras claves:

Comunicación política; campaña electoral; Facebook; personalización; comunidad de seguidores.

1. Introduction

In recent years, electoral campaigns have been redefined, mainly due to the emergence of social networks (Gil de Zúñiga, Huber & Strauß, 2018; Woolley, Limperos & Oliver, 2010). The potential of these platforms in which ease of participation and interaction prevails, enables politicians to produce and disseminate their own messages autonomously (Castells, 2009; Parmelee & Bichard, 2011). Likewise, these platforms allow them to maintain and create their own image, promote circles of support, and relate directly to other users, thus exercising a much more direct influence over citizens (Chadwick, 2013; Túñez & Sixto, 2011). Social networks such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube have established a new communication context between political parties and their voters, thus becoming preferential tools in the communication strategies of parties and political leaders (Bruns & Burgess, 2012; Jungherr, Schoen & Jürgens, 2015).

Previous research has focused mainly on examining the way that politicians use Twitter (Casero-Ripollés, 2018). At the international level, what stands out are studies focusing on the analysis of use dynamics and the thematic agenda disseminated by parties and political leaders on this platform (Enli & Skogerbø, 2013; Graham, Jackson & Broersma, 2016; Grusell & Nord, 2012; Jackson & Lilleker, 2011; Jungherr, 2014; Posegga & Jungherr, 2019; Vergeer, Hermans & Sams, 2013). In Spain, literature on the subject is extensive and deals with two facets, which are the study of general election campaigns (López-Abellán, 2012; Jivkova-Semova, Requeijo-Rey & Padilla-Castillo, 2017; Zugasti-Azagra & Pérez-González, 2016; García-Ortega & Zugasti-Azagra, 2018), in addition to regional or local elections (Criado, Martínez-Fuentes & Silván,

2013; López-Meri, 2016; Marín-Dueñas & Díaz-Guerra, 2016; Quevedo-Redondo, Portalés-Oliva & Berrocal-Gonzalo, 2016). These studies also pay special attention to aspects such as interaction between politicians and other Twitter users (Alonso-Muñoz, Marcos-García & Casero-Ripollés, 2017; Alonso-Muñoz, Miquel Segarra & Casero-Ripollés, 2016; Pérez-Dasilva, Meso-Ayerdi & Mendiguren-Galdospín, 2018), the content of messages (Zugasti-Azagra & Pérez-González, 2016; López-García, 2016; Zugasti-Azagra & García-Ortega, 2018), the influence of image (Bustos-Díaz & Ruiz del Olmo, 2018; López-Rabadán, López-Meri & Doménech-Fabregat, 2016), and the main uses and functions that politicians attribute to this social network (López-Meri, Marcos-García & Casero-Ripollés, 2017).

However, Facebook has generated less interest in the field of political communication research (Casero-Ripollés, 2018). Among the studies that have dealt with this social network, those that are especially significant are works that have analysed its use by politicians in the 2008 and 2012 elections in the United States in which Barack Obama was elected president of the country (Gerodimos & Justinussen, 2015; Robertson, Vatrappu & Medina, 2010; Williams & Gulati, 2013; Woolley, Limperos, & Oliver, 2010).

In Spain, the study of Facebook is still in its infancy and is especially focused on the analysis of content and resources shared by politicians (Túñez & Sixto, 2011), or on specific phenomena such as citizen participation (Fenoll & Cano-Orón, 2017; Zurutuza & Lilleker, 2018), the use of emotion (Coromina, Prado & Padilla, 2018; Sampietro & Valera-Ordaz, 2015), and persuasion (Abejón-Mendoza & Mayoral-Sánchez, 2017). However, research in Spain regarding the way in which politicians generally use this social network is still scarce.

2. Political uses of social networks: Facebook in election campaigns

Facebook has more than 2.1 billion active users worldwide (Global Digital Report, 2018), as well as one of the highest levels of participation. Its features allow users to exploit a multitude of functions, highlighted by the publication and sharing of content, interaction with other people through comments and reactions (“I like it”, “I have fun”, “It makes me angry”, among others), or community building related to their tastes and interests (Coromina, Prado & Padilla, 2018). In short, Facebook makes it possible for anyone to communicate and share their opinions and knowledge with a large audience, and as a result it becomes a space where quality deliberation on matters of public interest can take place (Camaj & Santana, 2016).

The large number of users, as well as Facebook’s own digital architecture (open structure network, hyperlink function, unlimited length of videos, algorithmic filtering, the possibility of including sponsored advertising), are all very attractive to politicians, who have incorporated this platform as another instrument of communication in their electoral campaigns (Bossetta, 2018; Woolley, Limperos & Oliver, 2010). However, according to studies carried out in different countries, there is still no consensus regarding the effect of Facebook on the public agenda, nor as a source of political information (Skogerbø & Krumsvik, 2015; Stier et al., 2018), and not even with regard to its effects on electoral results or on the communication strategies of politicians. On one hand, it has been pointed out that Facebook can promote political participation, debate with the audience, and voter engagement during campaign periods (Bene, 2018; Di Bonito, 2014; Gerbaudo, Marogna & Alzetta, 2019; Stier et al, 2018; Vesnic-Alujevic, 2012), while on the other hand, it has been concluded that political parties

and their leaders do not use this platform as a means of engaging in dialogue with other users (Klinger & Russmann, 2017; Macnamara & Kenning, 2011; Magin et al., 2017; Ross, Fountaine & Comrie, 2015; Russmann, 2018; Sweetser & Weaver, 2008). These results coincide with what has been observed on other social networks, such as Twitter. Thus, studies that have dealt with Twitter indicate that politicians tend to offer a one-way discourse, focusing on self-promotion of their own content such as program proposals and campaign events (Alonso-Muñoz, Marcos-García & Casero-Ripollés, 2017; Pérez-Dasilva, Meso-Ayerdi & Mendiguren-Galdospín, 2018; López-García, 2016; López-Meri, Marcos-García & Casero-Ripollés, 2017).

However, previous literature is in agreement when it points out that the relationship between politicians and citizens is one of influence. Thus, political parties and leaders tend to use social networks as a tool for effective voter mobilization and the dissemination of information about campaign events (Stetka, Surowiec & Mazák, 2019; Williams & Gulati, 2013). Studies such as the one carried out by Valera-Ordaz (2019) show that in the Spanish general elections of 2015, some political groups took advantage of Facebook pages to promote community building and social cohesion with people who had ideas that were similar to those of their political program. At the same time, López-Meri, Marcos-García and Casero-Ripollés (2017) point to the 2016 national election campaign a year later in which traditional and emerging parties dedicated a large part of their Twitter messages to encouraging citizens to take an active role in the campaign, as well as explicitly asking for their vote.

This influence on voters also takes place from the point of view of personalisation. Various studies indicate that politicians tend to use social networks as a way of giving greater prominence to the leader (Gerodimos & Justinussen, 2015; Puentes-Rivera, Rúas-Araujo & Dapena-González, 2016). This trend that can be seen, above all, in those platforms based on the use of image. In this sense, candidates take advantage of this visual potential in order to show how they carry out the activities associated with their professional role, as well as other situations typical of their daily lives, thus humanizing their political image (López-Rabadán & Doménech-Fabregat, 2018; Selva-Ruiz & Caro Castaño, 2017). Studies such as that of Enli & Skogerbø (2013) also point to an incipient trend to share some aspects of their private lives, such as family photos or cultural endorsements, among others.

In this context, after more than a decade has passed since the first studies were conducted on the use and influence of social networks in Barack Obama's election campaign, it is interesting to look more closely at the Spanish case. Specifically, the aim of this article is to analyse the main functions attributed to Facebook by politicians who ran in the 2016 general elections. The objective is to discover the purpose for which they used this platform and to identify their communication strategies. In this regard, the following research questions and their respective hypotheses have been proposed as follows:

RQ1: What functions do parties and their leaders attribute to Facebook during election campaigns?

H1: Political parties and their leaders tend to promote their campaign events and programs, as well as ask people for their vote, but they hardly use Facebook to encourage real dialogue with their supporters. However, leaders strive to strengthen ties with their community of supporters, share personal aspects, and give backstage information and anecdotes related to the election campaign.

RQ2: Are there differences between politicians according to their main ideas regarding progressive-conservative ideologies, and according to their central concepts about traditional party-emerging party?

H2: Progressive parties and their leaders strengthen their ties with the community more than conservative parties and their candidates, and they do so by appealing to the values and ideological foundations of their political parties. On the other hand, emerging parties and their leaders share personal issues and promote interaction with their supporters to a greater extent than traditional parties.

3. Methodology

The methodology used in this research is based on the techniques of quantitative content analysis (Igartua, 2006, Piñuel, 2002). Specifically, all of the publications that the main parties and their candidates disseminated on Facebook in the 2016 electoral campaign in Spain have been analysed. The period of investigation covered 18 days, including 15 days of official campaigning, the day of reflection, the day of voting, and the day after. During this period, the messages published in ten accounts of five parties and their respective leaders have been studied, and they are as follows: *Partido Popular (PP)* and Mariano Rajoy; *Partido Socialista (PSOE)* and Pedro Sánchez; *Ciudadanos (Cs)* and Albert Rivera; *Podemos* and Pablo Iglesias; *Izquierda Unida (IU)* and Alberto Garzón.

The sample was chosen according to those options that received the greatest number of votes in the 2016 election, representing 89.95% of all votes. It should be noted that Podemos and Izquierda Unida presented a joint list under the coalition known as Unidos Podemos, although they campaigned on Facebook from the accounts of both parties, which is why the details of both accounts are included. On the other hand, except for Alberto Garzón (IU), the rest of the leaders are the candidates of their respective lists to preside over the Spanish Government. Furthermore, this sample allows for a comparison to be made regarding the strategies followed by the big parties representing bipartisanship in Spain, PP and PSOE, which have been alternating power incumbency for years, as well as the strategies promoted by emerging parties that have been competing in the elections since 2015 and represent the “new politics”, which are Cs and Podemos.

Table 1. Distribution of the publication sample in Facebook

Parties	n	%
IU	95	15.8
PSOE	93	15.5
PP	76	12.6
Ciudadanos	59	9.8
Podemos	50	8.3
Leaders		
Alberto Garzón	88	14.6
Pedro Sánchez	55	9.2
Mariano Rajoy	38	6.3
Pablo Iglesias	33	5.5
Albert Rivera	14	2.3
Total	601	100.0

Source: Created by the authors

The sample was collected using the Netvizz application. The politicians who were analysed disseminated a total of 601 publications during the campaign (Table 1), of which 62% came from party accounts (373 posts), and 38% from leaders (228 posts). The statistical processing of the results was carried out using SPSS (v.23). The reliability of the inter-codifier, calculated with the Scott Pi formula, reaches a level of 0.97. Table 2 shows the analysis protocol used in this research, which was also based on previous work (López-Meri, Marcos-García & Casero-Ripollés, 2017).

Given that the objective is to analyse the functions that politicians attribute to Facebook during an election campaign, a series of categories and subcategories associated with the “function” variable have been designed. These are exclusive categories, or in other words, only one category is assigned to each analysis unit, which is the one that best represents the essence of the publication.

Table 2. Analysis protocol

Function		Description
Political agenda (organization of political events)		Information about campaign events
Program / Promises		Program measures or election proposals.
Political management achievements / opposition		Praise for achievements obtained by the party and/or its leader.
Criticism of the opponent		Direct attacks on the performance and/or ideology of other organizations or politicians.
Media Agenda (Media information)		Links to the media, an example of which is sharing an interview or debate in which the leader or other party member has participated.
Interaction / dialogue with users		The party or leader answers or asks another user through the use of the 'at' sign (@).
Participation and mobilization		Explicit request for the vote, for financial donations, or for the mobilisation of voters or volunteers.
Community building	Values and ideology	Publications that praise and strengthen the values and ideology of the party.
	Personal life / Backstage	Publications that show aspects of politicians' private lives (hobbies, preferences, family, etc.), in which they show a more human and personal side or where aspects of the campaign's backstage are shown (meetings, trips, etc.).
	Entertainment	Publications that aim to get closer to users by using entertainment.
Humour		Memes, practical jokes or other humorous resources.
Courtesy/Protocol		Acknowledgements, condolences, anniversaries, etc.
Other		Publications that cannot be classified according to the above categories.

Source: Created by the authors

4. Results

4.1. General trends

In the 2016 general election campaign in Spain, it can be ascertained that the traditional parties published more frequently on Facebook than the emerging parties (Table 3), especially the progressive parties, including Izquierda Unida (IU) and Partido Socialista (PSOE), followed by the conservative party, Partido Popular (PP).

These three forces account for 70.8% of the posts published by the five parties analysed. On an individual basis, the traditional parties achieved percentages that exceeded 20%, and even 25%, while the emerging parties, Ciudadanos (Cs) and Podemos, recorded percentages of around 15% and 13%, respectively (Table 3).

Table 3. Activity of the parties and leaders by number of publications

Parties	No.	%	Leaders	No.	%
IU	95	25.5	Alberto Garzón (IU)	88	38.6
PSOE	93	24.9	Pedro Sánchez (PSOE)	55	24.1
PP	76	20.4	Mariano Rajoy (PP)	38	16.7
Cs	59	15.8	Pablo Iglesias (Podemos)	33	14.5
Podemos	50	13.4	Albert Rivera (Cs)	14	6.1
Total	373	100.0	Total	228	100.0

Source: Created by the authors

This same trend is repeated by the leaders. Alberto Garzón (IU) and Pedro Sánchez (PSOE), are the most productive, accounting for 62.7% of total posts published by the five leaders analysed (Table 3). These two are followed at a considerable distance by Mariano Rajoy (PP) and Pablo Iglesias (Podemos), with percentages of 16% and 14%. The last position is held by Albert Rivera (Cs), who only published 14 campaign messages (6.1%). The case of Garzón (IU) stands out, as he headed the list of leaders with 38.6% of the messages and had more posts than the corporate accounts of parties such as Cs and Podemos. As Garzon (IU) was not a presidential candidate (he joined with Podemos whose candidate was Iglesias), his high level of activity might be due to his need for visibility, a reason that may have driven him to use Facebook more heavily.

4.1.1. Facebook functions in electoral campaigns

In response to RQ1 regarding the functions politicians attributed to Facebook during the campaign (Table 4), the leading positions were held by the intention to provide information regarding the agenda and organization of campaign events (25.6%); the call for people to vote, mobilization and other forms of participation (17.5%); and to share data on the electoral program (13.3%).

Table 4. Functions of Facebook posts in the 2016 election campaign

Function	%
Agenda and organization of political events	25.6
Participation	17.5
Program	13.3
Agenda / media information	7.8
Criticism of the opponent	7.7
Community Building: Personal Life / Backstage	7.7
Community Building: Values and Ideology	6.3
Courtesy/Protocol	5.7
Community Building: Fun / Entertainment	3.2
Political achievements	1.8
Interaction / Dialogue with users	1.3
Other	1.3
Humour	0.8
TOTAL	100.0

Source: Created by the authors

On an intermediate level, with percentages of around 7% and 6%, the posts focused on providing information about the interventions of the parties and leaders in the media, criticizing the political adversary, and community building to improve the loyalty or engagement of the audience, either by sharing private information or providing information regarding backstage activities of the campaign in an informal tone, or by appealing to the values or ideological foundations of the party (Table 4).

The remaining functions registered low percentages, even extremely low, as in the case of interaction with users (1.3%), or humour (0.8%). Politicians focus more on the campaign agenda and the program than on their achievements in previous terms (1.8%).

The dissemination of entertainment content was also insignificant (3.2%). Finally, there was some interest in messages related to protocol or courtesy (5.7%), the showing of appreciation or offering condolences, or highlighting anniversaries, among other issues.

4.2. Detailed analysis of Facebook functions related to parties and leaders

4.2.1. The activity of political parties

When analysing the data by party (Table 5), interesting discrepancies with regard to the general trends can be seen. For example, PSOE disrupted the trend of prioritising agenda items and campaign events. In fact, this party is the one that

allocates the least amount of publications for this purpose (only 9.7% of its posts). On the other hand, PP focuses more on promoting its activities in the media or news related to the campaign than to providing information about its own program (only 6.6% of its publications), contrary to the rest of the parties. As for Podemos and IU (in coalition), although references to the program and calls for participation carry a lot of weight on their Facebook Wall, they place less importance on these actions than other parties. Their percentages are around 10%, while organizations such as PSOE and Cs exceed 20% in these areas.

Table 5. Frequency of each function by party (in %)

Function	PP	PSOE	Podemos	Cs	IU
Political Agenda	40.8	9.7	36.0	27.1	20.0
Participation and mobilisation	25.0	21.5	10.0	22.0	16.8
Media Agenda	13.2	8.6	4.0	1.7	8.4
Program / promises	6.6	32.3	12.0	25.4	10.5
Political achievements	6.6	0.0	4.0	0.0	1.1
Criticism of the opponent	2.6	9.7	14.0	1.7	7.4
Interaction / dialogue with users	1.3	2.2	0.0	0.0	0.0
building: personal life	1.3	2.2	0.0	3.4	8.4
Community building: entertainment	1.3	0.0	6.0	0.0	12.6
Courtesy / protocol	1.3	1.1	6.0	3.4	4.2
Community building: values and ideology	0.0	10.8	8.0	15.3	7.4
Humour	0.0	2.2	0.0	0.0	2.1
Other	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.1
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Created by the authors

4.2.2. Differences between political parties according to their ideology and history

In response to RQ2, it is apparent that the media agenda is more present among traditional parties than emerging ones. Thus, Podemos and Cs are the parties that dedicate less space to the media, only in 4% and 1.7% of their publications, respectively (Table 5). In contrast, PP (13.2%), PSOE (8.6%) and IU (8.4%) register higher percentages in this task.

Moreover, it has been observed that criticism of the opponent is more frequent among progressive parties (PSOE, Podemos and IU) –Podemos being the one that uses this function the most– than among conservative parties (PP and Cs). Thus, PP and Cs only devote 2.6% and 1.7% of their content, respectively, to questioning the policies, actions or statements of other parties (Table 5). Podemos is the party that places the most importance on criticism (14%), even exceeding the program (12%) or requests for participation (10%).

With regard to functions that can strengthen the relationship with followers, such as interaction with the audience and community building through different channels, the data is mixed. In general, there is little or no direct interaction. There are hardly any posts where users receive responses or are challenged. On the other hand, the activity of increasing the

sense of belonging to the community by highlighting the values and ideological bases of the party attains outstanding percentages among all of the parties, except in the Facebook wall of PP. In this regard, Cs and PSOE are the forces that devote more space to this activity with 15.3% and 10.8% of their publications, respectively. Podemos and IU also use this function in 8% and 7.4% of their messages. However, community building through the strategies of sharing personal content or entertainment has only registered significant percentages in the case of IU (personal life in 8.4% of their posts and entertainment in 12.6%). Podemos also dedicates some space to entertainment (6%), but it does not disseminate personal information about its members.

4.2.3. *Activities of the leaders*

In terms of leaders (Table 6), there are also differences in general trends. For example, as had already happened with his own party, Sánchez (PSOE) disrupted the preference for prioritizing the agenda. In his case, the function that takes priority is sharing media content, normally related to his media activity (these focus of 25.5% of his posts). Also, more than the agenda function, Sánchez (PSOE) dedicates more space to criticising his opponent (16.4%). The rest of the candidates place a lot of emphasis on the agenda, although Rajoy (PP) still places more importance on asking for votes and mobilisation (34.2%).

In fact, the participation function registers high percentages on the walls of all candidates, although the percentages are not as high as in the case of the parties, except in the case of Rajoy (PP). Among the leaders, there is greater diversification in the use of Facebook's political functions, so there is a more balanced distribution in terms of percentages.

Another difference concerns functions related to programs/promises, which does not carry as much weight among the leaders as it does among the parties (Table 6). Specifically, the presence of this function is limited in the walls of Rajoy (PP), Iglesias (Podemos), and Garzón (IU), with percentages of 5.3%, 3% and 2.3%, respectively. On the other hand, this function is a priority in the case of Rivera (Cs), present in 21.4% of his party's messages.

Table 6. Frequency of each function by leader (in %)

Function	Rajoy	Sánchez	Iglesias	Rivera	Garzón
Participation and mobilisation	34.2	10.9	9.1	7.1	10.2
Political Agenda	21.1	14.5	39.4	28.6	31.8
Community building: personal life	10.5	5.5	12.1	7.1	23.9
Courtesy / protocol	10.5	10.9	9.1	14.3	9.1
Program / promises	5.3	10.9	3.0	21.4	2.3
Criticism of the opponent	5.3	16.4	6.1	0.0	8.0
Community building: values and ideology	5.3	1.8	9.1	14.3	6.8
Media Agenda	2.6	25.5	0.0	0.0	3.4
Interaction / dialogue with users	2.6	1.8	9.1	0.0	0.0
Community building: entertainment	2.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.3
Political achievements	0.0	1.8	3.0	7.1	0.0
Humour	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.1
Other	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.1
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Created by the authors

This also highlights the role of community building by sharing one's personal life or the backstage of the campaign (Table 6). This function, linked to personalisation, is present to a greater extent in the walls of the leaders than in those of the parties, especially in the case of Garzón (IU), with a percentage of 23.9%, but also with Iglesias (Podemos), Rajoy (PP) and Rivera (Cs), with percentages of 12.1%, 10.5% and 7.1%, respectively. In fact, this is the second most frequent activity in the wall of Garzón (IU) and Iglesias (Podemos), and the third most common function in the wall of Rajoy (PP). Only in the case of Sánchez (PSOE) has a lower percentage been registered (5.5%).

The media agenda function only attains relevance in the case of Sánchez (PSOE), as it is present in 25.5% of his posts, while it is scarce or non-existent among the rest of the leaders. The interaction/dialogue function with users only stands out on the wall of Iglesias (Podemos), with 9.1%. As for the function of praising one's own achievements, only the Rivera wall (Cs) stands out, with 7.1% of publications of this type.

4.2.4. Differences between leaders according to the ideology and evolution of their parties

In connection with RQ2, it has been noted that community building through the use of the party's values and ideological bases is more frequent among leaders of emerging parties than among those of traditional parties (Table 6). In this area, Rivera (Cs) and Iglesias (Podemos) obtained percentages of 14.3% and 9.1%, respectively. Their respective parties also bet on this function, although in this regard, Ciudadanos and PSOE achieved higher percentages than Podemos. It is striking that the PSOE candidate, unlike his party, is not very productive in this area (1.8%). For their part, both Garzón

(IU) and his party place similar and noteworthy importance on highlighting the values associated with the ideology of this organization. With regard to criticism of the opponent, the same tendency that existed among the parties has been replicated. This has a notable presence on the walls of the progressive leaders, especially in the case of Sánchez (PSOE), with a percentage of 16.4%, although the function is either scarce or non-existent among leaders of the conservative parties (Table 6).

5. Discussion and conclusions

In a context in which digital tools for political communication are increasingly relevant, and after more than a decade of international and national experience in the use of social networks in election campaigns, this research has allowed us to delve deeper into the Spanish case and the functions of Facebook, a platform that has generated less interest than Twitter in previous literature. Specifically, all of the publications posted on Facebook by the main political parties and their leaders in the 2016 general election campaign in Spain have been analysed in order to gain knowledge regarding their communication strategies, to detect possible differences with regard to each party's main ideological concepts, and to see whether each one is a traditional, long-standing organization, or an emerging force.

In this sense, the results allow us to identify some interesting trends. In relation to RQ1, the first hypothesis (H1) has been confirmed, with some exceptions. In general, it can be stated that parties and their leaders tend to promote their campaign events and programs as well as ask people for their vote, but they hardly use Facebook to encourage real dialogue with their followers, except in the case of Pablo Iglesias (Podemos), who does in fact promote conversation on this digital platform. However, in general terms, interaction or conversation on Facebook is either non-existent or symbolic on all walls. There are hardly any publications in which the main purpose is to initiate or maintain a conversation with the public.

Among other exceptions to general trends, the Socialist Party (PSOE) demonstrates one of these, as it barely promotes its agenda compared to the other parties. A further exception can be found in the case of Izquierda Unida (IU). This organization has a notable presence in personal and entertainment content, which transmits closeness and seeks to strengthen ties with its community of supporters. Finally, another exception is the promotion of party values, a function not mentioned in H1 but very present in all of the walls except in the case of Partido Popular (PP). This strategy of using Facebook to induce supporters to identify with the party's values also contributes to the creation of virtual communities and closer ties with them.

Moreover, in the case of leaders, they strengthen ties with their community by sharing personal aspects and showing the backstage and anecdotes surrounding election campaigns. To a greater or lesser extent, all leaders exhibit content along these lines, unlike the parties. The cases of Alberto Garzón (IU), Pablo Iglesias (Podemos) and Mariano Rajoy (PP) stand out. This is in line with a policy of personalisation (Enli and Skogerbø, 2013), which is now developed through a digital medium. In this regard, it has been found that the degree of engagement or commitment by supporters is usually greater when politicians appeal to emotions (Abejón-Mendoza & Mayoral-Sánchez, 2017).

The hybridization of new and old media also stands out on the wall of some leaders, who prioritize their actions in the media and advertise them through Facebook, giving these activities preference above content related to campaign events

or the electoral program. This approach seeks to expand the extent of circulation of actions in the media and improve their impact on the public by trying to synergistically combine the offline and online environments (Larsson, 2016; Golbeck, Grimes & Rogers, 2010).

With regard to RQ2, which involves studying the differences between political actors according to their ideology and evolution, there are no major discrepancies in terms of predominant functions. However, some specific differences can be observed in relation to functions that have less weight. Regarding the progressive-conservative ideology, these specific differences are located in the function of criticizing the adversary, which is more frequent among progressive parties and leaders (PSOE, Podemos, and IU) than among conservative parties and leaders (PP and Ciudadanos).

As for differences regarding the evolution of each party, discrepancies occur in relation to the functions of the media agenda and community building through the values of each party. Thus, the media agenda is more present in traditional parties than in emerging ones.

Podemos and Ciudadanos are the actors who dedicate less space on Facebook to content coming from the media, such as news, interviews, or participation by their leaders in televised debates. In contrast, the function of community building carried out by appealing to the ideological foundations of the party is more frequent among the leaders of emerging parties, such as Albert Rivera (Cs) and Pablo Iglesias (Podemos), than in the leaders of traditional parties. This difference is less in the case of the parties because it is not only Cs and Podemos who resort to this function, but PSOE and IU as well.

These data refute the second hypothesis (H2), which states that progressive parties and leaders appeal more than others to the ideological values of their followers. The second hypothesis (H2) also holds that emerging political parties and their leaders share personal issues and promote interaction to a greater extent than traditional ones. However, even though it is true that the leader of one of the emerging parties (Pablo Iglesias of Podemos) is the only one who registers a remarkable percentage of activity involving interaction or dialogue, the same situation does not generally occur with Ciudadanos. In addition, traditional party leaders also personalise their walls with private or informal affairs, especially Mariano Rajoy (PP).

The strategies identified in this study reinforce the idea that Facebook is a good tool for mobilising participation and the act of voting (Bene, 2018; Di Bonito, 2014; Stetka, Surowiec & Mazák, 2019; Vesnic-Alujevic, 2012; Williams & Gulati, 2013), although its use is focused to a greater extent on providing information related to content of interest, especially for self-promotion of campaign events and election promises (Sampietro & Valera-Ordaz, 2015).

By contrast, politicians publish a miniscule amount of posts that attempt to initiate or promote dialogue with followers, except in the case of Pablo Iglesias (Podemos). This trend has been observed previously in other contexts (Russmann, 2018; Klinger & Russmann, 2017; Macnamara & Kenning, 2011; Magin et al., 2017; Ross, Fountaine & Comrie, 2015; Sweetser & Weaver, 2008). However, studies of Facebook that have analysed comments by users within the context of Spain understand that Spanish politicians do make an effort to create social cohesion and engage in community building among their associates (Valera-Ordaz, 2019). This more interactive use of Facebook has also been found in other countries, although debate issues often revolve around campaign events rather than policies proposed by the parties (Stier et al., 2018).

By contrast, in other contexts parties do not respond to comments made by citizens, especially regarding criticism or negative messages (Klinger & Russmann, 2017; Russmann, 2018). On the other hand, if one analyses the case of the leaders, an upward trend can be seen in the personalisation strategy, perceived as an attempt to gain influence by showing a more human side of the candidates (Puentes-Rivera, Rúas-Araujo & Dapena-González, 2016, Gerodimos & Justinussen, 2015), as well as in community building by appealing to the values and ideology of the party, a practice that seeks emotional identification with supporters that can generate engagement with potential voters.

The results of this research can also be linked to the findings of similar studies related to Twitter. In fact, during the 2016 election campaign in Spain, the preference of politicians in disseminating agenda events and program proposals on Twitter was also noted, as well as the lack of initiative for interaction with citizens (López-Meri, Marcos-García & Casero-Ripollés, 2017). This attitude had already been observed in previous election campaigns (Alonso-Muñoz, Marcos-García & Casero-Ripollés, 2016; López-García, 2016).

By contrast, the trend toward personalisation shown by party leaders on Facebook was greater than that of Twitter during the same election campaign, according to data provided by López-Meri, Marcos-García & Casero-Ripollés (2017). Along the same line, but with some exceptions, the appeal by leaders to the values and ideological foundations of their parties in creating links with their Facebook community is greater than in Twitter, according to previous literature (López-Meri, Marcos-García & Casero-Ripollés, 2017).

These trends show only a slight evolution, and a similar use of Facebook and Twitter in election campaigns, at least in the 2016 elections in Spain. Instead of encouraging interaction on Facebook, Spanish political parties prioritised their agenda and program in order to promote their acts and electoral promises in the same way that they usually do so on Twitter (López-Meri, 2016; Pérez-Dasilva, Meso-Ayerdi & Mendiguren-Galdospín, 2018). This fact confirms the low level of innovation among Spanish politicians in the management of their electoral communication strategies on social networks.

Acknowledgements

This article is part of the research project designated UJI-B2017-55, funded by the University Jaume I of Castellón.

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