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Social Movements in Politics and the Media: The case of the Pro-underground railway Platform of Murcia in the 2019 local elections

Abstract
15M was the first reaction by some of the most important social movements in recent years in Spain. It was the impetus behind the emergence of the 'tides' or movements dedicated to education and health issues. However, after a few years of social inaction, citizen movements seem to have revived thanks to the feminist demonstrations of 8th March 2018 and the pensioners' protests because of their loss of purchasing power. In these times, when parliamentary majorities are in decline, it seems that citizen platforms are emerging as an alternative means of making their demands known to institutions. In the case presented in this study, the citizens of Murcia created a platform to demand that the Government comply with the plan for building the AVE railway tracks underground, as they had promised. Since then, the Citizen Pro-Underground Railway Platform has held several demonstrations and thanks to social networks it has developed a successful mass communication strategy. This study has been carried out in two phases and presents a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the Platform's communication strategy. In addition, it aims to determine its level of participation in the political and media Twitter conversation ahead of the 2019 local and regional elections in Murcia.

Keywords
Social Movements, citizen protests, Murcia, AVE underground railway, Citizenship and Media, 2019 Elections.

1. Introduction

In recent years, social movements have gained a growing visibility in the public sphere, and the media has reported on the different citizen protests voiced by various platforms or associations. These movements, known as 'tides' (Sánchez, 2013), emerged from diverse groups: education (green); health (white); young emigrants in pursuit of employment (maroon): the unemployed and researchers (red); against the privatization of water (blue); and feminists (purple/lilac). This eventually led to an amalgamation of the different civic movements (tides) and the creation of the 'Citizens' Tide' which pursued an end to the cuts in Education and Health (Gil de Biedma, 2014, p. 7).

The 15M (2011) movement had sown the seed that would foment the idea of 'Yes, we can,' by supporting different groups in order to defend their rights through an assembly movement

whose central axis was in the Puerta del Sol in Madrid. This same feeling and organizational system also emerged in the creation of Podemos. This party knew how to capture the feeling of general displeasure among the middle classes, and as they continued with their assemblies, they created 'circles' corresponding to different issues and territories (Rivero, 2014).

This increase in the visibility of citizens has spread globally with movements like: '#YoSoy132,' 'Ayotzinapa' or others in Mexico (González-Esteban & López-Rico, 2016, p. 3); the Arab Spring; *The Umbrella Movement* in Hong Kong; #Ferguson, against racism in the USA or the most recent #Metoo against sexual abuse. In Spain, the mass gatherings of 8M in 2018 were also covered by international media outlets and constituted a watershed moment for the Spanish feminist movement[1].

The power of society is indisputable, and it seems that citizens are increasingly more aware of this. Although the media is not always open to listening to social demands, they eventually make time for those who manage to rally a considerable crowd or arouse media interest in an issue which they believe will draw an audience.

In this study, we approach these themes by focusing on the case of the Pro-underground AVE Platform in Murcia, which has spent 30 years fighting the government so it would fulfil its initial promise to build the high-speed railway tracks underground, thereby preventing the city from being divided in two and leaving many of the neighbours cut off from the centre.

The case we are dealing with here is an example of how social mobilizations are effective. The fact that the AVE will be built underground is now a reality, as the president of ADIF declared in 2018[2].

2. The role of social movements in the public sphere

Different experts explain how from 1980 to 2008 protests became normalized in Spanish society through an increase in the number of demonstrators and demonstrations in the streets. These took place primarily in the capital of Spain where the main State institutions and administrations are situated. In this sense, these same experts (Jiménez, 2012, p. 61-63) point out that this "normalization" during the 1980's was influenced by "the incidence of demonstrations against terrorism and their effect on political learning" (Verdú, 2013, p. 3).

Nowadays, the catalyst for many of the social movements that have emerged since 2008 is attributed to 15M and the dissatisfaction generated in the population due to the world economic crisis, the revelation of endemic corruption, the modification of article 135 of the Constitution (expenditure limit), and the austerity policies that affected thousands of people. It was these events as a whole that led to a wave of protests which developed into different vindications and marked a new era after 2011, generating a crucial and relevant transition from individual autonomous thinking to collective autonomous thinking (Cohn-Bendit, 2013).

Some of the most important movements to emerge or become established since 15M are: PAH, Democracia Real Ya, Centro de medios, Juventud sin Futuro, Eurovegas No, Mareas, Occupy International, 15MpaRato, social centres, or urban gardens.

2.1. *How to penetrate the media agenda*

The media is fundamental to setting the public agenda. As we already know, they are responsible for filtering information to citizens through an agenda setting process, where they decide on what issues we learn about and how important they are.

In this sense, it is essential to find a way of drawing the media's attention to these citizen mobilizations. One way of achieving this is based on "reverse agenda setting," by capturing

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[1] Gil, I., Pascual, A. & Villarino, A. (2018, March, 09). 8-M histórico: millones de españolas llevan el feminismo al corazón del debate político. *El Confidencial.* Retrieved from https://www.elconfidencial.com/espana/2018-03-09/8-m-historico-millones-feminismo-partidos-politicos_1532930/.

[2] Buitrago, M. (2018, July, 21). Isabel Pardo: "Es viable que el AVE llegue soterrado en el año 2020". *La Verdad.* Retrieved from https://www.laverdad.es/murcia/vamos-pelear-llegue-20180721004039-ntvo.html.

the attention of the traditional media through communication strategies; for instance, political activism on social networks. Ultimately, the success of this strategy will transmit the message to the major media outlets (Jiang, 2014). The Pro-Underground Railway Platform is an example of this, since it managed to penetrate the media agenda thanks to its strategy based on social networks, mainly Facebook, building up a critical community which caught the media's attention.

Citing Meyer & Minkoff, (2004) "political opportunity," that is to say, whether the issue arouses interest in the political and institutional sphere or not, is determined by factors that are external to the social movement and can increase or decrease mobilization. Another factor "is the structure of media opportunity (Cammaerts, 2012), which determines the possibilities political activists have of accessing the media agenda." In this sense, the chief editor of *La Opinión* de Murcia, Lola García Abellán, confirms for this research that traditional media monitors the social networks of individual and group activists in order to follow certain issues. The Platform's social networks have been fundamental to their accessing the media agenda and published opinion. Dader (1990) notes that in the advanced phase of capitalism it is possible "to domesticate the sensation of frustration" in a large part of society. However, the case referred to, whose activity began in the nineties and has become even stronger in recent times, is an example that counters this predominant perception.

2.2. *The Internet as an alternative*

The Internet has become a critical tool for social movements and citizens in general. It has put an end to the exclusive control of the media in the selection, production and dissemination of information (Casero-Ripollés, 2010). It is now "forced to interact with citizens and new players in the production and distribution of news" (Jenkins, 2006; Deuze, 2007). There are many recent examples of the development of journalistic projects that originated on the net which were supported by social networks and justified by citizens' denouncements. Consequently, civic media has come to have a strong influence on traditional media (González-Esteban, López-Rico & Ortiz-Marín, 2019).

In the creation of information, self-media, that is to say, producing and disseminating one's own themes, allows social movements "to construct their own counter-hegemonic and critical narrative that expresses their interests, gives voice to those without one and plays an oppositional role against the dominant elites" (Fuchs, 2014). A clear example of this was 15M, where they created their own news channels like *Sol TV*, which was retransmitted live from the camps at the Puerta del Sol, managing to internationalize the protests and become a part of the international media agenda like *The Washington Post*, *Al Jazeera* or *The New York Times* (Casero-Ripollés, 2012).

Dissemination, another social networking phenomena, is viralization, which is achieved by the citizens' ability to share information. In the case that concerns us the media followed the issue on the social networks, but if this does not occur from the start, attention can be captured through viralization. By arousing public interest, the spotlight is focused on the issue and this will become of interest to the media who will then be able to provide their audience with information. However, social networks are not without controls, which prevents them from being a space of absolute freedom. The experts warn that on occasions there is a business impact. For instance, the interests of Facebook and Twitter are not always aligned with the protests that are disseminated on their channels, so they proceed to close the accounts of activists or movements based on their policies of use (Cammaerts, 2012).

Social networks are also a way of "monitoring governments" and controlling public policies. Citizens can be vigilant and denounce abuses and corruption without expecting the traditional media to do it for them "potentially, this can condition the media and the political agenda" (Casero-Ripollés & Feenstra, 2012).

The Pro-underground Railway Platform was created to make demands for infrastructures that would guarantee that there would be no risk to the population. However, this was not the only demand they made, they also put the spotlight on the corruption arising from the public-private management of this matter, spreading information about how the constructors were unable to account for more than six million euros to the Inland Revenue[3].

3. The origins and activity of the Pro-underground railway Platform in Murcia

The main aim of our research was established in 1991 when different neighbourhood associations formed a group to demand a solution to the problems of building the railway tracks underground in the vicinity of the Railway Station 'El Carmen,' an area of the city that experienced a rapid population and urban growth in the 1990s.

The problem of having the railway tracks built underground has concerned the people of Murcia for thirty years. The railway tracks divide the city in two, and for a large majority of the neighbours there are serious communication problems between their neighbourhoods and the city centre. The construction of an underpass below the tracks on the El Palmar-Cartagena road provided an alternative for vehicles but pedestrians had to use a subway which they refused to walk through because they considered it dangerous. It is these circumstances that led this neighbourhood group to become a Platform and fight for the same cause –the underground railway tracks.

Domingo Centenero, a member of the association, says father Tornel is the one who created the platform specifically dedicated to the issue of the underground railway. He is also the one who decided that the level crossing 'Santiago el Mayor' would be called the 'Plaza del Soterramiento,' "an important and mythical place that would become a common space for the neighbours to meet and for their proposal to become known to the whole city."

In the mid-nineties they began to meet periodically in the 'Plaza del Soterramiento'[4] (in fact Pío XII Street with C/ Orilla de la vía), "there was a time when the protest declined, from 2004/05, it looked as if things were going to be done, and in 2006 the agreement and environmental impact statement were signed and this caused the protests to subside," points out Centenero in an interview for this research.

In 1995 Miguel A. Cámara (PP) became Mayor, a position he would hold for 10 years. The mayor made "the promise of carrying out the most important urbanization Murcia has experienced in a century, which consisted of removing the 'scar' left by the railway and joining the two parts of the city." However, the citizens knew that if the AVE were to arrive before the railway was underground, this would never be done. So, the confrontation between local and regional administrations began, and the Platform decided to follow the example of the Mothers of the 'Plaza de Mayo' in Argentina (CADHU, 2014, p. 69) and assemble every Tuesday at a certain time, varying it according to their timetable. As these gatherings became known, alternative demonstrations and gradually, as father Tornel predicted, the message began to penetrate public opinion in Murcia.

The Platform is constituted as an assembly and the committee comprises 20 people, but any neighbour can attend the assemblies and demonstrations. They do not receive any public funding and they are supported by the contributions from neighbours.

They do not have a communication plan as such, the only thing they have clear is that "they are never going to lie to either the media or the neighbours," comments their media officer, Antonio Hernández. Their communication is based on social networks, especially Facebook and Twitter, and their website www.soterramientomurcia.es "The networks are

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[3] López Munuera, O. (2017, December, 14). Las constructoras del AVE no justificarían el 35 % del dinero facturado a Adif *Eldiario.es*. Retrieved from https://www.eldiario.es/murcia /corrupcion/constructoras-AVE-justificarian-facturado-Adif_0_718479158.html.

[4] The Plaform says that for a time they managed to get this name on Google Maps.

free, they are available to us 24 hours and are fundamental to getting our main message across: No to the AVE without underground tracks," explains Hernández.

Their profiles on the social networks demonstrate the importance of Facebook as the channel with most followers (23112) and a high index of Likes (22544), followed by Twitter (11800) and Instagram (1556).

The 2018 Digital Society Report in Spain affirms that in the Murcia Region the percentage of homes with Internet has increased, being 1.3% higher than the national average (Fundación Telefónica, 2019, p. 275). For this reason, the Platform is aware that the social networks have allowed them to spread their message and if they achieve their goal, the AVE will be built underground. They do not know what the Platform's future will be, but "the goal is to accomplish what we started," affirms their media officer and spokesperson.

For Domingo Centenero, it is important to know that Twitter and Facebook are different audiences: "What Facebook has done is to allow us to go beyond the framework of the media. The publicity that we have achieved with some content has gone viral and has given us extraordinary statistics, at one point they were higher than a regional newspaper."

4. Methodology and objectives

One of the main objectives of this research is to find out the extent to which the Pro-underground railway Platform is included in the Twitter profile of the most important politicians and press in the Murcia Region before the 2019 regional and municipal elections.

This social network has been chosen because it is the one most used by politicians and the media, as well as being one of the two most important online channels for the Platform.

We consider the following hypotheses:

H1. The Platform has managed to get the issues related to the underground railway mentioned on the Twitter accounts of politicians and parties from Murcia.

H2. The platform has managed to get the media to follow their information and has become the main source for this issue.

H3. Part of the communication success of the Platform is due to the fact that they have managed to remain an apolitical civic movement.

H4. Social networks have been fundamental to achieving their communication goals and creating a positive image of the movement among citizens.

The methodology includes a bibliographical and up to date review of social movements and their influence on public policies and the media. We have also combined quantitative methods, such as analysis of content (Bardin, 1991), and qualitative methods, such as structured and semi-structured interviews. With respect to the latter, we have consulted different experts from the Pro-underground railway Platform, citizens, political parties and communication professionals.

We have chosen these two types of interviews because they are better suited to the channels we used to contact the interviewees. The semi-structured interview is for those we have had face to face contact with because "it has greater flexibility than a structured interview, as it is based on planned questions that can be adapted to the interviewees." On the other hand, the structured interview, carried out by e-mail, "has the advantage of systematization" (Díaz-Bravo *et al.,* 2013, p. 163).

First of all, we contacted the Platform through a structured interview based on a questionnaire sent by e-mail to its media officer. This first phase involved gathering basic information that allowed us to establish a small sample of the impact it has had on national and regional media: television, radio, the press and online press.

With the general information we compiled, we consulted the rest of the interviewees by means of a questionnaire via e-mail, where we asked the different selected experts about their perception regarding the following questions:

- The Platform's communication strategies on the social networks.

- How the media have dealt with the issue nationally and regionally/locally.
- Which type of media has provided most coverage about the issue (press, television radio, digital media).

Finally, they were asked for a general valuation of the Platform's communication strategy and what they believed were its strong and weak points.

In this first phase, those interviewed included the journalists who have covered the information about this issue, as well as the members of the Platform itself and citizens who have participated in the mobilizations on the social networks and in person. Thus, we have opinions from the following: Daniel Sáez, a freelance designer; Carlos Nicolás Ortuño, a video analyst; Alejandro Vizcaíno Guillén, a Philosophy student; José Alberto Pardo Lidón, a journalist; Lola García Abellán, a journalist for *La Opinión* de Murcia; Jorge Fernández Sánchez, a student; Luis Peñalver Sánchez, an engineer; and Inma Morga Sánchez, a graphic designer.

In the second phase of the research, we focused on the repercussion that citizen mobilization and its media impact would have on pre-election actions. In this sense, a content analysis was made of the Twitter accounts of: political parties with representation in the council of Murcia (@PopularesMurcia, @MurciaPSOE, @Cs_Murcia, @murcia_podemos, @IuMurcia, @VoxMurcia, @EsAhoraMurcia, @CambiemosMurcia); election candidates for May 2019 (those who had presented their candidature at the time of the study @SergioRamosRuiz, @SerranoJAntonio, @GinesRuizMacia,, @oscarburu, @diegoconesa, @LopezMirasF, @Ballesta_Murcia, @mgfigal); the two most important newspapers in the region (@diariolaopinion, @laverdad_es) and the Platform itself (@SoterramientoMu). The sample period chosen was from 18th to 31st March.

The sample was selected considering three important milestones regarding the target subject of the study: the closure of the level crossing Santiago el Mayor (19th March) in order to start construction work; the Council of Ministers on 22nd March approving the addenda that modified the 2006 agreement for remodelling the 'Red Arterial Ferroviaria' (RAF) of Murcia[5]; and the meeting of the ADIF Administration Board (28th March).

Overall, we analysed all 321 tweets for the sample period, filtering out those tweets that were related to the issue, that is to say, that contained words like: soterramiento[6], AVE, estación/es, El Carmen, Santiago el Mayor, vías, tren and paso a nivel.

The online tool Netlytic, which retrieves tweets stored on the Twitter API, was used to download the material for the analysis.

The coding sheet we used for the content analysis comprises the following variables: number of tweets published, mentions of other accounts, terms most used, dates, retweets from other accounts and hashtags used. This allowed us to make averages, activity timelines on the accounts and to quantify the interactions between accounts while discussing the subject in question.

Alterix software was used for the treatment, integration and analysis of data, and results were displayed in Tableau. The procedure was as follows:

1. We excluded all tweets that were not published in the period from 18/03/19 to 31/03/19.
2. We included all tweets from the Platform SoterramientoMu (since all the tweets from this account discuss the target subject of the study). For the rest of the accounts selected in the download, we applied a search *string* filter in the field *description* (tweets content), selecting only the tweets that contain the text chains: soterramiento, soterr-, AVE, tren, vías, vias, estacion, estación, santiago el mayor, el carmen, estaciones y paso a nivel. In

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[5] Europa Press (2019, March, 22). El Consejo de Ministros modifica el convenio para la financiación del soterramiento del ferrocarril en Murcia. *La Verdad.* Retrieved from https://www.laverdad.es/murcia/consejo-ministros-modifica-20190322150001-nt.html.

[6] Including: soterrar, soterrando, and soterrado.

this way, the sample selection only included tweets that contain information related to the scope of this study.

3. Through tools for regular expression search, we made lists which specify which accounts are mentioned, the hashtags used, and which accounts they have retweeted to, and we counted them to find out the number of times.

4. With the same words used to select which tweets to include in the sample and with the help of tools for regular expression search, we obtained the number of times that each of these words appears in the data set.

This second phase also included qualitative methods, interviews by e-mail with the different actors from the parties represented in Murcia City Council, although we only received answers from Ginés Ruiz Maciá (Podemos-Equo) and Eduardo Martínez-Oliva Aguilera (PP). Likewise, we conducted semi-structured interviews, face to face with several members of the Platform: Antonio Hernández, the media officer; Domingo Centenero, a high-school history teacher and Pedro Arques, retired, and other members, who provided information about their relations with the parties, the Public Administrations of Murcia and the media. From a methodological perspective, these in-depth interviews have a special relevance because of the degree of knowledge that the people interviewed have about the issue and because they were planned in parallel with non-participatory observation in the area of the mobilizations.

5. Results

5.1. *Perception of the Platform's communication strategy by different social and media actors*

With respect to the opinions of the actors consulted in the first phase, we found they were unanimous in attributing a great importance to the social networks' role in disseminating the Platform's message. In this sense, the journalist, José Alberto Pardo Lidón believes that: "They have known how to gain a broad mass of followers through the networks, creating a 'newsletter' which the traditional media could draw on for information." For this reason, these channels have been of maximum importance, and for the journalist "the events they have been holding day after day throughout the year would not have been reflected and followed to such an extent without the social networks."

Daniel Sáez, a freelance designer, and active in the dissemination and creation of groups on social networks explains that "the strategy has been relentless, but in fact it has been a mirror of the grassroots debates and assemblies."

In the same sense, another citizen consulted, Alejandro Vizcaíno, a Philosophy student, indicates that "the constant activity by the Pro-underground Railway Platform on the social networks was crucial to the coordination of group actions. Every Tuesday there was a demonstration on the tracks and other actions were taken to cut off the South Circular road or part of the city centre, and all these actions were retransmitted through the social networks." In this line, the chief editor of *La Opinión*, Lola García Abellán, thinks that "they have used the networks with respect and above all to inform about the actions they were taking."

This communication strategy has favoured coverage by the media because, according to García Abellán, "we cannot be present on all fronts 24 hours a day, and the social networks have allowed us to keep up with events. It has been fundamental to us. Besides, they have also been an outlet for news and information produced by the media." In the same sense, she highlights the importance of "the internal documents that were posted on the networks and which have also been a source of information."

One of the most important communication actions and one which put the spotlight on the Platform were "the daily assemblies, which we have been able to follow live, as in the case

of the huge demonstrations in both Murcia and Madrid," affirms García Abellán. Pardo Lidón is of the same opinion and puts "the call for a huge demonstration on the same level as the Pilgrimage to the Virgin" emphasising that "this demonstration would not have been of such magnitude without the networks, which served as a loud-speaker to announce it." Word of mouth is now 'Facebook to Facebook.'

However, for the video analyst Carlos Ortuño, a citizen who has followed and supported the protests by the Platform, the key moment of visibilization was "the appearance of the Platform on a national radio program on Cadena SER. The mix of news with humour caught the attention of many more people who then became interested in this grassroots problem."

In the second phase of the research, we analysed the words related to the issue and their recurrence on the different accounts analysed during the sample period, as shown in Graph 1. In second place is 'Soterramiento,' the Platform's main demand, since the underground railway had to be constructed before the arrival of the AVE. They did not want to have the same experience as in Valladolid where "they were completely deceived and called us to tell us not to accept the agreement, because they had signed the same one, and there, the neighbourhood La Pilarica has become isolated and they have been told it is impossible to build the tracks underground," says Antonio Hernández.

Graph 1: Words related to the target subject which recurred most on the tweets in the sample.
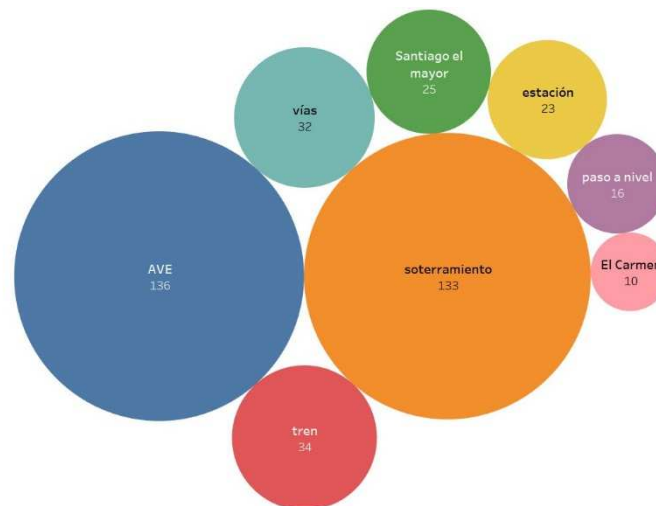
Source: Own elaboration.

5.2. *The strong and weak points of the Platform's communication strategy*

Overall, everybody interviewed in the first phase valued the Platform's communication strategy positively. We asked them to indicate from 0 (very poor) to 10 (excellent) what it was like generally and the average obtained was 8.8 points, with 8 being the lowest score.

More specifically, Daniel Sáez, points out the Platform's "capacity for self-organization, self-management and direct action."

One of the milestones achieved was managing to fully transmit all their demands on a regional and even national level. One "drawback was that greater unity of action could have been achieved after the violent clashes. It was not possible to reach a consensus and another independent neighbourhood platform was constituted (Asamblea Murcia Sin Muros)," points out Antonio Hernández for this investigation.

In this line, he notes that "infiltration of the neighbourhood Platform by certain people who acted violently, which the neighbours did not want, and the Tuesday demonstrations (in

the end they were minimal because people were fed up)" are aspects that, in his opinion, they could have managed better.

There have also been other points of disagreement among the Platform members about the closure of the level crossing. Some neighbours did not want it to close during the construction work. For, the media officer, Antonio Hernández:

> Adif told us that it was not safe because no technician was going to sign off on people crossing there during construction work. And, on the other hand, it was only going to be closed 8 months and not 2 years as was proposed at the start, since it was closed just when construction work started and not before.

However, there were successful points for the engineer like: "the 'fall of the wall,' the biggest feminist demonstration in Murcia and its culmination the railway tracks (8M 2018) and, of course, the underground railway project." From the Platform, Domingo Centenero remembers another demonstration on 30th September 2017 where there were "about 50,000 people according to the PP Government delegation, although we think there were more and it was the largest the city of Murcia had ever witnessed, on a par with the one on 8M 2018." For his part, Pedro Arques, points out that "a few days after this demonstration in September, we also managed to bring together thousands of people in front of the Ministry of Public Works and Transport in Madrid." By 20th March 2019, the citizens had spent 555 consecutive days holding assemblies, "everybody knows about this," some members of the Platform point out.

For Carlos Ortuño, there were no weaknesses and the high points of the strategy were "communication with national media, 24-hour daily information at the most sensitive times of the situation, and not aligning with any of the political parties."

From her journalist perspective, for Lola García Abellán the most relevant and positive values are "the simultaneity; the large number of people who were capable of engaging with and trawling the Internet, and the way they have accounted for and documented their opinions." As far as the weak points are concerned, she believes "sometimes the Platform's opinion has been confused with that of people who have used more radical invective on their personal accounts."

For the journalist José Alberto Pardo Lidón, the most favourable aspects were: "their creative ability and providing the media with something different, (we should not forget that they are like a loudspeaker) so their fight would not end up as a routine. I am referring to the special events like music, cinema, a procession, etc. The worst thing you can offer the media is routine, the same thing all the time, no news." He also highlights "their capacity for staying away from political focal points most of the time, which has gained them the sympathies of social environments, and for selling their fight as a good cause (counteracting the prejudices that their victory could lead to in the rest of Murcia society, casting them as something similar to a class fight, the poor against the rich, needs against luxuries)." Finally, this expert emphasises the positive handling of the social networks as a means of reaching a broader group of supporters and as a 'press office' "to get their information through to the traditional media."

Regarding negative points, he highlights that the usual discrepancies within groups of a certain magnitude were inevitable and warns that

> when any media outlet tried to publish the versions of other parties involved in the conflict, the information professionals who disseminated them were directly attacked, and some of the journalists and/or photographers who covered the terrain of the protests even received threats. It is a very common mistake, but the dangerous thing is when the very media of the affected party (its social networks) gives voice and prominence to these biased arguments.

According to the student Jorge Fernández: "The beginning was stimulating, and they created networks of great interest and with a strong presence of harmony, which is positive with respect to improving the neighbourhood and uniting so many people." In this sense, he indicates "a successful point was the deployment and organization of the networks, which remained active from different channels and generated a debate that was practically direct. Having so many people following a publication from afar was one of the great achievements of the Platform."

On the other hand, a negative aspect was "that this initial energy was dispersed through different channels. On the one hand, different strategies were created, some were more direct, and others were more passive, and this caused a significant division in the group, which had once been a single group. On the other hand, the inclusion of other vindications external to the neighbourhood and to Murcia, which in their pursuit to join forces brought about further internal dissipation."

Luis Peñalver specifies the success of "demonstrating that different public bodies (ADIF, RENFE, Council, Community, Public works…) were lying and presenting biased information. Going beyond the stranglehold these institutions have on political power in this Region regarding this issue and raising awareness of this problem."

On the other hand, he notes the weaknesses as:

> being an anti-political Platform. Various people had problems with each other because some wanted to align with one party and others refused. It took a lot of effort to establish common action strategies on the Networks, we were not flexible or firm in reaching agreements when developing communication strategies and a certain sector of the citizens disassociated themselves from the Platform, which wanted to maintain an anti-political stance.

Finally, Inma Morga, believes the best valuation can be found in "its organization and opting for providing information and allowing neighbours the freedom to express their points of view." However, she considers that "some opinions are repeated to a certain extent, and then they end up back in the same place."

5.3. *Coverage of neighbourhood action by* La Opinión *and* La Verdad

In general, and in the opinion of the Platform, local or regional coverage has been greater than national coverage. For the media officer, Antonio Hernández: "The difference is that the local press knows more about the problem and the national press is under less pressure from the regional government." However, appearances on national television, like La Sexta, gave the issue greater visibility. In this sense, both the journalist Pardo Lidón and García Abellán, defend the role of the written press regarding their in-depth treatment of the subject. For the chief editor of *La Opinión*: "it has followed the subject daily and analysed it through the opinion articles." This perception is shared by Sáez who believes that "television could have been the greatest in terms of audience figures, but by no means as profound."

However, not everyone agrees and citizens like Ortuño believe "the Facebook profile of the Pro-underground railway track was better because there were no lucrative interests and it fought to inform the world about a barbarism. The worst, *La Opinión* and *La Verdad*" because "the editors of the regional and local media had a lot to lose if they carried out their task as journalists and reported rigorously on the financial fraud that was committed at the expense of destroying the city and seriously harming the life of its citizens." This opinion is shared by Daniel Sáez: "The local media have only criminalized the Pro-underground actions, and their treatment of the corruption by ADIF was an insult." In the same sense, Vizcaíno highlights that "there was a feeling that they were criminalizing the neighbours and they did not support their vindications, and in this way, they took the same stance as the Government Delegation."

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In the same line of criticism about local media (González-Esteban, López-García, Llorca-Abad & López-Rico, 2015), Daniel Sáez indicates that it does not surprise him because "the media is a corporate servant, and in the case of 7RM in Murcia, everybody knows that this television station is managed by the institutional mafia."

We also asked about the importance of local media with respect to the visibilization of the issue. García Abelán points out that "even some national journalists have contacted the local press to comprehend our view of the subject," because "these channels very likely picked up on it from the 'noise' made by the regional media" affirms Pardo Lidón.

However, the citizens we asked agree that the local or regional media have fallen short. For Luis Peñalver, an engineer, the most accurate were "Cadena Ser and Onda Cero Reg. Murcia, who were very rigorous in presenting the information and focused on the real problems of the neighbours, not on the need for a 'train of ruin' so that a region forgotten for decades should prosper, which was the argument most disseminated by political powers." In fact, he emphasises that regional public television 7TV, "did not allow any member of the Platform to appear on their talk shows, except on two occasions."

Finally, the student Jorge Fernández, affirms that "in *La Verdad* I saw news items that always had an institutional undertone in their version, and in *La Opinión*, if I saw the demands of the movement reflected at certain times, it was always predominated by a certain sensation of doubting the Platform and belief in the institutions."

In the analysis made of the accounts of *La Opinión* and *La Verdad*, we noted that neither of them mentioned or retweeted the Platforms account during the sample period. However, the Platform did not retweet them either (it did retweet other media like @DailyMur, seven times, @ORMurcia, four, and @SER_Murcia, once).

At the same time, out of the total number of mentions that the Platform made of other media outlets, *La Verdad* is the one most mentioned as we can see in the following graph.

Graph 2: The Platform's mentions of the media during the sample period.
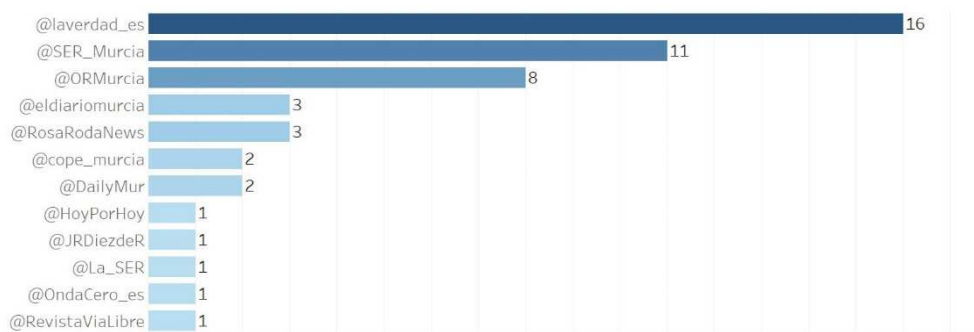
Source: Own elaboration.

Therefore, during the sample period, in our analysis of the most read press in Murcia, they did not visibilize the Platform on their accounts. However, as we can see in the following graph, they were conditioned by the events surrounding the underground railway. In the case of 22nd March (the Council of Ministers), the press did not increase its activity about the issue, but it did on Monday 25th and after the meeting of the ADIF Administration Board. On 29th March, we can see a small increase, in this case led by the press.

Graph 3: Evolution over time of the newspapers' accounts and the Platform's account during the sample period.
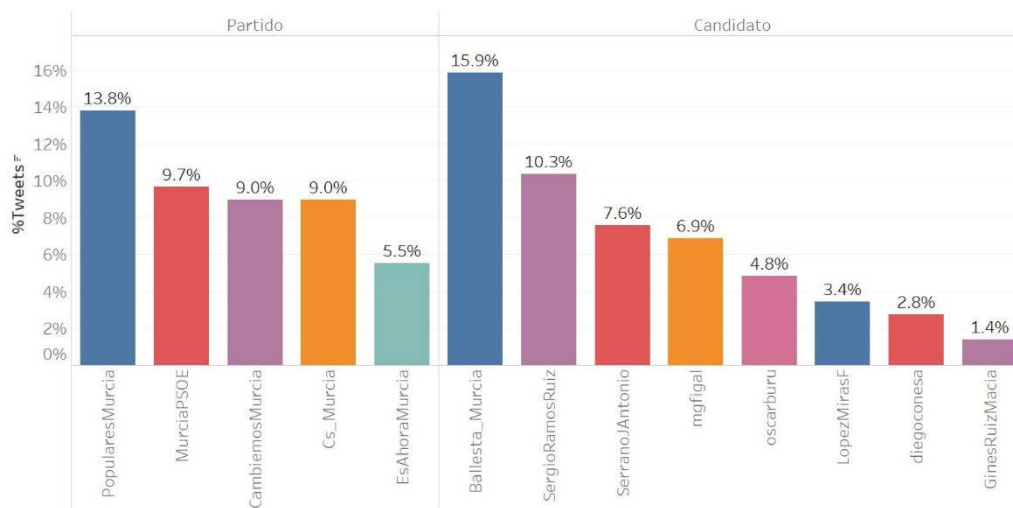

Source: Own elaboration.

5.4. *Appearance of the Platform and the underground railway in Twitter communications by parties*

The parties and candidates used the issue of the underground railway track on their accounts as part of their discourse, some defending the underground railway before the arrival of the AVE and vice-versa. As we can see, the PP in Murcia is the party that most dealt with the issue, followed by the PSOE. On the other hand, the candidates that most talked about the underground railway on their profiles is the mayor, Ballesta, followed by the candidates for Cambiemos Murcia, the PSOE and Mario Gómez Figal for Ciudadanos.

Graph 4: Number of tweets about the underground railway per accounts.
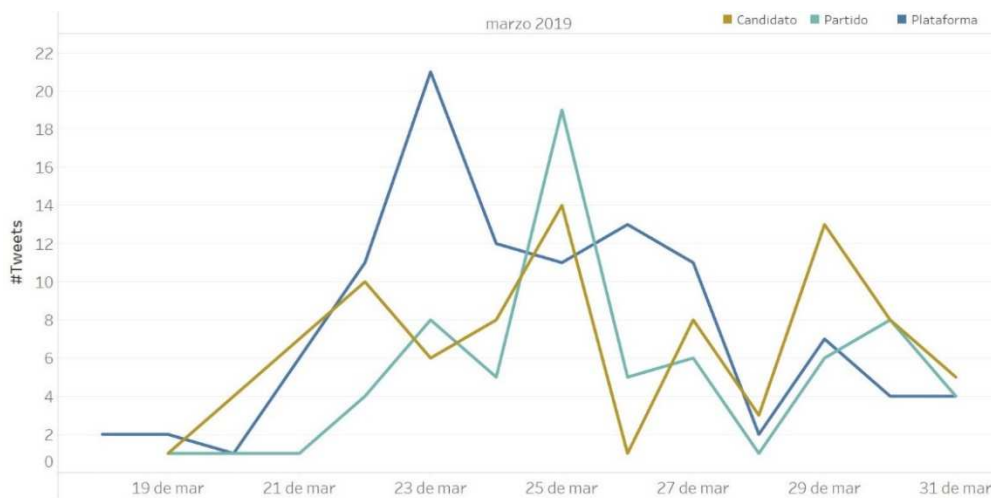

Source: Own elaboration.

As can be observed, the Platform's account was not mentioned by the media, and the parties or candidates followed this practice. Es Ahora Murcia is the only party that most mentioned it with three tweets, and the candidates that mentioned the Platform are: Óscar Urralburu Arza (Podemos Murcia) and Sergio Ramos Ruiz (Cambiemos Murcia) with three and two mentions respectively.

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In the case of retweets, only the accounts of @ SerranoJAntonio and @MurciaPSOE each retweeted the Platform once during the sample period.

Although the Platform did not have visibility on the profiles of other accounts via retweets and mentions, in the following graph, we can see how the parties and candidates followed it. For example, on 22nd March, after the Council of Ministers, the Platform published a post and there was a peak in the *tweets*, which were followed by the other accounts on Monday 25th, in this order: parties and candidates. Another of the peaks to stand out is on 29th March, after the meeting of the ADIF Board of Administration, where the candidates lead, followed by the Platform and the parties.

It is worth noting that on 19th March after the closure of the level crossing Santiago el Mayor, activity did not peak.

Graph 5: Evolution over time of the accounts of politicians and the Platform during the sample period.

Source: Own elaboration.

5.5. *Influence of the underground railway on the 2019 municipal and regional election campaigns in Murcia*

Although some parties have tried to politicize the Platform, one of its achievements is that it has been able to disassociate itself from them. "Before they told us that we were Podemos, now we are the PSOE, a short time ago we were Ciudadanos… but Podemos did not exist when we started the platform." The PP, in their opinion, is the party that has tried most to label the movement "because they were in government" and "in the end I believe that they thought, if we cannot discredit them in one way, we will do it another, but they achieved the opposite," affirms Antonio Hernández.

But for Centenero, the important thing is that the movement "was not opposing the AVE, it was a transversal movement. And at the same time, another of our strengths was to never lie, to say what was being done and what could or could not be achieved, and not allow ourselves to be influenced by any political party."

Hernández also believes that the subject of the underground railway will be present in the election campaign: "because the subject of the AVE is recurring, before for one reason and now for another. Before the PP said that the AVE was coming now, because since 2013 they have been promising this."

In the analysis carried out during the sample period, we can see how the parties and candidates talked about the issue on their Twitter accounts. Domingo Centenero, is not sure if the AVE issue is good as an election strategy for all the parties:

> It will be used politically for: when the work is going to be done, how long it will take…; and this is how it could be used between the PP and PSOE. The PP will say that the AVE has not arrived because the PSOE do not want it to, and the PSOE will say that they have brought the underground AVE to Murcia.

In this sense, the politicians interviewed affirm different actions. The deputy mayor from the PP, Eduardo Martínez-Oliva Aguilera explains that he will not take any specific action while campaigning, although they will propose the 'Conexión Sur' after the underground railway.

Ginés Ruiz Maciá, the Podemos-Equo candidate for mayor informs that they are going to continue in contact with the Platform during the campaign until they achieve their goal and after that he claims to have "numerous proposals for a new municipal model."

The speeches and the stance taken by the different parties with respect to the issue are clear, indicates Hernández: "The PSOE says their priority is the underground railway and once this is done, the AVE will arrive, and the PP says that first the AVE will arrive and then the underground railway." However, this changed when the three administrations signed the 2001 agreement stating that the AVE would arrive at the same time as the underground railway.

This has even caused internal differences within the regional and local PP. The mayor of Murcia, "has been much milder in his attacks on the Platform and in maintaining the same party discourse of asking for the AVE first and then the underground railway." But on a regional level, "as we understand it, because of pressures from Madrid, and as it is an important matter for them nationally, they have favoured the AVE first," affirms the Platform's media officer.

Relations with the parties, according to the Platform, have been marked by the initiatives on their part "we did not give them time, as soon as they took office we asked for a meeting." However, there have been important differences with some parties. "The PP was more reluctant before, but in the end, they realised that they had to play to the gallery and have a meeting with us because they could not remain on the side-lines," affirms Hernández.

However, Eduardo Martínez-Oliva Aguilera (PP) indicates that their party has always shared the same objective as the citizens, but "their relationship became difficult because of two specific events: the Platform's decision to bring civil proceedings against municipal representatives and the politicization of the issue as a consequence of the interventions by political groups."

The change in the national government has also made a difference. With the PP Government Delegation "2 million euros was spent on police to control the demonstrations," because they were eager to deter them, but this just led to more demonstrations because of police aggression. At that point, the PP changed strategy and began to fine neighbours for pointless reasons, like eating sunflower seeds[7]. "With the new Government Delegate, the fines have been withdrawn and the police have happily left because they did not want to fine people, but if they had not done that, they would have received a sanction," says Hernández.

Proof of police deployment was made evident on the programme 'El Intermedio,' when Gonzo visited Murcia. Antonio Hernández spoke to him because that day police presence was minimized "but Gonzo told me that he knew that, and that he was coming back the following day. That is how they did it, and they saw the usual police deployment."

Ultimately, the underground railway will be an issue that "could be decisive for the citizens from the south zone, but it is also going to depend on the parties. The more the AVE is talked about the worse for some and, in fact, there are people from the PP itself who tell us they would not talk about either the AVE or the underground railway" points out Antonio.

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[7] Peñalver, V. (2018, August, 02) Archivan la denuncia contra un vecino por "comer pipas y mirar de forma desafiante a la policía" en las vías de Murcia. *Eldiario.es*. Retrieved from https://www.eldiario.es/murcia/sociedad/Comer-desafiante-policia-Murcia-ilegal_0_799320291.html.

Instead, the opposition believe it could be beneficial to talk about the subject "by saying that thanks to the neighbours, the largest amount of public funding in the history of Murcia has been obtained, 600 million euros, and that a Council of Ministers has never changed two laws. This had never happened before, and it is a trump card for the PSOE. Although the rest of the opposition will say that this is especially thanks to the neighbours."

6. Conclusions

In conclusion, we can see how the citizens interviewed perceive that the networks are fundamentally important as a means of communication for the Platform. The journalists consulted also agree with this, recognizing that it facilitated their work when covering events. Therefore, according to the citizens interviewed and the large number of social network followers that the Platform has, H4 can be accepted. As the Platform has managed to remain a transversal apolitical movement and gained the sympathy of a large number of citizens, H3 is also confirmed.

In the context of the regional/local media's treatment of the subject, the journalists we contacted defend *La Opinión* de Murcia, the paper they work for. They especially defend the role of the local press, which, in their opinion, have informed in-depth about the issue. Besides, they point out the importance of the local media in arousing the interest of the national media, who then relied on them as a source of information.

However, in the analysis of the sample, we can see that the press accounts do not contain any mentions or retweets of the Platform, which has therefore not been able to participate in the social communication by the media as such. Yet, it has succeeded in introducing the subject of the underground railway in the conversations on the profiles of *La Verdad* and *La Opinión* de Murcia.

With respect to the candidates and parties, the Platform is not visible on their accounts either, except for the PSOE, Podemos and Es Ahora Murcia. But the subject of the underground railway itself has certainly been very important in general. All the parties or candidates talked about this issue throughout the sample period, so we can affirm likewise that the Platform as an association has not succeeded in appearing on the political accounts, but it has managed to make the issue visible, which was their main objective.

Nevertheless, we can affirm that the results obtained by the Platform have been more positive than negative, making it evident that social mobilisations are effective and can be sustained through self-management and one's own control of the information. All of this is thanks to new technologies, which have enabled the citizens to access a channel with worldwide dissemination that can catch the attention of the media and penetrate their agenda as well as that of the politicians.

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