# Cultural activism: A content analysis of popular culture petitions on Change.org Spain

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## Abstract

The digital platforms for citizen mobilisation host a multitude of protest petitions with different purposes and intentions. In this complex and pluralistic context, this study analyses the success of citizen-driven initiatives on Change.org Spain, as this platform appears to have become one of the most consequential participative websites in Spain, especially for petitions that are related to popular culture. To this end, this study used a quantitative content analysis method to examine a total of 304 petitions. The main results reveal some communication weaknesses of Change.org Spain as an important platform for cyber-activism. Specifically, *troll* petitions—joking messages that adulterate the seriousness of fan dynamics—are as impactful as *fan* or *antifan* initiatives; as a result, Change.org Spain has certain communicative deficiencies as a model cyber-activist channel. On the other hand, there are a significant number of non-diegetic petitions: the *fandom* profile is more concerned with issues outside popular culture than about modifying or changing the content. Finally, our findings show that, in general, the most successful popular culture initiatives are better written and include a longer title and text than closed initiatives, regardless of whether they were part of *fan* or *antifan* movements. In short, this study concludes that the length and linguistic correctness are relevant and meaningful elements that determine the success or failure of popular culture petitions on Change.org Spain, while all other variables (addresser, audiovisual elements, popular culture community type and type of actions) were not significant in determining the success or failure of the e-petition. In general, most of the petitions are not successful, typically use images,

usually address issues related to music, are extradiegetic, contain linguistic errors and are addressed to an individual.

**Keywords:** cyber-activism; cultural activism; popular culture; fans; antifans; civic participation

**Resum.** *Activisme cultural: anàlisi de contingut de les peticions de cultura popular a Change. org España*

Les plataformes digitals de mobilització ciutadana alberguen multitud d'iniciatives de protesta que representen diferents propòsits i intencions. En aquest complex mosaic pluralista, el present estudi ha considerat convenient analitzar les peticions que se situen a Change.org Espanya —ja que aquesta plataforma sembla que ha esdevingut un dels webs participatius més rellevants a Espanya—, concretament, les peticions relacionades amb la cultura popular. Per fer-ho, s'ha recorregut a la metodologia quantitativa d'anàlisi de contingut, amb la qual s'ha examinat un total de $n = 304$ peticions. Els principals resultats obtinguts revelen que Change.org Espanya presenta certes deficiències com a plataforma ciberactivista de referència perquè s'hi han detectat peticions trol —missatges jocosos que adulteren la serietat de les dinàmiques fan— que tenen el mateix èxit que les iniciatives fan o antifan. D'altra banda, existeix un nombre significatiu de peticions extradiegètiques: el perfil *fandom* (cultura fan) està més preocupat per les qüestions que envolten el producte de cultura popular que no pas per modificar-ne o replantejar-ne el contingut com a tal. Finalment, en general, les iniciatives de cultura popular més reeixides són les que estan més ben escrites i que tenen un títol i text més llargs que les peticions tancades, independentment de si aquests missatges formen o no part del moviment fan o antifan. Per tant, pot inferir-se que la longitud i la correcció lingüística són elements rellevants que condicionen l'èxit o el fracàs de les peticions de cultura popular a Change.org Espanya. En canvi, la resta de variables estudiades (emissor, tipus de contingut, temàtica i tipus de comunitat) no han resultat significatives per determinar l'èxit o el fracàs de les peticions. En línies generals, la majoria de les peticions no solen tenir èxit, l'emissor és individual, contenen preferentment imatges, aborden qüestions relacionades amb la música, són extradiegètiques i contenen errors lingüístics.

**Paraules clau:** ciberactivisme; activisme cultural; cultura popular; fans; antifans; participació ciutadana

**Resumen.** *Activismo cultural: análisis de contenido de las peticiones de cultura popular en Change.org España*

Las plataformas digitales de movilización ciudadana albergan multitud de iniciativas de protesta que representan diferentes propósitos e intenciones. En este complejo mosaico pluralista, el presente estudio ha considerado conveniente analizar las peticiones que se ubican en Change.org España —ya que esta plataforma parece haberse convertido en una de las webs participativas más relevantes en España—, en concreto, aquellas peticiones relacionadas con la cultura popular. Para ello, se ha recurrido a la metodología cuantitativa de análisis de contenido, con la que se ha examinado un total de $n = 304$ peticiones. Los principales resultados obtenidos revelan que Change.org España presenta ciertas deficiencias como plataforma ciberactivista de referencia porque se han detectado peticiones trol —mensajes jocosos que adulteran la seriedad de las dinámicas fan— que tienen el mismo éxito que las iniciativas fan o antifán. Por otro lado, existe un significativo número de peticiones extradiegéticas: el perfil *fandom* (cultura fan) está más preocupado por las cuestiones que rodean al producto de cultura popular que por modificar o replantear el contenido

como tal. Finalmente, en general, las iniciativas de cultura popular más exitosas son aquellas que están mejor escritas y que tienen un título y texto más largos que las peticiones cerradas, independientemente de si estos mensajes forman o no parte del movimiento fan o antifán. Por lo tanto, puede inferirse que la longitud y la corrección lingüística son elementos relevantes que condicionan el éxito o fracaso de las peticiones de cultura popular en Change.org España. En cambio, el resto de las variables estudiadas (emisor, tipo de contenido, temática y tipo de comunidad) no resultaron significativas para determinar el éxito o fracaso de las peticiones. En líneas generales, la mayoría de las peticiones no suelen tener éxito, el emisor es individual, contienen preferentemente imágenes, abordan cuestiones relacionadas con la música, son extradiegéticas y contienen errores lingüísticos.

**Palabras clave:** ciberactivismo; activismo cultural; cultura popular; fanes; antifanes; participación ciudadana

## 1. Introduction

In Spain, the cyber-activism that takes place on digital platforms associated with citizen mobilisation, such as Change.org, is still an emerging phenomenon. Nevertheless, despite its incipient nature, cyber-activism presents an opportunity for citizens to participate in the social context, develop a protest strategy and invite other individuals to join and become involved in their initiative (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2013). In this sense, cyber-activism is a multi-stakeholder process (Hemmati, 2002) aiming to integrate different voices and perspectives into a single digital platform. Thus, a type of collaboration is created that enhances the exchange of knowledge and fosters a shared culture.

The digital platforms for citizen mobilisation host a multitude of protest petitions that represent different purposes and intentions, as they reveal the concerns of the current heterogeneous society. In this complex and pluralistic context, this study has considered it appropriate to focus the analysis on popular culture petitions listed on Change.org, as this platform appears to have become one of the most consequential participative websites in Spain (Marqués, 2015; Change.org, 2018). Thus, this research focuses on exploring cultural activism, a specific form of cyber-activism engaged in by audiences involved in participatory practices, which exemplifies Jenkins' (2006) concept of convergence culture.

The main objective of this study is to analyse the success of popular culture initiatives on Change.org as a form of cultural activism and their connections to and implications for media fandom. A prior exploratory analysis suggested that these messages act like any other expression of civic engagement and social identity, closely tied to the concepts of community or fandom based on Jenkins' (2006) tenets. These messages also arise as a result of the diversity of profiles that come together in the current digital context.

Considering the proposed objectives, it was determined to be appropriate to use a quantitative content analysis methodology to analyse petitions on Change.org Spain. Of the 44,429 initial petitions recorded on the platform

through January 29, 2017, we identified a total of 1443 initiatives associated with popular culture. However, the subsequent SPSS analysis was carried out using a random sample of n = 304 petitions.

## 2. Cyber-activism as a new form of collective action

Cyber-activism is a tool of civic participation that arose out of citizen indignation which aims to construct a more open, transparent and interactive society (Cover, 2006), particularly at the meso and macro levels (Kim and Ball-Rokeach, 2006; Poutanen et al., 2015). Cyber-activism is a civic empowerment model (Casero-Ripollés, 2017) that responds to the need of citizens to establish horizontal communication among users across the world. This model seeks to create and share content and to find allies to become involved in the issues and initiatives proposed.

For Van Laer and Van Aelst (2009), an evident transformation has occurred in the repertoire of actions of citizen participation. The Internet has been the main catalyst for this change, which has incentivised the creation of new opportunities for civic engagement—activism—with the goal of guaranteeing individual participation in cultural, social, political and economic actions (Kaun and Uldam, 2018). In this sense, digital convergence has entailed the redefinition of the role of citizens so that, currently, individuals also seek to communicate with the creators of initiatives and contents. In this context, cyber-activists find in the digital ecosystem an immersive experience that enables them to personalise the participatory experience according to the objectives of the addresser, the dissemination method and the tools used to share content. According to Jenkins et al. (2013), this type of protest has the potential to promote 'spreadable' communication, in other words, communication that is easy to disseminate. Thus, collective knowledge or shared knowledge becomes an important tool of power in convergence societies (Jenkins, 2006) and the catalyst for 'common culture' (Raymond, 2008).

Change.org is well known as one of the largest online e-petition platforms (Huang et al., 2015; Elnoshokaty et al., 2016) and one of the main platforms for cyber-activism in Spain (Marqués, 2015; Change.org, 2018). The website Change.org must serve the practical function (Jakobson, 1960) of promoting interaction between the addresser and the addressee of content concerning cyber-activism while maintaining the conversation among platform users and motivating citizen mobilisation (Minocher, 2018). To execute this practical function, it was determined that Change.org should focus its activity in five areas: *information, interactivity, mobilisation, ease of use and instrumental help* and *visual appeal and design*. A content analysis of the website (Pérez-Escolar, 2017) concluded that the less pragmatic and functional areas, such as *ease of use and instrumental help* and *visual appeal and design*, were the best. In turn, the most important aspects regarding the epistemology of cyber-activism, such as *information, interactivity* and *mobilisation*, were not adequately developed.

## 3. Fans as cultural activists

Within the context of media convergence (Jenkins, 2006), the role of fans as cyber-activist agents should be highlighted. According to Duffett (2013: 2), "media fandom is the recognition of a positive, personal, relatively deep, emotional connection with a mediated element of popular culture". In this sense, Grandío (2016) asserts that one of the main motivations and characteristics of the fan as a viewer is the search for pleasure. This motivation is also highlighted by Brough and Shresthova (2012), who describe these agents as "a group of individuals" constructed "through interest-driven affiliations, forming a sense of collective or subcultural identity around shared tastes".

In his studies on media fandom, Jenkins has promoted a substantial paradigm shift to address these audiences. Although fans are generally viewed as producers or editors of content—linked to the concept of the "prosumer" in line with McLuhan and Barrington (1972) and Toffler (1980)—it should be highlighted that this expression is nothing more than a perspective and that the term "fan" implies a much more complex reality in which there are different identities and motivations. As Taylor (2015: 174) asserts, "fan identity is unlikely to be experienced in the same way by all individuals who identify as fans". Thus, the production of "tangible" content (Herrero-Diz et al., 2017: 940) is equally relevant to other actions, such as participation, interaction, interactivity, content and information search. Bennett (2014) proposes four praxes contributed by digital technology to fan communities, one of them being citizen empowerment—an example of organisational and civic power.

Although activism is commonly seen as actions that defy existing hegemonies, leading to political and social change (Brough and Shresthova, 2012), fan action can also be understood as participatory and transformative action. As Bennet (2014: 10) explains, activism has always been an essential characteristic of fan culture. For example, in many cases, fandoms associated with different TV shows have come together to prevent the cancellation of some of their favourite products through 'Save Our Show' campaigns (Guerrero-Pico, 2017). In this context, Guerrero-Pico (2017: 2087) describes how fans "have renegotiated their share in the power structure and have achieved a more decisive position in terms of influence capacity". As Brough and Shresthova (2012) explain, "fan and consumer activism are more visible than ever before, and the lines between these and traditional civic and political activities are blurring in today's increasingly 'participatory' media and entertainment landscape".

In turn, Van Zoonen (2005) encourages comparing the practices of fans with political participation: fans are intensely involved in the social context, participate in important discussions regarding the characteristics of the fan community, and propose and debate new alternatives that could be implemented. Thus, to reconcile the different approaches, Jenkins (2012) refers to cultural activism as a kind of cyber-activism integrated by fans who seek to change their cultural environment.

## 4. Methodology

The objective of this study is to analyse the success of popular culture-related petitions on Change.org Spain and their relation to media fandom using a quantitative content analysis methodology. The definition of popular culture established by Szeman and O'Brien (2017) was used to identify these petitions, incorporating the main characteristics of this type of culture linked to entertainment through any commercial means and with the economic and technological capacity to reach large sectors of the population.

Thus, during the first phase, a total of 44,429 petitions recorded through January 20, 2017 were identified using the platform's search function. However, we decided to focus the analysis only on those petitions related to popular culture expressions or products, following the above definition of the term. During the second and final stage, after reviewing the 44,429 petitions, we determined that the number of initiatives associated with popular culture was 1443. Given the size of the population, a sample was taken by simple randomisation (Hernández-Sampieri et al., 2014) using Epidat software (n = 304, e+/–5%, p = q = 50, GC = .95).

Based on the established objectives, we performed the SPSS analysis and coding according to an *ex professo* protocol for this study where the variable 'status' (that is, whether the initiative is 'closed' or has a 'victory' status) was compared to six other variables that have been used in a previous taxonomy (Pérez-Escolar, 2017) for studying cyber-activism on e-petition platforms: addresser, supporters, audiovisual elements, popular culture, community, type of actions and linguistic errors. Regarding this analysis, we determined the following research questions (RQ):

— RQ1. How does the variable 'addresser' affect the status of the petitions? The variable 'addresser' is the profile of the petition's sender under the categories of 'woman', 'man', 'collective' and 'anonymous'.
— RQ2. How does the variable 'supporters' affect the status of the petitions? The variable 'supporters' is the number of signatories to the petition at the time of analysis.
— RQ3. How does the variable 'audiovisual elements' affect the status of the petitions? The variable 'audiovisual elements' is the inclusion or absence of snapshots or videos in the petition.
— RQ4. How does the variable 'popular culture' affect the status of the petitions? This variable involves the topics for which addressers request support, such as 'videogames', 'movies', 'TV shows', 'music', 'e-sports', 'social media and Internet' and 'others'.
— RQ5. How does the variable 'community' affect the status of the petitions? This variable considers fans as activists according to the concept of cultural activism developed by Jenkins (2012) and Brough and Shresthova (2012). In this sense, two categories are proposed that define the relationship between each initiative and popular culture.

First, the label 'fan' will designate those activists emotionally linked to the cultural object—following the definition established by Duffett (2013) and Grandío (2016)—who defend and support said object. In turn, the label 'antifan' will be used in opposition to the first category, designating those collectives that define their identity by expressing their rejection or disagreement: for these people, hate or dislike can be as powerful as the strong and admiring affective relationship that fans feel (Gray, 2005: 841). Furthermore, a third category, called 'troll', refers to users who pervert the cyber-democratic dynamic and pollute the cyber-activist channels with irrelevant messages that could corrupt the real purpose of the protest.

— RQ6. How does the variable 'type of actions' affect the status of the petitions? The variable 'type of actions' indicates whether the type of action proposed is of a 'diegetic' nature, seeking to modify, transform, alter or fix content, or 'extradiegetic', which does not imply a modification of the content but, rather, an issue that concerns the product in terms of industrial or commercial aspects. To clarify both concepts, the diegetic [...] level of a narrative is that of the story world, and the events that exist within it, while the extradiegetic [...] level stands outside these (Kuhn and Westwell, 2012: 116-117).

— RQ7. How does the variable 'linguistic errors' affect the status of the petitions? This variable includes linguistic errors in both the title and the text according to the categories of 'spelling', 'punctuation', 'accents' and 'morphosyntax'.

The data were analysed according to a descriptive analysis (contingency tables) with contrast statistics to validate the difference -$X^2$ or likelihood ratio test with contingency coefficient ($r_{\varphi}^2$)-. To evaluate the magnitude of change, values <0.30 were considered as reflecting a small effect, 0.30–0.50 a medium effect and >0.50 a large effect (Cohen, 1992). In turn, means comparison applied to metric variables (number of supporters per petition, number of words in the title and text) was also used when appropriate. The contrast methodologies used were the Mann-Whitney U and Kruskal-Wallis H tests, given that the previous normality test (Kolmogorov-Smirnov) highlighted normal distributions. The level of significance for all tests was established at $p < .05$.

Before the aforementioned analysis, we carried out an exploratory-descriptive study (as a pre-analysis) with the goal of "specifying the accuracy of the data, since errors are always possible when recording said data from the questionnaires or coding tables to the SPSS data editor" (Humanes, 2005: 155).

The main results showed that popular culture petitions account for 3.25% of all the content analysed on Change.org through January 29, 2017. As illustrated in the following graph, activism regarding popular culture is a residual participatory action through Change.org.

**Figure 1.** Taxonomy of Spanish petitions through Change.org
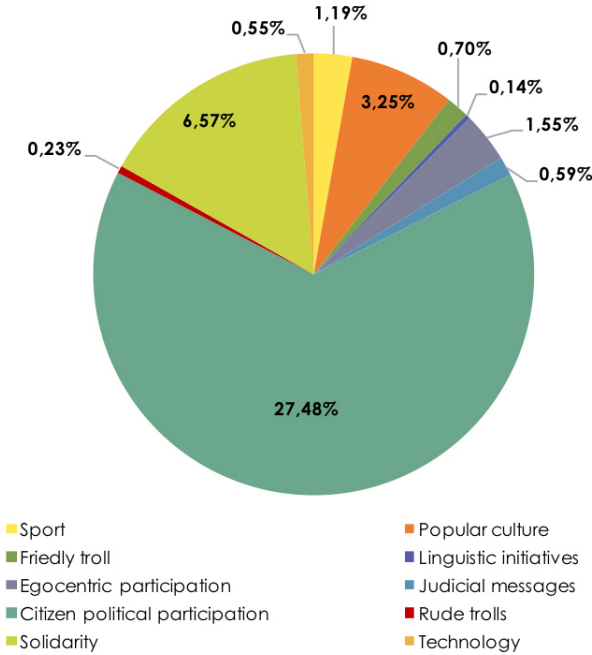


Source: Own elaboration.

## 5. Results

According to the main objective of this work, it is inferred that, on average, only 10.6% of the petitions are 'successful', compared to the remaining 89.4%, which are 'closed' or have failed. Furthermore, regardless of the success or failure of the petitions, the initiatives rarely receive a response from the target: 99.3% of the initiatives on Change.org do not receive a response from the recipient.

### 5.1. How the variable 'addresser' affects the status of the petitions

One of the first elements analysed refers to the 'addresser' of the petition on Change.org, namely, whether this is an individual or collective initiative. The data analysed show that most petitions are individual initiatives, representing 80.4% of the total (specifically, 38.45% are addressed to women and 42% to men), while collective petitions represent only 9.8% of the total. The rest are anonymous petitions.

Nevertheless, not all petitions address the same issues. The following table shows that women tend to promote petitions related to music.

**Table 1.** Type of petition by addresser (%)

|  | Women | Men | Collective | Anonymous | TOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Videogames | 2.6% | 21.9% | 6.7% | 20.0% | 12.8% |
| Movies | 2.6% | 8.6% | 6.7% | - | 5.2% |
| T.V. shows | 20.5% | 21.9% | 23.3% | 26.7% | 22.0% |
| Music | 48.7% | 20.3% | 36.7% | 30.0% | 33.8% |
| Social media and the Internet | 17.9% | 18.8% | 16.7% | 16.7% | 18.0% |
| Other | 7.7% | 8.6% | 10.0% | 6.7% | 8.2% |

Source: Own elaboration.

In the case of men, petitions are more or less uniformly distributed among music, TV shows and videogames. Collective petitions focus on music, TV shows and social media and the Internet. Anonymous petitions follow a pattern similar to that of collective petitions but also include videogames. Significant differences were found ($X^2 = 41.57$, $p = 0.00$, $r_\varphi^2 = 0.346$).

Regarding the 'addresser', collective petitions were the most successful (20% of successful petitions), followed by individual initiatives, with 9.9%. In the case of men, the success rate was 11.1%, whereas the rate was 8.7% for women. The lowest success rate corresponds, as expected, to anonymous petitions, with 6.7%.

## 5.2. How the variable 'supporters' affects the status of the petitions

Another relevant issue for this study is the number of signed petitions. While number is not the only indicator of success or failure (the target number of supporters is different for each petition), it highlights the popularity of the petition. Thus, it is meaningful to determine the addresser of the petition by profile, popular culture topic or community that might support the initiative and whether the number of signed petitions is objectively related to its success.

Concerning the addresser data, women were observed to request a higher average number of supporters, followed by collective petitions and then by men. By popular culture topic, those concerning social media and the Internet stand out. Finally, on average, antifan petitions were found to be more popular than fan petitions, although these differences were not statistically significant. The specific data are provided in the Table 2.

In a different context, statistically significant differences were found ($U = 1875.5$, $W = 38190.5$, $Z = -5.218$, $p = 0.000$) in relation to the average number of supporters of successful petitions ($M = 29863.67$, $SD = 112819.87$) and those that were closed ($M = 732.21$ $SD = 3517.26$). In other words, the average number of supporters for successful petitions is significantly higher than that for unsuccessful petitions.

**Table 2.** Average and standard deviation of signed petitions by addresser, popular culture topic and community

| | Average | Standard deviation |
|---|---|---|
| **Addresser** | | |
| Women | 8065.96 | 59,325.399 |
| Men | 613.32 | 1703.344 |
| Collective | 4570.50 | 18,345.441 |
| Anonymous | 216.97 | 469.861 |
| Total | 3822.45 | 37,268.106 |
| **Popular culture topic** | | |
| Videogames | 1594.31 | 7596.927 |
| Movies | 1130.06 | 2620.638 |
| TV shows | 1802.22 | 6422.653 |
| Music | 278.51 | 895.914 |
| Social media and the Internet | 16,831.58 | 86,670.979 |
| Other | 416.56 | 750.804 |
| Total | 3822.45 | 37,268.106 |
| **Community** | | |
| *Fan* | 3221.11 | 40,261.469 |
| *Antifan* | 7776.73 | 22,639.023 |
| *Troll* | 15.36 | 9.801 |
| *Total* | 3822.45 | 37,268.106 |

Source: Own elaboration.

## 5.3. How the variable 'audiovisual elements' affects the status of the petitions

The data show that, regardless of the profile of the addresser, the decision concerning most of the cases leaned towards the use of snapshots (84.3% of cases) versus video (7.5%) or the absence of both (8.2%). Moreover, the presence of snapshots in successful petitions (11.8%) was higher than the use of video (4.5%) or the absence of both (4%). There was no significant difference in these results, which is why the success or failure of the initiatives cannot be attributed to the incidence of this element.

In turn, considering the petitions' popular culture topics, we observed that some cultural products appear with a higher frequency than others: movies (18.8%), music (10.7%) and social media and the Internet (9.1%) appeared more frequently than the average (7.5%). Petitions associated with TV shows (3.0%) and videogames (5.1%) were on the opposite end of the spectrum. This difference is statistically significant ($X^2 = 23.43$, $p = 0.009$, $r_{\varphi}^2 = 0.267$).

## 5.4. How the variable 'popular culture' affects the status of the petitions

Regarding the existence of relevant differences in the likelihood of success of certain popular cultural topics, a higher rate of success was observed in peti-

tions associated with movies (26.7% of them were successful) and social media and the Internet (18.8%). These findings suggest that petitions concerning these popular culture topics are more likely to be successful.

Returning to one of the central issues of this study, it is important to determine whether the petitions on Change.org derive from fan or antifan initiatives or, on the contrary, whether they lack such characteristics and represent troll petitions. The most frequent fan petitions are related to music (38.6%) and TV shows (23.2%). In contrast, antifan petitions tend to be related to social media and the Internet (58.3%). In this sense, petitions denouncing and demanding that certain YouTube channels be shut down are particularly numerous. The specific figures, which revealed significant differences ($X^2$ = 77.40, $p$ = 0.000, $r_\varphi^2$ = 0.450), are shown in the following table.

**Table 3.** Type of petition by community (%)

|                              | Fan    | Antifan | Troll  | TOTAL  |
|------------------------------|--------|---------|--------|--------|
| Videogames                   | 14.2%  | 2.1%    | 27.3%  | 12.8%  |
| Movies                       | 6.1%   | 2.1%    | –      | 5.2%   |
| TV shows                     | 23.2%  | 20.8%   | –      | 22.0%  |
| Music                        | 38.6%  | 10.4%   | 27.3%  | 33.8%  |
| Social media and the Internet| 10.2%  | 58.3%   | 18.2%  | 18.0%  |
| Other                        | 7.7%   | 6.3%    | 27.3%  | 8.2%   |
| Total                        | 100.0% | 100.0%  | 100.0% | 100.0% |

Source: Own elaboration.

## 5.5. How the variable 'community' affects the status of the petitions

Regarding the community type and the success or failure of the petition, the homogeneity of the data should be highlighted: the success rates for fan (10.6%), antifan (11.1%) and troll (9.1%) petitions were very similar. Therefore, the success of the initiatives cannot be attributed to the community.

The type of action requested by the petitions—diegetic or extradiegetic—was also analysed. The results show a higher frequency of men (37.5%) as the addresser of petitions than women (22.2%) and collectives (20%). Regarding anonymous petitions, diegetic initiatives represented 36.7%. Nevertheless, note the significant prevalence of extradiegetic petitions in all addresser groups (RV = 9.01, $p$ = 0.031, $r_\varphi^2$ = 0.168).

## 5.6. How the variable 'type of actions' affects the status of the petitions

Extradiegetic actions stand out, especially in petitions related to music (present in 93.2% of music petitions and with a high presence in those initiatives involving concerts and music tours), movies (75%) and social media and the Internet (72.7%). In turn, diegetic actions are especially frequent in petitions

concerning videogames (53.8%), TV shows (49.3%) and others (44%). Furthermore, the difference is significant ($X^2$ = 51.67, $p$ = 0.000, $r_\varphi^2$ = 0.381).

Regarding the petition titles, the linguistic errors in the contents of these initiatives are particularly notable. The title is more likely to be correct when the petition is collective (86.7% of the petitions had no linguistic errors) than in individual initiatives (66.7% in general terms). Petitions sponsored by women, and especially anonymous initiatives, characterised by a lack of earnestness, were more likely to involve errors (53.3%). The difference is also significant ($X^2$ = 27.14, $p$ = 0.028, $r_\varphi^2$ = 0.286).

## 5.7. How the variable 'linguistic errors' affects the status of the petitions

Concerning the accuracy of the text of the petition, a higher rate of error is observed in all cases. In fact, it would seem that the longer the text is, the higher the frequency of linguistic errors. Nevertheless, this variable follows the same pattern as that of the title. Collective petitions have a higher degree of accuracy (53.3% of the petitions had no errors compared to only 28.55% in individual petitions). A similar proportion of errors occurred among men and women and among anonymous petitions (only 26.7% were error free).

Furthermore, the petitions with the best-written titles corresponded to movies (93.8% were written correctly), followed far behind by the rest of the initiatives. The same pattern of accuracy was observed in the text, where 62.5% of petitions associated with movies were error free. Delving into this issue, a somewhat lower rate of accuracy is observed in troll petitions (only 54.5% had no errors) compared to fan petitions (67.9% without errors) and to antifan petitions (66.7%). However, in terms of text accuracy, it was observed that although only 36.4% of troll petitions were error free, there was a higher level of accuracy in antifan petitions (45.8%) and a lower accuracy rate in fan petitions (27.6%).

Finally, it is also relevant to determine whether the existence of linguistic errors in the title and the text are related to the success or failure of the petitions. Concerning the title, petitions without errors accounted for 93.8% of successful petitions, compared to 64.3% for unsuccessful, closed petitions; the difference is significant (RV = 18.307, $p$ = 0.001, $r_\varphi^2$ = 0.196). Regarding the text, petitions without errors represented 59.4% of successful petitions versus 27.5% of unsuccessful, closed petitions. As in the previous case, the difference is significant (RV = 12.66, $p$ = 0.013, $r_\varphi^2$ = 0.209).

Therefore, it is meaningful to consider the length of the title and text regarding linguistic errors, since it can be assumed that the longer they are, the higher the likelihood of error. The following table reveals that collective petitions have longer texts than individual initiatives. Furthermore, anonymous petitions have, on average, a shorter text length, as expected.

**Table 4.** Average and standard deviation by addresser, popular culture and community

| | Number of words in title | | Number of words in text | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Average | Standard Deviation | Average | Standard Deviation |
| **Addresser** | | | | |
| Women | 9.21 | 13.308 | 129.74 | 128.779 |
| Men | 9.02 | 4.468 | 145.77 | 116.132 |
| Collective | 8.10 | 4.831 | 184.17 | 247.332 |
| Anonymous | 8.37 | 4.106 | 111.30 | 88.738 |
| **Popular culture** | | | | |
| Videogames | 12.64 | 21.881 | 180.62 | 214.440 |
| Movies | 10.81 | 4.102 | 180.63 | 87.431 |
| TV shows | 9.15 | 5.740 | 149.12 | 151.403 |
| Music | 7.01 | 3.669 | 94.94 | 74.362 |
| Social media and the Internet | 8.38 | 4.098 | 161.75 | 129.136 |
| Other | 10.56 | 3.675 | 164.04 | 151.838 |
| **Community** | | | | |
| *Fan* | 8.72 | 9.562 | 137.39 | 134.566 |
| *Antifan* | 9.69 | 5.835 | 166.58 | 157.025 |
| *Troll* | 10.45 | 4.698 | 82.36 | 84.396 |
| *Total* | 8.94 | 8.938 | 140.00 | 137.395 |

Source: Own elaboration.

As can be seen, petitions associated with music have shorter titles and text, especially compared with petitions related to videogames. This difference is significant both in terms of title length ($H = 30.524$, $p = 0.000$, $U = 1360$, $p = 0.003$) and text length ($H = 26.648$, $p = 0.000$, $U = 1372$, $p = 0.004$). Furthermore, antifan petitions have, on average, more words in the title and text than fan petitions have, and, as could be expected, troll petitions have significantly fewer words in the text than the previous two categories. Finally, it is revealing that the average length of the title of successful petitions ($M = 10.16$, $SD = 5.47$) is higher than that of closed petitions ($M = 8.82$, $SD = 9.31$). However, this difference is not significant ($U = 3455$, $W = 39770$, $Z = -1.831$, $p = 0.067$). The average length of the text of successful petitions is also higher ($M = 191.34$, $SD = 141.08$) than that of unsuccessful closed petitions ($M = 133.38$, $SD = 136.74$). In this case, the difference is significant ($U = 3093$, $W = 39408$, $Z = -2.602$, $p = 0.009$).

In short, successful petitions have longer titles and text. Furthermore, as stated earlier, successful initiatives are better written than closed petitions. Finally, the positive (fan) or negative (antifan) relationship between the activist and the cultural product is not a determining factor. Therefore, it can be concluded that the accuracy of the writing, in both the title and text, is a relevant and significant element that conditions the success or failure of petitions.

## 6. Discussion and conclusions

First, the main conclusions from this study suggest that successful popular culture petitions are rare on the Change.org platform of Spain: only 10.6% are successful. Furthermore, the results highlight the concern that fan, anti-fan and troll petitions are equally popular on Change.org. The fact that a troll petition can be almost as successful as a fan or antifan initiative is a considerable deficit that highlights some of the communication weaknesses of Change.org and has prevented it from becoming an important outlet for cyber-activists.

This finding is consistent with the results obtained in previous studies (Pérez-Escolar, 2017) on this platform for cyber-activism. Change.org is not an ideal outlet for cyber-activism because it offers no mechanisms to filter and remove information. Furthermore, interactivity among users is not encouraged, and mobilisation strategies that motivate citizens to participate are also not used, as has been shown when analysing the very rare feedback received on petitions. In addition, all of these elements frustrate users' expectations regarding their participation and hinder the initiatives' expected success. Although the platform offers a visually attractive setting with a simple and intuitive design, no informational resources to train citizens are available. Moreover, online interactions among agents lack motivation. Although such a situation may seem contradictory, mobilisation strategies encouraging citizens to participate are barely used.

Second, regarding the responsibility of the platform to organise and filter content, it was observed that successful popular culture petitions have significantly fewer linguistic errors in both the title and the text of the initiative. Furthermore, another element that conditions the success or failure of these petitions is the length of the content: petitions with longer texts and titles have a greater success rate. Moreover, successful initiatives manage to gather a significantly higher number of supporters.

Third, although the audience committed to popular culture traditionally consists of group communities (Jenkins, 2006), paradoxically, a higher volume of individual initiatives was observed (80.4%). However, it is important to point out that petitions promoted by collectives have a higher success rate.

Additionally, an especially noticeable prevalence of extradiegetic petitions was observed. In other words, activists are more concerned with issues related to the popular culture object than with modifying, transforming or overhauling the content itself. Thus, antifan petitions tend to have an association with social media and the Internet—accounting for 58.3%—and generally demand the shutdown of certain YouTube channels, Facebook or Twitter accounts considered offensive. In contrast, fan initiatives are related to music, demanding music concerts and autograph signings and to TV shows, asking to extend the content of a show by adding more episodes or seasons or not to cancel participants' favourite TV programmes.

Although Change.org is the online petition site used by the largest number of Spaniards (Marqués, 2015; Change.org, 2018), the results show that this platform is not a completely effective communication channel for cyber-activism. Other national platforms that are not as popular as Change.org offer tools to promote and disseminate their initiatives, including Oiga.me, Irekia, Peticiones.org, Petición Pública and Mifirma.com, among others. From an international perspective, a wide array of promising digital platforms for citizen mobilisation can be noted, such as 38Degrees, Care2, SumOfUs, Avaaz.org, GetUp!, GoPetition and MoveOn.org, among others.

Finally, Van Zoonen's (2005) argument on popular culture and activism is confirmed: audiences committed to popular culture act and participate as activists, given that they use Change.org to change their cultural environment. Nevertheless, it is important to clarify that while some of these fan culture petitions can have a dual character and could also be understood as political participation, they do not represent the same type of action, since actions of political participation among citizens target political actors and institutions to change the public context, as occurs in political fandom (Hernández-Santaolalla and Rubio-Hernández, 2017). In contrast, popular culture initiatives do not seek political change but rather target cultural agents, and thus, according to Jenkins (2012), these initiatives must also be understood as a form of cultural activism.

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