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INTERACTION, DIALOGUE, AND NEW POLITICS. AN EXPERIMENTAL STUDY IN ANDALUSIA

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: the term "new politics" encompasses actions aimed at bringing politics closer to citizens, including the use of social media. In this regard, while the anticipated interactivity and two-way communication are widely dismissed considering studies conducted on the sender and the message, it is worth questioning what the public perception is on this matter. In this context, this research seeks to determine whether the public perceives social media as more dialogical compared to other more traditional channels. Specifically, the main objective of the article is to verify whether the medium (a social network or a consolidated print medium) and the ideology of the political sender influence the perception of the message in terms of closeness, interest, and interactivity. **Methodology:** a quasi-experimental study was conducted with 68 participants from Andalusia, the most populous region in Spain and the first where the far-right party Vox gained parliamentary representation. **Results:** participants found the message disseminated through social media to be more interactive; however, none

of the channels genuinely promoted dialogue, and ideological stance did not influence the evaluation of the message. **Discussion:** the findings align with the principles of the so-called "new politics," as well as with the real conversational possibilities that social media offers. **Conclusions:** the discursive practices driven by political leaders and parties on social media continue to follow a one-way communication dynamic, a reality that is accepted by the younger electorate.

Keywords: interactivity, two-way communication, social media, perception, Spain, quasi-experiment, ideology, political communication, propaganda.

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, the Spanish political arena has witnessed the advent and consolidation of what has become to be known as "new politics". The concept emerges from the citizens' dissatisfaction with traditional politics and traditional democratic system (Bickerton & Accetti, 2021, p.1), something that in Spain gave rise to the 15-M movement (Hughes, 2011). Hence, "new politics" in this country is related to the shift from the traditional two-party system with the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (hereinafter PSOE) and the People's Party (hereinafter PP) towards a multiparty or "fragmented multiparty" system (Rama, 2016), with the arrival of Podemos, Ciudadanos (Citizens, hereinafter Cs) and, subsequently, the radical right-wing Vox on the political scene.

Specifically, the term "new politics" would encompass all those actions aimed at bringing politics closer to the citizenry, including the use of tools and technologies that make the innerworkings of parties more visible for civil society. In other words, the so-called "new politics" is inextricably linked to communication activity and, above all, to the use of social networking sites that would theoretically facilitate greater participation and interaction between the citizenry and the different political actors.

As this idea of a truly two-way communication facilitated by new technologies seems often to be a mere intention for some and an illusion for others, the aim of this study is to determine if the citizens perceive social media as a more "open to dialogue" tool, in contrast to other traditional channels. Although this kind of comparison is scarce in the academic literature, there are several studies that establish a relation between the use of social media by a political party or a candidate and a positive perception of it/him/her based on interactivity. In this sense, Arshad and Khurram (2020) determine that quality information posting on social media by a government agency was related to a perception of transparency, trust and responsiveness in its followers. Moreover, when a group of people was exposed to a male politician answering comments on social media, their intention to vote for him was stronger (Lee & Shin, 2012). The citizen perception of political interactivity had also been studied applied to political campaign websites: they were perceived as a key tool —thought undeveloped— for computer-mediated human interaction (Stromer-Galley & Foot, 2006), and their high level of interactivity had a positive effect on citizen involvement (Kruikemeier et al., 2016). Besides, these positive effects of political interactivity on the public perception are even stronger when the campaign adopts a personalized online communication, because it increases citizens' political involvement (Kruikemeier et al., 2013). In this

line, even politicians' X (formerly Twitter) blunders may increase the sense of authenticity in the public, as Lee, Lee and Choi concluded in two studies (2020).

The main research objective is to confirm whether the medium—a social networking site like Twitter/X or a well-established newspaper like *El País*—has an influence on how messages are perceived basically in terms of proximity, interest and interaction. To this end, a quasi-experimental study was performed on Andalusian political communication. By focusing on a regional political context, our research fills a gap in the literature on the use of Twitter/X, as most research is conducted within a national context. Andalusia is Spain's most inhabited region (INE, 2020) and it is characterized by a quite widespread SNS use: 64.6% of the population are digital users, hence being above the national average (63.2%) (INE, 2022). Twitter/X is a key platform in Andalusia; in fact, it is the most used SNS for searching political information about Andalusia (CENTRA, 2023, p. 106). Besides, the region is politically interesting since, within the framework of the 2018 Andalusian elections, it was the first Spanish region to bring radical-right party Vox into the parliament, thus ousting the Socialist government from power, which had ruled the region for decades. After the election, a coalition formed by the conservative PP, the centre-right-liberal Cs and radical-right national-populist Vox governed the region for a period and established a formula which was later replicated in other autonomous communities.

1.1. New politics and interaction

As Müller-Rommel observes, the shift towards new politics can be described as "a transition from 'old politics' values of economic growth, public order, national security, and traditional life-styles to 'new politics' values of environmental quality, social equality, alternative life-styles, minority rights and participation" (2019, p. 5), all concerns expressed by activists and citizen movements and, therefore, outside the realm of institutional politics.

In fact, the concept of "new politics" is related to another way of doing things, in contrast to the mainstream parties, regarding the innerworkings of political organizations and their relationship with the external environment (Ignazi, 2021). This leads to the association of the idea of "new politics" with the communication strategies implemented by political parties and, specifically, with the use of the Internet and social media. This shift towards new politics, therefore, hatches in a context also determined by the influence of digital media in citizens' political participation. As Gil de Zúñiga et al. (2014, p. 613) argue, "informational uses of many media types have been shown to lead directly and indirectly to political participation, including informational uses of newspapers (McLeod et al., 1999), television (Norris, 1996), the Internet (Shah, 2005), and mobile communication technologies (Campbell & Kwak, 2010)". With the development of the Internet and digital media, numerous studies explore their role in citizens' political participation.

Specifically, contemporary research shows substantial, positive coefficients between the use of digital media and participation in political life; a relationship that seems to gradually increase over time (Boulianne, 2020). Particularly, the rise of social networks has been an important trigger in this sense (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012; Skoric, 2011; Valenzuela et al., 2012). The search for information through social networks sites has

been associated with greater political participation, especially bearing in mind that social media facilitate new forms of media consumption, as well as new avenues for political participation (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2014). Social media platforms have become a critical arena for political participation given their potential "to facilitate both existing forms of participation and generate novel political actions which would not have been possible or feasible without them" (Theocharis et al., 2023, p. 792). Thus, the rise of digital and social media has created new modes of participation especially popular among young people, inserted these into a multichannel media ecosystem in which media devices, sources and services for accessing news multiply (Edgerly et al., 2018).

In this regard, the concept of interactivity is relevant because it implies a two-way communication process that fosters dialogue (Ramos Serrano & Selva Ruiz, 2005, p. 238). Understood as a feature inherent to new technologies, interactivity is a feature specific to social networking sites (Vergeer et al., 2011, p. 482) and central when considering the opportunities for political communication that the Internet offers. In a context in which Web 2.0 apps are seen "[...] as providing new opportunities to positively increase dialogue between people" (Vergeer & Hermans, 2013, p. 400), social media have the inherent potential for horizontal communication and for fostering one-to-one communication—in fact, interaction is considered to be one of the characteristics of communication between social media users (Enli & Moe, 2013, p. 639).

As to the concept of interaction in relation to political communication, as Lilleker (2015, p. 115) and Painter (2015, p. 803) note, there are two stances in academic literature: as a product that helps to interact with information systems (surveillance) or as a conversational process on the Web (expression). Similarly, Stromer-Galley (2000) divided interaction into two types, namely, the human and the media kind, demonstrating that in the 1996 and 1998 election campaigns US politicians opted for media interaction because human interaction involved the risk of losing control over the message. Later, Sundar et al. (2003) proposed a contingency view of interactivity, as opposed to a functional view, which refers to the capacity of the Web to facilitate dialogue but not to how it is maintained. The authors identified three levels of dialogue: (1) two-way/non-interactive communication, when messages flow bilaterally; (2) reactive communication, when messages reply to those immediately preceding them; and (3) interactive/responsive communication, when messages are related to some of the preceding ones (p. 35).

Additionally, McMillan (2002a) established the following classification of interactivity: user-to-system, user-to-document and user-to-user. Focusing on the last category, the author proposed five types of interactivity between users: monologue, feedback, mutual discourse, responsive dialogue and mutual discourse (McMillan, 2002b, p. 276). Finally, in the more recent social media environment López-Rabadán and Mellado (2019) have proposed a classification based on the level of interactivity in these communication environments, identifying three levels: low (which implies an approach strategy), intermediate (corresponding to an invitation to dialogue) and high (which would be dialogue per se, with an exchange of coherent replies) (p. 12). So, for example, in the specific case of Twitter/X, the first of these phases includes hashtags

and links; the second, “liking”, retweeting or mentioning a user, and the third, one includes the replies to someone’s post.

Anyway, although interactivity is a defining feature of the medium, it appears that the political class is not fully exploiting the opportunities that it provides for online campaigning. In their study focusing on four European countries (France, Germany, Poland and the U.K.), Koc-Michalska et al. (2016) arrived at the conclusion that “taking a normative stance, we can confidently claim that parties do not use the full potential that the architecture of the web is offering” (p. 346). According to the authors, moreover, if political parties, above all the smaller ones, made the most of the opportunities for interaction offered by the Web, they would obtain a greater number of votes: “as the rich parties do get richer, the smaller parties may be able to find an electoral edge if they are willing to release control and offer a more engaging and interactive experience to visitors to their websites” (p. 347). On a similar note, in Austria, Heiss et al. (2019, p. 1510) observed that “younger and smaller parties may still actively engage in interaction with users and may hence stimulate initial support among voters.”

1.2. Political parties on Twitter/X: uses and perceptions

Social networking sites possess intrinsic characteristics that make them different from the others from one another. Some authors, including Bosseta (2018), hold that each SNS is structured by a unique architecture that shapes, in a way, the political discourse. Specifically, Twitter/X has consolidated its position as one of the most popular online platforms during election time, making it the political social network par excellence (Enli & Skogerbø 2013; García Ortega & Zugasti Azagra 2014; López-Meri et al. 2017). Its dialogical nature, as well as the closeness and immediacy that it offers, makes it a very useful election campaign tool (López Abellán, 2012).

In relation to political communication on Twitter/X, studies have been conducted in very different countries, such as Norway (Enli & Skogerbø, 2013), U.S. (Bekafigo & McBride, 2013; Mirer & Bode, 2015), the Netherlands (Vergeer et al., 2011; Vergeer & Hermans, 2013), Australia (Grant et al., 2010), Brazil (Gilmore & Howard, 2014), Canada (Small, 2011), Sweden (Larsson & Moe, 2011), U.K. (Jensen & Anstead, 2014), or Spain (as detailed below), among others. These studies have focused on such diverse aspects as communication content (Jensen & Anstead, 2014), the way in which candidates use Twitter/X to inform, communicate and connect with members of the public (Vergeer et al., 2011), the direct engagement of users in the election process (Bekafigo & McBride, 2013), campaign personalization (Enli & Skogerbø, 2013) and the way in which the conventions of the political concession are transferred to the social media context (Mirer & Bode, 2015), to name just a few.

Also noteworthy is Alonso-Muñoz’s (2020) study of the communication of European populist parties on Twitter, concluding that “the more messages populist parties post, the greater the interest from users is” (pp. 514-515). In their analysis of the Rassemblement National, for instance, Carral and Tuñón-Navarro (2020, p. 10) established that this extreme right-wing French party’s communication on Twitter in 2019 had improved tremendously in interactive terms since 2014. Also in Europe, Scherpereel et al. (2017) enquired into the use to which MEPs put Twitter,

demonstrating that “the median MEP tweets infrequently, prefers ‘broadcasting’ to ‘chatting’, and, insofar as she is active on Twitter, prefers retweets to other tweet varieties” (p. 122).

Regarding this aspect, the review performed by Jungherr (2016) on 127 studies of political campaigning on Twitter should be mentioned. The author found that, in the group of studies performed on the use to which parties and candidates put Twitter, there were three main types: those analyzing why a party or candidate used the SNS, those focusing on how parties and candidates used this social network and those addressing the effects of tweets on users. His most relevant conclusions are as follows: (a) that mainstream parties, in addition to younger candidates, were more inclined to use this social network (p. 74); (b) that most politicians used Twitter to post information on election campaigns and not to interact with users (p. 76)—a conclusion similar to that arrived at by Campos-Domínguez (2017) in an almost identical theoretical study, and (c) that messages with a more personal tone were more engaging for audiences (with a prior political interest): “Personalized messages by candidates had strong effects on recognition, recall, feelings of social presence, and imagined intimacy” (Jungherr, 2016, p. 77).

Establishing a more direct relationship between citizens and politicians is possible on Twitter/X (Graham et al., 2013, p. 693), plus a higher level of interaction or dialogue with potential voters (Towner & Dulio, 2012, p. 103). As to Spain, Twitter/X has been used by the political class since 2010 at least (Congosto, 2015). After coming into its own in the November 2011 general elections, it was then studied in relation to those of 2015 (López-García, 2016; Said-Hung et al., 2017), 2016 (López-Meri et al., 2017; Suau-Gomila et al., 2020) and 2019 (Abuín-Vences & García-Rosales, 2023; Pallarés-Navarro & Zugasti, 2022), among other contexts (Fernández Gómez et al., 2018; Lorenzo-Rodríguez & Torcal, 2022).

Interaction was one of the aspects covered in these and other studies. For example, a study carried out during the 2012 Basque elections indicated that, although tweets fostering a certain degree of interaction were more frequent than those that did not have any, as only 7 per cent of them involved a conversation this did not actually imply that any relationship was established between the political class and the citizenry (Cebrián Guinovart et al., 2013). A more recent study focusing on the 2019 general elections in both April and November revealed yet again that frequently detected one-way communication (Gamir-Ríos et al., 2022). Despite this, the authors concluded that some degree of real interactivity could be detected in the way Pablo Iglesias and Santiago Abascal used Twitter, with the acting prime minister Pedro Sánchez, being the most frequent one-way communicator (2022, p. 15).

In light of these findings, it could be claimed that there is not much enthusiasm for political interaction on social media in Spain. Not only as far as Twitter/X is concerned but also on other social networks appearing and expanding afterwards, such as Instagram (Pineda et al., 2022) and TikTok (Cervi & Marín-Lladó, 2021; Zamora-Medina, 2023).

Considering the interaction between politicians and citizens on SNS and the perception of the latter in this respect, some research has shown that interaction has a positive

influence on the opinion that users have of politicians. In this regard, Painter (2015) found that in the 2012 US presidential elections those users who interacted, expressing themselves in some or other way on campaign websites or on Facebook pages, had more robust political organization-public relations (POPR) and political trust than those that did not (p. 806). However, the results of research on the citizenry's perception of interactivity on campaign websites are ambiguous. Stromer-Galley and Foot (2002) conducted 13 focus groups during the fortnight before the 2000 US presidential elections, discovering that citizens were aware of the difficulties that politicians might have in interacting with them online, many of whom "were forgiving of candidates for not engaging in such interaction because of these difficulties". Nevertheless, these citizens also declared that they would like the Internet to facilitate their participation in the campaign and politicians to use it differently, although they were not sure how this could be achieved.

Nowadays, direct citizen participation is possible through one-to-one dialogue with politicians on social networks, a tool that the political class does not seem to have fully exploited. Another study obtaining contradictory results with a positive view of user interaction was carried out by Warnick et al. (2005), whose results showed that users believed campaign websites with an interactivity based on rhetorical resources (the use of the active instead of the passive voice, of the first and second person, photos of candidates talking with people, etc.) were just as interactive as those that were based on user-to-user interaction (email subscriptions, online polls, etc.).

Research on the perception of political interaction on Twitter/X has generally yielded positive results. Lee and Shin (2012) performed a study involving 264 participants in South Korea who were asked to interact with the account of the leader of a liberal party with a high and low level of interactivity in terms of the number of replies to users. Only those participants who did not have strong political beliefs and who were shyer perceived the high level of interactivity as a conversation with the candidate. One of the most relevant findings was that a high level of interactivity could divert the participants' attention from the topic under discussion. In another study, Lyons and Veenstra (2016) showed how 344 US participants manipulated tweets based on real ones posted by members of the US Congress and the public about the 2014 Farm Bill. The politicians with the most interactive tweets were seen in a more positive light, while the author also concluded that politicians who use Twitter to broadcast instead of engaging with other users not only receive worse evaluations themselves, but that negative evaluation carries over to other users discussing the same topics, as well as to evaluations of the utility of Twitter as an information source (2016, p. 8).

In Spain, experimental research on political communication on Twitter/X is not so plentiful. Even so, the study performed by Lorenzo-Rodríguez and Torcal (2022) is remarkable, since it goes into whether following candidates on Twitter impacted affective polarization, obtaining negative results even for those participants who had previously professed to be very partisan.

However, this technique has yet to be applied in Andalusia, where there is a certain tradition of research on the political use of Twitter/X. Those studies focusing on this region in Southern Spain have stressed the role of this SNS as a network that galvanizes election campaigns and citizen participation, despite the scant interaction

between the political class and the citizenry (Fontenla Pedreira et al., 2019; Liberia Vayá et al., 2024; Pérez-Curiel & García-Gordillo, 2019; Pérez Gómez & Mahou Lago, 2020).

For instance, Deltell et al. (2013) examined the use of Twitter by the mainstream Andalusian political parties during the 2012 regional elections. The findings of their study “were closer to the final results than the traditional polls”, but only when not considering the minority parties, whose grassroots supporters were very active on the SNS (p. 12). The authors also called attention to the “low turnout and scant political activism of Andalusian society on this microblogging site” (p. 13), which however contrasted with the greater user activity on Twitter a few days before the start of the campaign.

Several years later, Díaz and del Olmo (2016) analyzed the images that the parties and candidates posted on Twitter during the 2015 regional election campaign in Andalusia, concluding that most of the images had to do with the campaign itself, at the expense of those that criticized rivals, party proposals and election propaganda. It was Podemos and Izquierda Unida that used images most, followed by the PP, with the PSOE and Cs being the parties that attached least importance to them. In the context of the 2018 regional elections in Andalusia Pérez-Curiel and García Gordillo (2019, pp. 272-273) determined that the most active candidates on the social network during the TV debates held on 19 and 26 November were Teresa Rodríguez (Adelante Andalucía) and Juanma Moreno (PP). In relation to the same elections, Pedreira et al. (2019) examined the use to which the parties and candidates put Twitter during the same TV debates, demonstrating provide that “even though there was indeed activity, conversations were one-way rather than two-way” (p. 236).

2. OBJECTIVES

Building on previous findings, the main research objective of this research is to confirm whether the medium/channel, drawing a distinction between the print press and social networking sites, influences the perception of messages, mainly in terms of closeness, interest and interaction. In this connection and taking the literature review performed above as a reference, beyond the real communicative actions of politicians and parties on social networks, it is true that the research reviewed above recognizes that the messages transmitted via this channel can be understood, in the main, as being more interactive and engaging. Accordingly, this study is based on the following hypothesis.

H. For the citizenry, the messages transmitted on social networks, versus other more traditional channels, are seen as an invitation to interact and maintain a conversation.

Besides the broadcast channel, the question arises as to whether the sender of a message can also affect this perception, bearing in mind that political parties and candidates have different ideological stances that can interfere with how that message is interpreted. Hence, the following research question has been formulated.

RQ. Does the perception of interactivity and the opportunity for dialogue influence the ideological stance of the sender?

3. METHODOLOGY

A quasi-experimental study with a 2x2 factorial design and without a control group was performed. The two independent variables were the medium (press vs. social network) and ideological orientation (left-wing vs. right-wing).

3.1. Participants

Sixty-eight subjects (82.4% women), all communication students aged between 18 and 22 ($M = 20.54$; $SD = 3.26$), participated in the study. With respect to their self-declared socioeconomic status, the average was 6.03 ($SD = 1.16$; 0, low class; 10, high class), and as to their self-declared ideological orientation, the average was 4.75 ($SD = 2.08$; 0, extreme left-wing; 10, extreme right-wing). This aspect should be related, however, to their voting decisions in the regional elections held in Andalusia in June 2022, in which 42.6 per cent of the respondents indicated that they had voted for the PP-A and only 23.5 per cent for left-wing or center-left parties, including the PSOE-A, Adelante Andalucía and Por Andalucía (Table 1).

The selection of university students in communication studies as participants was based on criteria of efficiency and accessibility. While this approach may pose a potential threat to external validity, it is important to recognize that the type of participants is neither the sole nor the most influential factor in drawing valid inferences (Kam et al., 2007; Druckman & Kam, 2011). Indeed, as noted by Arceneaux and Johnson (2008), measurement bias may arise from the outset if participants are not given the opportunity to engage with any form of communication of their choosing, as they would in their everyday lives. Moreover, one must consider the well-documented Hawthorne effect, whereby individuals alter their responses simply due to the awareness of being observed (McDermott, 2002). Consequently, while sample selection may present a challenge to external validity, this limitation has been carefully considered in the research design.

Table 1.

Voting decision in the last two regional elections (%).

Party	General Elections (N10 2019)	Regional Elections (19J 2022)
PSOE/PSOE-A	10.3	4.4
PP/PPA	5.9	42.6
Vox	1.5	2.9
Cs	1.5	5.9
Unidas Podemos	8.8	-
Adelante Andalucía	-	16.2
Por Andalucía	-	2.9
Other	1.5	1.5
Blank/null vote	1.5	2.9
Does no vote*	69.1	20.6

Source: Own elaboration.

3.2. Procedure, stimuli and measuring tools

The participants were divided into four groups, each in their separate classroom, before being randomly assigned different experimental conditions. Firstly, after being informed about their right to anonymity and the treatment of their data, according to the Ethics Research Committee of the institution, an initial questionnaire was administered to all the participants. In addition to providing some sociodemographic and political data, they were asked questions about the concept of new politics and to evaluate the make-up of current governments and media consumption on a seven-point Likert scale.

This was followed by the distribution of the stimulus, a message that was either (a) posted on Twitter/X or (b) published in the daily *El País* and whose sender was either (a) Inmaculada Nieto of Por Andalucía or (b) Macarena Olona of Vox Andalucía, thus offering them four possibilities, namely, the two media and the two ideological orientations of the parties of the candidates (left- and right-wing, respectively). In the four cases, the text message was identical – “I want to know the concerns of Andalusian men and women” – which could have been uttered by any presidential candidate running in the elections and which had a personal tone with the aim of making it sound more appealing, according to the conclusions of Jungherr (2016).

After exposing them to the first stimulus, a second questionnaire (post-test) was administered to the subjects in which they were asked who they thought was the sender of the message that they had just read, as well as its function and objective (Graham et al., 2013) and the probability that it had been transmitted by a different party or via another medium/channel, on a seven-point Likert scale (these last two questions varied according to the experimental conditions). Likewise, using the same Likert scale, they were asked whether the message fostered dialogue or interaction and whether it served to increase their personal and/or general interest in politics.

Lastly, the participants were posed two short-answer, open-ended questions in which they were asked to state (1) whether the channel chosen for disseminating the message was the most suitable one and (2) whether the political parties used new media and technologies for fostering dialogue and/or interacting with the citizenry, requesting them to indicate whether they could detect any differences, in this last sense, between the different political organizations.

The experiments were conducted in November 2022. As to data processing, a descriptive analysis was first performed on them, while some relevant variables were crossed using the non-parametric Chi-square statistic. Secondly, for studying the perception of an invitation to dialogue or of interaction, as well as the general and personal interest shown in terms of the experimental conditions, a one-way ANOVA was applied. All these analyses were conducted with the program IBM SPSS Statistics 29.0.1.0. Finally, in relation to the open-ended questions, they were coded to obtain the general replies of the participants.

4. RESULTS

In relation to “new politics”, most of the participants recognized that they were incapable of defining the concept. The replies of those who declared that they were indeed familiar with it revolved around the advent of new political parties, the end of the two-party system and extreme ideological polarization, plus the growing concern about specific social problems to which they had not paid attention to before and the use of new media to engage the citizenry. In any case, notwithstanding the foregoing, 83.9 per cent of the participants considered that social networks and new technologies had affected, in some way or another, “new politics”. As to the two-party/multiparty system pairing, 50 per cent of the participants believed that Spanish politics was closer to the multiparty system, in contrast to 27.9 per cent who considered that it was still anchored in the two-party system. In the case of Andalusian politics, this changed with 54.5 per cent of the participants claiming that it was still governed by the two-party system, versus 14.7 per cent who believed that the multiparty system now predominated in the region.

Lastly, as regards current government agreements and coalitions, for 32.4 per cent of the participants the coalition government in Spain between the PSOE and Unidas Podemos was positive, versus 48.4 per cent for whom it was negative. With reference to the coalition government in Andalusia between the PP and Cs, 32.2 per cent believed that it was positive, whereas for 36.8 per cent it was negative. In this respect, as was to be expected there were statistically significant differences in this assessment in terms of the participants’ self-declared ideological orientation, in the case of Spain ($\chi^2_{(8)}=34.166$; $p<0.001$) and Andalusia ($\chi^2_{(8)}=23.682$; $p<0.003$), alike. Specifically, those participants to the right and the left of the ideological spectrum were the ones who opposed the coalition government at a national and regional level, respectively. In other words, those who professed to be right- or extreme right-wing were opposed to the progressive government of the PSOE and Unidas Podemos, whereas those with opposite ideological leanings rejected the more conservative coalition government between the PP and Cs.

As to media consumption, it can be observed (Table 2) how the participants consumed above all entertainment, but also political information, on social networking sites (especially Twitter/X, Instagram, YouTube and TikTok), followed by television. They also consumed a lot of podcasts but only for entertainment, without searching for political information. Concerning the participants’ media consumption and self-declared socioeconomic status and ideological orientation, plus their voting decisions in the last elections, there were no statistically significant differences.

Table 2.

Media consumption of the participants (7-point Likert scale).

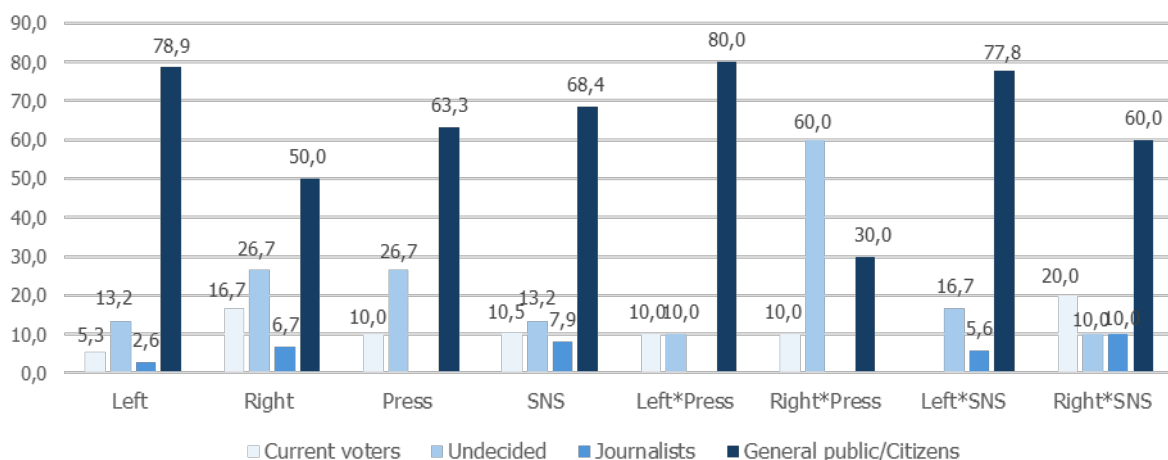
Media	Political Information		Entertainment	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Press	1.61	1.09	1.50	1.42
Digital press	3.18	1.83	2.44	1.71
Radio	2.34	1.85	3.12	1.80
Podcast	1.88	1.52	3.13	2.00
TV	4.44	1.6	4.29	1.85
SNS	4.79	2.03	6.29	1.32
Other	1.20	0.66	3.37	2.66

Source: Own elaboration.

Regarding the post-test, even though most of the participants observed that the message's target audience was the public or the citizenry (Figure 1) and that its function was to sound out the opinion of that audience (Figure 2), no statistically significant differences were detected by experimental condition in any case, according to the Chi-squared test. Moving on to the invitation to maintain a conversation and to interact (Table 3), the general tendency was to accept that these messages could achieve their purpose. However, Student's t-test yielded a statistically significant value in the case of their perception of the opportunity that the message offered for interaction (although not dialogue) in terms of whether the medium was a print newspaper (*El País*) or a social network (X), in favor of the latter, regardless of the participants' ideological orientation. In this way, the subjects perceived that the social network offered greater opportunities for participation than digital press; however, these opportunities remained limited. While they acknowledged the potential for interaction with politicians through the former, they did not believe it could extend to the level of true dialogue.

Figure 1

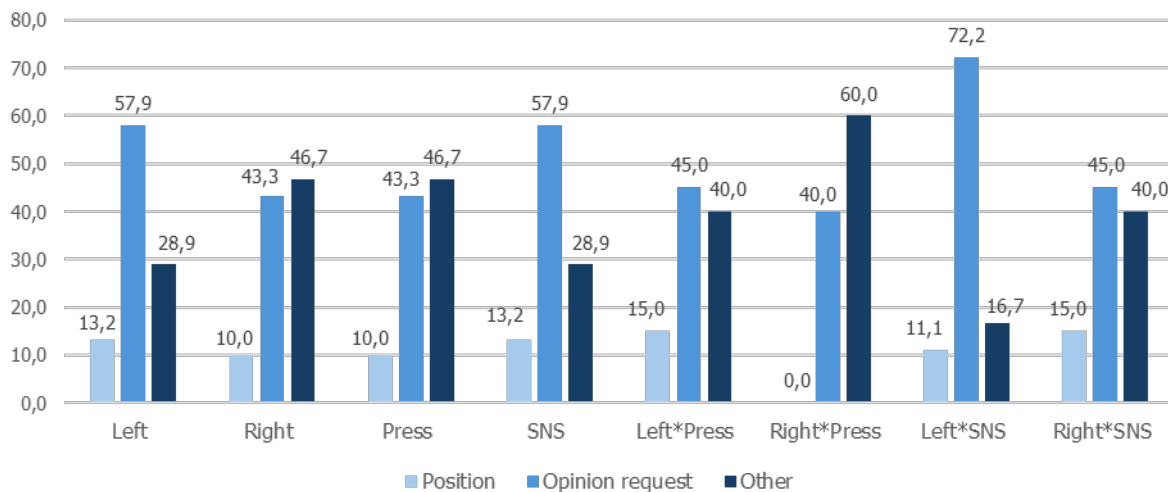
Target audience of the message (%)



Source: Own elaboration.

Figure 2.

Function or objective of the message (%)



Source: Own elaboration.

Table 3.

Invitation to maintain a conversation or to interact (7-point Likert scale) (N=68)

Condition	Dialogue				Interaction			
	Mean	SD	t	F	Mean	SD	t	F
Left								
Right	5.08	1.81	0.530 (p=0.60)		46.7	30	-0.420 (p=0.68)	
Press	4.83	1.97			46.7	30		
SNS	4.47	2.18			28.9	38		
Left*Press	5.37	1.50			40.0	20		
Right*Press	4.50	2.01	1.776 (p=0.16)		60.0	10		1.545 (p=0.21)
Left*SNS	4.40	2.59			16.7	18		
Right*SNS	5.72	1.32			40.0	20		
Total	5.05	1.61			36.8	68		

Source: Own elaboration.

To end with, as far as the general and personal interest that the message arose (Table 4), the former was assessed much more positively than the latter. In other words, while participants believed that the message could encourage the public to be receptive to the candidates' proposals, they did not find it personally engaging. In this connection, Student's t-test yielded a statistically significant value in the case of personal interest in terms of ideological orientation, being more interesting in the case of the left-wing candidate (Por Andalucía). Nevertheless, no significant results were found when considering the participants' self-declared ideology as a covariate, indicating that political affinity did not interact with either the perception of interaction/dialogue or the general/personal interest elicited.

Table 4.

General and personal interest (N=68)

Condition	Dialogue				Interaction			
Left	Mean	SD	t	F	Mean	SD	t	F
Right	5.08	1.58	1.840		3.63	1.75	2.061	
Press	4.37	1.59	(p=0.07)		2.77	1.70	(p<0.05)	
SNS	4.63	1.75	-0.584		3.10	1.85	-0.614	
Left*Press	4.87	1.51	(p=0.56)		3.37	1.72	(p=0.54)	
Right*Press	4.65	1.72		2.320 (p=0.08)	3.35	1.90		1.808 (p=0.155)
Left*SNS	4.60	1.90			2.60	1.71		
Right*SNS	5.56	1.29			3.94	1.55		
Total	4.25	1.45			2.85	1.73		

Source: Own elaboration.

Beyond these quantitative results, the open-ended questions also obtained interesting results. With respect to whether the medium was the most appropriate choice, the participants were more inclined to believe that this was the case with the social networking site. For example, those who saw the message in *El País* indicated that, although it could be an important channel for reaching a sector of society, “engaging a fairly broad and general audience”, “it’s a one-way channel” that did not allow to obtain replies, for which reason “it only serves for positioning”. They went on to say that social networks like Twitter/X should also be used, for it was a “closer” platform “that allows receivers to obtain feedback”, as well as to retweet and repost messages (quote posts) and was aimed at a younger audience. In fact, in their dealings with the media age bias was one of the issues that they brought up. Specifically, it was those participants who received the message through Twitter/X who complained that it was possible that the message would not reach a more adult sector of society. At any rate, they agreed that it was a social network conducive to dialogue and debate which had a huge rebroadcasting capacity, for which reason it was a good choice for transmitting messages of this kind, although they warned against the fact that hate messages, verbal abuse and defamation were increasingly more frequent on the platform.

With respect to the second question about whether political parties sought to foster dialogue and/or interaction with the citizenry through new media and technologies, their replies were fairly similar, indicating that these tools were indeed being used more often but without exploiting the opportunities that they offered for maintaining conversations, being used instead as one-way channels and, as the case may be, to create a false impression of closeness. They noted that there were exceptions, such as some recently created parties, above all left-wing ones, but it was precisely those participants with a left-wing ideological orientation who made this observation.

5. DISCUSSION

The use of the concept of new politics has become widespread in both the academic literature and informative and journalistic pieces (Müller-Rommel, 2019; Selva-Ruiz & Caro-Castaño, 2017). Considering our results, however, it warrants noting that the participants had difficulty in defining the concept, even though they had no doubts

about establishing a clear connection between this and the use of social media and new technologies. Specifically, the relationship between “new politics” and new technologies was something that most of the participants in the experiment clearly perceived (83,9%), theoretically agreeing with authors like Ignazi (2021) in this regard. Nevertheless, the participants’ perception of interaction in the tweet that they read corresponded to an invitation to dialogue—implying that it would fall within the intermediate level of interactivity, according to López-Rabadán and Mellado (2019)—although not to real dialogue.

So, it is an interaction with the online medium, instead of with real users, corresponding more to media interaction than to the human sort, in the words of Stromer-Galley (2000). This idea is also related to another of the results that we have obtained: the impression that the participants did not feel that the messages posted were addressed to them. Indeed, this was the general impression for in the open-ended questions the participants indicated that, although they were aware that the political class was using new technologies increasingly more, the interactive potential of social media was not being exploited but that they were being used as one-way communication channels. This is a finding that coincides with those of most research on the interactive use of Twitter/X by politicians, at a global (Jungherr, 2016; Campos-Domínguez, 2017) and European level (Scherpereel et al., 2017), and in the case of Spain, at a national (Gamir-Ríos et al., 2022; Ramos-Serrano et al., 2018), regional (Cebrián Guinovart et al., 2013; Pedreira et al., 2019) and local level (Criado et al., 2013).

More specifically, the participants recognized Twitter/X as a close platform, more open to feedback and interaction and aimed at a younger audience than that of other traditional mass media communication channels. It should therefore come as no surprise that as to maintaining a conversation and interaction they preferred the social networking site, in opposition to the one-way communication that they perceived in the press (*El País*). Nonetheless, it is remarkable that there were no statistically significant differences between the newspaper and the social network as regards their perception of the invitation to dialogue, but there was indeed in the case of interaction, although the results for both media were not that different. Given the technological advantages of social networks, the participants were of the mind that they—Twitter/X in this case—did allow interaction with users, in contrast to the press, but neither of the two really fostered dialogue. This only partially confirms our working hypothesis: the messages posted on social media, versus other more traditional channels, are seen by the citizenry as an invitation to dialogue and interaction.

On the other hand, as for the research question and results presented in Table 3, we can conclusively state that the ideological orientation of the sender had no influence whatsoever on the participants’ perception of the opportunities for dialogue and interaction. In this connection whether the candidates belonged to a left- or right-wing party made no difference at all. In this regard, previous studies have indicated that it is precisely the “youngest” and the most extreme parties that make the greatest and most effective use of social networks as these platforms allow them to transmit messages that, a priori, would have no place in traditional media. However, none of these issues affected the replies of the participants, regardless of whether it was

because they focused exclusively on the content of the message or because they understood that both politicians used Twitter/X in a similar way.

At all events, although the dialogical potential of online media is clear, perhaps the political class fears losing control over the message or that it might be distorted in the process, as noted by Stromer-Galley (2000). As a matter of fact, we have demonstrated here that for the participants the interactive messages that they received, although perceived as dialogical by some who did not have strong political beliefs, fostering dialogue could distract them from the topic under discussion (Lee & Shin, 2012). In this vein, the references to the progressive increase in hate messages, verbal abuse and defamation were striking (Theocharis et al., 2016, p. 1023). In fact, it is remarkable that the participants placed the accent on this issue, considering it as one of reasons apparently behind the fact that political parties and candidates miss the interactive opportunities of social networks. On the other hand, on certain occasions the lack of control over the message can be advantageous, redefining attacks, accepting them and turning them into humorous anecdotes about parties or candidates, as occurred with "Pepe the Frog" in the campaign of Donald Trump (Woods & Hahner, 2020) and with "Perro Sanxe" in the 2023 general elections in Spain (Blanco, 2023).

6. CONCLUSIONS

To conclude, this study highlights the fact that, in opposition to the general conception of the relevance of political interaction and dialogue on social networking sites, it is not only that political parties and representatives do not use them to this end, as has been shown in previous studies, but that users, and specifically younger voters, seem to attach little importance to this fact. In this sense, they are aware that these networks are put to a one-way use but, at the same time, do not miss greater dialogue on them, for their media consumption habits are not that different from the traditional model, except that there has been a change in the mode of choice of users who now have a wider range of information and entertainment sources available to them and can decide when they wish to consume.

Notwithstanding the above, this research presents some limitations that should be taken into consideration. In this respect, it should be noted that the participants' replies were conditioned by the broader communication context of the experimental conditions. Likewise, the study's local sample which, albeit significant for the autonomous community of Andalusia, was restricted to one province. To this should be added the similar demographic profile of the participants in that they were all young people, undergraduate students at the same faculty and, moreover, new voters. Specifically, in relation to the condition of university students in communication studies, the criteria established for the selection of participants have been previously developed in the corresponding section, noting the limitation that this implies. On the other hand, the characteristics of these participants as new voters led to another significant limitation. The participants who were asked about the concept of "new politics" were all youngsters who had reached the voting age in a context in which this had already been about for seven years, for which reason it was perhaps complicated from them to distinguish between old and new politics.

Lastly, with respect to the dialogical capacity of digital media, it could be interesting to approach formats that have received less attention to date, and which can be understood as a real change. Returning to our study, the participants declared that they consumed podcasts as a form of entertainment, which makes this an interesting option for the political class for it enables them to pursue politainment not only on television and social media but also on new platforms. A good example of this was the participation of the socialist candidate Pedro Sánchez in the podcast *La Pija y la Quinqui*, a radio program including interviews and entertainment explicitly aimed at Z-Generers, during the last general election held in 2023, a strategy that brought him into contact with a young audience (formed by new voters in many cases) perhaps uninterested in politics.

In future studies, it would be interesting to address the current success of classic one-way formats, such as talk shows and interviews, among young voters. This makes us reflect on the evolution of concepts like politainment (Nieland, 2008), which has been about since the 1980s, although it is now consumed via new screens and devices. On the other hand, and given its limitations, the scope of our study could be broadened to include participants with other age ranges and educational levels. It would also be a good idea to explore political communication on other social networks, with the aim of verifying whether there are any differences in the perception of the dialogical capacity of the medium and of the interest that messages arouse in different types of audiences depending on the channel used.

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