

# Twitch as a political communication tool: analysis of potential

## Twitch como herramienta de comunicación política: análisis de potencialidades

### *Twitch como ferramenta de comunicação política: análise de potencialidades*

**Núria Roca-Trenchs**, Universitat Internacional de Catalunya, Barcelona, Spain  
(nroca@uic.es)

**Alexandre López-Borrull**, Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, Barcelona, Spain  
(alopezbo@uoc.edu)

**Ferran Lalueza**, Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, Barcelona, Spain (flalueza@uoc.edu)

**ABSTRACT** | The digital platform ecosystem has a mix of new players, innovations, and trends. To this must be added an increase in political disaffection, polarization, and disinformation. Twitch was created to entertain; here, we study its use for political communication, positing whether it can reach specific age segments, such as young people. The study presents an exploratory analysis of the Twitch profiles of the main political parties of the Spanish Congress of Deputies, specifically, PSOE and VOX, the only ones with a presence on that network. Profiles of Spanish, European and international political representatives and parties are also explored to broaden the scope of the analysis. Among the advantages are modernity, loyalty capacity, the potential to reach new voters in times of polarization, and the possibility to monetize content to fund campaigns. Challenges include the need to experiment with new formats, the increase of politainment, the need to create own narratives, and the opportunity to create new channels or increase the presence in existing ones. Twitch can contribute to the rapprochement between the political class and the citizenry, especially in young segments, more distant from politics. Trying out new proposals and rhetoric of proximity, connecting directly and persuasively with the most elusive audience and breaking the most inoperative polarizations may be some of the benefits derived from using Twitch due to its characteristics: livestream hegemony, interaction, engagement, loyalty, low advertising saturation, and a young audience.

**KEYWORDS:** Twitch; political communication; social media; TikTok; Instagram; Twitter; youth; politainment.

#### HOW TO CITE

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**RESUMEN** | *El ecosistema de plataformas digitales tiene una mezcla de creación de nuevos actores, innovaciones y tendencias. A ello se debe añadir un incremento de la desafección política, la polarización y la desinformación. Twitch fue creada para entretener; aquí, se estudia su utilización para la comunicación política, planteando si puede llegar a segmentos de edad específicos, como los jóvenes. Se presenta un análisis exploratorio de los perfiles de Twitch de los principales partidos políticos del Congreso de los Diputados de España, específicamente el PSOE y VOX, los únicos con presencia en esa red. Asimismo, se exploran perfiles de representantes y partidos españoles, europeos e internacionales para ampliar el alcance del análisis. Entre las ventajas se cuenta la modernidad, la capacidad de fidelización, la potencialidad de llegar a nuevos votantes en momentos de polarización, y la posibilidad de monetizar los contenidos para financiar campañas. Como retos, se plantea la necesidad de experimentación con nuevos formatos, el aumento del politainment y la creación de narrativas propias, y se discute la oportunidad de crear nuevos canales o aumentar la presencia en los ya existentes. Twitch puede contribuir al acercamiento entre la clase política y la ciudadanía, sobre todo en segmentos jóvenes, más distantes de la política. Ensayar nuevas propuestas y retóricas de proximidad, conectar de forma directa y persuasiva y romper las polarizaciones más inoperantes pueden ser algunos de los beneficios dadas sus características: hegemonía del directo, interacción, compromiso, fidelización, baja saturación publicitaria y una audiencia joven.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Twitch; comunicación política; medios sociales; TikTok; Instagram; Twitter; juventud; politainment.

**RESUMO** | O ecossistema de plataformas digitais tem uma mistura de criação de novos atores, inovações e tendências. Também há que acrescentar o aumento da desinfecção política, polarização e desinformação. O Twitch foi criado para entreter e seu uso para comunicação política está sendo estudado, considerando se pode atingir segmentos etários específicos, como os jovens. O estudo apresenta uma análise exploratória dos perfis do Twitch dos principais partidos políticos do Congresso dos Deputados da Espanha, neste sentido, de PSOE e VOX, os únicos a ter um perfil nessa plataforma. Além disso, são explorados outros perfis de representantes políticos e partidos espanhóis, europeus e internacionais para ampliar o alcance da análise. Entre as vantagens, descreve-se a modernidade, a capacidade de fidelização, a potencialidade de chegar a novos eleitores em momentos de polarização, bem como a possibilidade de monetizar os conteúdos para financiar campanhas. Como desafios, propõe-se a necessidade de experimentação com novos formatos, o aumento do *politainment* e a criação de narrativas próprias, ao mesmo tempo a oportunidade de criar novos canais ou aumentar a presença nos já existentes. O Twitch pode contribuir à aproximação entre a classe política e a cidadania, sobretudo em segmentos jovens, que são mais distantes da política. Testar novas propostas e retóricas de proximidade, conectar-se de forma direta e persuasiva com o público mais esquivo e romper as polarizações mais inoperantes podem ser alguns dos benefícios do Twitch, por suas características: hegemonia do direto, interação, engajamento, fidelização, baixa saturação publicitária e um público jovem.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Twitch; comunicação política; mídia social; TikTok; Instagram; Twitter; juventude; politainment.

## INTRODUCTION

In addition to disseminating ideologies, values and agendas, political communicators now have to consider the desirability of using multiple digital platforms in a social context that has become increasingly complex due to the growing number of platforms and the generational differences between traditional and social media. Information ecosystems are becoming more complex due to the proliferation of disinformation, and thus digital platforms have become an additional setting for political communication: political actors have adapted to them, aware that social media allow them to reach an audience –young people– that would otherwise be inaccessible.

The use of Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter has been studied in works such as Campos-Domínguez (2017), Larsson (2021), and Medina Serrano et al. (2020) on the use of digital platforms in political communication. Twitch represents a new framework in which political actors can connect with this younger audience, who do not engage in politics because they feel it does not address the issues that concern them: employment, education, housing, and equality (Dirección General del INJUVE y Observatorio de la Juventud en España, 2020).

The role of Twitch is still relatively unexplored territory, with studies focusing on its possible use by public administrations to disseminate information (Kazanin, 2017), its potential as a strategic communication tool based on the existence of influencers and opinion makers (Wulf et al., 2020), the information overload in its chats (Nematzadeh et al., 2020), and livestreaming platforms as tools to attract the public and increase engagement (Yang and Kang, 2021) or for political messaging (Ruiz-Bravo et al., 2022).

Our research, which is exploratory in nature, examines the first incursions of some political parties into Twitch, focusing in particular on analyzing the channels created by mainstream political parties with members in the Spanish Congress of Deputies, in order to determine 1) whether Twitch can be considered as an additional tool for parties' political communication, and 2) what advantages Twitch has over more established social networks. We also analyze the accounts of European and international political actors and parties that are pioneers in exploring the political uses of Twitch. They were chosen because of their position, dominance, and abundant resources in areas of political communication.

This research breaks new ground in academic studies of the potential paradigm shift that Twitch represents, the new opportunities it can generate in political communication, and the possible growth of interest in politics among young people. Twitch is “new” in two ways: first, it is an innovation, something different that has its own value in political communication, so that a new message from a new actor

can change existing equilibria; and second, the immediacy and speed of streaming can enable new narratives that associate access to politics with fun and humor.

We provide a theoretical review of the main research on political disaffection, especially among young people; we identify Twitch as a tool to reach this most elusive of audiences more directly; and finally, we identify and give examples of the first political actors to use this platform.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Political disaffection: a challenge to communication**

Democratic countries face the challenge of overcoming their citizens' dissatisfaction with the government's management of public affairs and restoring the credibility of their political representatives (Castells, 2006; Enli, 2017). When the public does not feel politically represented, this distance affects voter behavior (Voogd and Dassonneville, 2020), reduces voter loyalty, generates a sense of disaffection, and makes their electoral choices more volatile (Chiaramonte & Emanuele, 2017; Dassonneville, 2012). Disaffection is understood as "the subjective feeling of powerlessness, cynicism, and lack of trust in the political process, politicians, and democratic institutions, but without questioning of the political regime" (Torcal & Montero, 2006, p. 7).

Authors such as Boulianne (2015) and Enli (2017) have shown that digital platforms can be an opportunity to empower citizens by setting up more deliberative formulas and methods that encourage participation, and our research will address whether Twitch has this potential to reach young people, in contrast to their distance from traditional mechanisms of participation.

### **Young people are disconnected from traditional media... and from politics?**

Citizens need relevant information in order to participate in decision making (Jungherr, 2016), to express their opinions on politics, or to ensure that they are adequately represented appropriately (Elenbaas et al., 2014). Mass media outlets played a fundamental role in the last century and established themselves up as important channels for information, including political information, but their influence has declined with the increasing consumption of news via mobile devices and digital platforms, where a large part of the public - young people - now select the content that most interests them most (Moeller et al., 2018). In most cases, this choice does not include the consumption of information related to politics, and thus young people end up knowing little about such matters (Kitanova, 2020; Sloam, 2018), to which we can add a lack of trust in political actors and a general loss of faith in politics (Torcal & Montero, 2006).

This reluctance to participate in formal political processes (voting, joining a party, etc.) or even in alternative forms of political engagement, is known as political disconnection. The fact that this segment of the electorate feels disconnected from traditional politics (Mycock and Tonge, 2012) has consequences for electoral participation in elections: their voting intentions are more inconsistent and they tend to abstain (Söderlund, 2008). In Spain, according to the *Informe de Juventud en España* (Dirección General del INJUVE y Observatorio de la Juventud en España, 2020), only 40% of young people claim to be interested in politics.

However, a renewal process of renewal is taking place in the political sphere, where young citizens will have new opportunities (Pickard, 2019) for mobilization and activism (calls for action, protests, demonstrations, etc.). Thus, political representatives understand the need to focus their efforts on this audience and to apply strategies that will lead them to regain their interest in politics: identification with a party, volunteering, participation in elections, etc., all factors that can contribute to facilitating democratic discourse and improving the quality of a democracy. In fact, this disengagement from politics among young people is less pronounced in countries with a more established democratic tradition (Kitanova, 2020).

### **Twitch: an opportunity to connect with young people?**

Wulf and colleagues (2018) define Twitch as a tool for leisure and entertainment. It is used to livestream and share online video games, and is the most popular streaming platform among young people: 34% of its users are between 25 and 34 years old, and 29% are between 18 and 24 years old. According to Statista (2021), it is the leading streaming platform in Spain with a share of 56%, well ahead of YouTube Gaming, Facebook Gaming, and SteamTV, and 88 minutes of use per day in Spain (Statista, 2023).

The importance of Twitch as a tool with potential to be explored in political communication, and for reaching young people, stems from the way it encourages and facilitates interaction between streamers and their audiences, allowing for real-time conversations, unlike platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, or Instagram, where interaction is generally delayed, or where no real interaction is perceived (Beriain et al., 2020). In livestreaming, viewers feel they are heard and free to express themselves, creating a new form of political participation and activism. Gutiérrez Lozano and Cuartero (2020) highlight that “the rise of Twitch is part of a change in the audiovisual consumption habits of young people worldwide, and therefore also in the youth of young people in Spain” (p. 171).

Like most digital platforms, Twitch is constantly evolving, and political representatives are beginning to have a presence there in order to connect with young people. This allows them to reach their most elusive target audience and

minimize the effort required to connect with them, as they are concentrated in a single environment, unlike a rally, a speech, or other in-person political events, or other platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or TikTok. Thus, political discussion is facilitated in an environment that is itself apolitical or uninterested in politics (Iranzo-Cabrera & Casero-Ripollés, 2023; Ruiz-Bravo et al., 2022). Finally, it provides interaction without gatekeepers, and makes political topics more appealing by mixing them with entertainment. This requires political representatives to understand the predominantly audiovisual language of Twitch (Gutiérrez Lozano & Cuartero (2020).

## **METHODOLOGY**

We conducted an exploratory analysis of the Twitch profiles of the main political parties in the Spanish Congress of Deputies. This is an appropriate method for topics that have not yet been widely studied, and requires some flexibility in the use of techniques to explore the essential aspects of the object of study. We analyzed the profiles of the PSOE and Vox, which were the only ones on Twitch at the time of the analysis (from their creation in September and February 2021, respectively, until December 2022). We also studied other profiles of Spanish, European, and international political representatives and parties in order to broaden the scope of our analysis and obtain a more accurate picture of the use of Twitch is used. This international perspective favours the contextualization and understanding of communication practices that tend to become homogeneous (Hallin & Mancini, 2004).

We collected data manually, due to the ephemeral nature of broadcasts, and considered the main value indicators of Twitch: the date streaming started; the number of livestreams; whether other media reported on the streamed content; the profile description (bio), profile picture, and profile banner; and the use of the schedule to announce streams. We also analyzed the types of broadcasts, their duration, the number of views, and the identity of the person livestreaming. These variables are relevant because they provide valuable clues to key issues: the level of commitment according to the number of broadcasts, the existence of a strategic approach to scheduled broadcast announcements, the impact in terms of number of views and media response, and so on.

Comparative analysis proved useful in identifying similarities and differences in how the way parties use Twitch, the number of interventions, and the content streamed content. Many authors emphasize the importance of comparative research (Dahl, 1989; Lijphart, 1971; Sartori, 1970; Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Kratzke, 2017), as it allows us to clarify how the investigated elements under study are similar or different, even if they operate in the same territory.

In line with the limitations inherent to the study of ephemeral content broadcast on social media (Bainotti et al., 2021), especially on Twitch, where live content dominates, we discarded the option of focusing the study only on descriptive content analysis..

## **ANALYSIS**

### **A review of political use in Spain**

Vox created its profile in February 2021 and had 13,210 followers by 18 December 18, 2022; the PSOE created its profile in September 2021, and in the analysed period, acquired 435 followers in the period analyzed (12,775 fewer than Vox). Both parties have shown interest in having a presence on the platform, but they use it in different ways.

Their profile pictures are the party logos. Vox's banner image is a generic image of a rally, while the PSOE's banner shows the slogan *Avanzamos* (Let's move forward).

Under the About tab, Vox (n.d.) defines its presence as "The official Vox channel on Twitch.". Meanwhile, the PSOE's presentation welcomed visitors to its official channel on Twitch<sup>1</sup> and added links to the other platforms where the party is present: Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and Facebook.

Under Schedule, Vox presents the date and time of upcoming streams, describes the type of activity, and gives the name of the person who will speak. The PSOE does not use this tab.

Under Videos, Vox caches broadcast videos and organizes them into the following categories: Highlights and Recent Uploads, Popular Clips, Press Conferences, and All Videos. Some content can be viewed, but most broadcasts are not archived. Although the PSOE does not archive its broadcasts, we can highlight one on the abolition of prostitution, with the participation of Andrea Fernández, Amelia Tiganus, and Melissa Farley.

Spanish political parties have not yet studied a content strategy for Twitch: only two of the main parties have created a profile, and most of their publications are press conferences, interventions in the Congress of Deputies, etc.; content that is not aimed at young people.

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1. Since this paper was written the PSOE channel has been closed down, so its content is paraphrased, and we are unable to provide citation links.

Among the non-parliamentary parties, Más Madrid was the first to create a channel. In December 2020, the spokesperson of the Madrid City Council, Rita Maestre, and the regional deputy and senator, Eduardo Rubiño, activated the channel in a live event from Usera, where they discussed LGBTphobia.

The party describes its channel, which has over 1568 followers, as “Chats, speeches, news. Building a fairer, greener, more feminist Madrid” (Más Madrid, n.d.). Its intention was for its political representatives to discuss current topics of interest, such as climate change, animal rights, feminism, and gender violence, although by 18 December 18, 2022, it had gone nine months without broadcasting.

Compromís created its Twitch channel in March 2021, and had 468 followers, but by 18 December 18, 2022, it appeared to be inactive.

Other political figures who have created profiles, such as Íñigo Errejón, a Más País deputy, in January 2021, which is still active and answers questions from his more than 13,000 followers.

The PSOE deputy Omar Anguita has also has a Twitch profile, with almost 400 followers, which is still active. The PSOE deputy Javi López is also present, although he has only 20 followers and has not broadcast for more than two years. In Catalonia, Demòcrates created its channel in 2021, although as of 18 December 18, 2022, it had only 25 followers and had not been active for eight months.



**Image 1. Clip of Íñigo Errejón**

Source: Screenshot from a livestream on Íñigo Errejón's Twitch profile ([www.twitch.tv/ierrejón](http://www.twitch.tv/ierrejón)).



## Interaction with journalists and streamers

Internationally, political representatives have also shown interest in Twitch, either by creating their own profiles or by broadcasting replays of other streamers' content. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (AOC), a Democratic member of the US Congress, created a Twitch profile in March 2020, which had 950,980 followers as of 14 November 14, 2022, and on which she has played various games. Her use of the channel has been very irregular, with her last livestream taking place over two years ago.

On Twitch, AOC combines politics with gameplay and fun, in line with the platform's audience and adapting to its relaxed and informal, entertainment-oriented approach, successfully conveying a more relatable image. She has also appeared as a guest on many shows, playing the video game *Among Us* and answering other players' questions from other players. During the US presidential election campaign in November 2020, Ocasio-Cortez explained to her supporters how to exercise their right to vote.

In the United States, it was seen as significant that Twitch cancelled the profile of the Republican former president Donald Trump for promoting hate speech and inciting violence. The current president, Joe Biden, does not have a Twitch profile and has not participated in any events. However, a profile called *VoteJoe* was created, where Biden voters could promote his candidacy: they could donate, join the campaign, and access the platforms where the campaign was present.

In Spain, Pablo Iglesias (Unidas Podemos), the former deputy prime minister, gave an interview to the journalist Gregori Marugan on *FurorTV* in 2021, and he was also interviewed by the streamer Yuste, whose content is mainly focused on esports (*League of Legends*), although he has also talked about media manipulation.

In France, the then prime minister Jean Castex was interviewed on the Twitch channel of journalist Samuel Étienne, while Anne Hidalgo, mayor of Paris and presidential candidate for the Socialist Party in the 2022 elections, was interviewed on the Twitch channel of *FranceTV*.

In Italy, Giuseppe Conte, ex-prime minister and president of the Five Star Movement, does not have his own Twitch profile, but has accepted invitations from professional streamers such as Ivan Grieco for the 2022 election campaign.

The MEPs Tiem Wolk and Julia Reda debated copyright law on Twitch with the streamers P4wnyhof and Mantrousse on Twitch while playing *Mario Kart 8 Deluxe*. Former New Zealand prime minister Jacinda Arden does not have her own channel, but joined a livestream with Broxh, a carpenter who shows his work on Twitch.

## DISCUSSION

With an exploratory analysis, we observe that both the Spanish parliamentary parties with Twitch channels -PSOE and Vox- and the political actors with profiles on the platform or appearing on the channels of streamers and journalists use Twitch in an irregular and experimental way. A content strategy would allow them to increase their influence and facilitate political discussion (Iranzo-Cabrera & Casero-Ripollés, 2023) within the community they hope to address, especially the young people who find politics less interesting (Kitanova, 2020; Mycock and Tonge, 2012; Söderlund, 2008), 40% of the cohort in Spain according to the *Informe de Juventud en España* (Dirección General del INJUVE y Observatorio de la Juventud en España, 2020).

Our analysis shows that political actors do not know how to use Twitch - as they use it very little and without a specific strategy -as explained in Gutiérrez Lozano and Cuartero (2020); in fact, this is one of the main challenges to be faced in political communication on digital platforms, which, according to Iranzo-Cabrera and Casero-Ripollés (2023), should focus on self-monitoring, mediated authenticity, and the promotion of connective democracy.

According to these studies and based on our analysis, we present the competitive advantages that Twitch can offer compared to other platforms, thanks to its characteristics: the dominance of live content, constant interaction with the community, very high engagement, audience loyalty, low advertising saturation, and a young audience (IAB Spain, 2022).

### **Possible competitive advantages compared to other social media**

#### *Modernity*

The use of more innovative social media is perceived as technological mastery and connotes the value of modernity. Candidates or parties who use these new tools with an awareness of the added value they provide are perceived as being in touch with the most relevant aspects of modern life.

Things that happen on Twitch can easily become news very easily, as its experimental nature and its novelty attracts conventional media. Traditional media are paying attention to Twitch and generating content on the platform, such as the rights to French Ligue 1 football (Leo Messi's first match); streamed commentaries by the streaming commentary of former coach of the Spanish national team coach Luís Enrique during the Qatar World Cup; the constant media visibility of the streamer Ibai Llanos; the Kings League; and the special program with 25 Spanish and 100 global content creators to cover the Qatar World Cup, with the participation of AuronPlay and El Rubius.

This has led to a debate about whether the media are missing an opportunity to lead the modernization of the sector, based on the use of new digital channels that could contribute to improving their communication with their audiences. Ibai Llanos interviewed Leo Messi on his arrival in Paris following his move to PSG. The interview was granted to a content creator on a digital platform, rather than a journalist or a traditional media outlet.

### *Loyalty*

The use of digital platforms in political communication usually responds to the desire for two-way communication, in which the political class does not just send a message, but facilitates a conversation, creating new communicative relationships (Graham et al., 2017).

They discuss topics of interest to their audience and acknowledge their needs, making them feel part of a group, and thus increasing audience loyalty. Twitch makes it easy to segment the audience into communities, partly because most users are young people, but also because it allows for the creation of more specific channels where a wide range of topics can be discussed.

Here, political representatives can find their most reluctant target audience gathered on a single platform. Instead of trying to attract young people to specific events, they can address them directly in the environment where many of them are already present.

### *The tie-breakers*

According to García Escribano and colleagues (2021), we are witnessing increasing polarization in Western liberal democracies, as exemplified by the 2020 US elections, the Brexit referendum in the United Kingdom, and the Catalan referendum of 1 October 2017. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated this polarization and highlighted how social media can become a source of toxic disinformation (Guerrero-Solé & Philippe, 2020).

These scenarios can have unpredictable consequences. It becomes almost unthinkable that voters would switch from one large bloc to another; in this context, political communication focuses on the collectives that traditionally abstain from voting, and it becomes clear that the new generations of young voters can make a decisive difference.

The use of platforms with a massive youth presence of young people can help create a climate of opinion that mobilizes new voters to exercise their right to vote. Twitch would meet the requirements for hosting campaigns aimed at this segment of the electorate, as it is an environment where many young people

congregate, and many of its users do not consume other media, making them immune to broader campaigns.

### *Campaign funding*

Twitch's monetization potential of Twitch is creating a number of streaming stars who can make a lot of money from their content. Johnson and Woodcock (2019) examine the different ways Twitch monetises the experience and identify seven - subscriptions, donations and cheering, advertising, sponsorship, competitions and goals, unpredictable rewards for viewers, and channel games - and conclude that lax regulation encourages innovation in finding new forms of funding.

Meanwhile, political parties' budgets are getting tighter, and there are stricter regulations on their presence and advertising on social media, with greater demands for transparency. The use of a network that allows donations, paid monthly paid subscriptions, the inclusion of advertising, and the sale of merchandise opens up new possibilities that could be a good option for specific campaigns or as an alternative to microcredits, as Podemos previously used by Podemos to finance the electoral campaign of Pablo Iglesias in Madrid ("Podemos recauda...", 2021).

## **The challenges of Twitch for political communication**

### *Need for experimentation, rehearsal and errors*

The emergence of a new social platform poses a challenge (message, audience, debate, potential for participation potential, etc.) from the perspective of academic research and for the practice of political communication.

Candidates and parties use social media to communicate more directly with voters, create a sense of community, establish new channels for debate, and improve their public image (Enli & Skogerbø, 2013). However, they are not always able to connect with their audiences, and their use ends up being superficial (Graham et al., 2017), squandering the potential for dialogue of these platforms for dialogue.

### *More politainment, new agoras*

The Internet offers greater access to and dissemination of information or promotional messages, as well as new entertainment options. For this reason, political actors consider the communication strategies of politainment (Berrocal-Gonzalo et al., 2017), hoping to go viral, especially during election periods, when more informal content is introduced to connect more directly with the audience. In this way, political journalism is used for infotainment, with accounts such as Emilio Doménech, "Nanísimo", and his innovative approach to monitoring the 2020 US election campaign. In this case, the Twitch content has also been transferred to YouTube, with the possibility of further optimization. Some politicians and parties have already created profiles or participated in events via Twitch, and Twitter profiles such as "El orden mundial" have also moved some of their content to Twitch.

### *Small fish in a big pond*

In political communication and in the context of the perpetual campaign (Blumenthal, 1980), when a new platform is launched, the first question is always whether it will be sustainable. This means deciding what human and financial resources will be devoted to learning how to use the new tool to publish content. The debate focuses on whether, with an election looming, there is time to explore and commit to creating your own content and channels, or whether it is better to seek a presence on these media through channels that other people and groups have already established.

Managers have more ability to control over their presence and can take better advantage of the platform by creating their own channels and content. In a medium-term plan, while the party's or politician's new channels are being developed, their presence can have a test run in the form of an interview or a shared experience (such as playing a video game) with an established journalist or streamer, who in turn needs to weigh up how such an association will affect his or her reputation.

### *In search of their own story*

The storytelling strategies used by political actors to evoke voter emotion and engagement have changed with the emergence of many new digital platforms. The construction of political communication messages, which aim to persuade their audience, must adapt to the usage rules of each platform, creating new narratives that are different from how politicians have traditionally communicated with and influenced the public.

Currently, digital strategies are being tested with content designed exclusively for online consumption, enhancing the audiovisual and multiplatform aspects. Twitch represents a major challenge due to its relative newness and the consequent lack of knowledge about how it works, and because it appeals to a collective - young people - whose loyalty is hard to win, leading to the need to adapt content to their specific language.

### *Anti-system / alternative parties*

The state of politics in Spain, marked by an economic crisis and a largely self-inflicted loss of credibility of the traditional political parties largely of their own making, has led to the emergence of new political options, both on the left (Podemos) and on the radical far right (Vox), which have grown rapidly thanks to a very effective, disruptive and uninhibited use of social media. Several studies have examined Vox's skillful handling of its Instagram presence (Aladro and Requeijo, 2020), its intensive use of social media (Castro Martínez and Díaz Morrilla, 2021), and even its use of disinformation (Díez-Garrido et al., 2021). Podemos has also been studied, from its discourse on social media (Molpeceres Arnáiz, 2016) and its

use of Twitter (Marcos-García, 2017) to the use of Facebook is used by its citizens' assemblies (Rodríguez-Fidalgo et al., 2017).

These studies show how social media can be used skillfully and efficiently to overcome the obstacles faced by newly created parties, which are less well-known to the general public and have less presence in traditional media. The challenge for Twitch is to replicate this model while maintaining a balance between freedom of expression and the need to restrict online messaging that strays into hate speech and disinformation. It is important to remember that the policing and curation of content on mainstream social networks (Twitter and TikTok) has led to the creation of minority social networks with more radical ideas and more polarizing hate speech, as seen in certain Telegram groups and profiles on Parler and Grab. This balance has recently led Twitter to change its regulations, after abandoning the European Code of Best Practices (European Commission, 2022), which focuses on content monitoring content. This is undoubtedly a perfect example of the validity of a regulatory approach to controlling hate speech.

## CONCLUSIONS

Platforms such as Twitch can help bring the political class and the general public closer together, presenting candidates and parties as more human and relatable figures, who listen and are transparent in their discourse and decision-making; at the same time, they can facilitate social engagement and strengthen the sense of community. The example of this platform could be a recommended practice, as long as the content transmitted content is adapted to the specific characteristics of this social medium and the profile of its users. Testing new options and rhetorics of proximity, connecting directly and convincingly with the most elusive audiences, and breaking with the most problematic polarizations could be some of the advantages of using Twitch, thanks to its characteristics: the dominance of live content, interaction, engagement, loyalty, low advertising saturation, and a young audience.

For the first of these objectives, we have seen that political actors and parties are already exploring Twitch as a tool for political communication, although few parties or representatives have recognized its potential or committed to its transformative power to reach a younger public: only two of the parties represented in the Congress of Deputies, the PSOE and Vox, have Twitch channels, and they use them only sporadically. Vox is the party that keeps its channel more active, but neither of the two uses this platform to experiment with content to attract the attention of a young audience.

As for the second goal, given that for a growing percentage of young people Twitch has become a powerful option for leisure and access to information for a

growing percentage of young people, this opens up opportunities to study new formulas for communication and challenges political actors to connect more directly with young people. Finally, political disaffection is not an irreversible phenomenon, but can be characterized as changeable (Megías and Moreno, 2022).

The above-mentioned lack of interest of young people in political affairs, mentioned above, contrasts with the impact of such affairs on their everyday lives, and indeed on the future of democratic societies, since the legitimacy of political representatives is based on the votes that come from an engaged public sphere that encourages dialogue and participation. However, it can be seen that the few political representatives present on Twitch do not use the platform to create specific content for a young audience.

In the future, the new experiences that emerge should be carefully studied in order to establish correlations between a presence on this platform and the capture of the youth vote, but also to identify bad practices that take advantage of scarce regulations to transmit unacceptable messages (hate speech), circumvent campaign finance rules on election financing, or contribute to disinformation. Combining effective communication with ethical values - along the persuasive lines of persuasion discussed in Rodríguez Andrés (2021) - is quite a challenge in this environment.

The exploratory nature of our research makes it useful for future studies, and it offers recommendations and guidelines for a deeper look into the use of Twitch in political communication. Future research could propose case studies that examine whether political actors adapt to the characteristics of the platform in order to connect with young people.

It would also be interesting to study the possible use of Twitch by far-right parties in different countries to attract the attention of younger audiences, who are easier to manipulate due to their lack of knowledge of political knowledge. In this area, there are already enough studies beginning to be available that show how the far right uses TikTok (Castro Martínez and Díaz Morilla, 2021) and its relationship with new messages (very different from the status quo) and new narratives on the networks most used by young people (Barragán Manjón and Rivas Otero, 2022). A new platform for a youth cohort not involved in politics is undoubtedly a potential goldmine of votes and influence for new parties with less presence in traditional media, with the possibility of more politically incorrect messages.

Technological advances will most likely improve the methodological analysis of each dimension of Twitch, allowing for a deeper and more transversal understanding of the platform. Considering that this topic is still understudied, the usefulness of this research stems from the importance of communication on diverse but complementary platforms (Pallarés-Navarro & Zugasti, 2022), hence the importance of comparative research.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**NÚRIA ROCA-TRENCHS**, holds a degree in Philosophy (UAB) and in Audiovisual Communication (UOC) and a Ph.D. in Journalism and Communication Sciences (UAB). Professor of the Department of Communication Sciences at the Universitat Internacional de Catalunya. Her research interests focus on political communication. She is part of the consolidated research group Audio-visual-textual Narrative Identity Analysis (AINA, by its Spanish acronym) of the UIC.

 <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9389-5098>

**ALEXANDRE LÓPEZ-BORRULL**, associate professor of Information and Communication Science Studies at the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (UOC), Ph.D. in Chemistry (UAB), he also holds a degree in Documentation (UOC). Director of the Information and Documentation degree at the latter university. His research interests focus on disinformation, social media, and open science. He is part of the UOC Learning, Media and Entertainment (GAME, by its Catalan acronym) research group.

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1609-2088>

**FERRAN LALUEZA**, holds a degree in Information Sciences from UAB and a Ph.D. in Journalism from UPF, and is a senior lecturer in Communication and Social Media at UOC. He is the director of the academic journal *COMeIN. Revista de los Estudios de Ciencias de la Información y de la Comunicación*, and is a member of the recognized consolidated research group GAME. He is currently involved in the eHealthLit4Teen research project (2022-2025), funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation.

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7010-9795>