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Framing EU trade policy online: the case of @NoAITTIP on Twitter

Abstract

Since the argumentative turn in EU studies, research has shown that civil society activists can challenge frames promoted by EU institutions and incumbent groups, and influence public opinion in the EU. However, most studies of civil society mobilisation on EU issues have focused on the vertical framing of issues from Brussels to national capitals, rarely analysing mobilisation beyond Brussels. This article builds upon ongoing research on Spanish civil society activism on the TTIP (Bouza & Oleart, 2018) and framing EU issues on Twitter (Bouza & Tuñón, 2018), contributing to the study of the role of national activists in the horizontal translation of EU-wide mobilisation to national publics. We argue that national actors play an influential role in the discursive struggle to define ‘Europe’ and the EU in the (national) public spheres (Díez Medrano, 2003). Building on our previous analysis of national activism on TTIP in Spain, we analyse whether activists have engaged in a process of frame bridging (Snow *et al.*, 1986), in order to expand the mobilisation against TTIP towards new issues and constituencies relating to the broader trade strategy of the EU. The present research addresses the role of the Spanish anti-TTIP social movement in the emergence, circulation and bridging of critical frames on the TTIP negotiations in the Spanish Twitter sphere. The article combines quantitative and qualitative methods –network analysis and framing analysis– in order to analyse the role of the @NoAITTIP network in the building and diffusion of frames challenging the EU institutions discourse on trade in the Spanish context.

Keywords

Social movements, framing, social media, Twitter, TTIP, European Union, #NoAITTIP.

1. Uses and functions of Twitter in political discourse by EU focused social movements

Government communication and social movements’ campaigns can no longer be understood without the use of what are possibly the most successful communication tools of the present and the future: social media (Bimber, 2014; López-Meri, Marcos-García & Casero-Ripollés, 2017). In fact, social media seems to be the most effective tools when interacting with younger audiences because of its ability to reduce the psychological and geographical barriers with institutions. Among social media institutions, politicians and academics have identified one of these media as the ideal venture for political debate: Twitter.

The last decade has witnessed the proliferation of so-called online social media as customary and decisive instruments for content production and message transmission between senders and receivers (Duggan, 2015; or Sloan & Quan-Haase, 2016). While Twitter is still far from overthrowing Facebook as the most used social network globally (Duggan, 2015), its features have made it the preferred social network for debate, political communication and for social scientific research on these fields, as well (Steward, 2017; Campos-Domínguez, 2017; López-Meri, Marcos-García & Casero-Ripollés, 2017).

In the field of political communication, a social media such as Twitter can be used for different functions. The literature has pointed to different roles in electoral campaigns: strategic communication by parties and candidates (Parmelee & Bichard, 2012); campaign information and dissemination of political discourse (Jackson & Lilleker, 2011); promotion of voter participation and mobilization (Gainous & Wagner, 2014); or promotion and self-reference in relation to the campaign itself (Jivkova-Semova, Requejo-Rey & Padilla-Castillo, 2017).

However, the literature is not unanimous about the contribution of Twitter to effective interaction between political actors and citizens (Alonso-Muñoz, Miquel-Segarra & Casero-Ripollés, 2016). Some researchers even maintain that interactions are more addressed to journalists than to citizens (Graham, Jackson & Broersma, 2014), since Twitter is the most relevant social network among the political and journalistic actors (Jivkova-Semova *et al.*, 2017), as it provides an “informative component that gives it a lot of value in terms of electoral political strategy” (Rodríguez-Andrés & Ureña-Uceda, 2011).

A use of Twitter that should not be neglected is the personalization or focus of discourse (mainly) on the issuing individual far above the content of the message. Precisely in some cases political communicators use Twitter to share details of their private lives (Parmelee & Bichard, 2012; Veerger, Hermans & Sams, 2013), in an attempt to humanize themselves before their audiences (Jackson & Lilleker, 2011; or Bentivegna, 2015), by means of an informal tone (Lopez-Meri, 2016) or using humour (Jivkova-Semova *et al.*, 2017), in a practice whose extension, frequency and effectiveness also depends on the geographic scope of application (Scherpereel, Wohlgemuth & Schmelzinger, 2016, or López-Meri, Marcos-García & Casero-Ripollés, 2017).

The efficiency of European communication has been (lately) questioned by different academics (see Papagiannenas, 2017; Tuñón, 2017; De Wilde, Michailidou & Trenz, 2015; Barisione & Michailidou, 2017; or Caiani & Guerra, 2017). These critics outline that the EU's failure at institutional communication shows that European political communication requires a profound reform to address issues such as: the creation of a European public sphere, the EU identity crisis, crucial campaign issues (Brexit or TTIP among others), the challenge of the Euro myths (now disinformation or fake news), bottom-up communication, or the branding of the EU.

Specifically Ruiz Soler (2018) outlines that there is a striking shortage of empirical studies addressing the European strategies in social media. Indeed, Twitter-based studies on the European Union have been conducted but only at the national levels or with reference to specific national topics: Austrian Twitter public sphere (Ausserhofer & Maireder, 2013); German discussion of #aufschrei (outcry) (Maireder & Schlögl, 2014); or the Norwegian Twittersphere (Bruns & Enli, 2018). Conversely, only few studies have addressed questions of the European Twittersphere transcending from the national lens (Hänksa & Bauchowitz, 2018; or Barisione & Ceron, 2017).

Beyond the possibilities (technical and theoretical) that the aforementioned social media offers, more needs to be known about their use by social movements when engaging in collective action on and framing EU affairs. In that sense, there is already a considerable volume of research on: Twitter and the unexpected political change processes (led by social and/or protest movements) through discussions generated from a specific hashtag and use

this social network for its organization and communication, as happened in: the revolts in Iran (Rahimi, 2011); Egypt (Papacharissi & Oliveira, 2012); the Arab Spring (Castells 2012; Chaudhry, 2014); the movement Indignados (Peña López, Congosto & Aragón, 2014) or Occupy Wall Street and others (Theocharis *et al.*, 2015).

Research has shown that social media contributes to restructuring power relations by empowering civil society and political actors traditionally less involved in EU politics and by enhancing the politicization and contestation of EU issues (Barisione & Michailidou, 2017). Some of the existing research associates critical discussion on social media with the politicization of the issue by social movements (see Barisione & Michailidou, 2017 on austerity protest, Ruiz Soler, 2018 for the case of TTIP). However, this research focuses more on the discussions on social media as a digital movement (Barisione & Michailidou, 2017) and the networks that structure the discussion (Ruiz Soler, 2018), rather than on the role of social movement activists and organisations in the online discussion. As a result, despite the growing interest for social media and European social movements discussing the EU, we still know relatively little about the way in which social movements frame the EU in social media. Therefore, the present research addresses the role of the Spanish anti-TTIP social movement in the emergence, circulation and bridging of critical frames on the TTIP negotiations in the Spanish Twitter sphere.

2. Transnational communication and political discourse in the European Union: frame bridging by social movements

While different academics have analysed political discourse in social media such as Twitter (Eom *et al.*, 2015; Kreiss, 2016; Larsson & Kalsnes, 2014), we intend to translate this analysis into activism and European transnational communication. In fact, along with the information that the media and the national governments of the member states publish on European issues, the EU itself has a duty to communicate, through its various forums, to publicize its actions, among which online formulas are presented today as crucial, so that political actors can connect with citizens and involve audiences (Campos-Domínguez, 2017; López-Meri, Marcos-García & Casero-Ripollés, 2017; among others).

While transnational approaches to the field of public relations and organizational communication or government information are not abundant, some conceptual perspectives such as branding, ‘reputation’ or ‘symmetric communication’ (Canel & Sanders, 2012, p. 93) are important tools in the search for alternatives to the current European institutional communication policies. That is why applying the milestones for understanding strategic communication provided by different theoretical approaches is a challenge that European communication must address (Coger, 2006).

The latest European crises (euro, refugees and Brexit), have shown the failure (among others) of the EU’s communication policy. That is why the sphere of institutional communication at supranational governmental level is currently at a turning point. Crises could be an opportunity for EU institutions to work on customized messages adapted for distribution, reception and impact on new characteristics of the audiences to and making room for emerging technological methodologies. But, on the other hand, the communication void left by the EU institutions has somehow been filled by actors such as critical social movements, increasingly Europeanised national quality media (Statham, 2008) and more recently populist or extreme right parties contesting the EU (Caiani & Guerra, 2017). In this article we focus on a good example of the first type of actors, the “No al TTIP” movement in Spain, part of the broader movement against the EU-USA trade and investment Treaty. This case study is a particularly relevant contribution to the literature on the EU communication struggle, since it shows a clear struggle between activists and EU officials to frame the negotiations either as a way of deconstructing European social stands by the former or a contribution to ruling globalisation by the latter. Interestingly and unlike the case of the far-

right populist challengers the struggle between these movements and the EU institutions is agonistic rather than antagonistic (Oleart & Bouza, 2018).

In practice, some of the factors that academics of European communication have been pointing as impediment to the homogenization of the European message have been: the lack of hybridization of communication in European public policies; the multiplicity of speakers and spokespersons disseminating different messages but suffering from a lack of common strategy and suffering from inter-institutional competence (Papagiannenas, 2017; or Tuñón, 2017).

In this article we focus on the way in which social movements frame European political issues in Twitter. The framing perspective analyses how issues are constructed discursively in the public sphere (Gamson, 2004). Issues can be discussed in different ways, and actors strategically define issues in particular ways. As Pan and Kosicki argue (2005, p. 177), framing “means adopting an interpretive framework for thinking about a political object,” and agents have an interest in defining the terms and interpretive frameworks to be used when discussing an issue. In terms of identifying frames, a “frame repeatedly invokes the same objects and traits, using identical or synonymous words and symbols in a series of similar communications that are concentrated in time” (Entman *et al.*, 2009, p. 177).

The frames put forward by activists do not operate in a vacuum, but rather in the public sphere where they compete with other frames, and often tap on the existing cultural resources of a community (Entman *et al.*, 2009, p. 177). The social movements literature has heavily dealt with the framing of issues by social movements, and has mobilised the concept of ‘collective action frames,’ which, according to Benford and Snow (2000, p. 614), are “action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate the activities and campaigns of a social movement organisation” (see Benford & Snow 2000, p. 614). Collective action frames put forward by social movements aim at mobilizing citizens for or against a particular issue. From this perspective, activists strategically frame issues to give a meaning to issues to trigger a reaction from citizens at large. We therefore conceive framing as a strategic action “to propose and seek to mobilise consensus” (Fligstein & McAdam, 2012, p. 22).

Given that national organisations tend to concentrate on the national political arena rather than the EU level one (Karamichas, 2007; Liebert, 2011; Poloni–Staudinger, 2008), social movements working on EU affairs are required to frame EU issues coherently with the national political dynamics. This is in line with the work of Díez Medrano (2003), who argues that the framing of Europe depends to a large extent on how ‘Europe’ is discussed at the national level, given that the political socialisation of citizens tends to happen at the national rather than European level. In Spain, the contestation and salience of EU affairs has been historically very low, but this has started to change, illustrated by the strong European dimension of the Indignados movement in 2011 and the Spanish campaign against TTIP (see Bouza & Oleart 2018). The difficulties for social movements to introduce EU issues in the national arenas can be solved through frame bridging, one of the frame alignment types introduced by Snow *et al.* (1986). Frame bridging refers to “the linkage of two or more ideologically congruent but structurally unconnected frames regarding a particular issue or problem” (Snow *et al.*, 1986, p. 467). Framing is a relational process, and actors can strategically frame issues in such a way that they are more likely to have resonance in a particular community.

Our theoretical ambition is to bridge the literature on transnational communication and political discourse in social media in the EU with the literature on framing and social movements, which we understand as complementary.

3. Online Social Research: Ethnographies, framing and network analysis

Within the framework of framing analysis, the development of new online research methodologies has led to the reconsideration of some classical research techniques. Indeed,

new research techniques involve the transfer of several of the classical techniques to the most modern virtual or online communication spaces (Jones, 1998; Hine, 2005; Markhan & Baym, 2008; Fielding, Lee & Blank, 2008; or Poynter, 2010). This can happen with surveys and online interviews, participant observation and online ethnography, analysis of online social networks or digital audiences, analysis of web content or audiovisual analysis, among other modalities.

Beyond conversational techniques such as surveys or online interviews, one of the leading “new techniques” in online social research in recent years is the so-called virtual or digital ethnography (Hine, 2004; Hine, 2005; Fielding *et al.*, 2008, p. 155–361; or Kozinets, 2009). The most recent trend involves the emergence of a virtual ethnography exclusively concentrated in the online field, by mixed or multi-situated models that take into account the online-offline hybridization. In fact, this type of research contributes to mapping political conversations, to discuss their limits and frames, or to investigate the concept of the public sphere (Fuchs, 2014). Some papers have explored the hybrid spaces of politics (Chadwick, 2013), concluding that those that create synergies and feedback between traditional media channels and social networks gain influence in the latest (Karlsen & Enjolras, 2016).

Equally, the virtual ethnography facilitates the (more or less) participant observations¹, as well as the use of mixed formulas, that can be considered a new ethnographic field. Besides, some scholars have argued that ethnography’s small sample size precludes claiming the breadth and generalizability that could have been achieved through survey methods, since ethnographic methods do not generate the powerful visual and structural data that the social network analysis could have offered (Stewart, 2017). Therefore, through this work, we intend to vindicate the use of a reformulated technique of qualitative analysis, mixing ethnography and social network analysis, within the framework of the activism/protest political communication.

As in the case of other online investigative techniques, virtual ethnography supposes a redefinition of the sample. At current, the selection of the field depends on new factors: messages, links, users, themes, space, graphic treatment, text length, or frames frequencies, among others. Therefore, as pointed out by Poynter (2010, p. 163–175), for the study of blogs or websites, we strongly support that social media in general and the Twitter sphere in particular, can be considered a new ethnographic field. Indeed, the so-called “reverse agenda” fostered by social media (Wallsten, 2007; Meraz, 2011; or Aruguete, 2017), activates a bottom-up mechanism, led by citizens and civil society, which can condition the media agenda thanks to the impact and scope (Pérez Curiel & García Gordillo, 2018), but also the frames of online messages, generating the subsequent opportunities for social and political change (Jost *et al.*, 2018; Sampedro & Martínez Avidad, 2018 or Casero Ripollés, 2015). In this context, political influence is being reconfigured in social media. Therefore, new research challenges should address towards the verification of the dynamics linked to the logic of networked media and the characteristics of the digital platforms, but the stakeholders and strategies capable of influencing more the agenda setting and the public debate, as well (Casero Ripollés, 2018).

Indeed, ethnography could be understood as “a method for enriching the understanding of media effects and influence, as well as for capturing not only everyday workings of political communication, but the deeply human experience of political communication on both the production and reception ends” (Spitulnik, Vidali & Peterson, 2012, p. 264). In fact, the methodological implications of new technologies are specified in three fundamental aspects: a) the incorporation of new tools for production, registration and collection of sociological information and data; b) the extension of the field of analysis to all online phenomena as social phenomena; and c) the creation of a more reflective research context in which the researcher

¹ Notice the figures include tweets by one of the authors -@AlvaroOleart- as part of our engagement with the activists.

has a greater and more permanent accessibility to the object of study, which facilitates him/her being able to be part of it, with the (ethical) implications that this involves.

All in all, the present work contributes to online social research in terms of social movements and protest political communication, through an analysis of content that constitutes a virtual ethnography. Following from our research question we will analyse the framings brought forward by Spanish social activists involved in EU affairs on the EU trade policy between June and October 2018. In doing so we build on previous work where we identified 19 key organisations as the more active members of the Spanish anti-TTIP campaign (Bouza & Oleart, 2018). Specifically, we start by identifying the key hashtags used by the campaign 'No al TTIP'. We focus on the June–October period because activists engaged in a crucial frame bridging process: we observe that their concern moves from in the TTIP and CETA negotiations to focus on other EU trade negotiations, such as firstly the Japan–EU Free Trade Agreement (JEFTA) or the EU–Singapore Free Trade Agreement, secondly on EU trade and investment treaties and thirdly by linking TTIP protests to the 24 and 27 October demonstrations of the Spanish left parties and alter-globalisation networks.

To start with, we downloaded all the tweets (N= 20747) by 17 of the 19 organisations that have a Twitter account for the period June–October 2018 with Chorus TweetCatcher. We then run a computer assisted search to identify the Tweets by these organisations specifically framing the EU trade treaties, with a result of n= 112. We qualitatively analysed this sample to analyse the frame bridging process undertaken by activists and to identify the key hashtags used by the promoters, and identified the hashtags #OtroComercioEsNecesario #Nosmovemos24y27 and the campaign “No a los tratados de comercio e inversión” as the key search references. We then run a general search for these terms compiling a database of n=356 tweets, allowing us to analyse the role of the social movement network in the creation and circulation of frames online.

We will undertake a qualitative framing analysis. We use the term 'framing analysis' (Pan & Kosicki, 1993) rather than 'frame analysis' (Goffman, 1974) because of the emphasis on understanding framing as a relational process, rather than as a static strategy. In addition of analysing how the activists around the campaign 'No al TTIP' frame EU trade policy, we will identify the strategies of frame bridging by the campaign 'No al TTIP.' When it comes to operationalise our framing analysis, we follow Gamson and Modigliani's (1989) suggestion that there are 'framing devices,' such as metaphors, images or keywords, that are part of the actor strategy's 'media package' to frame an issue in a particular way. Entman (1993, p. 52) suggested that framing can be analysed through "the presence or absence of certain keywords, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments." The framing perspective is a methodological challenge, since the frontiers between frames are in some cases blurry, and it is an empirical question to identify and define what a frame is and what is not. In order to address such challenge we will identify the frames used by the campaign based on prior work done on the subject (Bouza & Oleart, 2018) and track frame bridging strategies through the coding of the lexical choices and related themes connected to EU trade policy in the tweets collected. The aim is, first, to identify the framing of post-TTIP EU trade policy by the campaign 'No al TTIP,' and, second, to track how bridges are built with non-trade frames in the Spanish twitter sphere. We will use the software Nvivo for this qualitative framing analysis.

Lastly, in parallel with the framing analysis, we use network analysis to explore the circulation of the frames articulated by the activists and organisations of the network. Beyond the in-depth qualitative analysis of the of the frame creation, bridging and extension by the movement mentioned above, we intend to analyse their resonance in different internet communities. In order to do this, we compiled a matrix containing all the tweets (356) referring to TTIP with the search tags mentioned above and we used Gephi 0.91 to represent the spatial distribution of the users referring to the terms and to the retweet and mentions

communities. In doing this, we have both a representation of the number of users tweeting on the subject and of the users and organisations contributing most to the circulation of the frames. We then analyse these data with network analysis tools, in particular using modularity and outdegree measures in order to analyse the role of key actors and the different circulation communities. Finally, we compare this network to the collective action network of the 19 organisations identified previously in Bouza and Oleart (2018).

Our expectations are that the central organisations in the collective action network (No al TTIP, Ecologistas en Acción and ATTAC) have a key role in frame creation and bridging, whereas the other actors of the network rather amplify and circulate the frames. Secondly, we expect that in the process of frame bridging that goes from the focus on EU treaties in June-July to the connection to national political issues in October the attention to the issues grows. However, we also expect a relative failure of this network at making Stop TTIP a significant subject in the 24-27 October demonstrations. This has to do with issue competition and speaks of a partial success of the network: whereas the Spanish anti-TTIP activists have succeeded at attracting attention to this issue among the alter-globalisation community, the subject is still framed in a relatively technical way to compete with the broader political issues of the left under which the 24-27 October demonstrations are called upon.

4. 'No al TTIP:' Frame bridging of EU trade policy in Spain through Twitter

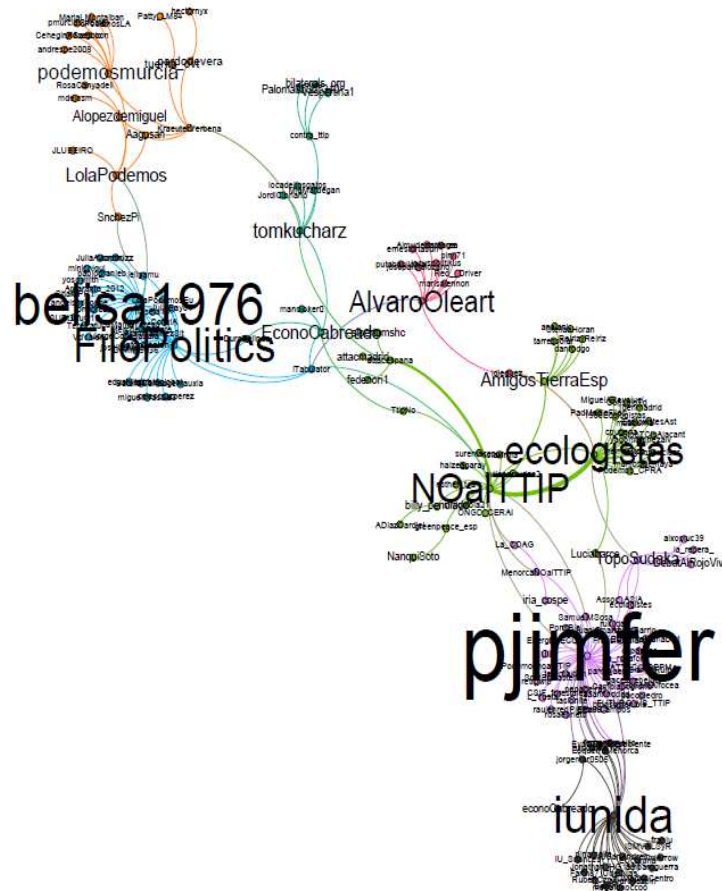
The Spanish campaign 'No al TTIP' was very successful in framing the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) as a threat to a very large community of actors, including environmental and consumer NGOs, left-wing political parties such as Podemos, trade unions and even taxi drivers and judges (Bouza & Oleart, 2018). However, the freezing of the TTIP negotiations in November 2016 created an impasse for the campaign 'No al TTIP.' The campaign has continued to introduce other trade agreements negotiated in the EU to the Spanish context, and we attempt to identify the framing strategies used by the campaign.

4.1. Network 'No al TTIP:' a small network of alter-globalisation activists attempting to reach beyond their usual suspects

As mentioned above, in previous work we showed how a core group of alter-globalisation organisations (Ecologistas en Acción, ATTAC and No Al TTIP) launched a successful campaign on TTIP in 2015 and 2016 (Bouza & Oleart, 2018). This campaign can be deemed successful firstly in that it managed to have an impact in the media on subject often considered "boring" because of its relative technical complexity and the lack of political conflict on trade issues in Spanish democracy. Secondly, the success of the promoters can be measured in their ability to impose their framing of the TTIP upon other civil society actors, including some that at first did not want to take sides (such as the trade unions) and successfully enlarging the framing to reach organisations not involved in EU or globalisation politics (such as judges' federations and taxi drivers associations). So, the obvious question is whether a similar evolution can be seen in the case of the more recent Twitter discussions on the Treaty. As mentioned above, the freezing of the negotiations following Donald Trump's election has led the activists to focus on elements of continuity in the EU-USA negotiations, such as the EU-Japan Treaty and the new generation of treaties focusing on regulatory alignment.

The figure below suggests that the role of the organisations considered was more limited. The figure represents the connected part of the graph focusing on the organisations where the label size represents in-degree measured by retweets and references and different colours show the different communities.

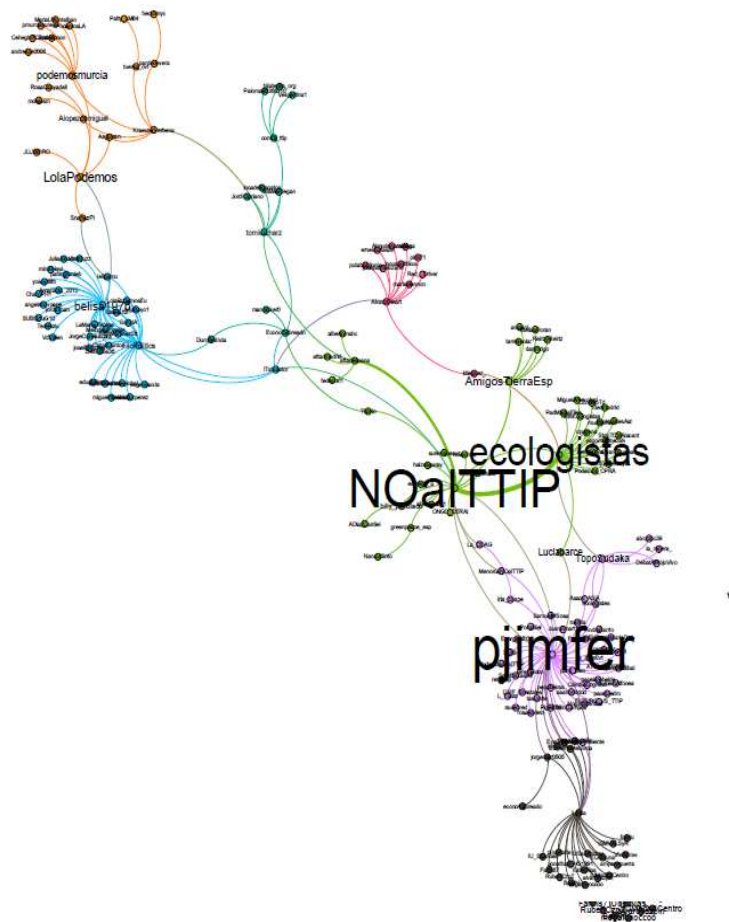
Figure 1: Indegree and communities.



Source: Own elaboration on the basis of data retrieved from Twitter.

The graph suggests that as important as organisations may have been in the circulation of the subjects and hashtags researched, other actors such as researchers (pjimfer, alvarooleart), political actors (LolaPodemos, iunida) and politics accounts had an even more important role in reaching communities of users. However, this very measure can rather be seen to express the ability of the organisations from which the frames originated –remember that all 356 tweets are assembled from the frames put forward by the organisations– to launch a series of issues that are relevant for different communities. This is confirmed by figure 2 below, where the labels size represents betweenness centrality, that is, how many shorter paths in the graph pass by an actor. The figure clearly shows the leadership of the two key organisations in connecting the users.

Figure 2: Betweenness and communities.



Source: Own elaboration on the basis of data retrieved from Twitter.

However, overall the results seem to tell a less successful story than that of the 2015–2016 campaign, both because of the modesty of the number of interactions (356 tweets) and in relation to the communities reached. In contrast with the 2015–2016 campaign civil society appears to share the leadership with political and media actors. Also, this network is clearly more concerned by EU and globalisation politics than the original network of 19 organisations: interestingly, all the anti-poverty organisations and the peripheral communities (health systems, taxi and judges) have vanished, with a very modest present of one of the trade unions (CCOO) and the agriculture unions (COAG). All in all, it seems that the framing was limited to already politicised and mobilised constituencies in the EU and alter-globalisation field.

4.2. Frame bridging on Twitter by 'No al TTIP'

The very nature of the online interaction contributes to a high diversity and fluidity in the framings as activists adapt their references to current events, news and the users they interact with. But following our understanding of digital ethnography, we do not seek to analyse the online framing of TTIP in a vacuum but rather in a situated context where online activism intersects other forms of activism. Also, our argument about strategic framing does not imply any position about the sincerity of activists' framings. Instead, strategic framing is one of the dimensions of activists' social skill (Fligstein & McAdam, 2012). This implies that activists are able to frame issues from a register of narratives compatible with their core beliefs and that can contribute to the success of their cause by expanding their reach beyond the networks already mobilised.

The strategic nature of the framing of EU trade policy online by the activists is seen firstly in the continuity of the issue. By investing time, efforts and skill into an issue on which there are no immediate advances demonstrates strategic thinking in two senses. Firstly, it is an effort into “frame bridging” (Snow *et al.*, 1986) in that the issue of interest is broadened to relate it to other ones such as the Japan Treaty or the WTO courts (see below). Secondly, by creating and circulating frames linking trade to other issues when the Treaty is not in the political spotlight, activists are investing into the future by attempting to have the issues framed when the debate is triggered in Spain on trade the issues will already be framed.

As mentioned above, our working assumption is that we can observe a frame bridging process by which activists open up the issue and link it to other causes. The first set of data confirms that the first framing focused on the traditional alter-globalisation issues since the very hashtag #OtroComercioEsNecesario is using the Porto Alegre framing of “another world is possible” and focusing on the criticism of world trade rule of the late 90s and early 2000s. This framing however is also an investment in realism or moderation in that the activists do not frame their criticism against international trade in general, and do so by focusing on the rules and the effects of the current proposal.

Even if still focusing on trade, this first hashtag is telling of the process of bridging, since activists go beyond the treaty with the USA –which can more easily attract the alter-globalisation communities– to point that TTIP was just one example of a new generation of international trade treaties that focus less on already relatively load tariffs and conceptualises –or frames– regulatory diversity as non-tariff trade barriers (Siles-Brügge & de Ville, 2015). This provides an opportunity for activists to focus not only on the economic dimension (inequality, development, transnational corporations) but also on the democratic and constitutional dimension. In this sense, the tweets we have analysed shows further evidence of frame bridging by relating the Japan treaty with the ongoing negotiations on a Multilateral Investment Court (MIC) as a continuation of the investment protection mechanisms negotiated within TTIP and CETA. Connecting JEFTA to TTIP is likely to increase the future resonance of JEFTA and MIC, given that the Spanish TTIP campaign was very successful in making the negotiations salient in the public sphere.

In a second moment, the framing moves to a more assertive and defensive stance, “No a los tratados de Comercio e Inversión.” One could think that this framing would imply a refocus on the economic aspects of the Treaty, but instead this is the longer lasting search term, since it refers to the campaign articulated by “No al TTIP.” This general framing allows different activists to refer to their own concern. In this context, environmental and feminist activists related the treaty systematically to the exploitation of resources and of the gender cleavage.

Table 1: Tweet posted by the journal *El Salto Diario* announcing the publication of a Special Issue dealing with trade agreements.

#TratadosContraLaVida: ethnographies of online and offline activism

Within the campaign against multilateral treaties such as TTIP, JEFTA and the ratification by Chile of the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement activists published a special issue of the activist journal *El Salto Diario* on the gender perspective of the new generation of treaties (Pérez Orozco, 2018). Many activists tweeted the issue in the days following the publication, posting pictures of the paper copy of the journal. The tweeting of the journal paper page can be interpreted as a way of demonstrating the support to the journal and belonging to its community of readers and is thus significant to highlight the intimate connection between online and offline activism.

zattac **españa** **ATTAC España** @attacespana · 5 jun. ▼
El @ElSaltoDiario Analiza en su suplemento desde una perspectiva feminista, qué consecuencias tienen los tratados de comercio e inversión sobre nuestras vidas. Muy interesante, no te lo pierdas. #TratadosContraLaVida



37 26

Source: Twitter, @El Salto Diario.

The last phase of the frame bridging focuses on the inclusion of the criticism of the new EU trade treaties within broader political struggles. Firstly, some activists and political groups seize the online mobilisation of social movements' activists to highlight the work of their MPs

or MEPs on the issue (such as @LolaPodemos for Podemos or @EvaGSempere for Izquierda Unida). A few users also use the campaign to ask questions to political leaders such as Pablo Casado or Pablo Iglesias or parties like Ciudadanos on their party position. None of them interacted with the activists, however. Secondly, some organisations such as Greenpeace and Ecologistas en Acción used the framing process to question the position of the new PSOE government as the party questioned CETA in the European Parliament but now ratified it as a government. Thirdly the two main organisations joined the campaign to demonstrate for political change on 24 and 27 October. This move on the one hand confirms a strong frame bridging by including trade among issues such as housing rights, employment and poverty. But on the other hand, it also shows the limited success of the bridging process among broader communities: among the 10864 tweets on the demonstration which we downloaded from 20 to 27 October, only 132 referred to trade or TTIP, most of them in the bio or profile of the user. Hence, this rather tends to confirm that the network of organisations framing the EU trade policy online belong to the broader online and offline alter-globalisation movement and identity. Hence, for them joining a demonstration such as 24 and 27 October was a goal in itself, rather than a strategic decision dependent on their ability to include TTIP and the EU trade issues as part of the demonstration.

Conclusion

The successful Spanish 'No al TTIP' campaign organised in 2015-2016 was composed of a small network of alter-globalisation activists that managed to reach way beyond their usual suspects, attracting peripheral communities such as taxi drivers or trade unions. Our network analysis has indicated that in the post-TTIP era, the campaign has been unable to attract the same constituencies into other trade-related campaigns, such as JEFTA, the EU-Singapore Free Trade Agreement or MIC.

The limited reach of 'No al TTIP' to introduce trade-related issues in the Spanish Twittersphere was followed by a frame bridging strategy, attempting to connect EU trade policy with other political events in Spain. The most notable was the series of demonstrations that were organised the 24th and the 27th October 2018. A number of left-wing political actors launched this mobilisation to protest against austerity, the restriction in social, environmental and labour rights, inequality and systemic corruption, and we have shown how 'No al TTIP' participated actively in an effort to connect EU trade policy to the central concerns of the mobilisation. Therefore, our hypothesis has been confirmed to a large extent, since we have identified a clear bridging from specific to general issues, but with a limited impact. Despite the limited reach of the efforts of 'No al TTIP' during the October 2018 Spanish demonstrations, the frame bridging strategy has a long-term perspective: when EU trade policy is politicised in the Spanish context, the dominant frames will already be ready to be circulated. Framing EU trade policy in the Spanish Twittersphere matters even when this issue is not very salient in a given moment, and networks such as 'No al TTIP' are conscious about it and make regular efforts to connect their trade-related campaigns with the political debate in Spain. Given that 'No al TTIP' is the only network actively encouraging further discussion about EU trade policy, their frames are likely to dominate the future debates on the subject in Spain.

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