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Political corruption, leadership and influence on Twitter. An analysis of public transparency in the context of the 28th April elections in Spain

Corrupción política, liderazgo e influencia en Twitter. Un análisis sobre la transparencia pública en el marco de las elecciones del 28 de abril en España

Abstract

According to the barometers of the Spanish Centre for Sociological Research (Centro de Investigacíones Sociológicas, 2019), corruption features as one of the citizens' main concerns; however, corruption is not a priority in the discourse of political leaders on social networks, although it acts as a mechanism to increase confrontation between adversaries, especially during election periods. This study seeks to analyse the political coverage of corruption on Twitter, identify the candidates' strategies, and confirm public opinion on the need to increase transparency policies that mitigate the effects of corruption and improve the access to information. The methodology combines a quantitative-qualitative content analysis with a comparative approach, focused on the personal accounts of candidates for the 28th April elections in Spain. In addition, a survey of the assessment of the transparency portals and a panel of experts aimed at professionals and academics linked to the political communication sector were also considered. The results confirm an electoral political use of corruption that does not respond to citizens' interest. In conclusion, there is an urgent need to review the public proposal for transparency portals so as to render them more useful to users.

Resumen

Según indican los barómetros del Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (CIS, 2019), la corrupción es una de las principales preocupaciones ciudadanas; sin embargo, no ocupa un lugar prioritario en el discurso de los líderes políticos en las redes sociales, aunque actúa como mecanismo para incrementar la polarización, especialmente en periodos electorales. Son objetivos del estudio analizar el tratamiento político de la corrupción en Twitter, identificar las estrategias de los candidatos, y constatar la opinión ciudadana sobre la necesidad de incrementar políticas de transparencia que mitiguen los efectos de la corrupción y mejoren el acceso a la información de la ciudadanía. La metodología combina un análisis de contenido cuantitativo-cualitativo de enfoque comparado, focalizado en las cuentas digitales de los candidatos a las elecciones del 28 de abril en España, al que se suma una encuesta de valoración sobre los portales de transparencia y un panel de expertos dirigido a profesionales y académicos vinculados al sector de la comunicación política. Los resultados confirman un uso político electoral de la corrupción que no responde al interés ciudadano. Como conclusión destaca la urgencia de una revisión de la propuesta pública de los portales de transparencia, en pro de una mayor utilidad para los usuarios.

Keywords
Citizenship; corruption; political communication; public administration; transparency; Twitter

Palabras clave
Administración pública; ciudadanía; comunicación política; corrupción; transparencia; Twitter

1. Introduction

The code of institutional political transparency (Manfredi-Sánchez, 2017; Molina-Rodríguez-Navas, Simelio-Solà and Corcoy-Rius, 2017; Herrero-Gutiérrez, Martínez-Vallvey, Tapia-Frade, Rey-García and Cabezuelo-Lorenzo, 2017; Rebolledo, Zamora-Medina and Rodríguez-Virgili, 2017; Corcoy-Rius, 2018) has marked the most recent stage of democracy in Spain. The proliferation of cases of political corruption and the resulting media expectation, together with the approval of transparency and good governance laws, have defined action strategies and public commitment, giving a relevant function to public communication.

Both Law 19/2013 of December 9 on Transparency, Access to Public Information and Good Governance as well as the different regional laws (Fernández Luque, 2017) or the interest of international organizations that promote transparency, relating its application with benefits in terms of democracy and development (UnitedNations, 2000; European Commission, 2001; European Commission, 2018), have contributed to the configuration of open access to information policies. In recent years, transparency portals (Paricio-Esteban, Bruno-Carlos, Alonso-Romero and García-Alcober, 2020) have multiplied in local, national and international administrations, in order to increase the levels of usability and usefulness population of institutional big data, given the new model of civic monitoring promoted by the network (Feenstra and Casero-Ripollés, 2014). In contrast, the levels of access and use of these platforms by public opinion are not directly proportional to the increase and diversity of services provided by the administrations.

In a socio-political context marked by the call for general elections (28A), the Macrobarometer of the Sociological Research Center (April 2019) places corruption and fraud as the third problem for Spanish citizens (11,0%), behind politics and politicians in general (13,1%) and unemployment (38,8%), with an obvious difference with respect to the rest.

In this framework, the candidates of the four parties with the highest parliamentary representation (PSOE, PP, Ciudadanos, Unidas Podemos) to which Vox joins, even without seats in Congress, focus their attention on the electoral campaign and on social medias as an engine of influence and viralization (López-García, 2016; Dader and Campos-Domínguez, 2017; Pérez-Curiel and García-Gordillo, 2020a) of a one-way discourse (Mancera and Helfrich, 2014) in which the theme of the Corruption generates political confrontation (Román-San Miguel, Sánchez-Gey and Elías, 2020) but does not provide solutions that guarantee citizen credibility. A multiplicity of approaches that point to the lack of political interest in responding to an issue of citizen concern such as corruption (H1) and the questioning of the procedures followed by public administrations to increase the levels of transparency and effectiveness in the issues related to political corruption diffusion (H2).

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Public Transparency Codes. Between the legal framework and the political strategy

Law 19/2013, on Transparency, Access to Public Information and Good Governance (LTBG) is approved as a result of Spain's adhesion to the Alliance for Open Government (Open Government) and the Alliance for the Council of Europe (Cotino -Hueso, 2014; Sánchez de Diego, 2014).

The incorporation of the concept of public transparency into the political scene is linked to the international economic crisis that generated a state of lack of protection and delegitimization of governments and institutions (Morales, Martínez, García and Caridad, 2016). This supposes a legal framework that promotes the emphatic discourse of parties and administrations on democratic regeneration, good governance, the fight against administrative corruption, and accessibility to public information.

Government transparency establishes a double track: an active one, linked to public administrations and the duty to make public information available to citizens, from administrative procedures or acts to resolutions or budget items (Beltrán-Orenes and Martínez, 2017) and a passive one, in which it is the citizens themselves who, on their own initiative, request from the administrations the information they deem appropriate to exercise the role of counter-power (O'Leary, Van Slyke and Soonhee, 2011).

In addition to academic research at the national level (Alonso-Muñoz and Casero-Ripollés, 2017; Manfredi, Herranz and Calvo, 2017), there are review protocols for public organizations that ensure compliance with the standard. The Council for Transparency and Good Governance of Spain (2017), together with the now defunct State Agency for the Evaluation of Public Policies and the Quality of Services (AEVAL) [1], develops a procedure for self-evaluation of compliance with the Law of State Transparency, called MESTA (Methodology for the Evaluation and Monitoring of Transparency in the Administration. Similarly, civil organizations create their own monitoring systems. The best known is the activity of TransparencyInternacional, represented in Spain by the NGO Transparency International Spain, with proposals to combat corruption such as the promotion of the depoliticization of constitutional

bodies, the prohibition of the granting of pardons, the reduction of the number of graduates, the reduction of political patronage or the improvement of the legal provisions on sanctions, publication of a Law to protect whistleblowers, among other actions.

2.2. Political leadership, influence and polarization on corruption on Twitter

Social media allow new forms of relationship management (Ki, Kim and Ledingham, 2015) aimed at recovering the trust of public opinion through dialogue and transparency (DiStaso and Bortree, 2012; Adams and McCorkindale, 2013). In parallel, the digital revolution has multiplied in networks the degree of influence of politicians (Sanz-Marcos, Jiménez-Marín and Elías, 2019) who take advantage of digital resources and the multiplier and instantaneous effect of the message in favor of electoral interest (López-García, 2016; Dader and Campos-Domínguez, 2017; Campos-Domínguez, 2017). Twitter users activate with likes, retweets and comments a unidirectional speech of the candidate against the bidirectionality that the network is supposed to have.

This habitual behavior of Spanish politicians on Twitter (Segado-Boj, Díaz-Campo and Sobrado, 2016), turned into influencers, speakers and prescribers (Deltell, Claes and Osteso, 2013) entails a loss of trust in public institutions, such as show the latest CIS barometers (2019), in which almost a third of those surveyed consider that Parliament pays too much attention to problems of little importance to citizens.

The electoral objective of the general election campaign (28A) was to disseminate program topics related to political strategies for obtaining the vote, such as polarization (Gruzd and Roy, 2014), criticism of the management of governments and parties, agreements and agreements, personal issues or the confrontation with the media (Pérez-Curiel and García-Gordillo, 2020b; Alonso-Muñoz and Casero-Ripollés, 2019). In a context marked by electoral interest, the lack of attention to corruption and the absence of institutional transparency policies, the following objectives are proposed:

O1.- To know what the issues and strategies are that politicians use to respond on Twitter to the corruption issues compared to other matters of public interest.

O2.- To analyze the public assessment of the content published on the public transparency portals/websites.

O3.- To check the opinion of experts on the social media political behavior about corruption and on the effectiveness of the transparency measures proposed by the Public Administrations.

3. Methodology

The leader's electoral discourse on Twitter eludes responding to audiences on issues such as corruption that opinion polls reveal important to voters (González-Oñate, Jiménez-Marín and Sanz-Marcos, 2020; Zugasti and Sabés, 2015), causing citizen disaffection, lack of trust, distancing or alienation and has repercussions on political efficacy (López-Hermida and Fierro-Zamora, 2016). In this context, the following research questions are posed:

RQ1. How do political candidates on Twitter respond to an issue such as corruption, identified by the CIS as the third problem of public concern?

RQ2. What opinion do citizens have about the content published on political corruption on institutional transparency web portals?

RQ3. Do experts consider that public information is useful and effective in reducing the effects of political discourse on Twitter?

In order to these premises, a methodology of combined phases is designed.

In the first part (PH1) the mixed quantitative-qualitative content analysis technique is applied (Silverman, 2016; Igartua-Perosanz, 2006; Krippendorff, 2004; Flick, 2004; Neuendorf, 2002). A second phase (PH2) focuses on the analysis of the assessment of citizen opinion on the content published in the public transparency portals (Consejo de Transparencia y Buen Gobierno, 2019). Finally, the third phase (PH3) contemplates the realization of a Delphi (Gideon, 2012; Finch and Lewis, 2003; Linstone and Turoff, 2002) as a complementary method indicated to gather the opinion of experts on the metrics obtained from the analysis content and survey, initially referenced.

Table 1: Phases of the research methodology used

	Methodological technique	Object of study	Objective / Research Questions
PHASE 1	Quantitative-qualitative content analysis (Silverman, 2016; Krippendorff, 2004; Neuendorf, 2002)	Political Leaders Twitter Accounts	O1/RQ1
PHASE 2	Quantitative-qualitative content analysis on Transparency	TGGC Citizen Assessment Surveys	O2/ RQ2
PHASE 3	Delphi - Expert Panel (Linstone and Turoff 2002; Gideon, 2012)	Transparency Portals of the Public Administration	O3/RQ3

Source: Own elaboration

3.1. Sampling indicators

In order to measure how much and how the issue of corruption is dealt with on different platforms, we established a sample that covers the week before and the day after (April 22-29) of the elections (28A).

In a first phase (PH1) we monitor the messages published about the elections on Twitter (n1 = 324) from the personal accounts of the leaders (@sanchezcastejon, from the PSOE; @pablocasado, from the PP; @Albert_Rivera, from Ciudadanos; @Pablo Iglesias , from Unidos Podemos; and @Santi_ABASCAL, from Vox), in order to check what issues and main strategies they deal with and what degree of importance they attach to corruption. In a second phase (F2), based on the published results of surveys (n2 = 218 [2]) on the assessment of public information subject to transparency (Transparency and Good Government Council, 2019), we verify the opinion of the public on the content and usefulness of transparency portals to inform, be accountable and fight corruption (DiStaso and Bortree, 2012). Finally, in the third phase (F3) we contacted a group of professionals and academics related to the field of political communication and transparency to validate the results obtained, through the so-called panel of experts, a qualitative technique, of broad tradition in research in Social Sciences (Pineda, Sanz-Marcos and Gordillo, 2019; Gideon, 2012), which consists in the discussion and search for consensus based on the opinions of the group, collected through a questionnaire and directed, on the one hand, to reflect on the strategies of politicians in the dissemination of digital content and their behavior in the face of corruption-related matters, and on the other, to question the validity of public transparency portals and the service they provide to users.

The selection of temporality, platforms and leaders responds to the following criteria:

- The framework for the 2019 general elections is chosen because, as shown by previous research (Guillen, Badii, Blanco & Sáenz, 2008; Espinosa, 2009), these are processes that affect citizens' assessment of matters of interest public
- It is decided to analyze Twitter given the advantages it presents for political communication in electoral campaigns (Thelwall and Cugelman, 2017; López-Meri, Marcos-García and Casero-Ripollés, 2017; Lozano-Aguiar and García-Orosa, 2017; Campos Domínguez, 2017).
- The candidates under study are at the top of the list of their formations and have parliamentary representation at the national and regional levels, in the case of Vox.
- The barometers of the CIS, an autonomous body dependent on the Ministry of the Presidency and linked to the public sector, are consulted to verify the position that corruption occupies among the main concerns of citizens, compared to other matters.
- The citizen assessment surveys released by the Council for Public Transparency and Good Governance (2019) are analyzed.
- A group of experts (7) in the area of Political Communication, from the academic and professional fields, are selected to evaluate, based on the results, the role of politicians in the face of corruption and the viability and effectiveness of the information procedures and the resources enabled by the public administrations to guarantee transparency.

As a first step, we designed a thematic categorization sheet (Table 2) in order to know general areas and specific blocks and to what extent they refer to corruption.

Table 2. Definition of general and specific thematic categories on Twitter

Thematic Blocks	Description
Economy	Tweets about employment, unemployment, wages, deficit, public spending, debt, crisis, taxes, entrepreneurship.
Governments and Parties	Tweets related to the message of the candidate, his party and the Government in any thematic area.
Corruption	Tweets about political corruption of the Government and parties.
Territorial model of the State	Tweets related to the territorial organization of the State. Tweets about the independence of territories, nationalisms and regionalisms are included.
Social policy	Tweets about pensions, health, education, welfare state, justice.
Foreign affairs	Tweets referring to the European Union and other parts of the world, other populist governments and Brexit.
Government strategies and pacts	Tweets about possible present and future pacts between parties and the construction of governments. Tweets about surveys and polls are also included.
Campaign acts	Tweets about organizing and attending rallies, interviews and various events.
Personal topics	Tweets related to the personal life of the politician.
Others	Tweets not classified in the previous categories.

Source: Own elaboration

In the list of thematic indicators (Table 2), corruption appears as an independent and specific block that includes tweets related to cases related to the Government and parties; however, corruption is a brand that can identify any of the other issues (economic, political, social, territorial, personal…).

3.2. Expert Panel (Delphi)

Once the PH1 and PH2 have been completed, a third phase (PH3) begins, which completes the methodological process of this research. It consists of the design and application of a panel of experts (Linstone and Turoff, 2002), whose objective is to analyze the complexity of the object of study and the results obtained in the previous phases. The sources in question come from the sphere of political parties, political communication, and political consulting. Three of the profiles also share their professional work with university academic work. The members of the panel are coded as follows: E1 (Popular Party - PP), E2 (Spanish Socialist Workers Party - PSOE), E3 (Citizen - C's and University Teacher), E4 (Podemos), E5 (VOX), E6 (Political Communication Association - ACOP and University Professor), E7 (Target Point - Independent Political Communication Consultancy and University Professor). The criteria for selecting the experts have revolved around three fundamental concepts. In the first place, academic and professional affinity has been sought with the object of study, in this case, with the issue of the influence of political and electoral discourse on social medias; secondly, the prestige and / or recognition of experts at the national level in the political field has been valued. Finally, the constitution of a group has been pursued that, despite being united by a previously defined common thread, will show heterogeneous profiles to enrich the discourse and the result.

The panel is developed electronically: an invitation is sent by email presenting the research together with a report and open-ended question form. The questions are aimed at reinforcing and justifying the results of the content analysis and the previous citizen questionnaires, thus proposing a direct intervention by the participants, who assess the results of the first and second phase of the study through a process of cause-effect.

In order to transfer the results obtained in previous phases together with the designed questions, a report is prepared with the statistical exploitation to discuss it during the celebration of the panel of experts. The answers are coded by dimensions in verbal categories, that is; The data collected from the interviews are transcribed by subject areas. The contribution of the experts is identified in quotation marks and is attributed to a code previously assigned to each one of them, which appears in parentheses, where the E refers to the term Expert, followed by the corresponding number according to the assigned sequential order.

The categories of base questions formulated are recorded in Table 3.

Table 3. Base questionnaire carried out in a Panel of Experts (Delphi)

Base Question	Linked Objectives
Do you think politicians spend time talking about corruption as a matter of public interest?	1
What do you think of politicians' strategies to avoid talking about corruption, especially in electoral campaigns?	1
Are polarization, spectacularization and political confrontation political strategies in the face of corruption?	1
Do you think that corruption can pass electoral revenue to politicians and their parties?	1
Do you consider that the information offered by the Public Administration to citizens on matters such as corruption is effective?	2
Do transparency webs work?	2
What measures do you propose to improve institutional political communication on corruption?	3

Source: Own elaboration

4. Results

In a scenario of socio-political movements determined by the calling of general elections (28A), the Macrobarometer of the Sociological Research Center for the month of April 2019 raises' corruption 'or' fraud 'as the main problems, along with' politics and politicians in general 'and' unemployment'. Faced with this manifest concern, the political representatives of the four forces with the greatest national parliamentary representation (PSOE, PP, Ciudadanos y Unidas Podemos) together with Vox, with representation in regional parliaments (Vox) are characterized by a speech on Twitter in which corruption does not reach priority levels, is treated superficially or serves as a weapon of confrontation and attack on the adversary. Likewise, the results of the surveys on citizen evaluation, subject to transparency (Transparency and Good Government Council, 2019), put into question the usefulness of portals and platforms and the content disseminated on matters of public interest.

The exploitation of data is structured in order to two initial phases (PH1 and PH2), with results that will later be analyzed and debated by the panel of experts (PH3) designed in order to the objectives of the research.

4.1. Phase 1. Statistical quantification-qualification block

In this first phase, the metrics registered in the Twitter accounts of each of the candidates are analyzed, as well as the theme and influence strategies that define their discourse.

4.1.1. Quantitative Dating (numerical)

The first record (Table 4) refers to the quantitative data regarding the number of followers, tweets, likes, retweets and comments from the leaders.

Table 4. Number of followers and candidate metrics (as of sampling date)

Twitter Metrics	Pedro Sánchez @sanchezcastejon	Pablo Casado @pablocasado	Albert Rivera @albert_rivera	Pablo Iglesias @pabloiglesias	Santiago Abascal @SANTI_ABASCAL	Total
No. Followers	1.036.192	245.548	1.133.204	2.303.393	229.610	4.947.947
No. Tweets	71	67	58	68	60	324
No. Likes	190.515	101.844	205.839	275.682	394.068	1.167.948
RT	67.328	46.100	78.601	102.636	173.757	468.422
Comments	46.689	29.058	28.425	18.189	28.008	150.369

Source: Own elaboration

On a total sample of 324 tweets published from the personal accounts of the selected political candidates, the metrics show the leadership of Pedro Sánchez in terms of number of tweets (71), followed closely by Pablo Iglesias (68) and Casado (67). Albert Rivera is the candidate who publishes the fewest tweets (58). However, it is Santiago Abascal who gets the highest number of likes (394.068) and retweets (173.757) compared to the rest of the leaders.

Regarding the number of followers, Iglesias achieves the leadership (2,303,393 followers) ahead of Rivera (1,133,204) and Sánchez (1,036,192). We also detected a high rate of user comments, with Pedro Sánchez reaching the maximum number (46,689), followed by Pablo Casado (29,058) and Albert Rivera (28,425). The number of comments received by the Vox leader (28,008) is striking, above those obtained by Pablo Iglesias (18,189). Although an influence relationship between the number of followers, metrics and electoral results is not demonstrable (Pérez-Curiel and García-Gordillo, 2020a), the progress of Vox and its positioning on Twitter, from the electoral triumph in the Andalusian elections, is a characteristic feature of the procedure followed by the party in these elections.

In this sense, it is essential to know with what functions and factors the level of political influence of each candidate is related. We propose to differentiate the value of likes and retweets, as user assessment records. According to statistics demonstrated in previous research (Carrasco-Polaino, Villar-Cirujano and Tejedor-Fuentes, 2018), a retweet favors the dissemination of the message. In this way, to calculate the viralization capacity of the message, a formula is drawn that starts from the assignment of a double value to the retweets received compared to the likes, because when a retweet is received, the content of the original tweet appears on the timeline of who publishes it and, with this, its diffusion is increased, which does not happen with the mere like, which does not provide visibility to the original. The final formula results from adding the retweets multiplied by 2 and the likes, all divided by the number of original tweets published.

Therefore:

$$\text{Viralization capacity} = [\textstyle\sum (RTx2) + LIKES] \;/\; \textstyle\sum N^{\circ}\ TWEETS$$

Table 5. Messages viralization capacity on Twitter

CANDIDATES	Tweets	RT	RT x 2	Likes	∑ (RTx2) +Likes	Total/n. de tweets
Pedro Sánchez PSOE	71	67.328	164.656	190.515	355.171	5.002,41
Pablo Casado PP	67	46.100	92.200	101.844	194.044	2.896,18
Albert Rivera Ciudadanos	58	78.601	157.202	205.839	363.041	6.259,33
Pablo Iglesias Unidas Podemos	68	102.636	205.272	275.682	480.954	7.072,85
Santiago Abascal Vox	60	173.757	347.514	394.068	741.582	12.359,70

Source: Own elaboration

Based on the number of tweets published and retweets received (Table 7), the data shows that the messages that have reached the highest diffusion and viralization capacity (12.359,7) are those corresponding to Santiago Abascal, leader of Vox. Thus, the 'less is more' effect is produced (Alonso-Muñoz and Casero-Ripollés, 2019), as some politicians focus their attention on the quality and effectiveness of the message over quantity. Along the same lines, users respond and spread more tweets from leaders who opt for this strategy.

Other research on the measurement and effects of retweets, more linked to the field of marketing and studies related to influencers (Díaz, 2017), propose assigning responses a value of two likes and retweets a value of three likes, to record the the viral capacity of these resources.

4.1.2. Qualitative Dating (thematic)

This section includes two focuses: analysis of topics on Twitter and analysis of surveys on citizen evaluation of transparency.

Regarding the selection of topics most frequently used by the leaders on Twitter (Table 6), data are presented that allow us to know the priorities of the candidates and analyze in a comparative way the place that corresponds to corruption, among the messages disseminated on Twitter.

Table 6. Percentages of tweets by topic and candidate (%)

	Candidates					Global statistical values				
	Pedro Sánchez	Pablo Casado	Albert Rivera	Pablo Iglesias	Santiago Abascal	Media	Mediana	Error estándar de la media	Mínimo	Máximo
Economy	**25,1**	**28,1**	**12,5**	**19,1**	**14,5**	**19,8**	19,1	2,9	12,5	28,1
Government and Parties	**19,8**	**18,5**	**22,5**	**12,8**	**19,3**	**18,5**	19,3	1,5	12,8	22,5
Corruption	**7,1**	**7,5**	**9,9**	**8,9**	**9,5**	8,5	8,9	0,5	7,1	9,9
Territorial model	9,9	**14,3**	**22,7**	6,4	**27,2**	**16,1**	14,3	3,8	6,4	27,2
Populisms	4,3	1,5	4,1	7,9	1,7	3,9	4,1	1,1	1,5	7,9
Social policy	**22,5**	11,1	7,5	**19,6**	7,1	**13,5**	11,1	3,1	7,1	22,5
Foreign affairs	2,5	5,2	5,5	4,2	4,9	4,4	4,9	0,5	2,5	5,5
Policy pacts	5,1	9,8	7,8	11,5	11,2	9	9,8	1,1	5,1	11,5
Personal topics	1,8	3,4	6,9	8	3,5	4,7	3,5	1,1	1,8	8
Others	1,6	0,4	0,4	1,2	0,9	0,9	0,9	0,2	0,4	1,6

Source: Own elaboration

- In bold: the percentages of the topics most covered by the candidates.
- To the right of the box: the specific percentages on corruption.

First, the exploration shows the thematic homogeneity that characterizes the leaders' discourse. The percentages indicate what politicians talk about on Twitter during the electoral campaign, where they focus their attention and what issues they minimize.

Topics of the electoral program such as Economy, led by Pablo Casado (28,1) or Social Policy, in which Pedro Sánchez (22,5) and Pablo Iglesias (19,6) stand out, become leading blocks.

Picture 1. Partido Popular tweet with mention to Pablo Casado

Source: https://twitter.com/populares/status/1120422691851337728?s=20

Also noteworthy is the item relating to Governments and Parties, which increases their percentages, especially in electoral periods, when the confrontational discourse between leaders sets the agenda. In this sense, the position of Albert Rivera (22,5) stands out compared to the rest of the candidates. In parallel, in a context marked by the conflict in Catalonia, the positions of Abascal stand out, with messages in favor of the unity of Spain (27,2) and Rivera (22,7), against the Catalan independence movement.

Picture 2. Santiago Abascal tweet

Source: https://twitter.com/Santi_ABASCAL/status/1121367327050731520?s=20

Picture 3. Ciudadanos tweet with mention to Albert Rivera

Source: https://twitter.com/CiudadanosCs/status/1120428383551348737?s=20

The comparison of average values therefore places blocks such as Economy (19.8) and Governments and Parties (18.5) and Territorial Model (16.1), ahead of another of the star thematic nuclei such as Social Policy (13, 5), the least treated with respect to the rest.

If we focus on corruption, the leaders who make the least reference to the issue are Pedro Sánchez (7.1) and Pablo Casado (7.5) compared to leaders such as Albert Rivera (9.9), Santiago Abascal (9.5) and Pablo Iglesias (8.9), who reach higher percentages, without being representative with respect to other issues. In any case, the leaders' references to corruption do not acknowledge their own guilt, that of the party or that of the government, and have repercussions on polarization and the political crisis.

Picture 4. Pedro Sánchez tweet

Source: https://twitter.com/sanchezcastejon/status/1120442391138308097?s=20

Picture 5. Pablo Iglesias tweet

Source: https://twitter.com/PabloIglesias/status/1121072489176629248?s=20

The global thematic radiograph shows the non-correspondence between the most disseminated topics on Twitter compared to those that in public opinion polls (CIS) reach higher levels of social concern such as unemployment (38.8%), politics and politicians in general (13.1%) and corruption (11%).

The tweets analyzed reveal the use of little or no transparent information, based on conflict, political confrontation and spectacularization (Casero-Ripollés, Ortells-Badene and Rosique-Cedillo, 2014) and, in a game scheme, Let's see who wins on the electoral stage (García, Calatrava and Luengo, 2018; Alonso-Muñoz, Marcos-García and Casero-Ripollés, 2016; Aalberg, Strömback and De Vreese, 2012; Reinemann and Wilke, 2007).

A second focus of content analysis collects the opinion of citizens on the contents of web portals linked to corruption issues. The report of the results of the survey on public valuation subject to transparency (Council of Transparency and Good Government, 2019) confirms, on the one hand, the levels of distrust of users in public information (Table 1).

Table 7. Main reasons for mistrust in public information (%)

	First mention	Total mentions
Because not all the information that is mandatory is disseminated	65,22	**32,85**
Because the information is false	1,45	0,73
Because the information is manipulated	13,04	**19,71**
Because the information is incomplete	18,84	**42,34**
Because other reasons	1,45	4,38

- In bold, the maximum values reached in terms of causes of citizen mistrust in public portals on transparency.

Source: TGGC Study 01/19

As the percentages shows (Table 7), the surveyed population shows their distrust of the information disseminated in the transparency portals (TGGC, 2019), understanding as main causes that incomplete information is published in these spaces (42,34%), that not all the mandatory information is disseminated (32.85%) and that the contents are manipulated (19,71%). The opinion of the citizens requires that the administrations consider a review of the published contents, their characteristics and the degree of public interest they contain. On the other hand, the lack of information on certain matters of public interest is evident (Table 8).

Table 8. Topics that according to public opinion should be published on transparency portals (%)

	Very important	Considerably important	Less important	Nothing important
Services offered by the different departments, agencies or units of that administration	**61,21**	31,78	6,54	0,47
Work agendas of those responsible, including meetings, matters to be discussed and the name of the attendees	50,23	34,74	13,15	1,88
Presents and gifts received	42,79	33,95	21,86	1,43
Travel costs	46,45	34,12	18,01	1,42
Expenses for formal and representative services	47,44	33,95	17,21	1,4
Information on the people who provide services in the institutions according to the type of employment relationship they maintain (civil servants, temporary, permanent staff ...)	53,3	28,3	14,62	3,77
Proceedings of the hiring tables and the meetings that are held	66,98	24,06	8,49	0,47
Services and Public Policies information (coverage, fulfillment of objectives, waiting times, etc.)	**71,5**	25,7	2,34	0,47
Individualized cost of Services and Public Policies	**68,22**	25,7	4,67	1,4
Job offers in public administrations	**71,23**	25	3,3	0,47
Issues of general interest reports: education, health, environment, employment	66,04	31,6	2,36	0

- In bold, the percentages of the topics that public opinion considers of the utmost importance to be published on the transparency webs.

Source: TGGC Study 01/19

As reflected in the percentage data (Table 8), citizens express their interest in knowing the performance of public services (71,50%), public job offers (71,23%) and the individualized cost of services and policies public (68,22%), three topics that affect the daily life of the population and that must be informed within the framework of the transparency policy.

Thus, a dilemma is drawn in which neither the leaders nor the institutions respond to an issue such as corruption, which reaches the third position among the citizen concerns detected by the CIS (2019).

4.2. Delphi Method (Expert Discussion)

The development of the interviews with the experts is defined as fluid and collaborative. When all the experts are initially asked whether politicians (and politics in general) spend enough time talking about corruption as a matter of public interest, they all agree to say no, more or less emphatically, although some of the experts provide some justification. Thus, both the E1 (PP) and the E2 (PSOE), curiously the most voted parties, indicate that no, that they are aware that not enough time is being devoted to it and they argue; Thus, E1 indicates that "it is not interesting to talk about corruption because if you take it out a lot to attack the other… it will still exploit you. It is taken out when there is no other option, but no party in their right mind takes it out voluntarily, unless they have nothing to lose". Along the same lines, E2 affirms that "the parties are here to govern, not to de-govern. And we cannot waste time on corruption, which is a reality, but not as great as citizens believe. The parties must deal with issues that serve to solve problems and make people live better, not to remove past things. The E6 and E7 (Target Point and ACOP) are more critical and affirm that there is no excuse: "The necessary time is not dedicated to it. And period. It's that nobody is interested" (E6); "If you were a top-tier politician, would you continually take out garbage? No right? Well, that's what they do, talk the least" (E7). However, politicians belonging to parties that are real options but have fewer votes, directly affirm and position themselves on the line that not enough time is spent on the issue because nobody is interested.

Likewise, and in general terms, the perception of those consulted about the strategies followed by different politicians and parties to avoid talking about corruption, fundamentally during electoral periods, remains consistent and based on a similar criterion. Thus, when the E2 (PSOE) is asked this question, it curiously has an opinion very similar to that of the rest of the experts. In fact, a statement very similar to that of the E5 (VOX) is particularly surprising. The E2 (PSOE) affirms that "the issue of corruption is very recurrent and always generates headlines; and it is a way of attacking the opponent and, in turn, a way of defending yourself from opponents, who also destroy your image by raising rumors about corruption". And, along the same lines, the E5 (VOX) asserts that "it is a political weapon, talking about corruption; when there is, and when not. Because if you don't use the accusation of corruption, your opponents will use it. It is so. And, as a defense, our role is to try to evade that issue because we know it makes headlines.

The E1 (PP) approaches corruption in a skeptical and suspicious way. It affirms, in fact, that "talking about corruption is easy, especially in the electoral campaign, but you have to demonstrate it with facts throughout your term or your opposition role." And along similar lines, both E3 (C's) and E4 (Podemos) suggest that we must avoid talking about corruption in the campaign but demonstrate by example that corruption within their relevant parties is paid. However, faced with this same question, the E6 and E7 (Target Point and ACOP, respectively), although they affirm that it is necessary to avoid talking about these issues, the truth is that they are bullets that the opposing forces do not stop launching, so Even trying to avoid it, it must be explained in order to draw attention to a matter more relevant to public opinion.

The acknowledgment of blame in corruption matters is not usually a quality in government or party dynamics; Faced with this, the representatives of the bipartisanship (E1 and E2) coincide in stating that when a member of their party has been denounced and blamed for corruption in the courts, "since they must wait for the judicial decision", measures have been taken to respect.

Finally, it is observed how members from two forces as ideologically disparate as Podemos (E4) and Vox (E5) recognize that a strategic use of the networks, knowing how to use all the tools, resorting to links with complementary information or mentions and labels or By selecting the right hashtag, you can reverse an increase in fan communities and "hook undecided voters" (E5) and lower abstention rates. There is a unanimous agreement of all the experts (E1-E7) regarding the damage that the networks have done on corruption issues, with politicians, media and users with a clear objective: to confuse, defame and hinder the work of the police and of justice.

In the different arguments of this panel, it is surprising to see how the experts agree on many issues, such as the fact that polarization, spectacularization and political confrontation are political strategies in the face of corruption. From E1 to E6 everyone affirms that yes, that the more spectacle and more confrontation there is, the more attention is diverted and the less the issue is attacked at its roots. Also, along these lines, all affirm that nobody likes to have corrupt, but they assume that avoiding corruption

is difficult by not controlling 100% of the party's actions. "And, once the fact is assumed, the more the issue deviates, the better" (E7), because "corruption is a less common issue than what public opinion thinks, but it raises many irascibilities" (E4), therefore that "it is quite probable that, if there is a political corruption issue, no matter how small, a € 5 coffee, and it appears in the media, that will pay off the party and the politician in question, fixed" (E3). All the experts agree with this line.

In the question about whether they consider that the information offered by the Public Administration on matters such as corruption is effective, and whether the transparency portals work, everyone agrees again with a resounding "no". However, there are nuances between the two experts. In this way, the E1 (PP) affirms that "it is not sufficiently transparent, but what exists now is better than what there was, or rather, what there was not, 10 years ago". The E2 (PSOE) states that "no, it is not enough, but less is nothing." The E3 (C's) organizes its speech based on the benefits that its party has implemented ("before Ciudadanos existed, a transparency portal was not even considered. Now, from a strong responsible opposition, it is a reality. Insufficient, but real"); and Podemos (E4), very much in line with Ciudadanos (E3), also talks about their role as an opposition, when they have been, and as members of the government. He states that "Without Podemos, there would be no transparency portal." And the E5 (VOX) states that "until the real right, we, did not go to the polls to seek votes, no one had talked about transparency. And Spain has had (and has) such disastrous managers, that the population must, at least, know certain information".

But the external consultants (E6 –Target Point– and E7 –ACOP–) refer to this issue, approaching it from a more independent perspective: "Now everyone is hanging a medal, but the truth is that it is a trend in Europe and, with or without new political parties, society would have ended up demanding it" (E6); "Transparency portals had to end up existing. Basically, because citizens, although very slowly, end up having a certain democratic education, and they would have ended up requesting it". All the experts (E1-E7 once again agree on the necessary review of the structure, contents and treatment of the transparency portals, adapting them to a broad profile of audiences and facilitating consultation, considering the opinion of citizens to improve tool.

On the other side, when we propose what content should be offered to promote the usability and usefulness of these information platforms on political transparency, the experts agree on certain elements such as: public salaries or budget items. The economic argument is the one that prevails most strongly:

"Knowing how much a politician charges is not necessary, in fact, it is often counterproductive, but voters want to know it" (E1 -PP-); "The citizen has the right to know in what and how our public money is spent or invested, since it is everyone's capital" (E2 -PSOE-); "We must know if there are resources to carry out projects or if, on the contrary, our resources are being wasted. We have the right to know "(E3 -C's-); "Being informed of our potential is a fundamental democratic right and that is only achieved by disseminating the entire economic question of our public politicians in a transparent way for the citizens" (E4 -We can-); "It is not necessary to know all the political ins and outs, but people want and should know if public managers are properly using everyone's resources, and that, without a transparency portal, would be complicated." Finally, all the experts agree on the need to improve the portals in favor of quality and not quantity, "many administrations diversify portals to increase access routes and, in the end,, they only manage to further confuse citizens (E1 and E3). Focusing the information well and thinking about users is the main objective (E1-E7).

To finalize the consultation, they are asked the question of what measures each one proposes to improve institutional political communication on corruption. In relation to this, everyone talks about transparency and fluidity in communication, as an abstract concept. But, when consulting specific measures, we find different approaches. In order of consultation, the E1 (PP) states that "the more transparent everything is, that an ordinary citizen can see how much I charge, or how much the presenter of the 1 newscast, is fine. I would make specific websites where everything can be consulted... but with caution and common sense"; the E2 (PSOE) indicates similar issues: "having a transparent and strong system of access to economic information is fundamental. But, in addition, I believe that it should be encouraged that the media (all) support us in this task and that fakenews be pursued much more, which do us so much damage in this regard". The E3 and E4 (Ciudadanos and Podemos, respectively) launch the idea of a public, online newspaper, which serves as a reference to launch real and truthful information on the persecution of corruption and the rewards of doing the job well. At this point, it must be said that the researchers were surprised that, without throwing an idea to the interviewee, both raised similar questions (despite placing themselves, according to their speeches, in political antipodes). For the E5 (VOX) it is not so necessary to devote much effort to institutional communication on corruption: "We must eliminate corruption, period." And, on the part of the consultants (E6 and E7), "in reality it is not doing anything wrong at all today" (E6) and "there is already a lot of institutional communication work done" (E7), so both experts they launch the idea of reinforcing what already exists.

In short, the panel of experts provides richness due to the diversity of opinions from the public and private communication and political sphere, and acts as a complementary methodological resource that analyzes in depth the results of previous phases.

5. Conclusions

Issues related to corruption in the field of politics become, especially during electoral periods, a resource that fuels polarization and confrontation between governments and parties in social medias (Gruzd and Roy, 2014). However, the citizen opinion collected in the reports and public surveys (CIS, 2019) that places corruption cases as one of the main concerns of the population does not receive a response from the candidates of the most relevant parties, who attend the election date of April 28 in Spain. The influence of leaders in electoral debates (Naderi and Hirst, 2018) and the projection of these messages on Twitter (Pérez-Curiel and García-Gordillo, 2020b), far from favoring transparent information, reinforce the already known slogan "and you more", without explaining issues that affect voters or incorporating initiatives that ensure the transparency of public institutions into their political programs (García and Martín, 2017), generating citizen mistrust (Morales et al., 2016).

The commitment of public administrations to increase the levels of transparency through the platforms and portals created for this purpose do not seem to respond to criteria of usability, usefulness and efficiency, according to the surveys and published reports (TGGC, 2019) that confirm mistrust of the population in the face of partial, manipulated and incomplete information, fueling the need for media literacy (Palau-Sampio, 2018) that provides audiences with tools to report and demand information of public interest.

Responding to the objectives and research questions raised, it is confirmed that corruption is not a priority issue in the published tweets, ranking behind others such as Economy, Governments and Parties, Social Policy or Territorial Model (O1 / RQ1). As collected by previous research (Pérez-Curiel and García-Gordillo, 2020a), the usual dynamics of candidates to face criticism and accusations of corruption in their political formations consists of diverting attention to other cases of corruption that affect the parties of the opposition without acknowledging blame or responding to comments from voters on the networks. In the present case, the prioritization of other issues increases the opacity and response of politicians to corruption, treating it from a superficial perspective based on criticism of the 'other'.

On the opposite, as recent studies (Gualda and Rúas, 2019) have shown, 68.1% of the population shows a lack of credibility in the information received and, therefore, an attitude of delegitimization of the institutions and their representatives. Accordingly, the results of the surveys on population valuation on public transparency portals (CGTB, 2019) show the lack of accessibility and usefulness of these spaces, which have not managed to become an accessible and useful resource for citizens (O2 / RQ2). The public criticize the lack of detailed information and the manipulation of the contents and demand a review of these platforms in accordance with the citizen's concern regarding matters of public interest.

The last block of objectives and research questions, focused on the experts' debate on the behavior of politicians in the face of corruption, on their strategies on Twitter (O3 / RQ3) reveals the ability of the leader to detach himself from corruption cases that They directly affect their party through strategies based on confrontation and spectacularization (Reinemann and Wilke, 2007). The results of the forum also recommend a review of the current transparency portals (Paricio-Esteban et al., 2020), necessary to deliver information of public interest, easily accessible and efficient. Overall, there is recognition of the problem, although endorsed by a heterogeneous debate on political behavior before the public and potential voters, as well as on actions aimed at promoting transparency through new ways of accessing information, in which networks can become perfect allies. As a common denominator, a shared discourse on the responsibility of the media in the fight against corruption, disinformation and the uncontrolled dissemination of fakenews stands out.

At an inflection point in which disinformation acts as a political strategy that favors the concealment of corruption and limits the possibilities of action and reaction of the audiences, future investigations are proposed that study in the field of new digital formats, control mechanisms and public audit against misinformation, self-protection of the public and promotion of transparency, in which the role of the media as the main generators of public service information should not be dispensed with.

6. Translator

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Notas

1. The website of the State Agency for the Evaluation of Public Policies and the Quality of Services (AEVAL) is no longer fully operational as a result of the dissolution of this Agency by Royal Decree 769/2017 of 28 July (published in the BOE of 29 July), its functions being taken over by the Secretariat of State for Public Function through the Institute for the Evaluation of Public Policies and the Directorate General for Public Governance.

2. Given that the study was not addressed to a representative sample of the Spanish population, the results shown here should be considered representative only of the opinions of those who responded to the questionnaire.