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Irene Liberia Vayá
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8883-0417
iliberia@us.es
Universidad de Sevilla

Bianca Sánchez-Gutiérrez
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7603-9169
bianca.sanchez@eusa.es
EUSA University Centre

Alberto Hermida
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4155-0108
ahermida@us.es
Universidad de Sevilla

The fallacy of interactivity on Twitter: the case of Andalusian political parties in 2020

Abstract

The advent and spread of social networking sites have been the object of study of most of the research performed on political communication over the past 25 years. However, more recent inquiries have indicated that the political establishment still has not fully exploited the interactive potential of these media. Against this backdrop, this paper presents the results of a systematic study of the communication between the main political parties in Andalusia (the most populous region in Spain) and the citizenry on Twitter, with the aim of confirming whether or not it is really interactive and participatory. To this end, the spotlight is placed here on those parties most active online and on the way in which they foster interactivity, the subjects that they broach and the functions of their messages. The data were obtained from a content analysis of the tweets (n = 10,729) posted on the official profiles of the main Andalusian parties in 2020. The results indicate that there was no interactive communication with the citizenry, despite the fact that they were in much need of reassurance owing to the unprecedented situation to which the COVID-19 pandemic had given rise. The Andalusian political parties still use social networking sites for the one-way dissemination of information, which shows that they are not, in practice, horizontal and participatory spaces of communication, as the cyber-optimists, defending the innovation hypothesis, predicted.

Keywords
Andalusia, citizenry, interactivity, political communication, social networking sites, Twitter.

1. Introduction

The democratization of the Internet and the development of social media have brought about an increase in citizen participation in public affairs. From politics to economic and social affairs, social networking sites (hereinafter SNSs) serve as vehicles through which citizens can express their views and set the agenda. Likewise, multiple social agents have also resorted to SNSs to communicate with the citizenry and disseminate their discourse in the public sphere. Versus an eminently one-way communication, SNSs offer the opportunity to overcome barriers between senders and receivers, in order to foster dialogue and achieve a horizontal and participatory democracy.

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In light of the foregoing, the aim of this paper is to analyze the extent to which political parties have used SNSs to maintain real dialogue with the citizenry or whether, on the contrary, they have replicated the traditional one-way communication mechanisms. Specifically, the spotlight is placed on information shared on Twitter, an eminently political SNS, during 2020.

Specifically, this study addresses political communication in the southern region of Andalusia, the most populous in Spain –with 8,464,411 inhabitants in 2020, it accounted for nearly a fifth of the overall population of 47,450,795 (INE, 2020)– governed since June 2022 by the conservative Partido Popular de Andalucía (hereinafter PP-A), with an absolute majority. However, it warrants noting that this research was conducted in 2020 when Andalusia was governed by a coalition formed by the PP-A and the free-market libertarian Ciudadanos Andalucía (hereinafter Cs-A), with the support of right-wing VOX Andalucía (hereinafter VOX-A).

Since the first democratic regional elections in 1982, the Junta de Andalucía (as the autonomous government is called) has been governed uninterruptedly by the center-left Partido Socialista Obrero Español de Andalucía (hereinafter PSOE-A), until the December 2018 elections, after which a coalition government was formed by the PP-A and Cs-A in 2019, as already observed. The other parliamentary groups with seats in the Andalusian parliament between 2018 and 2022 included VOX-A, an extreme right-wing party founded in 2013 after a split in the PP-A, and Adelante Andalucía (hereinafter AA), a confederation of parties created in 2018, featuring Podemos Andalucía (hereinafter Podemos-A), Izquierda Unida Andalucía (hereinafter IU-A) and Anticapitalistas Andalucía. The distribution of seats in the Andalusian parliament after the 2018 elections was as follows: PSOE-A, 33; PP-A, 26; Cs-A, 21; AA, 17; and VOX-A, 12. After the victory of the PP-A in the June 2022 regional elections, this distribution changed radically (PP-A, 58 seats; PSOE-A, 30; VOX-A, 14; Por Andalucía, 5; Adelante Andalucía, 2), with Cs-A losing all of its seats.

Following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the region's parties and public institutions communicated more frequently and directly with the citizenry, above and beyond the information provided by the traditional media. Information updates were essential for combating the virus that, by March 2022, had affected over 1,402,843 Andalusians. In these circumstances, it was only to be expected that the political class should make the most of SNSs to communicate interactively with the citizenry, the type of use on which this study focuses.

In this regard, the most original aspect of this study is that it revolves around a systematic analysis of the social media communication behavior of the main Andalusian political parties, something which has rarely been explored (regional political communication has been largely overlooked in the scholarly literature, mostly devoted to national studies). In other words, in contrast to the usual studies of the use to which national organizations put SNSs (Quevedo-Redondo & Portalés Oliva, 2017), it is innovative in that it places emphasis on regional parties, which have received much less attention, in this case on those of the Andalusian Autonomous Community, one of the most important regions of Spain.

Furthermore, this study is also pertinent because 64.6% of Andalusian use SNSs, slightly above the national average of 63.2% (INE, 2022). As 47% of Andalusians use SNSs for searching for information (CAA, 2020), regional parties are aware of how important it is to have social media profiles for posting political information. Particularly, Twitter is a very popular site in the digital culture of the region: research on Andalusian elections highlights that a broad sector of the population follows political information posted on Twitter (Pérez-Curiel & García-Gordillo, 2019).

Regarding generalizability, it is important to stress that this paper forms part of a wider research project focusing on the links between certain communicative aspects of SNSs – participation, interactivity and dialogue– and the improvement of political communication. This objective is also relevant for other Spanish regions and even other countries, since the technological characteristics that enable interactivity on Twitter are universal and can be put

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to a similar use in different contexts. Moreover, the results can also be extrapolated to political contexts of change and multi-party structures, because the continuous restructuring of the Spanish political landscape, with the advent of new parties and coalitions, affects the country as a whole.

2. Theoretical framework

Interactivity, understood as a two-way process that fosters dialogue (Ramos-Serrano & Selva Ruiz, 2005), has been represented as an intrinsic aspect of new technologies (Vergeer, Hermans & Sams, 2011). In particular, SNSs are understood as a meeting place for people, institutions, political parties and other bodies where that dialogue inherent to interactivity can be established. According to López-Rabadán and Mellado (2019), interaction on SNSs is gradual: the basic level is the approach strategy; the intermediate level prompts dialogue; and the most complete level ultimately establishes that dialogue between parties. On Twitter, the first stage would include the use of hashtags and links; the second would involve liking, re-tweeting or mentioning a user; the third would be replying, namely, a second answer (López-Rabadán & Mellado, 2019). Accordingly, this study draws from the premise that establishes that, for SNS interactivity to exist, when a politician or party sends a particular message, a person must reply to it and, at least, the main sender must resume the dialogue (Bellido-Pérez *et al.*, 2021).

The literature has shown great interest in analyzing how new technologies have favored or not the level of political participation and interaction of political institutions with the citizenry through these new tools (Gibson & Cantijoch, 2013; Graham *et al.*, 2013; García Ortega & Zugasti Azagra, 2014; Cantijoch, Cutts & Gibson, 2016; Rauchfleisch & Metag, 2020; Theocharis *et al.*, 2023). Empirical studies indicate that, despite the fact that citizens take a positive view of interaction with politicians on SNSs (Painter, 2015), dialogue does not tend to be habitual (Bellido-Pérez *et al.*, 2021). User-to-user interaction is precisely one of the most noteworthy characteristics of e-campaigns, as evidenced by diverse studies that have analyzed tendencies in online political communication in different countries, since the advent of SNSs and new media (Greer & LaPointe, 2005; Barko Germany, 2009; Enli & Skogerbø, 2013).

The scope and limits of online dialogue are based on different hypotheses. On the one hand, the "innovation hypothesis" holds that the very nature of new information and communication technologies (ICTs) brings politics closer to audiences (Schweitzer, 2008; Vergeer, Hermans & Sams, 2011; Rauchfleisch & Metag, 2020), giving rise to a more participatory and egalitarian politics and radically changing the classic paradigm of political communication (Kim & Lee, 2020). This idea is shared by Small and Giasson (2020, p. 142) who define such a scenario as "a levelled and egalitarian battlefield where citizens could engage directly with parties and governments," while also referring to this perspective as the "equalization hypothesis." In opposition to this optimistic conception of SNSs, a number of authors have put forward the "normalization hypothesis" (Schweitzer, 2008; Rauchfleisch & Metag, 2020), which contends that the Internet, and therefore SNSs, imitate hegemonic power structures in society, hence replicating and promoting electoral inequality (Kim & Lee, 2020).

Moreover, there is another important factor that should be borne in mind in relation to Twitter, specifically, that of the profound inequalities that exist in the behavior of overrepresented groups on this social network, namely, followers of political parties, who are more active than the rest in online political deliberation (Barberá & Rivero, 2015). Indeed, the most optimistic vision of interactivity in political communication has been refuted by many empirical studies (Lilleker, 2015; Kim & Lee, 2020; Guerrero-Solé & Oliver, 2020; Mateo-Toscano, Marín-Dueñas & Gómez Carmona, 2022).

Twitter has become the political SNS par excellence the world over (Enli & Skogerbø, 2013; López-Meri, Marcos-García & Casero-Ripollés, 2017) and, consequently, an essential object of study in political communication. Its dialogic nature, together with the immediacy

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and familiarity it offers, imply that it is a much sought-after tool for election propaganda (López Abellán, 2012). From the perspective of the citizenry, one of the motivations for following a politician on Twitter is precisely the possibility of maintaining direct contact (Fernández, 2012). However, research indicates yet again that the dialogic possibilities of this SNS are not being sufficiently harnessed (Aragón *et al.*, 2013; Graham *et al.*, 2013; Mirer & Bode, 2015). In this regard, it should be borne in mind that deliberative potential may be inhibited by factors relating to candidates, citizen behavior, and platform constraints (Theocharis *et al.*, 2016).

Additionally, personal and environmental/institutional factors affect both the adoption of new communication tools and the intensity of their political use (Lorenzo Rodríguez & Garmendia Madariaga, 2016). To this should be added the profound transformation that SNSs have brought in terms of how the flow of communication takes place and also as regards e-campaign strategies. As Fazekas *et al.* (2021) note, the possibility of direct dialogue between citizens and politicians increases the latter's ability to adapt information to their audiences by deciding on whether to emphasize or minimize the importance of certain issues. It should also be noted that studies have questioned, or updated, traditional communication theories, such as Katz and Lazarsfeld's (1955) two-step flow, in this new media environment. Specifically, Choi (2015) reviews this and other later models, such as Bennett and Manheim's one-step flow (2006) and Thorson and Wells' "curated flows" proposal (2012), concluding that "the two-step flow of communication might still have an explanatory power for understanding the flow of information in online public forums" (p. 700). On the other hand, Park (2019) "revisits" the two-step flow on Twitter, pointing out that the communication flow becomes more diversified and complex as news sources increase, and Twitter opinion leaders convey information to the general public through tweet links and news curation.

In Spain, studies point to the one-way character of political communication on Twitter (López Abellán, 2012; Alonso-Muñoz, Miquel-Segarra & Casero-Ripollés, 2016; López-Meri, Marcos-García & Casero-Ripollés, 2017). In this context, the case of the new extreme right-wing party VOX is particularly relevant, for it maintains a conflictive relationship with traditional media and, as a result, has decided to implement a SNS-based communication model, with high posting frequencies and mostly populist and anti-establishment messages (Vázquez-Barrio & Campos Zabala, 2020; Aladro Vico & Requeijo Rey, 2020; Lava, 2021; Guerrero-Solé, Mas-Manchón & Aira, 2022).

Likewise, studies focusing on Andalusia highlight the role of Twitter as a way of driving election campaigns and citizen participation, despite limited party-citizenry interactivity (Fontenla Pedreira, Conde Vázquez & Máiz Bar, 2019; Pérez-Curiel & García-Gordillo, 2019; Pérez Gómez & Mahou Lago, 2020; Pineda, Bellido-Pérez & Barragán-Romero, 2022).

Lastly, it warrants recalling that, at a time when there is a high demand for information, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic, SNSs have been key to allowing citizens to voice their doubts and concerns and to establishing direct communication between public institutions and society (Abd-Alrazaq, Alhuwail, Househ, Hamdi & Shah, 2020). It is also important to observe that Spain figures among those countries where both the citizenry and the political establishment have put SNSs to an intensive use (Bustos Díaz & Ruiz del Olmo, 2020; Guerrero-Solé & Oliver, 2020).

3. Methodological design

In light of the foregoing, this study is based on the following initial assumption: the communication strategy of the Andalusian political parties on Twitter during 2020 did not promote interactivity with the citizenry, in line with the normalization hypothesis. In order to test this assumption, a content analysis was performed. This data gathering technique, which allows for conducting frequency analyses, was applied to Twitter. According to official sociological data, SNSs are the second preferred initial medium for keeping abreast of political affairs and election campaigns (Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas [CIS], 2019). Of all the existing

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SNSs, Twitter was chosen for two reasons. First, the political and electoral use of this micro-blogging site has led to a boom in research, to the point of becoming the SNS attracting the greatest interest among the academic community (Ramos-Serrano, Fernández Gómez & Pineda, 2018; Evans, Habib, Litzen, San Jose & Ziegenbein, 2019). On the other, Twitter use is rather widespread in Spain (García Ortega & Zugasti Azagra, 2014), thus being an SNS that undoubtedly arouses the interest of the political class.

The test sample was formed by the messages posted on Twitter in 2020 by the Andalusian political parties which had won seats in the 2018 regional elections: PSOE-A (@psoedeandalucia), PP-A (@ppandaluz), Cs-A (@cs_andalucia), the coalition AA (@AdelanteAND) and VOX-A (@AndaluciaVox). Given the aforementioned implosion of AA, it was considered appropriate to analyze separately the tweets of this brand and those of the parties IU-A (@iuandalucia) and Podemos-A (@podemos_and). Furthermore, this sample of parties offers an overview of the different ideological positions in Andalusia. Based on these Twitter profiles, the total number of units making up the sample accounted for 10,729 tweets.

In addition to calculating the number of posts per party, an analytical construct based firstly on a series of formal variables corresponding to Twitter's communication features –presence of hashtags, links, stills, videos and GIFs– was applied. To these were added four interactivity-related variables: type of tweet (with the categories of normal tweet, retweet, quote tweet, and @reply) and the users with whom, where appropriate, it interacted (for instance, citizens, journalists, experts, etc.) –under the criterion that the reply function was an indicator of interactivity– plus the number of comments and mentions. Both formal variables and those relating to interaction were operationalized following Graham *et al.* (2013), Verón Lassa and Pallarés Navarro (2017), Cartes Barroso (2018), and López-Rabadán and Mellado (2019). The content analysis performed by Graham *et al.* (2013) was also used for the operationalization of variables relating to the tweets' thematic content and functions, while the categories employed in studies by Bustos Díaz and Ruiz del Olmo (2016) and Aladro Vico and Requeijo Rey (2020) were also considered. For a complete list of the categories making up the formal and interactivity variables, plus thematic content and functions, please see the results section.

Coding was performed manually by one postgraduate student between February and December 2021. Following this, the data were processed and tabulated using Excel software. Regarding inter-coder reliability, an initial two-coder test was run to calibrate the codebook, employing Krippendorff's (2004) alpha (α) as a reliability coefficient. No problems arose with the formal or interactivity-related data, but those relating to tweet content (themes and functions) showed relevant discrepancies between coders. After clarifying the meaning and coding of the most problematic variables, a second two-coder test was run, totaling three coders; the formal data yielded a very high average index of reliability ($\alpha = 0.97$), but the values of the variables relating to the tweets' thematic content and functions were still insufficient, according to content analysis standards ($\alpha = 0.75$). A third two-coder test, limited to the variables that had previously been problematic, obtained more favorable results, after substituting two coders. In this case, the reliability indices were $\alpha = 0.80$ (function) and $\alpha = 1$ (thematic content).

After the content analysis, a contingency analysis was carried out for the express purpose of crossing the thematic variables (topics and functions) with the rest, running the chi-square test to this end.

4. Results

4.1. *Formal variables*

This section describes variables such as the number of tweets published by the Andalusian parties during the period studied or their use of hashtags, links, stills, videos and GIFs.

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As to the number of tweets posted, Cs-A –the party with the third largest number of seats in the Andalusian parliament in 2020, and the fifth party in terms of its follower count on Twitter (26.5k)– came in first place with 2,823, accounting for 26.3% of the total. This was 8.3% more than the second party, the PSOE-A (1,931) –with 52.2k followers, also ranking in second place in this respect– 9.3% more than the third, the PP-A (1,829 tweets, but with 55.4k followers, putting it in first place), and 18.2% more than VOX-A (866 tweets), bringing up the rear with only 8.1%, and second to last in terms of followers, with 25k. It is striking that, among the "new parties," only Cs-A stood out for its Twitter activity, given that Podemos-A was only slightly ahead of VOX, with 8.5% (916 tweets) –while as to its follower count, it came in joint third place with IU-A, both with 28.6k followers– followed by AA, accounting for 9.9% of the sample (1,060 tweets and ranking last with 18.6k followers). For its part, IU-A remained in an intermediate position, with the 12.2% (1,304 tweets).

In relation to hashtags (see Figure 1), 60.3% of the tweets did not include them. Although the percentages varied depending on the political party, it is also noteworthy that this was not the case with Cs-A, which included them in the majority of its tweets, although as to VOX-A the opposite was true, with hashtags appearing in only 11.4%.

Of the 39.7% of tweets with a hashtag, 75.3% included one, whereas only 0.25% included more than five. The two parties that used this tool least were AA and especially VOX-A, with Podemos-A and PSOE-A using it most. In the case of IU-A, the proportion of tweets without hashtags was higher than average.
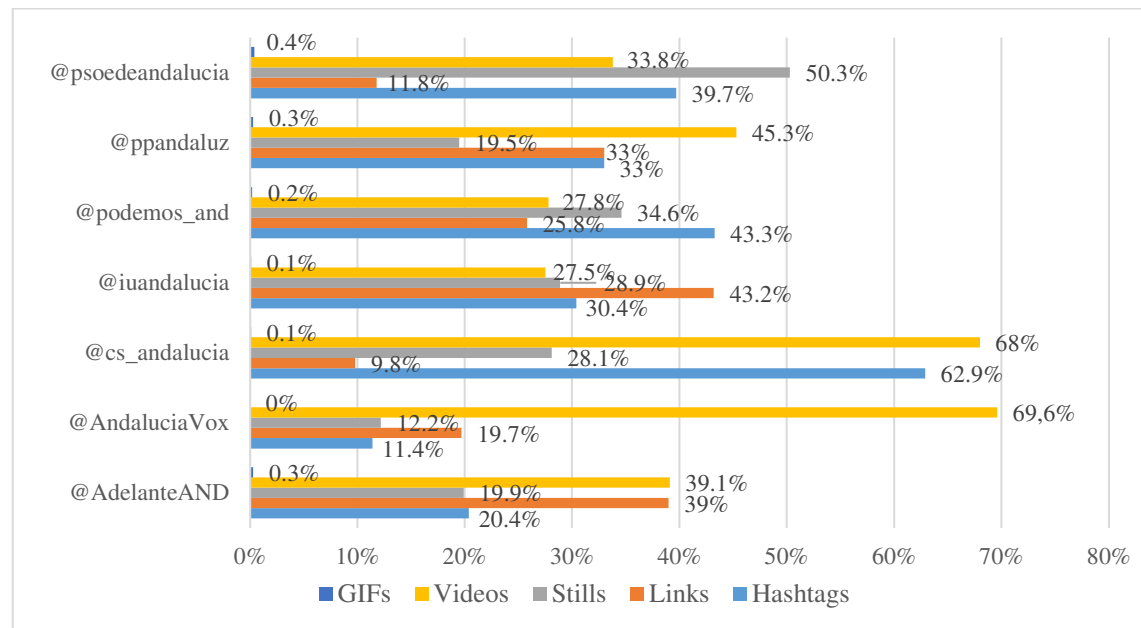
Generally speaking, the Andalusian parties included very few links in their tweets (see Figure 1), specifically, in only 23.2% of them, with IU-A leading the field with some or other link in about half of its tweets, followed by AA, the PP-A, the PSOE-A and Cs-A. Particularly, those tweets with links tended to include just one (99.1%).

Continuing with the formal variables, and contrary to what would be expected in the current context, most of the tweets did not contain any images (see Figure 1). At a party level, mention should first go to the PSOE-A, with stills in half of its tweets, followed by Podemos-A, IU-A and Cs-A. In this respect, the high proportion of images in the PSOE-A's tweets contrasted sharply with those of VOX-A (in only 12.2%).

As to the inclusion of videos in the tweets, the results were not as striking as those for the previous formal variable (see Figure 1). In the main, their use was much more balanced, appearing in almost half of the sample analyzed. In this regard, VOX-A compensated for the lack of stills by including videos in a significant majority of its tweets, followed by Cs-A and, at a greater distance, the PP-A, signifying that the right-wing parties put them to greater use.

Lastly, to the aforementioned should be added the inclusion of GIFs in the tweets (see Figure 1), the results for which were as emphatic as they were significant. Despite their growing popularity on SNSs and in the current communication dynamics, almost all of the tweets did not include any, their use being limited to only 22 of the 10,729 analyzed here.

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Figure 1. Tweets containing hashtags, links, stills, videos and GIFs.

Source: Own elaboration.

4.2. *Variables relating to interaction*

4.2.1. Type of post

As regards the type of posts, the vast majority were tweets (95.2%), followed by retweets[1] (4%). It is particularly remarkable that only a paltry 0.8% (85 of 10,729) of the tweets posted by the Andalusian parties in 2020 were replies. This is very revealing with respect to interactivity in that, as already stressed, the specialist literature considers the reply function as one of the fundamental indicators of interaction.

Specifically, as to that meagre 0.8% (see Table 1), it was the right-wing parties that used the reply function less, especially the PP-A which did not post any in 2020. In contrast, the PSOE-A was the party that publicly responded most often to a mention or a retweet.

Table 1. Type of tweets posted by the Andalusian parties in 2020.

Twitter profile	Tweet % (n)	Retweet % (n)	Reply % (n)	Total % (n)
@AdelanteAND	93.2% (988)	6.2% (66)	0.6% (6)	100% (1060)
@AndaluciaVox	97% (840)	2.7% (23)	0.3% (3)	100% (866)
@cs_andalucia	99.1% (2797)	0.7% (19)	0.2% (7)	100% (2823)
@iuandalucia	94.6% (1234)	4.6% (60)	0.2% (7)	100% (1304)
@podemos_and	82.4% (755)	16.8% (154)	0.8% (7)	100% (916)
@ppandaluz	97.8% (1789)	2.2% (40)	0% (0)	100% (1829)
@psoedeandalucia	93.8% (1812)	3.5% (67)	2.7% (52)	100% (1931)
Total	**95.2% (10215)**	**4% (429)**	**0.8% (85)**	**100% (10729)**

Source: Own elaboration.

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[1] Although the difference between "retweet" and "quote tweet" was considered in the analysis grid, this second type does not appear in the results due to the fact that the total count was zero.

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On practically half of the occasions on which the Andalusian parties interacted using this function, it was to reply to other political parties, followed by individual politicians and the citizenry at some distance behind the others (see Table 2). Notwithstanding the nature and possibilities of Twitter, not only the very limited use of this SNS for horizontal communication has been confirmed, but also in 79% of the tweets in which this occurred, it was to interact with other parties or politicians, the citizenry being relegated to third place, with a startlingly low 18 replies in 10,729 tweets. Lastly, the "Other" category contained other types of users with less significant results, such as experts in different fields (8.2%) and media or journalists (5.9%). Likewise, it should be stressed that none of these very few replies were aimed at lobbies, industry representatives or celebrities, among others.

As to the results by party (see Table 2), it was the PSOE-A that used the reply function most, mainly to interact with other political parties, followed by individual politicians and the citizenry. Trailing a long way behind the PSOE-A, IU-A and Podemos-A interacted with the citizenry 90 and 57.1% of the time, respectively. As to the very small number of replies posted by Cs-A, it also tended to interact with political parties and politicians, while two of VOX-A's three replies fell into this last category and the other was addressed to media/journalists.

Table 2. Type of user with whom the Andalusian parties interacted through the reply function.

Twitter profile	Political party	Individual politician	Citizen	Other	Total for each political party	Replies over total tweets
	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)
@AdelanteAND	16.7% (1)	0% (0)	50% (3)	33.3% (2)	100% (6)	0.6% (6)
@AndaluciaVox	0% (0)	66.7% (2)	0% (0)	33.3% (1)	100% (3)	0.3% (3)
@cs_andalucia	57.1% (4)	42.9% (3)	0% (0)	14.1% (1)	100% (7)	0.2% (7)
@iuandalucia	10% (1)	0% (0)	90% (9)	0% (0)	100% (10)	0.8% (10)
@podemos_and	0% (0)	42.9% (3)	57.1% (4)	0% (0)	100% (7)	0.8% (7)
@ppandaluz	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	100% (0)	0% (0)
@psoedeandalucia	85.4% (35)	15.4% (8)	3.8% (2)	32.7% (13)	100% (52)	2.7% (52)
Total	**48.2% (41)**	**30.8% (16)**	**21.2% (18)**	**20% (17)**	**120.2%* (85)**	**0.8% (85)**

* Note: the sum exceeds 100% due to the fact that replies can be aimed at more than one user category.

Source: Own elaboration.

4.2.2. Comments and mentions

Nearly two thirds of the 10,729 tweets posted contained comments (64.6%) (see Table 3). Once again, it was the PSOE-A that put this tool to the greatest use (88.9% of its tweets), followed by VOX-A (86.6%) and the PP-A (81.8%). In contrast, Cs-A stood out yet again, since only 35.5% of its more than 2,800 tweets were commented on. AA (65.5%) and Podemos-A (62.3%) were very close to the global tally, with IU-A trailing somewhat behind (54.1%).

Specifically, of the vast majority of the tweets that were commented on 96.1% (namely, 62.1% of the sample) received between 1 and 25 comments and 2.6% between 26 and 50, whereas only 0.15% received more than 200.

By party (see Table 3), of the 35.5% of Cs-A's tweets with comments 84.5% had the lowest number (between 1 and 25), the party being the only one not to have received more than 200 comments for one sole tweet. The PSOE-A received the highest number of comments for one sole tweet, with 6,100 (many of them accusing the party of corruption: https://twitter.com/psoedeandalucia/status/1316349768826793987), in addition to two others

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that received 1,600 and 2,500 comments, respectively. For its part, one of Podemos-A's tweets was commented on 3,500 times and one of AA's tweets, 1,500 times. Lastly, even though they were the parties with the highest proportion of tweets with comments after the PSOE-A, the highest number reached by VOX-A (774) and the PP-A (491) for one tweet was below the 1,000 mark.

In relation to mentions (see Table 3), they appeared in 70% of the sample. Of this proportion the majority only used one (44.3%), whereas merely 0.2% used more than five. By party, VOX-A and Cs-A stood out with mentions in 92.4 and 86% of their tweets, respectively, whereas Podemos-A (53.3%) and the PP-A (53.4%) used them the least.

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Table 3. Comments and mentions received by the tweets of the Andalusian parties in 2020.

Comments	@AdelanteAND	@AndaluciaVox	@cs_andalucia	@iuandalucia	@podemos_and	@ppandaluz	@psoedeandalucia	Total
	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)
0	34.5% (366)	13.4% (116)	64.5% (1820)	45.9% (599)	37.7% (345)	18.2% (333)	11.1% (215)	**35.4% (3794)**
1-25	61.8% (655)	81.3% (704)	35% (989)	52.9% (690)	61.4% (562)	78% (1427)	84.6% (1634)	**62.1% (6661)**
26-50	2.7% (29)	3.2% (28)	0.3% (8)	0.8% (11)	0.7% (6)	2.6% (48)	2.7% (52)	**1.7% (182)**
51-100	0.7% (7)	1.3% (11)	0.1% (2)	0.2% (2)	0.2% (2)	0.8% (15)	0.7% (13)	**0.5% (52)**
101-200	0.1% (1)	0.6 (5)	0.1% (4)	0.1% (1)	0% (0)	0.2% (3)	0.5% (10)	**0.2% (24)**
>200	0.2% (2)	0.2% (2)	0% (0)	0.1% (1)	0.1% (1)	0.2% (3)	0.4% (7)	**0.1% (16)**
Total	**100% (1060)**	**100% (866)**	**100% (2823)**	**100% (1304)**	**100% (916)**	**100% (1829)**	**100% (1931)**	**100% (10729)**
M	4.11	7.35	1.06	2.57	2.01	6.21	6.59	4.01
SD	11.91	30.66	5.30	24.78	4.62	19.2	21.08	17.95
Mentions	**% (n)**	**% (n)**	**% (n)**	**% (n)**	**% (n)**	**% (n)**	**% (n)**	**% (n)**
0	32% (339)	7.6% (66)	14% (396)	41.7% (544)	46.7% (428)	46.6% (853)	30.7% (592)	**30% (3218)**
1	57.5% (610)	33.1% (287)	47.4% (1339)	42.3% (551)	33.6% (308)	39% (713)	48.8% (943)	**44.3% (4751)**
2-5	10.3% (109)	59% (511)	38.5% (1086)	15.9% (207)	19.3% (177)	14.3% (261)	20.2% (391)	**25.6% (2742)**
>5	0.2% (2)	0.2% (2)	0.1% (2)	0.2% (2)	0.3% (3)	0.1% (2)	0.3% (5)	**0.2% (18)**
Total	**100% (1060)**	**100% (866)**	**100% (2823)**	**100% (1304)**	**100% (916)**	**100% (1829)**	**100% (1931)**	**100% (10729)**
M	0.81	1.82	1.32	0.79	0.82	0.7	0.97	1.04
SD	0.71	1.03	0.83	0.85	1.01	0.79	0.9	0.92

Source: Own elaboration.

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4.2.3. Likes and retweets

As could not be otherwise, practically all of the tweets posted received some or other like (99.4%) (see Table 4). In this connection, although the differences with the rest of the parties were not statistically significant, it was the PP-A and VOX-A, namely, the more right-wing parties, that were the only ones whose tweets always received likes. As to the number of likes, slightly less than two-thirds of the sample analyzed received between 1 and 50 likes, only 1% more than 500, and just 0.3% over 1,000.

In the analysis by party (see Table 4) there were statistically significant differences, with a higher number of the tweets posted by VOX-A receiving between 51 and 100 likes. As to the tweets posted by the extreme right-wing party with a higher number of likes, slightly more than 13% received more than 200, with one even receiving as many as 3,900. With respect to the PP-A, an important number of its tweets also received between 51 and 100 likes, whereas only very few received more than 1,000, although it was the political party that posted the tweet with the largest number (5,500).

Cs-A was conspicuous again, for considering that it was the political party putting Twitter to the greatest use, the large majority of its tweets received between 1 and 50 likes, with only a small proportion of them receiving more than 50 (5.9%). On the contrary, only 0.9% of its tweets did not receive any likes and, moreover, it was the only party, together with Podemos-A, none of whose tweets received more than 1,000 likes, unlike AA and IU-A, with over 2,000 and the PSOE-A with as many as 1,400.

Likewise, in relation to retweets (see Table 4), the vast majority of the tweets were retweeted at least once (98.6%). As before, all the tweets posted by the PP-A and VOX-A were retweeted. The percentages for the rest ranged between 99.5% (AA) and 97.1% (Cs-A), the latter bringing up the rear also in relation to this variable. As before, most of the tweets were retweeted between 1 and 50 times (74.6%), with only 0.4% surpassing the 500 mark. Versus this global tendency, more than half of the tweets posted by VOX-A and PP-A were retweeted more than 50 times, this figure being much higher than those of the rest of the political parties. Indeed, if VOX-A was by far the party with the largest number of tweets being retweeted more than 500 times, Cs-A was the only one that did not achieve this ever.

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Table 4. Likes and retweets received by the tweets of the Andalusian parties in 2020.

	@AdelanteAND	@AndaluciaVox	@cs_andalucia	@iuandalucia	@podemos_and	@ppandaluz	@psoedeandalucia	Total
Likes	**% (n)**	**% (n)**	**% (n)**	**% (n)**	**% (n)**	**% (n)**	**% (n)**	**% (n)**
0	0.6% (7)	0% (0)	0.9% (25)	0.8% (10)	0.7% (6)	0% (0)	0.9% (17)	**0.6% (65)**
1-50	64.6% (799)	23.1% (200)	93.2% (2632)	80.4% (1048)	73.8% (676)	19.4% (354)	63.5% (1226)	**64.6% (6935)**
51-100	19.5% (114)	35.8% (310)	4.6% (130)	11.4% (149)	18.8% (172)	41.9% (766)	23.1% (447)	**19.5% (2088)**
101-150	7.6% (52)	15.8% (137)	0.8% (23)	2.5% (32)	3.9% (36)	20.2% (370)	8.4% (163)	**7.6% (813)**
151-200	2.9% (23)	8.2% (71)	0.2% (7)	1.5% (20)	1.9% (17)	7.6% (139)	2% (38)	**2.9% (315)**
201-500	3.7% (50)	11.8% (102)	0.1% (4)	2.4% (31)	0.8% (7)	9.4% (172)	1.9% (36)	**3.7% (402)**
501-1000	0.7% (8)	3.9% (34)	0.1% (2)	0.6% (8)	0.2% (2)	1.3% (23)	0.2% (3)	**0.7% (78)**
>1000	0.3% (7)	1.4% (12)	0% (0)	0.5% (6)	0% (0)	0.3% (5)	0.1% (1)	**0.3% (33)**
Total	**100% (1060)**	**100% (866)**	**100% (2823)**	**100% (1304)**	**100% (916)**	**100% (1829)**	**100% (1931)**	**100% (10729)**
M	51.14	129.88	18.62	40.75	40.64	110.26	49.53	56.46
SD	90.51	140.09	29.97	73.10	46.71	94.62	58.48	83.34
Retweets	**% (n)**	**% (n)**	**% (n)**	**% (n)**	**% (n)**	**% (n)**	**% (n)**	**% (n)**
0	0.5% (5)	0% (0)	2.9% (82)	2.1% (27)	1.2% (11)	0% (0)	1.6% (30)	**1.4% (155)**
1-25	70.1% (743)	11.3% (98)	85.1% (2402)	58.7% (765)	64.5% (591)	15% (275)	44.5% (860)	**53.4% (5734)**
26-50	16.3% (173)	33.9% (294)	9.1% (258)	23.7% (309)	21.5% (197)	33.8% (619)	21.9% (422)	**21.2% (2272)**
51-75	4.8% (51)	19.7% (171)	1.7% (48)	6.7% (88)	7.9% (72)	21.9% (401)	14.7% (284)	**10.4% (1115)**
76-100	2.5% (27)	11% (95)	0.4% (11)	3.3% (43)	2.4% (22)	12.1% (222)	9% (173)	**5.5% (593)**
101-200	4.1% (43)	15.4% (133)	0.6% (16)	3.3% (43)	2.3% (21)	13.2% (241)	7% (135)	**5.9% (632)**
201-500	1.1% (12)	6.6% (57)	0.2% (5)	1.8% (23)	0.1% (1)	3.3% (61)	1.1% (22)	**1.7% (181)**
>500	0.6% (6)	2.1% (18)	0% (1)	0.5% (6)	0.1% (1)	0.5% (10)	0.3% (5)	**0.4% (47)**
Total	**100% (1060)**	**100% (866)**	**100% (2823)**	**100% (1304)**	**100% (916)**	**100% (1829)**	**100% (1931)**	**100% (10729)**
M	30.22	90.41	12.90	35.63	25.11	70.37	42.98	39.87
SD	53.83	115.02	22.38	61.14	28.37	69.17	50.89	62.26

Source: Own elaboration.

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4.3. *Thematic variables*

Lastly, as to the themes and main functions of the tweets (see Table 5), there was a predominance of the usual issues on the political agenda, such as the government, the economy, health and education, among others. Bearing in mind that 2020 was the year in which the pandemic started with the strictest lockdowns, it is indeed significant that "Health and social welfare" were not the most burning issues, appearing in third place behind "Government" and "Economy and business." As can be observed in Table 5, "Education" came in fifth place, followed by "Others," including topics like "Gender issues and feminisms" (3.3%), "Budget" (2.8%), "Andalusia" (1.9%), "Corruption" (1.6%) and "Environment" (1.4%). Lastly, 14.3% of the tweets fell into the "unspecified" category.

By party, the "Government" topic predominated in the tweets of the PP-A and the PSOE-A, both belonging to the traditional two-party system. Conversely, Podemos-A devoted very few tweets to this topic, while also being the party tweeting less about "Economy and business," unlike the results obtained by the free-market libertarian Cs-A and VOX-A. Returning to the "Health and social welfare" topic, it was yet again the two parties representing the "old politics," the PSOE-A and the PP-A, which posted an above average number of tweets in this respect, in contrast to VOX-A, the party bringing up the rear.

On the other hand, but still in relation to the topics, after a cross-correlation analysis, the following statistically significant results according to the Chi-square test stand out: regarding the type of tweet ($X^2_{(12)}$=94,151; p<0,001), it is noteworthy that the topic "Health and welfare" prompted more replies (16.5%) than "Economy and business" (12.9%), which might have been due to the impact of Covid-19. Moreover, it is striking that it was the less frequently tweeted topics, such as "Campaign and/or parties" and "Health and welfare," that received over 1,000 likes most often (24.2 and 18.2% respectively) or were retweeted more than 500 times ($X^2_{(42)}$=539,394; p<0,001).

With respect to the main functions of the tweets posted in 2020 (see Table 5), the principal objective of the vast majority (82.1%) was to take a stance, regardless of whether it was a political party or a politician. This function was followed at a fair distance by the rest, specifically highlighting or commenting on some or other party activity (7.3%), stressing their own achievements (4.1%) and other less important ones, like recognition/gratitude for some or other action (2.7%), discussing/criticizing a topic (1.5%) and spreading news (1.4%). Consequently, it can be flatly stated that the Andalusian political parties resorted to Twitter basically to air their own official stances, side-lining other functions that might have fostered greater interaction with the citizenry and other social agents.

In the individual analysis of the parties, the PSOE-A mostly used Twitter to present the stances of individual politicians (14.1% above average), in opposition to AA and Podemos-A whose references to the institutional positions of their respective parties were above average. If this finding is interpreted in light of the collapse of the AA coalition in 2020, it could be seen to reflect their interest in establishing their own stances and identities as political parties.

On the other hand, it is remarkable that Cs-A and the PP-A put Twitter to a very different use when referring to their activities: whereas the former only devoted 12% of its tweets to doing just that –being the party with the largest number of tweets in this regard– the latter only devoted a paltry 1% of its tweets to its activities. However, the PP-A was the party that tweeted most about its own achievements, which is understandable given its position at the head of the Government, whereas the PSOE-A, its historical adversary, now in the opposition, only devoted a very small number of tweets to trumpet its successes.

Finally, regarding the correlation between the function and the rest of the variables, according to the Chi-square test, there was a statistically significant relationship between the former and the type of tweet, posts with links, gifs, videos and mentions. As for the type of tweet

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($X2(10)$=304.067; p<0.001), it is only natural that the majority of replies (93%) corresponded to one of the two predominant functions ("Individual political stance" and "Party stance").

With respect to these two functions, it is noteworthy that those tweets containing links ($X2(5)$=772.914; p<0.001) or GIFs ($X2(5)$=20.330; p<0.001) mostly corresponded to the "Party stance" function. For their part, tweets with videos ($X2(5)$=1627.809; p<0.001) or mentions ($X2(5)$=2226.939; p<0.001) usually corresponded to the "Individual political stance" function. Lastly, when crossing the topic and function variables ($X2(30)$=4272.940; p<0.001), the results show that tweets on almost every topic corresponded to the "Individual political stance" function, with one exception: as is only to be expected, posts on "Campaign and/or parties" corresponded to the "Party stance" function.

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Table 5. Topics and functions of the tweets posted by the Andalusian parties in 2020.

	@AdelanteAND	@AndaluciaVox	@cs_andalucia	@iuandalucia	@podemos_and	@ppandaluz	@psoedeandalucia	Total
Topics	**% (n)**	**% (n)**	**% (n)**	**% (n)**	**% (n)**	**% (n)**	**% (n)**	**% (n)**
Government	13.1% (139)	14.7% (127)	12.3% (346)	11.3% (147)	3.7% (34)	23.3% (427)	21.3% (412)	**15.2% (1632)**
Economy and business	10.2% (108)	18.5% (160)	20.9% (590)	10.8% (141)	6.1% (56)	10% (183)	8.5% (165)	**13.1% (1403)**
Health and welfare	10.8% (115)	8.5% (74)	9.8% (277)	9% (118)	9.1% (83)	15.2% (278)	19.1% (369)	**12.2% (1314)**
Campaign and/or parties	5.9% (63)	11.3% (98)	9.8% (278)	9.7% (127)	11.9% (109)	18.2% (332)	8.1% (156)	**10.8% (1163)**
Education	7.5% (80)	6% (52)	8.2% (231)	5.6% (73)	6.9% (63)	4.5% (82)	12.2% (235)	**7.6% (816)**
Others	34.9% (370)	28.1% (243)	22% (622)	40% (521)	42.6% (390)	19.2% (352)	19% (366)	**26.7% (2864)**
Unspecified	17.5% (185)	12.9% (112)	17% (479)	13.6% (177)	19.8% (181)	9.6% (175)	11.8% (228)	**14.3% (1537)**
Total	**100% (1060)**	**100% (866)**	**100% (2823)**	**100% (1304)**	**100% (916)**	**100% (1829)**	**100% (1931)**	**100% (10729)**
Functions	**% (n)**	**% (n)**	**% (n)**	**% (n)**	**% (n)**	**% (n)**	**% (n)**	**% (n)**
Individual political stance	32% (339)	56.4% (488)	53.3% (1506)	41.7% (544)	27.1% (248)	43% (786)	61.7% (1191)	**47.6% (5102)**
Party stance	49.4% (524)	33.3% (288)	25.6% (723)	41% (534)	56.3% (516)	37.5% (685)	22.6% (436)	**34.5% (3706)**
Party activity	10.1% (107)	7.2% (62)	12% (340)	6.4% (83)	5.9% (54)	1% (19)	6.1% (118)	**7.3% (783)**
Highlighting achievements	3.5% (37)	1.6% (14)	3% (84)	3.8% (49)	4.8% (44)	9.5% (173)	1.8% (35)	**4.1% (436)**
Others	4.8% (51)	1.6% (14)	5.9% (167)	6.7% (88)	5.8% (53)	8.9% (162)	7.7% (149)	**6.4% (684)**
Unspecified	0.2% (2)	0% (0)	0.1% (3)	0.5% (6)	0.1% (1)	0.2% (4)	0.1% (2)	**0.2% (18)**
Total	**100% (1060)**	**100% (866)**	**100% (2823)**	**100% (1304)**	**100% (916)**	**100% (1829)**	**100% (1931)**	**100% (10729)**

Source: Own elaboration.

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5. Discussion and conclusions

As can be inferred from our results, the normalization hypothesis is reinforced, implying that the main Andalusian parties implemented vertical, one-way communication strategies, thus failing to make the most of the opportunities offered by SNSs for horizontal communication and for interacting with the citizenry. In this respect, Small and Giasson (2020) note that "[…] most political parties are terrified of losing control over their communications online and therefore do not actively engage in dialogic two-way communication with citizens during elections" (pp. 143-144). Thus, for example, relinquishing part of the control of communication may facilitate the intervention of citizens who take advantage of the anonymity to attack political candidates, thus undermining the quality of the debate, dissuading other users from participating in it and even destroying the reputation of those candidates (Theocharis *et al.*, 2016, p. 1023). This threat, together with the possible fragmentation of messages also associated with interaction, are two clear risk factors that seem to dissuade parties from assuming the "2.0 pledge" (Túñez López & Sixto García, 2011): to engage in 2.0 interaction as network behavior.

In any case, the interactive potential of social networks in relation to politics continues to be a very interesting topic for researchers. As in the case of Twitter, the numerous studies on social networks such as Facebook, Instagram or the more recent TikTok have arrived at conflicting conclusions about whether or not politicians and citizens harness the interactive potential of social networking sites. Whereas studies, such as that performed by Pineda, Bellido-Pérez and Barragán-Romero (2022), are categorical about the total lack of interactivity on Instagram in the context of Spanish politics, Medina Serrano, Papakyriakopoulos and Hegelich (2020), in their study focusing on the US political context, have demonstrated that TikTok is a much more interactive SNSs than others, due to the fact that users resort to multiple information channels to disseminate their messages.

As pointed out in the theoretical framework section, in their classification of interactivity on SNSs López-Rabadán and Mellado (2019) highlight three levels, of which the two-way dialogic communication level corresponds to replies in the case of Twitter. In the same vein, for Rauchfleisch and Metag (2020) the real interactive potential is shown when a political party/candidate replies to citizens and not conversely. In this sense, replies become a fundamental way of assessing the two-way character of the political communication of the main Andalusian parties on Twitter during 2020. In light of this, it is indeed striking that only 0.8% of the tweets posted were replies. An individual analysis reveals how many of them tended to be replies that did not lead to any conversation, for there was usually an absence of dialogue and even a predominance of self-replies, the parties using this function to open a thread of comments or to endorse the tweets of their other delegations.

Additionally, the normalization hypothesis is borne out further by the negligible number of replies, the majority of which were aimed at parties or political candidates, with only 21.2% being devoted to the citizenry (a surprising 18 tweets of the 10,729 analyzed). This coincides with the research conducted by Jungherr (2016, p. 76), in which he observes that "there is very little evidence of Twitter being an enabling device for dialogue between candidates and normal citizens". As a matter of fact, this reinforced the conclusions of more recent studies confirming the infrequency of dialogue in this type of communication (Bellido-Pérez *et al.*, 2021).

Despite the very poor results in this regard, it has already been observed how it was the right-wing Andalusian parties that resorted less to the reply function, this being non-existent in the case of the PP-A and no more than 0.3% in that of VOX-A and Cs-A. As to the left-wing parties, the results of the PSOE-A, with 52 replies (2.7%), are the most remarkable, followed by those of Podemos-A (0.8%) and AA (0.6%). Although higher than those of the rest, these results still reflect a minimum level of interaction.

In any case, apart from the aforementioned interaction between parties, delegations and/or political representatives, there were several exceptional cases of interaction with the

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citizenry, especially on IU-A's account. In the first example (https://lc.cx/nydmDm), relating to the situation of self-employed workers, the party crossed more than one tweet with a user who intervened with his replies, thus generating a brief dialogue and understanding between the two. Another example (https://lc.cx/Rssw17), in relation to the publication of a video about the party, also illustrates the use of the reply function as a resource to provide accurate information to a user requesting it. Thus, in these tweets, the interaction between the political class and the citizenry is confirmed, demonstrating a useful bidirectionality in communication and closeness between the two. In this sense, IU-A, despite the party's limited number of replies during 2020 (7, a minute 0.2% of the overall total of tweets posted), is the party that seems to have a better understanding of the reply function for promoting interaction with citizens.

Apart from IU-A, it is also important to note the tense interaction of VOX-A with a journalist of the regional public broadcaster Canal Sur TV (https://lc.cx/9r8p_8). Specifically, following a tweet from the party in which the journalist was mentioned and his work, criticized, he replied to it and, subsequently, received another from the party.

Finally, there were also examples of parties that responded to tweets from citizens, journalists or the media, among others, although in these cases neither did the communication originate from the parties, nor was a dialogue necessarily established with the user who posted the tweet, for which reason they were not considered here as high-level interactions.

Moving on to communication impact, beyond the number of replies, the PP-A and VOX-A were the only political parties whose tweets received likes or were retweeted in all cases. On the other hand, mention should go to how infrequently Cs-A's tweets were commented on or retweeted, despite being the party posting the greatest number of tweets of all, while also receiving the lowest number of likes per tweet (i.e., 1-50). In this regard, however, it is important to note that Cs-A was the party with the fifth largest follower count (26.5k). Concerning the right-wing parties, it is remarkable that VOX-A was the party that put Twitter to the least use in comparison to the rest, bearing in mind the importance that it attaches to SNSs in its digital communication strategy. Perhaps the reason behind this is the fact that it had since shifted to more modern SNSs aimed at a younger sector of society, like Instagram and TikTok (Castro Martínez & Díaz Morilla, 2021).

As to the left-wing parties, it was the PSOE-A –the party with the largest number of seats in the Andalusian parliament, the main opposition party and the party with the second largest follower count on Twitter (52.2k)– that posted the second highest number of tweets and that which received most comments, albeit receiving a lower number of likes. For its part, IU-A stood out especially for the fact that 90% of its replies were aimed at the citizenry, thus fostering a more horizontal communication. As to Podemos-A, the most noteworthy finding is that, together with VOX-A, it was the party posting the lowest number of tweets. Nevertheless, it was party with most hashtags and retweets and, along with IU-A, the second in the use of replies, 57.1% of which were aimed at the citizenry. Conversely, it was VOX-A that resorted less to mentions. Lastly, AA also stood out for devoting a considerable number of replies to citizens (50%).

In sum, it can be concluded that it was the left-wing parties that were the most committed to using the interactive Twitter tool par excellence (the reply function). Specifically, it was those parties belonging to the supposedly "new politics" that leveraged it to foster a dialogue with the citizenry, in opposition to the main left-wing party in Spain and Andalusia (PSOE).

As a closing remark, our study has a number of limitations. Firstly, it is limited to official party accounts, without including others, such as those of candidates. Secondly, due to the time devoted to the coding process (February-December 2021), there are some inconsistencies that have affected the results obtained. For instance, the user counts of the Twitter accounts were recorded on the day that coding was concluded, thus not reflecting the figure corresponding to

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the time of coding of each tweet. Lastly, we also decided not to gauge whether the posts or the comments that they received were positive, negative or neutral in tone.

Despite the limitations, our research makes a contribution to the many-sided debate on interactivity on SNSs in the field of political communication, specifically in the case of Twitter, adapting the empirical study to the Andalusian context. The result allows us to claim that our initial hypothesis has been confirmed, thus serving as further evidence of the consolidation of the normalization hypothesis. However, future research should meet the challenge of the increasingly complex dynamics of online political participation.

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