

Digital ISSN: 2172-9077
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14201/fjc.29749>

SPANISH POLITICAL PARTIES ON FACEBOOK: NEW SOURCES OF CONTENT FOR POLITICAL JOURNALISM

Los partidos españoles en Facebook: nuevas fuentes de contenido para el periodismo político

Dra. Ana BERIAIN BAÑARES
Professor, Abat Oliba CEU University, Spain
Email: aberianb@uao.es
 <https://orcid.org/000-0001-8025-4921>

Dra. Raquel CRISÓSTOMO GÁLVEZ
Professor, ESERP Business & Law School, Spain
Email: rcrisostomo@eserp.com
 <https://orcid.org/000-0003-1895-2889>

Dr. Ismael XIVA I MOLINA
Researcher, Abat Oliba CEU University, Spain
Email: ismael.xiva@gmail.com
 <https://orcid.org/000-0002-3096-4084>

Date of receipt of article: 29/06/2022
Date of definitive acceptance: 06/09/2022

ABSTRACT

Political parties take advantage of the internet to disseminate their messages, particularly during election campaigns. In addition to the public, these messages reach journalists, who have turned these platforms into another tool for their professional work. The aim of this study is to reflect on how the nature of publications can affect the work of journalists who use this content as raw material to work with. In order to explore this more deeply, a quantitative approach is proposed, consisting of a metric analysis of 1,280 Facebook posts by 10 political forces and a survey of 1,004 people, representing the universe of the Spanish population. The results show that the parties disseminate unidirectional and propagandistic content on Facebook during campaigns, marginalising dialogue and interaction. This restricts journalists' ability to converse with political parties through the social network, which at the same time is impacted by messages whose veracity is secondary to their objective of reaching as many internet users as possible.

Keywords: Social networks; political parties; electoral campaign; political journalism; political participation.

RESUMEN

Los partidos políticos aprovechan las redes para difundir sus consignas, especialmente durante la campaña electoral. Además de a la ciudadanía, estos mensajes llegan a los periodistas, que han convertido dichas plataformas en una herramienta más para su desempeño profesional. La meta del presente estudio es reflexionar sobre cómo la naturaleza de las publicaciones puede incidir en la labor del periodista que usa estos contenidos como materia prima sobre la que trabajar. Con vistas a concretarlo, se plantea un enfoque cuantitativo, consistente en un análisis de métricas de 1.280 publicaciones en *Facebook* realizadas por 10 fuerzas políticas y en una encuesta 1.004 personas, que representan al universo de la población española. Los resultados evidencian que los partidos difunden en campaña en *Facebook* contenidos unidireccionales y propagandísticos, marginando el diálogo y la interacción. Esto restringe la capacidad para conversar con los partidos a través de dicha red social del periodista, que al mismo tiempo se ve impactado por mensajes que dejan en un segundo plano la veracidad, pues su objetivo es llegar al máximo número de internautas posible.

Palabras clave: Redes sociales; partidos políticos; campaña electoral; periodismo político; participación política.

1. Introduction

The development of the internet over the last three decades has transformed the journalistic profession on several levels. Firstly, the internal structure and external ecosystem in which the media operate have changed. At the end of the last century, newspapers took to the internet, in a phenomenon that has been labelled the paperisation of the web (Marta-Lazo et al., 2020). To begin with, newspapers transferred to the virtual environment typical paper models, although they did not take long to generate their own habits in this new context. At the same time, the first digital-only media appeared.

In the decade that followed, the conjunction between the birth and development of social networks such as *Facebook* and *Twitter* and the financial crisis that began in 2008 forced newspaper companies to rethink their structure, given the fall in sales and the drop in advertising revenue (Casero-Ripollés and Izquierdo-Castillo, 2013). At the same time, access to the internet became widespread, not only from computers, but also from the emerging smartphones. This, together with the increase in the speed of connections (which allowed content to be uploaded in less time), and the proliferation of new media on the internet (with structures that are simpler than those of traditional media and which may be ephemeral), stimulated the advent of immediacy as a maxim in the exercise of journalism. Moreover, as Monfort (2013) stresses, in this context, journalists are no longer only competing against other media, but also against institutions, which have their own profiles on social networks and, through them, circumvent journalistic intermediation, connecting directly with the public.

This is why the 21st-century journalism professional must have a versatile and transmedia profile, and be able to handle digital tools with ease, with a view to reconciling immediacy with quality, which has often been compromised by the speed with which content is disseminated online (Grubenmann, 2017). This is particularly the case considering social media have not contributed to journalism fulfilling its role in society, but they have contributed to blurring the boundaries of the profession and to breaking down certain influences it had on its environment (Hess and Gutsche Jr., 2019). Moreover, considering the fact that several studies, such as the one conducted by Lischka (2021) in Switzerland and Finland or the one by Welbers and Opgenhaffen

(2019) relating to the Netherlands and Flanders, have detected the inclination of news site publishers to introduce subjective, emotional and surprising elements in the content they post on social networks, in order to adapt to their algorithms and the preferences of the recipients.

In short, it can be affirmed that *Facebook* has disturbed journalism and has forced information professionals to focus their publications on a specific way so they can obtain an audience and spread on this social network. Thus, following Johnson and Kelling (2021), it can be seen how Facebook is not a supposedly neutral technology company, but rather a media corporation with the ability to condition the way journalists express themselves.

However, in a study focused on the German media, Lischka and Garz (2021) found that, with the exception of the sensationalist ones, the rest tend to underuse clickbait. It means they try to avoid content aimed at generating advertising revenue and in the misleading headlines and thumbnail images are used to get as many clicks as possible. Both authors believe that this issue is due to the fact that the rules of journalism remain alive in social networks.

At the same time, social networks themselves have become sources of information for journalists, although, as Benaissa (2018) points out, their use is restricted and complementary, compared to other sources, in the newsrooms of *El País*, *El Mundo*, *La Vanguardia* and *ABC*. In parallel, an increase in its use has been observed in *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, and *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, especially in relation to *Twitter*, which is often preferred to *Facebook* as a source (Von Nordheim et al., 2018).

Political information is of particular interest in this regard. For the first time, politicians can address a broad spectrum of voters —as the internet has now penetrated almost all age groups— without the filter of journalists and the media. Social media have become a loudspeaker for their messaging, especially during the campaign. This period is one of the central moments of the electoral cycle, as it is the stage immediately preceding the elections. In democratic regimes, they are used by the public to appoint their representatives in legislative assemblies and, directly or indirectly, their rulers.

The length of the election campaign varies from country to country. In Spain, it lasts for two weeks, beginning on the 38th day after the signing of the decree calling the elections and ending at midnight on the day before the vote. In practice, however, the campaign extends to the day of reflection and the day of the elections, as there is nothing to prevent politicians from continuing to launch messages during this time. Moreover, public debate does not come to a sudden halt (Gamir-Ríos, 2016).

Throughout this period, parties make a significant effort in terms of communication to convince citizens to vote for them in order to win as many seats as possible. With the generalisation and consolidation of digital social networks, they have become another channel for disseminating their messages. As such, they capture the attention of journalists, since candidates often use them to launch messages that, for example, they do not later repeat at rallies or that end up shifting the focus of the debate outside the networks, moving into the physical world.

In relation to the development of the internet —which was the event that allowed the birth of social networks, as well as blogs and emails— Bericat (1996) already warned about the window of opportunity that was opening when it came to facilitating

communication between parties and the public, not only in terms of propaganda, but also in terms of dialogue with them. In contrast, Martins (1997) predicted that the internet could foster the emergence of simplistic political discourse, which has been corroborated by Gerbaudo (2018).

However, parties and politicians have spent this century trying to adapt to the new communication scenario that has opened up (Chadwick, 2013). This adaptation has not yet occurred and, in general, Spanish political parties resort to the dissemination of unidirectional, self-referential and propagandistic content on their social profiles during the election campaign, seeking feedback from internet users on their own positions, rather than the generation of dialogue and exchange (Xiva, 2022). In addition, in the case of *Twitter*, it has been seen that they only disseminate and share content that is consistent with their own points of view on current issues (Guerreiro-Solé, 2018).

In this way, it can be said that they apply a communication strategy that can be characterised as belonging to the press agent communication model described by Grunig and Hunt (1984). The latter, typical of propaganda, is characterised by its unidirectionality and by its focus on maximising the dissemination of the message, disregarding its veracity.

In addition, it has been seen that parties still lack the capacity to generate enough attraction to be massively followed on the internet, as only 18.4% of Spaniards follow political parties on *Facebook*, while this percentage drops to 12.9% on *Twitter* and 8.9% on *Instagram* (Beraiain et al., 2022). According to Gamir-Ríos, Cano-Orón and Baviera (2022), a candidate's lack of political experience, as well as the size of the constituency and starting from a small number of followers, are usually significant factors for gaining followers on social networks.

2. Objectives and hypotheses

This study aims to shed light on how Spanish political parties take advantage of the dialogical potential offered by *Facebook* during general election campaigns.

As such, the aim of the research is to determine whether, in general terms, all the parties standing in these elections, both parliamentary and extra-parliamentary, make use of the capacity for interaction and dialogue that *Facebook* offers them with internet users, part of the voting public, during the election campaign.

In addition, the aim is to determine the perception that the public have of the purpose of the content that parties publish on their *Facebook* profiles. The aim is to address how the nature of these messages can affect the performance of the journalist who uses them as raw material for their work.

Thus, we start out from the hypothesis that, in general, all Spanish parties without distinction marginalise interaction and dialogue with internet users on the aforementioned social network throughout the period studied. Instead, they focus on publishing unidirectional, self-referential content that avoids establishing a conversation with internet users.

In addition, it is suggested that the majority of Spaniards believe that, during an election campaign, parties use *Facebook* for the same purpose, that is, to disseminate propagandistic content that does not seek dialogue, but rather self-reference and feedback of their own messaging.

3. Methodology

In order to achieve the stated objectives and to corroborate or refute the proposed hypotheses, we propose a quantitative research based on an analysis of metrics on all the publications made on Facebook by 10 political parties that participated in the Spanish general elections that took place on 26 June 2016.

The sample of political formations selected for this research (Table 1) is made up of the 5 most voted political formations that obtained representation in the Congress of Deputies after those elections —Partido Popular (PP), Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE), Unidos Podemos (UP), Ciudadanos (Cs) and Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC)—, and the 5 most voted among those that were left without seats in the Spanish lower house —Partido Animalista Contra el Maltrato Animal (PACMA), Recortes Cero-Grupo Verde, Unión Progreso y Democracia (UPyD), Vox and Bloque Nacionalista Galego (BNG-Nós)—.

Table 1. Results of the political parties analysed in the 26 June 2016 elections

Party	Votes	Vote share as percentage	Seats won in Congress
PP	7,906,185	33.03%	137
PSOE	5,424,709	22.66%	85
UP	5,049,734	21.10%	71
Cs	3,123,769	13.05%	32
ERC	629,294	2.63%	9
PACMA	284,848	1.19%	0
R. Cero	51,742	0.22%	0
UPyD	50,282	0.21%	0
Vox	46,781	0.20%	0
BNG-Nós	44,902	0.19%	0

Source: Produced by author.

Together, these 10 formations made 1,280 posts on Facebook during the period under review, although there were large differences between them, as shown in the Table 2. In this regard, it should be noted that the study covers, in addition to the campaign formally considered, posts that were launched during the day of reflection and on the day of the vote.

Table 2. Distribution of Facebook posts by political party

Party	Number of posts
PP	332
PSOE	121

Party	Number of posts
UP	80
Cs	73
ERC	81
PACMA	105
R. Cero	85
UPyD	156
Vox	172
BNG-Nós	75

Source: Produced by author.

The data in the Table 3 also shows that parliamentary parties posted 687 messages on *Facebook*, while parties without representation in the parliament posted a total of 593.

In terms of the metrics analysed, the research focused on the volume of comments obtained by the parties' posts, as well as the number of responses they gave to the internet users who posted them. This information was collected through the *Fanpage Karma* tool and processed using the software SPSS.

The T-test of proportions has been applied to both metrics. This allows the comparison of data in a table, cell by cell, on categorical variables in independent samples (Wimmer and Dominick, 2011). This formula compares the values between two cells of the same row with respect to the columns of the table. The test is performed, for each column, based on the hypothesis that the proportion of A and the proportion of B are equal, versus the hypothesis that they are significantly different, with a 95% confidence level, or 5% risk level.

In other words, relevant discrepancies between the results of the same heading are isolated. For ease of reading, statistically significant differences are reproduced in the tables in lower case letters, with the letter of the column in which the proportion is considered to be higher.

At the same time, a second part of the study was carried out, consisting of a survey of a representative sample of the Spanish population over 18 years of age, that is, those with the right to vote, in relation to their socio-demographic characteristics.

For the sample design, the weight of each social and demographic variable in the overall population of Spain was calculated, based on data published by the National Statistics Institute of Spain (INE). The same proportions were applied to the 1,000 planned interviews. In this respect, 4 more were carried out—for a total of 1,004—and it was decided to keep them in order to increase the sample size.

In this respect, the large size of the survey, as well as the sampling system chosen, mean that the data obtained through this survey are applicable to all Spaniards in general, with a sampling error of $\pm 3.15\%$, at a confidence level of 95%.

Table 3. Distribution of interviews according to socio-demographic variables

	Number of interviews
Total interviews	1,004
Sex	
Male	492
Female	512
Age	
18–24	100
25–34	141
35–44	191
45–54	191
55–65	164
More than 65	217
Area	
North East	122
East	147
South	198
Centre	94
North West	93
North-Central	92
Canary Islands	45
Greater Barcelona	88
Greater Madrid	125
Habitat	
Province capital	310
Non-capital municipality with less than 50,000 inhabitants	493
Non-capital municipality of 50,000 inhabitants or more	201

Source: Produced by author.

As in the previous section, primary data are used in this block of the research, which are those collected for the first time and specifically with a view to covering specific information objectives (Berganza and Ruiz, 2005).

A structured questionnaire was used for data collection. The first part of the survey collected information on the socio-demographic characteristics of the interviewee. A closed-ended question was then asked in order to find out the level of following of political parties on *Facebook*. This was approached in the following way: Do you follow any political parties on *Facebook*?

Finally, respondents were asked, by means of another closed question, to what extent do you believe that political parties, both with parliamentary representation and without, use *Facebook* for the following purposes? Interact with the public during the election campaign | Disseminate propaganda during the election campaign | Distribute images and videos of their actions during the election campaign.

In this last question, the order of the answers was changed to eliminate possible biases. However, in order to find out the level of respondents' agreement with the three stated aims, a five-category Likert scale was used. These were: Completely agree with statement | Strongly agree with what I think | Somewhat agree with statement | Disagree with statement | Completely disagree with statement. In this sense, the Likert scale was used because it can be tested for reliability using Cronbach's Alpha and because of its simplicity in interpreting the results (Spooren, Mortelmans and Denekens, 2007). In addition, three social science research professionals were asked to supervise the questionnaire beforehand, as well as to pilot the questionnaire, to ensure the quality of its design and its correct understanding.

The survey fieldwork was conducted between 13 and 20 November 2019, just after the general election that took place on 10 November 2019. The data collection was carried out online by the company Netquest, through a community of Spanish individuals that operates on a single-use invitation-only basis to minimise the risk of self-selection and duplicates.

The data were tabulated with the software SPSS, obtaining contingency tables by cross-referencing the socio-demographic variables of the respondents with the data obtained in the second part of the questionnaire. To analyse the information obtained, the T-test for proportions has been applied, in the same way as for the metrics extracted from *Facebook*.

4. Results

Based on the results achieved through the application of the methodology described above (Table 4), it can be seen, firstly, that the parties with parliamentary representation (269) achieved a significantly higher average number of comments on their *Facebook* posts than extra-parliamentary parties (84).

Table 4. Percentage and average number of comments obtained on *Facebook* by parliamentary and extra-parliamentary parties

	Parliamentary parties (l)	Extra-parliamentary parties (m)
Base: total post	687	593
	%	%
No comments	0.9	30.5 1

	Parliamentary parties (l)	Extra-parliamentary parties (m)
From 1 to 10	10.5	27.7 l
From 11 to 30	17.2	15.9
From 31 to 100	22.7 m	11.3
From 101 to 300	23.7 m	6.9
More than 300	25 m	7.8
	Total	Total
Average	269 m	84

Source: Produced by author.

This is a consequence of the fact that 77.5% of UP's posts on this social network during the period studied achieved more than 300 comments. Also noteworthy are the percentages of posts placed in this band for PSOE (42.1%), Cs (39.7%) and PACMA (39%). It should be noted that the latter formation is part of the extra-parliamentary bloc (Table 5).

Table 5. Percentage and average number of comments obtained on *Facebook* by the parties

	PP (f)	PSOE (g)	UP (e)	Cs (b)	ERC (c)	PACMA (d)	R. CERO (h)	UPYD (j)	VOX (k)	BNG (a)
Base: total posts	332	121	80	73	81	105	85	156	172	75
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
No comments	0.6	-	-	-	4.9 defg	-	89.4 abcdefgjk	34.6 bcdefgk	5.2 bdefg	56 bcdefgjk
From 1 to 10	16.3 bdeg	2.5	-	1.4	17.3 bdeg	1	10.6 bdeg	51.9 bcdefghk	24.4 bdefgh	41.3 bcdefghk
From 11 to 30	25 abdeghj	7.4 eh	-	5.5 eh	27.2 abdeghj	9.5 aeh	-	10.9 aeh	38.4 abdeghj	1.3
From 31 to 100	35.2 abcdeghjk	14.9 aehj	-	12.3 aehj	14.8 aehj	21.9 aehj	-	2.6	22.7 aehj	-
From 101 to 300	15.1 ahjk	33.1 afhjk	22.5 ahjk	41.1 aefhjk	30.9 afhjk	28.6 afhjk	-	-	6.4 ahj	-
More than 300	7.8 ahjk	42.1 acfhjk	77.5 abcdfghjk	39.7 acfhjk	4.9 hj	39 acfhjk	-	-	2.9 j	-
	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total
Average	104 ahjk	373 acfhjk	798 abcdfghjk	461 acfhjk	93 ahjk	401 acfhjk	0	5 ah	40 ahj	2 h

Source: Produced by author.

However, the differences between the two groups of political forces end here. When examining the data collected in relation to the answers given by the official profiles of the parties to the comments made by internet users (Table 6), there are no significant differences between parties with representation in parliament and those without. As such, for the former, the average number of responses to comments on *Facebook* posts is 0 while for the latter it is 1.

Table 6. Percentage and average responses given on *Facebook* by parties with and without representation in parliament

	Parliamentary parties (l)	Extra-parliamentary parties (m)
Base: total posts	687	593
	%	%
No response	88.4 m	76.6
One response	4.2	8.8 l
Two responses	3.9	5.9
More than two responses	3.5	8.8
	Total	Total
Average	0	1 l

Source: Produced by author.

In the case of extra-parliamentary groups, the average of 3 responses per post achieved by PACMA was influential. At the same time, a certain willingness to interact on the part of Cs and Vox can be seen (Table 7).

Table 7. Percentage and average of responses given on *Facebook* by the parties

	PP (f)	PSOE (g)	UP (e)	Cs (b)	ERC (c)	PACMA (d)	R. CERO (h)	UPYD (j)	VOX (k)	BNG (a)
Base: total posts	332	121	80	73	81	105	85	156	172	75
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
No response	94.9 bdjk	94.9 bdjk	93.8 bdk	27.4	97.5 bdjk	36.2	94.1 bdk	86.5 bdk	74.4 bd	97.3 bdjk
One response	1.2	1.7	3.8	27.4 acefghjk	-	16.2 acefghj	4.7 f	6.4 f	11 acfg	2.7
Two responses	-	-	1.3 f	35.6 acefghjk	-	15.2 acefghjk	1.2 f	3.8 fg	7 acfg	-

	PP (f)	PSOE (g)	UP (e)	Cs (b)	ERC (c)	PACMA (d)	R. CERO (h)	UPYD (j)	VOX (k)	BNG (a)
More than two responses	3.9	0.8	1.3	9.6 aefghj	2.5	32.4 abcefgghjk	-	3.2	7.6 aegh	-
	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total
Average	0	0	0	1 acefghj	0	3 abcefgghjk	0	0	1 acefghj	0

Source: Produced by author.

With regard to the data extracted from the survey, Spaniards over the age of 18 were more inclined to think that, throughout the electoral campaign, the parties used the social network Facebook mainly for the dissemination of electoral propaganda (3.86) and the distribution of images and videos of their events (3.86). On the other hand, they were less likely to believe that political parties use their profiles on this platform to interact with the public during this period (Table 8).

Table 8. *Facebook's* objectives based on the total number of Spanish citizens

	Average*
Total interviews	1,004
Interacting with the public during the election campaign	3.25
Disseminating propaganda during the election campaign	3.86
Distributing images and videos of their events during the election campaign	3.86

Source: Produced by author.

* Average calculated between a maximum value of 5 (completely agree with statement) and a minimum value of 1 (completely disagree with statement).

When assessing responses by socio-demographic traits, men (3.90) are more likely than women (3.81) to say that parties disseminate propaganda on *Facebook* during the campaign. Young people aged 18–34 (3.92) were the most likely to share this opinion, along with people living in municipalities outside provincial capitals with 50,000 inhabitants or more (4.07), in households with more than two members (3.88) and in the Canary Islands (4.25).

Men (3.89) are also more likely than women (3.83) to agree with the statement that the main purpose of the parties on *Facebook* during the campaign is to distribute images and videos of their events. It also bears highlighting the fact that young people aged 18–34 (3.95), residents in municipalities outside provincial capitals with 50,000 inhabitants or more (4.03), households with more than two members (3.89) and in the Canary Islands (4.13) are most likely to support this statement.

As for the purpose involving interacting with internet users on Facebook throughout the campaign, men (3.30) are also the most likely to believe this, compared to women (3.20). By age, the previous pattern is reproduced, with 18–34 year olds (3.30) being the most in agreement with this statement. Exactly the same is true for inhabitants of non-provincial capital municipalities with 50,000 inhabitants or more (3.33), as well as for residents of the Canary Islands (3.42). On the other hand, in this case, Spaniards living in households with two members (3.28) are the ones who agree most with this aim.

If we focus particularly on Spaniards who are followers of a party on *Facebook*, who account for 18.4% of the total, the results are similar to those described above. As such, the majority of respondents say that the parties use this social network during the campaign to distribute images and videos of their events (4.03) and to disseminate propaganda (3.93). Fewer share the statement that *Facebook* is used for interaction with citizens (3.68) (Table 9).

Table 9. *Facebook's* objectives based on the total number of Spanish citizens who follow parties on this social network

	Average*
Total interviews	186
Interacting with the public during the election campaign	3.68
Disseminating propaganda during the election campaign	3.93
Distributing images and videos of their events during the election campaign	4.03

Source: Produced by author.

* Average calculated between a maximum value of 5 (completely agree with statement) and a minimum value of 1 (completely disagree with statement).

Looking at the data by socio-demographic characteristics, men (4.15) are more likely than women (3.92) to agree that parties use *Facebook* to distribute images and videos of their campaign events. This statement is most strongly supported by young people aged 18–34 (4.17), those living in municipalities outside provincial capitals with 50,000 inhabitants or more (4.32), as well as those living in households with more than two members (4.20) and in the Canary Islands (4.58).

At the same time, men (4.09) are also more likely than women (3.78) to believe that the parties use *Facebook* to disseminate propaganda during the campaign. Similarly, young people aged 18–34 (4.06) are the most supportive of this statement, as are people living in municipalities outside provincial capitals with 50,000 inhabitants or more (4.33), those living in households with two or more members (4.17) and those living in the Canary Islands (4.52).

Finally, men (3.92) also show more agreement than women (3.44) with the statement that parties seek interaction with the public during the campaign through *Facebook*. This assertion is most strongly supported by 18–34-year-olds (3.82), Spaniards living in municipalities outside provincial capitals of 50,000 inhabitants or more (4.00), in households with two members (3.75) and in the Canary Islands (4.00).

5. Discussion and conclusions

After examining the results of the research, the initial working hypothesis has been confirmed and it can be said that, in general terms, all Spanish political parties, both with parliamentary representation and without, do not prioritise interaction and dialogue with *Facebook* users throughout the electoral campaign. In this regard, they focus their efforts on the dissemination of unidirectional content that avoids establishing conversations with internet users.

This can be seen from the analysis of the metrics related to the comments received by the posts on the profiles of the political formations in the period studied and the responses obtained. We can reach the same conclusion if we focus on what Spaniards of legal age think about the communication model pursued on Facebook by these parties during the electoral campaign.

Thus, although the parliamentary parties attract, in quantitative terms, more comments in their publications than extra-parliamentary parties, the average number of responses to these comments in both cases is extremely low. For parties with representation in parliament, it is equal to 0. For those without, it is just 1.

In line with this, the universe of the Spanish population over the age of 18, that is, all citizens of the Spanish State with the right to vote, is more in agreement with the statement that political parties underestimate the dialogical and interactive potential of Facebook during the electoral campaign. Instead, in their view, they pursue dissemination, above all, of propaganda and images and videos of their actions.

This reality is in line, as has already been commented, with the practice generally observed in Spanish parties as a whole, for both those with parliamentary representation and without. This is almost equivalent to saying that it happens for both larger parties and smaller parties. As such, the latter bloc of parties not only misses out on the opportunity that *Facebook* offers it to shape a low-budget campaign, but also fails to dissociate itself in communicative terms from the patterns established by the other bloc of parties, in order to draw attention to itself and make up for its traditional invisibility in the conventional media.

In short, all parties rely on the press agent communication model as described by Grunig and Hunt (1984) or, at least, are inspired by it to develop their own. This propensity to marginalise interaction with the public and reinforce self-promotion was already revealed by López-Rabadán, López-Meri and Doménech-Fabregat (2016) in relation to the profiles of the PP, PSOE, Podemos and Cs candidates for the presidency of the Spanish government in the general elections of 20 December 2015, in the case of *Twitter*.

Against this background, the question arises as to whether internet users really want to create a space for dialogue between themselves and political parties through social networks, particularly on *Facebook*. In this regard, we cannot judge the generalised communicative strategy of the Spanish political parties throughout the electoral campaign as either good or bad. The crux of the matter is a separate issue and involves knowing whether this is a consequence of the preferences shown by social network users, whether it is due to a specific approach to communication by the parties as organisations, or whether it is due to a combination of the above or for other reasons. In line with this, according to García and Abuín (2019), 1.07% of internet users who visit the websites of Spanish parties do so to connect and hold a dialogue with politicians.

From the outset, then, it seems that it is internet users who are pushing the parties away from dialogue and who encourage unidirectionality on social networks, but, in order to support this thesis, it would be necessary to check, first of all, whether what is observed on the websites of parties can be extrapolated to networks. In addition, it remains to be seen whether such a transfer is even possible, particularly during the election campaign, which is the period of interest for this study. At this stage, *a priori*, the public should be more open to dialogue with their leaders, bearing in mind the proximity of the moment when they will be able to exercise their right to vote.

However, it also remains to be seen whether the possible lack of dialogue among internet users on social networks has its origins in a specific way of acting on the part of the parties that has frustrated their expectations to such an extent that they have come to consider that these social networks are not spaces where dialogue is possible.

All of the above has a decisive impact on the practice of journalism. The dissemination of propaganda and images and videos of events on the profiles of political parties—in this case on their *Facebook* accounts— during the electoral campaign makes it much easier for journalists to follow the campaign, since it is no longer essential for the professional to travel to the site where the meeting, visit, walkabout or press conference is being held. Now, they can be followed from any device with an internet connection and from almost anywhere, which, at the same time, means a reduction in overheads for the media. Moreover, as the content is uploaded to the internet, it can be viewed as many times as we wish and downloaded.

At the same time, however, the fact that the content distributed by parties on *Facebook* during the election campaign is the journalist's raw material is also dangerous, in view of the results obtained in this study. As such, the professional who performs their work in this way will basically receive and be affected by propaganda. In line with this, as Spanish parties base their *Facebook* strategy on Grunig and Hunt's (1984) press agent model, it must be borne in mind that the important thing is to maximise the dissemination of the message, without paying attention to its veracity, making it fertile ground for the spread of fake news.

The journalist will also not have the possibility to ask questions because, even if the social network provides this option, it is virtually certain that the party will not respond, given the minimal interaction with internet users referred to above. In addition, feeding on the content disseminated by political parties on social networks bypasses the very essence of the journalistic profession, renouncing physical interaction with politicians. If this happens, the non-verbal information they provide, which only humans are able to pick up in face-to-face encounters, is lost, as the coronavirus pandemic that broke out in early 2020 has brought to light.

6. Bibliography

- Benaissa, S. (2018). Las redes sociales como fuente de información periodística en la prensa digital española ('El País', 'El Mundo', 'La Vanguardia' and 'ABC'). *Index.comunicación: Revista científica en el ámbito de la Comunicación Aplicada*, 8(3), 13–42.
- Berganza, M. R. and Ruiz, J. A. (2005). *Investigar en comunicación. Guía práctica de métodos y técnicas de investigación social en comunicación*. McGraw-Hill.
- Beriaín, A., Crisóstomo, R. and Xiva, I. (2022). Comunicación política en España: representación e impacto en redes sociales de los partidos en campaña. *Revista Mexicana de*

- Ciencias Políticas y Sociales*, LXVII (244), 335-362. <http://dx.doi.org/10.22201/fcpys.2448492xe.2022.244.75881>
- Bericat, E. (1996). La sociedad de la información. Tecnología, cultura, sociedad. *Revista Española de Investigaciones Sociológicas*, (76), 99-122. <https://doi.org/10.2307/40183988>
- Casero-Ripollés, A. and Izquierdo-Castillo, J. (2013). Between Decline and a New Online Business Model: The Case of the Spanish Newspaper Industry. *Journal of Media Business Studies*, 10(1), 63-78. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16522354.2013.11073560>
- Chadwick, A. (2013). *The hybrid media system: Politics and power*. Oxford University Press.
- Gamir-Ríos, J. (2016). Blogs, Facebook y Twitter en las elecciones generales de 2011. Estudio cuantitativo del uso de la web 2.0 por parte de los cabezas de lista del PP y del PSOE. *Dígitos: Revista de Comunicación Digital*, 1(2), 101-120. <http://dx.doi.org/10.7203/rd.v0i2.53>
- Gamir-Ríos, J., Cano-Orón, L. and Baviera, T. (2022). Análisis del aumento de seguidores y de la presencia multiplataforma de la clase política en Facebook, Twitter e Instagram en campañas electorales (2011-2019). *Fonseca, Journal of Communication*, (24), 211-231. <https://doi.org/10.14201/fjc.28295>
- García, D. F. and Abuín, N. (2019). Preferencias y pautas de comportamiento de los usuarios en los sitios web de los partidos políticos españoles. *Estudios sobre el Mensaje Periodístico*, 25(2), 803-817. <https://doi.org/10.5209/esmp.64809>
- Gerbaudo, P. (2018). Social Media and Populism: an Elective Affinity. *Media, Culture & Society*, 40(5), 745-753. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443718772192>
- Grubenmann, S. (2017). Journalists' Professional Identity A resource to cope with change in the industry? *Journalism Studies*, 18(6), 732-748. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2015.1087812>
- Grunig, J. and Hunt, T. (1984). *Managing public relations*. Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Guerrero-Solé, F. (2018). Interactive Behavior in Political Discussions on Twitter: Politicians, Media and Citizens' Patterns of Interaction in the 2015 and 2016 Electoral Campaigns in Spain. *Social Media + Society*, 4(4), 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305118808776>
- Hess, K. and Gutsche Jr., R. E. (2019). Total Eclipse of the Social: What Journalism Can Learn from the Fundamentals of Facebook. *Journalism Practice*, 13(8), pp. 1.013-1.017. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2019.1642126>
- Johnson, B. G. and Kelling, K. (2021). Facebook and the boundaries of professional journalism. In L. T. Price, K. Sanders, and W. N. Wyatt (eds.). *The Routledge Companion to Journalism Ethics*. 407-416). <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429262708>
- Lischka, J. A. (2021). Logics in Social Media News Making: How social media editors marry the Facebook logic with journalistic standards. *Journalism*, 22(2), 430-447. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884918788472>
- Lischka, J. A. y Garz. M. (2021). Clickbait news and algorithmic curation: A game theory framework of the relation between journalism, users, and platforms. *New Media & Society*, pp. 1-22. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448211027174>
- López-Rabadán, P., López-Meri, A. and Doménech-Fabregat, H. (2016). La imagen política en Twitter. Estrategias de los partidos políticos españoles. *Index Comunicación*, 6(1), 165-195.
- Marta-Mazo, C., Rodríguez, J. M. and Peñalva, S. (2020). Competencias digitales en periodismo. Revisión sistemática de la literatura científica sobre nuevos perfiles profesionales del periodista. *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, (75), 53-68. <https://doi.org/10.4185/RLCS-2020-1416>
- Martins, A. M. (1997). Modelos de democracia. *Revista Filosófica de Coimbra*, (11), 85-100.
- Monfort, N. (2013). Internet: de la rapidez a la inmediatez. *adComunica. Revista Científica de Estrategias, Tendencias e Innovación en Comunicación*, (5), 269-271. <http://dx.doi.org/10.6035/2174-0992.2013.5.20>
- Spooren, P., Mortelmans, D. and Denekens, J. (2007). Student evaluation of teaching quality in higher education: development of an instrument based on 10 Likert-scales. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 32(45), 667-669. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02602930601117191>

- Von Nordheim, G., Boczek, K. and Koppers, L. (2018). Sourcing the Sources. An analysis of the use of Twitter and Facebook as a journalistic source over 10 years in The New York Times, The Guardian, and Süddeutsche Zeitung. *Digital Journalism*, 6(7), 807-828. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2018.1490658>
- Welbers, K. and Opgenhaffen, M. (2019), Presenting News on Social Media. *Digital Journalism*, 7(1), 45-62. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2018.1493939>
- Wimmer, R. and Dominick, J. (2011). *Mass media research: an introduction*. Wadsworth.
- Xiva, I. (2022). *La comunicación política en las redes Facebook, Twitter e Instagram en la campaña electoral de las elecciones generales del 26 de junio de 2016 en España: análisis comparativo de partidos parlamentarios y extraparlamentarios* (Doctoral thesis). Abat Oliba-CEU University, Barcelona.