Engagement between politicians and followers on Facebook. The case of the 2016 general elections in Spain

Engagement entre políticos y seguidores en Facebook. El caso de las elecciones generales de 2016 en España

Engajamento entre políticos e seguidores no Facebook. O caso das eleições gerais de 2016 na Espanha

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Susana Miquel-Segarra

Universitat Jaume I (Spain)

Susana Miquel-Segarra has a doctorate in Business, Economics and Society from the University of Alicante (UA) with an international mention (Glasgow Caledonian University). PhD Assistant Professor in the Department of Communication Sciences and Vice Dean in the Degree of Advertising and Public Relations at the Universitat Jaume I (UJI). Researcher in the ENCOM group and collaborator in the Journalism, communication and power group (UJI). Her research focuses on professional profiles in the field of corporate communication and public relations, as well as on social networks and their dialogical and communicative potential in different fields.

smiquel@uji.es
orcid.org/0000-0002-0337-7503

Amparo López-Meri

Universitat Jaume I (Spain)

Amparo López-Meri is PhD Assistant Professor in the Department of Communication Sciences of the Universitat Jaume I of Castelló (UJI). She has a degree in Journalism from the Universitat Politècnica de València (UPV), and an Official Master's Degree in New Trends and Innovation in Communication and a doctorate from the Universitat Jaume I. Her doctoral thesis has been awarded with the Lorenzo Gomis Prize in 2017 by the Sociedad Española de Periodismo. Her lines of research focus on the reformulation of journalism and political communication in the digital environment, as well as on media ethics.

meri@uji.es
orcid.org/0000-0003-3408-2190

Nadia Viounnikoff-Benet

Universitat Jaume I (Spain)

Nadia Viounnikoff-Benet has a PhD in Communication from the Universitat Jaume I (UJI) of Castelló and a Master's in Political Communication Management from the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB). He also has a postgraduate degree in Election Campaign Management from ICAI-ICADE- Comillas Pontifical University of Madrid. Her doctoral thesis is nominated for Best Research of the Year at the 2018 Victory Awards of the Washington Academy of Political Arts & Sciences at Georgetown University. Her lines of research address the visual narrative of political leadership in the electoral campaign.

nbenet@uji.es
orcid.org/0000-0001-6741-9728

Abstract

Social networks have incorporated citizens into political life, especially in electoral periods. The objective of this research is to evaluate which elements of the messages disseminated by politicians on Facebook favor a higher degree of engagement, support and commitment from followers. The posts published by PP, PSOE, Podemos and Ciudadanos, and their respective candidates are examined with the techniques of content analysis during the campaign of the 2016 general elections in Spain. The results indicate that the degree of engagement is very low, despite registering significant levels of interactio.

KEYWORDS

Facebook, Social media, Political communication, Electoral campaigns, Interaction, Engagement.

Resumen

Las redes sociales han incorporado a la ciudadanía en la vida política, especialmente en periodos electorales. El objetivo de esta investigación es evaluar qué elementos de los mensajes difundidos por actores políticos en Facebook favorecen un mayor grado de *engagement*, apoyo y compromiso de los seguidores. Con las técnicas del análisis de contenido se examinan los *posts* publicados por PP, PSOE, Podemos y Ciudadanos, y sus respectivos candidatos, durante la campaña de las elecciones generales de 2016 en España. Los resultados indican que el grado de *engagement* es muy bajo, pese a registrarse niveles de interacción significativos.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Facebook, Social media, Comunicación política, Campañas electorales, Interacción, *Engagement*.

Resumo

As redes sociais incorporaram os cidadãos à vida política, especialmente nos períodos eleitorais. O objetivo desta pesquisa é avaliar quais elementos das mensagens divulgadas pelos atores políticos no Facebook favorecem um maior grau de engajamento, apoio e comprometimento dos seguidores. Com as técnicas de análise de conteúdo, se examinam os posts publicados pelo PP, PSOE, Podemos e Ciudadanos, e seus respectivos candidatos, durante a campanha das eleições gerais

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de 2016 na Espanha. Os resultados indicam que o grau de engajamento é muito baixo, apesar de registrar níveis significativos de interação.

1. INTRODUCTION[1]

Social networks have achieved a relevant presence in electoral campaigns. At the same time, they have changed the way of disseminating information and involving citizens in political life (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2018). These platforms allow a hybrid and bidirectional communication model (Chadwick, 2017) more balanced and participatory between political parties and their voters.

Most of the literature has focused on the use of Twitter, although Facebook is the social network with the most users (Galeano, 2019). Although the study of dialogue is gaining interest as a way to retain followers (Miquel-Segarra et al., 2017; Pennington et al., 2015; Valera-Ordaz, 2019), the analysis of the uses and functions that politicians attribute to social networks predominates (López-Meri et al., 2017; García-Ortega & Zugasti-Azagra, 2018).

In this context, the objective of this work is to deepen the knowledge of the relationships established between politicians and voters on Facebook. Specifically, the analysis focuses on the degree of engagement generated by the parties and their candidates from the interactions with their social audience in the 2016 general elections in Spain. With this approach, it is sought to know which factors generate greater commitment among the potential electorate

on Facebook, which is a little studied phenomenon, at least in the case of Spain.

2. POLITICIANS AND THE ELECTORAL USE OF FACEBOOK

Political actors mainly resort to social media for three reasons: marketing, mobilization and the opportunity to dialogue with the electorate (Woolley *et al.*, 2010). Regarding marketing, politicians better capture voters' attention when they share personal issues and images than when they make political statements or comment on news (Enli & Skogerbø, 2013). Therefore, political parties resort to the strategy of personalization of the leader, appealing to emotions and avoiding political issues (Puentes-Rivera et al., 2016; Stier et al., 2018), in accordance with the precedent established by the 2008 and 2012 electoral campaigns in the United States (Bimber, 2014; Serazio, 2014). Consequently, it is common to maintain an emotional tone on Facebook (Abejón-Mendoza & Mayoral-Sánchez, 2017; Stromer-Galley, 2014). In this sense, candidates in the opposition attack the adversary and appeal to fear, while the candidates who seek to repeat their mandate focus on their achievements and opt for humor (Borah, 2016).

Regarding mobilization, political actors turn to Facebook to ask for votes or invite users to attend their events (Bene, 2018; Stetka et al., 2019), although some also risk more daring actions, such as encourage online donations

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(Gerodimos & Justinussen, 2015). In this field, new or alternative parties design more creative content as some authors point out (Casero-Ripollés et al., 2016), and this strategy could be classified as effective if we take into account the fact that their followers demonstrate greater commitment in terms of comments and responses (Stetka & Vochocová, 2014), although the level of engagement could be due to other factors such as having a more ideological and faithful electorate.

Regarding dialogue, political actors dedicate themselves to including links to their website and news about them, which reinforces the party's internal communication and its vocation for self-reference (Cervi & Roca, 2017; Sampietro & Valera-Ordaz, 2015). In general, no real conversation is generated with the audience (Magin et al., 2017; Renedo et al., 2018), with some exceptions (Sørensen, 2016). Sometimes political actors respond to users' first comments, giving the appearance of bidirectionality, but the dialogue is residual (López-Meri et al., 2020; Slimovich, 2016). The same happens on Twitter (Alonso-Muñoz et al., 2016; Pérez-Dasilva et al., 2018; López-Meri et al., 2017), where they talk more with other politicians than with citizens (López-Meri & Casero-Ripollés, 2016).

In fact, the debate on political news linked to the accounts of political actors usually comes from citizens (Ballesteros-Herencia & Díez-Garrido, 2018). Precisely, the ideology and history of each party are factors that generate disparate effects in relation to the conversations. For example, it was found that the discussions linked to the Facebook pages of left-wing parties in the 2015 elections in Spain, especially if they were new parties, tended to build community because they were led by like-minded people, which promotes social cohesion, group identity and mobilization. Meanwhile, the discussions associated with the pages of the right-wing par-

ties favored individualism, personal expression and the search for information (Valera-Ordaz, 2019).

3. POLITICAL COMMUNICATION, INTERACTION AND ENGAGEMENT ON FACEBOOK

Interaction on Facebook is possible thanks to the possibilities offered by this social network for sharing, commenting and evaluating posts in public, as well as sending private messages. You can also use resources that originally come from Twitter such as the hashtag and the mention, tools that facilitate the visibility and potentially make posts viral. Since 2015, Facebook has diversified the reactions offered by the "like" button so that users can better identify their emotions about a post. In addition to the traditional "like", a resource similar to that offered by other social networks, Facebook allows you to express five other reactions: "Love", "Haha", "Wow", "Sad" and "Angry."

Studies on Facebook interaction in the field of political communication have mainly focused on four aspects: studying how politicians and voters dialogue, checking whether the strategy of political actors improves the engagement or commitment of their followers, finding out if exposure to messages about politics increase the political participation of citizens, and try to predict the behavior of the electorate from the expression of their preferences.

The dialogue between politicians and voters has been analyzed through user comments. However, the results are inconclusive because case studies abound and trends are difficult to establish. In some countries, positive comments predominate (Bronstein, 2013), partly

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because users tend to post comments on the pages of parties related to their ideology (Valeria-Ordaz, 2019). In other cases, it depends on the type of party. For example, alternative parties received messages of support in the 2013 elections in the Czech Republic, while traditional parties received criticism (Stetka & Vochocová, 2014). A tendency to polarization is also detected through negative allusions to rivals both in the candidates' posts and in the comments of their followers (Abejón-Mendoza et al., 2019).

As for the engagement of users, it is measured from the interactions that an account achieves (comments, shared posts and reactions) with respect to the number of its followers (Balbuena et al., 2017). In relation to this, posts that include photographs or emotional aspects generate more engagement (Enli & Skogerbø, 2013; Abejón-Mendoza & Mayoral-Sánchez, 2017). In addition, Facebook users react more passionately to posts that contain negative or emotional content, memes, videos, mobilization messages and requests to share (Bene, 2017), although some study maintains that positive content attracts more interactions (Gerbaudo et al., 2019). Users also tend to share partisan and polarized comments (Woolley et al., 2010).

On the other hand, alternative parties generate more engagement than traditional parties in some countries (Stetka & Vochocová, 2014). This is the case in Spain, where actors linked to new parties (Podemos & Ciudadanos) manage to attract more interactions than traditional parties (PP and PSOE) both on Facebook (Ballesteros-Herencia & Díez-Garrido, 2018) and on Twitter (Miquel-Segarra et al., 2017). In the case of Facebook, it is observed that the expression of emotions is respectful, while emojis and stickers are used to express rejection and the most visceral criticism (Coromina et al., 2018).

The relationship between the use of social media and political participation has also been studied with contradictory results, so it cannot be said that there is a scientific consensus in this regard. Some authors have tested this correlation (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012; Valenzuela et al., 2018), while others do not find enough support (Gustafsson, 2012; Pennington et al., 2015). The most optimistic studies argue that the size of the network of contacts and the strength of the links on Facebook makes political participation more effective (Valenzuela et al., 2018), with actions such as political self-expression, the search for information and voting in the offline sphere. On the contrary, the most unfavorable studies even affirm that Facebook not only does not influence political participation, but also negatively affects it (Theocharis & Lowe, 2016), and that the degree of commitment depends on the political interests of each user and not the number of Facebook friends (Carlisle & Patton, 2013).

Finally, regarding the possibility of predicting the behavior of the electorate, the research has focused on the preferences expressed through the "like" button (Barclay et al., 2015; Williams & Gulati, 2013) and, from the *Facebook-Cambridge Analytica data scandal* (Cadwalladr and Graham-Harrison, 2018; Moreno-Muñoz, 2018), in the use of big data and artificial intelligence to obtain private data and influence the opinions and political decisions of users.

With the aim of delving into the elements (videos, photos, links, mentions, hashtags) that generate greater interaction and engagement on Facebook and from the posts of the main parties and candidates who ran in the 2016 general elections in Spain, the following research questions are posed:

RQ1. What type of interactions and degree of engagement do the main Spanish political par-

ties and their candidates in the electoral campaign generate on Facebook?

RQ2. Are there differences in terms of interaction and engagement according to the type of content linked on Facebook (videos, photos or links to other websites) by political parties and candidates during the electoral campaign?

RQ3. What role do hashtags and mentions play as generating resources for interaction and engagement in Facebook posts published by political parties and candidates in the electoral campaign?

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1. SAMPLE

The sample focuses on the electoral campaign of the general elections held in Spain on June 26, 2016. The 15 official campaign days, the day of reflection, the day of the elections and the day after the elections are analyzed. During this period, the messages published from the official Facebook profiles of the main Spanish political parties are studied: Partido Popular (PP), Ciudadanos (C's), Partido Socialista (PSOE), Podemos, and the messages emitted from the official Facebook profiles of their leaders: Mariano Rajoy (PP), Albert Rivera (C's), Pedro Sánchez (PSOE) and Pablo Iglesias (Podemos). The sample has been captured using the Netvizz application, with the total number of posts downloaded being 418 (Table 1). 66.5% of the messages have been published in the official party profiles (278) and 33.5% have been published in the profiles of the candidates (140) (Table 1).

Table 2 shows the followers that the official profiles of parties and candidates had at the time of the investigation:

Table 1

Sample of posts by parties and leaders

Parties	n	%	Leaders	n	%
PP	76	27.3	Mariano Rajoy	38	27.1
PSOE	93	33.5	Pedro Sánchez	55	39.3
Ciudadanos	59	21.2	Albert Rivera	14	10.0
Podemos	50	18.0	Pablo Iglesias	33	23.6
Total	278	100	Total	140	100

Source: Facebook data, June 11, 2016.

Table 2

Facebook followers of official profiles

Parties	n	Leaders	n
PP	150.906	Mariano Rajoy	208.544
PSOE	130.500	Pedro Sánchez	138.234
Ciudadanos	270.312	Albert Rivera	288.345
Podemos	1.076.900	Pablo Iglesias	616.416

Source: Facebook data, June 11, 2016.

4.2. DIMENSIONS AND ANALYSIS INDICATORS

Three dimensions have been established in this research: characteristics of the messages, user interaction and level of engagement. According to Balbuena et al. (2017), this work differentiates the concept of interaction (comments, number of times shared and reactions) from the concept of engagement (measurement of the weight of the different interactions received based on the number of followers).

To analyze the dimension of the characteristics of the messages, three indicators were studied: the links, the mentions and the hashtags. Regarding links, we analyzed their presence, the type of link (corporate or external), their content (campaign events, appearance on media, party issues, etc.) and the place they were directed (video, image, web, etc.). As for mentions and hashtags, their presence was analyzed.

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To evaluate the second dimension, user interaction, the three types of interactions available on Facebook were defined as indicators: comments, shares and reactions *(Like, Love, Haha, Wow, Sad, Angry)*.

Finally, to measure the third dimension, level of engagement, the formula employed by Balbuena et al. (2017) was used. This proposal arises from the adaptation of previous research and takes into consideration particular aspects of political communication (Oviedo-García et al., 2014). The formula weighs the impact of each type of interaction on the degree of engagement or commitment of the followers, establishing three levels:

- Low level: reactions *(Like, Love, Haha, Wow, Sad, Angry)*.

- Moderate level: comments and participation in the conversation.

- High level: content sharing.

Therefore, not all interactions have the same weight when it comes to measuring user engagement, as reflected in the formula used in this research (Balbuena et al., 2017):

Engagement level
[(N° of reactions) x 1 + (N° comments) x 2 + (N° of shares) x 3] / (N° of followers)

To analyze the differences between groups in the indicators defined as quantitative variables, the Student's t-test for independent samples and the one-factor ANOVA were applied. The established significance value was <0.05.

Intercoder reliability calculated using Scott's Pi formula reached a level of 0.97.

The analysis was performed using SPSS version 22.0.

5. ANALYSIS RESULTS

5.1. LEVEL OF INTERACTION AND ENGAGEMENT

In relation to RQ1, regarding the interaction of political parties and candidates (comments, shared posts and reactions), both Podemos and its leader Pablo Iglesias registered the highest level (Figure 1) with an average of 11,216 and 24,154 interactions, respectively. These averages have been calculated with respect to the total sum of interactions recorded by each user in the sample. Although the degree of interaction is always higher in the assumption of the candidates, the differences are only statistically significant in the accounts of Pablo Iglesias $(p < .001)$ and Mariano Rajoy $(p = .010)$.

Figure 1

*Average interaction by parties and candidates*
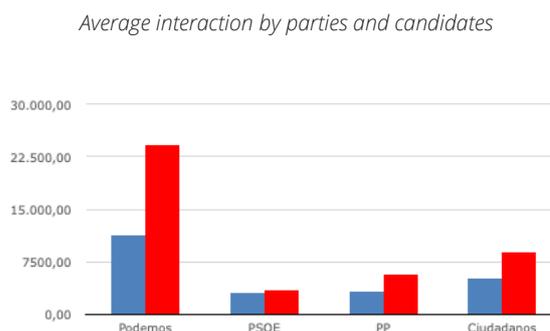
Regarding the level of engagement that weights the impact of the different interactions in relation to the number of followers (Balbuena et al., 2017), it is observed that it is higher among the leaders in all the formations, except in the PSOE where the engagement of the party is superior to Pedro Sánchez (Figure 2).

On the other hand, the data shows that the differences are statistically significant $(p < .001)$ only in the case of Podemos and its leader. It is interesting to observe how Podemos' engagement rates are the lowest of all the profiles analyzed (0.018), while in the case of its leader,

Pablo Iglesias, this index is at the highest value (0.057). Therefore, the data shows that it is he who generates engagement and not his party.

Figura 2

Medias de engagement por partidos y candidatos
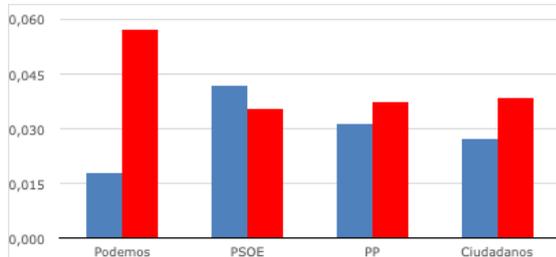
Source: Own elaboration from the formula of Balbuena et al. (2017).

5.2. THE INFLUENCE OF LINKS

Regarding the RQ2 and the format of the links, the posts that direct to videos receive more interactions than the rest (Table 3), especially in the case of the candidates whose accounts accumulate a greater number of interactions with an average of 13,145 (data calculated from the total interactions recorded by all the candidates' posts that contain videos) (Table 3).

If the data is analyzed according to the type of interaction, we observe that the posts most often shared are those that contain videos, both of the parties and their leaders. In the case of the parties, these differences are significant ($F(3, 136.79) = 19,244$; $p < .001$). Posts that go to videos are shared more than posts that go to images ($p < .001$) or to websites ($p < .001$). However, the number of posts of the candidates that direct to online media and that have been shared is relevant, surpassing even those that contain images.

There are also significant differences in the amount of comments based on the type of links in the posts of parties and candidates. In the case of parties ($F(3, 69,312) = 18,522$; $p < $

.001), the links that lead to videos have more comments than those that lead to images ($p < .001$), to websites ($p = .003$) and online media ($p = .004$). These results have theoretical implications, given that the importance of video is corroborated as one of the resources with the most capacity to attract the attention of the electorate and promote their active participation, specifically through the comments they leave on the accounts of political actors.

Regarding the reactions, although the differences are nonsignificant in the global figures, when we analyze the types of reactions in detail, significant differences are detected. In the case of parties, in the amount of "love" ($F(3, 34,386) = 8,579$; $p < .001$), we see how posts that direct to videos have more "love" than those that direct to images ($p < .001$). Regarding the amount of "wow" ($F(3, 9,233) = 13,422$; $p = .001$), it is observed that posts that direct to videos have more "wow" than those that direct to images ($p = .008$) , to websites ($p < .001$) and online media ($p = .001$).

In the case of the candidates, there are significant differences in the amount of "love" ($F(3, 27,463) = 3,967$; $p = .018$). Posts that lead to videos have more "love" than those that lead to images ($p = .008$) and online media ($p = .025$). Also in the amount of "haha" ($F(3, 32,218) = 3,013$; $p = .044$). Posts that direct to videos have more "haha" than those that direct to online media ($p = .028$).
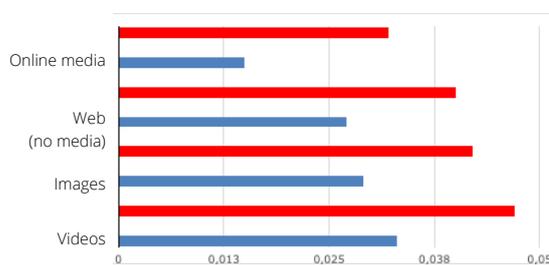
In relation to the different link formats, the data reveals that the level of engagement is very low. Although engagement seems higher in posts that include videos, the differences are statistically nonsignificant (Figure 3). In all cases, the level of engagement is higher in the candidates' accounts. This means that, although the video publications gather more comments, the volume of interactions and reactions is insufficient

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Table 3

Averages of the types of interaction according to the link format

	Videos		Images		Web (no media)		Online media	
	Party	Candidate	Party	Candidate	Party	Candidate	Party	Candidate
Shares	1.538,0	2.548.1	641,1	897,13	516,5	1.556,3	321,5	1.353,4
Comments	623,4	1.795.9	326,1	876,15	208,1	1.166,5	284,0	544,5
Reactions								
Like	2.980,6	7.084,4	2.463,7	6.014,2	1.695,6	4.531,4	1.718,0	3.780.0
Love	326,9	1.498,76	154,3	488,6	153,3	857,4	101,0	369,3
Haha	42,5	106,88	8,1	32,3	5,6	39,9	4,0	18,3
Wow	5,7	19,20	2,8	5,4	0,9	28,8	0,5	47,7
Sad	12,1	15,15	7,6	78,2	6,1	8,7	1,0	1,9
Angry	33,11	76,61	15,1	39,7	31,4	43,0	6,0	7,2
Total reactions	3.401,1	8.801	2.651,5	6.658,5	1.892.9	5.509,2	1.830.5	4.224,5
Total interactions	5.562,5	13.145,1	3.618,7	8.431,7	2.617.4	8.232,0	2.436.0	6.122,4

to be able to affirm that the degree of commitment of the followers is high. Therefore, despite the fact that the electorate participates in the online debate generated on Facebook, the results suggest that this would not necessarily translate into greater political participation in the offline sphere.

Figure 3

Engagement averages according to the link format

Source: Own elaboration from the formula of Balbuena et al. (2017).

Regarding the content of the links (Figure 4), the data shows that there are no significant differences in the interactions and reactions of the audience. Regardless of whether the links refer to campaign events, topics of interest about the party or appearances in the media, the behavior of party followers and political leaders on Facebook is maintained with respect to the number of comments or the times in which they have shared posts.

On the other hand, if we analyze the relationship between the content of the link and engagement, significant differences can be seen in the case of parties (F(3, 49,985) = 14,718; p < .001) (Figure 4). It is observed that the messages of the "others" category (content of web pages where they request information, content of leisure and free time, etc.) create less engagement than those that lead to campaign events (p < .001), topics of journalistic interest about

the party (p = .021) and appearances in the media (p = .023). However, these more personal and less politically related contents registered in the "others" category generate more engagement when they are disseminated by the candidates' accounts.
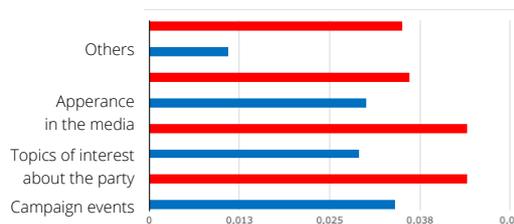
Table 4

Averages of the types of interaction according to the type of link

	Corporate links		External links	
	Party	**Candidate**	**Party**	**Candidate**
Shares	1.299,0	1.524,7	1.367,5	1.237,9
Comments	533,29	1.250,9	607,03	571,6
Reactions				
Like	2.715,5	6.257,5	3.363,9	4.680,2
Love	282,63	888,2	290,2	430,0
Haha	34,7	60,9	28,5	19,9
Wow	4,8	12,6	5,6	25,6
Sad	9,8	35,5	17,6	87,8
Angry	25,2	49,2	57,1	36,8
Total reactions	3.072,6	7.304,1	3.762,9	5.280,3
Total interactions	4.904,9	1.0079,6	5.737,5	7.089,8

Regarding the source of the link, although there are no significant differences in the interactions and reactions that the parties obtain, the situation is different in the case of the candidates. As Table 4 reflects, the corporate links published by the candidates get more comments than the external links (p < .001). They also record more "love" (p = .029) and more "haha" (p = .003).

On the other hand, the source of the link does not influence the level of engagement, very similar between parties and candidates (Table 5).

Table 5

Engagement averages according to the type of link

	Corporate links		External links	
	Party	Candidate	Party	Candidate
Engagement level	.0316	.0437	.0308	.0341

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5.3. THE IMPACT OF HASHTAGS AND MENTIONS

Regarding RQ3 on the impact of hashtags and mentions on interaction and engagement levels, it is observed that the posts of political parties that do not include mentions (@) have more comments than those that include this resource (Figure 5), the difference being statistically significant (p = .033). However, the use of mentions does not affect the number of times posts are shared, nor the number of reactions and interactions of followers. On the other hand, the use of hashtags (#) does not mean differences in any of the interventions of the followers of the analyzed accounts.

Figure 5

Averages of interactions according to the use of mentions and hashtags
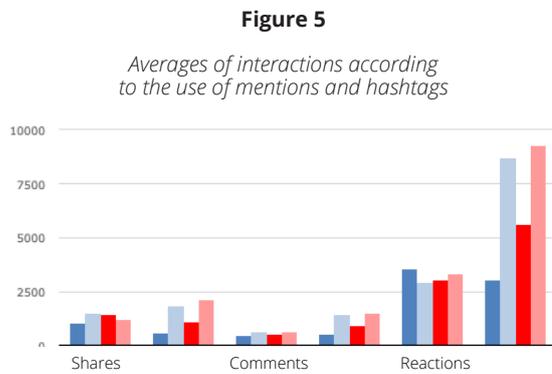
In the case of candidates, excluding mentions seems more effective than in the case of parties. When their posts have no mentions, they are shared more times *(p < .001)*, have more comments (p < .001), produce more reactions *(p < .001)*, and generate more interaction (p < .001) than when they include mentions, the differences being significant. Likewise, when they avoid the use of hashtags, they generate more reactions (p = .046) and interactions (p = .038) than when they include these labels, the differences being significant. However, the use of hashtags does not affect the times that posts are shared and commented.

Finally, it is evidenced that posts without mentions create more engagement than those that include them, both in parties (p < .001) and in candidates (p = .015). As observed in Table 6, the use of hashtags does not affect the engagement of posts, neither in parties nor in candidates.

These results reveal that mentions and hashtags are not as effective on Facebook as on Twitter, the social network from which they emerged. According to the data, the use of these two resources on Facebook does not imply greater interaction or participation of users in the accounts of political actors.

Table 6

Engagement averages based on the use of mentions and hashtags

		Engagement level	
		Parties	Candidates
Mentions	Have	.0224	.0321
	Do not have	.0371	.0457
	Total	.0316	.0414
Hashtags	Have	.0314	.0411
	Do not have	.0318	.0420
	Total	.0316	.0414

Source: Own elaboration from the formula of Balbuena et al. (2017).

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The obtained results allow to produce contributions of interest on the elements that enhance interaction and engagement among followers of political parties and candidates on Facebook. First, regarding RQ1, it is observed that the interactions in the candidates' posts (number of times shared, comments and reactions) were higher than the interactions received by the parties. This indicates that personalization in the leader may be a good strategy to get more comments and reactions (Gerodimos & Justinussen, 2015; Puentes-Rivera et al., 2016; Stier et al., 2018), in line with the trend of political hyper leadership of recent years (Feenstra et al., 2016). However, the level of engagement or commitment, a formula that weighs the impact of the different types of interaction in relation to the number of followers (Balbuena et al., 2017), was reduced and very similar in all cases, without significant differences between the parties and their leaders. Although it was logical that the levels of interaction increased when the number of followers was greater, this relationship did not exist with the level of engagement. Therefore, the number of followers does not guarantee greater engagement according to this case study. This finding indicates that simply following candidates does not guarantee greater commitment (Pennington et al., 2015), and questions the importance of the size and links of the network of contacts on Facebook (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012; Valenzuela et al., 2018).

Secondly, it is shown that quantitative data such as the number of followers, the number of publications or the number of interactions did not condition or determine the level of engagement, as seen in other countries (Carlisle & Patton, 2013). For example, Podemos is the account with the largest number of followers and exceeds its candidate in posts, but Pablo Iglesias generated more engagement than the party account. In the case of the PSOE, the interactions were similar between the party and its leader, but the level of engagement was higher in the party. In any case, it is confirmed that the new parties, specifically Podemos and its candidate, attracted more interactions than the rest, as in the previous elections (Ballesteros-Herencia and Díez-Garrido, 2018). This result is directly related to the largest number of followers. It is true that other factors that are not analyzed in this work may intervene, such as the age of the followers of Podemos, presumably younger and with more abilities to participate in the online environment than in the case of traditional parties.

Third, it is concluded that the emotional involvement of the followers is not relevant. Although Facebook has incorporated buttons

that allow users to diversify their emotions, the highest number of reactions corresponded to the "like" button, in line with previous research (Coromina et al., 2018). The rest of reactions obtained very low figures. It should be noted that users preferred to use those buttons that transmit positive emotions ("love" and "haha") over negative or unfavorable ones ("sad" and "angry") in relation to the political content of the electoral campaign. This preference for positive emotions can be related to studies that find a correlation between the positive content of posts and the engagement of Facebook users (Gerbaudo et al., 2019). Further research in this regard would be necessary as other studies show the tendency to polarization through negative messages addressed to rivals (Abejón-Mendoza et al., 2019).

The fourth contribution refers to the characteristics of the posts, specifically the format and content of the links (RQ2). In this sense, it is verified that the level of interaction increased significantly when links directed to videos and images were incorporated, in line with previous literature (Bene, 2017). On the other hand, it is ruled out that the content of the links determines the behavior of the followers on Facebook. That is, regardless of whether the links lead to campaign events, topics of interest about the party or appearances of the candidates in the media, the levels of interaction and engage-

ment did not vary. It is only seen in the case of the candidates that the corporate links (of their own content) obtained a better response from users than the rest of the content, a fact that would reinforce the tendency to self-reference that characterizes political actors both on Facebook (Cervi & Roca, 2017; López-Meri et al., 2020) and Twitter (Pérez-Dasilva et al., 2018; López-Meri et al., 2017).

Finally, as the fifth contribution and in relation to RQ3, there is little impact of mentions (@) and hashtags (#) in terms of engagement. The use of these resources on Facebook does not generate positive values regarding the level of commitment of the followers. Regarding the different types of interactions, the relationship between comments and mentions stands out. In this sense, comments decrease when the posts include mentions. In addition, posts without mentions generate more engagement than those that include this resource in both party and candidate accounts. This is a novel conclusion because most of the previous literature has focused on the response of the followers to the post as a whole or on the presence of links and images as elements of attraction, but the relationship between the use of mentions and hashtags and the response of the audience on Facebook had not been studied until now. According to the results of this research, the use of mentions and hashtags on

Facebook does not guarantee greater user interaction. Instead, it seems that the content of the post and the format of the links, especially if it is a video, have more influence as motivators of participation. This trend can be useful for designing the communication strategies of political actors.

These contributions are interesting to plan and execute the strategies of political actors on Facebook. It is one of the social networks that, despite being one of the most used in Spain, generates a low level of commitment among followers in the field of political communication. Furthermore, these results contribute to a better understanding of the relationship between different types of interaction and the level of engagement in the context of an electoral campaign. Although the study focuses on the Spanish case, the main conclusions can be extrapolated to other contexts, given that the observed trends can help any political actor to optimize the management of his/her activity on Facebook.

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