

Vox political party discourse, strategies and interactions on its official Instagram account during the A-28 elections. Radical right and Social Networks

Discurso, estrategias e interacciones de Vox en su cuenta oficial de Instagram en las elecciones del 28-A. Derecha radical y redes sociales

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: We investigate how Vox has used its official Instagram account during the two previous months to the 28-A elections. **Objectives and methodology:** Various texts are reviewed in order to place the political group ideologically, identify its discourse axes and the role of Instagram in its communication. Messages in the official account during the studied period are selected, obtaining a sample of 81 publications. Through a validation table, communication strategies, discourse axes and interaction are determined. We deepen into the analysis of the 20 publications with the highest interaction levels. **Results:** Cult of law, nativism and closed groupthinking are the main strategies and narratives of Vox, using metaphors and sinecdoques in clusters. **Conclusions:** Vox presents itself as a civil resistance movement that adapts to the youth code. Predominant communication strategies favor political polarization, nativism, law and order cult, with a hyper-leadership and a simplifying language.

KEYWORDS: political communication; 28-A general elections; Instagram; Vox political party; discourse.

RESUMEN

Introducción. Investigamos el uso de la cuenta oficial de Vox en Instagram en los dos meses previos a las elecciones del 28-A. **Objetivos y metodología.** Se revisan diversos textos para situar a la formación ideológicamente, identificar los ejes de su discurso y el papel de Instagram en su

comunicación. Se seleccionan los mensajes de su cuenta en el período de estudio, obteniendo una muestra de 81 publicaciones. Mediante validación, se determinan los ejes del discurso, estrategias de comunicación e interacción. Se profundiza en el análisis de las 20 publicaciones con mayores niveles de interacción. **Resultados.** Normativismo, nativismo, y mentalidad cerrada grupal dominan las estrategias y narrativas identitarias de Vox, en cadenas metafóricas y sinécdoques. **Conclusiones.** Vox se presenta como un movimiento de resistencia civil que se adapta al código de los jóvenes. Predominan las estrategias de polarización política, el nativismo, el culto a la norma, el hiperliderazgo y el lenguaje simplificador de carga.

PALABRAS CLAVE: comunicación política; elecciones generales 28-A; Instagram; Vox; discurso.

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Translation by **Carlos Javier Rivas Quintero** (University of the Andes, Mérida, Venezuela)

1. Introduction

The radical right political party, Vox, (Latin for “voice”) was founded at the end of December 2013. It was publicly launched at a press conference in Madrid in mid-January 2014. Its president, Santiago Abascal, is a former member of People’s Party (PP) and held different positions in this political group from 1994 and 2013. He decided to leave it because, according to his words, the direction had “betrayed his values and ideas”. Among the reasons for his desertion, the leader pointed out the stance of PP in the face of the terrorism in the Basque Country and other key points. They are going to be present in Vox’s founding manifesto (2014): PP stance regarding peripheral nationalisms, the absence of a Reform for the State of the autonomies, the tax increase, the preservation of the Sexual and Reproductive Health and Voluntary Termination of Pregnancy Law (2010) and the laxity against corruption within the party.

These will be the central issues of the discourse of the political group and its proposals: in the measures of its founding manifesto (2014), its bylaws (2015, 2019) and the so-called “100 measures for the *España Viva*” (2015b, 2018). It was not until December 2018 when Vox achieved parliamentary representation for the first time, getting 10.97% of votes during the Andalusian elections and obtained 12 seats (Gil Grande, 2018a).

One of the compelling reasons for the success of Vox was the Catalan Declaration of independence in October 2017 and the development of different occurrences related to it. The Catalanian conflict issue became one of the main topics in the agenda of the Andalusian elections (Castro, 2018; Camacho, 2018). In the new context, now more polarized and agitated after the increasing tension, with some of the independence leaders being imprisoned, the discourse against the disintegrating danger of the peripheral nationalism drew an important number of Andalusian voters (Gil Grande, 2018b; Araluce, 2019; Ferreira, 2019).

This phenomenon replicated on a national scale in 2019 and the political group finally managed its way into the Congress in the first general elections, with a voting percentage similar to the one in Andalusia (10.26%) becoming the fifth political force (Martín Plaza, 2019a). A few months later, with the elections repetition being held in an even more polarized context, -with the verdict of the Supreme Court sentencing nine independence leaders to 9 to 13 years in jail (Rincón, 2019) and the exhumation of the dictator Francisco Franco (Romero, 2019)-, Vox multiplied its success achieving 15.09% of the votes, doubling the number of seats, hence becoming the third force of the Congress (Martín Plaza, 2019b).

The press labeled 2014 as “The Podemos year” (Requeijo, 2018). Establishing an analogy, and bearing in mind what we just have described, we can affirm that 2019 has been the year for Vox. Behind its boom lies the fact that some of the main axes of its initial discourse, especially the one of the peripheral nationalisms threat, are strongly connected with the current context (Cruz, 2019) but it is also important to take into consideration the channels through which they project and disseminate this discourse. If social networks were necessary for the success of Podemos, they are also going to be essential for Vox’s success (Viejo, 2018). Getting to the point of becoming the political party with more followers on Instagram (481.803) outstripping Podemos (210.967) and quadrupling the numbers of Ciudadanos, People’s Party and the Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party (109.087, 92.163 and 86.751 followers, respectively).

Vox’s triumph on this social network was not incidental, but it was due to a thorough and continuous strategy in the hands of important figures such as Steve Bannon (Ferreira, 2019; Gould, 2019; Rendueles, 2019) who have been advising its leaders since 2017 (Verdú, 2019). It is an endeavor to connect with the most abstaining and disaffected segments of voters with the conventional policy (Mateos and Moral, 2006; Galais, 2012; Francés and Santacreu, 2014; Benedicto *et al.*, 2016; Camas, 2017) which has paid off to a certain extent. During the last general election, the most voted party by men younger than 30 (19.4% in total) was Vox, followed closely by Podemos (17.4%). However, it seems that this endeavor has only allowed them to penetrate the young male audience. The number of votes for Vox decreased considerably for women under the age of 30: only 6.5% of them decided on this party (Carpio, 2019; Espartero, 2019). The masculinization strategies of the discourse (Alabao, 2018; Fernández, 2019) and the criticism of feminism are behind these results.

The objective of this research, which is part of the AGLAYA European Project: Innovation Strategies in Cultural Myth Criticism¹, is to analyze the communicative use the political group made of Instagram regarding the general elections on April 28, 2019, (from now on “A-28”), the first ones in which representation was achieved at a national level. The posts Vox made on this social network during the two months before the elections comprise our corpus of study, which is going to be explained in the next segment. We chose this network because it is on which the political group presents itself more effectively and actively, in comparison to other parties. We are interested in identifying the axes of its discourse on this platform, the communicative strategies used and the level of interaction of the messages. We will also analyze which are its key signifiers and to what meanings it refers us to in the twenty posts with the highest level of interaction.

2. Methods

In order to achieve the objective proposed, we have followed a set of methodological steps that evolve as a spiral towards the distinctive features of Vox on Instagram. First, we have developed a

¹ This research is part of a bigger one of the European Project “AGLAYA: Innovation Strategies in Cultural Myth Criticism” Ref: H2019/HUM-5714., 2020-2023, of which the authors of this article are members and Co-IP.

brief statement regarding the issue as to why Vox must be framed within the radical right, the axes of its discourse in general, to later verify those axes and highlight the importance Instagram has in the communication of the party. We have established the starting point of our research on the bases of researchers and authors from different periods, about authoritarian thinking and narrow-mindedness.

Secondly, we have conducted a quantitative analysis of the use Vox has made of Instagram during the two months before the general elections of A-28 (from February 02, 2019 to April 28, 2019, both dates included). The justification for these dates period is because they coincide with both the electoral campaign and the communicative interactions of the group starting to occur on this network. We have processed the meaningful elements out of the total set, which were used as a sample basis, offering those that seemed more representative and led us to the third stage of the analysis.

During this third stage, we conducted a qualitative analysis of the 20 posts with the highest level of interaction, taking into consideration the discourse axes, the communicative strategies and the levels of interaction. We have commented on the most representative examples addressing the words, photographs, videos and links, as well as the posts having the greatest levels of interaction.

To undertake stages two and three, we have used two validation tables consisting of a set of variables. These variables identified aspects such as the type of post (carousel, image or video), the theme on which is centered, who acted as enunciators in the text or the level of interaction, which we ignored in the text in order for this analysis not to be too redundant. We have chosen the twenty posts with the highest levels of interaction and we have analyzed the strategies, key signifiers and meanings.

3. Theoretical framework

3.1. Radical right

First, it is necessary to identify in which family set of the right wing ideology we are going to place Vox. Many mediums as well as their opponents label them as extreme right. The party rejects this label and defines itself as “conservative liberal”, in the words of Espinosa de los Monteros, International Relations undersecretary (El Confidencial Digital, 2019). However, there is academic literature that states and reflects about why neither of these two labels is appropriate, but the right thing is to speak of radical right.

The political scientist Pippa Norris (2005) explains that what characterizes the extreme right is its rejection of the democratic system and its support for using violence to achieve political purposes. Following Norris and other authors such as Cas Mudde (2007) or Jens Rydgren (2018), Ferreira (2019), they point out that, unlike the extreme right, and even though it denies some of the ideas of the liberal democracy, radical right is neither against the democratic system nor defends the use of violence.

The party is characterized by *nativism* and *authoritarianism*, something that Ferreira (2019, p. 82) defines as “essential and sufficient conditions”. Nativism is “a movement whose main objective is to restrict immigrants flow to maintain the cultural, racial, religious or political status quo in a country, region or city”. The requirements for it to be successful entail creating “an internal or external clear convincing enemy”, eliminate “the internal differences at a social and ideological level in the heart of the “native” population and construct “a categorical and unchallenged narrative of belonging” (Guia, 2016).

For the European case, unlike the North American one, nativism after the Second World War is linked to the rejection of Muslims since its very beginning. They are defined by their “patriarchal traditions and orthodox religions”, opposed to the inherent values in the democratic system (Guia, 2016).

By speaking of authoritarianism, we refer to “the belief of a society strictly organized, where violations of the authority have to be severely punished” (Mudde, in Ferreira, 2019). Other characteristics, such as the defense of traditional values or neoliberalism can be, more or less, present in the radical right, but they are not as vital as the two aforementioned ones. As for the Vox case, not only is the defense of the law and order essential but so it is the defense of traditional values in its discourse. We are going to use the next section to develop the why of this matter from a socio-psychological perspective.

After a thorough analysis of the ideological key principles of Vox, following the casual chain method, Ferreira (2019) concluded that the political group is in the radical right. The reason is that the emphasis in its discourse is placed on nativism and authoritarianism, although they also advocate traditional values. Vox would not be extreme right because it does not support violence to accomplish its goals, and even if it does not adhere to certain aspects of liberal democracy, it does not reject it completely. It cannot either be simple identified with conservatism due to the importance of nativism in its discourse.

Similar to what Ferreira stated, the researcher Pueyo-Rubio (2019) also places Vox within the radical right subset and points out the importance of political nationalism in its discourse. Nationalism that, as we have already mentioned through Ferreira (2019) and we are going to detail throughout this research, goes beyond and becomes nativism, since it creates an enemy which entails a threat for the continuity of the values of the group.

3.2. Socio-communicative context, narrow-mindedness and digital society

From a socio-psychological perspective, the radical right connects with narrow and reactionary mindedness. There is an analysis current that began with the studies of Adorno (Adorno *et al.*, 1950) and that other authors updated during the whole twentieth and twenty-first century, such as Altemeyer (1981), and recently, Jost *et al.*, (2003) which explains the mentality that justifies militarists stances, of absolute dogmatism or based on exaggerated regulatory values.

The emergence of movements of narrow and dogmatic mentality is in actuality a “motivated social cognition” (Jost *et al.*, 2003). In moments of uncertainty and insecurity, dread of changes, increase in inequalities and economic crises, or moments of higher social turmoil, authoritarian thinking and right political parties linked to it, offer compensations which become predominant once groupthinking (Janis, 1972) and sectarianism phenomena generated by fear of freedom (Fromm, 1941) start to appear. This context coincides precisely with the one favoring the birth or reinforcement of nativism: the “crisis of confidence in the nation”, motivated “by economic, cultural or political issues” (Guia, 2016, p. 115). Recent researches such as the one conducted by Enrique Del Teso (2018, 2020) highlight the idea of how propaganda and the communicative styles of the radical right generate group identity, and the uses it makes of individualized appealing speech are aimed at the reinforcement of the group.

These structures can emerge and be strengthened in moments of social innovation and accelerated changes in the evolution of communities, as a reactionary and instinctive involution movement. That way, following the line of Adorno and his collaborators, people reluctant to changes and innovations embrace the ideas of an authoritarian leader since it allows them to make their defensive stances

stronger and reject unwanted growth or dreaded freedom (Fromm, 1941). There is very recent literature about these processes such as the researches by Aral, Muchnik and Sundadarajan (2009), and Aral and Walker (2015).

Some of the features identified in the authoritarian right parties and movements by traditional authors during the mid-twentieth century are still present in extreme right and radical right parties such as Vox. Among them, we point out:

- Conventionalism: cult of law and traditional social customs.
- Service and obedience mentality towards a leader, with a strong projection of the people in charge of these movements.
- Aggressiveness towards the exterior, with a tendency to isolate their networks and to homophily or unanimous thinking (Rogers, 1981).
- Internal organization of extreme rigour to promote groupthink and the creation of a pyramidal army, which transfers strength to its foundations and authority to its leader (Janis, 1972).
- Group compensations for individual weaknesses, with transferences of power and esteem given to the group, nation or leader either by weak or threatened individuals, or by little socialized ones (Janis, 1972).
- Narrow or dogmatic mentality (Rokeach, 1960).

In order to develop our research we were particularly interested in the amplification carried out by Milton Rokeach about the idea of the authoritarian personality of rights, of psychosocial etiology, relating the phenomenon to certain informative and communicative strategies and circumstances.

Rokeach linked the groups and social phenomena associated to extreme conservatism with informational isolation in the personal belief systems. That way, narrow-minded people tend to experience rejection of information contrary to their beliefs and principles. The language that manages to reinforce narrow-mindedness is the one of dogmatism, of extreme firm beliefs, and of absolute normativity (Rokeach, 1960). Language simplification, rejection of complexity and cult of law work communicatively to clear up the cognitive difficulty in an environment with a high communicational or informative burden.

During the mid-twentieth century, the escalation of The Cold War, urban modernization and the advancement of propaganda and advertising strategies in the United States promoted the increase of communities and social groups reluctant to accept innovations (Rogers, 1981). They fearfully witnessed the advance of the media and modern technologies and tended to seek security in conventionalism and in isolating from cosmopolitan information.

Today, the advent of digitalization, the economic and geographical differences and the new technological situation, impose similar conditions for the emergence of narrow-mindedness in political parties. These are known today as new populisms and new parties with extreme ideologies. In our case, as aforementioned, we are going to focus on a group framed in the radical right.

That way, if we related the rise of parties of absolute normative traditional dogmas isolated from the innovative environment with the context of digital society, we will notice that narrow-mindedness, characteristic of situations of information overload, is arising. The search for traditional values, conventionalism or the cult of law, are features of being in dread of freedom, caused by the global and extremely open society of today's world.

Disaggregation of traditional mass media is substituted with the new interpersonal spheres of digital networks, by which the emergence of groupthinking and sectarian mentality is much easier due to their own idiosyncrasy. We can clearly relate certain current social networks with traditional homophilic networks (Aladro, 2013; Valera-Ordaz, Calvo and López-García, 2018) in particular mechanics and characteristic interactions. Additionally, it is possible to convey the compensations and psychological transferences characteristic of the homophilic and closed groups on social networks, through a distinctive, emotional and aggressive language and communication style (Del Teso, 2020).

3.3. Vox discourse axes

In a first approach, which we are going to develop thoroughly thanks to the analysis of the Instagram account of the party, we have identified the basic axes of Vox's discourse based upon three types of texts. The base documents elaborated by the very group, three of the main speeches that its leader, Santiago Abascal, gave during the time frame of our research (February 28 – April 28, 2019), and the interview he did with TV host Bertín Osborne during the previous days to the electoral campaign (April 6, 2019).

Among Vox's base documents, we have analyzed the letter addressed to the former president of PP, Mariano Rajoy (2013), its founding manifesto (2014), its bylaws (2015a; 2019) and the 100 measures for *España Viva* and for the municipalities (2015b; 2018). From the speeches given by Santiago Abascal, we have chosen the one in Santander on March 28, 2019, the one in Covadonga on April 12, 2019, and the campaign closure at the Plaza de Colón (EN: Columbus Square) on April 26, 2019.

All these documents reveal there are four axes articulating the discourse of the party, which are deemed as hazards or threats: *peripheral nationalisms*, *Muslim immigration*, *feminism* and *the left*. This last one also represents a special danger since it advocates and agglutinates the former three aspects. All of them are framed within nativism since they endanger not only the identity of Spanish people as a group, but also the very continuity of it. We will later verify if these topics are mentioned again on Instagram.

3.4. Instagram and Vox

There is already a significant amount of academic literature about the political use of social networks, from both a critical point of view and an instrumental approach (Aral, 2012; Filimonov, 2016; Jung *et al.*, 2016; Zuckerman, 2017; Lovink *et al.*, 2017), with some authors in Spain specialized in socio-political movements and social networks (Gallardo Paúls and Enguix Oliver, 2016; Pinazo, Nós and Agut, 2020). Instagram and its capacity to persuade and draw different sectors, from politics to consumption, were concretely investigated, too (Eldin, 2015; Sheldon and Bryant 2016; Evans *et al.*, 2017; Casaló, Flavian and Ibáñez, 2018). The current interest is focused on its political use, based on the Cambridge Analytica case (among others), and there are already some interesting reflections in our country (Selva-Ruiz and Caro Castaño, 2017).

As we mentioned in the Introduction section, Vox is the Spanish party with more followers on Instagram. This social network has 15 million users in Spain, and 5 million of them are under the age of 35. Although this party achieves good levels of interaction on the four most important networks in our country -Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram-, it obtains the best results on the last one (Cea, 2019). If we address the engagement of users, its posts are again the ones reaching the best levels among the political groups, being Instagram the most important network once more (Cea, 2019).

There are important similarities between the discourse of the party under analysis and the one of Donald Trump on social media, at both content and form levels (Pardo, 2019). The reason for this fact and Vox's success lies in advisers such as Steve Bannon, former vice-president, founder of Cambridge Analytica and campaign manager of Trump. Rafael Bardají, member of Vox National Executive Board, has met several times with Bannon. The strategies implemented go from collaborating with opinion leader accounts to using the same language of the segments of the population they are targeting, and make posts with hashtags that are trends or draw special interest (Cea, 2019).

4. Results

4.1. Posts types and topics

Before we start providing the details of our analysis, it is important to point out that Instagram allows making two different types of contents: posts and stories. Posts are permanent content on the page of each profile of this network. The stories, on the contrary, are videos or images of an ephemeral nature. They have an expiration date, disappearing after 24 hours, which is why we have only analyzed posts.

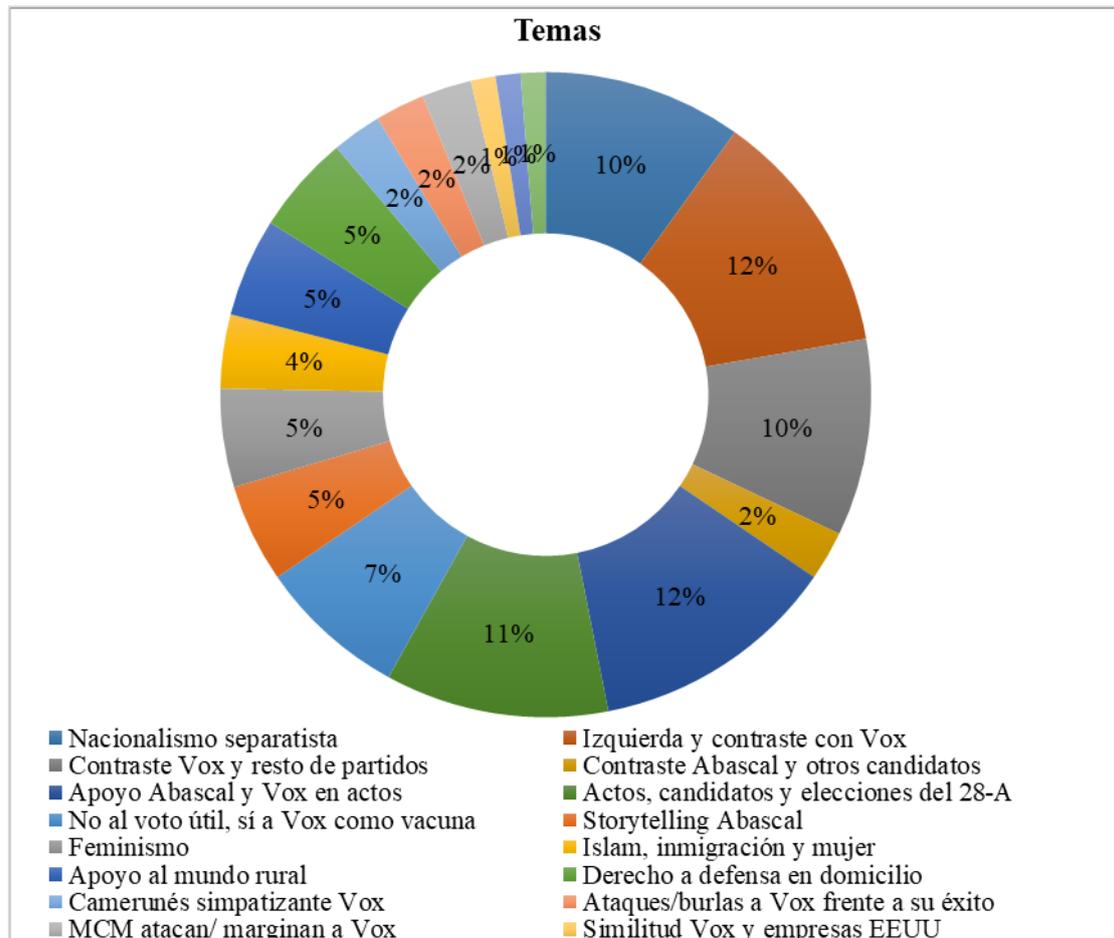
In total, the party made 81 posts during the period under analysis (from 28/02/2019 to 28/04/2019) which constitutes our sample or corpus. We observed that out of the 81 posts, the majority are videos (78%) and the rest images. For each post, the group usually included just one video (46%) or several videos combined (31%). As for images, we have identified different types, such as photographs, posters, memes and the front pages of different media.

The images mainly correspond to photographs (10%). In them, we can see the leaders of Vox, demonstrators (in Spain Square, Barcelona, and in Columbus Square, Madrid) or sympathizers (Party Conferences attendees). The purpose, partly, is to portray the idea that Vox has wide support from the people and that is a movement of and for citizens rather than a conventional political party. It is something on which Abascal also insists during the interviews he grants and the speeches he gives.

The posters (6%) inform of electoral events and demonstrations. They are designed to call supporters for mobilization.

The memes (5%) use humor to demotivate regarding tactical voting, compare the strength Abascal has to the weakness of the Government's president, Pedro Sánchez, who is portrayed as a ladybug, highlight the usefulness and success of Vox by establishing parallelism between the political party and American companies such as Apple or Amazon, and point out the war element when fighting enemies such as the Second Spanish Republic, communism, feminism or the LGBTI movement.

We have tried to identify the topics of its discourse on Instagram as much as possible to facilitate further discussion and commenting on them. We have identified 18 topics. However, the majority are clearly centered on the articulating axes identified in the first approach conducted during the theoretical framework, basing upon the analysis of the base texts of the party, the speeches and the interviews done to its leader.



Graphic 1: topics identified in the posts comprised in the sample.
Source: authors' own creation.

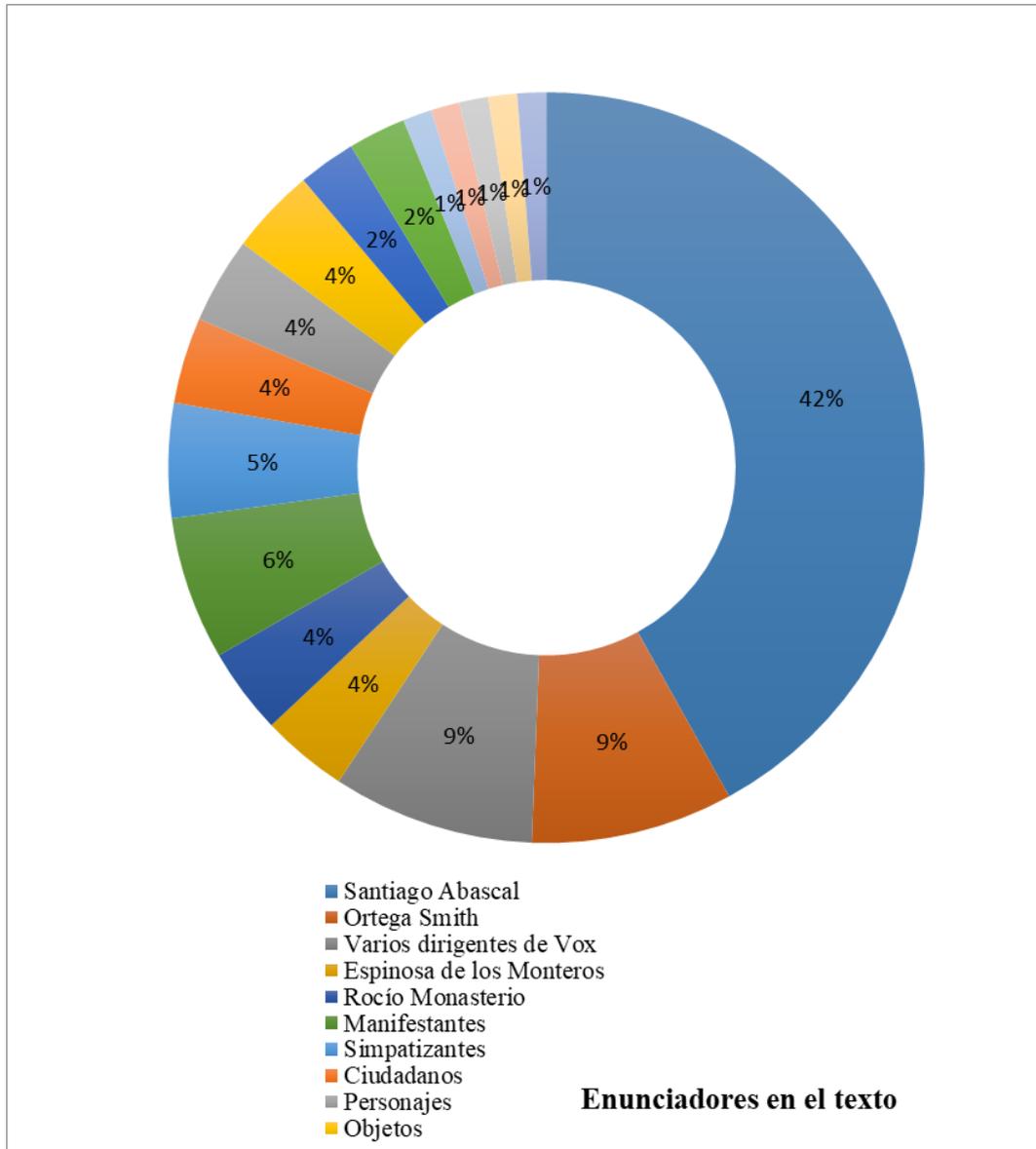
The danger-enemy axes are present in more than half of the posts (56%). On the one hand, there are the left and its comparison with Vox (12%), separatist nationalism (10%), feminism (5%) and Islam, immigration and women (4%). Against them, we find Vox working as an antidote or vaccine (7%). The differences of this party in comparison with the rest of political parties in general (10%) and of its leader against other officers (2%) are highlighted. The special and defining features of the personal history of Abascal are detailed through storytelling (5%).

When constructing its group identity, as we are going to explain in detail, it bets on the support of the rural world (5%), in addition to the continuous presence of the flag as a symbol of Spanish unity and tradition. Authoritarianism materializes in the right to defense in the very domicile (5%). The other two topics, which almost hold a fourth part of the discourse, are the support of sympathizers for the leader and the party (12%) and the presentation of events and candidates regarding the A-28 (11%).

4.2. Text enunciators

Once we had obtained the thematic spectrum, we addressed who are the main enunciators of it. We have taken the secondary categories that agglutinate some enunciations of the narratological analysis, with characters and objects. The main enunciator in the texts is the leader of the group, Santiago Abascal, in 42% of the posts. Far behind is the general secretary, Ortega Smith (9%). In other posts (9%), the protagonism is shared among several leaders of Vox. Demonstrations (6%), sympathizers

(5%), ordinary citizens in the role of parents or soldiers (4%), historical or popular culture personalities (4%) and objects acting as synecdoche (4%) are also important.



Graphic 2: enunciators of the text in the messages of Vox on Instagram.

Source: authors' own creation.

The fact that Abascal is the enunciator in the text of almost half of all the posts coincides with the personalization and hyper-leadership phenomenon (Gil-Ramírez, Gómez de Travesedo-Rojas and Almansa-Martínez, 2019) in the current Spanish and international political context. This fact fits with the mislabeled americanization or globalization of politics, which places more importance on the leader rather than on the party.

4.3. Posts with the highest interaction level

We have evaluated the level of interaction in each type of post made by Vox on Instagram, processing the number of “Likes” and comments for carousels (single or combined videos) or images (photograph, meme, poster or media front page) and the number of views and comments for videos.

The twenty posts having the highest level of interaction surpass 35,000 likes and comments (carousels and images) and 145,000 views (videos).

The majority of posts (75%) achieving the greatest interaction levels during the time of study (February 28 - April 28) were posted amid the electoral campaign (April 11 to April 16), the election Silence or the very day of elections. This proves that not only the activity of the parties is more intense during these two weeks, but also of citizens with them.

It is important to point out that in spite of the memes representing only 5% of the sample (four out of the 81 posts); three of them are among the twenty posts with the highest interaction levels of the period under analysis. Additionally, one of the videos that got in the fourth place regarding interaction level, which shows Espinosa de los Monteros as protagonist, includes a meme of the leader under the “thug life” caption at the end of the video.

This signifier, very popular on YouTube videos and memes, combines the words “thug life”, the image of sun glasses, a joint, and the song “The Next Episode” that the rapper Dr. Dre recorded along with Snoop Dog, Kurupt and Nate Dogg. The object is to signify, through irony, that someone has behaved, colloquially speaking, as the “master” or “chief” by handling completely a situation. In this case, Espinosa de los Monteros addressed, with a megaphone, a Cuatro journalist who asked him a question replying, “Cuatro, don’t bother me”. This case demonstrates the success of the meme as a type of discourse in the interaction between Vox and its Instagram Followers, and it is worthy of a completely separate study.

The other big enemies, which we have already identified as discourse axes, would be in the other third (35%) of the posts achieving the highest levels of interaction. Within them, the “left” enemy and its comparison to Vox is the most repeated topic. The posts portraying support to its leader and the party, as well as the contrast between its leader and other candidates (15%) also stand out.

The enunciator in the text on the majority of these posts (45%) is Santiago Abascal or he compared to his opponents. Sympathizers and citizens also have a prominent role (25% of the posts).

4.4. Language functions, key signifiers and meanings

We have proceeded to approach the functions, meanings and signifiers of the discourses of Vox on Instagram because they provide us with a good observation basis of discourses resorting partially to this discursive methodology (Van Dijk, 2001; and 2005). As we know, the detailed analysis of this methodology is particularly useful for describing the connection between language, ideology and persuasion strategies.

If we address the function of the language predominant in the twenty posts with the greatest levels of interaction, we notice that it is clearly the conative one. The objective is to influence on the behavior of the recipient. The poetic-aesthetic and expressive-emotive functions are important. Thirty percent of the posts are framed in the conative function, but another 35% are combined with the poetic-aesthetic, and 30% with the expressive-emotive. These are cases in which, in addition to mobilizing support and vote, they seek to draw the attention of users by posting images and music, or the enunciators in the text openly and strongly express their emotions and sentiments. As we are about to see, the emotionalization is key in Vox’s strategy.

The key signifiers of the twenty posts with highest levels of interaction are directly related to the semantic field of battle: homeland, treason, fight, resilience, freedom, to pursue, to immobilize, to

organize, to lose, fire, to burn, fear, hope, and courage. In this clear oppositional language, Vox represents the Spain and the Spanish people who are patriotic, good, decent, firm and brave in a synecdoche way. The other side, led by the left, represents all the dangers and threats. In line with the aforementioned, very clear metaphors are constructed: Spain-Vox is nation, homeland, people, home, family, grandparents, parents and children. The two fundamental semantic projections present Vox as a punishment or corrective, (acting as the police or army imposing law and order, and disciplining the left) or as assistance and aid, (guards or firefighters who provide help and put out a fire).

In the identified conceptual fusions (Fauconnier, 2005), in order to be Spain-homeland-people-home, Vox is constructed, not as a political party, but as a basic patriotic or spontaneous movement, formed by citizens who needed to defend themselves against needlessly experienced aggression. That is why it is important to highlight that people who are sensible, humble, hardworking, laborers, eager beavers, farmers and peasants form Vox. For that, metaphoric fusions and projections of the “pladur workers”, “the pladur Spain”, “Early riser Spain” or “the pladur reality” type are used.

5. Discussion and comment on the most relevant examples

5.1. Discourse axes

The structural axes of the discourse of Vox on Instagram are the same (separatism, Muslim immigration, feminism and left) to those we identified in the initial approach of the theoretical framework.

5.2. Communication strategies

The main communicative strategies on this social network coincide to those of nativism, cult of law and agreements, and narrow-mindedness described in the theoretical framework. It is about:

- Creation of an internal and external enemy.
- Group-community identity construction through belonging narratives that opposes to those enemies.
- Differences elimination within the group.
- Expose the violation of the law and request the maintenance and strengthening of the law and order.
- Emotionality, aggressiveness and fear exploitation (there is a kind of martial law which requires protection for the group-Spain).
- Rejection of complexity and simplifying charge language.

We present specific examples that detail the use of these strategies hereunder.

5.2.1. Creation of an internal and external enemy

The clustering of a common enemy of big dimensions in the form of opposing parties, foreign or terrorists and coup-plotter separatist or feminist invasions, is a clear strategy. For example, the use of the language linking signifiers associated to the Civil War and old times (communists, Popular Front) with signifiers associated to the most recent terrorism and separatism.

In the post 35 of the sample, a clip of a video of an improvised speech given by Abascal in Tarancón (Cuenca), clearly reflects this:

“Don’t let them scare you. I know you won’t, but don’t let them scare you with the fake speech of tactical voting (...) Vox is the only party that is going to prove its capacity for stopping the advance of the Popular Front of socialists who have covenanted with separatists and have covenanted with friends of the terrorists (...) Long live Spain!” (Abascal, Speech in Tarancón, April 5, 2019).

Another Instagram video (P. 38) shows how the set of signifiers of several demonized groups organizes an enemy of one thousand heads against which the party opposes:

“We are sick and tired of watching how our politicians protect those who are disloyal, the enemies of Spain, the squatters, the hawkers, the radical feminists. Those who represent what the majority of the Spanish people are not, since we are loyal to Spain and dutiful” (Monasterio, Speech in Leganés, April 7, 2019).

The redundancy and insistence on the identifications among opposing groups forming an assembled enemy of huge proportions allows the party to enhance its own importance and present itself as the only alternative (P. 53):

“Separatists, coup-plotter separatists, communists and friends of terrorists greet us all over Spain in our public events. They try to intimidate us. The partners of Pedro Sánchez decreed the anti-fascist alert the following date of the Andalusian elections to make clear they do not believe in democracy or in the will of the Spanish people. We have seen this during the weekend, with waste containers burning, with cobbles being thrown, with aggressions. With people of Vox watching how their Spanish flag was being snatched out of their hands and thrown into the Urumea (...). Hooded and muffled up people, threatening, insulting those of us who go with our faces undercover” (Abascal, Speech in Valladolid, April 16, 2019).

The left is one of the enemies with which Vox is obsessed. This one, just like separatists, is also violent (P. 53):

“Allow me to start solemnly holding Pedro Sánchez and the Socialist Party accountable for the environment of violence during these months and this campaign (...) but we must not delude ourselves, all those people who come to greet us at the rallies are nothing more than those at the forefront, the line of the hood and the truncheon of the progressive dictatorship that Pedro Sánchez represents (...) Violence here is always promoted by the same people” (Abascal, Speech in Valladolid, April 16, 2019).

They also use delegitimizing invectives against it as observed on P. 58. The left, in spite of having formed political parties and governed more than half of the democratic period (PSOE | EN: SSWP) “has never accepted democracy (Abascal, Libertad Digital, April 19, 2019).

5.2.2. Group-community identity construction through belonging narratives that oppose enemies

Narrow-mindedness around a community, with nativism and the creation of an imaginary enemy, are features that emerge vigorously in the frequency of the items. Simplification around the aforementioned core values is present for both the party and the authoritarian and closed mentality previously quoted.

For the development of its group-community identity, Vox draws on the patriotic symbologies with which its own group identifies, appropriating them. The “X” of the name of the party is a symbolic cross that also links directly to the crosses of crusaders.

The flag of the nation, representing the unity and liberty that separatists and the left want to break, becomes the symbol of the party. The rallies overflow with flags of Vox mixed with flags of Spain in intent to make them signify the same thing. A part for the whole, the synecdoche, emerges again as a core strategy. The location where political events usually take place, in addition to bullrings, is the Columbus Square in Madrid, which is the space having the official flag with the greatest dimensions of the country. The flag of Spain is, additionally, one of the most repeated emojis appearing in the posts. Due to these symbolic correlations, the party resembles the nation and its great dimensions by feeding off these semantic correlations with it.

The language of mythical and religious symbolism also ties the party to an identity opposing secularism. A clear example of this is post 60 (P. 60) which, in the form of a video, is a clip of a speech given by Abascal in Murcia addressing these values:

“On my chest, up until this campaign, I was only wearing a scapular with my grandfather’s Sacred Heart, which also belonged to my father. Now, after these intense and hopeful days I have to tell you that I am wearing the Christ of the Good Death that a legionary has lent me until the 28. Our blessed Lady of Covadonga that a thrilled woman handed me, precisely, at the feet of the Santina; The Saint Benedict Cross; and I do not know what else I will be wearing by the end of the campaign! (Abascal, Speech in Murcia, April 21, 2019).

5.2.3. Differences elimination within the group

In order to generate a simple oppositional language, Vox creates a set of simple values. The posts in which the candidates appear but are not giving any speech, portraying the atmosphere of the rallies and the support for Vox and its leaders, seek to project the concept that Vox is a people’s movement, without internal differences. This recourse to people’s basis is combined with a simple language (P. 73):

“Vox is much more than that. It is a patriotic movement in defense of the most important things (...) but have you seen the video of the pladur worker? All Spain has seen it, and Ismael, which is his name, that worker, that honorable Spanish man, who represents the early rising Spain, has shown an excellent stance against a liberal who wanted to annoy him. Moreover, he taught him not only 1 lesson but 18, one after the other in only 3 minutes. Because we defend the pladur Spain against the madness of liberals, who think that a worker could be concerned about the heteropatriarchy. What are they thinking? That a farmer or a countryside man would be concerned about gender-inclusive language? (...) The big advantage we have to defeat the progressive dictatorship is that they completely lost their mind. They are against common sense, reality, normal things and what normal people are taught at home. Do you know why we are going to win? Because the fucking pladur reality is against their obsessions, their bullshit, their fanaticism and they have no chance of victory” (Abascal, Speech at the Columbus Square, April 26, 2019).

Oppositional language permits creating a closed belief system that ultimately results in Vox being the only option possible. In post 74 (P. 74) we find a carousel of photographs of the campaign closure event at the Columbus Square together with this fragment of Abascal’s speech: “Either the disappearance or the historical continuity of our Nation. Either socialist misery or prosperity for our

children and grandchildren. Either progressive dictatorship or liberty for the Spanish people, either the anti-Spain or the *España Viva*” (Abascal, Speech at the Columbus Square, April 26, 2019).

The country world has clear presence in this return to primary values. It is represented by making use of chains of connections in synecdoche and symbolism, by bulls, hunting, fishing, truck drivers, and even the control of illegal immigration and the defense of national products. Regarding the later two, a parallelism between illegal immigration and what they label as “the invasion of poor quality Moroccan products”, which is also a defense of the land, of the Spanish fields, is established. In post 52 (P. 52) Ortega Smith explained during a visit to El Ejido (Almeria providence) that they would promote agriculture by “ending illegal immigration once and for all”. He also called to put an end to “the invasion of poor quality Moroccan products” (Ortega Smith, Speech in El Ejido, April 15, 2019).

Finally, on post 20 (P. 20), we have a photograph of Santiago Abascal holding an eagle and smiling, together with these hashtags: #Nature #Hunting #Fishing #Agriculture #Livestock #Bullfighting #Ruralworld #Photography. The chain of connections towards a wide-ranging symbolism can be appreciated.

5.2.4. Normativism: law and order as dominant discourses

Normativism, the adherence to the law and the stress laid on criminal rigor are aspects that connect to the authoritarian personality ruling the dynamic of conservative groups like Vox. The party emphasizes on contents that accentuate punishments and penal harshness in the face of crimes:

P. 55: “Let us discuss the matter of outlawing separatist parties once and for all” (Abascal, Speech in Granada, April 17, 2019).

P. 9: “We are the only party that stands for greater severity in punishments. What is more, keep the recent rapists in prison for life” (Monasterio, interview on the *Ana Rosa* Show, March 12, 2019).

In this last piece, the penal relaxation the government has brought about in recent times is narrated in dramatic and apocalyptic tones (P. 18): “A battered woman, who is in her home, who is approached by an abuser who broke into her house and wants to kill her. That woman, if she picks up a knife or kills the abuser, or hurts him, has every right in the world to do so. She is defending herself (...) that girl who was raped by four minors in Azuqueca who are now in the streets. We do want to talk about that security in Vox and about far severe punishments for all those recent rapists” (Monasterio, interview on TVE *Los Desayunos* show, March 22, 2019).

The use of military language deserves special mention. It symbolizes the adherence to the norm and it is a powerful code of informative simplification. The military orders and commands (“We are going to attack and get them!”, “For Spain!”, “Long live Spain!”) have the twofold function of reducing the semantic load and evoking nostalgic memories. Within this belligerent-military language, the metaphor of the battle for the continuity of Spain in a decisive moment, in a moment that is *kairos*, is essential in the discourse of the party. In this battle, Vox is the only “warrior” that can defeat the key enemies of Spain because the very group is Spain itself, and it is clearly appreciated in the images, words, and even the music accompanying the Instagram posts. In the face of these enemies, the party arises as a wall, army or protecting guardian capable of establishing order and justice in the country again:

P. 33: “We Vox are now the resistance! (...) we have come here to tell you that *España Viva* is much stronger than those who want to see Spain dead. And on April 28 we are going to defeat them. We are going to prove that what is truly useful is to stand up (...) long live Spain!” (Abascal, Speech, April 3, 2019).

P. 5: “Welcome to the resistance from Europe (...) thanks to all the people who believe that saving Europe is still possible” (Ortega Smith, Speech at the European Parliament, March 6, 2019).

In the list of candidates running for the A-28 (P. 15) the presence of three generals “who have dedicated their lives in the Army serving Spain” is highlighted. The center of the post is a photograph of the General Alberto Asarta who interpellates the user-viewer directly with a defiant look and arms folded. The #Army #Voxadvances hashtags are used. The green color of Vox is also the one of the Spanish Army, and the one of the clothing and equipment of hunters.

5.2.5. Emotionality, aggressiveness and fear exploitation

Promoting penal severity and decrying the laxity of the current authorities seek an additional goal, which is inciting fear and the subsequent hatred of the aggressor.

P.34: “The enemy of freedom, the enemy of progress, the enemy of democracy, the enemy of families, the enemy of life, the enemy of the future is called Islam invasion (...) let no one doubt it: Vox will keep on condemning and fighting against Islamic invasion. We have to be vigilant and we have to expel anyone who represents a threat to the security of Spanish people” (Ortega Smith, Statements on the Antena 3 news, April 4, 2019).

Catastrophic descriptions of imaginary attack situations to common people abound in the discourse of Vox, to place individuals in threatening environments that can spark hatred and fear:

P. 21: “We have said it, if you are at home and you are assaulted, you have the right to defend yourself: with a stick, with an ashtray, with a kitchen knife, with the authorization the State has given you. If a Spanish person is assaulted at his/her house and sees how his/her family is being gagged, how they are trying to rape his/her daughters, he/she has the right and duty to defend them and not to wait for the police to arrive” (Abascal, Speech in Ciudad Real, March 24, 2019).

P. 22: “Now I ask you that, for a moment, imagine any of you, your parents, or think of your grandparents if you want, being peacefully at home on a Sunday when suddenly two criminals wearing ski-masks enter through the garden of your house. Shoot your dogs with a silenced gun and enter your house. They beat your grandfather and grandmother, who are 78 and 72 years old, a beating that could have been lethal... (...) that criminal organization was very close to killing these two people” (Ortega Smith, Speech in Martos-Jaén, March 25, 2019).

The expression of primary emotions like fear, anger, bravery or courage abound in the posts suiting well the necessity of emotional warmth in this disaggregated and relativistic world of the twenty-first century:

P. 30: “We the Spanish people have survived shots on the nape and limpet bombs. We are not going to be intimidated by a few corny people singing Lluís Llach”, (Abascal, Speech at the demonstration in Barcelona, March 31, 2019).

This strongly emotional speech puts voters in positions of insecurity and uncertainty. The party claims to defend the voters against fear, but they are the first ones promoting it in their speeches and allegations. This strategy, of repeatedly alluding said sentiment, brings and puts it constantly in the front line, as appreciated in this slogan: “No fearing anything and anyone! For Spain! Long live Spain!”

5.2.6. Rejection of complexity and simplifying charge language

If we analyze Vox’s discourse, we can notice that expressions related to a simple and natural language prevail: family, grandparents, woman, children, tradition, field, Spain, life, homeland, progressive spirit, dictatorship.

Vox has a very clear tendency to group wide semantic clusters in simple oppositions (enemies/friends, defenders/aggressors, victims/executioners, loyal/traitors, cowards/courageous, fake/sincere) that arrange reality in a basic Manichaeism. It is even presented as an alternative to the democratic discourse, based on rational, consensual and political progressivism axes.

There is a clear gap between the set of semantic isotopies associated to the conventional democratic political discourse and the set of semantic isotopies of the extremist discourse of Vox. This difference manifests itself in constant phrases that arrange these two types of styles as if they were two sides of a dispute. Abascal affirms in the post of April 3 (P. 33): “And tell the brave ones that they have a party for the courageous people willing to fight against all the impositions of what is politically correct”.

The homeland is also associated to parenthood and family, to promote the chain of identifications that end up in the very leader who often shows his condition of being a father. The images of family parents who appear on the Father’s Day video on March 19 (P. 16) include soldiers explicitly. This way, both values unite and the discourse is simplified.

The simplification of the figure of the leader, Abascal, with simple and heroic personal traits, is clear in his political storytelling constructions. On the post on April 14 (P. 51), the voices and images of women, especially the ones in Abascal’s family, have a significant prominence: his grandmother, his mother and sister express what the trait that identifies him is: strength.

As a peculiar feature within the simplifying language, there is the attack on the media and their discourses. The attack on the mass media is also a clear feature of rejection of the information society, and can work in defense of voters who reject that society due to its complexity and overload aspect. It is a clear feature of narrow-mindedness.

Vox shares with the populist parties the attack on the media and a clear criminalization of all the reporters who oppose or criticize their ideas. That way, it is frequent that their spokespersons talk about fake news, about media of the mafias of the left or about campaigns orchestrated against the party. On a post on March 28 (P. 26), Abascal explains how fake news is orchestrated against Vox. The media, especially those of the left, and the cesspits of the parties work in behalf of promoting lies and hoaxes, thus to spread fear of Vox.

6. Discussion

The twenty posts with a higher level of interaction have helped us to confirm the main aspects of the specific discourse of Vox on the Instagram world. There is a clear coherence and unity in the use of

images, texts, cultural allusions, and symbolisms, which insistently revolve around the thematic axes we have pointed out in a general manner. The endeavor of the group through the creation of enemies, cult of law, nativism, the emotional simplification and glorification of a belligerent and mythological language, all together, is again evident. Although it is adapted to the code of users, through memes, word games or the imaginary appeal for combat, fear or activism.

These results coincide with the previous existing researches regarding the radical right, as well as with the contributions about the political influence of radical movements by using social networks. These are presented as a new sphere in which the narcissist hyper-leadership, homophily and groupthinking, the identity reinforcement and the conative appealing for belonging find an ideal ground.

The sample analyzed also fits with the initial thematic approach, and shows us the types of messages and languages of Vox on Instagram. The memes promoting more responses stand out once more. The conative and appealing tone is confirmed. The semantic fields are the same to those in the set of statements of this political group, which has as an effective strategy the elimination of complexity and a simple oppositional language. The discursive operations are still focused on metaphorization, conceptual fusions, synecdoches and symbolic extensions.

It is important to point out that Vox has found a gold mine in its basic communicative strategy to approach an iconic, simple and closed groupthinking language that exists on the social networks mainly used by young people. The same strategy that works for addressing all the social layers by amplifying the semantic associations of its metaphors, allows it to access the world of social networks, such as Instagram, with the right adaptations.

7. Conclusions

On the Instagram posts we have studied, Vox maintains the four oppositional discourse axes that frame it, just as we have defined it, as a radical right party inclined to narrow-mindedness and dogmatism: the peripheral nationalisms, Muslim immigration, feminism and the left are the key topics. The party stands against them as a possible antidote.

In the multi-methodological analysis we have conducted, Vox is confirmed to be a party using thematic selection and its own language as a key strategy. This strategy has multiple advantages. It simplifies the discourse to a small amount of elements –with a brief political program–, which favors the comprehension of voters who are overloaded with informative redundancy on certain topics.

Vox's symbols, language and contents on Instagram demonstrate with absolute clarity the complete adaptation to the strategies and dynamic inherent in nativism, the cult of nostalgia, traditionalism and compliance with the norms and laws as constitutive elements of its discourse. The authoritarianism and hyper-presence of its leader, the enclosing around a community with no economic and class differences, the recourse to military values and the use of emotions and fear towards imaginary enemies, are some of the concrete features that absolutely fit, once more, with the strategies of the authoritarian mentality described almost a century ago for political groups of the radical right.

The use of the metaphor combined with synecdoche is essential in the construction of the core identity narratives of its discourse. Vox is a party presented to us as marked by symbolic associations, with networks of semantic relations that connect with a whole, making it susceptible of an absolute identification with the country. Vox is Spain, the flag, the nation, the homeland, which also evokes the concept of house, home, family and father.

The strategy of associations through synecdoches and fusions of meanings has maintained specially the linkage of all the discourses with the figure of a sole leader, hypostatized on social networks such as Instagram. This last figure is clearly embodied by Santiago Abascal, whose importance is reinforced on social media due to his especial capacity for narcissist and hyper-personal presentation. His particular journey and personal history are highlighted on the Instagram images and videos. Accustomed to serving others since he was young, the leader embodies the very virtues of the traditional hero, among which strength stands out. He is the very essence of the group, he embodies that ideal, and at the same time, the common man. The capacity of the party to personalize all the values it preaches in this figure, has found the perfect platform on social networks like Instagram for it.

It is important to point out that these Instagram posts, at both content and form levels, are not aimed at common users of a social network, but to create an activist. The discourse is the one of a civil resistance movement, which asks citizens to be brave and to commit, along with their peers, to stand against abusive and unjust powers. Thereby, we are dealing with the reinforced enclosing of the group, with the search for groupthinking, which suits well with combative activism.

Followers of Vox on Instagram are, according to the strategy designed by the party, the members of a spontaneous protest originated from the boredom and exhaustion of citizens. In this sense, the support of sympathizers with the party is visually represented with an enormous amount of people holding flags of Spain, as if they were demonstrators, rather than rally attendees. The reference framework is clearly non-conventional policy, and the semantic associations to war, fighting, and historical battles, do nothing but to reinforce this aspect.

Therefore, Vox is not exclusively a radical right party, but a socially grounded or citizens' platform movement, in which young people are the core of it. In this sense, the discourse on Instagram uses the very code of this segment. In the sample analyzed, we have found brief clips, which lasts from 40 to 50 seconds, or carousels that combine several short videos, which is the most typical format for this population. Among the posts having the highest number of interactions, memes stand out and, in addition to the conative-appellative function inherent in politics, the expressive and poetic-aesthetic function, which emphasizes the moods, also stand out, but it is also a type of aesthetic that can clearly draw the attention of this group.

That way, the set of strategies, language, and discourse of Vox on Instagram offer us an important example of a new communicative style in current Spanish politics, which draws on elements and tools well known by analysts of closed groupthinking. However, the combination of elements that this party presents is novel, which, in spite of having democratic precedents, it is oriented against the main concepts, strategies and discourses of the democratic politics in Spain. There is where its originality lies: in bringing strategies and language from old times onto the social networks of the twenty-first century.

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