

**TWITTER AS A TOOL OF PARA-DIPLOMACY: AN EXPLORATORY
COHORT STUDY BASED ON CATALONIA (2013-2017)**
*TWITTER COMO HERRAMIENTA DE PARADIPLOMACIA: UN ESTUDIO
EXPLORATORIO DE COHORTE (2013-2017) BASADO EN CATALUÑA*
**TWITTER COMO FERRAMENTA PARA A PARADIPLOMACIA: UM ESTUDO DE
COORTE EXPLORATÓRIO (2013-2017) COM BASE NA CATALUNHA**

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Resumen

Este estudio exploratorio de cohorte investigó sobre el fenómeno de la Diplomacia Digital en los actores subestatales dentro del campo de la paradiplomacia, específicamente sobre el uso de las plataformas de medios sociales por parte de las Secretarías Catalanas y los Delegados de la Generalitat, y en particular cómo utilizan Twitter para la promoción internacional de su causa independentista y/o su marca país. Una muestra significativa estratificada de cada año entre 2013 y 2017 fue recogida empleando el software R, que luego se analizó con el software Nvivo. La metodología fue diseñada a partir de diferentes aspectos abordados por Abela (2001), Kirppendorff (2004), y Neuendorf (2002). En conclusión, los datos muestran que tanto los Servidores Públicos de las agencias catalanas, como sus Delegados en el Extranjero emplean Twitter mayoritariamente para un uso personal. Sin embargo, al analizar únicamente los datos de contenidos de temas internacionales o intermésticos, se observa que existe una tendencia a publicar tópicos relacionados con la causa independentista más que de la promoción de su marca país.

Palabras clave

Paradiplomacia, paradiplomacia digital, Twitter, Cataluña, diplomacia web de las subregiones, diplomacia 2.0

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Abstract

This exploratory cohort study investigated the phenomenon of Digital Diplomacy by sub-state actors within the field of para-diplomacy, specifically the use of social media platforms by Catalanian Secretaries and Delegates of the Generalitat, and in particular how they use Twitter for the international promotion of its independence and/or its nation branding. A stratified significant sample of each year between 2013 and 2017 was collected using R software, and then analyzed using Nvivo. The methodology was based on Abela (2001), Krippendorff (2004), and Neuendorf (2002). The data shows that both Catalan public servants as well as its Delegates Abroad, use Twitter mostly for personal use. However, when analyzing only the contents about international or intermestic topics, it is observed that there is a tendency to publish topics related to independence rather than national brand.

Keywords

Para-diplomacy, digital para-diplomacy, Twitter, Catalonia, web diplomacy of sub-regions, diplomacy 2.0.

Para-diplomacy, as a phenomenon, is related to the diplomatic acts of international relations that non-central governments take in order to promote their own interests. The term was coined by Soldatos (1990, 1993), and Duchacek (1984, 1986) who defined two general characteristics: visibility and intensification of multiple governmental initiatives that aim to get several alternatives of self-help for regions when central government is insufficient; and transboundary regionalism and “global micro-diplomacy”, which is a result of the jurisdictional autonomy and sovereignty that the sub-national leaders hold. This definition is strongly based on Keohane & Nye (1977), who from the notion of complex interdependence concluded that the new agenda of international relations is characterized by a variety of different and complex issues and surpass governments, questioning the model of a unitary actor in international politics, and recognizing other actors such as sub-national regions.

Internet is one of the main challenges for diplomacy today. Social connection platforms that allow communication to change from a one-to-many to a many-to-many model are the focus of analysis for academics in fields such as political science, public administration, and international relations, as well as in

communications. Twitter and Facebook –among others– are changing the way public diplomacy works in the 21st Century (Lichtenstein, 2010).

The world has experienced how Internet, and social media channels in particular, play an important role in current politics, both locally and internationally. Actors as diverse as the Pope, the Islamic State, and the President of the United States have used Twitter as a tool to reach out to audiences and gain space in the debate, successfully embracing new communication trends. On the citizens' side the experience of using social media in order to address politicians directly is observed in social movements such as Wikileaks, Anonymous, or Occupy Wall Street, all of which have used Facebook or Twitter in order to demand more transparency, encourage direct dialogue, and exercise an active participation in politics.

In 'The Political Power of Social Media', Shirky (2008, 2011) one of the pioneers in the study of the leap from personal to institutional use of social media, described the events that marked the fall of several governments around the world thanks to citizen coordination using new information technologies, which, thanks to being inexpensive and easy to use, gained broad use together to the increasingly easier access to mobile devices and wireless Internet. Matthias Lüfkens (2012, 2013, 2015, 2016, 2017), author of Burson-Marsteller's Twiplomacy Study, has analyzed the evolution of the digital communications of diplomats around the world. His 2015 study stated:

"Governments which are successful on Twitter often have substantial dedicated social media teams to produce engaging content adapted to all platforms. Governments which put more financial and human resources into their digital communications are often the ones who are the most effective.

While Twitter is certainly not the only governmental communication channel, a number of heads of state and government now enjoy massive followings, which often dwarf the circulation of the main newspaper in their respective countries."
(2015)

However, the use of Twitter as a tool of para-diplomacy by sub-state actors has not yet been fully addressed. The main objective of this paper is to identify, calculate, categorize, relate, and compare the messages sent by the government

of Catalonia through Twitter during the same span of time in each year between 2013 and 2017. The result aims to offer data on the use of this platform as a tool of digital para-diplomacy.

Specifically, this article seeks to:

1) Measure the number of messages published by the government of Catalonia in relation to its para-diplomatic efforts according to the para-diplomacy categories described by Duchacek (1986), Keating & Aldecoa (2001), and Zeraoui (2013), versus its nation branding, following Anholt's index and categories (2003, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008a, 2008b, 2010; 2006), and;

2) Measure the volume of messages in the same categories, differentiating between senders - Catalanian Central Government Public Servants, and Catalanian Delegates Abroad.

Due to the nature of this exploratory research, and according to Hernández Sampieri's Social Science Research Methods (2014), there is no need to establish a hypothesis for this type of studies. However, I project that the results should indicate a larger volume of messages related to the independence cause in Catalanian Central Government accounts, while in the Catalanian Delegates Abroad accounts we should expect to find a greater volume of messages related to the promotion of the sub-region and therefore of its nation brand.

Likewise, it is possible to argue that the messages issued between 2013 and 2015 harbour a greater number of tweets referring to nation brand promotion, whereas those published between 2016 and 2017 concentrate more on independence.

Finally, it is also possible to hypothesize that although the Catalanian government has a usage and style guide for its social media channels, its recommendations are not reflected in the messages issued by its Central Government Agents or its Delegates Abroad. The use of Twitter is of a more amateur nature, used to chat among friends and family.

METHODOLOGY

According to Hernández Sampieri (2014) and Dahnke (1986) this is a case study that uses mixed methods with a strong focus on quantitative analysis, because quantitative methods will be used to observe the message categories that the groups in the sample published, without analyzing any effects of what those tweets could cause, nor making any interpretation further than those the data itself here collected can provide.

However, it is worth pointing out that in order to classify the data collected, it will be necessary to go through a process of content interpretation, so the quantitative method will be momentarily bypassed during that process. The technique of content analysis expounded by Abela (2001), Krippendorff (2004), and Neuendorf (2002) will be used during this phase.

This study analyzes the contents published by 17 different Twitter accounts: 8 Catalanian sub-state government agents (President of the Generalitat, Vice-President, Foreign Relations Advisor, Spokesman, General Secretary of Catalonia's Public Diplomacy Council, and the Director of Foreign Communications), and 9 from Catalanian delegates overseas, all strictly related to the communication of Catalonia's foreign policy.

For each sample data was collected during a period of 3 weeks prior to the week of the national holiday (the 'Diada', on September 11th) as well as the week itself, under the supposition that those weeks would represent the highest volume of messages bearing nationalist sentiments and the promotion of Catalonia's nation brand.

Table 1: Samples, Twitter Handles, and Periods to be Analyzed.

Nature	Name	Position	Twitter Handle	2013		2014		2015		2016		2017		Total of Samples
				Since	Until									
Public Servants	Carls Puigdemont	President of the <i>Generalitat</i>	@KRLS							16-Aug	11-Sep	21-Aug	17-Sep	271
	Joana Ortega	Vice-President	@joanaortega	19-Aug	15-Sep	18-Aug	14-Sep							13
	Neus Munté	Vice-President	@neusmonte					17-Aug	13-Sep	16-Aug	11-Sep			159
	Oriol Junqueras	Vice-President	@junqueras									21-Aug	17-Sep	304
	Raül Romeva	Advisor of Foreign Affairs	@raulromeva							16-Aug	11-Sep	21-Aug	17-Sep	88
	Jordi Turull	Spokesman	@jorditurull									21-Aug	17-Sep	416
	Albert Royó Mariné	Secretary General of the Public Diplomacy Council of Catalonia	@A_RoyoMarine	19-Aug	15-Sep	18-Aug	14-Sep	17-Aug	13-Sep	16-Aug	11-Sep	21-Aug	17-Sep	978
	Joan María Pique	Director of Foreign Communications	@joanmariapique	19-Aug	15-Sep	18-Aug	14-Sep	17-Aug	13-Sep	16-Aug	11-Sep	21-Aug	17-Sep	9 557
Delegates Abroad	Sergi Marcén López	Delegate to the United Kingdom & Ireland	@sergimarcel									21-Aug	17-Sep	283
	Amadeu Altafaj	Delegate to the European Union	@aaltafaj	19-Aug	15-Sep	18-Aug	14-Sep	17-Aug	13-Sep	16-Aug	11-Sep	21-Aug	17-Sep	1 655
	Martí Anglada i Birulé	Delegate to France & Switzerland	@AngladaMarti					17-Aug	13-Sep	16-Aug	11-Sep	21-Aug	17-Sep	463
	Mar Ortega	Delegate to Germany	@OrtegaMar	19-Aug	15-Sep	18-Aug	14-Sep	17-Aug	13-Sep					0
	Marie Kapetz	Delegate to Germany	@marie_kapetz							16-Aug	11-Sep	21-Aug	17-Sep	127
	Andrew Devis	Delegate to the United States, Canada & Mexico	@andrwdevs	19-Aug	15-Sep	18-Aug	14-Sep	17-Aug	13-Sep	16-Aug	11-Sep	21-Aug	17-Sep	140
	Adam Casals	Delegate to Austria	@lenz_casals					17-Aug	13-Sep	16-Aug	11-Sep	21-Aug	17-Sep	2 041
	Luca Bellizzi	Delegate to Italy	@luca_bellizzi	19-Aug	15-Sep	18-Aug	14-Sep	17-Aug	13-Sep	16-Aug	11-Sep	21-Aug	17-Sep	124
	Francesca Guardiola	Delegate to Denmark	@frgs1111									21-Aug	17-Sep	196
Total of Samples													16 813	

Source: Author's collection.

For the purposes of comparing through time, this study collected data from 2013 onwards, that year being an inflection point after which there appeared no other international debate regarding any independence movement.

However, the reader can notice that not all the Twitter profiles selected were sampled. This is because not all the positions were established since 2013 –that is the cases of the Advisor of Foreign Relations, the Delegate to Austria, the Delegate to the Holy See, and the Delegate to Denmark–, or because the person holding the position did not own a Twitter account, such as in the cases of the President Artur Mas (2010-2016), the Delegate to the United Kingdom & Ireland

Josep Suàrez, the Delegate to France & Switzerland Marysé Olivé, the Delegate to Morocco Shan Elasri, and the Delegate to Portugal Ramon Font i Bové.

The data was collected using the software R version 3.4.2 "Short Summer" (2017), RStudio version 1.1.383 (2016), and rtweet package version 0.5.14 (2016) for Mac High Sierra 10.13 operative system. The data was then exported as a .CSV file into Microsoft Excel in order to be translated into Spanish. The script used for this process is the following:

```
library(rtweet)

  ## Replace "App_You_Created" by the name you gave to your app
  in https://apps.twitter.com
  ## While creating your app in Twitter, include this Callback URL:
  http://127.0.0.1:1410
  ## Replace "key_token" and "secret_token" with the keys and
  access tokens created in your app properties
  appname <- "App_You_Created"
  key <- "key_token"
  secret <- "secret_token"
  twitter_token <- create_token(app = appname, consumer_key =
  key, consumer_secret = secret)
  ## Replace User_Twitter_Handle by the user account you want to
  search account <- "User_Twitter_Handle"
  ##Replace since and until with the dates you need to search
  NewFile <- get_timeline(account, n = 3200, parse = TRUE, since =
  "YYYY-MM-DD" until = "YYYY-MM-DD")
  ##replace "Sample" with the name you want to give to your file
  saved in your local hard drive
  save_as_csv(NewFile, file_name = "Sample")
```

After collecting the sample, the researcher realized that it is almost impossible to analyze the full collection of 16,813 tweets. Therefore, a stratified sample was designed taking in consideration the problems addressed by Joshi, V., Padmanabhan, D., & Subramaniam, L. V. (2016). In this way each strata corresponds to each year between 2013 and 2017, while a significant sample size

for a finite population was also calculated for each strata, with a 5% margin of error and a 95% confidence level, as follows:

Table 2: Stratas, and Significant Sample Size.

Strata	Total Sample (number of tweets)	Significant Sample Size (number of tweets)
2013	1,052	282
2014	1,731	315
2015	3,506	342
2016	2,355	331
2017	8,169	367
TOTAL	16,813	1,637

Source: Author's collection.

In order to get a random sample, each tweet within each strata was paired with a random number using the RAND() function in Microsoft Excel, top being the number in the Total Sample column in Table 1. The collection of tweets was then sorted from lowest to highest, and the sample to be analyzed was selected by choosing the portion according to the Significant Sample Size to each strata.

Since the original messages on Twitter were mostly published in Catalanian, they were translated into Spanish according to Brislin (1970), while reliability was measured according to Van Slype's criteria (1979, p. 78,), which reported an average of 2.58/3.00 .

The manual coding classification of each message of the 1637 significant sample were categorized by two individuals, both students of international studies with knowledge of research methods, and native Spanish speakers.

After the translation into Spanish was done, the data was loaded into Nvivo for Mac version 11.4.2 (2081) in order to be classified.

A book of categories was designed in order to classify the messages as follows:

1. Nature: seeks to identify the kind of author.

1.1 Sub-State Government Agent: contents gathered from a Twitter account that belongs to a person working for the Catalonian government within its territory, such as the President of the Generalitat or the Foreign Relations Advisor.

1.2 Catalonian Delegates Overseas: contents gathered from a Twitter account belonging to a person representing any Catalonian Delegation abroad, such as Amadeu Altafaj, Delegate of Catalonia to the European Union.

2. Geographical Scope: seeks to identify whether the subject generally aims to debate issues within Catalonia, or international topics.

2.1 National: contents speaking of national affairs, exclusively regarding to Catalonia.

2.2 International: contents strictly related to international affairs.

2.3 Intermestic : contents where national and international issues mix and are therefore difficult to categorize exclusively.

3. Para-diplomacy: those contents that are related to the foreign policy or international relations of Catalonia, according to the classifications by Zeraoui (2016, pp. 19-21), Duchacek (1986), and Kuznetsov (2015).

3.1 Convergent Diplomacy: contents that make a reference to a complementary foreign policy between the sub-state government and the central government of the country that it still belongs to. This is to say, actions of mutual support where the central state is relieved of certain specific tasks that are delegated to subnational entities. In this case there is no confrontation between the interests of the parties.

3.2 Divergent Diplomacy: contents that make references to opposing interests among the central government and the local authorities.

3.3 Proto-diplomacy: contents that explicitly appeal to the vindication of the independence cause, that is to say any explicit support to referendum or

interpellations to other international actors in the advocacy for independence of the sub-national region.

3.4 Identity Diplomacy: contents that seek to promote actions that strengthen the international image of the sub-national region, that is to say the projection of a certain territorial brand or certain particular characteristics of the territory.

4. Nation Brand: contents that explicitly appeal to the promotion of the sub-region, according to Anholt's categories (2006).

4.1 Presence: contents that make a reference to the international status of the sub-region and its reputation.

4.2 Place: contents that make a reference to the physical aspects of the sub-region. For example, how beautiful its open spaces are or the how pleasant it is to travel around it, as well as the promotion of good climate.

4.3 Potential: contents that promote the economic or education opportunities the sub-region has to offer visitors, businessmen, and immigrants.

4.4 Pulse: contents that refer to the entertainment the sub-region has to offer, both for tourists and local citizens.

4.5 People: contents that talk about the characteristics of the inhabitants of the sub-region, such as kindness, hospitality, etc.

4.6 Prerequisites: contents that are related to the basic attributes of the sub-region: what it is like to live there, how easy it is to find a home, public facilities such as schools, hospitals, public transportation, sports venues, etc.

5. Others / Unclassifiable: contents that due to their unusual nature are not possible to be classified, their contents are not clear, or their nature is not understood.

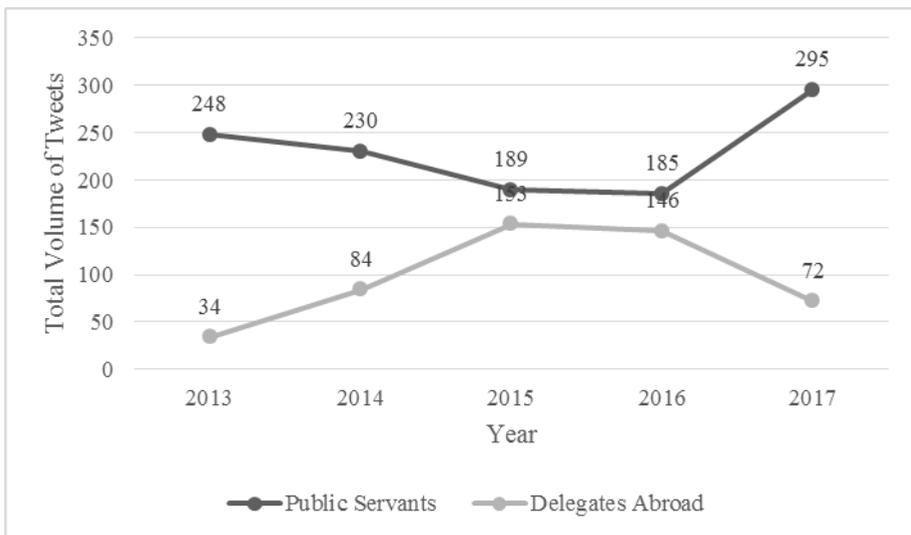
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data shows that in general, 70.13% of tweets published came from Catalonian Central Government public servants, while 29.87% came from its delegates abroad. Of a total of 1,637 tweets analyzed, 61.27% belong to messages categorized under 'national', which were immediately discarded for further analysis since they do not provide any information of interest, which left a new

total of 634 tweets under the categories ‘international’ and ‘intermestic’. In general, and across time, 21.32% of the tweets analyzed correspond to messages of para-diplomacy, with the sub-category ‘proto-diplomacy’ being predominant with 72.78%, equivalent to 15.52% of the total volume of the significant sample.

The same situation may be observed under the ‘nation branding’ macro category. The potential of the Catalonian sub-region turns out to be the most published category, with 50% of its volume or 2.14% of the significant sample. It is interesting to observe that 214 tweets, or 13.07%, out of the significant sample correspond to the Others / Unclassifiable category, leading us to believe that rather than being used for business purposes, Twitter is quite often being used by these individuals as a tool for chatting with close people abroad or for posting personal links to news or other information.

Graph 1: Total volume of Catalonia’s Public Servants and its Delegates Abroad across time.



Source: Author’s research.

It is interesting to see in the Graph 1 that while the volume of tweets among Public Servants decreases annually, and that of Delegates Abroad increases, in 2017 the phenomenon is the opposite. This is likely due to the fact that in the period previous to the independence referendum delegates abroad were more cautious in their Twitter use, since the information posted could be used in

potential legal proceedings (as has been the case with Catalonia's President Carles Puigdemont). (Jackson, 2017).

Table 3: Total Tweet Units among Catalonia's Public Servants and its Delegates Abroad, by

		Para-Diplomacy				Nation Branding						
		Convergent Diplomacy	Divergent Diplomacy	Proto-Diplomacy	Identity Diplomacy	Presence	Place	Potential	Pulse	People	Prerequisites	Others
2013	Public Servants	4	5	47	5	1	0	4	0	4	0	16
	Delegates Abroad	1	4	3	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	7
2014	Public Servants	1	5	42	3	0	0	2	0	0	1	21
	Delegates Abroad	0	0	11	3	0	2	0	0	0	0	28
2015	Public Servants	0	8	27	0	0	0	3	1	0	0	23
	Delegates Abroad	3	8	17	1	0	1	5	3	0	0	19
2016	Public Servants	0	5	23	5	0	0	9	4	1	1	28
	Delegates Abroad	2	5	21	6	0	1	5	4	0	1	30
2017	Public Servants	0	7	45	9	0	1	4	3	0	2	34
	Delegates Abroad	2	1	18	2	0	0	1	3	0	0	8
Total		13	48	254	34	1	5	35	18	6	5	214

Source: Author's research.

Table 3 shows the total tweet units for every single nature and sub-category, in each strata. As shown, out of the full range of data there are three noteworthy sub-categories: proto-diplomacy (under the category of para-diplomacy), potential (under the category of nation branding), and other / unclassifiable, representing the top three.

Proto-diplomacy represents 15.52% out of the total representative sample. As previously stated, those messages pertain to the idea of calling audience attention to the sub-region's independence. Such results may be expected, since the independence movement has gained strength in Catalonia since 2009, with a series of public consultations, protests, plebiscitary elections, and referendums.

Out of the four sub-categories of Para-Diplomacy, Proto-Diplomacy and Identity Diplomacy naturally collect more tweets since they are two ways of promoting national identity and interest in the sub-region when addressing foreign audiences, explaining who the Catalonian people are and what their hopes and dreams are. However, it is worth noting that that 0.79% of the total of the significant sample belongs to the 'Convergent Diplomacy' sub-category denominated, which is defined as messages that do not exhibit confrontation between the interests of the sub-national unit and the national unit. In this case, the 13 messages found across the 5-year sample are related to fairly non-controversial themes, such as public policies on global warming, globalization, immigration, terrorism, and –particularly in this case– pan-Europeism. However, while Catalonian Public Servants published 184 Proto-Diplomacy messages, the Delegates Abroad only published 70, almost 2.5 times less, which may be explained as a result of a bad instruction or training on how to use Twitter as a tool for para-diplomacy, especially if one keeps in mind the high value of the 'Others / Unclassifiable' category.

Out of the six sub-categories of 'Nation Branding', it might be expected that either 'Pulse' or 'Prerequisites' take the lead. In the case of Catalonia, 'Potential' gathers 50% of the category, or 2.14% out of the total of the significant sample, which leads us to think that the Delegates Abroad are focused on economic positioning and promoting investment opportunities in Catalonia, rather than its natural attributes or tourism.

As previously explained, 'Potential' refers to any message that promotes the economic and education opportunities the sub-region has to offer visitors, businessmen, and immigrants. Notwithstanding, it is curious to note once again that Public Servants lead that category in most of the stratas, with the exception of 2015.

After comparing the total units in the Para-Diplomatic and Nation Branding categories, it is obvious that efforts were centered in spreading the political message of independence rather than promoting the sub-region. Catalonia seems to have forgotten –or at least underrated– the potential of social media channels for promoting the sub-region, its people, land, nature, and culture, all aspects that certainly would be included in a properly developed digital strategy aiming to promote independence.

The 'Others / Unclassifiable' category stands out constantly as the second macro category with the most tweets. Messages classified under this group refer to any type of tweet that contains a chat or dialogue between any of the Public Servants or Delegates Abroad and another Twitter user, most of the time related to internal communications or private topics.

The size of this group of tweets (214 units, or 13.07% out of the significant sample) might reflect the efforts personally made by the users to embrace Twitter for their professional use, as the Generalitat has directed to its public servants to do:

"Public Service. It is our reason for being. Communication through social media must be as effective, or even more-so, than face-to-face communication, and must be more efficient and give better results without requiring many more resources. It is advisable to show a predisposition to listen at all times, and to help any citizen in everything possible, as well as to offer solutions to his/her doubts." (Biblioteca de Catalunya - Departamento de la Presidencia, 2011, p. 6)

However, it seems like Catalanian Government users -both, Public Servants and Delegates Abroad- have signed on to Twitter firstly to learn and experiment how to use the tool and what can be done on it, rather than after in-depth training on its strategic use for diplomatic purposes. That may explain the large amount of personal tweets.

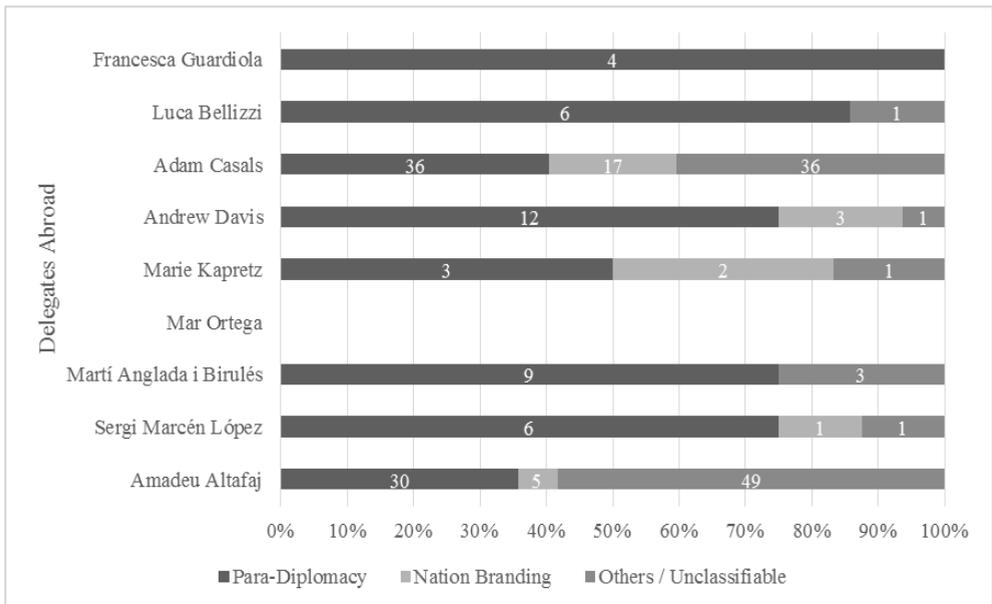
Two other interesting sub-samples are worth discussing. How some of Catalonia's leaders are using Twitter and how Catalonia's Delegates Abroad are doing so.

While the President of Catalonia, Carls Puigdemont (@KRLS on Twitter), reported 20 units out of the significant sample, only 3 of them belong to the 'International' category of geographic scope, and one to the 'Intermestic' group. By way of contrast, the sub-region's Foreign Minister, Raül Romeva (@raulromeva on Twitter) reported 6, all of them related to international or intermestic issues. Both these individuals opened their Twitter profiles in 2016.

Both these public servants do not really add a significant number of messages, especially in comparison to Joan María Piqué (@joanmariapique on Twitter) who has been acting as the Director of International Communications

since 2008, and who opened his Twitter account in 2012. Piqué is responsible for 932 units out of the 1,636 significant sample (56.97%). However, only 305 of Piqué’s messages address either international or intermestic topics, while 95 of Piqué’s total sample were coded under the category ‘Others / Unclassifiable’, once again highlighting the use of Twitter for private conversations between users or sharing news or information.

Graph 2: Comparative of Volume of Tweets under each Category between each Delegate Abroad.



Source: Author’s research.

Graph 2 is another visualization of the main problem in Catalonia’s use of Twitter for international relations or diplomatic purposes. Here it is possible to state that the small amount of total units published by each Delegate Abroad makes it almost impossible to make an in-depth analysis. However, we can see that in two of the oldest Twitter profiles (Amadeu Altafaj and Adam Casals) the proportion of messages under the ‘Others / Unclassifiable’ category overshadows the contents coded under Para-Diplomacy or Nation Branding categories, meaning once again that Twitter accounts were created most likely in order to test the platform before actually implementing any digital strategy, and that while there are some Delegates Abroad (such as Andrew Davis or Amadeu Altafaj) that use it in order to address topics belonging to all the

categories covered here, the main overall use of this social media channel remains focused on national audiences.

In summary, it is possible to say that in this particular case:

1) The use of Twitter by either Public Servants or Delegates Abroad is quite different, both in volume and topics covered.

2) Both types of users publish more messages related to national issues, even if their job positions are related to international affairs.

3) When observing the messages related to foreign or intermestic affairs, it is also a constant in both sub-groups that they use Twitter for personal purposes, such as personal conversations and chats with relatives or friends, especially among early adopters of the social platform.

4) No messages related to consular affairs were collected, which leads us to believe that Catalonian authorities do not use this platform for immediate help of nationals overseas.

5) Para-Diplomatic messages are the biggest category for Public Servants. This is an expected result. However, Others / Unclassifiable messages represents the biggest category for Delegates Abroad. As previously stated, this phenomenon might be explained due to the fact that the Delegates Abroad might either not have gained proper training in the strategic use of the platform, or are afraid of posting sensitive contents that could later be used against them in a potential trial for sedition or disobedience towards the Spanish Kingdom. The result here expected was to find more messages related to Nation Branding issues, however it seems there is no running campaign or public policy of promotion of the local characteristics of the sub-region, so these are not promoted on Twitter.

6) Proto-Diplomatic tweets make up the biggest sub-category, in both group –Public Servants and Delegates Abroad. While this is an expected result for the Public Servant group, it is a new discovery for Delegates Abroad, whom were most likely to tweet about the characteristics of the Catalonian sub-region.

7) When analyzing the sub-categories under Nation Branding, ‘Potential’ and ‘Pulse’ were expected to show high volumes, and this is indeed the case. Most tweets coded as “Potential” were related to economic issues, leaving

relatively little space for promoting Catalonia as a destiny for immigration, or the promotion of its post-graduate education, both topics that are important characteristics of this sub-region.

8) In general, it is evident that there is no strategy when it comes to the use of Twitter as a tool of para-diplomacy in the case of Catalonia. Rather, the data shows that while the Catalanian government promotes the use of this social media channel, the guideline provides little information about how to use it on a daily basis, especially for diplomatic purposes, which underlines a lack of training in the diplomatic corps.

CONCLUSIONS

This exploratory research focused on the use of Twitter as a tool to communicate either para-diplomatic or nation branding topics by the sub-region of Catalonia.

The main objective of this investigation was to identify, calculate, categorize, relate, and compare the messages sent out by the government of Catalonia in the last five years, so the results could reflect change over time.

In order to compare the 17 Twitter users observed, it was necessary to create two groups: Catalanian Central Government Public Servants (8 users), and Catalanian Delegates Abroad (9 users). In both groups there are real people managing the messages on a regular basis.

For sampling purposes, data was collected during a 3-week period prior to the week of the national holiday (the 'Diada', on September 11th), as well as the week itself, under the assumption that those weeks would represent the highest volume of nationalist messages and the promotion of Catalonia's nation brand.

In order to address the case, it was necessary to create a stratified random significant sample of tweets (1 637 units), out of the total of 16,813 tweets collected by R software, which later were coded analyzed using Nvivo software. The exact total of tweets for each year is explained in Table 2.

A manual coding classification of each message out of the significant sample used a book of categories designed specifically for the purpose of this investigation, as detailed in the Methodology section of this article.

Data shows that the use of Twitter is quite different in both groups observed. While both publish mainly messages related to national issues, Public Servants promote para-diplomatic topics, which is an expected result. However, it is strange to see that this situation also replicates in the Delegates Abroad group, which might have focused on pushing messages online related to the promotion of the Catalonian sub-region.

After observing the messages coded under the Nation Branding category, it is expected to find that most of them belong to the 'Potential' or 'Pulse' categories, since they are the easiest to promote in platforms like Twitter.

However, the interesting discovery of this research is that while there is a social media guideline for the Catalonian government agencies, most of its public servants, both locally and overseas, use Twitter mostly to chat with their families and friends rather than for business purposes, which leads one to think that further instruction or usage policies are required.

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