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Electoral campaigns and Twitter. The dissemination of media content in the digital environment

Campañas electorales y Twitter. La difusión de contenidos mediáticos en el entorno digital

Campanhas eleitorais e Twitter. A disseminação do conteúdo midiático no ambiente digital

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ABSTRACT | During the last decades, social media have significantly transformed the field of political communication. Political parties and politicians have incorporated these platforms as a regular tool in their communication strategy. In turn, the mainstream media continues to play a key role in the political and social sphere. In this context marked by the coexistence between traditional media and social media, political actors take advantage of the potential of both communication spaces to expand the dissemination of their message. This research examines the relationship between mass media and Twitter during the 2016 election campaign in Spain. The methodology combines the quantitative content analysis and the metric analysis on a sample of 8199 messages published by the four most voted political parties: PP, PSOE, Podemos and Ciudadanos. The results confirm that parties take advantage of Twitter to amplify the impact of their interventions in mass media, being especially significant the debate broadcast on television. This data reinforces the idea that old and new media coexist and complement each other in a hybrid communicative environment.

KEYWORDS: political communication; election campaign; social media; Twitter; television; hybridization.

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RESUMEN | *Durante las últimas décadas, las redes sociales han transformado de forma relevante el campo de la comunicación política. Partidos y políticos han incorporado estas plataformas como una herramienta habitual en su estrategia comunicativa. A su vez, los medios de comunicación convencionales siguen manteniendo un rol central en la esfera política y social. En este contexto marcado por la convivencia entre medios tradicionales y medios sociales, los actores políticos aprovechan las potencialidades de ambos espacios comunicativos para ampliar la difusión de su mensaje. Esta investigación examina la relación entre medios convencionales y Twitter durante la campaña electoral de 2016 en España. La metodología combina el análisis de contenido cuantitativo y el análisis métrico sobre una muestra de 8199 mensajes publicados por los cuatro partidos más votados: PP, PSOE, Podemos y Ciudadanos. Los resultados confirman que los partidos aprovechan Twitter para amplificar el impacto de sus intervenciones en medios convencionales, siendo especialmente significativo el debate a cuatro emitido por diferentes cadenas televisivas. Este dato refuerza la idea de que viejos y nuevos medios conviven y se complementan en un entorno comunicativo híbrido.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: *comunicación política; campaña electoral; medios sociales; Twitter; televisión; hibridación.*

RESUMO | Nas últimas décadas, as redes sociais transformaram significativamente o campo da comunicação política. Partidos e políticos incorporaram essas plataformas como uma ferramenta regular na sua estratégia de comunicação. Por sua vez, a grande mídia continua a desempenhar um papel central na esfera política e social. Nesse contexto marcado pela coexistência entre mídias tradicionais e mídias sociais, os atores políticos aproveitam o potencial dos dois espaços de comunicação para expandir a disseminação da sua mensagem. Esta pesquisa examina a relação entre a mídia convencional e o Twitter na campanha eleitoral de 2016 na Espanha. A metodologia combina a análise quantitativa de conteúdo e a análise métrica em uma amostra de 8.199 mensagens publicadas pelos quatro partidos políticos mais votados: PP, PSOE, Podemos e Ciudadanos. Os resultados confirmam que os partidos aproveitam o Twitter para ampliar o impacto de suas intervenções na mídia convencional, sendo especialmente significativo o debate desses partidos veiculado na televisão. Esses dados reforçam a ideia de que os meios tradicionais e novos coexistem e se complementam em um ambiente comunicativo híbrido.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: comunicação política; campanha eleitoral; redes sociais; Twitter; televisão; hibridização.

INTRODUCTION

The use of social media, especially Twitter, is currently a common resource in the field of political communication. The potential of this microblogging network, where ease of participation and interaction between users prevails, make this platform a preferred tool for politicians, journalists, and citizens alike (Parmelee & Bichard, 2011; Kruikemeier, 2014). Twitter has become a new medium to discuss about the main political issues and democratic processes that affect society (Chadwick, 2011).

The electoral campaigns of the last decade have shown the prominent role that Twitter has played in the political actors' communication strategies. Both parties and politicians have used this social media as a channel to disseminate information concerning campaign events, share political statements, mobilize the vote, and get their electorate to participate (Jackson & Lilleker, 2011; Parmelee & Bichard, 2011; Gainous & Wagner, 2014; López-Meri, Marcos-García, & Casero-Ripollés, 2017). They have also utilized it to dialogue with other users from a personal perspective, even humorous, revealing emotions or aspects of their private life (Vergeer, Hermans, & Sams, 2013). The parties have also taken advantage of Twitter as a loudspeaker from which to promote and viralize their interventions in television programs, newspaper interviews, and any other content about them produced by the conventional media. Thus, they use this social media as a hybrid space in which they apply the logics of old and new media simultaneously (Casero-Ripollés, Feenstra, & Tormey, 2016; Chadwick, 2017).

The main objective of this research is to evaluate the relationship between social media and conventional media during an electoral campaign based on the study of the peaks or days of maximum activity on Twitter of the four most voted parties in the 2016 Spanish general elections. We analyzed the profiles of two classic parties, *Partido Popular* (PP) and *Partido Socialista Obrero Español* (PSOE), and two emerging ones, *Podemos* and *Ciudadanos*. We searched to identify what type of events cause a greater production of tweets, to know if there is a direct connection between the mediated events and the parties' publications.

Until now, research based on the study of hybridization in political communication has focused on the use of Twitter by citizens. They have specifically focused their attention on the degree of activity and on the type and function of their messages regarding a political event mediated and broadcast live, such as electoral debates (Shamma, Kennedy, & Churchill, 2009; Wohn & Na, 2011; Mascaro & Goggins, 2012; Freelon & Karpf, 2015; Marcos-García, Alonso-Muñoz, & Casero Ripollés, 2016).

However, there are still few studies that examine how political actors use Twitter to emphasize and viralize their participation in television talk shows, radio programs, and other content centered on their figure and produced by conventional media. Therefore, this research provides a novel vision that contributes to expand knowledge in the field of communication and the use of social networks by political actors.

POLITICAL COMMUNICATION AND ELECTION CAMPAIGNS ON TWITTER

Using Twitter as a communication tool is a common resource in the strategies of parties and politicians, especially during electoral campaign periods (Criado, Martínez-Fuentes, & Silván, 2013; Suau-Gomila & Pont-Sorribes, 2019). Along with other social media such as Facebook or YouTube, the utilization of the microblogging network in political communication has led to a complete transformation in the information production and distribution processes, so that new paradigms have been established in the current political scenario (Doménech, 2018). In this regard, social media have not only expanded the spaces where political and media actors can efficiently launch their message to a larger audience but have also multiplied the types of actors that interact and negotiate in the field of political communication (Casero-Ripollés, 2018). These platforms offer citizens the opportunity to be informed, debate, and participate freely (Jenkins, 2006; Ceccarini, 2015). As authors such as Rúas and Casero-Ripollés (2018) indicate, the arrival of social media has allowed citizens to have mechanisms to produce and disseminate their own content and, consequently, be able to participate in the political conversation. This potential introduces a communicative panorama much more competitive than the one of previous decades, which is also characterized by the appearance of new forms of participation in democratic processes (Chadwick, 2011).

In this context, political actors have had to adapt their communication strategy to the digital environment to maximize their ability to approach the electorate and value their opinions and comments more directly (Stromer-Galley, 2014; Lilleker, Tenscher, & Štětka, 2015). This potential is exploited above all on Twitter, which has become one of the social platforms of reference in virtual politics (Parmelee & Bichard, 2011; Kruikemeier, 2014). Social media have helped parties and politicians to manage their communication and their public image, thus expanding the range of instruments that they can exploit for their self-promotion (Rega, 2016). This is why authors such as Piscitelli affirm that Twitter is "one of the most powerful communication mechanisms in history" (2011, p. 15).

HOW POLITICAL ACTORS TAKE ADVANTAGE OF TWITTER'S POTENTIAL

The variety of features offered by the media make it a valuable tool for political actors. Among other possibilities, it allows sharing and receiving information in real time (Jewitt, 2009), directing a message to large groups of users (Kim, 2011), proposing a public, non-restricted, communication (Rossi & Magnani, 2012), and combining heterogeneous methods of conversation (Papacharissi & De Fatima Oliveira, 2012; Murthy, 2013).

Twitter allows parties and politicians, as well as other users, to easily send messages to their own followers (retweets), link them to other users utilizing mentions (@), share external content (links), or participate in a conversation or debate on a certain topic by using one or more related hashtags (#).

Although these are some of the general features of Twitter, previous literature indicates that the inherent characteristics of this social media allow parties and politicians other specific uses of political communication. Thus, one Twitter's main functions is to offer a channel that allows political representatives and institutions to communicate easily, directly, and massively with other users, mainly with their electorate (Hosch-Dayican, 2014; Rega, 2016). A conversation that, furthermore, occurs without the need to go through the media filter that traditionally dominated the relationship between politicians and citizens (Casero-Ripollés, 2008).

Nevertheless, even though more and more politicians and parties use Twitter as a communication tool, there are still few who use it to interact and dialogue with citizens (Alonso & Adell, 2011; Alonso-Muñoz, Miquel-Segarra, & Casero-Ripollés, 2016; Alonso-Muñoz, Marcos-García, & Casero-Ripollés, 2016).

Another relevant function that political actors grant to Twitter is promotion (López-Meri, Marcos-García, & Casero-Ripollés, 2017): they use this platform as a channel to inform about their campaign activities, offer political statements, share links to their own websites, and evaluate their performance in the events in which they participate (Jackson & Lilleker, 2011; Parmelee & Bichard, 2012; Gainous & Wagner, 2014). Twitter has even become a tool to encourage economic contributions and mobilize volunteers in electoral campaigns (Norquay, 2008; Rodríguez & Ureña, 2011). In short, politicians use this social media as a bulletin board through which they transmit the data they are interested in sending directly to the electorate (Alonso & Adell, 2011).

The parties, and especially their leaders, mainly use Twitter as a mechanism to highlight their public image and humanize themselves before other users of this social network (Jackson & Lilleker, 2011; Holtz-Bacha, 2013; Bentivegna, 2015; Karlsen & Enjolras, 2016). Thus, they add other contents to the programmatic proposals and their

professional attributes, ones based on intimate aspects, regarding their private life, or hobbies that strengthens the relationship between political actors and their electorate (Holtz-Bacha, 2013; Kruikemeier, 2014; Marcos-García & Alonso-Muñoz, 2019).

At the same time, the use that the political class makes of Twitter gives great importance to conventional media. Many political actors use this platform to be featured in headlines and gain presence in newspapers and on radio and television programs (Strömbäck, 2008; Broersma & Graham, 2013), so that Twitter works as a channel for transmitting media content (Casero -Ripollés et al., 2016). In other words, parties and politicians use it to share their collaborations or appearances in the media with other users, with the aim of viralizing the interviews and news in which they are protagonists, and which have previously been broadcast by newspapers, radio stations, or television channels (Alonso-Muñoz & Casero-Ripollés, 2018).

TWITTER AS A HYBRID SPACE IN POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

Since the advent of the Internet and social networks, there have been many conjectures about the possible disappearance of traditional media, especially the press. However, many authors claim that conventional media still play a crucial role in political communication (Chadwick, 2017). Recent research indicates that social media such as Twitter are platforms especially relevant in the professional routines of the media and political figures (Trilling, 2015). As with politicians and parties, the mass media and their professionals continue to play an important role in political communication and the digital environment (Cha, Haddadi, Benevenuto, & Gummadi, 2010; Casero-Ripollés, 2020).

In this regard, the microblogging social media functions as a hybrid space where conventional media dissemination and reception logics and the digital context's new logics and potentialities of circulation and negotiation coexist in balance (Chadwick, 2017; Graham, Broersma, Hazelhoff, & van't Haar, 2013). In other words, Twitter proposes an integration process in which new and old media coexist in the same habitat, feed on their own content, and cooperate and interact simultaneously and dynamically (Chadwick, 2011; Casero-Ripollés et al., 2016). This relationship supposes, for authors such as Marchetti and Ceccobelli (2016), a positive impact in the political arena.

Regarding the media, there are more and more that incorporate sections and offer numerous contents based on the publications or declarations of a politician on Twitter (Rodríguez & Ureña, 2011; Marchetti & Ceccobelli, 2016). Likewise, journalists have come to consider this social network as a relevant source for finding information and to create specialized content (López-Meri & Casero Ripollés, 2017).

As for political actors, they have not abandoned or replaced their communication strategy's traditional tactics and tools, but rather enriched them with social media's new dynamics and possibilities (López-Meri et al., 2017). Thus, they take advantage of the ease of interaction on Twitter to dialogue with the media and their professionals (Jungherr, 2014). Likewise, politicians exploit the resources of this social network, such as hashtags and mentions of journalists and media spaces in which they intervene (Alonso-Muñoz et al., 2016).

As previous research shows, this dynamic gets a great response from users. The peaks or days of maximum activity on Twitter usually coincide with the dissemination of political content in the conventional media (Hanna, Wells, Maurer, Friedland, Shah, & Matthes, 2013; Larsson, 2016), especially on television. Twitter has come to function as a channel where politicians, citizens and journalists can interact and share their interpretations, opinions, and comments during television broadcasts (Marchetti & Ceccobelli, 2016). Authors such as Chadwick (2011) or Iannelli (2016) even state that politicians take advantage of the broadcast of televised political events to form communities of users using hashtags, trending topics or related keywords.

This trend becomes more important during broadcast electoral debates, which register the highest number of retweets and user comments (Anstead & O'Loughlin, 2011). In this regard, Twitter allows audiences not only to consume political content through their televisions, but also to participate and respond to the debate, entering the public sphere from their own homes (Pedersen, Baxter, Burnett, Goker, Corney, & Martin, 2020). Twitter has become a prominent backchannel for political debates, so that audience reactions to interventions by political actors become much more visible in an online context (Kalsnes, Krumsvik, & Storsul, 2014). Political actors, on the other hand, take advantage of the virality of social networks as an added value, since they can spread their message through different channels, thus reaching a larger audience (Pérez-Curiel & García-Gordillo, 2020). Therefore, Twitter poses a new hybrid communicative environment, in which both the content broadcast by conventional media, especially television, and the participation of users in the digital context, are in continuous and constant feedback.

METHODOLOGY

This work has two phases. The first is intended to identify the activity peaks of each party on Twitter, i.e., the days that exceed the daily average of tweets published by each of them. We conducted a metric analysis of the profiles of the four selected parties (*Partido Popular*, *Partido Socialista*, *Podemos* and *Ciudadanos*), those that obtained the highest number of votes in the 2016 Spanish general elections.

The sample has 8,199 analysis units, which include all those messages sent by the analyzed profiles, as well as the responses, but not the retweets, since these only serve to redistribute the content published by third-party authors (Larsson, 2017). This is the sum of tweets disseminated by the *Partido Popular* (PP), *Partido Socialista* (PSOE), *Podemos* and *Ciudadanos* for 18 days, between June 10 (beginning of the electoral campaign) and June 27 (day after to the vote). The sample has been captured with the Twitonomy web application.

The second phase of this research focuses on the peaks or days of maximum activity of each party. Specifically, we conducted a quantitative content analysis of the tweets published on these dates with the aim of evaluating, among other factors, whether the peaks of activity on Twitter coincide with the celebration of events mediated by traditional media. For each party, depending on the case, from 8 to 11 days exceed the daily average of tweets. The sample corresponding to these activity peaks amounts to 5,728 publications (table 1).

The quantitative content analysis aims to examine the role played on Twitter by the interventions of the leaders and other members of each party in the conventional media, with respect to other messages focused on campaign events or the electoral program. To do this, we created a code book in which five variables were included: 1) the type of shared content; 2) presence in the media; 3) the type of program in which they participated; 4) the hashtags used in relation to the programs, and 5) the mentions used related to the media and the programs in which they appeared. Thus, we tried to answer three research questions:

RQ1. Do the activity peaks of the parties on Twitter coincide with the celebration of events mediated by traditional media?

RQ2. What type of media has the greatest role when there are peaks of activity in the parties' Twitter profiles?

RQ3. Are there differences between classic parties and emerging parties regarding the coexistence between old and new media?

Concerning these questions, we raised the following hypotheses:

H1. The parties' activity peaks on Twitter during the electoral campaign usually coincide with events mediated by traditional media.

H2. Television has more prominence than radio and the press when there are peaks of activity in the Twitter party profiles.

H3. The emerging parties bet on television, while the classic parties distribute the space more evenly, without forgetting the radio and the press.

Party	Total tweets	Peaks	No. peaks
PP	995	789	11 days
PSOE	3,113	2,268	9 days
Podemos	2,511	1,617	8 days
Ciudadanos	1,580	1,054	9 days
Total	*8,199*	*5,728*	

Table 1. Breakdown of the 2016 election campaign tweets sample

Source: Own elaboration.

The analysis was conducted using the statistical package SPSS (v.23). The sample was manually analyzed by three members of the research team. To calculate the degree of reliability between the encoders, 600 relative messages of the total sample were analyzed that refer to the activity peaks (N=5728), approximately 10% of the sample, reaching a reliability level of 0.95 according to Scott's Pi coefficient.

RESULTS

The first data that stands out is the inequality between parties in terms of the frequency of publication on Twitter. In the 2016 electoral campaign, PSOE and *Podemos* were the most active ones, with 3,113 and 2,511 tweets, respectively. *Ciudadanos* and PP are at a lower level, with 1,580 and 995 units, respectively. Therefore, the daily average of publications during the 18 days analyzed is higher in PSOE (172 tweets) and *Podemos* (139 tweets) profiles than in the *Ciudadanos* (87 tweets) and PP (55 tweets) accounts.

In this regard, there are between eight and 11 peaks of activity or days in which each party exceeds its daily average of updates, depending on the case (figure 1). The PP is the most constant. It publishes less and, therefore, its daily average is lower. Therefore, the party led by Mariano Rajoy presents eleven peaks of greater activity, an outstanding figure if we consider that the period analyzed is 18 days. PSOE and *Ciudadanos* exceed their daily average on nine occasions, and *Podemos* does so in eight days. Nevertheless, only five of the recorded activity peaks are common to the four parties: on June 13, 15, 16, 23 and 24 (figure 1).

The most abrupt peaks occur, on the one hand, on June 13, coinciding with the four-man debate produced by the *Academia de Televisión*, in collaboration with RTVE, *Atresmedia* and *Mediaset*, and broadcast on 17 channels, and on June 24, with the closing of the electoral campaign. That last day of the campaign, PSOE and *Podemos* exceeded 300 tweets, while PP and *Ciudadanos* had around a hundred messages. As for the rest of the days, June 15, 16 and 23, the number of updates is close to the average. Thus, on those dates, the graph reflects fewer oscillations.

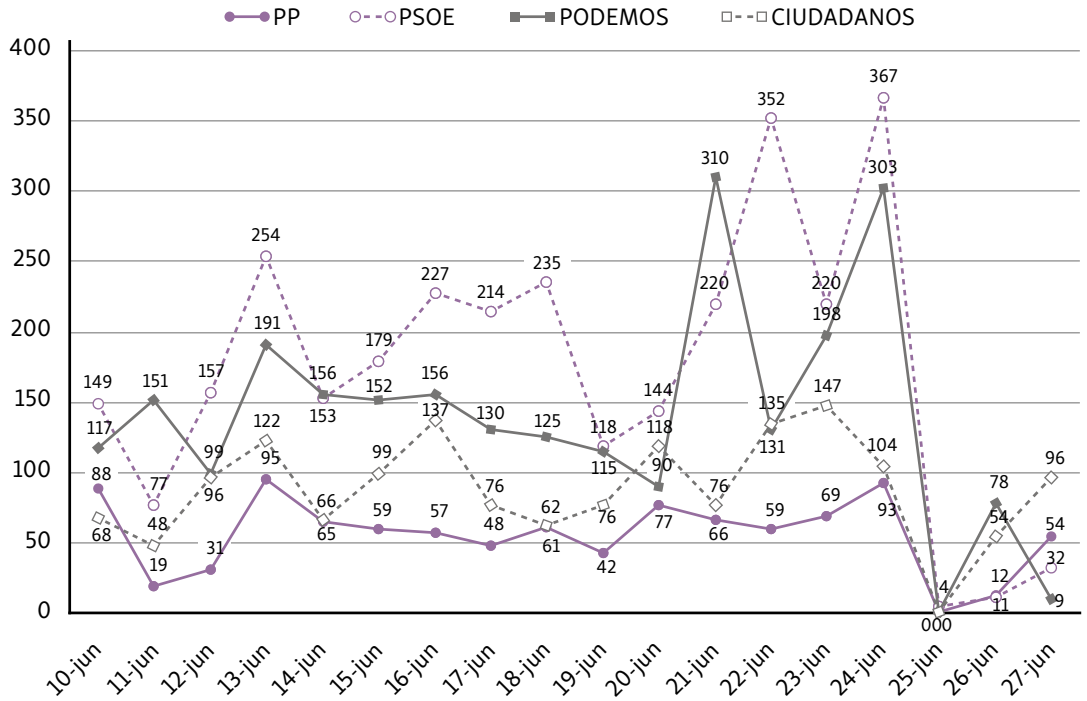

Figure 1. Daily distribution of tweets published in the 2016 election campaign

Source: Own elaboration.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ACTIVITY PEAKS ON TWITTER AND MEDIA CONTENT

Regarding the confluence of activity peaks and events broadcast in traditional media, there is greater coincidence in the cases of PP and *Ciudadanos* (figure 2). In both profiles, nearly half of the messages (between 46% and 48%) correspond to the candidate and other party members interventions in the media.

In contrast, the PSOE and *Podemos* accounts dedicate more space to broadcasting their rallies and campaign events (between 63% and 64% of tweets) than to their media appearances (between 26% and 28%). The electoral program goes unnoticed (between 4% and 10% of tweets), except in the case of PP (31%).

Analyzing each activity peak separately reveals trends and details specific to each party. The four-men debate between the candidates collapsed the timeline of the parties on June 13. This is the day that they paid more attention on Twitter to media interventions (93% of the *Podemos* tweets; 82% of *Ciudadanos*; 76% of PP, and 61% of PSOE). In addition, all the parties coincide in including the specific hashtag of the debate, #Debate13J, in their tweets when highlighting the statements of their respective leaders.

On the other hand, although PSOE and *Podemos* dedicate a significant number of messages to promote content produced by traditional media (608 and 458 tweets, respectively), these do not have much importance in relation to the total number of publications.

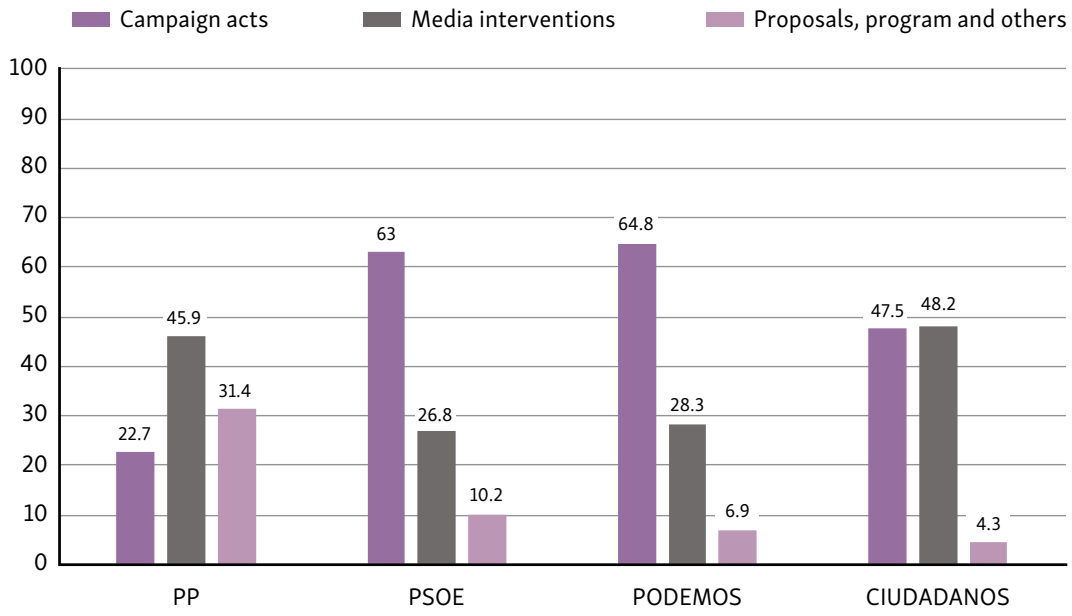

Figure 2. Content disseminated during the days with the most activity (%)

Source: Own elaboration.

Apart from the debate day, they only have another day that reaches a certain notoriety due to its link to media content. In the case of *Podemos*, it is June 14, when 48% of the tweets are dedicated to promoting their interventions in six radio and television programs. As for PSOE, the day is June 15, and it invests 40% of the messages in five media spaces.

On the other hand, PP and *Ciudadanos* focus on media content more frequently than PSOE and *Podemos*. Specifically, references to conventional media exceed half of PP's tweets in five days (June 10, 13, 20, 21 and 22). The same thing happens in the *Ciudadanos* account on four occasions (June 13, 16, 20 and 27).

For example, PP promotes its appearances in up to five different media on the same day (June 10). Likewise, *Ciudadanos*, much more active in this area, has thirteen interventions in the media in a single day (June 27).

In addition, in PP and *Ciudadanos* accounts June 20 stands out, the date on which *Televisión Española* (TVE) broadcast a seven-person debate, which was joined by *Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya* (ERC), *Convergència Democràtica de Catalunya* (CDC) and *Partido Nacionalista Vasco* (PNV). In this debate, the leaders of the main parties were not present, but there was a debate between the spokesmen of these organizations, such as Pablo Casado (PP) or Juan Carlos Girauta (*Ciudadanos*).

Overall, some of the parties dedicate at least 40% of their activity on Twitter to sharing their appearances in traditional media in up to eleven days of the electoral campaign. In seven days, the percentage increases to 50%. On five occasions, the

60% barrier is even exceeded. These data reinforce the idea that activity peaks on this social network are often linked to media events, or the promotion of content previously broadcast by traditional media.

MEDIA PRESENCE IN THE PARTIES' TWITTER ACCOUNTS ANALYSIS

Television is the medium with the greatest presence on Twitter during the electoral campaign. 33.8% of the tweets published by the parties during the days of greatest activity refer to the media (1,936 out of 5,728 units). 69.3% concern television, 22.7%, radio, and 8%, the press. If the profile of each party is analyzed individually, we can see that this trend is repeated in all cases (figure 3). Thus, interviews and statements on television programs are present in more than 60% of the media content tweeted by the four political forces.

PP and *Podemos* register the highest percentages, above 70%, bordering on 80% in the case of *Podemos*. This is partly due to the importance of the two televised debates, on June 13 with the four candidates and on June 20 with representatives of seven parties. However, the parties also promote their appearances in the talk shows of the main morning programs, such as *Espejo Público* (*Antena 3*), *El programa de Ana Rosa* (*Tele 5*) and *Las Mañanas de Cuatro*, in humor and entertainment programs, such as *El Hormiguero* (*Antena 3*), or in spaces dedicated to journalistic investigation and analysis, such as *El Objetivo* (*La Sexta*). It is also noted that they prefer to tag specific programs rather than mention the generic corporate profiles of television networks.

The presence of radio content is lower, around 20%, except in the case of *Ciudadanos*, which reaches 30%. *Cadena SER* and *Onda Cero* are two of the most tagged stations, especially to announce the time at which their followers will be able to listen live to the candidate or other party spokespersons. References to the printed or digital press are less frequent, only exceeding 10% in the PSOE profile.

Regarding the television programs most tagged in the parties' accounts during the days of greatest activity, three stand out: the electoral debate of June 13 with the candidates of the four main parties, broadcast by 17 channels, *Al Rojo Vivo* of *La Sexta* and *Las Mañanas de Cuatro*. Without considering the tweets related to the debate held on June 13 and broadcast on different channels, *Atresmedia* (*La Sexta* and *Antena 3*) is the group that gets the most attention from politicians. Of the 1,341 tweets that refer to television interventions, 32% mention these channels. On the contrary, the mentions of the *Mediaset* group (*Tele 5* and *Cuatro*) are less abundant, since they only add up to 15.7%. *Televisión Española* (TVE) achieved a presence of 13.9%, thanks to the seven-men debate on June 20, and to programs such as *Los Desayunos*, *La Mañana* and *La noche 24H*.

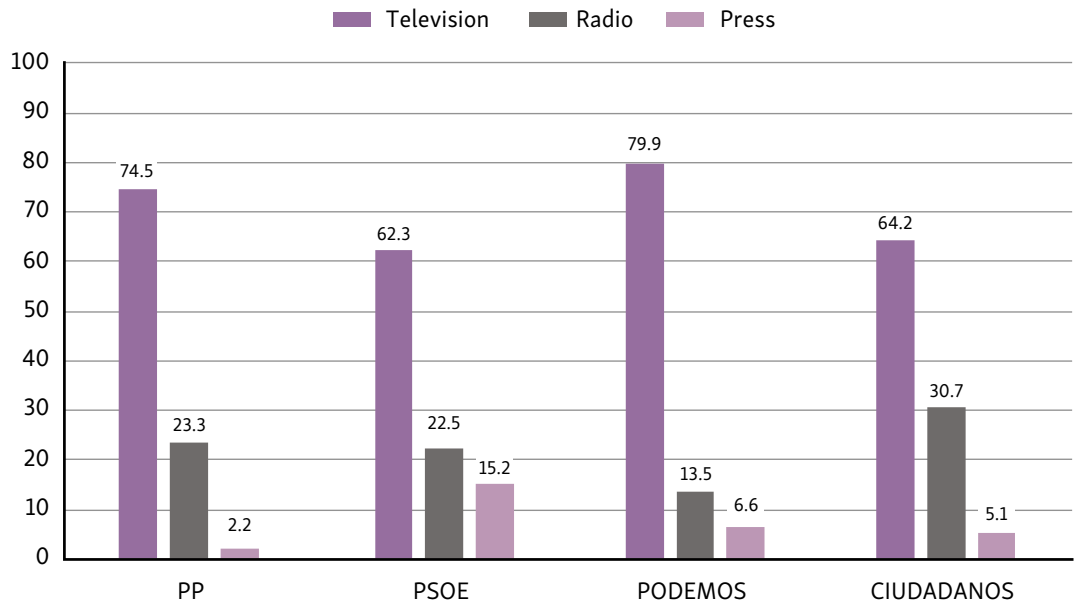

Figure 3. Presence of media during the days of more activity (%)

Source: Own elaboration.

Nevertheless, when looking at the specific behavior of each party, some notable differences can be seen. For example, the PP publishes more messages related to the star program of public television (TVE's *Los Desayunos*) than to the news programs of *Atresmedia*, *Al Rojo Vivo* and *Espejo Público*. PSOE, *Podemos* and *Ciudadanos* do the opposite. In addition, only PP and *Ciudadanos* refer to spaces of the private channel *13TV*, and only the PSOE and *Podemos* mention *Canal Sur*, the Andalusian public television.

Finally, it is worth noting the participation of Mariano Rajoy (PP) in programs that resort to a more friendly and personal tone in their interviews, such as *El Hormiguero* or *Dos días y una noche*, both on *Antena 3*. The rest of the candidates also took part in these spaces, but they did so before the official start of the electoral campaign or on days that generated little activity on Twitter. This would explain why there are no references in this research to those programs made by PSOE, Podemos or *Ciudadanos*.

CONCLUSIONS

The importance of this research lies in the lack of specific studies on hybridization in the communication strategies of political actors. There are some works on the contributions of citizens in social media during the broadcast of electoral debates (Marcos-García et al., 2016), but the issue has hardly been addressed from the perspective of political parties. Therefore, this paper evaluates the relationship

between old and new media developed by political parties in social media. This hybrid relationship is analyzed during the 2016 general election campaign in Spain based on the activity on Twitter of the four most voted political parties: PP, PSOE, *Podemos* and *Ciudadanos*.

The results confirm that these parties use Twitter as an extension of their traditional communication tools, with the aim of promoting their interventions in traditional media, especially on television, to viralize and amplify the impact of their electoral campaign discourse, in the same vein that other authors (Alonso-Muñoz et al., 2016; López-Meri et al., 2017).

Regarding to RQ1 (*Do the activity peaks of the parties on Twitter coincide with the celebration of events mediated by traditional media?*), we can see that, to a great extent, the days of greatest activity on Twitter, in terms of production, usually coincide with media events. In other words, it is common that the days that exceed the daily average of tweets correspond to those in which the parties register a greater number of appearances in traditional media, either the candidate or other members of it. This is what happens in seven days of the electoral campaign, in which one of the parties dedicates at least half of their tweets to media content. On various days, it even exceeds 60%. In addition, on June 13, the day of the debate of the four candidates, broadcast by various television channels, the media content exceeds 80% in the *Ciudadanos* profile and 90% in the *Podemos* account. In fact, the day of the debate is one of the peaks of common activity in the profiles of the four parties. These findings confirm the first hypothesis raised at the beginning of the article.

On the other hand, regarding RQ2 and the specific role played by each type of media, television has more prominence than radio and the press during the days of greatest production on Twitter. This result confirms the second hypothesis. All the parties include more television than radio content. The press ranks last. Therefore, the role played by television, which continues to capture the attention of politicians as a valuable channel to address citizens, is confirmed (López-Meri et al., 2017). In the digital environment, parties continue to give great importance to television. In fact, they use the potential of Twitter to attract more audiences and viralize the media content of which they are protagonists, as seen in previous research (Chadwick, 2017; Casero-Ripollés et al., 2016).

The dominance of television can partly be explained by the relevance acquired by the two televised debates during the campaign, especially the one with the four candidates from the main parties. However, political news programs and morning talk shows also play an important role, especially *Al Rojo Vivo* (*Atresmedia*) and *Las Mañanas de Cuatro* (*Mediaset*).

Finally, regarding RQ3, there are no substantial differences between the classic parties and the emerging forces. Both PP and PSOE as well as *Podemos* and *Ciudadanos* give priority to their interventions on television, so the third hypothesis is refuted. Only *Ciudadanos* grants a little more space to radio content, although it dedicates twice as many tweets to television programs. However, liberal-leaning parties, PP and *Ciudadanos*, allocate more messages to promote their interventions in the media than their campaign events. The left-wing forces, PSOE and *Podemos*, do the opposite and pay twice as much attention to their rallies than to their appearances in the media.

In conclusion, these results reinforce the idea that Twitter functions as a hybrid space where the traditional media transmission and reception logics and the new circulation and negotiation logics offered by the digital context coexist in balance (Chadwick, 2017; Graham et al. al., 2013). Far from replacing traditional media, Twitter complements and enriches the communication strategies of political parties, in a process of integration in which new and old media coexist, interact, and cooperate dynamically (Chadwick, 2011; Casero-Ripollés et al., 2016).

However, although these conclusions can be extrapolated to other contexts, it is necessary to investigate further in this line, for example, analyzing the hybridization of political communication in periods other than electoral campaigns.

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