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Twitter as a tool for the communication of European Union. Comparative analysis in Germany, United Kingdom and Spain

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Abstract

Introduction: European Union institutional communication currently faces several challenges. This research will address some of the practical implications of this communication in its member states.

Objectives. To analyze how the EU Commission and Parliament aims at impacting politically through social networks. **Results.** Through a mixed qualitative and quantitative content analysis, three representative study cases will be analyzed. It will be explained how (differently) the EU representation offices in Germany, the UK and Spain use Twitter as platform to communicate, impact and engage with the EU national public opinions. **Conclusions.** The European institutions looks at redesign its communication policy fostering the use of social networks, understood as the potentially most effective tool to interact with the audiences and to engage and reduce the psychological and geographical distance with the European citizens.

Keywords

Twitter; social networks; digital communication; European institutions; citizen participation; institutional communication.

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1 Introduction and backgrounds

The following EU Parliament elections, which will be held in May 2019, offer a new milestone for assessing the efficiency of the European governmental institutional communication. In fact, this factor has lately been questioned by different academics such as Papagianneas (2017), Michailidou, Trenz & De Wilde, 2015 Barisone & Michailidou (2017) or Caiani & Guerra (2017); for whom the failure of European communication could only be reversed if the European Union substantially reforms its institutional communication and seriously meet those capital affairs which have blasted so far: the creation of a European public sphere, the identity crisis, the multilingualism, the Brexit campaign (or even the lack of it), the bottom-up communication, the own European branding or the challenge of the Euro-myths which have been recently denominated fake news – an issue about which the European Commission just launched its last statement at the end of April (European Commission: 2018).

Within a framework where academics (Michailidou, Trenz & De Wilde, 2015; Barisone & Michailidou 2017; Caiani & Guerra 2017; or Papagianneas 2017) as well as the latest consecutive Eurobarometers have revealed (since a decade at least) the incapacity of the EU to involve its own citizenship, it is the moment to analyse how the European institutions have informed the most recent events (Brexit negotiations, German electoral campaign, the end of roaming, among others) to the European population. With the aim of measuring the repercussion and the impact over the audiences after those events, it turns out unfeasible a proper analysis without using the most likely tools to succeed, the social networks. In order to relieve the increasing indexes of populism and Euroscepticism, the European institutions must find new narratives to appeal the new generations. Indeed, social networks seem to be the most effective tools at the time to interact with the youngest audiences due to their capacity to reduce the psychological and geographical barriers, which still entice them away from the political side.

Our investigation will be focused on three countries with very diverse social and economic backgrounds within the European framework, Germany, United Kingdom and Spain. Regardless of their common belonging to the EU, each of them is living nowadays a vibrant context, even though is due to much different circumstances at the political level, either by the Brexit or by the volatility of the Executive power. Nonetheless, those circumstances do not only affect to the national daily life, but also they might influence the (sometimes distant) decision-making processes carried in Brussels and the communication in the own land. Thus, it is fundamental to take into consideration the framework of each country and the unequal grade of belonging feeling which citizenship shows towards Europe in relation with the Europeanization process. This identity index is measured by the half-yearly Eurobarometers held in May and December of each exercise.

Consequently, this paper will analyse how the large European institutions with representation in the Member States (European Commission and European Parliament) expect to reformulate its

communication by prominently drawing on the social networks to politically impact preferably over the European youth. By combining both qualitative and quantitative content, three cases study will be studied, i.e., it will be displayed how the representation offices of the EU in Germany, United Kingdom and Spain use the social network Twitter as a decisive platform to inform, communicate, involve and to sway the opinions and the national public agendas of the Member States.

Therefore, there is no doubt that these days the own EU has the duty to make known its actions across different mediums, among which the online formula appears like crucial to connect the political actors with the audiences (Campos-Domínguez, 2017; López-Meri, Marcos-García y Casero-Ripollés, 2017, among others). This may be seen as one of the essential strategies of political communication of a supranational entity such as the EU (Papagiannas, 2017; or Tuñón, 2017). As well, it should be recognised the work of mass media and national governments for enhancing the ratio of those potential audiences up to which the information concerning European affairs can reach.

1.1. Institutional communication of the European Union

The latest events, also defined as European ‘poly crisis’ (Euro, refugees and Brexit could complete the podium), which came to alter the evolution of the international relationships, have revealed the failure (among other results) of the EU communication policy (Papagiannas; Tuñón, 2017). This is the reason why the institutional communication sphere at a supranational governmental level positioned itself in the European case under an inflection point, which ought to serve as a unique opportunity to renew the unitary message which is tried to issue, in the light of new features of the audiences addressed. Therefore, it is essential that EU communication policies adjust their guidelines in order to give entrance to the emergent technological methodologies and, particularly, to the social networks.

Despite the low number of studies in the field of public relations and organizational communication specially referring to the governmental information, some conceptual perspectives could successfully be applied to academic investigation. “Among them, ‘branding, reputation or the ‘symmetric communication’ may be some key and quite useful instruments” (Canel; Sanders, 2012: 93) in the search of alternatives for the current European institutional communication policies.

The abovementioned challenge could involve the implementation of the milestone’s analysis in the European communication prism with the goal of improving the comprehension of the strategical communication provided by diverse theoretical approaches (Coger, 2006). As indicated by Doris Graber (2003: 13-14), with respect to the communication of the public institutions, the study of the organizational communication lacks a theory of overreaching at the analysis level (micro and/or macro) as well as at the methodological and ideological approaches throughout which should be examined. Moreover, we do adhere to the conception suggested by Grabber (2003: 13-14) and stated by Canel and Sanders (2012: 93), who promote the benefits since multiple theoretical perspectives and a wide range of strategies of investigation within the field of the governmental communication.

Neither the institutional communication of the EU entities nor the national governmental multi-level tools in charge of the European affairs have been traditionally analysed or systematically

investigated. Indeed, the fact that the scopes of International Relations, Comparative Politics and Political Communication generally do overlap in the methodologies and the approaches has not favoured the analysis. So, our objective is to make a humble contribution to the field of political institutional communication from the supranational prism of the EU and throughout a multidisciplinary methodological approach.

1.2. Digital innovation in institutional communication

The new information and communication technologies (ICTs) have reached an extent, which either simple individuals or private corporations and public institutions have not been able to escape from, regardless their grade of performance (worldwide, regional or local). On the basis of those ICTs, it has recently been moved forward a bidirectional communication between institutions and civil society, promoting not only the dissemination of the message (unidirectional communication), but also the citizenship participation or the audience's feedback (bidirectional communication).

Particularly, social networks can be considered as online decisive tools for producing and broadcasting content between emitters and receptors (Duggan, 2015 or Sloan & Quan-Haase 2017). Although Twitter is still far from overthrowing Facebook as the most-used social network at global scale (Duggan, 2015), the own characteristics of Facebook have converted itself into the favourite site for debates and the development of political communication as well as from the social and scientific investigation in those fields (Steward, 2017; Campos-Domínguez, 2017; López-Meri, Marcos-García & Casero-Ripollés, 2017).

Nevertheless, it was not an obstacle from 2010 on to flare up the first criticism regarding the lack of political commitment by the “representatives of the network” (Campos-Domínguez, 2017). Such allegations came justified by the heterodox use of Twitter carried by the populist side, “referring to the Italian politicians” (Bracciale; Martella, 2017), “to the Latin American ones” (Waisbord; Amado, 2017), or even in these days, managed by the US president, Donald Trump. All of them have tried “to carry out personal battles and call the attention of the communication media” (Campos-Domínguez, 2017), instead of profiting the advantages of Twitter in order to reduce the gap between representatives and represented ones.

Simultaneously, the same academic investigations showed up positive results, highlighting two phenomena. The first one is the emergence of a new category of actors, kind of political voices denominated as ‘celebrities’, able to influence in the citizens’ opinions. The second one is the birth of the term ‘*viewtariat*’, concerning the “users that interpret, comment and discuss in Twitter what they see in real time, generally through television” (Anstead; O’Loughlin, 2010; Ampofo; Anstead; O’Loughlin, 2011).

In fact, the ‘commented debate’ has grown as a new room, thanks to platforms such as Twitter, where users doubly track political events, passively through television and actively across the continuous trickle of interactions with other users in the social networks by mentioning the own accounts from politicians (Bouza; Tuñón, 2018). “Twitter allows a great easiness to judge the decisive moments in the debates and political acts” (Freelon; Karpf, 2015). Once again, this feature

remarks the transformation towards a more participative receptor's culture thanks to the new technological tools.

However, the institutional communication does not follow the same guidelines within all contexts. In practice, "the use of Twitter presents an unequal introduction in countries and communities, being Spaniards and Italians, among the European nationalities, the most prolific users at the expense of Germans and Belgians" (Scherpereel; Wohlgemuth; Schmelzinger, 2016). In that sense, the current investigation will flow to finally clarify, in terms of frequencies, contents and actors, the job of Representatives Offices of Member States' EU Commission and Parliament accounts and their impact over the European citizenship.

2. Methodology and field of study

With the objectives of studying the institutional communication of the European offices in the Member States and validating the questions of the investigation, it will be followed a combined methodology comparing the three cases selected: Germany, United Kingdom (UK) and Spain:

- a) Quantitative analysis of the use of Twitter by the European Commission and the EU Parliament's accounts
- b) Quantitative and qualitative content and functions analysis of the tweets and the stakeholders involved in the communicative process.

Therefore, thanks to the observation and data recounting (data publication, number of tweets, comments, RTs, likes, followers, sources, contents and functions), it will be possible to measure the frequency and the repercussion of the work carried out by the Representative Offices. Simultaneously, these variables will also allow us to know the grade of audience's reciprocity. Moreover, the latest point is related with the analytic part of the investigation, since it will clarify the profile of the actor/receptor user of those messages, by verifying a personality either active or passive on base of the launched content.

Result of the compared approximation, it is estimated that the British Office's communication strategy can be significantly different from its counterparts, since the current social-political context of the UK, referred to the Brexit negotiations, can be considered totally different from the German or the Spanish ones. Likewise, within the logics of similarities and differentiation that reign in the whole compared research (Tuñón, 2009), Germany and Spain may seem to own the same contextual map, since both are traditionally pro-European countries with current minority governments, without absolute majority and therefore in need of other parties' parliamentary support. Therefore, other endogenous variables (engagement of national audiences with Twitter, languages restrictions and dynamics of European support) will remark the differences between the German and Spanish frameworks.

Moreover, the selection of the case-studies presumes a critical decision for the compared research. On the one hand, the *Brexit* process and the EU news fluxes invited us to choose the British representative offices as the paradox example to analyse the delicate state of the European

communicative strategy with the audiences from UK. In opposition, Germany presents itself (along with France) in the opposite side, setting the government led by Merkel up as the guarantor of the European essence and sovereignty, which must have been reflected in the communicational means of the EU Representative Offices in Germany. Likewise, the Spanish case finds its significance not only due to the emotional proximity of the authors of this investigation, but also because of the pro-European tradition surrounding the Mediterranean country, whose index however used to decrease since the economic crisis, the rescue and its constitution as a net contributor of the EU, a position where Spain could be moved out from due to the British departure (Tuñón; Carral, 2017) [1].

Graphic 1 / Count of tweets and followers of the Twitter accounts from the European Representative Offices in Germany, United Kingdom and Spain

	Tweets	Followers
EP - GE	18	4.947
EC - GE	146	4.461
EP - UK	47	10.100
EC - UK	97	13.000
EP - SP	144	37.400
EC - SP	201	154.000

Moreover, the identification of the European citizenship with the EU institutions is measured twice, throughout a half-yearly Eurobarometer whose results are published by the European Commission at the end of May and November respectively. We have, therefore, wanted to take advantage of the mentioned frequency to analyse the period of time subsequent to the publication of the European surveys, since it is presumed to be the climax of the EU actions to relieve the diminishing indexes of identification with the Europeanization process. Thus, it was decided to make a manual compilation of the tweets uploaded in the accounts of the European Commission and Parliament related to the three study cases: Germany (48 & 146), United Kingdom (47 & 97) and Spain (144 & 201), during the month immediately following the Eurobarometer of November 2017, that is between December 1 and December 31, which results in a final sample of 683 tweets.

Specifically, the sample has been manually codified by the researchers as an attempt to focus on multiple variables previously established and related to the frequencies, contents and actors. So, the analysis, predominantly quantitative, was developed through the compilation, analysis, tabulation and percentages elaboration with a Microsoft Office pack and the measuring tool Twitonomy. Furthermore, the analysis protocol of this investigation was inspired by previous works from Pfetsch, Adam y Eschner (2010) or López-Meri, Marcos-García y Casero-Ripollés, (2017), in order to create a number of variables mutually exclusive within the actors and content categories, as it is noticeable later in the results.

Graphic 2 / Results from the frequencies, contents, functions and actors for the cases of Berlin, London and Madrid EC an EP Twitter accounts.

A. STATISTICS AND FREQUENCIES						
	Comments	Retweets	Likes	Links	Images	Videos
EP - GE	35,7% (1,54)	68,75% (5,6)	60,41% (8,6)	52,08%	45,83%	2,08%
EC - GE	69,86% (35,78)	98,63% (132,05)	94,52% (190,95)	90,41%	80,13%	6,16%
EP - UK	48,93 (24,27)	97,87% (141,95)	100% (187,08)	61,70%	34,04%	17,02%
EC - UK	65,97% (25,90)	96,90% (138,70)	88,65% (201,27)	55,67%	52,57%	12,37%
EP - SP	61,11% (4,21)	100% (68,74)	96,52% (74,59)	56,94%	62,50%	15,27%
EC - SP	50,54% (7,32)	100% (63,11)	98,50% (91,78)	66,66%	76,61%	10,44%
B1. CONTENTS						
	Relation States	Relation UE/ States	Relation UE/ Citizens	Other politics	Enhance / Deepen	Identity / Belonging
EP - GE	4,16%	18,75%	25%	52,08%		
EC - GE	8,90%	28,76%	13,69%	48,63%		
EP - UK		40,42%	57,44%	2,12%		
EC - UK	1,03%	46,39%	46,39%	6,18%		
EP - SP	11,80%	13,88%	42,36%	31,94%		
EC - SP	8,45%	18,40%	38,30%	34,82%		
B2. FUNCTIONS						
	Political Agenda	EU Programme	Achievements	General Information	Others	
EP - GE	35,41%	16,66%	2,08%	25%	25%	
EC - GE	20,54%	15,75%		26,02%	31,50%	
EP - UK	48,93%		17,02%	12,76%	17,02%	
EC - UK	16,49%	13,40%	12,37%	22,68%	35,05%	
EP - SP	20,13%	17,36%	4,16%	46,52%	22,91%	
EC - SP	6,46%	15,42%	7,96%	32,83%	42,78	
C. ACTORES O FUENTES						
	Political/ Institutional	Civil Society	Academics	Press/ Reporters	Others	Own
EP - GE	93,75%	2,08%	4,16%			83,33%
EC - GE	86,98%	4,10%	0,68%	8,21%		13,69%
EP - UK	91,48%		4,25%	2,12%	2,12%	56,25%
EC - UK	94,84%	2,06%	1,03%	2,06%		51,54%
EP - SP	93,05%	2,77%	1,38%	2,77%		75,69%
EC - SP	98,50%	0,99%		0,49%		77,11%

3. Hypothesis and results

The current investigation starts from a question of main hypothesis (Hp) clearly defined to know: The Europhile or Sceptic feelings condition the European communication in the Member States regarding the frequencies, audiences, actors, contents and functions. Moreover, we split the hypothesis into different sub hypothesis according to A) frequencies, B) functions and C) actors:

- Sub-Hp A: The geographical and political distance respect to the European decision-making processes incentives the use of Twitter as a European communication tool.
- Sub-Hp A/B: Although the EU Commission uses Twitter more frequently than the EU Parliament, the reach is quite similar due to the little differentiation between the message sent by each Member State's profiles.
- Sub-Hp B: The Euro-scepticism (grown due to the Brexit) determines the European message regarding the content (no politics) and functions (consecution of goals).
- Sub-Hp C: The emission, management and distribution of the European message assume that the EU informs in one direction and towards a limited audience filled by the political or institutional elites surrounding it, and not involving other sources from any State.

3.1. Case-study: Germany

The Representative Offices of the European Parliament (EP-GE) and European Commission (EC-GE) in the German capital manage their participation in the social network Twitter through the profiles @EPinDeutschland (BER) and @EUinDE respectively, which by the time of the data collection (April 2018) had a relatively homogeneous number of followers: 5032 in the case of Parliament, and 4533, in the Commission's account. Moreover, were included the 48 tweets published by @EPinDeutschland (BER), and the 146 ones published by @EUinDE during the period of time studied (from 12/01/2017 to 12/31/2017). Indeed, we might classify this data collection by a triple criterion: A) frequencies; B) contents and functions; and C) actors or sources.

- A) Attending to the frequencies, our counterfoil (146 tweets EC-GE and 48 tweets EP-GE) reveals that: only the 35,7% of the published tweets in the EU Parliament's account involved the comments of audiences (1,54 average per tweet), being the 69,86% (35,7/tweet) in the case of the EU Commission. As well, the 68,75% (EP-GE) were RT (5,66/tweet), being 98,63% (132/tweet) in the case of EC-GE. Also, the 60,41% received 'like' (8,68/tweet) in the case of the EP-GE, a figure which reached the 94,52% (190,95/tweet) in the EC-GE. For what respects to the hypertext and visual content, the 52,08% of the sample from the Parliament contained links to different websites, corresponding the 45,83% to visual content in form of images, and only the 2,08% included a video to directly display. Those numbers were significantly superior (90,41%, 80,13% and 6,16% respectively) in the case of the EU Commission in Berlin.
- B) Regarding the content, the counterfoil of the EP-GE did contrast the "Other EU policies" as the most frequent theme (52,08%); followed by the "Relation between citizens and the EU" (25%) and the "relation between the States and the EU" (18,75%), the "relation between

Member States” (4,16%). Meanwhile, in the case of the EC-GE, it was detected “Other EU policies” as the most frequent theme (48,63%), followed by the “relation between the States and the EU” (28,76%), the “relation between citizens and the EU” (13,69%) or the “relation between the Member States (8,90%). About the functions, the EP-GE showed “political agenda” as the first one (35,41%), followed by “general information” and “others” (25% each one), “EU policies” (16,66%) and “European achievements” (2,08%). In a different way has worked the EC-GE, since the “Others” category was the more appellant function (31,50%), followed by the “General information” (26,02%), “political agenda” (20,54%) and last, “EU Programmes” (15,75%). Likewise, surrounding the linguistic question, while the 95,83% out of the EP-GE sample was written in German, the proportion was balanced in the case of EC-GE (52,73% in English and 47,26% in German).

- C) In relation to the analysis of sources and actors, the EP-GE account accredited a wide majority of own institutional content (83,33%), completely opposite data to the verified in the EC-GE (13,63%). By categories, the results underwent a homogeneous behaviour: the major part of EP-GE sources had a political institutional nature (93,75%), very little residual contribution from academics (4,16%) and from civil society or associations (2,08%). Meanwhile, an 86,98% out of the EC-GE sample had a political institutional nature, the 8,21% came from the communication media field and 4,10% were academics.

3.2. Case study: United Kingdom

The Representative Offices of the European Parliament (EP-UK) and European Commission (EC-UK) in London manage their participation in the social network Twitter through the profiles @EPinUK and @EULondonrep respectively, which by the time of the data collection (April 2018) had a relatively homogeneous number of followers: 11,300 in the case of Parliament, and 13,600, in the Commission’s account. Moreover, were included the 47 tweets published by @EPinUK and the 97 ones published by @EULondonrep during the period of time studied (from 12/01/2017 to 12/31/2017). Indeed, we might classify this data collection by a triple criterion: A) frequencies; B) contents and functions; and C) actors or sources.

- A) Attending to the frequencies, only the 48,93% of the published tweets in the EU Parliament’s account involved the comments of audiences (24,27 average per tweet), being the 65,97% (25,90/tweet) in the case of the EU Commission. As well, the 98,87% (EP-UK) were RT (141,95/tweet), being 96,90% (138,70/tweet) in the case of EC-UK. Also, the 100% out of the sample received ‘like’ (187,08/tweet) in the case of the EP-UK, a figure which reached the 88,65% (201,27/tweet) in the EC-UK. For what respects to the hypertext and visual content, the 34,04% of the sample from the Parliament contained links to different websites, corresponding the 45,83% to visual content in form of images, and only the 17,02% included a video to directly display. Those numbers were inferior in the case of the EU Commission in London (55,67%, 52,57% and 12,37% respectively).

- B) Regarding the content, the counterfoil of the EP-UK did contrast the “Relation between citizens and the EU” as the most frequent theme (57,44%); followed by the “relation between the States and the EU” (40,42%) and “other EU policies”, with a residual final representation of 2,12%. Meanwhile, in the case of the EC-UK, it was detected “relation between the States and the EU” and “Relation between citizens and the EU” as the most frequent themes (46,39%), followed far away by the “Other EU policies” (6,18%) or the “relation between the Member States (1,03%). About the functions, the EP-UK showed “political agenda” as the first one (48,93%), followed by “Achievements” and “Others” (17,02% each one) and “General Information” (12,76%). In a different way has worked the EC-UK, since the “Others” category was the more appellat function (35,05%), followed by the “General information” (22,68%), “political agenda” (16,49%), “EU Programmes” (13,40%) and lastly, “Achievements” (12,37%). Likewise, surrounding the linguistic question, the total of the tweets sent by the EP-UK and EC-UK are written in English, founding no other language variable in the whole of the database.
- C) In relation to the analysis of sources and actors, the EP-UK account accredited a wide majority of own institutional content (56,25%), a collection of data very similar to the verified in the EC-UK (51,54%). By categories, the results underwent a homogeneous behaviour: the major part of EP-GE sources had a political institutional nature (91,48%), very little residual contribution from academics (4,25%) and from civil society or associations (2,12%). Meanwhile, an 94,84% out of the EC-UK sample had a political institutional nature, the 2,06% came from the communication media field as well as from the civil society and a little 1,03% were academics.

3.3. Case study: Spain

The Representative Offices of the European Parliament (EP-SP) and European Commission (EC-SP) in Madrid manage their participation in the social network Twitter through the profiles @PE_España and @UEMadrid respectively, which by the time of the data collection (April 2018) had a number of followers as high as uneven: 38,100 in the case of Parliament, and 156,000, in the Commission’s account. Moreover, were included the 144 tweets published by @PE_España and the 201 ones published by @UEMadrid during the period of time studied (from 12/01/2017 to 12/31/2017). Indeed, we might classify this data collection by a triple criterion: A) frequencies; B) contents and functions; and C) actors or sources.

- A) Attending to the frequencies, our database reveals that only three-fifths (61,11%) of the published tweets in the EU Parliament’s account involved the comments of audiences (4,21 average per tweet), being the 50,34% (7,32/tweet) in the case of the EU Commission in Madrid. As well, the total sample of the EP-SP was RT (64,78/tweet) as well as in the case of EC-SP (63,11/tweet). Also, a high proportion out of the EP-SP’ sample (96,52%) received ‘like’ (74,59/tweet), a figure which even reached the 98,50% (91,78/tweet) in the EC-SP. For what respects to the hypertext and visual content, the 56,94% of the sample from the Parliament contained links to different websites, corresponding the 62,50% to visual content

in form of images, and 15,27% included a video to directly display. Those numbers reached the 66,66%, 76,61% and 10,44% respectively in the case of the EU Commission in Madrid.

B) Regarding the content, the counterfoil of the EP-SP did contrast the “Relation between States and the EU” and “Relation between citizens and the EU” as the most frequent themes with an equal percentage of 46,39% of tweets; followed far away by the “Other EU policies” (6,18%) and a clearly residual representation in “Relation between the Member States” (1,03%). Meanwhile, in the case of the EC-SP, it was detected “Relation between citizens and the EU” as the most frequent theme (38,30%), followed by “Other EU policies” (34,82%) or, far away, the “Relation between the States and the EU” (18,40%) and lastly, “Relation between Member States” (8,45%). About the functions, the EP-SP showed a ranking led by “General Information” (46,52%), followed by “Others” (22,91%), “Political agenda” (20,13%), “EU programmes” (17,36%), and “Achievements” (4,16%). In a different way has worked the EC-SP, since the “Others” category was the more appellat function (42,78%), followed by the “General information” (32,83%), “EU Programmes” (15,42%), “Achievements” (7,96%) and “Political agenda” (6,46%). Likewise, surrounding the linguistic question, a majority of the sample from EP-SP was written in Spanish (98,61%) and only a 1,39% in English; meanwhile it was verified a more widely linguistic dispersion in the ES-SP’ account (84,57% in Spanish, 14,42% in English and 0,99% in Portuguese).

C) In relation to the analysis of sources and actors, the EP-SP account accredited a 75,69% of the content as own-written, a figure very similar to the verified one in the EC-SP (77,11%). By categories, the results underwent a homogeneous behaviour: the major part of EP-SP sources had a political institutional nature (94,84%), very little residual contribution from civil society (2,06%), media communication (2,06%) and academics (1,03%). Meanwhile, a 98,50% out of the EC-SP’ sample had a political institutional nature, the 0,99% came from the civil society and only a 0,49% from the communication media field.

4. Discussion and conclusion

Reached this point, it is expected to start the discussion of results focusing on our research question or main hypothesis (Hp): the Europhile or Sceptic feelings condition the European communication in the Member States regarding the frequencies, audiences, actors, contents and functions; as well as on the three dimensions essentially analysed in this work (frequencies, contents and functions; and actors) and interlacing the sub hypothesis of the investigation determined in the previous point.

4.1. Frequencies

We raised as sub hypothesis: The geographical and political distance respect to the European decision-making processes incentives the use of Twitter as a European communication tool.

Regarding the database explained in the previous section, we should consider that our combined quantitative-qualitative analysis completely validates the above-mentioned hypothesis. Concretely,

the same size of the sample for an identical period of time as well as the quantity of followers shows that, firstly, the geographical distance (Spain) and later, the political one (United Kingdom) positively condition the mobilization and the use of the social network (Twitter) in the EU. It ought to be carried out a deeper analysis of the revealed data regarding the frequencies of interactions (comments, RT and likes), as it is presumed that they would also validate the hypothesis in the cases of United Kingdom and Spain, in contrast to the case of Germany. Here is revealed a heterogeneity between the Parliament (few interactions) and the Commission (high interactions), probably derived by the contradictory management model of the German profiles (a wide majority of own content in the Parliament's account and a wide minority in the Commission's account).

4.2. Frequencies and contents

We raised as sub hypothesis: Although the EU Commission uses Twitter more frequent than the EU Parliament, the reach is quite similar due to the little differentiation between the message sent by each Member State's profiles.

Regarding the database related to the frequencies and contents and functions, we can also validate the mixed hypothesis. On the one hand, it has been verified some indexes measuring the use frequency (sample, followers and interactions) clearly superior in the EU Commission's profiles of the three cases than in the EU Parliament's accounts. On the other hand, respect to the content analysis of the tweets, it has been contrasted an evident coincidence between categories in the case of both communitarian institutions in each Member State. Therefore, from the combination of both results, we conclude that, although it has been verified a superior use frequency for the EU Commission in Berlin, London and Madrid, the impact of the Office's accounts in Twitter does not differ considerably due to the theme homogeneity of the contents published by the Offices of the States Members, either the EU Commission or the EU Parliament.

4.3. Contents & Functions

We raised as sub hypothesis: The Euro-scepticism (grown due to the Brexit) determines the European message regarding the content (no politics) and functions (consecution of goals).

According to the partial results derived from the contents and functions' database, the discrepancies with the Europeanization processes or the development of the Euroscepticism, (particularly for the British assumption) have been revealed as decisive with respect to the themes or functions and it was verified in a more variegated way in relation to the functions derived from the messages published in Twitter. On the one hand, it was confirmed an exclusive theme concentration about the relation between the EU and the States as well as with the citizens and a lack of attention to the EU policies in both accounts belonging to the Representatives Offices of London. Those results contrast with the ones raised in the cases of Berlin and Madrid, which verified a more widespread thematic and, concretely, a larger focus on the EU policies. On the other hand, and within a framework of much more heterogeneous results, it can be also noted the inter-state difference with regards to the achievements category at the functions level. Particularly, it seems to be necessary for the British institutional profiles to report the achievements because of the Brexit alert and of the Euroscepticism

climate. This phenomenon derives from the negative impact of UK's decision to leave the EU as well as the interest of the EU delegations to counteract any kind of misinformation and fake news by registering all the goals conquered. In contrast, Berlin attributes its lack of insistence in the register of the EU objectives due to the hard faith in the European process, a variable also shared by the Spanish entities, and to the geographical and political proximity to the European decision-making processes.

4.4. Actors or sources

We raised as sub hypothesis: The emission, management and distribution of the European message assume that the EU informs in one direction and towards a limited audience filled by the political or institutional elites surrounding it, and not involving other sources from any State.

Reasserting what the experts have said (Papagiannas, 2017 or Tuñón, 2017), it was pointed out the lack of feedback for the European message and the priority established to disseminate this message within the European borders, and concretely, just surrounding the institutional and political elites of those countries. It was expected, thus, to clarify if this similar situation continued to happen in the digital communication strategies too. Effectively, if we choose the disaggregated data from the chart related to the actors and sources, it is noted that this hypothesis can be completely verified, since the participation proportion of any actor except from the institutional politicians is practically inexistent. Indeed, neither civil society, associations nor any journalist, communication media outlet, nor academics have had a remarkable involvement in the production, management, dissemination or interaction of the information published via Twitter and targeted to the national audiences of the three (Germany, United Kingdom and Spain). Therefore, it is confirmed one of the most severe and traditional lack of the European work, including nowadays the scope of the social networks: the European message sent by the institutions is unidirectional and does not represent neither in the production nor the reception the wide range of actors conforming the European society.

[2]



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5 Notes

[1] In the case of two out of the three cases studied (Germany and Spain), where they count with two European Representative Offices in their territories, it has been chosen to work with the seat located in the capital of each State (Berlin and Madrid) at the expense of Munich and Barcelona. Furthermore, in the last case, the dual language system of Spanish and Catalan could bias comparatively the results).

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