

Influencers, personal branding and political ideology on Twitter

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ABSTRACT

Social media has been a participant of the growth of the role of the influencer as a new model of opinion leader who combines personal branding with a prescriber role, including messages with political content. In this context, this research has applied a content analysis to 790 messages from ten Spanish influencers with a high impact on Twitter. We analyzed in particular the pursued objectives, the topics discussed and the ideological content of the tweets. In this regard, although these messages reflected an ideological-political objective, the discourse is quite moderate, if not de-ideologized.

Keywords: opinion leader; social media; ideologeme; political communication; personal branding.

RESUMEN

Las redes sociales han visto crecer la figura del influencer como un nuevo modelo de líder de opinión que debe combinar la gestión de su marca personal con el rol de prescriptor, incluyendo los mensajes de contenido político. En este contexto, esta investigación aplicó un análisis de contenido a 790 mensajes de diez influencers españoles con alto impacto en Twitter. En concreto, se analizaron los objetivos perseguidos, los temas tratados y el contenido ideológico de los tuits. Al respecto, a pesar de que se refleja un objetivo ideológico-político en los mensajes, el discurso se torna bastante moderado, cuando no desideologizado.

Palabras clave: líder de opinión; redes sociales; ideologema; comunicación política; marca personal.

RESUMO

As redes sociais viram a figura do *influencer* como um novo modelo de líder de opinião que deve combinar a gestão de sua marca pessoal com o papel de influenciador do público, incluindo mensagens com conteúdo político. Neste contexto, o presente estudo aplicou uma análise de conteúdo a 790 mensagens de dez influenciadores espanhóis de alto impacto no Twitter. Em particular, os objetivos-perseguidos, os tópicos discutidos e o conteúdo ideológico dos tuits foram analisados. A este respeito, embora um objetivo ideológico-político seja refletido nas mensagens, o discurso se torna bastante moderado, senão des-ideologizado.

Palavras-chave: líder de opinião; redes sociais; ideologema; comunicação política; marca pessoal.

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INTRODUCTION

Like a modern version of the traditional opinion leader, the influencer has emerged as an interesting tool of marketing, whose value lies in knowing how to combine his/her work as a prescriber with the care and management of his/her personal brand in an environment so suitable for that as the one of social networks. In this regard, the influencer would serve as a speaker and channeler of the brands' messages, but also of the mass media and even of the political parties. This paper focuses precisely on the role of these opinion leaders in the Spanish political environment, a context marked by the multiparty system ruling since the European elections in 2014 and the prominence of online communication, which could serve as a starting point to the expression of a greater diversity of ideological positions.

In particular, the main objective of this study is to know to what extent influencers use social networks, particularly Twitter –the political network par excellence– to spread a certain political ideology in their messages, considering their need to cultivate a unique and attractive personal brand to reach the maximum notoriety and thus to increase their number of followers.

BRANDING AND INFLUENCERS: THE INDIVIDUAL'S PERSONALITY AS A DRIVING FORCE FOR BRANDS

In the current market, the brand is configured as a fundamental strategic value (Fernández Gómez, 2013, p. 1). This strength does not only refer to its value as a differentiating element or to its commercial competence (Aaker, 1996; Keller, 1998; Kotler, 2000), since the brand transcends these functions in order to assume more complex roles that range from conferring symbolic meaning (Fernández Gómez, 2011; Kapferer, 2012; Semprini, 1995) to provide a community of consumers with a sense of belonging (Atkin, 2005; Fournier, 1998; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). The idea that only traditional private companies participate in the notion of brand has become obsolete (Fernández Gómez, 2013; Hatch & Schultz, 2010; Kapferer, 2012). On the contrary, the brand value is extrapolated to other advertisers that have nothing to do with trade: political parties (Araya-Castillo & Etchebarne, 2014; Uribe, Buzeta, & Reyes, 2017), institutions (Balmer & Greyser, 2006; Melewar & Syed Alwi, 2015; Osman, 2008), countries (Dinnie, 2015; Kavaratzis, 2004; Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005) and even people (Commaile, 2018; Díaz, 2017; Kelly,

2017). In a way, we can affirm that today everything is susceptible of becoming a brand (Rodríguez & Fernández Gómez, 2017, p. 62).

In this context, the figure of the influencer can be understood as a copy of a personal brand (Labrecque, Markos, & Milne, 2011): a personal brand that is developed thanks to the opportunity provided by social networks (Díaz, 2017; Labrecque, Markos, & Milne, 2011). Indeed, in these social media the influencer works to cultivate the greatest possible attention by developing what is known as a personal brand (Marshall & Redmond, 2016, p. 194). This term, which has been widely studied by numerous scholars (Montoya & Vandehey, 2009; Pérez Ortega, 2014; Rampersad, 2009), refers to a set of external personal perceptions (Montoya & Vandehey, 2009, p. 6; Rampersad, 2009, p. 6) that condenses the expectations, promises and experiences that a person offers to others (Pérez Ortega, 2014, p. 26). In this regard, the investigations of Labrecque, Markos and Milne reveal that social networks profiles are used by the subjects to communicate their own personal brand (2011, p. 48). Considering this reality, the traditional mass media seem to be replaced by networks of influencers (Gillin, 2009, p. 23), which have led to a revolution in commercial communications (Díaz, 2017, p. 29); in addition, they begin to rise as important opinion leaders on political issues.

The easy accessibility to the different tools and the low cost involved in the production of information in the online sphere cause people of different socioeconomic levels to produce massive amounts of information (Xu, Sang, Blasiola, & Park, 2014, p. 1280). This, accompanied by an exponential growth of social networks on the Internet since 2004 (Gillin, 2009, p. 19), sets a favorable scenario for the emergence of these new prescribers, recently known in the academic literature as influencers (Díaz, 2017; Freberg, Graham, McGaughey, & Freberg, 2011; Gillin, 2009). This figure is considered as "an especially effective tool to increase the notoriety of a brand" (Augure, 2015, p. 2).

Some authors consider it as a new branch of marketing¹ (Díaz, 2017, p. 17), which refers to those influential people in social networks who have the ability to shape the attitudes of the audience through blogs, tweets and the use of other social networks (Freberg et al., 2011, p. 90); however, it is nothing more than what has traditionally been studied under the theory of the two-step flow of communication that Katz and Lazarsfeld (2006) defined in the fifties regarding opinion leaders. According to this theory, the

influence of the media would first reach the opinion leaders, who, in turn, would function as a sieve to transmit to the audience what they read and hear, managing to influence and exert pressure through the transmission of messages to an audience that decides not to directly access the political elite (Dubois & Gaffney, 2014, p. 1262). Thus, the ability to influence of these leaders depends on the trust that the audience places in them. Some studies identify that opinion leaders are innovative, highly involved individuals with relatively high social status and extensive social connections (Rogers, 2003; Vishwanath & Barnett, 2011). In this regard, it was originally considered that opinion leaders have greater access to information and have a greater number of platforms to disseminate their messages. However, the democratization that comes from the development of new digital technologies, particularly social networks, has led to an important paradigm shift, since ordinary Internet users can produce and transmit information to mass audiences (Xu et al., 2014, p. 1280).

TWITTER AND POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

In this digital context, Twitter²—the second most powerful global social network (Bruns 2012, p. 1)—is becoming an important channel for online communication due to its ability to reduce the barriers of participation among the public (Asserhofer & Maireder, 2013, p. 292) and of influencer engagement campaigns (Augure, 2015, p. 8). Following Gallardo Paúls and Enguiz Oliver, in the case of Spanish society, in this platform we can find, in the same scenario, the main political actors and opinion leaders (2016, p. 29). Considering the above, in the context of political communication, Twitter is the ideal scenario for diverse publics (politicians, journalists, citizens, etc.) of different ideology to be in conditions of equality. At the same time, given its characteristics of anonymous and not very intimate nature, this social network allows people to share a sincere vision of their opinions, without inhibitions (Chopra, 2014, p. 28). Specifically, this type of platform is used by many celebrities to express their opinions and views on public issues (Park, Lee, Ryu, & Hahn, 2015, p. 256), even encouraging the mobilization of the population (Larsson & Moe, 2011; Otterbacher, Shapiro, & Hemphill, 2013). The growing success and political influence on Twitter has been studied by numerous authors.

Research has focused on very different aspects, such

as effects (Parmelee & Bichard, 2011), the impact of new technologies on political parties, electoral processes and various social movements (Chadwick 2006; Hermida & Hernández-Santaolalla, 2018; Penney & Dadas, 2014), the content of the communication (Golbeck, Grimes, & Rogers, 2010; Jensen & Anstead, 2014), the way in which candidates use Twitter to inform, communicate and connect with citizens (Vergeer, Hermans, & Sams, 2011), the user's direct engagement in the electoral process (Bekafigo & McBride, 2013), the use of Twitter by candidates of minority parties (Christensen, 2013, p. 646), the personalization of the campaigns (Enli & Skogerbø, 2013), the way in which the characteristics of the candidate relate to the adoption and use of Twitter (Vergeer & Hermans, 2013), the advantages derived from the use of digital media by different types of candidate (Gilmore & Howard, 2014), or the way in which the conventions of the political concession are transferred to the context of social media (Miser & Bode, 2015).

Geographically, it is in the United States where we find seminal studies on this subject, such as the one that Bimber and Davis published in 2003 under the title *Campaigning Online: The Internet in US Elections*, which already warns of a major change in American political life thanks to the increasing use of the Internet by political parties, or more specific ones such as those of Hanson, Haridakis, Cunninghamman, Sharma and Ponder (2010) about electoral campaigns like those of candidates Barack Obama and John McCain. More specifically, in that country stand out the researches that analyzes the use of Twitter by congressmen (Golbeck, Grimes, & Rogers, 2010), the success of the implementation of social networks to manage crisis situations (Kavanaugh et al., 2012), or the dialogue with citizens promoted by politicians through the social network (Bekafigo & McBride, 2013). However, researches have been conducted in very different countries, such as Norway (Enli & Skogerbø, 2013), The Netherlands (Vergeer, Hermans, & Sams, 2011; Vergeer & Hermans, 2013), Australia (Grant, Moon, & Busby, 2010), Brazil (Gilmore & Howard, 2014), Argentina (García & Spinosa, 2014), Canada (Dubois & Gaffney, 2014; Gruzd & Roy, 2014; Small, 2011), Sweden (Larsson & Moe, 2011), France (Vaccari, 2008), Pakistan (Ahmed & Skoric, 2014) or the United Kingdom (Jensen & Anstead, 2014). Likewise, there are proposals of comparative analysis between countries (Cárdenas, Ballesteros, & Jara, 2017).

In the case of Spain, the political and electoral use of Twitter has also become a fertile field of study, and there is already a considerable body of research on

topics such as the degree of diffusion achieved by this social network system or the behavior of candidates in it (Criado, Martínez-Fuentes, & Silván, 2013), the use of Twitter as a tool for dialogue (García Ortega & Zugasti Azagra, 2014), the relationships established between a political party, cyber-activists related to the party and civil society (Franco Buendía, 2014), the mobilization of political fandom (Hernández-Santaolalla & Rubio-Hernández, 2017), virality (Congosto, 2015) or the use of elements of interaction (Zugasti Azagra & Pérez González, 2015).

CITIZENS, POLITICS AND TWITTER IN THE SPANISH MULTIPARTY CONTEXT

The 2014 elections to the European Parliament and the municipal and regional elections held the following year were the end of bipartisanship in Spanish politics, which led to a reconfiguration in the traditional distribution of votes. This situation was already anticipated in 2010 and 2011 –years in which the use of Twitter by political candidates Spain consecrated (García Ortega & Zugasti Azagra, 2014)–, given the degree of exhaustion of the system that coincide with the economic crisis (Azpitarte Sánchez, 2016, p. 207).

This produced a change from a limited pluralism towards a fragmented multiparty system (Rama, 2016), in a context in which Podemos and Ciudadanos stood as the standard bearers of the new policy, a term with which they sought to unite all those actions that seek to “bring politics closer to the citizen” (Civieta, 2015), including the use of new technologies and social networks, which could end the distancing between citizenship and the political class (Abejón, Mendoza, & Linares, 2012, p. 158). These parties seemed to conduct a democratic regeneration, a new stage in which the way was opened for dialogue with the rest of the coalitions and with civil society, which meant a reduction in ideological impositions. Nevertheless, while some have seen in Ciudadanos the true face of this new politics, by truly understanding in their management of post-electoral negotiations the transition from bipartisanship to a multiparty system (León Gros, 2016), others maintain that neither the formation of Albert Rivera nor that of Pablo Iglesias have managed to maintain this tendency, leaving the aforementioned generation “buried under ideological blocks” (León, 2016).

In terms of ideological polarization, Mainwaring (1995) pointed out that –in the face of a multiparty system that could lead to a more polarized ideological

spectrum– the centripetal tendencies of bipartisan systems would limit extremism and encourage moderation (1995, p. 136). In any case, he states, this is more pressing in the presidential systems than in the parliamentarians, who “have more coalition-building mechanisms that facilitate multiparty democracy” (1995, p. 139).

Social networks are one of the mechanisms that enable this new politics, and Twitter is the most advantaged. Indeed, this network has emerged as the most political, gathering in the same “scenario the main political actors and opinion leaders of Spanish society” (Gallardo Paúls & Enguiz Oliver, 2016, p. 29). In this regard, Moya Sánchez and Herrera Damas state that, as long as “polarization is a problem in democracy, media such as Twitter, that facilitate exposure to other political opinions through the diversification of sources, contribute to a greater democratic quality” (2015, p. 8).

Faced with this idea, Casero-Ripollés states that the opportunity to use a network does not mean that all users are equal: “Some users possess more advantages on social media due to their fame or power. They thus create strong doses of attention and they amass large followings, which amplifies their reach and visibility. This establishes limits, in terms of counterbalancing the citizen and web 2.0’s capacity, for social influence” (2017, p. 15).

Regarding this polarization the concept of echo chamber emerges, which refers to situations in which users would only expose themselves to media/networks and consume contents consistent with their own point of view (Garimella, Morales, Gionis, & Mathioudakis, 2018; Gruzd & Roy, 2014), and that in the environment of social networks has come to be seen as a natural consequence of its commercial design (Khosravinik, 2017, p. 64). These echo chambers would be the result of a selective exposure that would reinforce previous political perspectives; a notion that would oppose those who talk about online media as a favorable scenario for the formation of a public sphere (Colleoni, Rozza, & Arvidsson, 2014). In this regard, despite the alarming situation posed by some media (Emba, 2016; Grimes, 2017) and the conclusions of some studies that confirm this political polarization in social networks (Conover, Gonçalves, Flammini, & Menczer, 2011), other works do not corroborate these results (Dubois & Blank, 2017). Thus, some authors argue that the appearance or not of polarization would depend on the topic of the conversation (Van Boven, Judd, & Sherman, 2012), being more propitious when the issues are controversial

or of political engagement (Barberá, Jost, Nagler, Tucker, & Bonneau, 2015; Garimella et al., 2018). In short, the issue of online ideological polarization and echo chambers on social networks, and particularly on Twitter, is still an open debate (Barberá et al., 2015; Gruzd & Roy, 2014), which makes it impossible to answer to the question of whether it exists with a mere yes or no (Gruzd & Roy, 2014, p. 40).

OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This work seeks to contribute to the accumulated knowledge about Twitter, the phenomenon of influencers –the management of a personal brand– and the dominant ideologies in the current Spanish political scenario. We start with one of the classic questions raised by Towner and Dulio about the role of media in electoral campaigns that, as technology advances, also applies to the Internet: How are media used by candidates, political parties and interest groups? (2012, p. 105).

Considering the views of González Herrero –who understands that the term influencer is broader than that of opinion leader, based on criteria of credibility and sphere of influence (2009, p. 416)– in our opinion this concept assimilates to the one proposed by Katz & Lazarsfeld (2006). That is, social networks occupy a space very similar to that of traditional mass media such as the press, radio or television, so that influencers can use them as a platform to disseminate political content (González, 2011) that can serve as an ideological polarizer. Thus, despite the possibility offered by the Internet to disseminate sincere and independent content (Chopra, 2014), this study seeks to analyze the possible ideological and political implications of the influencers' opinions, who may be far from that hypothetical absence of inhibitions inherent to that means of communication. In this regard, Spain is an interesting case, since it is a country that has an intensive use of Twitter (Campos-Domínguez, 2017; García Ortega & Zugasti Azagra, 2014; Marín Dueñas & Díaz Guerra, 2016). The fact that the Spanish political scenario is being restructured, somehow as a consequence of citizen movements that demand a new way of doing politics or of pro-independence concerns, is also very interesting. Along with this objective of research, we propose to quantify the activity of influencers on Twitter, analyze the main topics present in their messages, study the functions fulfilled by their tweets and their ideological ascription.

The literature reviewed is ambiguous regarding the polarizing ideology of influencers –in line with the notion of echo chamber in terms of reception and effects (Barberá et al., 2015; Gruzd & Roy, 2014)–, which leads us to formulate the following research question, which tries to verify to what extent the Spanish influencers have a defined ideological line, according to what Hallin and Mancini call the Mediterranean or Polarized Pluralist Model (2004, p. 89):

RQ1. Do influencers polarize the political scenario through their opinions on Twitter?

We also pose four complementary research questions, which will help us to outline the content and dynamics of the use of Twitter by these opinion leaders:

RQ1.1. To what extent are the opinions of the influencers ideologized?

RQ1.2. What ideologies and ideologemes prevail?

RQ1.3. What are the functions of the influencers tweets?

RQ1.4. What topics do the influencers address?

METHODOLOGY

To answer the research questions posed, we used a quantitative methodology, applying the content analysis technique to a corpus of Twitter messages emitted during a month by Spanish influencers, selected in January 2018 through the Klout Score index provided by the website Top Influencers³ Specifically, we chose the ten most influential users of the general ranking, with a minimum of ten thousand followers, who were not professional politicians or declared sympathizers of a certain political party (affiliates, for example), nor journalists belonging to a communication group –that is, on the payroll of a specific media. These last two criteria allowed to eliminate those users whose messages would be ideologized per se, either in tune with their party or with the media in which they worked, since many media outlets have a clear political position (for example, *Público* declares itself left-winged and *La Razón* is openly conservative). In other words, the influencers selected should be independent opinion leaders. This involved identifying voices that had their own and independent opinions, which allowed journalists to

User	Profile	Followers	Klout Score	Universe	Sample
Jordi Borrás (@jordiborras)	Journalist	111,452	82.03	160	49
La vecina rubia (@lavecinarubia)	Citizen	349,785	80.41	693	213
Toni Soler (@soler_toni)	Journalist	320,620	78.19	178	55
Arturo Pérez-Reverte (@perezreverte)	Intellectual	1,949,941	78.06	28	9
Ricardo Galli (@gallir)	Expert	28,158	77.80	156	48
Salvador Cardús Ros (@salvadorcardus)	Journalist	66,085	78.01	201	62
Gerardo Tecé (@gerardotc)	Journalist	437,390	77.61	266	82
Juan Ramón Rallo (@juanrallo)	Expert	83,576	73.89	287	88
Empar Moliner (@emparmoliner)	Journalist	140,403	73.29	101	31
Quique Peinado (@quiquepeinado)	Journalist	257,184	72.81	497	153

Table 1. Messages analyzed by user

Source: Own elaboration.

be selected as influencers because of their background and accumulated image, as long as they collaborated with different media in a timely manner and had an independent ideological thought.

After the identification of the users⁴ (table 1), we used a multistage sampling to select the messages, beginning with a simple random sampling for the selection of the days to be analyzed, which was established in the period comprised between January 25 and February 25, 2017. During that interval, the ten influencers issued a total of 2567 messages on Twitter (not counting retweets or responses to other users), a universe that served to calculate the sample with a level of confidence of 95% and an error of $\pm 2.9\%$.

In total, we analyzed 790 messages, which were selected following a stratified random sampling of proportional allocation to maintain the weight of each of the opinion leaders, as shown in table 1. Finally, for the final selection of the tweets within the universe, we decided to follow a systematic random sampling 1 every 3.

The coding was made by six judges, who reached an agreement index of 0.847 in the intercoder reliability test calculated from Krippendorff's alpha (2004), a

remarkable value considering the difficulty of analyzing thematic units (2004, pp. 108-109), and the ideological component of the messages. In this regard, aside from some general questions –as if the tweet was accompanied by some audiovisual material or was linked to another website–, the content analysis aimed to define the ideological intention of the messages. To do so, we considered four fundamental variables: type of user, objective or function of the tweet, subject of the message and its ideology. The analysis code-sheet and the coding book were elaborated following Graham, Broersma, Hazelhoff and van't Haar (2013) and Ramos, Fernández Gómez and Pineda (2018), adapting them to the object of study, to the Spanish context and to the conjuncture analyzed.

1. **Type of user:** (1) citizen/public, (2) journalist, (3) lobby, (4) expert, (5) entrepreneur/industry, (6) intellectual, (7) humorist, (8) athlete, (9) actor, (10) activist, and (11) others.
2. **Objective of the tweet:** (1) political/ideological objective, or (2) others. In the event that the tweet belonged to the first option, we established a series

of specific political/ideological objectives, namely (1) news, (2) take a stand for a politician, (3) take a stand for a political party, (4) criticize/argue, (5) respond to a public issue, (6) give advice/help, (7) acknowledge/thank, (8) inform personal issues, and (9) others.

3. **Tweet theme:** (1) animal rights, (2) human or civil rights, (3) judicial process or crimes, (4) economics and business, (5) education, (6) environment, (7) Europe, (8) government, (9) health and social welfare, (10) immigration, (11) defense/military, (12) religion, (13) science and technology, (14) conflicts and wars, (15) news of the world, (16) national news, (17) infrastructure, (18) campaign and parties, (19) norms and values, (20) corruption, and (21) others.
4. **Ideology of the tweet:** based on Heywood (2007), the ideologemes were distributed in four blocks, dividing the ideological spectrum into right, center, left and nationalist positions –following the dynamic proposed by Pineda, Fernández Gómez and Huici (2018). Thus, within the right we have (1) tradition, (2) human imperfection, (3) organic society, (4) hierarchy and authority, and (5) property; in the center, (1) individualism, (2) freedom, (3) reason, (4) justice, and (5) tolerance and diversity; on the left (1) community, (2) cooperation, (3) equality, (4) class consciousness, and (5) common property, and in nationalism (1) the nation, (2) organic community, (3) self-determination and (4) culturalism.

RESULTS

Of the ten influencers analyzed, six were coded as journalists and two as experts. Likewise, regarding the content added to the text of the tweets, 38.1% contained a link to another website and 13.9% and 1.6% were accompanied by image and video, respectively. However, more interesting are the results related to the objectives and themes of the messages, as well as those related to their ideological content.

Objectives and themes. 51.0% of the tweets analyzed pursued a political/ideological objective; practically half of them (44.9%) criticized some aspect of the current policy. Evidently, the function of the messages, both at a general and at a specific level, also depended on its issuer. Users @juanrallo, @jordiborras or

@salvadorcardus had a very high percentage of messages with political/ideological function –95.5%, 93.9% and 91.9%, respectively–, followed by @gerardotc (74.4%), @soler_toni (70.9%) and @emparmoliner (54.8%) that, although to a lesser extent, have a majority of messages with that objective. In this regard, we found significant differences among users and whether their messages pursued an ideological/political objective ($\chi^2(9) = 331.0, p < 0.001$). On the other hand, considering the specific objectives within this more general one, most of the tweets of the ten users analyzed were critical, as shown in table 2; although some were more than others, no significant differences were found. Some messages that collect, for example, said objective of criticism, are the following:

“The ministry decides what crap comes out, when it comes out, and with what fake crap it mixes. While there is a process, we will not leave from here” (@soler_toni, February 3, 2017).

“One million signatures at <http://Change.org> to ask NASA to find 7 neurons, or exa, in the brain of the Garzón brothers” (@gallir, February 22, 2017).

“Rajoy has put in his place that bully of Donald Trump: he has asked him if we can be his errand boy. Trump says we’ll see” (@gerardotc, February 7, 2017).

Related to the above, and although the subject of the tweets is more blurred than the objectives, as reflected in table 3, it is noteworthy that the most repeated issue was the one referred to the government (21.1%), accumulating approximately twice as many messages as the next three most frequent topics: norms and values, campaigns and parties, and human or civil rights. In fact, 24.3% of the messages that aim to criticize are related to this issue. However, as with the previous variable, the frequency of the theme also differs depending on the user. Thus, although no significant differences were found from the chi-square coefficient, considering the frequencies we can see that although half of the tweets from the @lavecinarubia talk about the government (56.5%), those from @quiquepeinado lean more to the issue of norms and values (37.5%).

“Rajoy handles the budget worse than how I handle my money during the sales” (@lavecinarubia, January 28, 2017).

“Did I like that Hercules did not sign Zubikarai due to ideological reasons? No. If the reaction of his supporters had been the same...” (@quiquepeinado, February 2, 2017).

	Criticism	News	Take a political stand	Respond to a public issue	Inform personal issues	Recognize/acknowledge	Others	Total
@jordiborras	28.3	47.8	8.7	2.2	0.0	8.7	4.3	46
@lavecinarubia	60.9	8.7	8.7	0.0	13.0	0.0	8.7	23
@soler_toni	48.7	23.1	2.6	17.9	2.6	5.1	0.0	39
@perezreverte	50.0	50.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	2
@gallir	83.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	11.1	0.0	5.6	18
@salvadorcardus	33.3	12.3	26.3	3.5	10.5	5.3	8.8	57
@gerardotc	60.7	14.8	0.0	1.6	8.2	0.0	14.8	61
@juanrallo	28.6	10.7	26.2	20.2	6.0	2.4	6.0	84
@emparmoliner	17.6	0.0	23.5	35.3	17.6	5.9	0.0	17
@quiquepeinado	64.3	14.3	1.8	0.0	14.3	3.6	1.8	56
	44.9	16.6	12.2	8.4	8.2	3.5	6.2	403

Table 2. Political/ideological objectives of the tweets (%)

* Those objectives with an incidence percentage lower than 3% have been coded as others.

Source: Own elaboration.

	Government	Norms and values	Campaigns and parties	Human or civil rights	Economy and business	Corruption	National news	Judicial process or crimes	News of the world	Others	Total
@jordiborras	39.1	2.2	8.7	8.7	2.2	4.3	15.2	6.5	0.0	13.0	46
@lavecinarubia	56.5	17.4	4.3	0.0	0.0	13.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	8.7	23
@soler_toni	33.3	15.4	7.7	5.1	2.6	10.3	10.3	12.8	0.0	2.6	39
@perezreverte	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	50.0	0.0	0.0	50.0	2
@gallir	22.2	0.0	11.1	0.0	11.1	5.6	0.0	5.6	0.0	44.4	18
@salvadorcardus	22.8	5.3	0.0	35.1	0.0	3.5	12.3	0.0	1.8	19.3	57
@gerardotc	14.8	8.2	6.6	3.3	3.3	16.4	6.6	11.5	8.2	21.3	61
@juanrallo	9.5	3.6	17.9	10.7	34.5	3.6	1.2	1.2	8.3	9.5	84
@emparmoliner	17.6	17.6	17.6	5.9	5.9	0.0	17.6	0.0	0.0	17.6	17
@quiquepeinado	7.1	37.5	21.4	3.6	0.0	12.5	0.0	3.6	8.9	5.4	56
	21.1	11.4	10.9	9.9	8.9	7.9	6.7	4.7	4.5	13.9	403

Table 3. Theme of the tweets with political/ideological objective (%)

* Those themes with an incidence percentage lower than 3% have been coded as others.

Source: Own elaboration.

Ideologemes. Regarding ideologemes, the most repeated are those of freedom (19.9%), justice (19.1%), equality (18.1%) and tolerance and diversity (17.9%), which are reflected in the following four examples, respectively:

“#Soyliberal because liberalism respects the vital aspirations of each person” (@juanrallo, February 7, 2017).

“Ciudadanos will ask for the resignation of the president of Murcia, but when the imputation is a corner goal” (@gerardotc, February 13, 2017).

“The State is the strongest. We are against the state law. Legal equality” (@juanrallo, February 7, 2017).

“When they say hardly a soul and come up with a low number, it will still be higher than the refugees that we should have welcomed. #VolemAcollir” (@gerardotc, February 18, 2017).

The protagonism of these ideologemes would give, a priori, a greater weight to the center-left ideology in the messages of the influencers analyzed. In fact, if we look at the four ideological stratum analyzed⁵, we can see how of the total number of messages, there is 6.8% of right ideologemes, 16.7% of center ideologemes, 10.9% of left ideologemes, and 7.6% of nationalism ideologemes.

In any case, there is not a totally defined ideological trend, since the majority of the messages do not have marked ideologemes; i.e., there are tweets in which political issues are discussed, and especially public issues are discussed, but without showing a clear ideological stance (table 4).

Likewise, the ideological content –concreted in the ideologemes– of the messages will differ, once again, depending on the users analyzed, as can be seen in table 5. In any case, there are no significant differences between the users and the ideological blocks or between the former and ideologemes.

CONCLUSION

Through this study we have analyzed the ideological implications, in the context of politics, of the messages disseminated by Spanish influencers on Twitter. In this regard –given the lack of clear indications in literature of an ideological polarization of these opinion leaders, but in line with the proposal regarding the Mediterranean model of Hallin and Mancini (2004)– we posed as the main research question if the Spanish influencers polarize the political scene through their opinions on

Twitter. However, the results of the content analysis do not show a clear answer, since although more than half of the analyzed tweets fulfilled an ideological-political objective, the analysis of the ideologemes revealed a clear de-ideologization of the messages.

That is, answering the research question 1.1. –To what extent are the opinions of the influencers ideologized?– the ten most important Spanish influencers according to the Klout index (ignoring politicians or journalists belonging to a specific media) do not convey a clear ideology in the set of messages. This does not mean that a certain background has not been detected in the messages, but the problem is that it is minimal and isolated. Regarding this, the research question 1.2. asked which were the ideologies and dominant ideologemes in the opinions expressed on Twitter. The data of the content analysis have allowed detecting a certain tendency to the center/center-left ideology: in order of frequency, the ideologemes of freedom, justice, equality, and tolerance and diversity stand out. In any case, it is important to emphasize that the weight of said ideologemes, considering the set of messages analyzed, is significantly low.

Regarding the functions and the specific topics of the tweets that pursued a political-ideological objective –questions 1.3. and 1.4, respectively– criticism stands out as a function and government, as a theme. In fact, although no significant differences were found, the tweets that sought to criticize the government’s actions and management were frequent; a criticism that, nevertheless, was quite moderate, something that would be in line with the results of previous studies regarding the role of independent journalists (López-Merri & Casero-Ripollés, 2016), a profile met by six of the ten influencers analyzed.

As the main conclusion of this study, it is worth highlighting the de-ideologization of the analyzed messages, beyond the fact that some of them could fulfill a certain ideological-political objective. Regarding these, criticism of the government stands out, although in a moderate way, sometimes resorting to humor or irony. In fact, this moderation is also detected in the prevailing center/center-left ideological tendency, whose messages share ideologemes such as those of freedom, justice, equality, or tolerance and diversity.

DISCUSSION

Often criticism and vindication are disguised in humor and irony, which would result in greater

	Right	Center	Left	Nationalism			
Tradition	3.7	Individualism	9.9	Community	10.9	The nation	10.4
Imperfection	10.9	Freedom	19.9	Cooperation	9.7	Organic community	7.7
Organic society	6.7	Reason	16.9	Equality	18.6	Self-determination	9.7
Hierarchy	11.2	Justice	19.1	Class consciousness	13.6	Culturalism	2.7
Property	1.5	Tolerance	17.9	Common property	3.2		
	6.8		16.7		11.2		7.6

Table 4. Frequency (%) of ideologemes (and ideologemes by stratum) of the analyzed tweets (n = 403)

Source: Own elaboration.

	Right	Center	Left	Nationalism
@jordiborras	25.7	8.7	7.4	14.1
@lavecinarubia	0.0	8.7	4.3	0.0
@soler_toni	9.7	2.6	3.1	29.5
@perezreverte	0.0	10.0	30.0	0.0
@gallir	16.7	2.2	1.1	0.0
@salvadorcardus	14.7	2.8	3.5	11.4
@gerardotc	0.7	30.2	32.5	0.0
@juanrallo	0.0	35.5	1.7	0.0
@emparmoliner	0.0	24.7	7.1	36.8
@quiquepeinado	0.0	10.0	23.2	0.0
Total (403)	6.8	16.7	10.9	7.6

Table 5. Ideological spectrum of the tweets (%)

Source: Own elaboration.

ambiguity in the discourse. In any case, it is possible that this moderation in the messages—both in terms of the clear objective of attacking or defending and their explicit ideology— may be due, precisely, to their role as influencers, which should not adhere to any political position, as members of political parties and journalists on the media could do (and even profusely).

In line with the idea of personal branding, the influencers should try, first of all, to increase their

level of notoriety and coverage, so they would try to disseminate moderate and de-ideologized messages to please a greater part of the public. This discourse of neutrality and moderation is typical of commercial brands. The brand image is a concept of reception that depends on its audiences (Fernández Gómez, 2013, p. 80), so being aware of the messages spread is a constant. In the same way, influencers are configured as personal brands that have to maintain

a restrained and majority discourse if they intend to grow and consolidate. In political marketing, this would be the same as the catch-all parties, which took on special relevance in the Spanish context, for example, with the centrist intention of José María Aznar or the proposal of Rosa Díez that UPyD was beyond ideological positions. In any case, regarding influencers, it is true that all those analyzed here are in social networks with their true name and identity, which is why, in line with Chopra (2004), they would not have that anonymous nature that would allow them to share a truly sincere opinion.

Beyond the possible explanations of the results found, these reinforce the idea that these new opinion leaders, at least those who share the characteristics of

those analyzed, filter the messages disseminated by the political elite and by the media, acting as a true intermediate step in the flow of communication (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 2006). In this regard, it would be interesting to analyze the profiles of those citizens and independent journalists with a lower impact index and followers, to see if they maintain this trend. Another possible line of interesting research would be to analyze these issues during the electoral period, at which time they may define their positions more openly. Finally, another relevant approach given the current ambivalence of results, is to analyze the reception and effects of these messages in the context of the notion of echo chamber, studying, for example, the impact of tweets considering the “likes”, “comments” or “retweets”.

NOTAS

1. Other authors understand personal branding as a new professional role. In this regard, Marwick (2013), while admitting that this originally comprises a set of practices and a mentality of thinking about oneself as a salable product, also affirms that the personal brand has evolved to become a basic element of professional orientation and personal advice (p. 166). There are also conflicting approaches, which understand the phenomenon of influencers under the concept of microcelebrity (Abidin, 2015; Caro Castaño, 2017; Khamis, Ang, & Welling, 2016; Marwick, 2013).
2. According to the Annual Social Networks Study of 2017 of the Interactive Advertising Bureau, Twitter (80%) is the second social network most mentioned by spontaneous knowledge, only behind Facebook (99%) and far ahead of Instagram (63%) or LinkedIn (25%) (IAB, 2017, p. 20).
3. The website topinfluencers.es defines Klout as a web service that, through an index called Klout Score, measures the degree of influence of a person or a brand on social networks. To determine the Klout Score of a person, the web service analyzes more than 400 different parameters of the seven most important social networks and assigns a score between 1 and 100 to the users. These parameters would be divided into three main sections: reach, amplification and network.
4. The type of profile is linked to the analysis of content conducted. It is curious that, of the ten selected, only two are women; in other words, the Spanish influencers (of the proposed profile) with more notoriety and followers are men. This clearly historical absence of female referents continues to be perpetuated when these data are analyzed.
5. The ideological weight of each stratum has been calculated by adding one point for each ideologeme contemplated for each block, and dividing it by the total. Thus, for example, a message that defended reason, equality and class consciousness, would have a value of 0% in right ideologemes, a value of 20% in center ideologemes and a value of 40% in left ideologemes. For nationalism we proceeded in the same way.

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