Analysis of communication and interactivity strategies in social networks. The case of Málaga's candidacy for the 2027 Universal Exhibition

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: The objective of this work is to analyze the communication strategy applied by Málaga's candidacy for the 2027 Universal Exhibition on social networks. The activity, topics, formats and ability to generate interaction with users are examined against the other candidates: Belgrade (Serbia), Minnesota (United States), Phuket (Thailand) and San Carlos de Bariloche (Argentina). **Methodology**: Content analysis of the candidacy's official accounts is used. In total, 1,945 publications from the period between 2020 and 2023 are analyzed on the official Málaga 2027 profiles on Twitter/X, Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram. **Results**: It is observed that the candidacy used social networks with a top-down approach in which spontaneous content generated by users had almost no place. However, followers played an important role with the actions of positively evaluating the publications (especially on Instagram), and more specifically the videos; as well as share and comment through Twitter/X followed by Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn. **Discussion**: The promotion on social networks was done in a similar way to how large tourist destinations do it to attract their travelers, although there were factors outside of communication that could influence the result of the candidacy. **Conclusions**: The behavior of the audience was adapted to the characteristics of each social network, while the candidate analyzed used their official accounts as information channels rather than as

means of interaction, missing greater innovation and taking advantage of the possibilities of active listening and response offered by social networks.

Keywords: social networks; strategic communication; digital marketing; Universal Expo 2027; content analysis; interactivity; stake.

1. INTRODUCTION

The development of social networks has completely changed the way we communicate (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Cheng & Wang, 2021), thanks to its great ability to generate dialogue and facilitate interaction (Lim et al. 2012). Therefore, these media have become one of the best public relations tools, especially in those organizations that understand communication as a two-way element with the publics (Fernández-Cavia & Huertas, 2014).

A good use of social networks allows organizations to dialogue with their audiences and pave the way for future relationships (Mariné-Roig & Huertas, 2016). In the case of cities and territories, it contributes to strengthening the brand (Domínguez & Araújo, 2012; Millán, 2024), which is currently understood as a powerful element of communication (Fernández-Cavia, 2011). Not surprisingly, cities with a strong brand find it easier to attract investment and new residents (Morgan et al., 2011).

Although territories are not products, many authors have already pointed out that branding can be applied to cities, municipalities and, of course, to the events organized by them (Fernández-Cavia & Huertas, 2009; De San Eugenio, 2011; Pastor-Marín & Paniagua, 2020); that is why it is so important to pay attention to the positive effects that social networks can generate in the relationships between users, territories and brands (Laroche et al., 2013).

To this end, the social network management must be committed to dialogue, because if they are used only as a bulletin board, it is difficult for interaction to take place (Míguez et al., 2014; Arguiñano, 2020). Only a proper use of social networks as a way of interaction will benefit the marketing of cities (Zhou & Wang, 2014), which offers numerous opportunities, but also a challenge (Pastor-Marín & Paniagua-Rojano, 2020).

Thus, more and more organizations are prioritizing their communication through social networks, which has led to important changes in the structure of their communication departments (Wichels, 2014). In fact, social networks are, by far, the most important channel that communication directors have to address and dialogue with their users (Zerfass et al., 2017; Martínez-Sala & Campillo-Alhama, 2021).

In any case, the European Communication Monitor, in its 2017 edition, has already shown that more than 89% of communication directors consider that social networks force professionals to acquire new skills, and more than half of them assured that they had also modified their structures and processes. Similarly, the relevance of social networks was reflected in the fact that more than 90% of the professionals interviewed stressed that these tools are the most important communication channels, ahead of websites, online newspapers, events, radio and television stations or traditional newspapers (Zerfass et al., 2017).

So far, all studies (Bigné et al., 2009; Pastor et al., 2022) have reflected a clear preponderance of the communication of tangible elements over emotional values in the use of social networks; and despite the fact that for years communication strategies have been focused on emotion and experiences rather than promotion or information (De San Eugenio, 2011).

At the same time, social networks have become one of the preferred communication tools for digital marketing. Its communicative potential lies not only in its immediacy and the possibility of sending mass and direct messages, but also in its ability to expand the possibilities of dissemination thanks to the participation

and interaction of its followers when they share, comment or assess the published messages (Gelpi Texeira, 2017; López Fernández, 2022).

The use of social networks for marketing and communication campaigns by institutions and companies has enough studies to support its effectiveness and the generalization of its use for this purpose. There are also previous studies on specific cases of use of these media not only in promotional or commercial campaigns of brands (Alonso González, 2015; Ortiz Ortega, 2023; Amich Biurrun, 2023) or tourist destinations (Mariani et al*.,* 2018; Martínez Sala & Campillo Alhama, 2018; Pastor-Marín *et al*., 2021), but also in electoral campaigns or in the mobilization of citizens for political purposes (Chaves-Montero et al., 2017; Vire Riascos, 2019; Ballesteros-Herencia, 2022).

The case study of a specific communication campaign through social networks allows to know in depth the processes, strategies, results and effectiveness of communication (López & Cabrera, 2014; Lago et al., 2016; Carral & -Navarro, 2020; Campillo-Alhama et al., 2024).

The content analysis of the posts and the interactivity in the social networks extend the knowledge about the effectiveness of the communication strategies applied and their greater or lesser influence on the final results of the promotional campaign.

This justifies our interest in the combination of these two research methods, consisting of the specific case study of Málaga's candidacy for the 2027 Universal Exhibition, against four other cities: Belgrade (Serbia), Minnesota (United States), Phuket (Thailand) and San Carlos de Bariloche (Argentina); and the analysis of the content and interactivity of its official accounts on Twitter (merged with the new company X Corp. since April 2023, so from now on we will refer to it as Twitter/X), Instagram, Facebook and LinkedIn.

The starting hypothesis of the research suggests that, regardless of the final result of the five candidacies, the analysis of the content published during the process and route of the Málaga's campaign until the verdict can provide relevant data that - added and / or compared to those of other experiences - contribute to expand and consolidate the corpus of knowledge necessary to make an increasingly effective use of social networks for promotional purposes.

2. OBJECTIVES

This study aims to know the specific use of social networks by the Málaga's Candidacy for 2027 Exhibition, through the analysis of its communication strategies, the content posted and the interactions observed in its profiles or official accounts.

3. METHODOLOGY

The triangulation of methods is used to obtain qualitative and quantitative data on the candidacy object of analysis. The documentation and bibliographic review of the literature on the subject allows to know the studies and methods previously carried out with similar purposes to this research. The case study of the Málaga's candidacy for the 2027 Universal Exhibition provides a detailed and in-depth analysis of the object of study in its real context (Yin, 2018). This method has already been used effectively in the field of communication for case studies on fake news becoming viral, the impact of digital marketing strategies on brand perception, or the analysis of social awareness campaigns through social networks. Authors such as Michael Quinn Patton & Kathleen M. Eisenhardt, in addition to Robert K. Yin, have developed key concepts and methodological approaches for case studies in communication. Patton (2002) develops the idea of "intentional use" of the case study, focusing on how research findings can be used for practical decision-making, and Eisenhardt (2021) provides theory-based case study approaches for case construction and analysis.

Finally, metrics-based content analysis (on user engagement, post reach, content interaction, etc.) and qualitative analysis (on brand tone and voice assessment, audience perception, and emotional impact of content) are used to explore social networks communication strategies.

Thus, we try to answer the main objective of the research: to shed light on the communication strategy implemented by the Málaga's candidacy during its race towards the achievement of this international event, while presenting the communication case from a descriptive point of view, relating aspects discussed throughout the theoretical framework on good practices in communication management.

The research was developed in the following phases:

1. Bibliographical documentation of the case study;
2. Monitoring and direct observation of the candidacy's accounts in the chosen social networks;
3. Design of the content analysis sheet;
4. Data collection through the analysis sheet about the published texts and videos, as well as their reach and interactions;
5. Management of the collected database to compare the analyzed accounts, the final interpretation and the result conclusion.

3.1. The case of the Málaga's candidacy 2027

In May 2019, the Mayor of Málaga, Francisco de la Torre, announced his intention to organize a Universal Exhibition in Málaga to coincide with his electoral campaign. In 2020, the Secretary of the International Bureau of Exhibitions (BIE) visited the city. In 2021, the President of the Junta de Andalucía, Juan Manuel Moreno, and later the President of the Central Government, Pedro Sánchez, expressed their support for Málaga's candidacy. In January 2022, the candidacy for Universal Exhibition 2027 was officially presented under the slogan "The urban era: towards the sustainable city", with the conviction that Málaga's tourist, cultural and technological attractions would make it the third Spanish city to host an Expo in the last 35 years, after Seville in 1992 and Zaragoza in 2008. In October 2022, the BIE recognized the viability of the 5 candidacies that would compete to be chosen as the final destination for the Exhibition. In November of the same year, they all passed a further suitability test before the final vote in June 2023.

In March 2021, the Málaga's candidacy created the official profiles for Málaga 2027 on Twitter/X, Instagram and Facebook. The LinkedIn account was created a few months later, in October 2022. The description of the accounts reads: "Project of the City of Málaga to host a Universal Exhibition to be held in 2027". This project and its activity on social networks came to an end on June 21st, 2023, when the final result of all the candidacies presented was announced. On that day, the 4 accounts mentioned above said goodbye to their followers, thanking them for sharing the content generated during their two years and seven months of activity and for helping to spread the word about Málaga's candidacy for Expo 2027. A previous publication thanked the city, the Provincial Council, the Government of Andalusia and the Ministry, as well as companies, associations and entities for their support.

5 candidates from all over the world took part in the selection process to host Expo 2027: Belgrade (Serbia), Málaga (Spain), Minnesota (United States), Phuket (Thailand) and San Carlos de Bariloche (Argentina). Málaga, Minnesota and Phuket were considered the favorites; however, the results of the final vote came as a surprise with the definitive choice of Belgrade's candidacy (81 votes) to host the event, followed by Málaga (70 votes) and 3 abstentions.

Málaga came very close to winning the candidacy but lost the final race by just 11 votes. Voting was conducted in 4 rounds as follows.

First: Belgrade 54 votes, Málaga 42 votes, Minnesota 19 votes, Phuket 16 votes, San Carlos de Bariloche 8 votes and 1 abstention.

Second: Belgrade 69 votes, Málaga 48 votes, Minnesota 21 votes, Phuket 15 votes and 1 abstention. Third: Belgrade 74 votes, Málaga 53 votes, Minnesota 23 votes and 2 abstentions. Fourth and final: Belgrade 81 votes, Málaga 70 votes and 3 abstentions.

In the search for reasons to explain the results obtained by the city of Málaga, the media, as soon as the result was known, echoed the warning of the International Bureau of Exhibitions (BIE), during its visit to Málaga in 2022, that "political interests or strategic alliances of countries come into play". This warning, together with the lack of sufficient institutional support from the Government (Recio, 2023), is added to 3 other reasons pointed out by the media that have tried to explain the results (Marinetto, 2023):

1. The belief that Málaga could be able to win the Hispanic destination vote once San Carlos de Bariloche was eliminated as a candidate, however, the 8 votes that Argentina had initially received were distributed and only 6 went to Málaga.
2. The lack of support for Málaga's candidacy after the elimination of Phuket and the United States, although it could count on the Hispanic presence in the United States and had won a large part of the votes of the delegates who had chosen Minnesota, but not enough to beat Belgrade.
3. Serbia's surprise by stepping up in the last few weeks through intensified last-minute diplomatic contacts and meetings with several voting delegates. In addition, Serbia is a member of the Non-Aligned Movement, an international organization established during the Cold War and comprising 120 countries, many of which are represented in the BIE, which could have supported its candidacy.

These results and interpretations of the final votes for the selection of the winning venue frame or contextualize our object of study, since they help to understand the extent to which factors other than communication and the use of social networks to post and promote the Málaga's candidacy 2027 influenced the result.

Based on these premises and contexts, the research focuses on the study of the role that social networks have played in the promotion of Málaga's candidacy for Expo 2027, through their analysis, in order to extend the knowledge and experience of their use in communication campaigns.

3.2. Content analysis

The content analysis method has been used and the subsequent interpretation of the results obtained has been carried out by using a proprietary observation and data collection tool that corresponds to the objectives of the work and that has tried to replace other automated tools for the integrated management of social networks, such as Fanpage Karma. Although this commercial tool has been used in previous studies and posts by the authors, it has been discarded on this occasion for reasons of reliability and the search for not only quantitative but also qualitative data, which can only be obtained by directly observing each of the profiles and posts that make up the research sample.

The analysis sheet designed by the authors for the observation of each of the selected accounts made it possible to collect more complete quantitative data than those obtained through Fanpage Karma, specifically on the number of followers, posts and videos, interactions, views, likes, comments and content shared on each of the social networks analyzed. It also sought to collect qualitative data derived from the direct observation of the accounts and related to the post format (text, image, video), the content and genre of the post (news, interview, support for the candidacy, event, promotion or presentation of the candidacy), the tone and subjects of the message, its link or role within the candidacy and the language in which the content

is posted.

This content analysis method has been chosen in order to understand and evaluate the specific use of social networks by the official profiles of Málaga's Expo 2027. The comprehensive analysis of the posts of each of the selected accounts has allowed us to obtain an in-depth knowledge of the activity of the profiles that goes beyond that of automated measurement tools, thanks to the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data.

3.3. Sample

Although Málaga 2027 created profiles on five different channels (Twitter/X, LinkedIn, Instagram, Facebook and YouTube), it was decided to exclude the YouTube channel from the analysis, as it has its own characteristics that distinguish it from the other four, which are properly considered social networks and therefore fit the type of media on which our research focuses. In order to determine the reasons for inclusion or exclusion from the sample, following the model of Wijaya (2024), the activity of Málaga 2027 on YouTube was observed and analyzed in parallel, and it was found that the total number of posts on this channel represented 3.5% of the total content posted on all the accounts created by the candidacy. In addition, 83 videos were followed on the YouTube account, of which 16 were promotional or presentation videos, 6 were event videos, 18 were interview videos and 42 were videos in support of the candidacy. All videos and content published on YouTube were 100% consistent with those posted on the other analyzed accounts. Therefore, the exclusion of YouTube from the final sample meets the criteria of relevance to the type of channel analyzed, the relevance of the activity carried out and the originality or novelty of the content.

Figure 1. *Publication of content in each of the channels.*
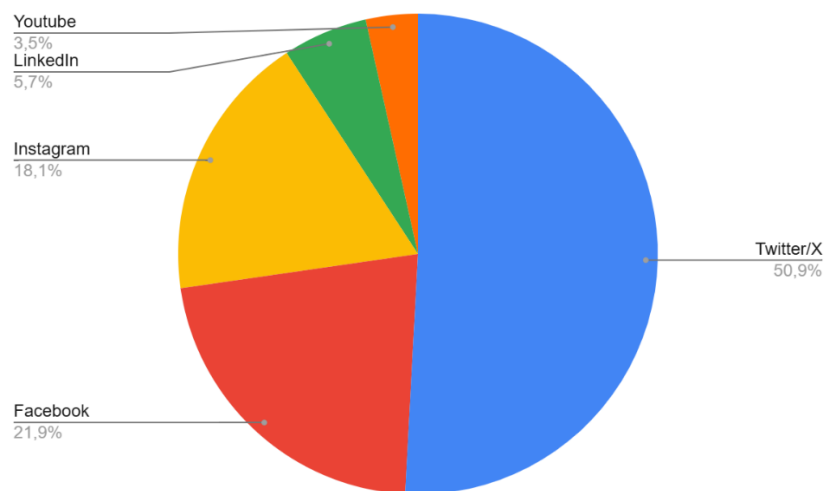
Source: Own elaboration.

Therefore, this study has analyzed the other four social networks with official accounts for the Málaga's candidacy 2027: Twitter/X, Instagram, LinkedIn and Facebook. The starting date of the analysis coincides with the start of their activity, on March 10th, 2021, and varies only in the case of LinkedIn, which was created on October 29th, 2022. The analysis ends on June 21st, 2023, the date of the candidacy's last vote.

Table 1. *Post number analyzed in each social networks.*

Social networks	Post numbers
Twitter/X	873 (since March 2021)
Facebook	513 (since March 2021)
Instagram	424 (since March 2021)
LinkedIn	135 (since October 2022)
TOTAL	**1.945**

Source: Own elaboration.

Once the posts in each of the selected social networks were counted, the final sample of the analysis would amount to 2,820 posts; however, due to access restrictions to all Twitter posts, only 873 of the 1,189 posts counted from this social network could be analyzed. The 1,945 posts in the final sample come from the sum of the posts accessible at the time of the analysis of the profiles of Twitter/X, Instagram, Facebook and LinkedIn, during the period between March 2020 and June 21st, 2023. The exact post count for each social network is 873 for Twitter, 513 for Facebook, 424 for Instagram, and 135 for LinkedIn.

Table 2. *Sample description.*

Content type	Source	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria	Sample (number of posts and date)
Post	Twitter/X	The content published is related to the Málaga's candidacy 2027. The activity and number of posts are relevant.	At the time of analysis, content published prior to 10/03/2021 is not accessible.	873 posts out of 1,189 (as of 10/03/2021)
Post	Instagram	The content published is related to the Málaga's candidacy 2027.	The content published is not related to the Málaga's candidacy 2027.	824 posts (as of 10/03/2021)
Post	Facebook	The content published is related to the Málaga's candidacy 2027.	The content published is not related to the Málaga's candidacy 2027.	513 (as of 10/03/2021)
Post	LinkedIn	The content published is related to the Málaga's candidacy 2027.	The content published is not related to the Málaga's candidacy 2027.	135 (as of 29/10/2022)
Video	YouTube	The content published is related to the Málaga's candidacy 2027.	The content posted is consistent with videos posted on the other four social networks. The activity level is not representative. Not a social network	83 (as of 10/03/2021)

Source: Own elaboration.

4. RESULTS

The simple observation of the four accounts of the Málaga 2027 profiles on social networks, managed by the Communication Office of Málaga City Council, has allowed us to verify the unity and homogeneity of the messages transmitted, as well as the simultaneity in time of the posting of their contents.

Below, other relevant results related to each of the variables analyzed are presented, specifically: the activity registered in the social networks (encoded through the analysis of the number of posts, type of content and topics posted), the audience follow-up (from the metrics of the number of followers and users followed), the reproduction of content from other sources, the interactions and participation (from the likes, comments and shared posts counted) and the final reach achieved with the posts (with the sum of followers, views or reproductions of promotional videos and shared content).

4.1. Activity and contents

The official profiles on the different social networks were active from the time of their creation between September 2020 (Twitter), March 2021 (Instagram and Facebook) and October 2022 (LinkedIn) until June 21st, 2023, when the results of the final vote were announced and the candidacy was closed.

In terms of number of posts, Twitter/X recorded a total of 1,189, compared to 513 for Facebook, 424 for Instagram and 135 for LinkedIn, for a total of 2,261 posts published from the starting date of the different accounts. Only 1,945 were available at the time of analysis, so this was the final number of analyzed contents.

Of the total number of posts, 1,745 were developed by the Communication Office of Málaga City Council. Only half a hundred reproductions of posts from other accounts were counted in each of the profiles analyzed. These content reproductions developed by others represent 1% of the total content posted. Although these contents were numerically a minority, we found it interesting to identify the origin of the accounts to which they belonged in order to better understand the candidacy's communication strategies.

In this sense, it was found that 30% of the content reproduced in the Málaga 2027 account came from the official profile of Málaga City Council (15 in total) and another 30% came from the BIE. The remaining 40% of the reproductions of messages were identified as comments made by authorities or relevant people linked to the city (such as the Mayor of Málaga, Francisco de la Torre, the President of the Junta de Andalucía, Juan Manuel Moreno, or the famous Málaga actor Antonio Banderas), or by other official bodies such as the Málaga County Council or the Andalucía Board, private companies (such as GVA), Málaga associations (such as the Association of Young Entrepreneurs) or municipal media (such as Canal Málaga TV). These reproductions were increased in the dates close to the final vote.

On the other hand, during the first months after the candidacy presentation, the activity of all the social networks of Málaga 2027 was focused on the publication of short videos showing the support of the candidacy by business persons, professionals and relevant people of the city with activities in different sectors. These videos, as well as others with different content, registered a higher number of likes, reproductions and comments when compared to other types of posts where text or photographs predominated.

The results of the content analysis show that all the messages posted and analyzed in the 4 social networks were focused on the candidacy itself. The type of content posted can be classified into specific information about the moment the candidacy was launched, the promotion of outstanding aspects of the city, or the data preview and details about the project (such as the location of the headquarters, collaborations and commitments manifested by the business fabric, institutional support, etc.).

In terms of periodicity, an attempt was made to post at least once a day, as shown by the average number of total posts per day of activity of the accounts. From a qualitative point of view, the results of the content analysis showed that the posts analyzed repeated or republished promotional content (such as promotional videos or the presentation of the candidacy) rather than informative content. From a strategic point of view, the repetition of promotional content may have favored the production work, reinforced the brand image and increased the periodicity of the posts, to the detriment of their originality, novelty or creativity.

4.2. Follow-up

The results regarding the number of followers show that LinkedIn was the social network that reached the highest number of followers (7,201), followed by Facebook (3,666), Twitter (2,252) and Instagram (2,331). Therefore, the network considered the most professional of all analyzed (LinkedIn) is the one that managed to attract 22% more interest in the candidacy than the next network with the most followers (Facebook). It is surprising that the second most influential network was Facebook, despite the fact that its growth has slowed

down in recent years which is associated with an older audience than the regular users of, for example, Instagram. These results lead us to believe that the candidacy has been of more interest to the professional, business and adult spheres than to the youth and the general population.

Figure 2. *Percentage of followers in each of the social networks analyzed.*
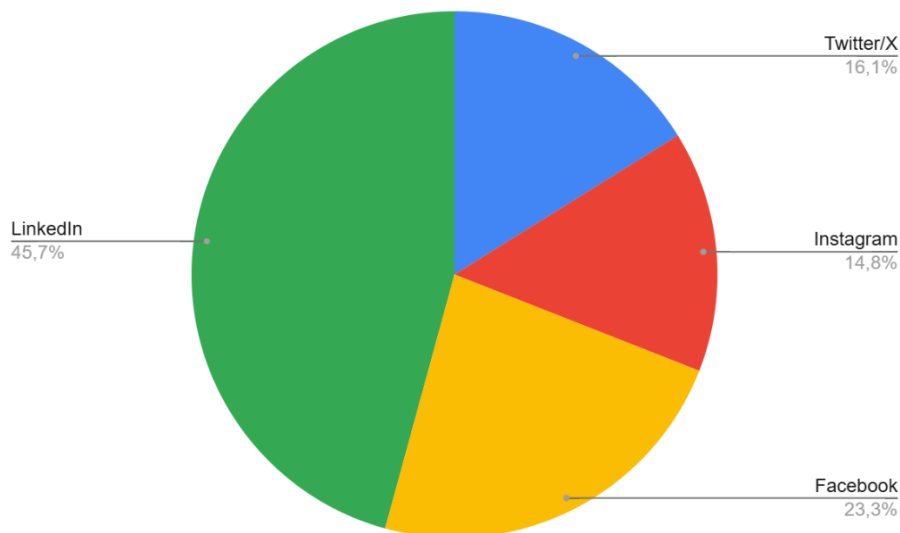
Source: Own elaboration.

The total number of followers reached by the four social networks analyzed is 15,729. If we add to this the number of times each post was shared (6,512), the scope is even greater, reaching at least 22,241 views. If we add to this the views or reproductions of the videos recorded on Facebook (2,798) and Instagram (13,040), the final reach is 38,079 views in total.

Table 3. Follow-up of the official accounts of Málaga 2027.

Social networks	Followers	Follow-up
Twitter/X	2.542	1.171
Instagram	2.331	316
Facebook	3.666	29
LinkedIn	7.201	-
TOTAL	15.740	1.516

Source: Own elaboration.

These results suggest that followers themselves can double the reach of the accounts they follow by sharing the posts they find interesting with their contacts.

4.3. Interactions and participation

The interaction analysis allows us to check which of the analyzed social networks has aroused the greatest interest on the part of users when they like, comment or share the content.

The results of the analysis show that the social network with the highest total number of interactions was Instagram (with 40,133 likes and 334 comments), but the one that adds the highest number of interactions in general was Twitter (with a total of 21,272 from 15. 027 likes, 1,326 comments and 4,919 shares), followed by

LinkedIn (with 12,610 likes, 190 comments and 1,020 shares for a total of 13,820) and Facebook (with 3,403 likes, 108 comments and 573 shares for a total of 4,084 interactions).

The most popular action was to rate Instagram posts with likes (40,133), followed by the 15,027 likes on Twitter/X posts and the 12,610 likes on LinkedIn.

The second most popular action was sharing (4,919 in the case of Twitter) and lastly commenting, an action in which Twitter/X also achieved the highest user participation (1,326).

In general, compared to the other social networks, Facebook was the social network with the fewest interactions.

Table 4. *Interactions and participation*.

Social networks	Comments	Likes	Shares	TOTAL
Twitter/X	1.306	15.027	4.919	21.272
Instagram	334	40.133	-	40.467
Facebook	108	3.474	573	4.155
LinkedIn	190	12.610	1.020	13.820
TOTAL	1.958	71.244	6.512	79.714

Source: Own elaboration.

4.4. Use of video and other effective formats

Of all the posts analyzed, the ones that received the highest audience participation were those that included video. In the case of the 126 videos published only on Instagram, they received a total of 5,385 likes, 142 comments and 179 shares.

Concerning all the videos, the one that received the most likes (169) was in English, so even though it was a minority, the content posted in English attracted the attention of more users than the content posted in Spanish. The videos posted on Instagram alone reached a total of 13,040 views, while the 74 Facebook videos reached 2,798 views.

The videos posting makes it possible to analyze and count the number of views or reproductions, and thus their effectiveness and acceptance by the audience. The results of our analysis suggest the desirability of posting these videos in English, given the international nature of the Universal Exhibition candidacy.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The research has achieved the objective of knowing the specific use of social networks by the Málaga's candidacy for Exhibition 2027 through the analysis of its communication strategies, the contents posted, and the interactions observed in its profiles or official accounts.

In the specific case of Málaga's candidacy for the 2027 Universal Exhibition, social networks have become an important tool for the dissemination and promotion of the city, thus contributing to the enhancement of its brand image (Domínguez & Araújo, 2012; Millán, 2024), creating a dialogue with the public and facilitating audience interaction (Lim et al., 2012). Likewise, the social network accounts analyzed have managed to reinforce the image of the city by focusing on its goodness and strengths as a candidacy for 2027 Exhibition, which, according to Morgan et al. (2011), could be a source of investment and new inhabitants. The study of the activity carried out in its social networks profiles has allowed us to know to what extent its communication

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through social networks was decisive or not in obtaining second place in the final vote.

The aim of this study was to learn about the specific use of social networks by Málaga's candidacy for the 2027 Exhibition through the analysis of its communication strategies. In this regard, it should be noted that the promotion of the candidacy on social networks was carried out in a manner like that used by major tourist destinations to attract potential travelers. Thus, as Pastor & Paniagua (2020) pointed out in their study on the use of Facebook by major urban tourist destinations, the City of Málaga gave priority to the promotion of tangible values.

The bibliographic and hemerographic review of the case study shows that there were factors other than communication that could have influenced the result of the candidacy, such as alliances between countries and diplomatic support. In this regard, the fact that the city was ranked second, even though it did not win first place, was relevant and positive for the city. As highlighted by its ambassadors, the result shows that the city was a good candidate against the other competitors (Fuentes, 2022). Therefore, the reasons for the result are not directly related to the role played by social networks, since, according to experts and analysts such as Marinetto (2023) & Recio (2023), getting the votes in favor of the candidacy depended more on alliances between countries than on the image or promotion that could be made through social networks.

However, the option of accompanying the candidacy with the creation of official accounts in the social networks analyzed, as a means and source of information on the milestones related to the candidacy, has contributed to the interest and involvement of citizens, other entities and institutions in the candidacy, and that -in some way- they felt they were supporting the initiative with the monitoring and interaction of their accounts.

The profiles analyzed were able to create a virtual community around the candidacy with a number of 15,740 followers. In addition, they became a source of direct information on all events related to the project, which could also stimulate interest and facilitate the work of other media professionals, using the official accounts of Málaga 2027 as a source of information.

Each of the social networks analyzed proved to have its own characteristics and, as such, the behavior of its communities proved to be different. For example, according to the results, Instagram could be defined as the social network where the most positive evaluations are obtained, given the high number of likes obtained. Meanwhile, Twitter/X is the social network where posted content is shared the most, and LinkedIn is the one where the largest number of followers has been reached.

Therefore, for future communication campaigns through social networks, the results of this study suggest a controlled use of each of them, depending on the results to be achieved: number of followers (LinkedIn), positive ratings (Instagram) or impact through shared content (Twitter/X).

On the other hand, this research aimed to analyze the interactions observed in the official profiles or accounts of the candidacy. Thus, it is concluded that, in line with what was established in 2016 by Mariani et al. (2018), the Málaga candidacy used social networks with a top-down approach, where spontaneous content generated by users had almost no place. The participation of the public was limited to the assessment of official posts through likes or the introduction of comments, overlooking the fact that the official accounts reposted content generated directly by the audience itself, which would have contributed to a greater engagement and connection with the digital society of the 21st century, where the audience not only consumes information but also produces it (Cabrera, 2012) and where network technologies have reorganized the way information flows and how people interact with it and with each other (Boyd, 2010).

In any case, it can be concluded that social networks played a very relevant role as a marketing tool, although not too innovative, as Hays et al. already pointed out in 2013 that this would be the best way to differentiate from the competition. Málaga's candidacy did not come first for reasons unrelated to its promotion on social networks, and the fact that it came second has more to do with diplomatic issues than with communication. However, the communication campaign carried out via social networks proved to be an opportunity to promote the city and its potential beyond the local and national level.

The presence in 4 different social networks has served to expand the possibilities of reaching new and diverse followers, from the closest to the most distant, from the most specialized or professional to the most popular, or from the youngest to the most adult, since each network has its own characteristics and audiences. All in all, the largest number of followers reached by the Málaga's candidacy comes from the local, professional and adult sphere, rather than from young people or the public, as can be deduced from the behavior of the audiences in each of the social networks analyzed.

Among the results of the analysis of interactions, the large number of positive assessments shown by the community through the Likes accumulated in all the social networks stand out above the content shared or the comments made by the followers. Instagram is positioned as the social network with the highest number of Likes, even though it was the one with the fewest followers of the 4 social networks analyzed.

Regarding what could have been done and, according to our analysis, has not been done yet, we can say that the low use of English, the second most spoken language in social networks, and the lack of a global or universal vision of the campaign to promote the candidacy is surprising. We believe that a greater use of English in the posts of the social networks would have made it possible to achieve a greater communicative and promotional impact, since it would have aroused the interest of a greater number of foreign followers and, above all, of the International Candidacy Evaluation Committee (BIE) itself.

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