POLITICAL POPULISM IN COVID´S TIME. ANALYSIS OF DONALD TRUMP AND BORIS JOHNSON COMMUNICATION STRATEGY ON TWITTER

POPULISMO POLÍTICO EN TIEMPOS DE COVID. ANÁLISIS DE LA ESTRATEGIA DE COMUNICACIÓN DE DONALD TRUMP Y BORIS JOHNSON EN TWITTER

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: the information overactivation that the pandemic has caused in the social networks of International Governance describes a scenario marked by polarization and political populism. Twitter becomes a reference platform for unmediated communication. The use of this tool as part of the strategy of political leaders reactivates the alarm of global organizations in the face of increased disinformation. **Methodology:** to know which brands identify populist discourse and what effects they produce in the public sphere, a triple approach methodology (quantitative-qualitative-discursive) is applied on tuits published during the first COVID-19 alarm period by Donald Trump (@realDonaldTrump), United States president and Boris Johnson (@BorisJohnson), United Kingdom president. **Discussion and conclusions:** the results reveal the presence of fallacy as a hallmark of populist discourse, the projection of Twitter messages in the media, and an influence on the social audience that could be the cause of citizen disaffection with politics.

KEYWORDS: Twitter – COVID-19 - Political - Populism - Leader - Influence - Social Networks – Speech.

RESUMEN

Introducción: La sobreactivación informativa que la pandemia ha provocado en las Redes Sociales de la gobernanza internacional describe un escenario marcado por la polarización y el populismo político. Twitter se convierte en una plataforma de referencia para la comunicación no mediada. El uso de esta herramienta como por parte de la estrategia de los líderes políticos reactiva la alarma de las organizaciones mundiales ante el incremento de la desinformación. **Metodología:** con el objetivo de conocer qué marcas identifican el discurso populista y qué efectos producen en la esfera pública, se aplica una metodología de triple enfoque (cuantitativo-cualitativo-discursivo) sobre los tuits publicados durante el primer periodo de alarma de la COVID-19 por Donald Trump (@realDonaldTrump), presidente de Estados Unidos y Boris Johnson (@BorisJohnson), primer ministro del Reino Unido. **Discusión y Conclusiones:** Los resultados revelan la presencia de la falacia como marca del discurso populista, la proyección de los mensajes de Twitter en los medios de comunicación y una influencia en la audiencia social, causa probable de la desafección ciudadana ante la política.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Desinformación **-**Twitter – COVID-19 – Populismo – Líder – Influencia – Audiencia Social

POPULISMO POLÍTICO EM TEMPOS DE COVID. ANÁLISE DA ESTRATÉGIA DE COMUNICAÇÃO DE DONALD TRUMP E BORIS JOHNSON NO TWITTER

RESUMO

Introdução: A super ativação de informações que a pandemia causou nas Redes Sociais de políticos a nivel internacional descreve um cenário marcado pela polarização e pelo populismo político. O Twitter passa a ser uma plataforma de referência para comunicação não mediada. O uso dessa ferramenta como parte da estratégia dos dirigentes políticos reativa o alarme das organizações mundiais diante do aumento da desinformação. Metodologia: com o objetivo de saber quais marcas identificam o discurso populista e quais os efeitos que produzem na esfera pública, uma metodologia de tripla abordagem (quantitativo-qualitativa-discursiva) é aplicada aos tweets publicados durante o primeiro período de alarme do COVID-19 por Donald Trump (@realDonaldTrump), presidente dos Estados Unidos e Boris Johnson (@BorisJohnson), primeiro-ministro do Reino Unido. Discussão e Conclusões: Os resultados revelam a presença da falácia como marca do discurso populista, a projeção de mensagens do Twitter na mídia e influência no público social, provável causa do descontentamento do cidadão com a política.

PALAVRAS CHAVE: Desinformação -Twitter - COVID-19 - Populismo - Líder - Influência - Público Social

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1. INTRODUCTION

The World Health Organization (WHO), on February 13th, 2020, through its Director-General Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, asked the technological giants to take immediate systematic measures to stop the flow of misinformation about health and the public health crisis. It is a phenomenon defined as an infodemic[1] that alerts about misinformation and the increase in fake news related to COVID-19 and the effects it produces on citizens (Fernández-Torres et al., 2021).

By focusing the research on this issue, we selected great world leaders who were a reference and whose degree of influence was notorious, specifying the right-wing ideology, because fake news acquired a right-wing connotation since the government of the German National Socialist Workers' Party (NSDAP), starting in the 1920s, allocated a huge amount of resources to spread false information, hoaxes, manipulations, or defamations. This fake news is linked to Nazi Propaganda, led by Joseph Goebbels. A discourse that, besides recognizing the benefits of Nazism, attacked its political rivals and hid the miseries of the regime (Cuervo, 2015). This phenomenon is projected today in a post-truth context that affects politics and its rulers, especially in the field of social networks.

The chosen leaders are closely linked in their propaganda format and in the extreme right-wing populism they use (Pérez-Curiel et al., 2021) with precedents in social networks that justify the election. Specifically, Twitter decides to delete Donald Trump's account (@realDonaldTrump), among other reasons, for being the author of conspiracy theories that accuse China of endemic evil, for the advertisement of drugs without scientific support (Chadwick; Cereceda, 2020), for the complaint about the efficacy of vaccines from other countries, or for his attitude of politicizing and downplaying the virus, hallmarks of the populist discourse.

For his part, Boris Johnson defends the theory called "Herd immunity" that justifies the maximum spread of the virus, reaching so many people that the virus does not find more people to infect. A strategy of populism that presents him as a messiah and savior of the community (Hawkins, 2016).

1.1. Global health crisis

"We have concluded that COVID-19 can be considered a pandemic" (WHO, 2020). With this statement, the World Health Organization announced, on March 11th, 2020,

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[1] Infodemic: is an overabundance of information, online or in other formats, and includes deliberate attempts to spread misinformation to undermine the public health response and promote other interests of certain groups or individuals.

that the COVID-19 virus was declared a pandemic, after detecting more than 118,000 cases in 114 countries, and 4,291 people dead from this disease.

The viral spread has reached all corners of the world, with great affection in Europe and America. The significance and effects of COVID-19 will be difficult to quantify even in the framework of an advanced society, dominated by algorithms and artificial intelligence (Xifra, 2020; Hansen et al., 2017; Powers and Kounalakis 2017) since the situation of social, health, political, and economic crisis has put scientific production systems to the test (Kupferschmidt, 2020).

The political context of the presidents selected for the study describes different actions against the pandemic. The initiation of treatment for the disease in the UK and the measures taken by Boris Johnson to reduce mortality and the scope of COVID-19 were questioned by the scientific community, in the 'Report: Impact of non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPIs)'[2]. The prime minister maintained, at the beginning of the pandemic, that, in the absence of a vaccine, public health measures should be evaluated, known as non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPIs) that combine home isolation, quarantine, and social distancing, mainly of the elderly and people at risk, complemented with the closure of schools and universities.

In the United States, on March 13th, two days after the WHO classified the COVID-19 outbreak as a pandemic, President Donald Trump proclaims a national emergency throughout the country, although he is committed to maintaining the economy in the face of the spread of the disease.

1.2. Communication in alarm period of COVID-19

During the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, we witnessed an overexposure of political information (Castillo-Esparcia et al., 2020) derived from the multiple public appearances of the leaders, given the need to explain to the public what is happening. This self-advertising implies risks for the image of the lead representatives, caused by the ignorance of this situation and the consequences of the implemented strategy. In this sense, communication becomes an important ally of political, social, institutional, and health management (Costa-Sánchez and López-García, 2020).

At a time when government agencies focus their efforts on fighting the disease, information professionals must play a relevant role to stop the spread of misinformation related to the pandemic (Tandoc, 2020), producing, according to the experts, massive growth of fact-checks[3] due to COVID-19 (Brennen, 2020), using these communication channels as sources of information about the pandemic (Gil-Ramírez et al., 2020). The implosion of a critical and risky situation for the world population, such as that caused by COVID-19, linked to levels of maximum insecurity and

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[2] https://spiral.imperial.ac.uk/bitstream/10044/1/77482/15/2020-03-16-COVID19-Report-9-Spanish.pdf

3 fact-checks: definition used to check that all the data of a text, a news item, a speech, etc. are correct

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uncertainty, triggers the rates of fake news and hoaxes on the networks (Pérez-Dasilva et al., 2020). It even leads to an activation of institutional messages about the coronavirus, often unproven, which become a breeding ground for anonymized users of the network (Pérez-Curiel and Velasco-Molpeceres, 2020).

1.3. Populism and political context

The so-called Populism 2.0 (Gerbaudo 2014) is installed as a communication strategy of some leaders to spread and viralize the message, saving the difficulty of access that they find in conventional media (Shoemaker, Vos, 2009; Groshek, Engelbert, 2013) controlled by the elites (Van-Kessel; Castelein, 2016).

A report published by *The Guardian* (2019), on a sample of 40 countries, finds that the number of populist leaders has doubled in the 21st century. Specifically, in Europe, social polarization and the refugee crisis have been a catalyst for right-wing populists and the transformation of non-populist parties into populist parties (Mudde, 2016). The ultra-right populist discourse is installed in the media and social networks and achieves unprecedented electoral results (Alonso-Muñoz and Casero-Ripollés, 2019) (Bosch; Brunet; Rosiñol, 2017). *The Guardian's* analysis shows how populists tripled in number between 1998 and 2018, garnering enough votes to put their leaders in government positions in 11 countries.

The Republican Party, led by Trump, won the 2016 elections, reaching 47.3% of the votes that represented 60,541,308 voters and 306 seats, surpassing the 232 won by Hillary Clinton. During this campaign, a study by the University of Southern California (Bessi and Ferrara, 2016) analyzed 20 million tweets generated between September 16th and October 21st and written by some 2.8 million users. It is found that approximately 400,000 publications were bots (19%) distorting the debate on Twitter, the vast majority in favor of Trump.

This last theory, of the situation that led to Trump's triumph in 2016, is supported by different studies, such as those obtained by researchers from Oxford University, led by Philip Howard, who followed up on more than 19 million tweets between November 1st and 9th, as well as by the Center for Journalist Studies, which came to count that 80% of the activity on Twitter, in favor of Trump, was generated by these bots (Hermida 2016).

Johnson, on the European side, made use of bots, used as a strategy to influence English citizens. The link with the analysis company 'Cambridge Analytica'[4], a company accused of stealing data from Facebook users without their consent or knowledge of its use; or the indications of relations with Russia and its interference in the viral Brexit strategy, are elements to be studied and determined, according to the statements of

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[4] Cambridge Analytica: it is an analytical consultancy that used its platform to irregularly obtain the data of 87 million Facebook users. Being used in the presidential elections of the United States for Donald Trump to become president.

Brittany Kaiser in the documentary 'The Great Hack'[5] and in the monitoring committee that was carried out in the English parliament.

The right-wing or conservative parties worldwide are facing ideological shifts towards "the right of their rights". In recent years, new parties of extreme ideology have appeared (Acha, 2017) to occupy that space based on socioeconomic, psychological, political, or international factors (Ebata 1997) that are no longer represented by the established parties. They define a charismatic leader, with a simple language, typical of ordinary people, who conveys a message with a strong ideological and emotional charge (Taggart, 2020). The leaders establish a demonstrated demagoguery, which evolves into ochlocracy[6], the concept being understood as the consequence of a demagogic action, which occurs in the worst of political systems and the last iota of degeneration of power. Demagoguery and populism of the crowd represented in a political figure, in front of the people as a power of governance. Leaders who are in charge of establishing themselves as representatives of a whole, when they hardly do so for minorities, without ever actually being the government of a people (Mackintosh, 1791).

Besides the actions that they undertake in their governance, the leaders of the far-right parties focus their attention on the electoral campaign and social networks as an engine of influence (Orozco, 2021) and viralization (López-García, 2016; Dader & Campos-Domínguez, 2017), using policies to delegitimize the electoral process and populist messages (Pérez-Curiel et al., 2021).

1.4. Politics influencers. Causal factor of misinformation

The digital revolution in the 21st century has multiplied, in social networks, the degree of influence of politicians, as well as their conscious capacity to produce disinformation, based on professional use of fallacy and propaganda. The politics of post-truth is installed in which the manipulation of ignorance and the feelings or emotions of citizens are worth more than rational argumentation (Boczkowski, 2016; Urmeneta, 2017). In the digital context, the citizen is positioned in the role of receiver who offers immediate feedback, with the risks that this distortion implies for the intention of the speech. On the contrary, this digitization does favor the management of transparency, essential for new information aimed at citizens, through citizen platforms (Alonso-Muñoz and Casero-Ripollés, 2017).

The trend towards disinformation grows like a virus (Pérez-Curiel and Velasco-Molpeceres, 2020; Román-San Miguel, Sánchez-Gey, & Elías, 2020; Elías, 2018), with a dangerous power for democracy (Coughlan; Valadier, 2017). The influence of populism (Pérez-Curiel, 2020) joins the distrust or apathy of citizens towards political parties or representatives or even towards other scourges such as corruption

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[5] https://www.documaniatv.com/ciencia-y-tecnologia/el-gran-hackeo-video_a56bd7bdd.html
[6] Ochlocracy: comes from Greek and is formed by the root chlo, which means multitude, and by cratos, which translates as government. Thus, in its literal sense, ochlocracy is the government of the multitude.

(Hernández-Santaolalla and Sola-Morales, 2019). In parallel, the digital revolution multiplies in social networks, especially in Twitter, the degree of impact of politicians over users and the configuration of the media agenda (Montoya & Vandehey, 2009; Pérez-Ortega, 2014; Rampersad, 2009). Along these lines, Krane (2010) publishes a work focused on the analysis of the content disseminated on Twitter by three media, The New York Times, CNN, and NPR, which reinforces the theory that there is a direct relationship between the content disseminated by the media and the topics that are most frequently addressed by users on the Internet.

After this analysis, the role of Donald Trump, as a political influencer in social networks, gains strength. The leader demonstrates the ability to mobilize opinions, generate reactions over different concrete elements, increase the audience and levels of participation, through the dynamization of a simple, brief, rhythmic, and almost syllabic language, aspects that disguise a discourse of domination, empowerment, and leadership (Pérez-Curiel and Limón-Naharro, 2019). Likewise, the advance of populism in Europe positions leaders as new digital influencers. We focus on Boris Johnson who, through Twitter, finds a stage for the dissemination, interaction, mobilization, and personalization of the candidate as a strategist, in the selection of topics, and the use of propaganda and fallacy (Bravo, 2020).

In the aforementioned sense, the published events go to the background and the politician is positioned as prominent, besides turning the publication into news, positioning it on social networks, and promoting viralization, using the resources of propaganda in speech (Nocetti, 1990; Van Dijck, 2015). At present, their activity in social networks is questioned more than their electoral program, their image as a leader, the ideology they represent, or the party they run, due to the polarization that confronts the left and the right in the international arena.

The populist discourse of the leaders on Twitter about COVID-19 generates a relevant amount of misinformation that affects the media agenda and public perception of the pandemic.

2. METHODOLOGY

In the context of COVID-19, the institutional discourse of rulers on Twitter favors fallacy and hoax, therefore, it can increase citizen confusion and mistrust. In certain profiles of politicians, such as those of Donald Trump and Boris Johnson, there are many characteristics of far-right populism that define communication strategies for the construction of the message on Twitter. They are also leaders who coincide in a discourse based on conspiracy and negativism about the effects of COVID-19. The subsequent influence of this discourse in the media is another factor that increases the effects on citizens.

Along these lines, a series of research questions are established:
RQ. 1. Are fallacies, fake news, and disinformation considered hallmarks of the discourse of populist leaders on Twitter?

RQ. 2. Do the posts published by the leaders in social networks affect the programming of the usual agenda of the traditional media?

RQ. 3. What indicators of extreme populism are found in the messages posted on Twitter and the media?

The application of a quantitative, qualitative, and discursive methodology in the Twitter accounts of the selected candidates, together with the theoretical considerations set out, generate the following objectives:

1. Know the activity of political leaders in social networks, their influence on users, and the veracity of their publications.
2. Analyze the presence of the hallmarks of populist discourse in the messages published by Donald Trump and Boris Johnson on Twitter.
3. Check what projection the discursive strategy of the leaders has reached in the agenda-setting of the media.

To carry out the content analysis, different agents intervene. An in-depth study has been carried out through a bibliographic review. To this is added a methodology of comparative content analysis with a triple approach: quantitative, qualitative, and discursive (Lopéz-Noguero, 2002; Krippendorff, 2012; Silverman, 2016; Van-Dijk, 2015; Flowerdew and Richardson, 2017).

The content analysis center encompasses the study of Twitter posts, researched during two sample periods, covering the week before and after the start of the pandemic in each of the selected countries (P1), and from the week before until the week after the end of the most restrictive measures in each state (P2).

Specifically, in the United States, the alarm period begins on March 13th after the president's public appearance, overcoming his pre-theories about stopping the spread of the virus. The study of the president's personal Twitter in the first period (P1) is carried out from March 6th to 20th, 2020. This episode of the first alarm period ends on April 30th, 2020, the date on which President Donald Trump announces the beginning of the economic reopening, although some states extend the "stay at home" order, such as New York, until May 15th. Consequently, the publications disseminated during the second period (P2), which runs from April 23rd to May 7th, 2020, are analyzed.

In the United Kingdom, with Boris Johnson at the helm, decisive measures are not taken until March 23rd. Before this date, the prime minister advises precautionary measures without establishing an alarm or emergency period like most countries. Efforts focus on the obligation to comply with established measures. On this date, mandatory home confinement is announced, so the Twitter sample is set from March 16th to 30th, 2020 (P1). Likewise, to evaluate the dates of the end of confinement, we take as a reference May 11th, when the leader considers the particular state of limitation of home mobility ended and the de-escalation begins (P2). Publications issued between May 4th and 18th, 2020 are evaluated.

The tool used for the analysis is the SPSS computer statistics program from IBM Company[7], which collects the different variables arranged to generate concepts resulting from the total compendium of indicators. The Twitter accounts of the selected politicians, named official accounts by the social network, are the digital space most exploited by the referents of this study. Trump is identified as @realDonaldTrump, with more than 88,900,000 users, created in March 2009 and with the slogan "45th President of the United States of America" at the top of his profile. Johnson determines his user link with the spelling of his full name @BorisJohnson, with more than 3,100,000 users. His joining this social network dates from 2015 and the caption that appears on his profile is "Prime Minister of the United Kingdom and @Conservatives leader. Member of Parliament for Uxbridge and South Ruislip".

The analysis through SPSS is carried out by numerical quantification, including quantitative variables where the number of tweets linked to COVID-19, the number of comments received, the number of shares of each related tweet, the sum of favorites, the count of fallacies stipulated in the published posts, and the collection of particular or generic mentions that appear in the publications, are specified. Likewise, the tags (directed appointments) referring to the political opposition or the media and the meritorious self-attributions of the messages are counted.

The qualitative variables show the location of fake news, the topic of the fallacy, if the tone of the comment is positive or negative, and if the content of the tweets appears published in any of the selected media.

Finally, the discursive analysis focuses attention on the analysis of the appeal as a rhetorical resource of language. Three types of appeals are distinguished: authority, emotion, and ignorance.

Table 1. *The research methodology used in the analysis of Twitter*

TWITTER ACCOUNTS	TYPE OF SOURCES	QUANTITATIVE VARIABLES	QUALITATIVE VARIABLES	DISCURSIVE VARIABLES
• Donald Trump • Boris Johnson	@realDonaldTrump @BorisJohnson	• Tweets • Comments • Retweets • Favorites • Fakes • Labels • Attributions	• Fake news location • Topic • Comment tone • Presence in the media	• Appeals to authority • Appeals to emotion • Appeals to ignorance

Source: Self-made

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[7] SPSS from IBM Company: Statistical platform for variable analysis

3. DISCUSSION

The strategies of political communication and the influence of the discourse of the leaders over the electorate and citizens through social networks multiply in crises of any kind and origin (Gelpi, 2018). COVID-19 is an obvious example of the behavior of political representatives in continuous public exhibitions in the face of a situation of political and economic instability, surrounded by insecurity and social disorder.

The first analyzed period provides us with a sample of the total of publications in which 60.65% are of content related to the Coronavirus pandemic, the affection in society, the applied measures, and the causes and consequences of the disease. The result reaches a total of 135 tweets about COVID-19, published by political representatives (Trump 82; Johnson, 53).

In the second researched phase, a count of a total of 261 tweets published during the 14 days analyzed (Trump 196; Johnson 65) is shown, of which 107 were dedicated to COVID-19 (Trump 50 and Johnson 57), a percentage that exposes Johnson's high dedication to information about the virus. Compared with the previous period, the Republican leader and the Conservative leader increase the number of digital emissions, due to the institutional information generated by the phase change.

3.1. Quantification Block

After the prologue of general data on the politicians' accounts, we are going to establish the initial quantitative approach between the relationship of tweets, the interactions of users in the profiles of the analyzed characters, through likes, retweets, and comments, and the comparison between the researched periods.

In the first period, Donald Trump stands out at the head of Twitter publications with 82 posts, 35.36% more posts than the English leader. On the other hand, in the second period, it is observed that it is the English leader, Boris Johnson, who has used the social network more times.

Table 2. *Quantitative Analysis, publication interactivity on COVID-19*

TWITTER METRIC	DONALD TRUMP		BORIS JOHNSON		TOTAL	
Period	P1	P2	P1	P2	P1	P2
Nº of related tweets	82	50	53	57	135	107
Nº *Likes*	10.078.142	6.062.825	1.249.462	445.718	11.327.604	6.508.543
Nº Retweets	2.713.658	1.410.269	373.852	75.407	3.087.510	1.485.676
Nº Comments	1.723.198	1.073.124	153.620	92.757	1.876.818	1.165.881

Source: self-made

Donal Trump shows the highest number of likes in both periods, with an advantage four times greater than his own retweets and six times greater than the likes obtained by Boris Johnson. This issue of metrics invites us to reflect on the interaction that Trump maintains with his followers since retweets generate visibility and favor the dissemination of the message. Trump is in retweets well below his percentage of likes, with the particularity that the retweet reaches the double value in the network, given the ability to make the original go viral and position itself on the timeline (Carrasco-Polaino et al., 2018).

Regarding the number of fallacies detected, the highest percentage of false news is attributed to the American leader with 26.8% (P1) / 26% (P2) compared to the percentages achieved by the British Prime Minister with only 9.4% (P1) / 12.29% (P2).

Table 3. Quantitative analysis of fakes graphs

	FREQUENCY		PERCENTAGE		FREQUENCY		PERCENTAGE	
	P1	P2	P1	P2	P1	P2	P1	P2
Yes	22	18	26.82%	26%	5	2	9.4%	12.29%
No	60	32	73.17%	64%	48	55	90.6%	87.71%
TOTAL	82	50	100%	100%	53	57	100%	100%
	Trump				Johnson			

Source: self-made

To finalize the quantitative analysis, the comparison between the variables of 'tag', a name that reflects the attack of both leaders on the opposition and/or the media, and 'attribution', merits referred to other sources or themselves, is made.

Table 4. *Quantitative analysis of tags and attributions*

|	TAGS		%		ATTRIBUTIONS		%	
Donald Trump	23	17	38.33%	53.12%	44	36	52.38%	58.06%
Boris Johnson	16	2	26.66%	6.25%	17	18	20.23%	29.03%

Source: self-made

The comparison in terms of attributions shows a higher number of self-attribution in both periods, mainly related to their ideological position.

3.2. Qualification Block

The topic where the greatest number of fallacies is located is the so-called "Actions carried out by the government" with a total of 17 fake news in the first period (14 Trump; 3 Johnson), as in P2 with a total of 13 fake news (12 Trump; 1 Johnson). The difference between Trump and Boris Johnson in this item lies in the high percentage of attacks that the president of the United States dedicates to the opposition and the media to justify his decisions on the pandemic.

Other topics in which fake news also appears, although to a lesser extent, are 'virus affection', 'government statements', 'events with citizens', and 'proposed measures'.

Fakes de Donald Trump
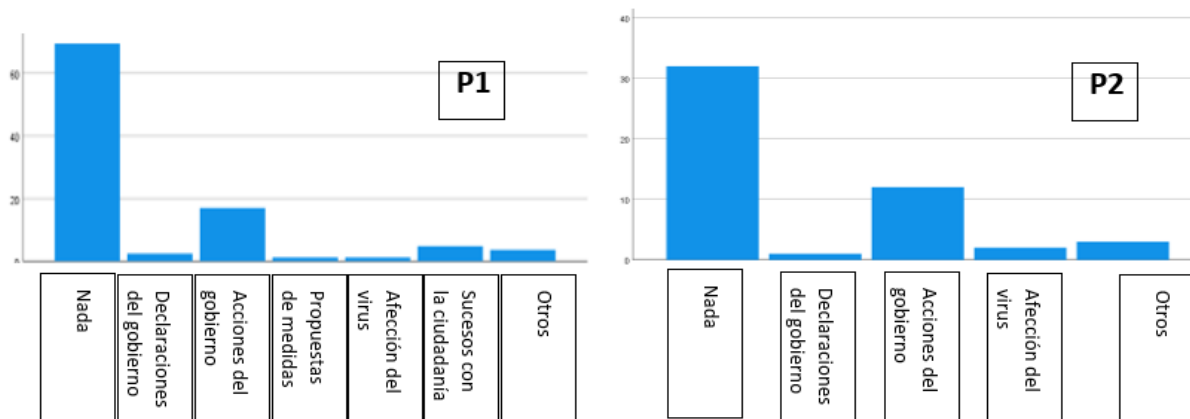
Fakes de Boris Johnson
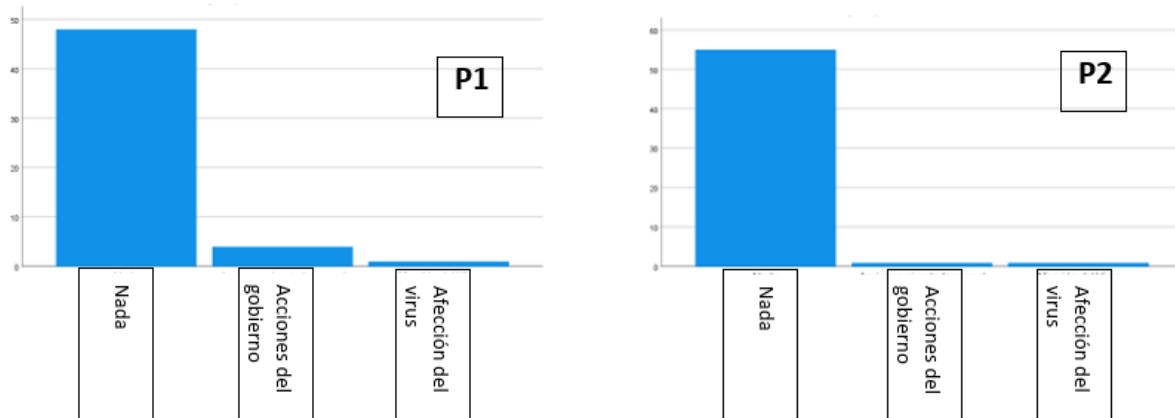
Graph 1. *Qualitative analysis of fake topics*
Source: self-made

Another of the qualitative aspects discussed has to do with the tone of the message. The tone of communication on Twitter is informal. It is important to note that on some occasions the limitation of 280 characters can make it difficult to implement the appropriate communication tone (Mejías-Llanos, 2019).

The influence of the position that the conservative and the republican candidates occupy as leaders of each country, shows the percentage of positive messages that they accumulate in the two periods. In both analyzes, the positive comments outnumber the negative ones by doubling the amount. Trump reaches 61 messages in (P1) / 31 (P2) messages with a positive tone, compared to 21 (P1) / 19 (P2) negative. For his part, Johnson registers 37 (P1) / 36 (P2) positive compared to 16

(P1) / 21 (P2) negative. The need to encourage citizens in times of a pandemic is proven.

Table 5. *Qualitative analysis of the tone of the message*

	Frequency		Percentage		Frequency		Percentage	
Period	P1	P2	P1	P2	P1	P2	P1	P2
Positive	61	31	74.4%	62%	37	36	69.8%	63.2%
Negative	21	19	25.6%	38%	16	21	30.2%	36.8%
Total	82	50	100%	100%	53	57	100%	100%
	Trump				Johnson			

Source: *self-made*

Finally, in the analysis of this approach, the impact that these leaders' tweets have on the media is considered. The number of analyzed tweets that have been news in the media and that have appeared in any format, modifying or marking the agenda-setting, is listed.

The results reveal that the majority of Trump's tweets have been seconded with 67.9 (P1) / 68 (P2) by the media, with a total of 55 (P1) / 34 (P2) tweets published in different communication companies, either in its traditional or digital version.
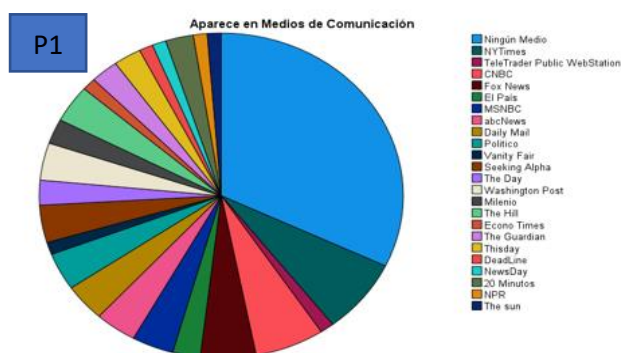
NYTimes	6	Washington Post	3
TeleTrader Public W	1	Milenio	2
CNBC	5	The Hill	3
Fox News	4	Econo Times	1
El País	2	The Guardian	2
MSNBC	3	Thisday	2
ABC News	3	Deadiez	1
Daily Mail	3	NewsDay	1
Politico	3	20 Minutos	2
Vanity Fair	1	NPR	1
Seeking Alpha	3	The Sun	1
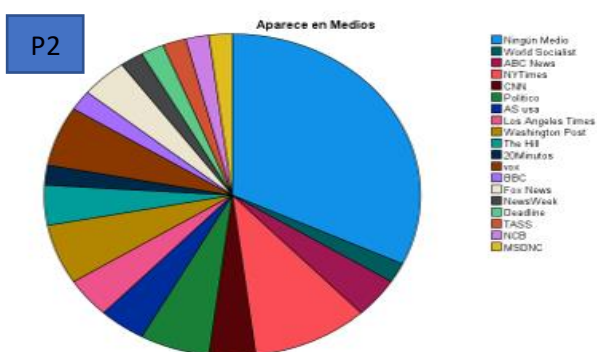
Worid Socialist	1	20 Minutos	1
ABC News	2	Vox	3
NYTimes	5	BBC	1
CNN	2	Fox News	2
Politico	3	NewsWeek	1
As USA	2	Deadline	1
Los Angeles Times	2	TASS	1
Washington Post	3	NCB	1
The Hill	2	MSNBC	1

Graph 2. *Qualitative Analysis Media Appearance, Trump*
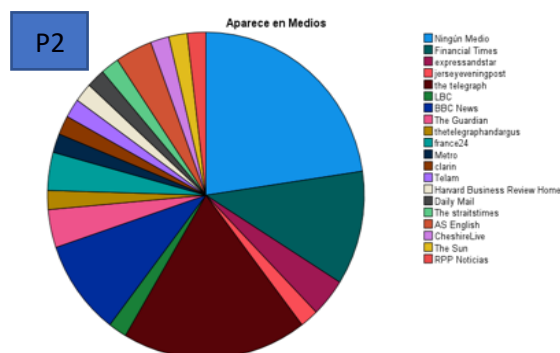**Source:** self-made

Likewise, we evaluate Johnson's influence on the media, in the two studied periods. In this case, 41 publications (P1) / 35 (P2) were projected in the media, exceeding, in the first period, the coverage that the media has dedicated to the American tycoon.

Financial Times	6	Clarín	1
Expressamdstar	2	Telam	1
Jerseyeveningpost	1	Harvard Business RH	1
The Telegraph	10	Daily Mail	1
LBC	1	The Straitstimes	1
BBC News	5	AS English	2
The Guardian	2	CheshireLive	1
Telegraphandargus	1	The Sun	1
France 24	2	RPP Noticias	1
Metro	1	The Day	2
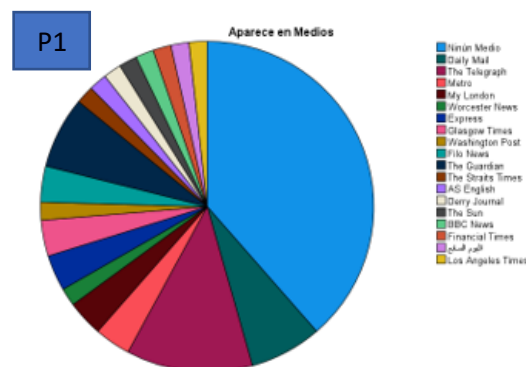
|			
Daily Mail	4	The Guardian	4
The Telegraph	7	The Straits Times	1
Metro	2	AS English	1
My London	2	Derry Journal	1
Worcester News	1	The Sun	1
Express	2	BBC News	1
Glasgow Times	2	Financial Times	1
Washington Post	1	Aljazeera Magazine	1
Filo News	2	Los Angeles Times	1

Graph 3. *Qualitative Analysis Media Appearance, Johnson*
Source: self-made

3.3. Discursiveness Block

The discursive approach attends to consider the act of language, on the one hand, as an act of enunciation, of titling, attending to the active role of the subjects who intervene in the discourse, and, on the other hand, as an act of textualization that results in the construction of a text. A discursive approach consists of forming activity of construction of representations between the interlocutors and the referential world (Álvarez, 2006).

The discursive paradigm is resolved in the study attending to the appeals related to emotion, ignorance, and authority, which the messages published by both leaders contain.
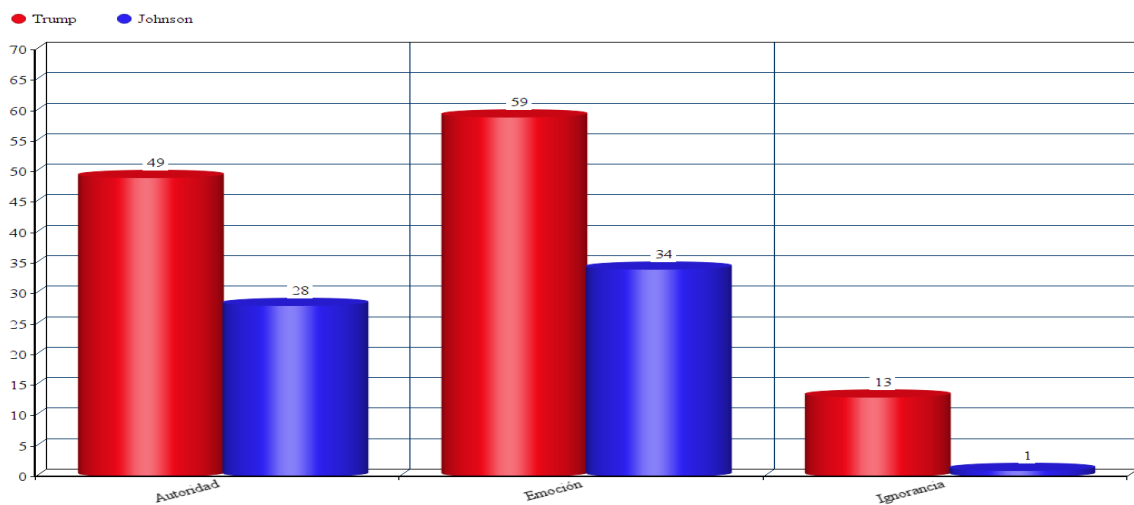
Graph 4. *Type of appeals and levels of use on Twitter in the first period*
Source: self-made

We see in graph P1 that the demand for emotion is, par excellence, the most recurrent appeal of the leaders in social networks. In this first analyzed period, Trump appeals to these feelings in 71.95% of his publications. These data differ with Johnson's interference, which regarding emotion is lighter, with 64.15%, although it continues to exceed half of the issued posts.
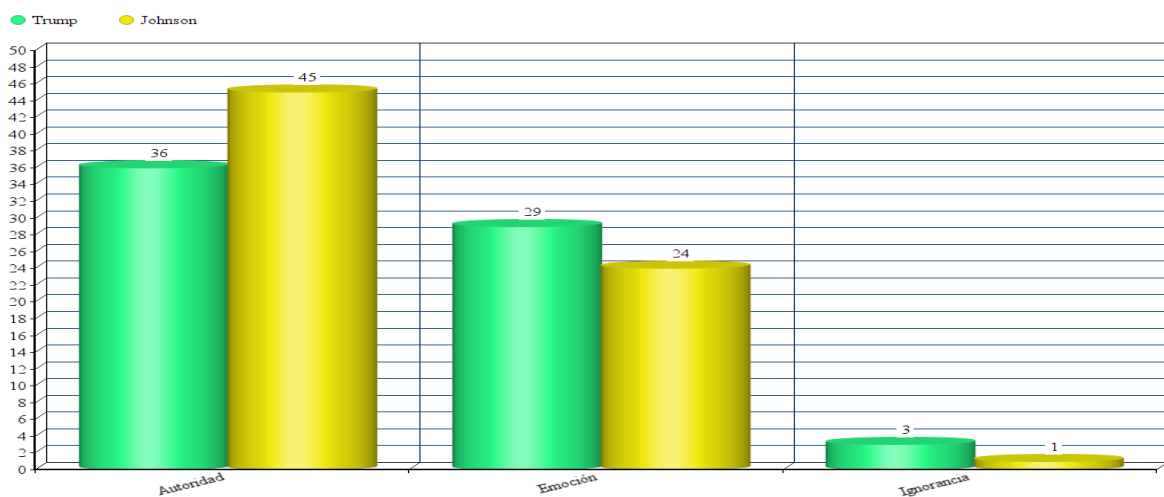
Graph 5. *Typology of appeals and levels of use on Twitter in the second period*
Source: self-made

In P2, emotion is still one of the most used appeals in publications, although it is positioned behind 'authority'. The variable 'authority' occupies first place in the ranking. Along with this evolution, it is Boris Johnson who overtakes the American leader to

place himself in the main position. He accumulates a total of 45 references attributed to his position as ruler (78.94%) compared to those reached by Trump (72%).

Finally, the appeal to ignorance is a less used resource by the leaders in both periods. In this sense, Trump uses 15.85% (P1) / 18.75% (P2) of his digital interventions to appeal to the ignorance of some users on specific issues. Faced with these data, the British leader gives less prominence to this appeal with 1.89% (P1) / 1.75% (P2) of the published tweets.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Populism and propaganda have invaded social networks favoring the use of fallacies, communicative distortion, and the infoxication of citizens. Immersed in a period of unprecedented alarm for today's society, previous research is used (Pérez-Curiel and Velasco-Molpeceres, 2020; Pérez-da-Silva, et. al. 2020; Salaverría et al., 2020) that deepen in the use of social networks and the mechanisms of control of fallacies, with the contribution of an audit and verification system to combat misinformation.

Likewise, affirming that any false message, with public visibility, is a premeditated or/and intentional hoax, implies making a subjective judgment. The reality is more complex since the production of false content is due to different motivations such as exaggerated information and the linking of different disjointed elements, a decontextualized statement, or a misinterpretation (Redondo, 2018).

Regarding the specific objectives set, the sample allows knowing the activity of the leaders on Twitter during the pandemic, their influence, and the veracity of the publications in the two analyzed periods.

The fallacy is identified as a speech hallmark of the appeal to emotion, ignorance, and the authority of the leader (RQ1). These values represent the idiosyncrasies of conservative populism. Most of the messages focused on the subject of COVID-19 reinforce the premise of overexposure and the publication of fake news during the pandemic period (Pérez-Curiel and Limón-Naharro, 2019).

The second premise (RQ2) confirms the influence of leaders in the media. The data confirm that more than 60% of the messages have been broadcast in conventional media, in any of its formats. In this sense, the interest of the candidates to achieve electoral revenue is evident, as other previous studies advance (Redondo, 2018).

The mechanisms of appeal to ignorance, authority, and emotion confirm the presence of hallmarks of extreme right-wing populism in messages posted on Twitter (RQ3). The interaction with the fan communities, the likes, retweets, and comments on the published topics, and their influence as presidents of the government are personality traits of both candidates.

The conclusion not only raises the presented results. Indistinctly, we can highlight the difficulties found in the research, such as: finding modified or deleted posts when studying an element as alive as Twitter. The modification of messages by those responsible for the disclosures or the closure of publications by Twitter when discovering that they were missing some of the rules that you must comply with to use their digital spaces are the most notorious pieces of evidence. Likewise, these actions are useful to strengthen the second hypothesis where the existence of hallmarks of populist discourse in the messages is specified, with a superior exponent that forces us to act on them. Another notable difficulty has been found when trying to contextualize the leader of Vox, Santiago Abascal, within the analysis to compare related ideologies of different countries where Spain was included, but the connotation of not governing in the state distorted the reality of the research.

Finally, in an unprecedented state of alarm and global crisis, in which populism, propaganda, and disinformation have invaded social networks producing infoxication effects on citizens, future lines of research related to the study of the role of the media as verifiers of information in a system in which fallacies and propaganda of political leaders and new digital actors prevail, are being proposed. Indistinctly, the study of the communications of world leaders could be expanded by ideology, as representative of their parties, not with the institutional character that has been treated in the current analysis. Extending the study by comparing the different Social Networks and what discourse is used in each of them, for what type of group the publication on each channel is determined, is another line to consider. And as the last possible line of future research, it is proposed to study the ideological influence in the society that consumes this type of direct communication from leaders.

It is essential to promote the hybridization of traditional and digital media and mark their differences, so that each platform occupies the space that belongs to it, without forgetting the social responsibility that guarantees the veracity of political information and any field.

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