BARCELONA EN COMÚ ON *TWITTER.* ANALYZING THE ELECTORAL COMMUNICATION OF THE CONFLUENCE DURING THE 2015 COUNCIL ELECTION

Barcelona en Comú en *Twitter.* Análisis de la comunicación electoral de la confluencia durante las elecciones municipales de 2015

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Abstract

In recent years there has been a great deal of interest in digital networks as political communication tools. However, the use of social media depends on, among other things, the character of each political organization. The main objective of this research is to analyze *Barcelona en Comú*'s digital communication on *Twitter* during the municipal election campaign from May 8 to May 22, 2015 in Barcelona. The methodology is based on a social network analysis (SNA) of all the tweets disseminated by the six political parties that formed the confluence. The investigation deepens our understanding of the communicative relationship between the six parties, and between the parties and the users, with the aim of analyzing the bi-directionality of the communicative process. We conclude that the party that generated the most electoral information on *Twitter* during the electoral campaign was *Barcelona en Comú*.

Resumen

En los últimos años se ha producido un aumento del interés en las redes digitales como medio de comunicación política. Sin embargo su uso se encuentra determinado, entre otros factores, por la naturaleza y estrategias de cada partido político. Esta investigación analiza el uso que los partidos de la confluencia *Barcelona en Comú* llevaron a cabo durante la campaña de las municipales de 2015, del 8 al 22 de mayo, en la red digital *Twitter*. El método empleado ha sido el análisis de redes sociales de todos los tweets difundidos por los seis partidos políticos que forman la confluencia. Se profundiza en la relación comunicativa entre estos partidos, así como en la relación entre los partidos y los usuarios en la red digital analizando la bidireccionalidad del proceso comunicativo. El partido que generó más información electoral en *Twitter* durante la campaña fue *Barcelona en Comú*.

1. Introduction

The political party *Barcelona en Comú* appeared in June 2014 as a consequence of the social, political, and economic context of a crisis in Spain. After the process of approval and evaluation, a confluence of six parties –*Barcelona en Comú*, *Iniciativa per Catalunya Verds*, *EQUO*, *Podem*, *Esquerra Unida i Alternativa*, and *Procés Constituent*- was founded under the same name *Barcelona en Comú*. The climate of distrust and political disaffection, institutional degradation, the widening of inequalities, and the decrease in government responsibility was made manifest by social movements in Spain, like the *Indignados movement* or the *Platform of Mortgage Victims* (*PAH*), among others (**Sampedro**; **Sánchez-Duarte**, 2011; **Royo**, 2014; **Roos**; **Oikonomakis**, 2014). These movements that emerged out of the crisis (**Della-Porta**; **Mattoni**, 2014) introduced a different language and a variety of actions into the public sphere (**Flesher-Fominaya**; **Montañés-Jiménez**, 2014) and 'gave roots to three different political parties –*Podemos*, *Ganemos*, and *Partido X*' (**Bosi**; **Giugni**; **Uba**, 2016, p. 21).

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Thus, *Barcelona en Comú* is part of the background which **Sanz-Abad** and **Mateos-Martín** (2014) define as the post-15M (after May 15, 2011) context and a part of **Tarrow**'s (1995) concept of political opportunity. In other words, the conditions that encourage or discourage political and social actors to form social movements or organizations. However, the relationship between these social movements and recent political parties is not clear because they do not align with any political or institutional organization (**Roos**; **Oikonomakis**, 2014). Nonetheless, movements turn into political parties as 'movement states' (**McAdam**; **Tarrow**, 2010) and *Barcelona en Comú* and *Podemos*, among others, inherited the practices, the tools, and most of the leaders of the Indignados movement (**Borge**; **Santamaría**, 2015). Hence,

> "research should consider the different ways in which social movements and parties interact" (**Piccio**, 2015, p. 280).

However, the focus of this research is not to compare or find out the differences and similarities between Spanish social movements and new political parties. Instead, the aim of this investigation is to study the communication process and the use of social media and digital tools by these new political organizations that were born after the crisis of 2008. Thus, we seek to agree or disagree with **Haberer** and **Peña-López**'s (2016, p. 480) statement:

> "a crucial element of *Barcelona en Comú* is the extensive use of online forums for policy development, which permit as many people as possible to contribute to specific issues."

In terms of digital communication, scholars differentiate between two main uses of *Twitter* as a political communication tool: one for the politicians and the other for the citizens (**Zugasti**; **Sabés-Turmo**, 2015; **Tromble**, 2016). Along the same lines, authors differentiate between the two net groups in *Barcelona en Comú*: one controlled by the political party and the other formed by the activists and supporters (**Aragón**; **Volkovich**; **Laniado**; **Kaltenbrunner**, 2015). Nevertheless, political parties, citizens, and other organizations have the imperative of sharing (**Van-Dijck**, 2013) and although

> "politicians and government have been always complex [...] the increase in the complexity of communication challenges faced by those involved in early twenty-first-century" (**Couldry**; **Hepp**, 2017, p. 205).

> A confluence of six parties (*Barcelona en Comú*, *Iniciativa per Catalunya Verds*, *EQUO*, *Podem*, *Esquerra Unida i Alternativa*, and *Procés Constituent*) was founded under the same name *Barcelona en Comú*

2. The counter-hegemony and social media in electoral campaigns

2.1. Hegemony and counter-hegemony

The political party is a complex social organism that is an expression of the collective, which is supported and partially recognized through action (**Gramsci**, 1971). According to this, and to the characteristics of the Spanish political system (**Colomer**, 2004), *Barcelona en Comú* and other new parties like *Podemos*, that have appeared in recent years in Spain, take part in the framework of left populism, more common in Southern than in Western European countries (**Muis**; **Immerzeel**, 2016). Notwithstanding the difficulty in defining what populism is (**Laclau**, 2005), the concept is understood as the denial of the left-right dichotomy, multiclass, and the participation of common people who demand equal politi-

cal rights against privileged groups (**Germani**, 2003). Moreover, populism can be a political style due to

> "the effect of the mediatization of the political equating to a simplification of political discourse, it's the reduction to neat us-against-them antagonisms and sound-bite solutions" (**Moffitt**; **Tormey**, 2013, p. 7).

After the Cold War, the previously positive connotations of 'popular' and 'populism' changed as a result of their association with the Soviet bloc (**D'Eramo**, 2013). Consequently, the left-right dichotomy and theory of the extremes won the war of position in political concepts and terms (**Bourdieu**, 1985; **Gramsci**, 1971). This theory legitimizes the political center and excludes hard left or right political positions, and this is one of the main reasons why left and right populist parties are understood as similar (**D'Eramo**, 2013). In this connection, the war of position between political parties in a democratic system is related to two positions or kinds of political parties: the hegemonic parties and the counter-hegemonic parties (**Laclau**; **Mouffe**, 2001; **Laclau**, 2005). Hegemony (the social, cultural, ideological, or economic influence exerted by a dominant group) is a relation or a political form susceptible to change, that is constantly being redefined because of its open and incomplete nature that is constituted by the antagonisms articulations and frontiers (**Laclau**; **Mouffe**, 2001).

> After the Cold War, the previously positive connotations of 'popular' and 'populism' changed as a result of their association with the Soviet bloc

The articulation of the hegemony is between the historical bloc and/or hegemonic formations (**Gramsci**, 1971), which includes the Catalan and Spanish traditional parties, and the counter-hegemonic parties (**Laclau**; **Mouffe**, 2001), like *Barcelona en Comú*. This articulation is based on the relations among them and political communication in mass media. According to Mouffe (**Carpentier**; **Cammaerts**, 2006, p. 4), the social is always the result of a hegemonic articulation but, at the same time, it implies that there is always an outside. Thus, in line with Bart Cammaerts and Nico Carpentier:

> "dominance and hegemony are again being reproduced, also on the Internet, but there are also counter-hegemonic spaces at the same time" (**Carpentier**; **Cammaerts**, 2006, p. 6).

Therefore, although online political communication research was initially positive about the democratic possibilities of counter-hegemonic parties (**Larsson**; **Moe**, 2013),

> "research has continuously demonstrated that these more mundane and less demanding usage patterns are by far the most prevalent" (**Bechmann**; **Lomborg**, 2013)

and that, to a large extent, social media reproduces broadcasting and mass media logic (**Graham**; **Broersma**; **Hazelhoff**; **Van't Haar**, 2013). In the same way, although *Twitter* can be an instrument for political parties to share information and connect to the people (**Jackson**; **Lilleker**, 2011), their

message is not outside the control of traditional communication channels (**Broersma**; **Graham**, 2012).

> As the counter-hegemonic have less coverage, social media can be understood as a channel to articulate the hegemonic by the new political parties

2.2. The articulation of hegemony in social media

In Spain, the traditional media's coverage of the electoral campaign is regulated by Spanish law according to the results of the previous election. Therefore, considering that television is the main political communication mass media in Spain (**Sampedro**, **Sánchez-Duarte**; **Campos-Domínguez**, 2014) and the counter-hegemonic have less coverage, social media can be understood as a channel to articulate the hegemonic by these new political parties. In order to focus on political and electoral communication, the mediatization theory states that mass media, particularly television, is the main communication channel for the citizens, and in a political framework too (**Hepp**, 2013; **Hjarvard**, 2013). Despite this, mass media and social media can coexist (**Casero-Ripollés**; **Feenstra**; **Tormey**, 2016; **Chadwick**, 2013; **McNair**, 2006). With regard to this, in electoral campaigns they

> "do not abandon their traditional tactics and tools; they enrich them with the new logics and possibilities of digital media" (**Casero-Ripollés** *et al.*, 2016, p. 382).

Barack Obama's 2008 campaign is underscored as an example of the integration of social networks as a political communication tool (**Jungherr**, 2016) (**Nielsen**, 2012). Nevertheless, the United States should not be used as a typical case study because of the distance and differences between parties and the degree of sophistication (**Vaccari**, 2013). That said, cross-national comparisons of the use of *Twitter* during electoral campaigns are useful for understanding that tweeting behavior depends on the political and media conditions of each country (**Graham**; **Jackson**; **Broersma**, 2014). Recent studies have explored the use of *Twitter* as a political communication tool in the Spanish general election (**Alonso-Muñoz**; **Marcos-García**; **Casero-Ripollés**, 2016; **Aragón**; **Kappler**; **Kaltenbrunner**; **Laniado**; **Volkovich**, 2013; **Campos-Domínguez**; **Calvo**, 2017; **López-García**, 2016; **Sampedro**, 2011; **Zugasti**; **Sabés-Turmo**, 2015), regional election (**López-García**; **Cano-Orón**; **Argilés-Martínez**, 2016; **Marín-Dueñas**; **Díaz-Guerra**, 2016; **Pérez-Gabaldón**; **Nicasio-Varea**, 2015), council election (**Carratalá**; **Galán**, 2016; **Quevedo-Redondo**; **Portalés-Oliva**; **Berrocal-Gonzalo**, 2016) and, among others, relevant political moments in Spain (**Marcos-García**; **Alonso-Muñoz**; **Casero-Ripollés**, 2016). In addition, some studies have explored the use of *Twitter* in other Southern European countries like Greece (**Poulakidakos**; **Veneti**, 2016) and Italy (**Auriemma** *et al.*, 2015).

According to **Bor** (2014), it is possible to identify two ways of understanding political and electoral communication through digital networks. On the one hand, there is communication related to the diffusion of mass messages and

its presence in social media, and on the other hand, communication based on exchange, participation, and feedback (**Bor**, 2014). In this context, scholars have pointed out the relevance of *Twitter* as a fluid and opinionated channel of communication between politicians and the audience or citizens, but the power of mass media remains in the digital network (**Lawrence**; **Molyneux**; **Coddington**; **Holton**, 2014). The expectations of bidirectional communication on social media are not always met (**Fernández**, 2012) and they are also not a substitute for social or political practices and other methods of political communication (**Couldry**, 2015). It is important to note that this study is about political parties that used digital networks as the principal channel of communication for the counter-hegemony, although it

"is very different to concluding that the natural balance of politics overall has been changed by these new communication tools" (**Couldry**; **Hepp**, 2017, p. 209).

> *Barcelona en Comú* party centralized the confluence's electoral communication on *Twitter*

3. Goals and methods

3.1. Goals

In order to identify the electoral communication strategies and communication coordination between the six political parties that formed the *Barcelona en Comú* (*BeC*) confluence from May 8-22, 2015, it is necessary to answer some questions that have been unresolved by previous studies. First, the *Barcelona en Comú* party centralized the confluence's electoral communication on *Twitter*. Then, according to the text of the tweets, an analysis of the main campaign issues revealed that *BeC* used *Twitter* to rally people to participate in public meetings or speeches in the urban area, election debates in the mass media, and other kinds of announcements for the campaign. Using this information, we can determine how the parties used hashtags to disseminate the campaign issues, which has not been address in previous studies. Finally, the purpose of this research is to understand the relationship between the parties and the users according to their replies and the two-way process of communication that *Twitter* enables. With this aim, we have organized our investigation into three objectives:

1. Analyze the flow of communication and the relationship between the six political parties in the confluence on *Twitter* during the electoral campaign.

2. Study the relationship between the party and the users on *Twitter* through replies and comments in tweets spread by the political parties.

3. Identify the dominant issues proposed by political parties through the hashtags used.

This article presents the results obtained by the application of network analysis to all of the tweets disseminated by the six political parties:

- *Barcelona en Comú* (@bcnencomu)
- *Podem* (@Podem_BCN)

- *Iniciativa per Catalunya Verds* (@iniciativaBCN)
- *Esquerra Unida i Alternativa* (@EUiABCN)
- *Procés Constituent* (@pconstituentBCN) and
- *EQUO* (@Equobcn).

In order to complete the second objective of this research, secondary nodes or actors were analyzed. Thus, the ego net in the replies to the parties' tweets. According to **Pérez-Altable** (2015), based on work by **Borgatti**, **Everett,** and **Johnson** (2013), the *Twitter* accounts of both political parties and users are the ego network, which means these nodes or actors are a part of the network this research is focused on. As **Bellotti** (2015, p. 3) has pointed out:

"network science starts from the observation of actors entangled in meaningful relations in contextualized environments."

Accordingly, the official *Twitter* accounts of the six political parties are the nodes or actors on which we focused our attention, based on social networks analysis (SNA), in order to establish which node centralized the communication flow of the confluence and how the campaign's information was spread. In addition, we explore the most popular hashtags (#) spread by the political parties in order to identify: 1) if the group of parties, the confluence, posted together during the electoral campaign; and 2) what were the words or hashtags that represent what they considered to be the most important issues of the electoral period. Thus, we can discover if the political parties were able to spread and manage their political program without mass media while leveraging the power of social media (**Fenton**; **Barassi**, 2011).

3.2. Data collection and network analysis

The empirical study presented in this paper employs the network analysis approach. In order to trace the *Barcelona en Comú* confluence's network, we have analyzed all of the tweets disseminated through *Twitter* by the confluence on May 8-22, 2015, based on information collected from the official accounts of the parties. The *Twitter* data are particularly useful in terms of our research objectives as they allow us to determine the diffusion of information through the platform and the interaction between users. In that sense, social media are fundamentally driven by the interaction between users. Thus, communication is interactive and networked (**Bechmann**; **Lomborg**, 2013, p. 3). The number of emitted tweets was 1,253:

- 568 from *Barcelona en Comú* (*BeC*)
- 394 from *Iniciativa per Catalunya Verds* (*ICV*)
- 152 from *Procés Constituent*
- 100 from *Podem*
- 28 from *Esquerra Unida i Alternativa* (*EUiA*) and
- 11 from *EQUO*.

Then, we organized the data in a two-step process. The first step was the collection of the data day-by-day during the campaign using the *Google Chrome* extension*Dataminer*.

Secondly, we developed a database using *FileMaker Pro* software that contained several categories for applying the content analysis technique collecting and organising the interaction among the network, with the aim of exploring the bidirectional process of communication on *Twitter*. By inte-
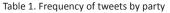
raction, we mean the flow of information exchange among the nodes in the network, by replies or retweets. With this file, we generated a node list. In a node list, the first name in each row gives the node that is 'sending' a tie (the ego). The names that follow, in the same row, are the nodes receiving a tie (the alters) (**Borgatti** *et al.*, 2013, p. 66). The software used to process the node list was *Ucinet*. The program allows for the measurement of the properties of the network as a whole and on the element level. Analyzing our data with *Ucinet*, we obtained degree centrality measures. Thus, we can identify the most central nodes in the network. According to **Borgatti** (2005, p. 62), based on **Freeman** (1979), degree centrality can be defined as the number of the incident upon a node. There are two types of degree centrality: in-degree and out-degree. In-degree centrality refers to the connections received by a node, meanwhile out-degree refers to the connections sent by a node (**Freeman**, 1979). In this study, connection refers to the retweets and mentions received/sent by a particular node. Thus, if a node has high in-degree centrality this means that this node receives a large number of retweets or/and mentions from other nodes. Conversely, if a node has a high out-degree value this means that this node sends a large number of retweets and/or mentions to other nodes within the network.

After analyzing our data, one way of conceptualizing networks mathematically was by using a graph (**Borgatti** *et al.*, 2013, p.11). In our study, for the visualization of the network, we used *Gephi* software. In the graph, nodes are represented as points and arcs are represented by directional arrows between these points (**Wasserman**; **Faust**, 1994, p. 73).

4. Results

The composition of the digital network of *Barcelona en Comú* during the electoral campaign provides information about how the confluence disseminated their electoral communication via relationships between the six actors. Table 1, based on **Graham**, **Jackson,** and **Broersma's** (2014) work, illustrates how *Barcelona en Comú* was the party that disseminated the greatest number of tweets during the campaign. Also, according to the mean and SD data, *BeC* was the party of the confluence that produced the most consistent number of tweets per day. By contrast, the SD of the other five parties reveals that there were large differences in tweet dissemination during the campaign, especially in the cases of *Podem*, *EUiA* (1.59), and *EQUO* (1.91). Figure 1 shows that this imbalance was related to a large increase in dissemination on specific days. The highest dissemination of tweets by *ICV*, *Procés Constituent,*

Table 1. Frequency of tweets by party

	N	%	Mean	Median	SD
BeC	568	45.33	37.87	39	11.80
Podem	100	7.98	6.67	3	11.54
ICV	394	31.44	26.27	20	22.56
Procés Constituent	152	12.13	10.13	8	7.42
EUiA	28	2.23	1.86	2	1.59
EQUO	11	0.88	0.73	0	1.91
Total	1253	100	13.92	5	17.89

SD: standard deviation

and *EUiA* was related to campaign acts in the public sphere. Regarding the tweets from *Podem* and *EQUO*, the highest dissemination was related to political debates in the mass media.

> ' The climate of distrust and political disaffection, institutional degradation, the widening of inequalities, and the decrease in government responsibility was made manifest by social movements in Spain '

Second, as shown in Figure 2, the political party actors are represented by points organized by different colors and their own identification labels. Consequently, secondary actors corresponding to each political party on *Twitter* have the same color points without a label. Table 2 illustrates the value of the network's density. Reciprocity measures the likelihood of nodes in a network being mutually linked; that is to say, reciprocity evaluates the tendency of node pairs to form mutual connections between each other. The number of reciprocity edges is 204, which is 9.9% of the total (2,070). As
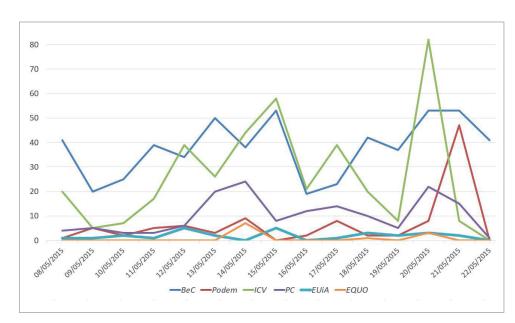

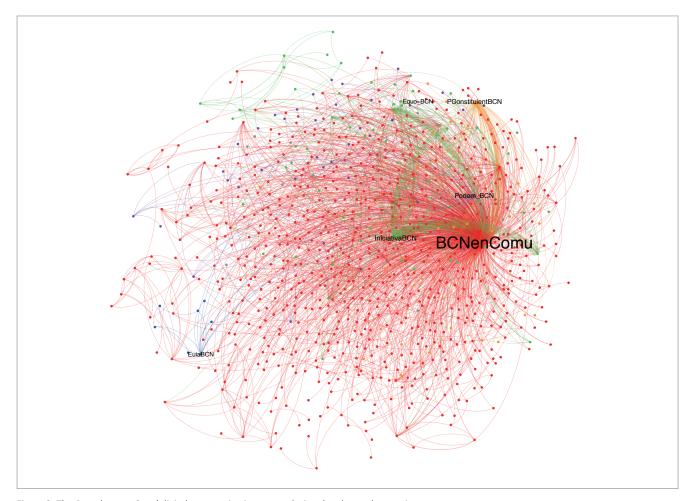Figure 1. Party's tweet count during the campaign

Figure 2. The *Barcelona en Comú* digital communication actors during the electoral campaign
Nodes key:
Red = *Barcelona en Comú*
Green = *Iniciativa per Catalunya*
Blue = *Esquerra Unida i Alternativa*
Purple = *Podem*
Orange = *Procès Constituent*
Pink = *EQUO*

a result, a significant number of unreciprocated interactions in the network indicates that there were a large number of relationships which were unbalanced. Our findings suggest also that lower values of reciprocity characterized networks centered on leaders or central nodes, which means there was an asymmetric distribution of power, showing that the network tended to be hierarchical.

As we can see from Figure 3, the distribution of the network was a decreasing function, resembling a power-law distribution. This result indicates that there were a few nodes that

Table 2. Network measures

Network metrics	Value
Nodes	891
Edges	2,070
Density	0.003
Reciprocity	204 (9.9%)

managed considerable information, and many nodes that managed less information; a few very central nodes dominated the network. Consequently, the highly connected nodes at the tail of the power-law distribution played a key role in keeping the network together and in disseminating information. These nodes played the role of bridging the many small communities of clusters into an integrated network. Hence, the statement that *Barcelona en Comú* (party) centralized the confluence's electoral communication was verified. On the one hand, @bcnencomu has the highest in-degree, which indicates that it was the main party generating new content or information on *Twitter*. On the other hand, the remaining parties have a low in-degree, which means that there was a high level of dissemination of information during the campaign.

As the results show, the ego net *Barcelona en Comú* centralized electoral communication on *Twitter*. Out of the total number of tweets disseminated, the party which received the highest number of mentions (in-degree) is @bcnencomu, followed by @iniciativabcn, and @podem_bcn. After this came @pconstituentBCN and eventually, @EUiABCN.

By contrast, @Equobcn did not receive any mentions or replies. In relation to the number of answers or comments that the parties disseminated, the out-degree, the first political party was @iniciativa. In second was @bcnencomu and then @pconstituentBCN. Fourth, was @podem_bcn, followed by @EUiABCN. Last was @Equobcn.

So far, we have shown each party's profile according to users' activity (number of messages sent) and the attention receiv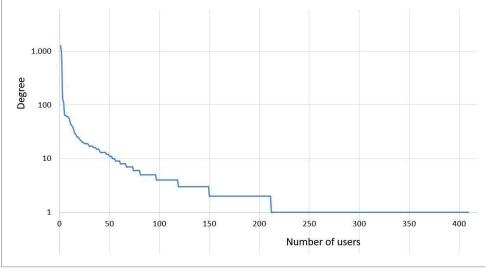ed (in-degree). Considering these two variables, users' activity and attention received, we determined the efficiency of each party's activity. **Morales-Guzmán** *et al.* (2014) define user efficiency as the ratio between influence gained and effort expended. The fact that not all parties' accounts must employ the same amount of effort to accomplish the same level of interaction with other users implies that these accounts have an individual efficiency for their activity (**Morales-Guzmán** *et al.*, 2014, p. 5). In this paper, the term *user efficiency* refers to the ratio between the number of interactions (retweets and mentions) obtained by an account and the activity, i.e. the number of messages posted by that account. The equation to calculate user efficiency is written as (ibidem):

$$e = \frac{i}{a}$$

where *i* is the number of interactions gained by a political party's account and *a* is the number of messages posted by the account. The accounts whose n>1 received more interactions than the number of messages sent are, therefore, more efficient in spreading information among the network. Alternatively, accounts with <1 had to employ more effort to obtain the same outcomes. As can be seen from Table 3, in the case of the confluence there was only one efficient party: *BeC* (2.23). The rest of the accounts show low efficiency values.

Taking into account the classification proposed by **Padovani** and **Pavan** (2016, p. 360), we have divided the users into two main groups: *programmers,* which were the nodes in the top of the distribution, and *mobilizers*, which were the nodes in the bottom of the distribution. Programmer nodes were important in order to set the discourse of the network and define the framework of the conversation. On the other hand, mobilizers were the nodes that operated into the network, implementing the network's potential connections in different directions. Thus, programmer nodes received a high number of hyperlinks (in-degree), while mobilizer nodes sent many hyperlinks to other actors within the network (out-degree).

Table 4 shows programers in the network. In general, programmer nodes were related to the confluence. This means that the discourse within the network was settled primarily by members of the party. Thus, the conversation was focused around the organization, specifically around the candidates, as we can see in the case of @adacolau, @g_pisarello, or @janetsanz.

Table 5 reveals the mobilizer nodes in the network. The role of mobilizers was mainly played by the political parties, instead of the candidates, as was the case with the programer nodes.

The campaign issues, according to the total of 128 hashtags disseminated, show (Figure 4) that the most common hashtags were spread in a cross-cutting way for the six parties. For example, the issues #Ada24M and #guanyarem24m, with an 0.714 of degree, followed by #Adaalcaldessa, #alaplaça20m, #jovaigalaplaça, and #municipalsbcn with an

Figure 3. Degree centrality distribution

Table 3. Efficiency of each party account

	Messages	%	Interaction (RT + Mention)	Efficiency (e)
BeC	568	45.33	1,266	2.23
Podem	100	7.98	26	0.26
ICV	394	31.44	58	0.15
Procès Constituent	152	12.13	6	0.04
EUiA	28	2.23	3	0
EQUO	11	0.88	0	0.11
Total	1,253	100	1,359	1.01

Table 4. Programmer nodes

Programmers	In-degree
@bcnencomu	1,263
@adacolau	880
@g_pisarello	132
@laiaortiz	115
@misanchezgar	65
@janetsanz	64
@3eses	61
@jaumeasens	61
@iniciativabcn	58
@xaviertrias	53

Table 5. Mobilizer nodes

Mobilisers	Out-degree
@iniciativabcn	468
@bcnencomu	439
@pconstituentbcn	199
@misanchezgar	186
@3eses	108
@podem_bcn	93
@marfil1961	61
@fernatwit	54
@estacadebares	50
@rosanabraveses	37

0.571 of degree. In addition, we were able to differentiate a secondary group of cross hashtags like #24m, #bcn, #debatbcn, #eixampleencomu, #elecrac1, and #guanyembarcelona in an 0.429 degree.

Regarding the hashtags from the parties, the outstanding one was #bcnencomu, which was spread by @pconstituentbcn with an 0.286 of degree. Even though the majority of the rest of the hashtags had exactly the same
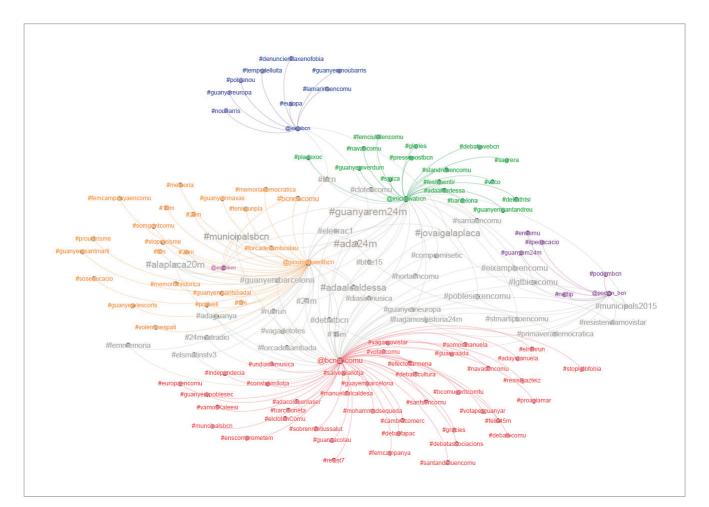

Figure 4. *Barcelona en Comú* digital communication issues during the electoral campaign
Nodes and hashtags key:
Red = @bcnencomu
Green = @iniciativabcn
Blue = @EUiABCN
Purple = @podem_bcn
Orange = @pconstituentbcn
Pink = @EQUO
Grey = used by all the parties.

quantitative value (0.143), some issues related with each party were #adacolauenlaser, #barceloneta, and #bcomugentcomu from @bcnencomu, #adaalcaldessa; and #barcelona from @iniciativabcn, #podembcn, and #nottip from @podem_bcn; and finally, #guanyaeuropa and #denunciemlaxenofobia from @EUiABCN. The party @EQUO did not use hashtags during the electoral campaign.

5. Conclusions

This research allows us to conclude that:

1) The party that generated the most electoral information on *Twitter* during the electoral campaign was *Barcelona en Comú*. The role played by the party was to set the issue agenda for the confluence. Additionally, the other five parties disseminated this information. Thus, *BeC* effectively used *Twitter* as an electoral communication channel because it maintained a differentiated strategy based on continuously balancing the dissemination of tweets. By contrast, the other five parties of the confluence used *Twitter* mainly to reproduce what was happening in both public and mass media spaces. In other words, *Twitter* was used as a channel of

> 'communication between two entities that are spatially distant from each other, creating new first-order interactions' and as a tool for 'communication-at-a-distance' (**Couldry**; **Hepp**, 2017, p. 81).

> " @Bcnencomú and @AdaColau managed a lot of information "

In this context, the articulation of the hegemony (**Gramsci**, 1971; **Laclau**; **Mouffe**, 2001) during the campaign played a part in social media, and also in other more traditional electoral communication venues. In our case study, we observed how *Twitter* can be used as a channel for covering political meetings (as the SD shows) and that it can be used as a way to articulate hegemony when mass media coverage is limited. Therefore, until *Twitter* is implemented in a more participatory way, mass media and social media will continue to contribute to the articulation of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic spaces at the same time (**Carpentier**; **Cammaerts**, 2006).

Second, the out-degree and in-degree values of the SNA allow us to conclude that the parties which did not use *Twitter* to its best advantage, as a bidirectional communication channel, were primarily *Esquerra Unida i Alternativa* and *EQUO*. By contrast, *Iniciativa per Catalunya Verds* and *Barcelona en Comú* were parties that better exploited the bidirectional potential of *Twitter*. In accordance with the other actors (the users) who participated in *Twitter* replies during the campaign.

2) We also observed an increase in tweets from @bcnencomu. Thus, a 46.38% for the tweets give rise to conversations. Based on the above, *Barcelona en Comú* was the party that carried out the most effective use of *Twitter* and by using it as a channel for electoral communication during the electoral campaign, regardless of mass media logic (**Martínez-Rodríguez**, 2005; **Carpentier**, 2015; **Aragón**

et al., 2013; **Zugasti**; **Sabés-Turmo**, 2015). The low level of reciprocity between nodes in the network meant that most of the interactions were unreciprocated. This was a common feature which characterised networks centered on leaders or a central node, in line with the idea of 'the myth of horizontality' (**Pavan**, 2015, p. 917). This means that @Bcnencomú and @AdaColau managed a lot of information, while fewer nodes managed less information. The nodes with lower centrality values were usually nodes that did not have any connection with the central nodes. As can be seen from our findings, the nodes with higher centrality values were the official party accounts, as well as the candidates' accounts. This means that the conversation was set by the organization, that is, from top to bottom. But the nodes with low centrality were essential in the process of diffusion. In a nutshell, we can conclude that the top-nodes were responsible for generating new information, since the bottom-nodes, the nodes in the tail of the distribution, were relevant to the spread of the information generated by the top-nodes which reached of wider audiences.

> " The most common issue related to the text of the tweets was the call or agenda campaign which was mainly related to directive acts: when the speaker affirms or denies anything certainly "

3) As aforementioned, a study based on content analysis was conducted previously. Based on issues with the previous study, in this research we analyzed the hashtags spread on *Twitter* with the aim of identifying the dominant issues proposed for all the parties of the confluence. The most common issue related to the text of the tweets was the call or agenda campaign which was mainly related to directive acts: when the speaker affirms or denies anything certainly (**Austin**, 1988; **Searle**, 1976). Thus, with this kind of tweet, the intention of the *Barcelona en Comú* confluence was to achieve its goal of recovering the public and institutional places. The power-law distribution of the network played an important role in this regard, facilitating the dissemination of these ideas in a more efficient way. The hashtags used by the parties for this cross-cutting issue were #Ada24M, #guanyarem24M, #alaplaça20m, #jovaigalaplaça, #adaalcaldessa, and #municipalsbcn. Even though, after the call or agenda campaign, the second and third most disseminated issues during the campaign were activism and citizen participation, and social inequalities, there were also indications that the hashtags used in these tweets were more related to the place of a public activity or the date than the content of the tweet. The hashtags #StMartiProencomu, #SarriaenComu, #Eixamplenecomu, and #15M, related to activism, and #SantAndreuencomu, #navasencomu, or #BTVe15, related to social inequalities.

6. Limitations and further research

The findings of this study provide information about the communication flow and the relationship on *Twitter* between the six parties that formed the *Barcelona en Comú* confluence. We believe this exploratory analysis offers a so-

lid foundation to deepen the electoral communication strategies of *Barcelona en Comú*.

Nevertheless, we found some limitations. For example, hashtags did not exactly define electoral issues and as a result there wasn't a clear connection between the hashtag and issue. Also, only *Barcelona en Comú* was efficient while the rest of the accounts presented low-efficiency values, although it is important to note that this approach does not provide enough information to know why this was the case. Hence, we believe that going into detail about the correspondence between the results obtained and a qualitative approach is necessary. Therefore, the next step in our research will include a detailed content analysis of the tweets and six in-depth interviews with the person(s) responsible for the parties' electoral communications. In addition, an interesting future study could be an in-depth look at how the parties integrated *Twitter* communications into their entire media campaign.

Note

Acknowledgements

7. References

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