INVESTIGACIÓN

HASHTAG POLITICS IN TWITTER

La política del hashtag en twitter

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ABSTRACT

This paper, on political communication on Twitter, presents and discusses the results of a comparative pragmalinguistic analysis of a corpus of hashtags included in the tweets posted by five Spanish political leaders on their own profiles from April 12 to November 8, 2019. Within this period of almost 8 months, two general elections, the elections for the European Parliament, and several regional and local electoral events took place in Spain. This quantitative and qualitative study aims at delving into the impact this tool has on political discourse on social network sites, identifying the formal and content similarities and differences it exhibits in the messages of the leaders considered, and pointing out the discursive functions that it has in such messages. The main objective is determinining whether hashtags are mechanisms of innovation in current political communication. The results show that there are relevant differences regarding the number of hashtags used by each politician. However, from a formal and a functional point of view, they are implemented similarly with the functions of persuading the voter, like a slogan, and thematizing and contextualizing the content of the tweet. At the same time, the hashtag implicitly invites the leaders' *followers* to support and to make the political content in the tweet go viral.

KEY WORDS: hashtag - twitter - syntax - discourse - enunciation - campaigning - elections

RESUMEN

En este trabajo sobre la comunicación política en Twitter se presentan los resultados de un análisis pragmalingüístico comparado de un corpus de etiquetas o *hashtags* contenidos en los *tuits* de cinco líderes políticos españoles, publicados desde el 12 de abril hasta el 8 de noviembre de 2019, en un periodo de casi 8 meses que comprende las elecciones generales, autonómicas y municipales que tuvieron lugar en España ese año y las elecciones al Parlamento europeo. Este estudio cuantitativo y cualitativo tiene como objetivos profundizar en la incidencia que tiene este dispositivo en el discurso político en redes, identificar las semejanzas y diferencias formales y de

contenido que presenta en los mensajes de los cinco líderes considerados y señalar sus funciones discursivas. Se pretende así determinar si este es un mecanismo de innovación en la comunicación política actual. Los resultados muestran que existen diferencias en lo que respecta a la cantidad de etiquetas empleada por cada político. Sin embargo, desde un punto de vista formal y funcional, se emplean de manera similar con las funciones de persuadir al votante, como un eslogan, y tematizar y contextualizar el mensaje, invitando implícitamente a los propios *seguidores* a apoyar y viralizar el contenido político del *tuit*.

PALABRAS CLAVE: etiqueta - twitter - discurso - enunciación - campaña - elecciones

A POLITICA DO *HASHTAG* NO TWITTER

RESUMO

Neste trabalho sobre a comunicação política no Twitter se apresentam os resultados de uma análise pragmalingüístico comparado de um corpus de etiquetas ou *hashtags* contidos nos *tuits* de cinco líderes políticos espanhóis, publicados desde o 12 de abril até o 8 de novembro de 2019, num período de quase 8 meses que abrange as eleições gerais, autonómicas e municipais que aconteceram na Espanha nesse ano e as eleições ao Parlamento europeu. Este estudo quantitativo e qualitativo tem como objetivos aprofundar a incidência deste dispositivo no discurso político nas redes, identificar as semelhanças e diferenças formais e de conteúdo que apresenta nas mensagens dos cinco líderes considerados e sinalizar suas funções discursivas. É pretendido dessa forma determinar se este é um mecanismo de inovação na comunicação política actual. Os resultados mostram que existem diferenças em relação a quantidade de etiquetas empregadas por cada político. Porém, desde um ponto de vista formal e funcional, se empregam de forma semelhante com as funções de persuadir ao votante, como um slogan, e tematizar e contextualizar a mensagem, convidando implícitamente aos próprios *seguidores* a apoiar e viralizar o conteúdo político do *tuit*.

PALAVRAS CHAVE: etiqueta – twitter – discurso – enunciação – campanha – eleiçoes

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1. INTRODUCTION

Hashtags are one of the most used mechanisms by Twitter users; however, due to their communicative scope and great versatility, they have crossed the borders of this microblogging site, being very common to see the "#" symbol that characterizes it in banners, television advertising or photographs (Heid and Puschmann, 2017). Hashtags, which emerged in 2009 to tag content on Twitter, are characters strings preceded by the "#" symbol that automatically become links that can be tracked on the microblogging search engine. Generally, these are words or sequences of few words that allow marking the topic of a tweet and say more with less, that is, condensing in those few words different informative, persuasive, argumentative or expressive functions and promoting interaction between users (Mancera Rueda and Pano Alamán, 2015). In the field of politics, they have become tools that, in a similar way to emojis and videos embedded in the text, have contributed to transforming political discourse into a multimodal and hypertextual code (Pano Alamán, 2019).

This study aims at contributing to the research on the role that this tool has in the interactions that take place on Twitter and to determine to what extent it contributes to innovating the strategies in political communication, taking into account the mutations that occur in the discourse of politicians on social networks today (Gallardo Paúls and Enguix Oliver, 2016; Pellisser Rossell and Oleaque Moreno, 2019). Specifically, the results of a comparative linguistic-pragmatic analysis of the use of hashtags by five Spanish political leaders, from April 12 to November 8, 2019, are presented. This study seeks to provide answers to these questions: what hashtags did these Spanish politicians use on twitter during that period? What linguistic features do they exhibit in the analyzed tweets? And, what discursive functions do they perform? After reviewing different theoretical aspects related to hashtags in political communication, and presenting the methodology and the corpus for analysis, the results are shown and discussed, providing some reflections on the research in this field.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

On Twitter, a hashtag acts as explicit metadata integrated into the tweet, indicating what the topic of the tweet is and connecting it with other tweets posted on different profiles, on which that same hashtag has been integrated. In this sense, it places this microblogging site in the world of *folksonomy*, since it also constitutes a collaborative classification method of data based on keywords chosen by the users of this network. That way, a hashtag expands the potential meaning of the tweet, since, by becoming a tag that can be linked and tracked, it relates with other discourses, promoting what Zappavigna calls "affiliation environment" (2011). If the hashtag is put in the Twitter search engine, it is possible to retrieve a tweet or a set of tweets related to that topic and keep track of the existing "conversation" about it. Ultimately, thanks to this tool, users can recapitulate ideas and even access different threads and interactions by using that "key word".

Based on the analysis of discourse, hashtags has been analyzed as a tool that promotes online activism on social networks (Menna, 2012; Zeifer, 2020), the debate and political participation of citizens around the same issue (Santoveña, 2015; Escuder, 2019), the configuration of the very brand and image (Page, 2012), as a mechanism that allows analyzing the debate that takes place, for example, on a television program, as if Twitter were a "second screen" (Calvo Rubio, 2018), as an element of creation of the media agenda (Briceño Romero et al., 2018) or news framing (Pérez Fumero, 2013). In these investigations, it is assumed that the "#" symbol is a complex semiotic element that establishes different types of relations with the rest of the components of the tweet. Menna (2012, p. 49) points out three types of relations: internal, referring to the link the hashtag has with the linguistic elements of the message; external, which alludes to the possible relations between the content of the message in which the hashtag appears and the content of the messages that also use it (for example, when it becomes a hyperlink to access all the tweets containing it); and contextual, which is the relation established between a signifier unit, in this case a tweet, and the situational context to which it refers, generating meanings that addressees interpret basing on the knowledge they share with the addresser (Heyd and Puschmann, 2017, p. 56). In this sense, it is important to note that:

> Hashtags provide a means by which tweeters can activate relevant contextual assumptions within the character limit and without the need to provide explicit background information and thus detract from the casual, informal style. In sum, hashtags can be used to activate certain contextual assumptions, thus guiding the reader's inferential processes (Scott, 2015, p. 19).

In the analysis of the Spanish political discourse, it has been pointed out that tweets convey a synthetic and fragmented discourse (Mancera Rueda and Pano Alamán, 2013; Pano Alamán and Mancera Rueda, 2014). In fact, the political discourse on twitter connects with a current political discourse in which the information is underpinned by a few and compelling words, with which it is possible to "say very little, repeat it a lot and, if possible, explain very little or nothing at all" (Ortega, 2005, p. 23), and that, according to Gallardo-Paúls and Enguix Oliver (2016), moves towards a pseudo-political discourse, characterized by the narcissistic personalism in the message of those who represent it, the frivolous spectacularization in the media, and the de-ideologization in the discourse of citizens. On another note, the political content on Twitter is characterized, on the one hand, by fragmentation, since it presents the information in portions –text, emojis, images, links, hashtags, videos, photographs and posters– that interrupt the communication flow; and, on the other hand, by semantic condensation (Held, 2011, pp. 35-36), in the sense that the statement is generally underpinned by elliptical structures and a few full words (nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs) (Pano Alamán, 2019). Perhaps, the element that best expresses the tendency of the political tweet to fragmentation and condensation is the hashtag. As for their roles in political discourse, Mancera Rueda and Helfrich (2014) have pointed out that hashtags allow opposition parties to classify tweets into those messages supporting the government and messages of criticism meant for the government. Similarly, through the use of

hashtags, politicians elaborate a "rhetoric of persuasion" aimed at their followers on the microblogging site or, in general, at their supporters, to show they are "on the front line of the public debate" (Mancera Rueda and Helfrich, 2014, p. 83).

2.1. From the slogan to the campaign hashtag

It should be noted that hashtags in politician's tweets often appear at the end of the message, sometimes without syntactic integration with the rest of the verbal and non-verbal elements, so that they are quickly visualized summarizing the content of the tweet (Mancera Rueda and Pano Alamán, 2015). In this sense, they can work as a motto or slogan, since they seek to trigger a reaction in the recipients that leads them to feel identified or support what the political addresser proposes, especially during periods of electoral campaign (Mancera Rueda and Pano Alamán, 2013). For example, in the first campaign of the Spanish general election developed on Twitter, the team of the candidate Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba launched –after the face-to-face debate between him and Mariano Rajoy on November 7, 2011– the hashtag #undebatedecisivo [EN: #*adecisivedebate*], so that whoever following the account of this politician could express his/her opinion about this debate, adding this hashtag in their tweets. The search on Twitter for the words sequence #undebatedecisivo showed numerous messages, both positive and negative, about this face-to-face meeting, which is why the use Twitter users made of it provided unexpected results, both favorable and adverse for the strategy of the socialist party. This hashtag was also created with the intention of becoming one of the most commented Trending Topics[1] in Spain. However, even though it actually ended up becoming a TT, it also caused a wave of critical opinions that demonstrated general indifference from websurfers towards the debate or that questioned precisely the decisive nature of the meeting. In other cases, the same hashtag was used, as planned, to mark and group those messages that could contain useful proposals for the debate. The analysis of the hashtags used during the 2014 European Parliament elections campaign (Mancera Rueda and Pano Alamán 2015) and the analysis of the most frequently used ones of the 2015 general elections campaign (González Bengoechea, 2015) confirm this same use of hashtags. Indeed, just as a slogan, hashtags seem to designate "a concise formula, easy to retain and repeat, that implies or connotes and suggests more than what it really says or denotes" (López Eire (1998, p. 43). Furthermore, it is characterized by its brevity; it is, in sum, an autonomous textual unit that, in the political discourse on social networks, synthesizes the message by linking it to the party or the candidate.

Both the slogan and the hashtag have a high level of semantic density, which is manifested in the use of full words such as nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs that convey a simple message, in order to reach the largest possible audience (Peña

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[1] The topic marked by the hashtag can become a TT when the number of messages containing it increases in a short period of time. Generally, it is the most commented term or syntagma by users in a short period of time. The system automatically tracks those terms and, by calculating the frequency with which the word or syntagma appears, it determines which hashtag stands out from the rest.

Jiménez and Ortiz Sobrino, 2011, p. 553). On another note, a slogan, just like the hashtag used for electoral purposes, will be more evocative if it is easy to be perceived, interpreted and memorized (Reboul, 1978, p. 42). For this purpose, as in the case of the advertising slogan, the brevity and density of the political slogan respond to its persuasive intention (Garrido-Lora, 2013, p. 177). Another characteristic of slogans to which some hashtags aspire, is brilliance, which contributes to their being remembered and that are grounded, partially, in the semantic content of words and the formal resources that are brought into play to elaborate them. As Garrido Lora (2013, pp. 178-179) recalls, the slogans used during the electoral campaign of the 2008 general elections incorporated rhetorical figures such as parallelism, hyperbole or ellipsis and typographic resources such as capital letters, to provide expressiveness.

3. METHODOLOGY AND CORPUS

With the purpose of determining how the hashtags in the Twitter messages of the main leaders of five Spanish political parties behave discursively, a quantitative-qualitative and comparative analysis of a corpus of tweets posted on their profiles has been carried out. First, with Sketch Engine we have obtained a list of frequencies of the most frequent hashtags and the agreements related to each one. Secondly, their functions in the tweets have been identified following the proposal of Mancera Rueda and Pano Alamán (2015) for the qualitative analysis of the syntactic-discursive values of the hashtags in these political discourses. To construct the corpus, the tweets posted on the official profiles of Pedro Sánchez (PSOE), Pablo Casado (PP), Pablo Iglesias (*Unidas Podemos*), Albert Rivera (*Ciudadanos*) and Santiago Abascal (Vox) have been collected automatically (through the Twitter API), from April 12, 2019, which marks the beginning of the 28-A electoral campaign, the date of the general and regional elections in the Valencian Community, to November 8, 2019, the closing day of the 10-N campaign. Between these two calls, on May 26 (26-M), the elections for the European Parliament, the regional ones, with the exception of those deemed historical and of the Valencian Community, and municipal elections in all the territory, took place. The total number of tweets collected is 3905, excluding retweets or forwarded messages from other users. Table 1 shows the total number of tweets collected, the total number of hashtags used and the number of unique hashtags per account:

Table 1: Number of tweets collected and corpus of hashtags per account

Account	Tweets	No. total hashtags	No. of unique hashtags
@sanchezcastejon	966	1481	434
@pablocasado_	867	301	126
@PabloIglesias	700	175	103
@Albert_Rivera	706	433	164
@Santi_ABASCAL	458	352	120
TOTAL	**3905**	**3109**	**969**

Source: Author's own creation.

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4. RESULTS

4.1. Quantitative analysis

In all the tweets collected, 3109 total hashtags and 969 unique or different hashtags have been used (See Table 1). This difference is significant, since there is not an exact connection between the number of tweets posted and the number of hashtags used: on the one hand, not all messages contain hashtags, and on the other, it is common for several hashtags to appear in the same text. From the perspective of frequency, we noted some differences that indicate different strategies in the use politicians make of this tool.
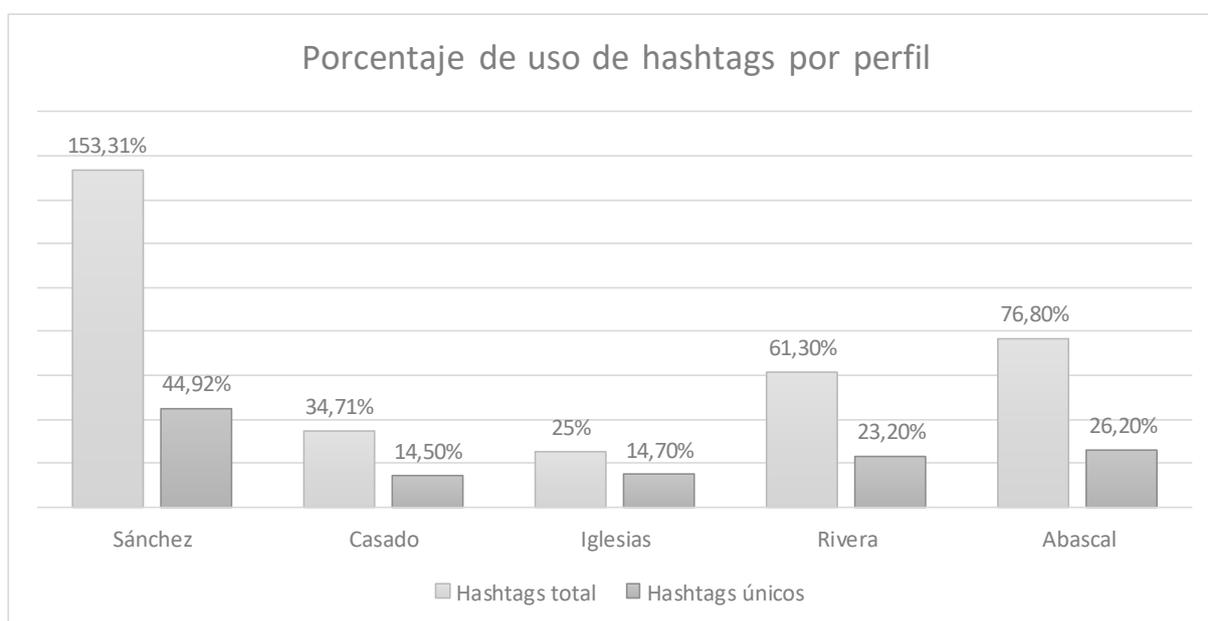
Graph 1: Weighted percentage of total and unique (not repeated) hashtags per account.
Source: Author's own creation.

As it is evident, the percentage of total use of Sánchez (153.31%) outstrips the others' and indicates that the socialist politician used, in general, more than one hashtag in his messages. He is followed by Abascal (76.8%) and Rivera (61.30%) and, more distant, there are Casado (34.71%) and Iglesias (25%). As for the percentage of unique hashtags, we observed that the differences between politicians were reduced. In this case, it should be noted that the leader of the PSOE, although he uses numerous hashtags, these are often repeated since less than half of the total (44.92%) are different hashtags. Something similar is observed in Abascal (26.20%) and Rivera (23.20%), with a similar percentage of unique hashtags. In the cases of Casado and Iglesias, the difference between total and unique percentage is less. On another note, the leader of Podemos was the one who used this tool the least, although he did so in a more diverse way compared to the others.

Therefore, Sánchez is the one who uses a greater number of total and unique hashtags, a datum that confirms the tendency observed in the study of the 2011 electoral campaign, in which the then socialist candidate, Pérez Rubalcaba, used a total of 105 hashtags compared to the 43 used by Mariano Rajoy (Mancera Rueda and Pano Alamán, 2013, p. 193). The results of the analysis by González Bengoechea (2015, p. 549) about the use of twitter by different Spanish parties from April 23 to April 29, 2015, showed that PSOE and Podemos were the parties that used this tool the most. While Vox, then an "emerging party", made very little use of this resource with just 4 hashtags, Podemos used it 135 times, even using the hashtag #L6Ncalleiglesias up to 66 times, to report what its leader said in the program *La Sexta Noche* broadcasted on *La Sexta* channel. More recently, an analysis of a sample of tweets posted from July 1 to August 17, 2018, during an inactive period from an electoral and institutional perspective (Pano Alamán, 2019), indicates that Podemos was the party that used hashtags the least (29.2%) compared to the PSOE, which used it in 87% of their tweets posted, Ciudadanos (74%) and PP (43.8%). These recent data partially coincide with the results of this research, which leads us to believe that the greater or lesser use of hashtags does not depend so much on the period during which the messages are posted, that is, during pre-electoral, electoral or non-electoral campaigns, but on the communicative strategy of the party and its leader on Twitter. Likewise, it is important to point out the countertendency in the case of Unidas Podemos and Vox compared to previous campaigns. While Iglesias reduced the number of hashtags used, Abascal increased its use, partially due to the urgency of the electoral events in 2019 and the importance it has today in the Spanish representative system.

Regarding the most frequent hashtags in the corpus, Table 2 gathers those that have been used at least 5 times by each of the politicians considered:

Table 2: Most frequent hashtags per account.

Accounts	Most frequent hashtags > 5
@sanchezcastejon	#HazQuePase (50), #10N (61), #AhoraSí (58), #SiempreHaciaDelante (56), #26M (55), #AhoraEspaña (48), #28A (41), #EstamosMuyCerca (37), #AhoraUnidad (30), #España (25), #ConstruirGobierno (23), #ViolenciaMachista (22). #EUCO (13), #ViolenciaDeGénero (13), #NiUnaMenos (12), #LaEspañaQueQuieres (12), #VotaConElCorazón/ ♡ (9), #ProgramaComúnProgresista (8), #SánchezARV (8), #G20OsakaSummit (8), #ElDebate4N (8), #Agenda2030 (8), #TransiciónEcológica (7), #CMin (7), #Gobierno (7), #Europa (6), #G20 (6), #igualdad (5), #AhoraAvanzar (5), #AhoraPrograma (5), #DANA (5), #ElDebateDecisivo (5), #G20Osaka (5), #LaEuropaQueQuieres (5), #PlanAntibloqueo (5), #SánchezA3N (5), #SelFEM (5), #SesiónDeInvestidura (5)
@pablocasado_	#ValorSeguro (32), #VotaPP (26), #26M (21), #10N (16), #28A (11), #CentradosEnTuFuturo (11), #NosUneEspaña (9), #ElVotoSeUne (8), #PorTodoLoQueNosUne (7), #CasadoEnOndaCero (5), #ElDebateDecisivo (5), #ELDEBATEenRTVE (5)
@PabloIglesias	#LaHistoriaLaEscribesTú (19), #UnGobiernoContigo (9), #SíSePuede (5)

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@Albert_Rivera	#NoNosCallarán (18), #EspañaEnMarcha (17), #VamosCiudadanos (12), #28A (9), #26M (7), #VamosPorLaLibertad (6)
@Santi_ABASCAL	#EspañaSiempre (60), #EspañaViva (33), #PorEspaña (28), #VOX (18), #AhoraVOX (11), #EnEuropaPorEspaña (11), #VistalegrePlusUltra (9), #Madrid (5), #Oviedo (5), #Valencia (5), #Valladolid (5)

Source: Sketch Engine and author's own creation.

As shown in the table, some of the most used hashtags appear in more than one account. For example, see the cases of #28A and #26M, which allude to the dates of the first general elections of 2019 and the European ones, and that appear in the messages of Sánchez, Casado and Rivera, 61 times (28A), 77 times (10N) and 83 times (26M). In any case, the most frequent hashtags are verbal and nominal phrases that work as slogans and mottos, a fact that is not surprising given the amount of different electoral events in 2019. All the accounts analyzed use hashtags that coincide with the official slogans adopted by the parties during the 28A or the 10N campaigns, such as: #HazQuePase [EN: MakeItHappen], used 50 times by Sánchez; #EspañaSiempre [EN: #AlwaysSpain], which follows being used 60 times in Abascal's tweets; #ValorSeguro [EN: #SafeValue], which is the main used one by Casado 32 times; #LaHistoriaLaEscribesTú [EN: #HistoryIsWritenByYou], which appears 19 times in the messages of Iglesias; and #EspanaEnMarcha [EN: #SpainOnTheMarch], appearing 17 times in Rivera's messages. It is interesting that, only for the last case, this hashtag is not the one that appears the most, since in the tweets of the then leader of Ciudadanos, the most used one was the verbal phrase in negative form: #NoNosCallarán [EN: #TheyWontSilentUs], appearing 18 times. Other frequent hashtags in the corpus are the slogans used during the pre-campaign periods and the mottos that accumulate in the messages meant for the final stage of the campaign to exhort voters to vote for one or the other party or to remind them the reasons why they should vote for them: #LaEspañaQueQuieres, #VotaPP, #SíSePuede, #VamosPorLaLibertad [EN: #TheSpainYouWant, #VotePP, #WeCanDoIt, #Let'sGetOurFreedom] or #EspañaViva.

Beyond this type of electoral hashtags, we also find those that, only in the case of the socialist leader, allude to topics related to the policies of the Government then headed by Sánchez, or his party, and to issues related to current affairs that were debated by the public. Particularly, #ViolenciaMachista, #ViolenciaDeGénero y #NiUnaMenos [EN: #MachoViolence, #GenderBasedViolence and #NoOneWomanLess] stand out with 21, 13 and 12 appearances each, which focus on femicide; other frequent thematic hashtags in Sánchez's tweets are those related to government policies, advertised through hashtags such as #Agenda2030, #TransiciónEcológica or #igualdad [EN: #2030Agenda #EcologicalTransition #Equality]. Acronyms and abbreviations referring to specific times and places, such as European and international summits, are also very common on his account: #EUCO (European Council), that appears 13 times, and #G20OsakaSummit, #G20 y #G20Osaka, related to the summit of the G20 that took place on June 28-29, 2019, totaling 19 appearances. These were spaces in which Sánchez participated as

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President of the Government and for this reason they are not found in other accounts or exhibit a much lower frequency.

This type of hashtag, which we label contextualizing, also appears in the messages of the other politicians considered. We have already seen the dates referring to the days of elections, to which the hashtags indicating a place name in which a party conference takes place are included, such as #Madrid, used 5 times by Sánchez and Abascal, in whose messages #Oviedo, #Valencia y #Valladolid are also repeated up to five times. This allows us to affirm that Abascal uses this tool predominantly to provide a context to his words and actions, especially during campaign, in addition to being a wink to those cities and their residents to ensure the support of potential voters. Finally, it is worth analyzing those hashtags that combine the name of the leader and the name of a television or radio program in which he is being interviewed in the same syntagma. These are hashtags that appear in all of the accounts, although with greater presence in the tweets of the socialist leader (#SánchezARV, SánchezA3N) and in those of Casado (#CasadoEnOndaCero). The hashtags #ElDebate4N and #ElDebateDecisivo [EN: #The4NDebate y #TheDecisiveDebate] are used in a similar way, which refer to the face-to-face debates that took place during the campaigns.

4.2. Qualitative analysis

As for the most outstanding linguistic features, it should be noted that most of the hashtags used by political leaders are words, generally nouns, belonging to the general or specialized vocabulary, which allude to issues that were topical at that time. These types of hashtags are more frequent on Sánchez's account, on which nouns related to government policies and the party's proposals and promises in the face of elections are combined (#agua, #cultura, #digitalización, #emprendimiento, #pobreza, #startup, #tuberculosis [EN: #water, #culture, #digitalization, #entrepreneurship, #poverty #startup #tuberculosis]). On the contrary, these are rarely seen in Abascal's messages, appearing only five times (#agricultores, #autonómicas, #congreso, #Lema, #sentencia [EN: #farmers, #regional, #congress, #motto, #sentence]) and in those of Rivera, only four times (#gotafría, #paro, #selectividad [EN: #colddrop, #unemployment, #selectivity], #Trial). They are practically accidental with just one example for Casado (#HepatitisC) and Iglesias (#Selectividad). These types of hashtags are inserted into the syntactic structure of the statement in which it performs a certain function. For example, in (1), #convivencia [EN: #coexistence] is a direct object of the verb "want", which designates what the Catalan society wants according to Sánchez, and in (2), #paro [EN: #unemployment] is the subject of an assertive statement of Rivera in which he quotes the unemployment rates published in September, 2019, to attack the Government's economic and fiscal policies:

(1) @sanchezcastejon: We have always defended the law and dialogue in Catalonia, but the independence movement continues falling in the same hole. Catalan society does not want to become independent; it has decided so in

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each electoral process. *It wants #coexistence* and that is what the Generalitat must guarantee (10-03-2019).

(2) @Albert_Rivera: *#unemployment registered its worst rate* in an August since 2010 and Spain destroys 213,000 jobs. Increasing expenditure, raising taxes on families and entrepreneurs, postponing pending reforms and *podemizar* the economy has its consequences (09-03-2019).
[Podemizar: to become like or adopt the policies of Podemos party]

Other types of hashtags with a single element are those that refer, as aforementioned, to cities or autonomous communities that in the message refer to the place where politicians are, particularly, during electoral campaign events. In Sánchez's messages there are 65 unique appearances of cities and Autonomous Communities. 47 in those of Abascal, data that contrasts with those of Casado (4) and Iglesias, who only uses one hashtag of this kind, #Murcia, with thematizing function, in a tweet that denounces the pollution from multinationals in that region. In any case, the most frequent hashtags are those that have more complex noun phrases, in which words appear combined. Generally, these include nouns preceded or followed by adjectives:

(3) @PabloIglesias: There are those who hold lots of power in European institutions without being elected through the ballot boxes. Unidas Podemos Cambiar Europa [...] will work for a more democratic Europe that serves people and not lobbies. *#AfairerEurope* [ES: #UnaEuropaMásJusta] (05-14-2019).

(4) @Santi_ABASCAL: Terrible video: The number 3 of the PP *[People's Party]* lying about VOX and, on his knees, asking BILDU for forgiveness. They deserve to disappear in the ballot boxes *#RightCowards* [ES: #DerechitaCobarde] (04-12-2019).

Nouns followed by other nouns and acronyms in apposition are also common, as in the following tweets:

(5) @sanchezcastejon: Thank you for your municipal commitment. I am sure you will do a great job transferring the socialist values into the public policies of your towns and cities to improve people's lives. Congratulations, teammates! *#CouncilsPSOE* 🗳 [ES: #AytosPSOE] (06-15-2019).

(6) @pablocasado_: Clear, concise and coherent, @cayetanaAT has proven to be the best candidate in the *#DebateRTVE*. [...] Congratulations (04-16-2019).

On another note, hashtags in which a genitive construction appears abound in all the accounts, as in #CopaDelRey (Rivera) and #EstadoDeExcepción [EN: #StateOfException] (Abascal). There is also an abundant presence in all of the accounts, and without distinction, of hashtags that refer, on the one hand, to institutions such as the Congress (#congreso #congresodelosdiputados [EN:

#congress, #congressofdeputies]), the Council of Ministers (#CMin, in the case of Sánchez) or European Council (#EUCO), and on the other hand, to celebrations. The most common formula in these cases is #AutonomousCommunity+Day [ES: #*Díade*+*ComunidadAutónoma*] which, although it appears in all of the accounts, it abounds particularly in the messages of Sánchez (29), and Rivera's (19); others such as #DíaDasLetrasGalegas [EN: #GalicianLiteratureDay] (Sánchez, Iglesias) or #DíaDeEuropa [EN: #EuropeDay] (Sánchez, Casado, Rivera, Iglesias) are also repeated on more than one account. Often, Sánchez, Casado, and Rivera use this tool to wish a #HappyThursday, #HappySunday [ES: #FelizJueves, #FelizDomingo] or even the most colloquial #HappyWeekend [ES: #FelizFinde]. Occasionally, the celebration is related to "the world day" of the rights of certain social groups or to name days. In this sense, the differences are notable, since each politician selects celebrations based on their ideology and the one they assume their followers on Twitter have, to elaborate messages in which they claim their stance on certain social and political issues that mark their program:

> (7) @PabloIglesias: 25 people per minute are forced to leave their homes due to wars, famine and persecution. One out of two refugees is a boy or a girl. Today is #*WorldRefugeeDay* [ES: #DiaMundialDelRefugiado]. Every day, looking the other way makes us indifferent to barbarism. (06-20-2019).

> (8) @Santi_ABASCAL: It was very exciting to enjoy the parade of the Armed Forces on Columbus Day; the dedication of so many men and women to this Homeland and the common good gives hope to all the Spanish people. #*ColumbusDay* #PillarDay [ES: #DíaDeLaHispanidad #*DíaDelPilar*] #12oct (10-12-2019).

> (9) @Albert_Rivera: We the constitutionalists Catalans cannot celebrate the festival of our land because the separatists have turned it into the festival of hatred to Spain. But it can be celebrated by Otegi, who has not apologized yet for the killings of his gang in Hipercor or Vic. #*Diada2019* (09-11-2019).

Lastly, it is worth mentioning the notable presence in all of the accounts, except for Abascal's, of hashtags with acronyms that refer, in most cases, to teams and sports events (#FIFAWWC, #Sub21, #ATPMontreal, #SelFEM, #NBA, #RG29, #MX2)[2], especially in Rivera's messages, who apparently pays more attention to these events. Other accounts point out issues that are part of the media agenda, such as #IIFF (Wildfires), hashtag that only Sánchez, Casado, and Rivera used, in this way or with the #IF+Place structure [EN: IF-Incendio Forestal = Wildfires], or political proposals, such as #PPR (Life Imprisonment in Spain) in the messages of Casado, and anniversaries, such as #DIFAS2019 (Armed Forces Day 2019), which appears in a message of Rivera. As for the acronyms, it is possible to affirm that political parties privilege those that commemorate national and international sports events, distant from the political proposals in their programs or from the issues that characterize

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[2] See also #SOSMarMenor (Sánchez, Iglesias), #SOSPrisiones21M (Rivera), #StopSquatters [ES: #StopOkupas] (Casado) and #STOPDelinquency [ES: #STOPDelincuencia] (Rivera).

their political proposals, confirming the already observed tendency of de-ideologized contents that they convey on social networks (Gallardo Paúls and Enguix Oliver, 2016).

In any case, and despite the fact that nominal phrases are predominant, verbal phrases are used in some cases, both in copulative structures, such as #155EsLibertad [EN: #155IsFreddom] (Rivera), #EsTiempoDeMemoria [EN: #ItIsMemoryTime] (Sánchez) and #SoyEspañol [EN: #IamSpanish] (Abascal), or the hashtag with a sporting meaning #SomosEquipo [EN: #WeAreATeam] (Sánchez, Casado, and Rivera), and in predicative structures, whose meaning is more complex and requires greater interpretative effort based on the context:

> (10) @Albert_Rivera: My commitments to children, the future of Spain: Law for the eradication of violence against children; that child sexual abuse crimes do not have a statute of limitations. Aid Plan for all families. Thank you, @unicef_es. #*EvenIfYouDon'tVote* [ES: #AunqueNoVoten] (04-22-2019).

> (11) @pablocasado_: Bildu reveals that they are the priority spokespersons of the PSOE, with whom they promised to maintain continuous collaboration. It is outrageous that those who negotiate with ETA defenders demand our abstention. #*SánchezNavarraDoesntSellOut* [ES: #SánchezNavarraNoSeVende] (07-26-2019).

Other hashtags contain verbs in the simple present tense with which politicians seek to position themselves in the face of current events (#yosítecreo [EN: #Idobeliveyou], Iglesias), to denounce or draw attention to something that is occurring (#BarcelonaArde [EN: #BarcelonaIsOnFire], Abascal), to come up with ideas or solutions to certain problems (#RompeElCírculo [EN: #BreakTheCircle] Sánchez) or to convey electoral mottos and slogans (#NosUneElEmpleo [EN: #WeAreUnitedByWork], Casado). On another note, in Sánchez's tweets there are also hashtags with infinitive verbs such as #AhoraAvanzar or #ConstruirDeporte [EN: #ItIsTimeToMoveFoward or #ToBuildSports], while in those of Iglesias and Abascal the use of modal structures (in Spanish grammar) such as the ironic #aversivoyaserdeUP [EN: #Let'sSeeIfImGointobeUP] of the former one and the #NoQueremosVerAOtegi [ES: #WeDontWantToSeeOtegi] of the later. In the case of Rivera, it should be noted the repeated use of the expression "*Vamos*" in #VamosJuntos, #VamosMoteros [EN: #Let'sGoTogether, #Let'sGoBikers] or even in the periphrasis #VamosAGanar [EN: #WeAreGoingToWin], which also works as slogan for the 28A campaign. Finally, in the messages of all the leaders, there are hashtags that include the imperative in exhortatory statements that ask voters for their vote, partially coinciding with the electoral slogan: #HazQuePase, #VotaPP, #VotaVox, #VamosPorLaLibertad, #ApodérateUnidasPodemos.

In the hashtags of Casado and Rivera, "*nosotros*" [EN: us] is more frequent, which includes both the politician and the potential voter, see: #ElVotoQueNosUne [EN: #TheVoteThatUnitesUs] (Casado) and #VamosCiudadanos [EN: #Let'sGoCitizens] (Rivera). In the messages of Iglesias and Abascal, that inclusive meaning is found,

instead, through the "*I*" with which each political leader invites their followers to feel identified: #YoRepresentoaPodemos [EN: #IRepresentPodemos] (Iglesias) or #YoVoyaVistalegre [EN: #IwillGoToVistalegre] (Abascal). The subject pronoun "*You*" only appears explicitly in the hashtags of Iglesias (#LaHistoriaLaEscribesTú, #LaRegiónLaHacesTú [EN: #HistoryIsWritenByYou, #YouMakeTheRegion], while in the rest of cases it is expressed through verbs: #LaRiojaQue*Quieres* [EN: #LaRiojaThatYou*Want*] (Sánchez) or the pronoun with the preposition: #*Contigo*Sumamos [EN: #WeAreMore*WithYou*] (Casado).

Regarding the main discursive functions of these hashtags, they generally identify the topic of the tweet in a few words, promoting the engagement of users –*followers* or not– to the content of the message, which is usually carried out through a retweet, or inserting the hashtag in their own message, so that the "conversation" around that topic is expanded. These are matters to which the politician wants to draw attention:

> (12) @sanchezcastejon: Meeting with organizations within the field of #digitalization and #science. Together, we want to build a program for a more competitive productive model, a more prepare society to face #future, a country with fewer social inequalities. *#ToBuildGovernment* [ES: #ConstruirGobierno] (08-01-2019).

> (13) @Santi_ABASCAL: Do you want to convince us that HM the King had to intervene in a problem of public order, in a street riot? Do you want to convince us that the coup leaders did not attack the constitutional order? We are not going to buy that. #*Sentence* [ES: #Sentencia] (10-14-2019).

Other hashtags have an informative function. For example, place names are often used to indicate where the next rally of a party will take place. Even if in other cases they seem to have a contextualizing function when they refer to international meetings or the place where certain statements have been made, as a demarcation sign for a quotation. For example, in (14) the words of Irene Montero, spokesperson of Unidas Podemos, were quoted in a direct style, even without quotation marks, while she was participating in the first televised debate of the 10N campaign, the "*Debate a 7*" broadcasted on RTVE on November 1, 2019:

> (14) @PabloIglesias: These proposals to protect labor rights, to make life easier for the self-employed and to guarantee decent pensions for our elders are the reasons why the CEOE [*Spanish Confederation of Employer's Organization*] don't want us in the Government. @Irene_Montero_ on #*Debatea7RTVE* (11-01-2019).

Finally, hashtags that constitute directive speech acts with which participation is encouraged stand out. Some contain the imperative form of the verb "*to vote*", which appears together with the initials of the party for which support is requested. These are more traditional slogans such as #VotePSOE (Sánchez), #VotePP (Casado), #VoteUnidasPodemos (Iglesias) and #VoteVox. They appear, although infrequently, in all of the accounts, with the exception of Rivera's, who prefers #VamosCiudadanos. With a similar function, #VotaConElCorazón [EN:

#VoteFromTheHeart] (Sánchez), #VamosEspaña [EN: #LetsGoSpain] (Casado, Rivera), #VotaFeminista [EN: #VoteFeminist] (Iglesias) and #PorEspañaVotaVox [EN: #SpainVotesForVox] (Abascal). On the one hand, we can see how they use the traditional slogan with which they explicitly ask people to vote for their parties; on the other hand, they adopt formulas that, even if they are not original since they are repeated or remind people of slogans that have been used in past elections (Garrido Lora, 2013), resort, in a diversified way, to expressions inherent in the sports world ("Let's go"), draw on the emotions of voters ("from your heart"), indicate the reason why they should be voted for ("for Spain") or indicate the cause or the values that are being defended by voting for them ("feminist"). In this sense, we refer to what Dader (2008: 234) calls "sensiocracy", a kind of sentiment ideology upon which we base to process the information from the environment in terms of "sentimental empathy or dyspathy" (Peña Jiménez and Ortiz Sobrino, 2011, p. 554). It is important to point out that a slogan, that is presented as an "order that a leading person or organization gives to their subordinates or affiliates" (*DLE*, 2014) in political groups, is distinguished from a campaign slogan, which seems to have a more general nature, since it expresses a goal or a promise meant for all voters.

4.2.1. "Electoral" hashtags

We are now focused on the analysis of those hashtags that are linked to the slogans of the electoral campaigns of the 28A and 10N[3]. As aforementioned, these are the hashtags that have the highest frequency in all the cases, except for Iglesias, in whose messages the appearance of a slogan-hashtag for the first electoral round happens just once.

Table 2: **Hashtags that convey the official campaign slogan**

	SANCHEZ	CASADO	RIVERA	IGLESIAS	ABASCAL
28A	#HazQuePase (81)	#ValorSeguro (32)	#Vamos Ciudadanos (12)	#LaHistoriaLaE scribesTú	#PorEspaña (28)
10N	#AhoraSí (58)	#PorTodoLoQue NosUne (7)	#EspañaEnM archa (17)	#UnGobiernoCo ntigo (9)	#España Siempre (60)

It is important to mention that #AhoraSí and #PorTodoLoQueNosUne [EN: #NowYes and #ForEverythingthatUnitesUs] became Trending Topics (TT) in Spain for about two hours on the first day of the 10N campaign. The data that Trendinalia.com provides on the TT related to the first and last day of the campaign of the two processes considered indicate that these were the only electoral hashtags that became trending topics that day. Together with them, these slogans and mottos also became TT: #VotaPSOE (3h15') and #VotaPP (2h30'), on April 12; #EstaHistoriaLaEscribesTú (4h36') [EN: ThisHistoryIsWrittenByYou] and

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[3] About the slogans and communicative strategies adopted by each party in both electoral processes, v. M. Á. Alfonso. From 28A to 10N in the campaign slogans. *El Correo*, 10-30-2019. Retrieved from: https://www.elcorreo.com/elecciones/generales/lemas-campana-partidos-20191030114715-ntrc.html

#VamosEspaña (2h30′), on April 6; #CsEnMarcha (13h40′), on November 1; #VotaUnidasPodemos (4h45′) and #VotaConElCorazón (4h10′), on November 8.

Just like a slogan, these hashtags are characterized by brevity, conciseness, syntactic simplicity, and semantic density. The use of short formulas is evident, even elliptical ones, which are underpinned by concise syntagmas, with two or three combined elements with the initial capital letter, some of which are verbs. In the cases of Rivera and Abascal, shorter formulas were adopted, while Sánchez and Casado alternated between structures with two and three elements depending on the campaign. The slogan-hashtags of UnidasPodemos identified in the tweets of Iglesias have three or more lexemes. In the case of the 28A elections call, it is a statement that focuses on "history" and "you" and that intends to highlight the importance of the vote of citizens to whom they address, to decide on the future of the country, to write its "history". Generally, there are not overly creative formulas, in particular, those that include "Spain" (Rivera and Abascal), very frequent in the hashtags and pre-campaign slogans of other parties, such as #AhoraEspaña [EN: #NowSpain] in Sánchez's tweets (with 48 appearances) and #NosUneEspaña [EN: #SpainUnitesUs] in the ones of Casado (9).

As for what is in the content, that appears condensed in a few words, the positive values stand out: in the case of Sánchez it does so explicitly (#AhoraSí); in other cases they derive from the positive meaning of certain words such as, for example, the noun "*valor*" and the adjective "*seguro*" in the first slogan of Casado, and the expression "vamos" and the locution "*en marcha*" in both of Rivera's, which mean movement and dynamism. Beyond those that are related to slogans, most of the hashtags analyzed in this study convey messages that promote the positive image of the candidate-leader and the party itself. However, in the case of Rivera, hashtags such as #NoNosCallarán or #ContraLaDespoblación [EN: #AgainstDepopulation] are also frequent, in which elements of negative polarity stand out, a risky strategy that is not implemented by the other politicians. On another note, the most used tools during campaign seek to adulate voters. They address voters as the only ones capable of making "something happen", in Sánchez's case. In other cases, they include the second-person singular explicitly to call to vote or to be in the government with that party, as in the hashtags of Iglesias; in others they still implement the inclusive first-person plural object pronoun "us" to allude explicitly to the values and ideas they share with potential voters. It is about information that the recipients of the message on Twitter must infer from the context in which the hashtag is embedded and from the knowledge they share with the politician. For example, in (15), #PorTodoLoQueNosUne leaves room for all kinds of interpretations about what is it that unites the party of Casado and the recipients of his electoral message. The context of the hashtag in that tweet, particularly the listing series "create jobs, improve pensions, the countryside…" gives clues to the recipient of the PP leader –mainly, his followers on the network–, about the issues that seem to concern and unite both and the objectives "for which" they should be voted. In (16), the sequential placement of #Oviedo and the slogan #PorEspaña leads one to infer

that that city, or the residents of that city who attend the event being promoted, "is there" together with the leader and his party, "for" the country:

> (15) @pablocasado_: [...] We go out there to win the elections to create jobs, improve pensions, the countryside… #*ForEverythingThatUnitesUs* there is an opportunity for change in the face of this Government that Spain is enduring (10-08-2019).

> (16) @Santi_ABASCAL: We still have over an hour left before the Vox rally in Oviedo begins. Lots of people are already waiting in a very long queue to access the largest auditorium in Oviedo. The hopeful #LivingSpain [ES: #EspañaViva] with Vox for the next 28-A. #Oviedo #ForSpain (04-12-2019).

From the perspective of the use of rhetorical figures, it is possible to affirm that these slogan-hashtags are not very creative. They are mainly underpinned by an elliptical construction (#AhoraSí, #EspañaEnMarcha, #UnGobiernoContigo [EN: #AGovernmentWithYou]) and analogies with sports, through prototypical expressions of that world (#VamosCiudadanos), and with the insurance and finance field, through the frequently used syntagma in those areas (#ValorSeguro). In any case, the references of hashtags might be opaque or difficult to understand for those who do not know Spanish politics. Indeed, as Peña Jiménez and Ortiz Sobrino affirm, the historical, political and social contexts acquire great relevance in these types of messages, since, as seen in the examples, "these words can neither be separated from their context of use, nor from the political moment in which they have been pronounced or used" 2011, p. 555).

On another note, they do not stray too far from the ones these parties have used in previous electoral processes. In 2008, the PSOE adopted the slogan "For everything that is worthwhile" [ES: "Por todo lo que merece la pena"] while *Unión Progreso y Democracia* launched the headline "What unites us" [ES: "Lo que nos une"] (Garrido Lora, 2013, p. 184). These are two slogans almost identical to "Por todo lo que nos une", used by the PP during the 10N campaign. Also, in 2008, the PP opted for "With head and heart" [ES: "Con cabeza y corazón"], which combined rational and emotional values (Garrido Lora, 2013, p. 183). With a similar strategy, one of the most frequent slogan-hashtags, "VotaConElCorazón", disseminated during the 10N elections, is used in Sánchez's tweets. And is that, during the over-ten-years period that separates the 2008 and 2019 elections, we have witnessed the trend pointed out by Peña Jiménez and Ortiz Sobrino (2011, p. 565), that is, the "in crescendo similarity between the slogans of the different parties" and the use of:

> Open and very vague slogans, without an ideological marked feature, in such way that they do not compromise their advocates: current campaigns seek, above all, to win and not to commit. They promote messages that can be easily shared by the majority (Peña Jiménez and Ortiz Sobrino, 2011, p. 560).

As for durability, a characteristic feature of the slogan, Garrido Lora observed that "today more circumstantial slogans are preferred" (2013, p. 179). This is an aspect that has increasingly accentuated the massive use of social networks like Twitter by

campaign teams, through the condensation and fragmentation of the political message, to some extent incapable of generating debate in society and working with a long-term perspective (Pano Alamán, 2019: 89).

5. CONCLUSIONS

The analysis here conducted allows us to answer the questions raised at the beginning of this study. First, it is possible to affirm that hashtags are very frequent in all of the accounts analyzed, particularly, in those of the socialist leader, who uses more than one in most of the messages posted from April 12 to November 8, 2019. However, these are hashtags that are repeated in all of the accounts, except for Iglesias, who makes a more diversified use of this tool. The most frequent hashtags coincide with the mottos and slogans of the electoral campaigns, a datum that leads us to believe that politicians prefer this persuasive use of the hashtag perhaps due to its short form and its capacity to generate "conversation" around that context. However, these structures are easily interchangeable, since they are underpinned by polysemous and open meanings to avoid, among other things, compromising.

The hashtags analyzed also establish internal relations with the linguistic elements that appear in the tweets, and external ones, when they refer to the national and international socio-political context. These become not only tools to contribute to the dissemination of the very political argument, but they also become enunciative marks within assertive acts, which indicate what their stance is about these problems. With few differences between the five leaders, many of the hashtags used usually are underpinned by isolated nouns or nominal and verbal phrases that thematize the content of the tweet, referring to issues that concern the party or that its leader intends to put in the media and political agenda, and to currents affairs that he denounces or on which he takes a stance. Other hashtags, generally place names, inform about the location of an event, they are inserted in expressions of celebration, or indicate the context on which statements must be placed, particularly on television programs. In this case, they have contextualizing and quotation demarcation functions, which especially draw on the knowledge shared by the addresser and the addressees.

Hashtags take advantage of the brevity and semantic density inherent in slogans and electoral messages to convey, in general, slightly committed contents that are more emotional than rational, with the purpose of making their messages go viral and pinpoint the topics that are debated on Twitter. This analysis has demonstrated that these tools replicate the words and expressions that are already strategically disseminated in other media and, since they seem to ignore the hashtags that other users use on Twitter, it is possible to affirm that the use politicians make of hashtags is still not very innovative. A different strategy would be to insert hashtags related to their ideas into their own messages, used by their followers, to participate in the global "conversation".

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