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Building a political image on Instagram: A study of the personal profile of Santiago Abascal (Vox) in 2018

Abstract
Due to Instagram's growing popularity in Spain, politicians have also begun to turn to this social network increasingly more. Accordingly, this paper analyses the visual and textual discourse of 259 posts published throughout 2018 on the personal Instagram profile of Santiago Abascal, the leader of the party Vox. Insofar as he is the Spanish politician with the highest number of followers on Instagram, the aim here is to analyse how he uses this social network in order to identify possible strategies that justify his growing number of followers. In the analysis, special attention was paid to aspects that might have contributed to the (self)presentation of Abascal and the promotion of his party, such as posting personal information and the direct involvement with his followers. The results show that consistent with the use to which Spanish politicians put Instagram, Abascal's profile highlights his 'political' dimension and, specifically, his agenda. Personal content (such as references to leisure or sports) are used strategically to highlight certain features of his persona and ideology. The predominance of unedited images, the framing of the photos and appeals to his followers are some of the clues that reveal that, rather than providing access to his personal life, Abascal's use of Instagram is the result of a carefully planned promotional strategy.

Keywords
Political communication, Instagram, multimodality, visual communication, memes, Vox.

1. Introduction

Social networking sites are currently very important in political life. Since 2008, when Barack Obama became the first 'Internet candidate' to win a national election, the strategic use of the Internet for political purposes has gone from strength to strength (Bimber, 2014). Even in non-election periods, the Internet seems to have opened up new communication channels and allowed parties to circumvent, to some extent, the traditional media. Politicians are employing modern and interactive tools increasingly more, thus displaying a certain degree of adaptability to technological innovation (Dader, 2009). Consequently, one of the challenges facing researchers in this field is the rapid change in technology with the launching and popularisation of new apps and tools (Larsson, 2018). For example, the use of webpages as

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political communication tool (Dader, 2009; Vaccari, 2008) has given way to a boom in more participatory platforms such as blogs (Maarek, 2009) and, more recently, to a genuine normalisation of social networking sites as political instruments (Kreiss & McGregor, 2018). Academic research has also reflected these trends. Noteworthy among the most studied platforms is Twitter and its political use, above all during election campaigns (see for example, Kreiss, 2016; Medina & Zurutuza, 2014; Baviera, Sampietro & García, 2019), and Facebook, whose influence in election times has been clearly acknowledged and analysed in a large variety of contexts (see, for instance, Enli & Skogerbø, 2013; Muñiz, Campos-Domínguez, Saldierna & Dader, 2019; Sampietro & Valera-Ordaz, 2015).

In the current social media environment, the growing popularity of Instagram, video and photo-sharing platform, is remarkable. In just three years, the number of Instagram users in Spain doubled, reaching the 15-million mark in 2018, most of whom were aged between 18 and 39 (IAB Spain, 2018). Owing to its growing popularity, relevant public figures, including politicians, are resorting to Instagram more often. As a result, in the past few years, research has begun to focus on political communication on this social networking site, in which visual elements predominate (for a literature review, see Section 2).

Accordingly, this study analyses the content posted on the personal Instagram profile of Santiago Abascal, the leader of Vox, during 2018. Abascal is currently the most popular politician on Instagram, a social networking site by which Vox sets great store. As reported by the press, the number of followers that the leader of Vox has on Instagram has grown exponentially. In December 2018, *El Plural* (Gasparyan, 2018) noted that Abascal's wife, the Instagrammer Lidia Bedman, had quite a few more followers than he did –120,000 versus 85,000 to be exact. As stated by Aliás (2019), the leader of Vox had 121,000 followers on 1st January 2019. According to the platform's own data, a week before the general elections held on 28th April 2019, he had over 210,000 followers and, two months later, 288,000. In this study, the Instagram profile of Abascal is analysed to gain further insights into his use of the platform and the self-presentation strategies that he implemented as regards himself and his party during 2018.

Vox is a fairly young political party that is attracting increasingly more media and academic attention (Anduiza, 2018; Casals, 2018; Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019a). The party was created at the end of 2013 with a view to capitalising on the votes that the People's Party (hereinafter PP) would lose as a result of the corruption cases in which it was involved. The founders of Vox were a number of social conservatives critical with the PP–led by Mariano Rajoy at the time–at a moment when the decline caused by the crisis was for all to see. Vox ('voice' in Latin) intended to give voice to those who were looking for another right-wing perspective. In 2016, Abascal became the leader of Vox and, in December 2018, the party won 12 seats in the Andalusian Parliament. This political party has been chosen as the object of study precisely because of the relevance achieved on the Spanish political scene in 2018. During that year, Vox ceased to be a minority party to win seats in a regional parliament and to improve, by leaps and bounds, its prospects in the forthcoming 2019 elections.

This study starts with a review of the literature on the use of Instagram in political communication and a contextualisation of the research. This is followed by a description of the data collection and analytical methodologies employed. Then it shows the results obtained, which together with the conclusions are discussed in the final section.

2. Instagram and political communication

The study of the use of Instagram in political communication is a fairly recent line of research, partly because the platform, launched in 2010, is relatively new. The 2014 Swedish General elections were the first in which Instagram was used as a campaign tool (Filimonov, Russmann & Svensson, 2016). Perhaps owing to its newness, the country's political parties merely resorted to this social networking site to reproduce content posted on other platforms, as if

it were a sort of billboard (Filimonov *et al.*, 2016, p. 8). The candidates in the US presidential primaries held in 2016 also employed Instagram in a similar manner, although the first attempts to rally voters on this platform were also made (Muñoz & Towner, 2017, p. 312). A study of the prolonged 2016 Austrian election campaign observed that the incumbent president Alexander van der Bellen used this social networking site as a 'visual diary' of his daily routine (Liebhart & Bernhardt, 2017), taken up to a great extent by campaign rallies, although he also posted content relating to his private life (especially hobbies, family background, and personal experiences). The posting of personal content by politicians has also been observed in other studies of the use of Instagram in electoral and post-election periods (Lalancette & Raynaud, 2017; Larsson, 2017; Muñoz & Towner, 2017; Quevedo-Redondo & Portalés-Oliva, 2017).

Researchers have also begun to study the political use of Instagram in Spain. A recent study (Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019b) has compared how the main political parties used Instagram in the 2015 and 2016 election campaigns. It observed how the 'new' parties (i.e. Podemos and Ciudadanos) posted much more content on Instagram than the 'old' ones (PP and the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party [hereinafter PSOE]), perhaps because of their greater popularity among younger voters (Orriols & Cordero, 2016). As to personal accounts, although the uses to which politicians put Instagram during election campaigns varies, it is possible to detect a common pattern of converting politicians into celebrities. On the one hand, they are 'humanised' through references to their private lives and, on the other, presented in their official roles, highlighting their capacity to run the country (Quevedo-Redondo & Portalés-Oliva, 2017, p. 925).

The use of Instagram varies, to some extent, in non-election periods not only because the frequency of social media posts tends to be lower (Enli & Skogerbø, 2013; Lalancette & Raynaud, 2017), but also because of the type of content posted. For instance, in these periods politicians usually appear on Instagram in the discharge of their duties, conceivably to demonstrate their commitment to the country (Lalancette & Raynaud, 2017; López-Rabadán & Doménech-Fábregat, 2018; Selva-Ruiz & Caro-Castaño, 2017). Even personal content is employed strategically to underscore their attributes, like, for example, posting photos of themselves with their children to offer the impression that they are good parents (Lalancette & Raynaud, 2017).

In brief, studies of the political use of this social networking site indicate by and large that personal Instagram profiles are used in campaign periods as visual diaries and to disseminate electoral announcements (Filimonov *et al.*, 2016; Larsson, 2017; López-Rabadán & Doménech-Fabregat, 2018; Quevedo-Redondo & Portalés-Oliva, 2017). In pre- and post-election periods, in contrast, it is predominantly employed to present politicians in the exercise of their duties (Lalancette & Raynauld, 2017; Liebhart & Bernhardt, 2017; Selva-Ruiz & Caro-Castaño, 2017). In other words, they resort to Instagram not only for institutional purposes and for mobilising the electorate, but also for disseminating information concerning their private lives. This trend corresponds to the 'celebrity politician' phenomenon, at present one of the main characteristics of political marketing on social media (Lalancette & Raynauld, 2017; Quevedo-Redondo & Portalés-Oliva, 2017).

As the term suggests, celebrity politicians (Driessens, 2013; Street, 2004; van Zoonen, 2006) act in a similar way to celebrities, who strategically exhibit aspects of both their daily lives and their work (Marwick & boyd, 2011). This phenomenon's defining trait is the type of access that Goffman (1959) metaphorically calls 'backstage,' namely, what happens off stage, far from the spotlights. However, unlike the access to people's private lives offered by paparazzi and tabloids, in this case, what to disclose and how and when is decided by celebrities (or their teams), aware of exhibiting their public persona in the best possible light. This also creates a feeling of closeness and familiarity with their followers, simulates sincerity or authenticity and, unquestionably, helps to maintain and increase the follower base

(Marwick & boyd, 2011). These practices have become powerful self-presentation tools (Usher, 2016) allowing front-line politicians to convey messages in a clear and entertaining fashion to a wide audience (Street, 2004) and to 'humanise' themselves (Selva-Ruiz & Caro-Castaño, 2017). This phenomenon is not a novelty of the Digital Age but dates back to the convergence between entertainment and politics, which already has a long tradition in popular culture (Street, 2004; van Zoonen, 2006). The contribution of social media has been to ease the production and circulation of this content, without intermediaries (Marwick & boyd, 2011, p. 139).

One of the advantages that becoming celebrities have for politicians themselves is that they maintain a fan base as if they were real celebrities (Mancini, 2011, p. 50). Furthermore, Instagram users seem to prefer this type of information when it is posted on the profiles of politicians. For instance, in an analysis of the Instagram accounts of the political parties and candidates participating in the 2015 elections in Norway, Larsson (2017) noted that the Instagram posts of the parties obtained more 'likes' and comments when they focus on information and those of the candidates when they contained more personal aspects. Those following the accounts of the candidates in the 2016 US primaries had a greater appreciation for the photos of them with their families and children (Towner & Muñoz, 2018). This tendency towards the strategic representation of the private lives of politicians is also evident in non-election periods. During his first year in office, the Canadian premier Justin Trudeau posted personal content on his Instagram account, although there was a prevalence of posts relating to his daily work (Lalancette & Raynauld, 2017). Public and professional content also predominates in political communication on Instagram in Spain (Selva-Ruiz & Caro-Castaño, 2017).

This study explores the successful use of Instagram by Abascal, the leader of the political party Vox, throughout 2018, analysing both the visual content (photos and videos) and the brief texts accompanying them. Due to the dearth of research on Vox and its leader (justified by the fact that it is a newcomer on the Spanish political scene), recourse was had to the press' observations on the politician's account. According to *El Confidencial* (Madrid, 2018; Díaz, 2019), Abascal uses Instagram as an influencer would and the popularity of his account would be down to a 'shift' towards personal content and, specifically, references to his family. *El País* has published the results of a comprehensive study performed on the accounts of 15 Spanish politicians, in which it is also highlighted that Abascal posts a large number of memes and personal photographs (Pérez Colomé, 2019). On the basis of the aforementioned academic literature and press articles on the political use of Instagram in Spain, in general, and by Abascal, in particular, the following research questions were formulated:

RQ1: What type of visual formats does Abascal post on his Instagram account?

RQ2: Does Abascal post personal information on his Instagram account or does his public persona prevail?

RQ3: How does Abascal use Instagram to promote his public persona and the party that he leads?

3. Method

3.1. *Corpus*

The content posted on Abascal's Instagram account from 1st January to 31st December 2018[1] was collected using a Python program. The study of this year allowed for the analysis of non-election (the first quarter of 2018) and election periods (the Andalusian elections held in

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[1] As to ethics, permission to access Abascal's Instagram account and to collect data from it was not explicitly requested, since, due to the fact that he is a recognised public figure and has an open account, we are of the opinion that he intends to promote himself and is aware that his social media accounts are placed under scrutiny.

December), insofar as during election campaigns politicians and their parties predominantly post messages aimed at mobilising voters and encouraging them to cast their ballot (Enli & Skogerbø, 2013; Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019b). Moreover, during election campaigns, the same content is often posted on different social media (Bossetta, 2018), for which reason it was believed that also focusing on a non-election period would offer a broader overview of account activity.

For the analysis, the first post of each day was selected, obtaining a total of 259. In order to have the same number of texts and images and thus ease statistical calculations, in the case of photo albums (i.e. attaching several images to the same post), only the first photo was analysed. As to the videos, their main content was considered. The corpus was analysed after inductively and deductively creating a codebook, which included 14 visual and 26 textual description variables.

3.2. *Methodological tool*

From a methodological perspective, inspiration was drawn from the study conducted by Lalancette and Raynauld (2017) on Trudeau's Instagram profile. Their 125 variables take into account a wide range of aspects, including the content and appearance of the photos (the people appearing in them, the use of filters, etc.), the political issues represented, the photographic or videographic 'staging' and the posts' textual content (use of mentions, emoji, hashtags and the type of statement). Although the number of variables was reduced substantially, in this study things were taken a step further by assessing the textual aspect, considering the relationship (and possible contradictions) between the texts of the posts and the images accompanying them, owing to the fact that social media users focus on both the visual and textual cues to judge the profiles of other users (Pelled, Zilberstein, Tsirulnikov, Pick, Patkin & Tal-Or, 2017). And a well-constructed text on Instagram can influence the impression that politicians make on the users of this social network (Jung, Tay, Hong, Ho & Goh, 2017).

One of the objectives of this study was to identify the elements posted on Instagram that contributed to present Abascal's public and political persona before and after he had arrived on the political scene. As a consequence, some of the visual and textual features considered to be important for representing people in studies of social semiotics and multimodality (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; van Leeuwen, 2008) were taken into consideration. Analyses of multimodal materials, an inherently qualitative methodology, tend to be performed on fairly small corpora. In this work, as it was necessary to analyse over 200 posts, some of the relevant visual and textual factors described by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) were converted into variables (see the following section) so as to be able to quantify them in the corpus as a whole.

3.2.1. Variables for analysing visual elements (photos and videos)

From a visual point of view, it was determined whether the images were unedited photos, memes or some other type of graphic representation (M = 3.54, SD = .957). As with Lalancette and Raynauld (2017), it was considered whether Abascal appeared on his own or with other people (M = 1.81, SD = .395), who was accompanying him (M = 6.12, SD = 2.98) and the context (with his family, in his spare time, in his public role, participating in political activities, etc.; M = 3.65, SD = 1.85). Additionally, to assess the visual representation of political aspects, posts were examined to ascertain whether or not Vox's logo (M = 1.34, SD = .475) or the Spanish flag (M = 1.48, SD = .501) appeared in them. Abascal's facial expression (M = 6.49, SD = .73), was also analysed, following the criteria established by Betancor, Rodríguez, and Delgado (2010).

Studies of social semiotics have shown that the interaction between whoever appears in a photo and the observer is a key aspect in the representation of social actors (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 136). Accordingly, the camera angle (normal, high or low), the angulation of the camera position (M = 1.84, SD = 1.14) and the scaling of images (M = 3.78, SD = 1.37),

distinguishing between close-ups, mid shots, and general shots, were analysed. Lastly, it was considered appropriate to determine the direction of Abascal's gaze (M = 2.59, SD = 1.38), so as to discover whether or not the politician, when looking directly into the camera, gave rise to any interaction with the observer (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 240).

3.2.2. Variables for analysing the texts of the posts

Regarding the texts, the accent was placed on whether there were any references to other users (M = 1.08, SD = .273) and, if so, the hashtags employed. Moreover, a detailed analysis was performed on the texts of the posts to assess the representation of Abascal's persona, employing some of the analytical categories of the social actors who have been defined in previous multimodal discourse analyses (van Leeuwen, 2008). To evaluate personalisation, it was considered whether the main actor in the posts was Abascal (M= 1.41, SD = .493), whether Vox was mentioned (M = 1.51, SD = .501), either by explicitly naming the party or by referring to the slogan *España Viva* ('The Living Spain,' another way of defining the party and its followers) and whether other members of the party got a look in (M = 5.66, SD = 2.83). In addition, the person in which the verb was conjugated in the texts of the posts (providing that there was a conjugated verb) was analysed to determine the construction of groups of membership and the interaction with the observer (van Leeuwen, 2008; Wodak & Meyer, 2001).

As to the party's rhetoric, it was ascertained whether Spain was mentioned in the texts (M = 1.20, SD = .398) and whether the emoji representing the Spanish flag was used (M = 1.09, SD = .291). Abascal's language was also examined to determine if he made any derogatory comments to discredit his adversaries (M = 1.10, SD = .306). To assess the contribution of the texts to flesh out his private and public persona, whether the texts of the posts referred to specific activities, for example, enjoying his spare time (M = 1.08, SD = .273), practicing sports (M = 1.15, SD = .359), spending time with his family (M = 1.27, SD = .446) or mentioning items on his agenda (M = 1.60, SD = .492), was also verified.

Two researchers were responsible for coding the variables: one tasked with coding those relating to the visual content and the other to those relating to the textual content. Inter-coder reliability was measured with the help of two external coders who independently analysed all of the variables in 12% (n = 31) of the posts comprising the corpus (Tabachnick, Fidell & Ullman, 2007). The minimum value obtained, according to Scott's pi, was above 0.61, high (Landis & Koch, 1977) for all of the variables, reaching a mean value (Neuendorf, 2002) of .7249 in all of them. Version 21 of the IBM SPSS software package was employed for the statistical analysis.

4. Results

4.1. *Visual elements*

In 2018, primarily unedited photos or photomontages were posted on Abascal's personal Instagram profile (n = 203; 78.4%). In most of the photos and videos, he appeared on his own (n = 209; 80.7%). Whereas, during the Andalusian election campaign, he was accompanied by members of Vox (n = 37; 14.3%), family members (n = 26; 10%) and personalities (n = 20; 7.7%). Only on three occasions did he appear with political adversaries (1.2%). He was shown in his spare time (n = 74; 28.6%), in his political role or attending the press (n = 62; 23.9%) and at demonstrations (n = 6; 2.3%). Figure 1[2] reproduces one of the few selfies posted on his account during the study time frame, in which he is shown enjoying one of the recreational activities

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[2] In order to illustrate the content, screenshots were taken of the selected posts using Instagram's version for desktop computers. This method was chosen so as to make it easier to indicate the links to the original posts. One of the drawbacks is that the emoji representing the Spanish flag cannot be viewed correctly in this way (it is substituted by the initials ES). Some of the screenshots were edited to erase the avatars and comments of the followers appearing in the original posts.

mentioned most often on his account: bullfighting. Obviously, talking about his hobbies is a way of revealing the most personal side of his life. Nevertheless, it is also a clear example of the politicisation of private life (Langer, 2010), bearing in mind that Vox is openly committed to the defence of bullfighting, considering it part of Spain's cultural heritage (Vox España, 2018).

Figure 1: Santiago Abascal in his spare time.
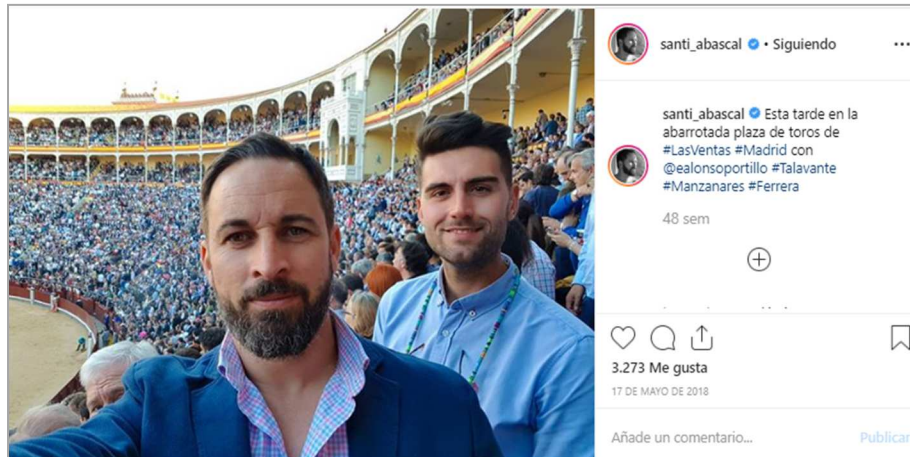
Source: https://www.instagram.com/p/Bi2smfKhDlS/, 17th May 2018.

One of the aspects that research on the political use of Instagram has highlighted is the reference to the private lives of political candidates (Lalancette & Raynauld, 2017; Quevedo-Redondo & Portalés-Oliva, 2017). In the case of Abascal, the press has emphasised this as one of the keys to his success on Instagram (Díaz, 2019; Pérez Colomé, 2019). Noteworthy among the activities to which he dedicates his spare time is his passion for sports. These are mostly of the individual kind, like mountaineering or running. In several of these photos, Abascal appears in the midst of nature (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Mountaineering, one of the sports practiced by Abascal.

Source: https://www.instagram.com/p/Bl8470hlP7N/, 1st August 2018.

Abascal also used sports to build his image. In addition to showing his appreciation for the outdoors, these references to sports allowed him to emphasise his youthfulness and athletic build, as with Trudeau (Lalancette & Raynauld, 2017, p. 13). Likewise, through sports, he extolled his physical strength, often underscoring aspects such as his resistance, his

endurance capacity and the harshness of the mountains, which could also contribute to conveying a masculine image. This strategic use of his private life is evident when considering how the photos were taken. Abascal tended to be the centre of attention. Only very seldom photos were taken from a subjective angle; namely, even when he was photographed in his spare time, most of the photos were taken by others with him at the fore.

With respect to the iconography, the Spanish flag appeared in half of the photos and videos (n = 125; 48.3%), along with Vox's logo (n = 88; 34%). The significant visual presence of the national symbols can also be regarded as strategic (Lilleker, Veneti & Jackson, 2019). Moving on to his non-verbal language, Abascal usually wore a neutral (n = 94; 36.3%) or contented expression (n = 79; 30.7%) and very rarely showed anger (n = 15; 5.8%).

In relation to the photo composition, mid-shots were the most frequent (n = 103; 39.8%), followed by general shots (n = 68; 26.3%) and, lastly, close-ups (n = 12; 3.9%). The camera angle was usually normal (n = 161; 62.2%), low (n = 58; 22.4%) and, very rarely, high (n = 9; 3.5%). In the photos, the leader of Vox mostly appeared looking to the right (n = 88; 34%) or directly into the camera (n = 85; 32.8%).

4.2. *Textual elements*

In the texts accompanying the 259 photos and videos analysed, the central figure was generally Abascal himself (n = 107; 41.3%). In around half of the posts, there were also allusions to the party (n = 131; 50.6%), to other members of Vox (n = 62; 23.9%) and, to a lesser degree, to his family (n = 18; 6.9%). In the few cases in which there was no mention of Abascal, the main theme of the posts tended to be the party (n = 30; 11,6%), the supporters of Vox (n = 22; 8.5%) and the politician's family (n = 20; 7.7%). With respect to hyperlinks, only 10.4% of the posts (n = 27) referred directly to other users. Hashtags were the most frequently implemented link strategy. All of Abascal's posts contained them, the most common being #Vox (n = 55; 20.8%), #Voxavanza (n = 53; 20%) and #EspañaViva (n = 37; 14%). Of the 265 hashtags detected, the vast majority (n = 165; 62.2%) only appeared once. Many of these unique hashtags referred to the city in which Abascal was to be found at the time (for example, #Murcia). As a matter of fact, the politician's geographical location was indicated in most of the posts (n = 168; 64.9%). On the other hand, 38.2% of the posts (n = 99) contained references to his agenda (events, rallies, interviews, etc.), for which reason it can be claimed that the politician used Instagram as a sort of 'visual agenda,' among other things (Liebhart & Bernhardt, 2017, p. 23). This constant synergy between online and offline activities is an example of the hybrid content, part real part virtual, which is currently dominating political communication on social media (Casero-Ripolles, Feenstra & Tormey, 2016, p. 382). Leisure and sports activities, two facets of Abascal's private life, were mentioned in fewer posts (leisure n=35; 13.5%; and sports n = 25; 9.7%), although, as already observed in the previous section, they were visually portrayed quite often. Relating to the texts, 19.7% (n = 51) of the posts included references to Spain, 9.3% (n = 24) the emoji representing the Spanish flag and 10.4% (n = 27) derogatory language.

4.3. *Overall assessment of the photos and videos and their accompanying texts*

On Abascal's Instagram account, there were plenty of references to Spain, one of the central themes of the party's political discourse (Anduiza, 2018; Casals, 2018), that is, his persona and political role constantly merged. As already observed, the Spanish flag frequently appeared in the posts and Spain was often mentioned in their accompanying texts. As can be seen in Table 1, the flag appeared primarily in posts commenting on party activities (r(259) = .66 p<.001).

At the same time, Abascal's presence at rallies and events had a strong correlation with the references to Spain in the texts (r(259) = .53 p<.001), which shows that the leader of Vox reproduced his political discourse in a multimodal manner also on Instagram. In the posts relating to Vox's rallies and demonstrations, emphasis was placed on the great number of people attending them. Those doing so were usually described as 'Spain.' Spain was not only

a country but was also continually personified in Abascal's discourse with the hashtag #EspañaViva, as if there were assimilation (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 37) between the nation and the party's supporters. Furthermore, this expression metaphorically associated the party with no less than life itself (and, by extension, the other parties were implicitly considered to be 'lifeless').

As to the stylistic features of his discourse, Abascal sometimes made derogatory comments about his political adversaries to discredit them. In the case of Vox, specific but not necessarily abusive terms were employed (so as circumvent the content moderation), but which when expressed by Abascal and other party members clearly had unflattering connotations.

As an example, numerous scornful references to 'the cowardly Right' (referring to the PP, as noted by Casals, 2018) and 'the coup perpetrators' (the pro-independence supporters, as observed by Anduiza, 2018) were detected in the corpus. For its part, the PSOE was defined on one occasion as the 'socialist mafia.' Allusions to coups and mafias are examples of the strong and emotional language that sometimes made its way into Abascal's discourse when referring to his political adversaries. As Moffitt (2016) remarks, in all likelihood he employed this language to attract the attention of the media. Another term detected in Vox's discourse was 'the progressives,' which when employed by Abascal lost its positive associations (it is colloquially used to indicate a person with progressive and advanced ideas) since he was referring disparagingly to the country's left-wing parties and specific media outlets.

Table 1: Visual elements vs. settings and mentions.

	Settings						Mentions			Emoji	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	Spain	Vox	Others	Ironic	Spanish flag
Presence of the leader with others											
Members of Vox	.27	-.43	.45	.18**	.78*	.32	-.32**	.75***	.17	.03	-.88**
Family	.67**	.22**	-.29*	-.29	.82*	-.45**	.48*	.32	-.22*	-.32	.03
Citizens in general	.72*	.24	.02**	-.49**	.09	.03	.29*	-.42*	-.04	-.21	.73***
Important personalities	.62	.82	.72	.19	.02	.05	.01	.01	-.06	-.05	-.75
Supporters of Vox	.82*	-.18	-.35*	-.62**	.49**	-.22*	-.41***	.71**	.23	.03	-.68**
Journalists	.17	.63	-.28	.73**	.01	.59	.20	.05	.28*	.02*	.42
Political adversaries	-.27*	.28	.03*	-.82	.02*	-.19	-.72**	.59**	-.19**	-.22**	-.83***
Context											
Spare time/leisure/outdoors	-.58***	.28***	-.39	-.29	.19	-.01**	-.04	-.06	.05	.02	.04
Attending to the press	-.27	.81	.08	.08*	.11	.20	-.75*	.72**	-.82	.28*	-.83
Family setting	-.38**	.52**	.28	.09	.09	.13**	.42	.10	.06	-.04	-.75*
Presence at rallies	-.77	-.29	-.49**	-.49**	.66**	.25	.53***	-.30***	-.22*	.72	.43
At demonstrations	.32	.53	-.91**	.92**	.28**	-.09	-.62***	.21**	.71*	02	-.76***
Ironic content	.17	.08	.10	-.04	-.05	.46	-.57	-.71	-.56*	-.85***	-.74
Presence of the flag	-.29	-.28*	.02	.66***	.49*	.32	-.49***	.30*	.05	.03	-.84**
Presence of Vox's logo	.29*	.82**	.30	.59***	.26*	.01**	.11**	-.12**	-.45	.06	-.73**
Historicist recreation	.34	.66	.28	.72*	-.20*	-.29	-.71**	.21	.33*	.12**	-.49*
Only the leader appears	.72***	.39**	.16	.28	-.05	.03***	-.13**	-.92	.06	.02	-.83

Significance levels: +p<.10; *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001. N = 259. Note: (1) sports; (2) spare time; (3) city; (4) political activities; (5) institutions; (6) outdoors.
Source: own elaboration.

In the assessment of the interaction with the observer (Table 2), which, in this case, would be social media users, a certain degree of connection was observed between the use of the second person singular in the texts ('you') and visual contact with the observer (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; van Leeuwen, 2008), namely, when Abascal was looking into the camera ($r(259) = .45$ $p<.040$).

Table 2: Visual elements *vs.* text structure.

	Person and tense			Language			Mentions	
	Singular			Plural				
	1st	2nd	3rd	1st	2nd	3rd	Derogatory	To others
Gaze direction								
To the right	-.74*	-.39*	-.49	.05*	.62	.28	.45	-.35
To the left	.42	.28	.29	-.27	.55*	-.48	-.22	.05
Looking back	-.36	-.29	.43	.82	-.65	.59	.08	.19
Looking into the camera	.08	.45**	-.77	-.45**	-.29**	-.29	.27*	.45*
Hand gestures								
None	.38	-.33	-.29	-.85	-.62	.17	.35	.21
Pointing to people	-.45*	-.57**	.55	.25*	.45**	.93	-.04	-.09
At himself	.05	.28	.05	.05	.66	.12	.82	-.23
In another direction	.19	.22*	-.03	-.59*	-.76*	-.82	.83*	.05*
'V' for victory	-.45	.05	.93	.49	.33	.05	.29	.33
Clothing								
Informal	.67*	-55*	.49	.44*	.09	-.17	-.87	.03
Formal	-.22	.39	-.28	-.87	.02	-.32	.03	-.56**
Facial expression								
Inexpressive	.05	.45	.33	-.34	.24	.14	.35	.45
Content	-.33*	-28*	-.83	.55*	-.05*	.05	.66	-.37
Does not show his face	.29	.04	.05	.04	.32	-.41	.06	.22
Anger	.55	.87	-.29	.27	.05	.26	-.45*	.88*

Significance levels: +p<.10; *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001. N = 259

Source: own elaboration.

By using the second person and looking into the camera, Abascal intended to engage his followers directly. It is interesting to note that these types of direct appeals in the second person singular ('you') were generally associated with images and posters promoting the party's activities, events, and rallies. In contrast, the use of the second person plural was usually aimed at the party's followers as a whole, like, for example, to express his thanks to those who had attended the party's events. These uses demonstrate that Abascal was perfectly aware of his audience who he addressed directly in the second person.

It is also worth mentioning the fact that when he was looking into the camera, he usually did not use the first person plural 'us' ($r(259)= -.45$ $p<.010$). The dichotomy between 'us' and 'them' is essential for forming groups of membership (Wodak & Meyer, 2001): with 'us,' the so-called 'in-group' is built (in which it is normal to find both the party and potential voters), and with the third person plural 'them' the 'out-group' is defined (i.e. the adversary). The 'us' employed by Abascal referred to Vox, while he preferably resorted to third-person nouns and pronouns to allude to the party's supporters and potential voters who were associated with Spain (*España Viva*, Spaniards, etc.), generic terms (people, attendees, etc.) or, as has just been observed, direct appeals in the second person. This is a rhetorical strategy opposed to Barack Obama's successful slogan, 'Yes we can!' in 2008; Conceivably, Abascal avoided this slogan to distance himself stylistically from his rival Podemos, which also alluded to it (Casero-Ripollés *et al.*, 2016; Sampietro & Valera-Ordaz, 2015).

However, groups of membership were indeed created, in some measure, with the use of personal pronouns, as is evidenced by the post reproduced in Figure 3, in which he employed

'us' to refer to Vox ('we don't want'), the second person singular to allude to followers ('to you') and 'them' to distance himself from his political rivals (in this case, Podemos). In addition, this example shows yet again that to gain an adequate understanding of the content it is essential to consider both the photos and videos and their accompanying texts. For if only the visual content were analysed, we would be forgiven for arriving at the conclusion that the photograph had to do with a controversy involving a political adversary (the purchase of a big detached house by Pablo Iglesias and Irene Montero). The text, however, did not mention the issue or Vox's political adversaries (who were referred to with a generic 'them'), calling instead party's followers (who he addressed using the informal Spanish pronoun '*tú*').

Figure 3: Reference to political adversaries and supporters.

Source: https://www.instagram.com/p/BjwwM-JFgFL/, 8th June 2018.

As to Abascal's facial expression, as already noted, this tended to be neutral. Nonetheless, when considering the texts of the posts, it can be observed how Abascal's expressions of satisfaction positively correlate with the use of 'us' in the texts ($r(259) = .55 \ p<.001$) and negatively with the use of the first person singular 'I' ($r(259)= -.33 \ p<.010$) and the second person singular 'you' ($r(259)= -.28 \ p<.025$). Talking about Vox with a smile created an association between positive emotions and the party (Dumitrescu, 2016; Sampietro & Valera-Ordaz, 2015). With respect to negative emotions, Abascal showed anger, especially when talking about other parties ($r(259)= .88 \ p<.004$). These practically never appeared in the photos (the example shown in Figure 3 was one of the few instances detected in the corpus). On Abascal's Instagram profile, Vox's political adversaries were visually excluded (van Leeuwen, 2008), but not completely so: by talking about them in unflattering terms or visibly expressing his displeasure, the politician associated his political adversaries with negative emotions.

5. Discussion and conclusions

In this study, we have analysed how Abascal used Instagram in 2018 by examining the visual and textual content of 259 posts appearing on his personal profile during this period. Our aim has been to inquire into his successful use of this social networking site, the strategies that he employed to represent himself and to promote his party, and the type of content that he posted. In response to RQ1, despite that fact that the press considers that Abascal posts a large number of memes (see Pérez Colomé, 2019), the majority of the content that he posted on Instagram in 2018 were unedited photos, also in keeping with the preferential use of the platform (Zappavigna, 2016). As regards RQ2, Abascal's account not only featured himself (something that should come as no surprise bearing in mind that it is a personal account)–he appeared on his own in most of the photos and videos–but also his political activity. In 2018, he did not use his profile primarily to show aspects of his personal life but to call attention to his agenda, in line with the use of Instagram of other Spanish politicians (Selva–Ruiz & Caro–

Castaño, 2017). In other words, more than allowing access to the 'backstage' (Goffman, 1959) by disclosing his private life, this politician preferred to highlight his political activity (Quevedo-Redondo & Portalés-Oliva, 2017). The presentation of personal content seemed to offer his followers access to his most intimate sphere, but, actually, that content was selected and reviewed. In point of fact, in response to RQ3, personal elements, like, for instance, his references to leisure and sports, were used strategically to highlight aspects of his persona (like his physical strength) and the party's vision (for example, its defence of bullfighting). So, rather than a shift towards the personal, this content constructed a 'strategic authenticity' (Gaden & Dumitrica, 2014). Abascal used Instagram as a sort of personal diary (Liebhart & Bernhardt, 2017), in which he commented on his public agenda: interviews, events, meetings, and rallies. In fact, the texts of the posts nearly always included a reference to the city in which he was to be found at the time as if the observer were following him. The predominance of Abascal's public persona was probably aimed at demonstrating that he had the wherewithal to govern (Liebhart & Bernhardt, 2017; Quevedo-Redondo & Portalés-Oliva, 2017).

From a visual angle, he appeared on his own in the majority of the photos and videos, with mid-shots of him predominating. In line with the observations made by López-Rabadán and Doménech-Fábregat (2018, p. 1017), the presence of selfies, a format that may seem more spontaneous (Filimonov *et al.*, 2016) and which is regarded as the modality par excellence for accessing the backstage (Usher, 2016), was fairly secondary. Nor were there numerous photos taken from Abascal's perspective, which might have demonstrated a certain degree of subjectivity (Zappavigna, 2016). To reveal the most private aspects of his life, he preferred to be strategically portrayed in his spare time, with his family or practicing sports.

As to the promotion of the party and its ideology, Vox and Spain appeared very frequently in both the visual content (Vox's logo and the Spanish flag) and the accompanying texts (there was a reference to the party or Spain or the emoji representing the Spanish flag was included). The term 'Spain' was also personified to address his followers. It is noteworthy that Vox was identified with the nation as a whole, for it was practically a way of positioning the party on the Spanish political stage even before the general elections were held. In the text content, moreover, it is important to note Abascal's use of derogatory language, which also enabled him to simulate a certain degree of authenticity and to attract the attention of the media (Moffitt, 2016). Although his face was nearly always inexpressive, he did show anger when talking about his political adversaries and used such language. Similarly, he also implemented a number of strategies for engaging his followers, who he addressed informally in the second person, looking them in the eyes as if the social network served to enter into a direct dialogue with the observer (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Thus, Abascal leveraged Instagram to reinforce the calls to action that were also circulated via other media. This direct engagement of followers can be understood as an example of some degree of interactivity. In line with the general observations of research on political communication on social media, the direct replies of politicians and parties to their followers tend to be rather thin on the ground on these virtual platforms (Valera-Ordaz, 2017). So, by addressing followers informally in the second person it is possible to simulate some level of interaction with the audience (Jung *et al.*, 2017), although the ultimate purpose is to sway voters.

This study is not without its limitations. Firstly, the content posted by Abascal on Instagram might have also been posted on other platforms, above all in election periods (Bossetta, 2018). A comparative analysis of this politician's posts on different social networking sites would allow us to clarify this point and to identify possible 'styles' in the use of different social media (Casero-Ripollés, 2018). Future research could also analyse whether or not Abascal's discourse has changed with time, particularly after the party's arrival on the Spanish political scene. In order to gain a better grasp of the contribution of Abascal's image to the promotion of Vox and to the construction of its discourse, it would be interesting to compare his profile with the party's, as Larsson (2017) has done in Norway. Lastly, the potential

originality in Abascal's strategic use of Instagram could be studied empirically by comparing the uses to which other right- and left-wing politicians and parties in Spain put this social network. There is a need for further research on ideology and the use of Instagram to verify whether or not there are any significant differences between the uses to which right- and left-wing politicians and parties put this platform, especially with respect to the values underlying allusions to the private lives of the former.

There is still one unanswered question: if Abascal's use of Instagram is not so novel, as some media outlets claim, why does he have so many followers in comparison with his political rivals? In line with the analysis performed by Gálvez Garcés (2019), one of the reasons may be that, to give an impression of political newness and renovation, Vox, a new party, has focused heavily on a new platform and that, through it, its intention is to gain followers and popularity among the young (Jung *et al.*, 2017), Instagram's main users. Future studies of the evolution of the political track record of Abascal and Vox and the ways in which they leverage social media, plus comparisons with how other parties use Instagram, will ultimately confirm or refute this hypothesis.

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