

The think tanks in Spain. Analysis of their digital communication strategies

Los *think tanks* en España. Análisis de sus estrategias de comunicación digitales

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: This work focus on the study of how spanish think tanks use digital media to spread their activity and transmit their ideas. **Methodology:** Through content analysis, we analyze what types of communication tools are used in the digital spaces that are officially implemented (web sites and social media), as well as the use of these tools as unidirectional or bidirectional channels. **Results:** It shows that the unidirectional focus on dissemination of these organizations identities, closely linked to educative activities. Among the bidirectional, social media become relevant, and are used to generate engagement with its stakeholders. **Discussion and Conclusions:** Think tanks use digital communication as a strategy to disseminate their activities. This fact enhances the prospective of advocacy and a pretension to participate in the topics of public discussion with proposals on its framings (Bürger, 2015, Misztal, 2012).

KEYWORDS: think tanks; institutional relations; advocacy tanks; strategic communication; digital communication.

RESUMEN

Introducción: Esta investigación se ocupa de estudiar cómo los *think tanks* españoles utilizan el medio digital para difundir su actividad y transmitir sus ideas. **Metodología:** A través del análisis de contenido, se analiza qué tipos de herramientas de comunicación emplean en los espacios digitales que implementan de manera oficial (webs y medios sociales), así como la utilización de estas como

canales unidireccionales o bidireccionales. **Resultados:** Se muestra que los unidireccionales se centran en la difusión de la identidad de estas organizaciones, muy vinculada a las actividades formativas. Entre los bidireccionales, cobran relevancia los medios sociales, que se emplean para la generación de compromiso con sus públicos. **Discusión y conclusiones:** Los *think tanks* utilizan la comunicación digital como estrategia de difusión de sus actividades. Eso supone potenciar la perspectiva de *advocacy* y una pretensión de participar en los temas de discusión pública con propuestas sobre sus encuadres (Bürger, 2015, Misztal, 2012).

PALABRAS CLAVE: *think tanks*; relaciones institucionales; *advocacy tanks*; comunicación estratégica; comunicación digital.

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Translation by **Paula González** (Universidad Católica Andrés Bello, Venezuela)

1. Introduction

Today there is a remarkable number of think tanks with a relevant presence in political and social processes around the world. The management of ideas is no longer exclusive to political parties and think tanks are emerging as organizations that propose ideas and solutions to various social problems. As in all organizations, their communication actions represent a key element in the process of relationship with their audiences. This facet is particularly relevant in the era of new media since it will shape the magnitude of the visibility of think tanks that participate in current political communication processes.

The general objective of this work is to study how Spanish think tanks use the digital medium to spread their activity and transmit their ideas. In the Spanish case, the terminology of “idea laboratories” is also used. Specifically, the work analyzes what types of communication tools are used in the different digital spaces that are officially implemented (web sites and social media), as well as their use as one-way or bidirectional channels in interaction with their audiences.

This initial approach constitutes the necessary basis to establish a first approach to the communication management of think tanks and advance towards optimizing the possibilities offered by these resources. These organizations develop communication strategies and actions to broadcast their activities and thematic proposals (Almansa-Martínez, Fernández-Torres, 2011).

From this perspective, communication strategies are essential elements for any organization to broadcast their activities and manage relationships with their audiences. Hallahan *et al.*, (2007, pp.3-4) define strategic communication as the “intentional use of communication by an organization”.

In their book, *Social Media and Strategic Communications*, Al-Deen and Hendricks (2013) point out that advertising, marketing, and public relations are among the industries that lead the exploitation of social media for strategic purposes to enable them to achieve organizational goals.

1.1. Think tanks and communication

From the perspective of think tanks in Spain, we are witnessing a multiplication of these organizations, their activities, and their relevant presence in political, social, and communication

processes. The management of circulating ideas is no longer the exclusive space of political parties and think tanks are shown as organizations that propose ideas, contexts, and solutions to social problems (Abelson, 2012; Lalueza and Girona, 2016; McGann and Viden Rafferty, 2014; Stone, 1996; Stone and Denham, 2004).

Defined as research centers or laboratories of ideas, they are organizations that carry out research and analysis on political action, that generate studies on specific aspects, and that propose political actions to public institutions. In this sense, they provide specialized personnel in the analysis and proposal of public policies and are an expert complement to the institutional decision-making process.

McGann (2011) defines think tanks as research organizations, the analysis and implementation of public policies, which generate studies, analyzes, and recommendations regarding national and international issues, and which facilitate those involved in politics and society in general to make informed decisions on matters of public policy.

These idea laboratories created under ideas and not for profit, in most cases, are defined by Castillo (2009) as “entities that, through research and analysis, propose proposals for political action to the institutional bodies through direct or indirect communication strategies, such as access and influence on public opinion”. Stone defines think tanks as: “independent research institutes whose main objective is the research of public policies, [...] non-governmental non-profit organizations, independent of the government, political parties, and interest groups” (1996, p. 16).

From a historical perspective, Castillo (2009, p. 5-6) points out three main periods marking its development from university, through advisory functions to the government, and activism in the international arena:

- Until the beginning of the 20th century, framed in university research and with strict research operation, they were focused on the development of basic knowledge.
- From the Second World War, their participation is related to technical issues in the warlike conflict and will be continued within the framework of American hegemony in the international sphere.
- The decade of the 70s constitutes the scene of the third evolution of these organizations, developing undercover the multiplication of national and international social organizations.

Think tanks are organizations that can get involved quickly and in a specialized way on recurring issues of political dynamics but also on new social, political, geostrategic, or economic challenges in which it is necessary to have the competition and proposals of specialists in the resolution of political and social problems.

The conceptual breadth of the term encompasses a set of organizations with very different functions, objectives, and structures. In this sense, McGann and Weaver (2000) have structured think tanks into three main groups:

Universities without students whose main objective is the publication of their research and with strict research staff. They differ from universities in that they do not provide formal academic training and many of them are formed under the configuration of foundations. They have a wide variety of financing sources such as donations from individuals, companies, sponsorships, and patronages, but they are free to undertake the most relevant research on their lines of interest.

Contract research organization in which these idea laboratories carry out research based on a contract with defined and detailed objectives. In this sense, the model would be a contractor (public or private) that pays for the fulfillment of a specific service.

Advocacy tanks are those that have an ideology, research on how to solve social problems, and become defenders of their own ideas. They are characterized by acting so that their ideology permeates public policies, so they develop very active communication strategies and tactics in the form of specialized reports and seminars.

Similarly, Xifra (2003, p. 205) points to the emergence of *advocacy tanks* that defend the interests and carry out the political actions that are most characteristic of interest groups or lobbyists, and that, very often, have one or other ideological links. From the perspective of communication, influence and impact, the fact of pursuing involvement in the political process and objectives related to *advocacy tanks*, become the characteristics of think tanks of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century (Auger, 2013; Rich and Weaver, 2000; Misztal, 2012; Jan, 2017).

There is no doubt that idea laboratories carry out a series of activities that are directed towards the interior of the political system in the form of advice, analysis, or evaluation of public policies, either in a propositional and/or analytical way. However, *advocacy tanks* have a communicative dimension as the axis of the broadcast of the ideas that these organizations defend and that they develop through actions of education, awareness, and legitimization of certain social positions (Bürger, 2015; Carim and Warwick, 2013; Cizek, 2016; Martínez-Salas and Campillo, 2018).

But these communication actions are not only focused on broadcast but also on a commitment to their audiences, which contributed to the amplification of the propositional actions of these organizations, spreading their proposals *en masse* as prescribers of the organization (Castillo-Esparcia, García-Ponce and Smolak-Lozano, 2013; Coombs and Holladay, 2015; Gershon, 2016; Kent, 2013).

All these one-way and two-way communication activities of think tanks do not differ from the communication strategies of other organizations. Thus, they plan, develop, and execute communication campaigns of their ideas from different perspectives, considering that the diverse audiences must be globally informed with a plurality of communication channels:

- Activities focused on the dialogical dimension with the different audiences with whom they interact and which focus on the organization of seminars or conferences. In them, the attendees are an already sensitized audience that comes to know the proposals of the think tank or to delve into the parameters of their initiatives, becoming possible broadcasters of these organizations.
- Broadcast actions in traditional media, through the organization of press releases, press conferences, interviews, or opinion articles in the reference media, among others. With this media activity, they pursue the irradiation to society of their proposals on current social problems or the approach of public attention actions. Thus, the action focuses on maintaining an opinion presence on the issues on the public agenda, an active participation in the thematization process of certain issues, and a proposal of the conceptual borders of the public policy discussion through the framing function.
- Presence in the digital ecosystem, with the creation of spaces for the broadcast of their proposals that multiply and generate spaces on digital platforms such as social networks, blogs, or web spaces. One of the most relevant elements of the knowledge society is the multiplicity of spaces, through which information is reproduced. In this sense, maintaining a

presence allows reinforcing the different messages and reaching other types of audiences that do not consume traditional media.

- The possibility of delivering their official documents to any of their audiences with the presence of reports, studies, evaluations, books, or work documents on the webspace and that are easily accessible to interested people.

All these possibilities of communication development are a facet of think tanks that have been pointed out by researchers and that should be added to the initial function of advising and consulting public authorities in proposing political proposals (Stone and Denham, 2004; Xifra, 2003; Abelson, 2012).

Abelson (2000) argues that there are several reasons why American politicians turned, and still turn, to think tanks for information and advice. First, a significant number of these North American centers have developed extensive research programs on national and international policies, recruiting not only prominent academics but also high-ranking former public officials. Second, young professionals who research in think tanks are more sensitive to what decision-making politicians need. They can provide them with adequate, concise, and clear information so that they can make their decisions knowing the benefits associated with certain measures. Third, many think tanks can provide politicians with technical teams to fill all important positions in government. Fourth, politicians and candidates for the ministries can look to think tanks to find ideological support for their proposals.

Furthermore, they can develop their communicative activity through three different channels: structuring the debate, modeling public opinion or its general climate in one way or another, and helping to redefine or maintain the general understanding of the public interest.

This role seems very important, especially in the era of new media, since it will configure the magnitude of the visibility of idea laboratories that participate in these processes of political communication. The contribution of think tanks to public debate lies in the importance of public debates for the political decision process, so think tanks can be considered as powerful instruments for discussion and rationalization of public policies (Castillo-Esparcia, 2009; McGann, Viden, and Rafferty, 2014).

This perspective configures think tanks as organizations that no longer focus only on interacting with government agencies. Furthermore, they strive to develop communication strategies aimed at broadcasting their analyzes and perspectives, participating in the social process of knowledge construction and raising issues on the public agenda, proposing specific frameworks in the interactive dynamic of the political game of the inclusions, exclusions, and rankings of public actors. They are, without a doubt, political actors in proposing, formulating, analyzing, and broadcasting training proposals and formulating political proposals to social realities.

2. Methodology

In this contribution, exploratory work is proposed, whose main contribution is to establish the current state of digital communication developed by Spanish think tanks.

This initial approach was developed through a content analysis of all the digital platforms of the 48 most influential Spanish think tanks according to the work of Tello (2013) and McGann (2017). Regarding the list made from those proposed by these authors, it should be noted that a reorganization was carried out since the number of laboratories has changed in relation to the

mentioned studies. Table 1 shows the list grouped according to the thematic axis on which their work is focused and indicating the percentage they represent of the total.

As can be seen, the largest percentage of think tanks are dedicated to the field of economics and international relations, followed by those who focus their work on governance, culture, education, and science.

Table 1. Spanish think tanks according to their scope of work.

ANALYZED THINK TANKS	PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL	THEMES
Barcelona Institute for Global Health Basque centre for climate change Centro de Desarrollo Internacional Ecodes GRAIN	10.41%	Climate change/ Agriculture/ Biodiversity/ Efficient water management/ Global health/ Energy poverty
Círculo de Economía Círculo de Empresarios Fundación Alternativas Fedea FUNCAS Fundación Ciudadanía y Valores Fundación Estudios Financieros Institución Futuro Instituto Estudios Económicos CIVISMO Instituto Estudios Fiscales	22.91%	Economy/ Socioeconomic Policy/ Public Administration/ Business and entrepreneurship/ Society/ Social welfare
Centro Internacional de Toledo para la Paz CIDOB Fundación Cultura de Paz Fundación Euroamérica Fundación Iberoamérica y Europa Iberglobal IECAH Instituto Europeo del Mediterráneo Real Instituto Elcano Instituto Juan de Mariana Seminario de Investigación para la Paz del Centro Pignatelli	22.91%	International Relations/ Peace/ Freedom/ Conflict resolution-mediation/ Foreign Policy/ Foreign trade/ International Cooperation/ Humanitarian aid/ Migrations
Club de Madrid FAES Instituto Estudios Democracia Asociación de Investigación y Especialización sobre Temas Iberoamericanos Centro de Estudios Políticos y Constitucionales Instituto Gobernanza Democrática	12.5%	Politics/ Democratic Governance/ Inclusive Society/ Western Humanism/ Human Rights/ Governance and participation
Fundación Carolina Fundación Independiente Fundación de Investigaciones Marxistas Fundación Pablo Iglesias Fundación Ortega y Gasset-Marañón Fundación Sistema	12.5%	Culture/ Art/ Education/ Science/ Social and Legal Sciences/ Humanities/ Civil Society/ Bioethics

Grupo de Estudios Estratégicos (GEES) Grupo de Estudios sobre Política y Seguridad Internacional (GESI) Instituto Universitario Gutiérrez Mellado	6.25%	International security/ Defense
Cotec Fundación de la Innovación Bankinter Infonomia.com	6.25%	Innovation/ Entrepreneurship
Cercle per al Coneixement (Comisión de SEBAP) Grupo de Análisis sobre Estrategia y Prospectiva de la Información (ThinkEPI) Observatorio Nacional de las Telecomunicaciones y de la Sociedad de la Información	6.25%	Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) Librarianship/ Documentation/ Spanish language Information Society

Source: self-made.

To get to know the digital communication tools used by the different think tanks, the corporate web pages are taken as a starting point, which today constitute the main element that organizations use to present themselves to their publics. From the content that they offer and the way of presenting it will depend the interest that they arouse among the visitors, as well as the repercussion that these centers can generate.

The web pages of the studied think tanks contain one-way and two-way communication tools. By making an initial observation, it is possible to determine the level of interactivity presented by these official digital platforms, indicating that the former is used to make themselves known and spread their research. Specifically, the latter allows fluid feedback with their interlocutors. Among the latter, social media plays a fundamental role in terms of a channel of influence, given the intense activity that is registered in it today.

At first, an attempt was made to determine the type of communication tool that was being used in the different web portals (unidirectional or bidirectional). Subsequently, the type of broadcasted content was identified, as well as the frequency of updating it published by the various think tanks on their official social media. Content analysis was used for this task. The limited analysis time was one month, from April 1st to April 30th, 2018, considering this interval as adequate to observe the communicative activity of these organizations in the dynamic digital environment.

To categorize the communication tools, an analysis template was designed (table 2) that includes all the communication tools registered in the official communication platforms of Spanish think tanks.

Table 2. Analysis template for think tanks' corporate web pages.

ONE-WAY COMMUNICATION TOOLS	BIDIRECTIONAL COMMUNICATION TOOLS
Multimedia files inserted in web page (audios, videos)	Press conferences
Photographs and images	Interviews

Virtual press room (Press releases)	Seminars/ Conferences/ Congresses
News published on the web	Conferences/ Workshops
Publications: Studies, thematic reports, books, articles, periodicals (Journals)	Symposia and round tables
Newsletter	Interventions in academic acts
Information brochure (Presentation of the Think tank)	Meetings with experts
Institutional yearbooks (Memoirs)	Other training/ education-oriented events
Media campaigns	Courses and postgraduate courses
Publication of event agenda	Other events (parties, awards)
	Forums (online discussion sites)
	Blogs
	Virtual campus
	Intranet
	Social networks

Source: self-made.

In each case, the theme of the content broadcasted through the different tools used was identified.

On the other hand, as has been pointed out, social media (networks and blogs) are especially relevant resources in terms of their level of use, due in large part to the possibilities of interaction they offer. In this sense, a specific template was designed (table 3) to carry out an analysis of the activity carried out in these spaces. As can be seen, the list includes social media in which Spanish think tanks have significant official participation in terms of content creation (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and blogs) and collects information on the topic and updating of the content (created or shared).

Table 3. *Analysis template for think tanks' social media.*

ANALYZED SOCIAL MEDIA	OBSERVED ASPECTS
Facebook	Update frequency created content Frequency of shared content Theme of the entries
Twitter	Update frequency Retweet frequency Theme of the entries
YouTube	Update frequency Theme of the entries
Blogs	Update frequency Theme of the entries

Source: self-made.

3. Results

On the one hand, the analysis addresses one-way communication tools that try to establish a connection with the web visitor to display corporate information, allowing both the media and citizens to be informed about their identity and activities.

In this group of tools (table 4) are those that allow the presentation of the organization (founding creed, objectives, experts, and research teams), the broadcast of their research, events, developed communication campaigns, and other news. This information is supplemented through the

publication of newsletters, yearbooks/memoirs, event agendas, or brochures. Beyond these generic resources, there are spaces dedicated to the relationship with the media, mainly called a virtual press room.

All Spanish think tanks have some of the tools shown in table 4 on their respective websites. In percentage terms, publications that reflect studies, thematic reports, books, articles, as well as periodicals (journals) stand out in the first place, since 100% of the sample has this type of one-way tool. They are followed in use-frequency by photographs and images, thirdly, multimedia files, news, and yearbooks or institutional memoirs. The organization with the most one-way resources is the Barcelona Institute for Global Health, followed by CIDOB.

Table 4. *One-way communication tools on the website.*

ANALYZED THINK TANKS	ONE-WAY COMMUNICATION TOOLS									
	Multimedia files inserted in web page (audios, videos)	Photographs and images inserted in web page	Virtual press room (Press releases)	News published on the web	Publications: Studies, thematic reports, books, articles, periodicals (Journals)	Newsletter	Information brochure (Presentation of the Think tank)	Institutional yearbooks (memoirs)	Information on media campaigns	Publication of event agenda
Barcelona Institute for Global Health	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
CIDOB	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
Círculo de Empresarios/ Cotec/ F. Alternativas/ FUNCAS/ Fundación de la Innovación Bankinter/ Fundación Pablo Iglesias / Fundación Ortega y Gasset-Marañón / IECAH/ Institución Futuro/ Instituto Estudios Democracia/ Instituto Europeo del Mediterráneo/ Real Instituto Elcano/ Cercle per al Coneixement (Comisión de SEBAP)	X	X	X	X	X	X		X		X
Ecodes/ GRAIN	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	
FAES/ Peace Culture F. F. Cultura de Paz	X	X	X	X	X	X		X		
CIVISMO/ Instituto Juan de Mariana	X	X	X	X	X	X				X
Centro de Estudios Políticos y Constitucionales	X	X	X	X	X			X		X
Grupo de Análisis sobre Estrategia y Prospectiva de la Información (ThinkEPI)	X	X		X	X	X		X		X
Asociación de Investigación y Especialización sobre Temas Iberoamericanos	X	X		X	X	X		X	X	
Basque centre for climate change/ Instituto Estudios Económicos	X	X	X	X	X			X		
Fundación Independiente	X	X	X	X	X					X
Centro de Desarrollo Internacional, Universidad de Navarra	X	X	X	X	X					X
Instituto Gobernanza Democrática/ F. Estudios Financieros	X	X		X	X			X		X

Instituto Universitario Gutiérrez Mellado	X	X		X	X	X		X		
Fundación Carolina	X	X	X	X	X					
Centro Internacional de Toledo para la Paz	X	X			X			X		X
Fundación Ciudadanía y Valores		X		X	X	X				X
F. Euroamérica	X	X		X	X					
Fundación de Investigaciones Marxistas	X	X		X	X			X		
Fedea	X	X	X		X					X
Observatorio Nacional de las Telecomunicaciones y de la Sociedad de la Información	X	X			X	X		X		
Fundación Sistema	X	X		X	X	X				
Círculo de Economía	X	X			X			X		
Fundación Iberoamérica y Europa		X	X	X	X					
Instituto Estudios Fiscales				X	X			X		X
Seminario de Investigación para la Paz del Centro Pignatelli		X			X	X				X
Grupo de Estudios sobre Política y Seguridad Internacional (GESI)	X	X			X					
Club de Madrid		X		X	X					
GEES (Grupo de Estudios Estratégicos) / Iberglobal					X	X				
TOTAL	41	46	29	39	48	31	2	32	4	28
PERCENTAGE (%)	85.41	95.83	60.41	81.25	100	64.58	4.16	66.66	8.33	58.33

Source: self-made.

Regarding the analysis of two-way communication tools (table 5), all think tanks have profiles on social networks. A marked percentage of them (81.25%) organizes seminars, congresses, conferences, and workshops whose contents are broadcasted through their digital platforms. Likewise, there are high percentages of those who include training activities (50%) and those who develop blogs (43.75%). As in the case of one-way tools, the Barcelona Institute for Global Health stands out in terms of organization of activities, among which stand out round tables, open debates, interviews with experts and researchers, and conferences.

Taking into account the type of activities that are broadcasted through these resources, those of an educational nature stand out. This is the case of the conferences, courses, seminars, projects, or the announcement of scholarships, practices, and prizes in education. Sometimes, to manage the training activity, think tanks organize or participate in research institutes, implement senior universities (in the case of the José Ortega y Gasset-Gregorio Marañón Foundation), as well as develop summer schools or exchange programs (Basque centre for climate change, CIVISMO, Fundación de Investigaciones Marxistas, FAES, and the Instituto Estudios Fiscales). Most of them teach courses, seminars, and postgraduate courses, or participate in university teaching at other centers.

Table 5. Bidirectional communication tools on the web pages of Spanish think tanks

ANALYZED THINK TANKS	BIDIRECTIONAL COMMUNICATION TOOLS												
	Press conferences	Interviews	Seminars / Conferences / Congresses	Conferences / Workshops	Symposiums / round tables	Interventions in academic acts	Meetings with experts	Other training / education oriented events	Courses and postgraduate courses	Other events (parties, awards)	Forums (online discussion sites)	Blogs	Social networks
Barcelona Institute for Global Health		X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X		X	X
Centro de Estudios Políticos y Constitucionales	X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X			X
FAES		X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X			X
Basque centre for climate change			X	X	X			X	X			X	X
Cercle per al Coneixement (Comisión de SEBAP)	X	X	X		X			X		X			X
F. Alternativas	X		X		X		X			X		X	X
FUNCAS			X	X	X	X				X		X	X
Fundación Independiente		X	X	X	X						X	X	X
Fundación de Investigaciones Marxistas			X	X	X			X	X	X			X
IECAH		X	X	X					X		X	X	X
Instituto Europeo del Mediterráneo		X	X	X	X			X	X				X
Real Instituto Elcano	X	X	X	X	X							X	X
Centro de Desarrollo Internacional, Universidad de Navarra			X	X				X	X			X	X
Círculo de Empresarios	X	X			X					X		X	X
Fundación de la Innovación Bankinter		X	X	X					X			X	X
Fundación Ortega y Gasset-Marañón		X	X		X			X	X				X
Instituto Juan de Mariana			X	X				X	X	X			X
Círculo de Economía	X		X	X					X				X
Ecodes			X	X						X		X	X
Fundación Carolina		X						X	X			X	X
Fundación Pablo Iglesias			X	X	X				X				X
Grupo de Estudios sobre Política y Seguridad Internacional (GESI)				X				X	X			X	X
Instituto Estudios Económicos			X	X	X					X			X
Instituto Estudios Fiscales			X	X				X	X				X
Seminario de Investigación para la Paz del Centro Pignatelli		X	X						X			X	X
Asociación de Investigación y Especialización sobre Temáticas Iberoamericanas			X	X				X					X
Centro Internacional de Toledo para la Paz			X				X		X				X
CIVISMO			X					X		X			X
Cotec			X	X							X		X
Fundación Ciudadanía y Valores			X						X			X	X
F. Cultura de Paz		X	X									X	X
Grupo de Análisis sobre Estrategia y Prospectiva de la			X	X								X	X

Información (ThinkEPI)													
Institución Futuro			X	X								X	X
Instituto Gobernanza Democrática			X	X				X					X
Instituto Universitario Gutiérrez Mellado		X	X						X				X
CIDOB		X	X										X
Fedea			X	X									X
F. Estudios Financieros			X						X				X
F. Euroamérica			X					X					X
Fundación Iberoamérica y Europa			X						X				X
GRAIN		X										X	X
Iberglobal									X			X	X
Instituto Estudios Democracia			X						X				X
Fundación Sistema			X										X
Infonomía.com												X	X
Club de Madrid													X
GEES (Grupo de Estudios Estratégicos)													X
Observatorio Nacional de las Telecomunicaciones y de la Sociedad de la Información													X
TOTAL	6	17	39	23	14	3	5	17	24	12	3	21	48
PERCENTAGE (%)	12.53	35.42	81.25	47.92	29.17	6.25	10.42	35.42	50	25	6.25	43.75	100

Source: Self-made.

Taking into account the think tanks' use of both unidirectional and bidirectional communication tools, a ranking has been drawn up (table 6) that shows the most and least communicative centers, according to the information reflected in their portals in the digital media.

In this ranking it can be seen, if we take into account the double typology of communication tools, that it is headed by the Barcelona Institute for Global Health, which uses 91.30% of the categories taken into account. They are followed, tied, by the Centro de Estudios Políticos y Constitucionales and FAES which use 69.56% of these tools. The list closes, as the think tanks that least show communication actions with their different audiences, the Club de Madrid and the GEES (Grupo de Estudios Estratégicos).

Table 6. Ranking of the most communicative Spanish think tanks according to the information reflected in the digital media.

	RANKING OF THE MOST COMMUNICATIVE THINK TANKS ACCORDING TO THE INFORMATION REFLECTED IN THE DIGITAL MEDIA	Nº Of One-way tools used	Nº of bi-directional tools used	Total tools used
1.	Barcelona Institute for Global Health	10	10	20
2.	Centro de Estudios Políticos y Constitucionales	7	9	16
	FAES	7	9	16
3.	Cercle per al Coneixement (Comisión de SEBAP)	8	7	15
	F. Alternativas	8	7	15
	FUNCAS	8	7	15
	IECAH	8	7	15
	Instituto Europeo del Mediterráneo	8	7	15
	Real Instituto Elcano	8	7	15

4.	Círculo de Empresarios	8	6	14
	Fundación de la Innovación Bankinter	8	6	14
	Fundación Ortega y Gasset-Marañón	8	6	14
5.	Basque centre for climate change	6	7	13
	Fundación Independiente	6	7	13
	Instituto Juan de Mariana	7	6	13
	Ecodes	8	5	13
	Fundación Pablo Iglesias	8	5	13
6.	Fundación de Investigaciones Marxistas	5	7	12
	Centro de Desarrollo Internacional, Universidad de Navarra	6	6	12
	Cotec	8	4	12
	Institución Futuro	8	4	12
	CIDOB	9	3	12
7.	Instituto Estudios Económicos	6	5	11
	Asociación de Investigación y Especialización sobre Temas Iberoamericanos	7	4	11
	CIVISMO	7	4	11
	F. Cultura de Paz	7	4	11
	Grupo de Análisis sobre Estrategia y Prospectiva de la Información (ThinkEPI)	7	4	11
	GRAIN	8	3	11
	Instituto Estudios Democracia	8	3	11
8.	Fundación Carolina	5	5	10
	Seminario de Investigación para la Paz del Centro Pignatelli	5	5	10
	Instituto Gobernanza Democrática	6	4	10
	Instituto Universitario Gutiérrez Mellado	6	4	10
	F. Estudios Financieros	7	3	10
9.	Círculo de Economía	4	5	9
	Instituto Estudios Fiscales	4	5	9
	Centro Internacional de Toledo para la Paz	5	4	9
	Fundación Ciudadanía y Valores	5	4	9
	Fedea	6	3	9
10.	Grupo de Estudios sobre Política y Seguridad Internacional (GESI)	3	5	8
	F. Euroamérica	5	3	8
11.	Fundación Iberoamérica y Europa	4	3	7
	Fundación Sistema	5	2	7
	Observatorio Nacional de las Telecomunicaciones y de la Sociedad de la Información	6	1	7
12.	Iberglobal	2	3	5
	Infonomia.com	3	2	5
13.	Club de Madrid	3	1	4
14.	GEES (Grupo de Estudios Estratégicos)	2	1	3

Source: self-made.

As indicated in the reference review, the communication of think tanks through social media plays a determining role today. In fact, 100% of think tanks use them. A first analysis of the results reflected in table 7, allows us to affirm that Twitter and Facebook are the most widely used social networks. Thus, 87.50% of the studied organizations use Twitter. With numbers slightly below (85.41%), Facebook follows. Third, is LinkedIn, 64.58% of the total use this network to bring together different professionals or create groups where they share interests. The presence of these centers on YouTube (62.5%) also stands out. Less significant is the bet made on platforms like Google+ (45.83%) or photo networks like Flickr (39.58%). In the last positions of this analysis would be those organizations that have a presence on Instagram (22.91%), Vimeo, and Pinterest (27.08% as a

whole). Regarding the use of social networks, the Fundación Bankinter, followed by the Barcelona Institute for Global Health, are the most active think tanks.

Table 7. Global presence of Spanish think tanks on social networks.

<u>Think tanks</u>	<i>Facebook</i>	<i>Twitter</i>	<i>LinkedIn</i>	<i>YouTube</i>	<i>Google+</i>	<i>Flickr</i>	<i>Instagram</i>	Others	<i>Total networks</i>
Fundación de la Innovación Bankinter	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Pinterest/Vimeo	9
Barcelona Institute for Global Health	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Vimeo	8
Círculo de Empresarios	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Pinterest	7
Institución Futuro	X	X	X	X	X	X		Vimeo	7
Infonomía.com	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		7
Real Instituto Elcano	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		7
CIVISMO	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		6
Fundación Alternativas	X	X	X	X		X		Vimeo	6
Fundación Carolina	X	X	X	X		X	X		6
Fundación Ciudadanía y Valores	X	X	X	X	X			Vimeo	6
CIDOB	X	X	X	X	X		X		5
Club de Madrid	X	X	X	X	X	X			5
Cotec	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		5
Fundación Estudios Financieros	X	X	X	X				Vimeo	5
Fundación Ortega y Gasset-Marañón	X	X	X	X	X				5
Grupo de Estudios sobre Política y Seguridad Internacional (GESI)	X	X	X	X	X				5
IECAH	X	X	X	X	X				5
Instituto Europeo del Mediterráneo	X	X		X	X	X			5
Instituto Gobernanza Democrática	X	X		X		X		Vimeo	5
Instituto Juan de Mariana	X	X	X	X	X		X		5
Basque centre for climate change	X	X	X					Vimeo	4
Centro de Desarrollo Internacional, Universidad de Navarra		X		X		X			4
Cercle per al Coneixement	X	X	X					Vimeo	4
Ecodes	X	X	X	X					4
FAES	X	X	X	X		X			4
Fedea		X	X	X		X		Vimeo	4
Fundación Independiente	X	X	X	X			X		4
Instituto Estudios Económicos	X	X		X	X				4
Asoc. de Investigación y Especialización sobre Temas Iberoamericanos	X	X	X						3

FUNCAS		X		X	X	X			3
Fundación Cultura de Paz	X			X	X				3
Fundación Euroamérica	X	X	X						3
Fundación Iberoamérica y Europa	X	X	X		X				3
Fundación Pablo Iglesias	X	X						Vimeo	3
GRAIN	X	X	X						3
Grupo de Análisis sobre Estrategia y Prospectiva de la Información	X	X				X			3
GEES (Grupo de Estudios Estratégicos)	X	X	X						3
Seminario de Investigación para la Paz del Centro Pignatelli	X	X		X					3
Centro de Estudios Políticos y Constitucionales		X	X						2
Círculo de Economía		X		X		X			2
Fundación de Investigaciones Marxistas	X	X							2
Iberglobal	X	X			X				2
Instituto Estudios Fiscales	X				X				2
Observatorio Nacional de las Telecomunicaciones y de la SI		X	X						2
Fundación Sistema	X								1
Instituto Estudios Democracia	X								1
Instituto Universitario Gutiérrez Mellado	X								1
Centro Internacional de Toledo para la Paz									0
TOTAL	41	42	31	30	22	19	11	13	-
PERCENTAGE (%)	85.41	87.5	64.58	62.5	45.83	39.58	22.91	27.08	-

Source: self-made.

Based on the developed analysis, it can be seen that on Facebook the activity in most of the studied profiles is not daily, with the average frequency of content updating being 18 or 19 entries per month. The centers that stand out for having greater activity are the Instituto Juan de Mariana, Fundación Alternativas, and Fundación Independiente. When it comes to shared content, the average is 2 posts per month. The Fundación Carolina leads the group with 35 shared entries from the profile of Jesús Andreu, director of the foundation. Overall, only 33.3% of those who use Facebook have shared content on their accounts in the analyzed period.

For its part, think tanks' activity on Twitter is greater than that registered on Facebook. The average of own content in the analyzed accounts is 63 or 64 entries per month. The accounts of the Fundación de la Innovación Bankinter, the Real Instituto Elcano, and the Barcelona Institute for Global Health stand out. Based on shared or retweeted content, the average frequency is 33 or 34 entries per month, highlighting the accounts of the Fundación Ciudadanía y Valores, the Fundación Independiente, and the Fundación Pablo Iglesias.

Despite that 62.5% of think tanks have a YouTube profile, the activity registered in the accounts can be described as low. The average frequency of content updating ranges from 2 to 3 entries per month,

highlighting the activity of the Instituto Europeo del Mediterráneo, the Fundación de la Innovación Bankinter, and the Círculo de Economía.

As a specific tool for the broadcast of bidirectional content, 39.5% of the analyzed organizations have blogs. Within this percentage, some outdated spaces are identified (ThinkEPI, Iberglobal, Fundación Ciudadanía y Valores, and Institución Futuro), others that are not their own blogs (Ecodes and the one of the Centro de Estudios Políticos y Constitucionales), and others that could not be considered a tool for two-way communication since they do not allow comments (Círculo de Empresarios, FUNCAS, and Fundación Ciudadanía y Valores). The average frequency of content updates on these platforms fluctuates between 8 and 9 entries per month. The daily activity of GRAIN stands out, with 64 entries in the analyzed interval. On the opposite extreme, 12.65% of outdated blogs are located.

Finally, examining the theme of the entries, it can be determined that the following topics are the ones with the greatest presence on Facebook:

- Publication of information of events of their own or of other related centers with which they share interests or to which they turn to, intervene, or support.
- Information on studies, reports, projects, and periodicals, as well as calls for scholarships and grants, courses, masters, and doctorates.
- Themed entries regarding the celebration of commemorative days and holidays at the national or international level.
- Finally, national and international news related to their interests are shared and broadcasted, as well as publications in the media; prevailing the intervention of their experts in newspapers with opinion articles.

On Twitter, the topics covered are the same as on Facebook, although more information is shared about their own acts or those of other centers where they intervene and the broadcasting of events is more thorough.

On various occasions, the content shared by these accounts is published by universities to which these groups belong or with which they have a close relationship. This is the case of the Fundación Ciudadanía y Valores, which shares UNIR publications; the Fundación de Investigaciones Marxistas that broadcasts the summer courses at the Complutense University of Madrid; the Centro de Desarrollo Internacional linked to the University of Navarra; the Grupo de Estudios sobre Política y Seguridad Internacional (GESI) of the University of Granada, or the Instituto Estudios Democracia attached to the CEU San Pablo University.

The YouTube channels are used to upload videos in which events are broadcasted, including book presentations, reports, projects, and awards. There are quite a few videos where you can see talks and expert speeches, as well as interviews, as is the case of the Diálogos FAES space. Furthermore, this network is used to present commemorative videos and documentary presentations.

In particular, the analyzed blogs allow presenting the experts and research teams that are part of the think tanks, as well as their contributions in reports and studies. As a support element, interviews with these researchers and experts are published. In general, these spaces provide more extensive information on their studies and research to a public more interested in their subjects.

4. Discussion and conclusions

The study carried out achieves the general objective of studying how Spanish think tanks use the digital medium to spread their activity and transmit their ideas. Specifically, the work allows us to

know what types of communication tools are used by these types of entities in the different digital spaces that they officially implement (web sites and social media) and the use they make of them. From the analysis, an activity is inferred to broadcast the activities carried out by think tanks without incorporating discursive and specific-to-the-digital-environment elements.

The digital communication ecosystem allows think tanks to better manage the different audiences with whom they interact and specify the tools based on the socio-communicative characteristics of their audiences.

The platforms there are tools of a unidirectional nature and others of a bidirectional type. The former contributes to the presentation of the identity of these organizations and the broadcast of their activities and ideas. One-way resources include generic tools (activity agendas, broadcast of reports, or news sections) and others of a specific nature aimed at communication with information professionals (virtual press rooms). The bidirectional tools, meanwhile, deal with the interactive broadcast of think tanks' activities, with the use of social media (social networks and blogs) becoming particularly relevant. These last resources try to promote compromise with their audiences (Castillo-Esparcia, García Ponce, and Smolak, 2013; Coombs and Holladay, 2015; Gershon, 2016, and Kent, 2013).

In both cases (unidirectional and bidirectional tools), the function of education, awareness, and legitimization of certain social positions noted above is of special significance (Bürger, 2015; Carim and Warwick, 2013; Ciszek, 2016; Martínez-Salas and Campillo, 2018). This function is carried out through two channels: one more specialized that is aimed at a selective audience and the other that is aimed at a wider audience to show or place certain topics with greater importance over others. In this structuring of the topics, certain frames also take place, in which think tanks have the opportunity to present some solutions against other possible ones to said issues.

The education function is articulated through research institutes, senior universities, exchange programs, summer schools, and numerous training activities. In this line, a clear link between these institutions and various university centers can be seen.

The most used social media are Twitter and Facebook, followed by LinkedIn and YouTube. These platforms are used primarily to broadcast their own content. Based on their topic, the offered content usually revolves around three fundamental axes: events, studies (supported, on numerous occasions, by talks or interviews with experts), and news. Twitter and YouTube are usually the most widely used platforms for broadcasting events more thoroughly.

The greater use frequency of the Twitter platform over Facebook may indicate that, given the use of the first of these by these institutions, unidirectional or bidirectional asymmetric communication flows prevail, while the second is used with a more interactive nature in the digital medium. This can translate into that think tanks still show a greater interest in establishing a broadcasting communicative relationship or asymmetric bidirectionality with their different audiences instead of the symmetrical one, in which the latter would have greater opportunities to express themselves by showing their own initiative.

Finally, blogs are still an important part of the digital communication of Spanish think tanks, despite that a significant percentage of outdated accounts are already beginning to be observed. Their use focuses on the detailed broadcast of contributions from experts and research teams.

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