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Politicians or influencers? Twitter profiles of Pablo Iglesias and Albert Rivera in the Spanish general elections of 20-D and 26-J

Abstract

The Spanish general elections of 20 December 2015 and 26 June 2016, which can be understood as an electoral continuum, were notable for being the first case of a repeated election in Spain's history, the consequence of the difficulty in forming a government due to the emergence of two new political forces, Podemos and Ciudadanos, led by Pablo Iglesias and Albert Rivera, respectively. We analysed the Twitter communications of these political leaders in both election campaigns using quantitative and qualitative research techniques, we also compare the overall results with the results of the Top Discussion Indicator (TDI). The main objectives of the study were: a) to determine the degree of influence and the ability to create community of both political leaders; b) to identify strategic communication differences between the two leaders and changes between the two campaigns; and c) to investigate the interconnections between their Twitter profiles and media profiles (mainly Spanish newspapers and TV channels). Our findings indicate that issues linked to their own campaigns were the most discussed by these politicians. It is noted that political leaders have little capacity to influence beyond their own community on Twitter, in this sense, hybridization with traditional media and, in particular, with television helps to penetrate beyond the digital sphere. In addition, it was found that Pablo Iglesias and Albert Rivera interacted most with Atresmedia and Prisa group media.

Keywords

Twitter, electoral campaign 20-D, electoral campaign 26-J, Pablo Iglesias, Albert Rivera, opinion political leaders, Spain.

1. Introduction

Most studies on the use of Twitter as an instrument of communication and persuasion in election campaigns highlight the fact that politicians fail to take advantage of the opportunities offered by social media for a real dialogue with citizens. Different authors point out that politicians merely use Twitter for feedback and reassurance, and fail to interact in conversations with interest groups, media and citizens (Bor, 2014; Deltell, 2011; Di Bonito, 2015; López-García, 2016).

The theory of media hybridization analyses how traditional and new media interrelate in the current hypermediated environment (Chadwick, 2013; Casero-Ripollés, Feenstra & Tormey, 2016; Enli, 2017). While traditional media have adapted to the new media logic of the digital sphere (Pont-Sorribes, Codina & Pedraza-Jiménez, 2010), the new media are especially relevant in election campaigns because they enable conversations between politicians, the media and citizens (Abejón-Mendoza, Sastre-Asensio & Linares-Rodríguez, 2012). This does not mean that new media have replaced traditional media (Scolari, 2015); on the contrary, some studies argue that, in election campaigns, social platforms such as Twitter amplify traditional media coverage of major events (Lilleker & Jackson, 2010; Zugasti-Azagra & García-Ortega, 2018). Twitter interactions with traditional media can be measured using, as metrics, tweets and retweets, mentions, hashtags, links and multimedia content (Baviera-Puig, García-Ull & Cano-Orón, 2017). Some studies suggest that traditional media are losing the ability to influence citizens in the political conversations held in social media (Casero-Ripollés, 2020; Casero-Ripollés & López-Rabadán, 2014).

Pablo Iglesias and Albert Rivera have been two political leaders who have permanently manage this media hybridization because they have been two highly-mediatic leaders. Iglesias has been the host of the television program *La Tuerka* broadcast on the Internet and appears frequently in political gatherings of the Atresmedia group such as: *La Sexta Noche* or *Al Rojo Vivo*. Rivera has been also a regular Tertullian in Atresmedia and Mediaset programs such as *Las Mañanas de Cuatro*. In addition, both political leaders have been very active in social media, specifically, on Twitter, where their community is made up of users who know them for their television appearances. For that reason, Dubois and Gaffney (2014) argue that political leaders, the media and journalists are the most influential profiles in political conversations on Twitter. In this sense, Pérez-Curiel and García-Gordillo (2018) conclude that the Twitter profiles of the candidates are more influential than the Twitter profiles of the political parties themselves.

We comparatively analysed use of Twitter by Pablo Iglesias and Albert Rivera, leaders of the new Podemos (leftwing) and Ciudadanos (rightwing) parties, respectively, in the Spanish general election campaigns for 20 December 2015 (20-D) and 26 June 2016 (26-J). Our objectives were as follows:

1. To determine the degree of influence and the ability to create community of both political leaders.
2. To identify and analyse changes in Twitter use by Iglesias and Rivera during the 20-D and 26-J campaigns.
3. To investigate interconnections between the Iglesias and Rivera Twitter profiles and traditional media via hashtags, mentions and links.
4. To identify the preferred topics of Iglesias and Rivera during the 20-D and 26-J campaigns.
5. To analyse the capacity of the top discussion indicator (TDI) (Percastre-Mendizábal, Pont-Sorribes & Codina, 2017) to identify trends in tweets by Iglesias and Rivera during the 20-D and 26-J campaigns.

The Spanish political scenario in 2015-2016 was exceptional for the following reasons: (1) the traditional bipartisanship of the PP (rightwing) and the PSOE (leftwing) was weakened due to the emergence of Podemos and Ciudadanos as new parties; (2) the impossibility of forming a government after the 20-D elections led to the first ever repetition of elections (on 26-J) in the history of Spain; and (3) 20-D reflected both a quantitative leap in terms of Twitter use and the beginnings of algorithmic communications in social media by Spanish politicians and political parties (Campos-Domínguez & García-Orosa, 2018). Guerrero-Solé (2018) concludes that the Spanish general elections of 2015 and 2016 had a highly polarized conversation sphere on Twitter.

While permanent campaigning is increasingly a feature of politics (Blumenthal, 1980; Norris, 2000; del Rey Morató, 2011), studying pre-election campaign periods continues to be relevant, as this is when specifically, electoral marketing techniques are deployed and social media are used more intensively (Enli & Skoger, 2013; García-Ortega & Zugasti-Azagra, 2018; Pont-Sorribes & Bérrio, 2015; Thelwall & Cugelman, 2017).

We chose to study political communications in Twitter, rather than in more widely subscribed social media platforms in Spain (IAB Spain, 2019), because Twitter is more open than alternatives such as Facebook or Instagram, etc, allows data to be collected more easily and has an interface design that favours the virality of content. As the social media platform most used by Spanish politicians (Jivkova-Semova, Requeijo-Rey & Padilla-Castillo, 2017) and the most useful platform for reaching out to influencers, it is especially popular in the political and media spheres (Giansante, 2015; Gottfried, 2014; Rodríguez-Ureña, 2012). Based on Sng, Ying-Au and Pang (2019), influencers are defined in this way by their ability to shape their audiences 'attitudes through constant interactions.

In this hypermediated context, politicians try to spread their messages through a wide variety of channels (Chadwick, James & Amy, 2016). As Karlsen and Enjorlas (2016) say social media allow costless and decentralized forms of production and diffusion of content causing a change in the power relationship between the actors involved in the election campaigns. For this reason, politicians use Twitter with the aim of building a reputation that allows them to increase their power, influence and autonomy beyond their political parties (Karlsen & Enjorlas, 2016; Pont-Sorribes & Suau-Gomila, 2019). But some studies state that due to the echo chambers that are generated on Twitter, it is difficult to influence beyond your own community of followers (Hayashi, Ogawa & Umehara, 2017; Karlsen & Enjorlas, 2016; Soares, Recuero & Zago, 2018).

In recent years, Twitter has become central to the design of communication strategies for Spanish election campaigns, and most especially of Podemos (Campos-Domínguez & Calvo, 2017; López-Meri, Marcos-García & Casero-Ripollés, 2017). For both Podemos and Ciudadanos, in fact, social media are a crucial communication tool (García-Ortega & Zugasti-Azagra, 2018). Twitter is also central to research into political communications (Bruns & Stieglitz, 2013; Campos-Domínguez, 2017; López-García, 2016; Moya-Sánchez & Herrera-Damas, 2015; Suau-Gomila & Pont-Sorribes, 2019). In addition, Baviera-Puig (2018) states that the community of Podemos on Twitter was the most influential on Twitter in the talks about the general elections of 20D and 26J.

2. Methodology

We applied a mixed method approach (specifically, descriptive and interpretative analyses of Twitter metrics and of quantitative and qualitative tweet content) to our analysis of the entire universe of analysis and a comparative analysis of a sample extracted using the TDI (Percastre-Mendizábal, Pont-Sorribes & Codina, 2017).

2.1. Analysis universe and TDI sample

The universe of analysis was composed of all tweets posted by Pablo Iglesias and Albert Rivera in the 20-D and 26-J Spanish general election campaigns. The legal 15-day period for official electoral campaigning in Spain starts 16 days before the elections, but since the day before voting is reserved as a day of reflection (i.e., no campaigning is allowed), our analysis period, for 20-D, was midnight 4 December 2015 to midnight 18 December 2015 and, for 26-J, was midnight 10 June 2016 to midnight 24 June 2016.

In total, 30 days of Twitter activity by Iglesias and Rivera were analysed (Table 1). The TDI was used as a complementary technique to identify patterns in Twitter use by the two political leaders. TDI application consisted of identifying the time slot (day, hour, minute) in which Twitter activity (in terms of tweets) was maximum and applying a virality criterion, defined

as 50 or more retweets and 10 or more favourites. The virality criterion has been defined in this way because previous research has confirmed that it is an effective measure to delimit the test sample (Percastré-Mendizábal, Pont-Sorribes & Suau-Gomila, 2019; Pont-Sorribes, Suau-Gomila & Percastré-Mendizábal, 2020). Retweets were given greater value than favourites because they more directly favour virality in the Twitter timeline logic (Congosto, 2015).

Table 1: Tweets by Iglesias and Rivera during the 20-D and 26-J campaign.

Profile	20-D of 2015 campaign	26-J of 2016 campaign
Pablo Iglesias (n=223)	137 tweets	86 tweets
Albert Rivera (n=213)	120 tweets	93 tweets
Total (n=436)	257 tweets	179 tweets
Pablo Iglesias TDI (n=68)	42 TDI tweets	26 TDI tweets
Albert Rivera TDI (n=66)	37 TDI tweets	29 TDI tweets
Total TDI (n=134)	79 TDI tweets	55 TDI tweets

Source: Own elaboration.

Analysing TDI tweets (Table 1) clarifies whether the TDI can identify trends in Twitter conversations –which typically consist of such a vast amount of data (millions of tweets) that analysis of the total universe of study is impossible. The TDI also identifies more viral tweets, i.e., with a greater impact in the Twitter sphere. TDI use was therefore justified in this research for two main reasons: (1) it identified viral tweets posted by both political leaders at high points of the Twitter conversation, i.e., when they were most active on Twitter, and (2) it determined whether the tweets showed a trend, i.e., were representative of most of the tweets posted by the political leaders.

For Iglesias, peak 20-D activity was 18 December with 16 tweets, 10 December with 14 tweets and 15 December with 13 tweets (43 tweets), and peak 26-J activity was 10 June with 11 tweets, 16 June with 10 tweets and 22 June with 9 tweets (30 tweets). Of those tweets, 42 of the 43 20-D tweets (97.7%) and 26 of the 30 26-J tweets (86.7%) met the TDI virality criterion, i.e., 68 of 73 tweets overall, representing 30.5% of the 223 tweets published by Iglesias in the two campaigns. For Rivera, peak 20-D activity was 10 December with 16 tweets, 18 December with 15 tweets and 11 December with 12 tweets (43 tweets), and peak 26-J activity was 14 June with 11 tweets, 10 June with 9 tweets and 22 June with 9 tweets (29 tweets). Of those tweets, 37 of the 43 20-D tweets (86%) and all 29 of the 26-J tweets (100%) met the TDI virality criterion, i.e., 66 of 72 tweets overall, representing 31% of the 213 tweets published by Rivera in the two campaigns. As can be seen in table 1, Pablo Iglesias published more tweets and obtained more virality in the 20D campaign, but Albert Rivera reversed this trend in the 26J campaign.

2.2. Twitter metrics

We used Twitter metrics –the use of hashtags, mentions, links and shared multimedia content (images, gifs and videos) in tweets and retweets– to quantitatively analyse Twitter activity by the two political leaders.

2.3. Content analysis

The content analysis applied is mixed, quantitative results are first extracted and, from these, qualitative results are inferred. This method is useful because it allows a systematic and rigorous study of the nature of the messages published (Krippendorff, 1990).

The content analysis used in this study is an adaptation of a model applied elsewhere (Percastré-Mendizábal, Pont-Sorribes & Suau-Gomila, 2019) to the analysis of emergency communications using Twitter. For elaboration and categorization purposes, studies of political framing (Muñiz & Ballesteros, 2016), political language games (del Rey Morató, 2007)

and the functions of political tweets (López-Meri, Marcos-García & Casero-Ripollés, 2017) were also taken into account.

The categories of content analysis are: **Informative**: electoral programme information. **Emotional**: emotional connection with potential voters. **Self-promotion**: promotion of campaign events, candidate media appearances, etc. **Counter-propaganda**: criticism of political adversaries, distinguishing between direct and indirect counter-propaganda: direct is when the recipient of the criticism is mentioned (whether or not using @), and indirect is a non-explicit reference, although the informed potential voter usually knows who is referred to. **Victory construction**: claims in relation to positive polls and victory and calls for tactical voting, often using sports and war metaphors. **Coherence**: coherent and consistent ideological and political messages. **Incoherence**: contradictory ideological and political messages.

Based on the categorization proposed by Mazzoleni (2010) the topics are classified as follows: **Political issues**: more abstracts and ideological political issues. **Policy issues**: specific administrative problems and issues. **Personal issues**: personal aspects of a politician's life. **Campaign issues**: campaigns topics such as: media coverage, events, incidents, polls, etc.

3. Results

3.1. Results both elections campaigns

Iglesias and Rivera made very similar but relatively little use of hashtags during 20D election campaign. In 26J election campaign, Rivera posted significantly more tweets with hashtags (64%) than in 20D (39%) and Iglesias posted even fewer tweets with hashtags in 26-J (27%) than in 20D (33.5%).

To determine how hashtags were used (especially in relation to the media), they were classified as campaign, counter-campaign, victory construction, media, emotional, informative, participation/mobilization, personal, programme/promises, management achievements, ephemeral and other.

Following this categorization, it can be stated that both political leaders varied their use of hashtags in elections campaigns. However, in the case of Rivera campaign hashtags were the most used in the two periods studied, while in the case of Iglesias, campaign hashtags were the most used in 20D but the emotional ones were most used in 26J. In the case of Pablo Iglesias in the 20D campaign, the use of the hashtag #VistalegreNaranja predominates.

In 20D election campaign, both political leaders made significantly different use of hashtags. While both used hashtags – such as #ConLaPepaPodemos (Iglesias) and #VistalegreNaranja (Rivera) – to promote their campaigns, they did so in different proportions (30% Iglesias and 48% Rivera). Iglesias's second most used hashtag (16%) was #Gracias1978Hola2016 (referring to constitutional reform), while Rivera's second most used hashtags (33%), referring to participation/mobilization, #YoVotoAlbert and #AlbertResponde. Other important differences were the greater use of emotional, counter-campaign and victory construction hashtags (e.g., #PodemosRemontada) by Iglesias, and Rivera's greater use of informative hashtags (e.g., #InnovacionCs).

In relation to media hybridization in 20D –via hashtags such as #7DelDebateDecisivo, #Los5Responden and #PabloIglesiasenCOPE– hashtag use by both politicians was minimal (11% Iglesias and 7% Rivera). In other words, the 20-D campaign was featured by a low degree of media hybridization via hashtags.

In 26J election campaign, Iglesias used four main categories of hashtags –emotional (31%), participation/mobilization (22%), campaign (18%) and media (17%). Some examples of the four major categories of hashtags used by Iglesias were: #LaSonrisaDeLaAbuela (emotional), #VotoPorTi26J (participation and mobilization), #UnidosPodemos (campaign), and #26segNobastan (media). In contrast, Rivera (Figure 10) mostly used campaign hashtags (60%)

–e.g., #CambioMejor and #CsConLaRoja– followed at a distance by media hashtags (13%) –e.g., #ObjectiveDebate26J and #AlbertRiveraEH.

In summary, clear differences in hashtag use by Iglesias and Rivera in the two campaigns. Rivera mostly focused on campaign hashtags in both campaigns, using his campaign's own slogans as hashtags in 26J in particular. In contrast, Iglesias appealed directly to Twitter users more in 26-J, whether in the emotional sense or to mobilize them, and focused less on campaigning, programme/promises and victory construction than he did in 20-D.

In 20D election campaign Iglesias used mentions in tweets (69 with and 68 without) more intensively than Rivera (42 with and 78 without), and especially in terms of multiple (three or more) mentions, posting, for instance, six tweets with three mentions, four tweets with four mentions and one tweet with six mentions, compared to Rivera's two tweets with three mentions. In total Iglesias posted 51% of his tweets with mentions and used 114 mentions overall, whereas the equivalent figures for Rivera were 35% and 56.

In 26J election campaign both leaders made even less use of this discursive resource: Iglesias went from 51% use in 20-D to 43% use in 26-J, while Rivera went from 35% use in 20-D to 36% use in 26-J. Rivera used more than one mention in 36% of his tweets with mentions, whereas for Iglesias the corresponding figure was 43%.

In 20D election campaign, the most used type of mention was endogamic, i.e., a call out to their own party members/coalition partners (Iglesias 51% and Rivera 55%). The second most frequent type of mention, with similar percentages (35% Iglesias and 39% Rivera) was the media, indicating a higher degree of media hybridization than was the case for hashtags (although still less than 50%). The remaining actors (culture, sport, academic, other politicians, etc.) were only mentioned sporadically, rarely accounting for more than 10% of mentions.

In 26-J both politicians mention the media overall very much the same as in 20-D, indicating a medium degree of media hybridization using mentions (under 50% for both leaders). However, while the percentage for Rivera in both campaigns was 39%, for Iglesias, the percentage increased from 35% to 43%. In relation to endogamic use of mentions, Iglesias reduced this substantially from 52% in 20-D to 35% in 26-J, whereas Rivera largely maintained the endogamy (55% in 20-D and 52% in 20-J).

The use of links was another Twitter metric that signaled media hybridization as well as the informative use made by both politicians of their Twitter profiles. In 20D election campaign, the use of links was residual; Iglesias shared links in just 38% of his tweets, while Rivera did so in just 23% of his tweets. As for multimedia content (videos, images and gifs), the two leaders made relatively intensive use of this kind of content, as a way to overcome the character limit in Twitter (Iglesias 55% and Rivera 50% of tweets).

In 26J, Iglesias and Rivera used links in 21% and 15% of tweets, respectively, reflecting less use than in 20-D. The low use of links shows that neither leader expanded on information nor interacted with the media using this hypertextual device. The use of multimedia content, there was a general increase in its use in 26-J compared to 20-D: Iglesias and Rivera included this type of content in 53% and 71% of tweets, respectively. Individually, there was a slight decrease in use by Iglesias (55% in 20-D) and a significant increase in use by Rivera (50% in 20-D).

In relation to the significance of the message, in 20D election campaign, self-promotion tweets were widely used –especially by Iglesias (55%, compared to Rivera 36%)– followed by emotional tweets (16% Iglesias and 18% Rivera). Regarding the self-promotion tweets, eight tweets (18.6%) by Rivera and 18 tweets (23.7%) by Iglesias drew attention to media appearances, i.e., interactions with traditional media. Informative tweets regarding election programmes and political proposals accounted for 14% of tweets by Rivera and only 1% by Iglesias, while both leaders posted counter-propaganda tweets in similar proportions (10% Iglesias and 13% Rivera).

In 26J also predominance self-promotional tweets, while emotional messages were also important for both politicians (29% Iglesias, 22% Rivera). For Iglesias, other important messages reflected ideological coherence and victory construction, and, for Rivera, counter-propaganda, in the form, mainly, of criticisms of Podemos and the PP. In the case of self-promotional messages, Iglesias and Rivera used 29.4% and 32.5%, respectively, of the corresponding tweets (10 and 13, respectively) to connect with the media. This represented an increase in 26-J of 5.7 percentage points for Iglesias and 13.9 percentage points for Rivera. As for informative messages, for Rivera these were reduced by 7 percentage points, while for Iglesias they were increased by 5 percentage points. The two politicians used relatively few of their tweets to provide information on their electoral programmes.

Counter-propaganda tweets were mainly focused on the ruling PP, but in Rivera's case we found significant differences in his strategy between 20D and 26J. In 20D, Iglesias focused his criticisms (72%) mainly on the then government (the PP and President Mariano Rajoy). The PSOE, its main ideological competitor, received 22% of his criticisms and the monarchy 6%. For Rivera, while criticism was more wide-ranging and included Podemos (9%) and the Basque independence party Bildu (4%), it also focused mostly on the PP and Rajoy (59%) and the PSOE and its leader Pedro Sánchez (28%).

In 26J, the pattern for Iglesias was similar to that of 20-D with 62% of criticisms directed at the PP (70% with the 8% directed at Rajoy), followed by the PSOE (15%), compared to 61% (72%, including Rajoy) and 22%, respectively, in 20-D. The pattern for Rivera was significantly different, in 20-D, the most criticized parties by Rivera were the PP (and Rajoy, 59%) and the PSOE (23%). In 26-J, these percentages dropped to 26% and 7%, respectively, attributable, in the case of the PSOE, to the attempt to form a government together. In 26-J Rivera changed tack and very predominantly criticized Podemos (36% in 26-J –42% with the 6% directed at Iglesias– compared to 9% in 20-D), probably because, unexpectedly, polls indicated that Podemos would obtain more votes and seats than Ciudadanos.

In 20D, Rivera interacted more with the Twitter community than Iglesias. While 75% of his tweets were original tweets, 24% were responses to tweeters and 1% were quotes, whereas the equivalent figures for Iglesias were 98% original tweets and just 2% responses. In 26J Iglesias interacted more with users than in 20-D: responses to tweeters and retweets represented 20% and 1% of all his 26-J tweets. He also interacted with users far more than Rivera, whose interactions with users were less in 26-J (8% of tweets) than in 20-D.

In both elections campaign the topics focused about own campaign was predominated (with percentages above 50% in all cases). In general, in terms of Twitter use, therefore, Iglesias' use was more emotional while Rivera's use was more political. There are two main differences between the two leaders. Firstly, Iglesias posted more on personal topics, 6% and 16%, compared to 2% and 1% for Rivera. Secondly, Rivera focused more on ideological/political issues, 11% and 22%, compared to 7% and 13% for Iglesias.

In 26-J as in 20-D Iglesias achieved greater dissemination of his messages than Rivera. Iglesias also achieved far greater virality with his 26-J tweets (1,181 retweets and 1,569 favourites) than with his 20-D tweets (633 retweets and 796 favourites), while the opposite happened with Rivera (473 retweets and 544 favourites in 26-J, compared to 535 retweets and 495 favourites in 20-D).

3.2. TDI results

TDI results compared to overall results for both election campaigns clarified whether the TDI was a valid approach to capturing global conversation trends.

Table 2 indicate that the TDI reliably reflected the fact that use of hashtags by both leaders in both campaigns was residual.

Table 2: TDI and hashtags use by Iglesias and Rivera in both electoral campaigns.

Profiles	Tweets with hashtags	Tweets without hashtags
Pablo Iglesias 20D	32%	68%
Pablo Iglesias 20D TDI	36%	64%
Albert Rivera 20D	37%	63%
Albert Rivera 20D TDI	41%	59%
Pablo Iglesias 26J	24%	76%
Pablo Iglesias 26J TDI	31%	69%
Albert Rivera 26J	52%	48%
Albert Rivera 26J TDI	55%	45%

Source: Own elaboration.

The TDI accurately captured the overall use of hashtags in 20-D and 26-J, reflecting an increased TDI use of hashtags by both politicians of several percentage points (7 percentage points for Iglesias and 3 percentage points for Rivera in 26-J and 4 percentage points each in 20-D).

Table 3 show that the hashtag type used also broadly reflected global conversation trends, especially for the most used categories.

Table 3: TDI and overall hashtag types most used by Iglesias and Rivera in the 20-D and 26J campaigns.

Pablo Iglesias 20D	Pablo Iglesias 20D TDI	Albert Rivera 20D	Albert Rivera 20D TDI
Campaign 30% Programme 16% Participation 14%	Campaign 33% Participation 33% Emotional 20%	Campaign 48% Participation 33% Media 7%	Participation 80% Campaign 20%
Pablo Iglesias 26J	Pablo Iglesias 26J TDI	Albert Rivera 26J	Albert Rivera 26J TDI
Emotional 31% Participation 22% Campaign 18% Media 18%	Media 45% Emotional 33% Participation 11% Campaign 11%	Campaign 60% Media 13% Other 12%	Campaign 52% Media 29% Other 19%

Source: Own elaboration.

Over and above percentage differences arising from the significant reduction in the sample, the TDI reflects that, for both politicians, the most used hashtags were campaign and participation/mobilization in 20-D (Table 3), approximately reflecting the global conversation trend. The biggest differences between the global and TDI results were, firstly, that for Iglesias, hashtags reflecting programme/promises became less relevant in the TDI, whereas emotional hashtags acquired greater prominence, and that, for Rivera, media became less relevant in the TDI, whereas participation/mobilization hashtags became more important. For the 20-D campaign, therefore, hashtag use reflected not so much a desire to connect with the media, but to mobilize the electorate and generate a conversation around the campaigns. In the 26-J campaign, a similar trend is observed, with some differences, especially in relation to Iglesias. While, for Rivera in 26-J, the order is the same with similar percentages (the biggest difference is 16 percentage points in the case of media hashtags), for Iglesias – although the global trend is also broadly reflected in the TDI – the greatest differences are an increase in media hashtags (by 27 percentage points) and a decrease in participation/mobilization hashtags (by 11 percentage points) in the TDI.

Table 4 suggest that there were no major differences in the use of mentions, indicating that the TDI was representative of the global conversation trend.

Table 4: TDI and overall use of mentions by Iglesias and Rivera in both electoral campaigns.

Profile	Tweets with mentions	Tweets without mentions
Pablo Iglesias 20D	51%	49%
Pablo Iglesias 20D TDI	48%	52%
Albert Rivera 20D	35%	65%
Albert Rivera 20D TDI	32%	68%
Pablo Iglesias 26J	43%	57%
Pablo Iglesias 26J TDI	50%	50%
Albert Rivera 26J	36%	64%
Albert Rivera 26J TDI	31%	69%

Source: Own elaboration.

Table 5 refer to the content analysis and show a high degree of similarity between overall results and the TDI results, most especially in the TDI of 26-J compared to the TDI of 20-D.

Table 5: Content analysis: TDI and overall political message significance and issues addressed in both campaigns.

Significance of the Political Message			
Pablo Iglesias 20D	Pablo Iglesias 20D TDI	Albert Rivera 20D	Albert Rivera 20D TDI
self-promotion 55% emotional 16% coherence 12% counter-propaganda 10%	self-promotion 64% emotional 14% victory construction 10% counter propaganda 7%	self-promotion 36% emotional 18% informative 14% counter-propaganda 13%	self-promotion 33% informative 24% victory construction 16% emotional 8%
Pablo Iglesias 26J	Pablo Iglesias 26J TDI	Albert Rivera 26J	Albert Rivera 26J TDI
self-promotion 40% emotional 29% coherence 10% counter-propaganda 9%	emotional 35% self-promotion 27% coherence 12% counter-propaganda 11%	self-promotion 42% counter-propaganda 26% emotional 22% informative 7%	self-promotion 56% counter-propaganda 35% emotional 6% informative 3%
Issues addressed in electoral campaigns			
Pablo Iglesias 20D	Pablo Iglesias 20D TDI	Albert Rivera 20D	Albert Rivera 20D TDI
campaign 82% political 7% personal 6%	campaign 91% personal 7% political 2%	campaign 74% policy 13% political 11%	campaign 73% policy 24% political 3%
Pablo Iglesias 26J	Pablo Iglesias 26J TDI	Albert Rivera 26J	Albert Rivera 26J TDI
campaign 52% policy 19% personal 16%	campaign 65% policy 23% political 12%	campaign 61% political 22% policy 16%	campaign 55% policy 28% political 17%

Source: Own Source: Own elaboration.

For Iglesias in 20-D, variations were small: the greatest change was the loss of relevance of coherence tweets in favour of victory construction tweets in the TDI. In contrast, for Rivera in 20-D, variations were greater: the most important difference was that counter-propaganda tweets lost importance in favour of victory construction tweets in the TDI. Note also how, according to the TDI, informative tweets increased whereas emotional tweets decreased in relation to the global conversation. For both politicians it was significant that victory construction tweets, which aim to generate a bandwagon effect (from poll data, for instance),

had greater relevance in the TDI. This responded to a communicative strategy that sought to position these messages at high points of the conversation in Twitter. Notable in the case of Rivera was the higher position of informative tweets than emotional tweets in the TDI (a divergence from his campaign as a whole), which suggests tactically inserting electoral proposals at moments of greatest Twitter activity. As for 26-J, the only important difference was the lower use of self-promotional tweets and greater use of emotional tweets by Iglesias in the TDI.

In relation to the issues addressed during the electoral campaigns, the 20-D results for the campaign and the TDI were very similar, with the main difference lying in a TDI increase in personal messages and reduction in political messages by Iglesias. The opposite pattern was evident in 26-J for Iglesias, as personal issues lost relevance in favour of political issues. As for Rivera in 26-J, in comparison to the overall campaign, he tweeted more on policy issues than on political issues in the TDI.

4. Discussion

4.1. The political leaders analyzed interacted little in both electoral periods with other profiles through Twitter resources (hashtags, mentions and links)

Pablo Iglesias and Albert Rivera used hashtags, mentions and links in the 20D campaign in the following percentages, hashtags: 32% Iglesias and 37% Rivera; mentions: 51% Iglesias and 35% Rivera; links: 38% Iglesias and 23% Rivera. In the 26J campaign, the use of these interactions decreased to the following percentages, hashtags: 24% Iglesias and 52% Rivera; Mentions: 43% Iglesias and 36% Rivera; links: 21% Iglesias and 15% Rivera.

This general decrease in the management of interactive elements (with the exception of the use of hashtags by Rivera that increases in the 26J) shows that political leaders did not actively seek interaction with other users and, nor, to back the conversation campaign through the active and intensive purpose of own hashtags.

In relation to multimedia content, there is a slight decrease in use in the case of Iglesias from 55% in 20D to 53% in use in 26J, but its handling increases significantly in the case of Rivera of 50% of use in 20D at 61% utilization in 26J. These results highlight the importance of the audiovisual content on Twitter that, as can be seen, was widely used by both political leaders in the two electoral campaigns analyzed, in all cases in a percentage equal to or greater than 50% of usage.

4.2. The degree of media hybridization increases in the electoral campaign of 26J in relation to that of 20D

In both electoral campaigns the degree of hybridization is medium, although, less than 50% in all cases, however, this increases in the 26J campaign. In the 20D Iglesias campaign he made 35% of media mentions and Rivera 39% of these mentions. In 26J Iglesias makes 43% of media mentions and Rivera maintains the same 39% of media mentions. In relation to Iglesias hashtags, he goes from using media labels in 11% of his tweets in 20D to 17% in 26J, while Rivera went from 7% of use in 20D to 13% of use in 26J. These results show that there is an incipient and growing trend towards hybridization between new and old media in “emerging politics.” This result is consistent with that obtained by López-Meri, Marcos-García and Casero-Ripollés (2017).

Traditional media continued to be relevant in online political conversations. Political leaders interacted with the media in particular when they or prominent members of their party participated in television debates or appeared in widely broadcast programmes. In both campaigns, Iglesias and Rivera interacted mainly with television channels in the Atresmedia group (La Sexta and Antena 3), as these were the channels that broadcast the more decisive debates.

4.3. The links were barely used in both electoral campaigns by political leaders

The use of links was very low in both electoral campaigns, so much so that Pablo Iglesias has the highest percentage of use in the 20D campaign using links in 48% of his tweets and Rivera has the lowest in 26J with a use of links in 15% of your messages.

This shows that Twitter is not conceived by political leaders as a space in which to inform users about concrete measures, possible electoral pacts, etc. Therefore, rarely expand the information contained in the 140 characters of Twitter with links to interviews explaining these issues, or the electoral program of his party among others. It is significant that both leaders used the links more in the 20D campaign than in the 26J campaign, which demonstrates that this informative will of their Twitter profiles was lower in the second election campaign.

4.4. Self-promotional, emotional, coherence and counter-propaganda tweets predominated

In both campaigns, self-promotional tweets were the most prominent type of tweets by both political leaders, followed by emotional tweets by both leaders in 20-D and by Iglesias in 26-J. Coherence tweets took third place for Iglesias in both electoral campaigns, whereas counter-propaganda tweets took second place for Rivera in 26-J. The Twitter strategy of both leaders was fundamentally to disseminate self-promotional content on rallies, media appearances, etc. and to seek emotional connections with potential voters, i.e., they played what del Rey Morató (2011) called the ‘niceness game.’ The main difference between the two leaders was that Iglesias posted coherence tweets that ideologically positioned Podemos and reinforced its image as representing the left in Spain, whereas Rivera used Twitter more as a means to criticize his political adversaries, most especially, Podemos, which unexpectedly surged ahead in the polls for 26-J; his criticisms of the PSOE were less than in 20-D because of an attempt to form a government between these two parties.

4.5. Rivera’s dissemination in 20-D of specific electoral proposals on behalf of Ciudadanos was the high point of the Twitter conversation

Informative messages that transmitted concrete electoral proposals were infrequently posted by either politician. The TDI revealed, however, that in 20-D Rivera achieved great visibility for Ciudadanos’ electoral proposals in tweets representing 24% of all his tweets (contrasting with just 3% for 26-J).

4.6. Iglesias consistently focused his criticisms on the PP in both campaigns, whereas Rivera switched his focus from the PP in 20-D to Podemos in 26-J

Iglesias maintained the same strategy of focusing mainly on the PP, then in government, in counter-propaganda tweets in both campaigns (61% and 62% of critical tweets in 20-D and 26-J, respectively), followed by the PSOE (22% and 15% of critical tweets in 20-D and 26-J, respectively), which was competing for a similar pool of leftwing voters as Podemos. Rivera, in contrast, changed tack remarkably from 20-D to 26-J. In 20-D, like Iglesias, he also mainly focused on the governing PP, secondly on the PSOE (50% and 23% of his critical tweets, respectively) with which Ciudadanos was competing for second place in the polls (the PSOE was just slightly ahead) and, thirdly on Podemos (9% of critical tweets), which was polling just behind Ciudadanos. In 26-J, however, Podemos became the main target of Rivera’s criticisms (36% of his critical tweets) –as the election results of 20-D revealed that party to have obtained more votes and seats than Ciudadanos– followed by the PP and, at a distance, by one of the most representative mayors from the Podemos environment, Ada Colau (24% and 9% of critical tweets, respectively). Finally, Rivera’s reproaches of the PSOE dropped to 7% of his counter-propaganda tweets in 26-J (compared to 23% in 20-D), as a consequence of (ultimately unsuccessful) talks to form a coalition government with the PSOE.

4.7. The campaigns themselves were the predominant tweet topics

Campaign rallies, media appearances, events and incidents (e.g., the attack on Ciudadanos militants in Vallecas (Madrid) in 26-J and on Rajoy in 20-D) were the most tweeted themes of both political leaders in both campaigns: in 20-D, Iglesias 82% and Rivera 74%, and in 26-J, Iglesias 52% and Rivera 61%. The main difference between the two leaders was that Iglesias tweeted about more personal issues (6% in 20-D and 16% in 26-J), e.g., family, campaign backstage events, etc.; in other words, Iglesias used his own media figure to interact with people through Twitter. Rivera disseminated more political content reflecting both ideological positioning and proposals on how to address policy issues. However, most especially he increased ideological tweets significantly in 26-J (22%, compared to 11% in 20-D).

4.8. While neither Iglesias nor Rivera conducted campaigns focused on themselves as personalities, Iglesias shared more personal content than Rivera

The conversation of both politicians in Twitter was more emotional-ideological than rational-political, as the focus was fundamentally on campaign issues that had self-promotional, emotional, coherence and counter-campaign implications. Within that emotional-ideological framework, however, communicative strategies in neither case dealt with the leader as a celebrity. While Iglesias shared more personal content with his followers, he only did so in 6% and 16% of tweets in 20-D and 26-J, respectively, while for Rivera, these percentages were 2% and 1%, respectively. Those results suggest that Twitter was used as a platform for horizontal electoral marketing purposes, where an immediate and emotional impact was sought over and above exchanges of a rational and reflective nature with users. Furthermore, the results indicate that the leadership style of Iglesias in Twitter was more personal than that of Rivera in both campaigns.

4.9. Tweets were fewer but interaction was greater in 26-J compared to 20-D

Both leaders overall were less active in Twitter in 26-J than in 20-D (as can be seen in Table 1) but responded more to users in 26-J compared to 20-D. However, the trend was different for each leader; for Iglesias, 2% and 20% of tweets were responses in 20-D and 26-J, respectively, while for Rivera, the corresponding percentages were 24% and 8% in 20-D and 26-J, respectively. Adding the percentages of both leaders, however, 28% of 26-J tweets were responses, compared to 26% in 20-D. This is relevant because, as Sng, Ying-Au and Pang (2019) argue, one of the main characteristics of the influencers is their ability to constantly interact with the community.

4.10. Tweets were more viral in 26-J than in 20-D

In 26-J, tweet virality for Iglesias improved overall, with retweets increasing by 86.6% and favourites by 97.1%. For Rivera, while retweets decreased by 11.6%, favourites increased by 9.9%. The implications, especially for Iglesias, are a consequence of two factors: greater loyalty of followers and an increased number of followers.

4.11. As a result of points 2, 9 and 10, it is extracted that Iglesias and Rivera were more successful in building and influencing the community in the 26J campaign than in 20D

There is an evolution in the influence capacity of both leaders in the 26J campaign in relation to that of the 20D. Greater media hybridization, more viral tweets, more followers and more interactions with the Twitter community. These results show that both leaders tried to exert influencers in the 26J campaign rather than the 20D campaign, however, this influence is limited due to polarization in online communities and requires the hybridization of messages in the traditional media as our results and those of other studies on the subject demonstrate

(Hayashi, Ogawa & Umehara, 2017; Karlsen & Enjorlas, 2016; Guerrero-Solé, 2018; Soares, Recuero & Zago, 2018).

4.12. *The TDI was demonstrated to be a useful means of obtaining a representative sample that faithfully identified overall conversation trends*

Although small differences were found in the TDI results and the global results, the TDI was largely representative of trends in the global conversation. Taking for instance the 20-D campaign and the three most important types of messages in the global conversation versus the TDI, for Iglesias these were self-promotion, emotional and coherence tweets versus self-promotion, emotional and victory construction tweets, whereas for Rivera, these were self-promotion, emotional and informative tweets versus self-promotion, informative and victory construction tweets. Despite such variations, it can be concluded that the TDI reliably reflects trends in the overall conversation, thereby validating the use of this method in this study: in relation to the relevance concept that Percastre-Mendizábal, Pont-Sorribes and Codina (2017) linked to virality, the TDI tweets were a relevant and representative sample of the global conversation.

5. Conclusions

Our results suggest that there were no significant changes in the communication strategies of Iglesias or Rivera. Responding to objective two: “To identify and analyse changes in Twitter use by Iglesias and Rivera during the 20-D and 26-J campaigns”, both leaders mainly issued one-directional tweets focused on political marketing (emotional/ideological) and did not conduct any open dialogue on concrete proposals with tweeters. There were some changes in how they used Twitter, however. For Rivera, counter-propaganda tweets increased after 20-D campaign increased, directed especially at Podemos, which had unexpectedly surpassed them in votes and seats in the 20-D elections. As for Iglesias, he adopted a more personal approach in the 26-J campaign, sharing more intimate content on his family (e.g., anecdotes about parents and grandparents), moments from campaign backstage events and information on interests and hobbies, etc. Both politicians slightly increased their interactions with traditional media in 26-J, in this way expanding the impact of their tweets beyond the Twitter platform. Although interaction with users was generally low, it increased slightly in 26-J, with the politicians showing more willingness to debate with tweeters. While the number of tweets was significantly reduced in the 26-J campaign (due to the pact between parties to shorten the 26-J campaign to a week rather than the usual two weeks to reduce electoral spending and minimize voter burnout), those posted, especially by Iglesias, were significantly more viral.

Attending to objective three: “To investigate interconnections between the Iglesias and Rivera Twitter profiles and traditional media via hashtags, mentions and links,” in both campaigns interconnection with the media varied between 20% and 45% depending on the Twitter metric and the political leader. This hybridization between political and media profiles reflected the interests of the politicians, i.e., tweets reflected media appearances by themselves or members of their party, news stories that gained them electoral leverage and favourable poll results that could generate a bandwagon effect. The media with which the politicians interacted most were La Sexta and Antena 3 (both television channels in the Atresmedia group) and Cadena Ser and *El País* (a radio station and a newspaper, respectively, in the Prisa media group). Rivera also interacted with *El Mundo* (newspaper) and COPE (radio station), and Iglesias additionally with *eldiario.es* (online newspaper) and RTVE (the national television/radio network).

In reference to objective four, both politicians tweeted mainly on aspects related to their own campaigns (campaign events, media appearances, publicity and slogans, etc.). Otherwise the politicians tweeted on political and ideological issues, e.g., populism, Brexit, austerity, Catalonia, Spanish unity, equality, etc. The least frequent tweets were those of a personal

nature, although as mentioned above, Iglesias significantly increased his use of emotional tweets in 26-J.

As the results have shown and answering objective five, the TDI was confirmed to be a valid method for identifying those and other main trends in the global Twitter conversation. The study confirms that the political leaders of Podemos and Citizens interacted little with the Twitter community; rather their communicative strategy was to use the platform for the one-way transmission of persuasive messages of an emotional/ideological nature –mainly content related to their own election campaign. Interconnection with conventional media was mainly done to ensure greater impact outside Twitter.

As a general conclusion and in response to the main objective, there is an evolution in the construction of the community of both political leaders, both leaders evolve in their use of Twitter from the 20D campaign to the 26J campaign. In the 26J campaign they interacted more with the Twitter community and traditional media and, also, achieved greater virality in their messages. However, the polarization of social networks makes it very difficult to permeate beyond the ideological spheres (eco chambers), therefore, traditional media are still important for public awareness and also for influencing more segments of the society.

Twitter is seen as a useful tool to generate community, but not to influence beyond their own followers, for this the media and the traditional campaign remain very important, therefore, as Deltell (2011) and Giansante (2015) says politicians cannot win elections only from social platforms.

Future research will focus on further explorations of the TDI as a means for extracting and analysing representative samples from Twitter data that accurately reflect overall conversation trends, given its potential usefulness in future political communication research relying on big data analysis.

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