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Strategy and creativity in the use of political slogans: A study of the elections held in Spain in 2019

Abstract

The unquestionable predominance of slogans in political communication versus their declining relevance in the commercial kind underpins the objective of this study, which is to gain further insight into the strategies and creative discourses employed by political parties in their campaigning before the general, regional and local elections held in Spain in 2019, whereby the results are compared with those obtained in previous research. The aim is thus to determine the attributes of electoral slogans regarding such aspects as their semantic density, complexity, use of rhetorical devices, core focus or communication efficiency. Accordingly, this study is framed in the field of research on political advertising, employing content analysis. To this end, an analysis was performed on an extensive corpus of 197 slogans, selected according to the criteria of comprehensiveness, relevance and representativeness. In short, it can be claimed that the tendencies noted in previous studies have stabilized, albeit with some new developments in relation to briefness, the use of double or triple slogans, expressive focus, bilingualism, the use of visual resources (such as emoticons) or digital language (contractions), the presence of rhetorical devices, and the relevance of voters and candidates versus political parties, among other factors. Besides the specific evolution of their formal and content-related aspects, we argue that the relevance of political slogans still prevails, and rather than undermining their essence and uses, the advent of social media has instead enhanced them.

Keywords

Slogan, political advertising, election campaigns, content analysis, ad copywriting.

1. Introduction

Over the past decades, slogans have lost importance in commercial communication in comparison with their growing presence in political communication (Cwalina, Falkowski & Newman, 2011; Jungherr, 2015). Typically constructed using written code, slogans carry increasingly less weight in commercial communication. This is not case, however, in political communication, for which slogans, the quintessence of advertising creativity (Vaes, Paladino & Magagnotti, 2011), have not lost their most primordial meaning as a key tool of persuasion in election campaigns, especially regarding populism (van Kessel & Castelein, 2016; Gerbaudo,

2018). The role of slogans has not gone unnoticed by many researchers with the passage of time (Chan, 2000; Muñiz, 2005; Hernández, 2007; Samuelsen & Olsen, 2010; Kemp, Bui & Chapa, 2012; Garrido, 2013; Hartig, 2018).

This study, which is framed in the field of political advertising research, employs content analysis –a tested technique in the field (Evans & Clark, 2016). For this purpose, an analysis was performed on an extensive corpus of 197 slogans, selected according to the criteria of comprehensiveness, relevance and representativeness. In some cases, it was considered relevant to compare our findings with those obtained in research conducted in the commercial field (Garrido & Ramos, 2006; Garrido, Rey & Ramos, 2012) in order to draw a more precise map of the evolution of ad slogans in the first two decades of the twenty-first century as a result of the scant data resulting from prior research on political slogans in Spain.

The timeliness of this study is also justified by the singularity of its time frame, namely 2019, when different factors converged to give rise to the highest number of election calls in such a short time frame in the history of Spain's recent democracy: general elections held on 28 April and 10 November, and local elections (in over 8,000 municipalities), regional elections (in 12 autonomous communities) and European elections, all held on 26 May. This represents a unique and decisive context for studying the strategic and conceptual aspects of slogans used in the most recent Spanish political advertisements.

In light of the foregoing, the aim of this study is to promote a better understanding of the strategies and creativity adopted in the slogans used by Spanish political parties during their campaigning before the general, regional and local elections held in Spain in 2019. This involved analyzing their thematic content, expressive economy, semantic density, use of rhetorical devices and typographic resources, use of official languages, the framing of candidates, parties and voters, and the presence of images and symbols, among other aspects.

An additional aim of the study is the comparison between the attributes presented by political slogans and those that are typical of commercial slogans, as well as the identification of the differences in the design of slogans depending on the type of electoral campaign (local, regional, general or European). In a time characterized by the crossing of the political and media systems (Chadwick, 2013; Vaccari & Valeriani, 2015), the slogans should adapt to the double logic of working with hashtags (Bastos, Raimundo & Travitzki, 2013) as well as images to be shared with the voters (Quevedo-Redondo, Portalés-Oliva & Berrocal-Gonzalo, 2016).

2. Background: Slogans in political campaigns

Spain's relatively recent democracy has required more than four decades to fine-tune its political communication techniques. By and large, the slogans employed in Spanish election campaigns have been rather unimaginative, perhaps barring the memorable slogan, 'Por el cambio' [For change], whose ability to engage Spanish society in 1982 boosted Felipe González to power. In many cases, the type of campaign and the slogans used in Spanish election campaigns have been similar to or adaptations of those employed in other Western democracies, with a greater electoral tradition but with huge polarization (Hallin & Mancini, 2004; López-García, 2016).

The United States has always been the unavoidable benchmark (Bossetta, 2018): the 1952 US presidential elections, in which Eisenhower and Stevenson ran for the White House, undoubtedly marked a change of course in the United States –and, by extension, Western– political advertising, which is still valid nowadays at a time characterized by the decline of ideologies and parties for the benefit of candidates in addition to the emphatic application of electoral marketing techniques (Rey, 2005; Cwalina, Falkowski & Newman, 2011). This has to do with political advertising, which employs the commercial resources of marketing to make the candidate appealing to voters.

In this study, a slogan is understood as the brilliant, lasting and efficient linguistic expression of a corporate, political or institutional communication strategy. This definition

includes two key concepts of the slogan: brilliance and longevity. Thus, they connect with classical rhetoric, which advocates to conclude a speech with a brief, brilliant and lasting phrase, summarizing the foregoing (*peroratio*). In this sense, a slogan should be like a ‘flash’ (Vaes, Paladino & Magagnotti, 2011) or the ‘abridged constituent’ of advertising (Adam & Bonhomme, 2000; Song & Jeon, 2018). This overlaps with the current personalization of politics (Kruikemeier *et al.*, 2013), fostering a communication that puts the politician at the center, as stated by the ‘pop politics’ (Mazzoleni & Sfardini, 2009; Bimber, 2014; Amado, 2016).

This current trend moves the political discussion beyond the traditional party loyalties (Ardèvol-Abreu & Gil de Zúñiga, 2020). The concept of personalization refers to delivering public communication through individuals, especially political leaders (McAllister, 2007; Rivas-de-Roca & García-Gordillo, 2020). This has negative implications for the degree of conversationalization, understood as a public discourse style that simulates informal language (Stromer-Galley, 2014). Instead of a dialogical relationship, leaders prefer short messages to convey proximity and maximize their point of view (Larsson & Ihlen, 2015).

The personalization of politics could affect the design of slogans by focusing on candidates and using short messages. The discourse of political actors regarding their personal life has helped to build a relationship of trust between candidates and voters (van Aelst, Sheaffer & Stanyer, 2012). The phenomenon of mediatization of politics frames these processes, since there is a context of audience democracy in which elections are won on media platforms (Strömbäck & Esser, 2009). These two trends (personalization and mediatization) have implications on the way in which political communication is designed, moving towards media-oriented practices.

Moreover, the term ‘slogan’ derives from the Gaelic expression *‘sluagh-gairm,’* “a war cry with which to give warriors strength” (Eguizábal, 2007, p. 23), being the most frequently employed word to refer to this phrase, at least since the British began to use it in Parliament in the eighteenth century. Later on, in the nineteenth century, it caught on in American culture thanks to Anglo-American connections and influences, adapting itself to the US industrial boom and becoming the driving force behind commercial communication. Slogans also became central to the totalitarian propaganda of fascists and a key element in the different bourgeois and popular revolutions during the twentieth century. In the last third of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty first century, slogans, once again took center stage in both commercial and political communication, including campaigning in social media (Stromer-Galley, 2014; Stier *et al.*, 2018).

In the same vein, the importance of slogans gives rise to the transfer of techniques and professionals between the commercial and political spheres, most recently observed with the use of algorithms and big data (Campos-Domínguez & García-Orosa, 2018). The influence of political communication on individuals and, therefore, their slogans, is greater and more far-reaching (Rey, 1999; Loader & Mercea, 2012; Kreiss, Lawrence, & McGregor, 2018). This explains the role of those messages on a disruptive populist communication (Keane, 2013; Bennet & Livingston, 2018). Populism is considered more as a communicative style rather than a form of political organization (D’heer & Verdegem, 2014; Block & Negrine, 2017), in whose discourses society is divided into antagonist groups, “the people versus the elite.”

The use of slogans in commercial and political campaigns has generated a corpus of academic studies and research in the past decades which has defined their attributes in persuasive communication (Díez de Castro & Galán, 1988; Ortega, Mora Antón & Rauld Campos, 2006; Kemp, Bui & Chapa, 2012; Boerman & Kruikemeier, 2016; Fuchs, 2017; Ocieпка, 2018). In Spain, there are also recent works on the linguistic and pragmatic features of slogans of protest movements, ranging from the anti-austerity movement known as “15-M” (Pujante & Morales López, 2013) to feminism (Romano, 2021). These studies apply critical and socio-cognitive models of language to explore how new discourses are built, fostering social change through the use of creative discourse strategies (Morales López, 2016).

Despite the fact that commercial and political slogans could be placed at the same level, there are certain features of slogans largely identified in the political field:

- (1) Conciseness. This is one of the essential attributes of a slogan, which, according to research in the contextual framework of this study (Garrido, 2013), tends to contain few words with a high semantic load. This tendency overlaps with the new uses of the media in digital society (Verweij, 2012; Karlsen & Enjolras, 2016), since communication today is characterized by fast and mobile consumption (Fletcher & Nielsen, 2018).
- (2) Semantic density. Resources such as ellipses, emphatic punctuation and semantic load are inherent to the advertising discourse. Consequently, current slogans are characterized by a high presence of lexical words (nouns, verbs and adjectives) at the expense of function words with less autonomy and semantic load (such as articles, pronouns and conjunctions) (Curto, Fuentes & Sabaté, 2008).
- (3) Brilliance. The use of formal and stylistic strategies coming from classical rhetoric explain the survival of slogans in the present-day mass media and even in their more recent digital counterparts (Holt *et al.*, 2013; Song & Jeon, 2018). Different typographic resources are also used in pursuit of expressiveness.
- (4) Longevity and catchiness. The aim of political or commercial communication is to be memorable. This implies an association with the aforementioned brand that endures over time (Boerman & Kruikemeier, 2016). This objective is hindered by the speed with which campaigns are currently renewed (Dubois & Blank, 2018; Valera-Ordaz, 2019), and even more so in cases when a large number of election calls are analyzed in very short periods of time.
- (5) Focus on the target audience (voters). As previously noted, slogans lay the foundation for positioning campaigns and can focus on three items: the product or service, consumers and their universe, or the advertiser per se. Something similar occurs in the case of political communication. Some decades ago, campaign slogans focusing on the parties became a problem. Nowadays, most campaign slogans contain messages in which voters play a leading role (Dimitrova & Matthes, 2018).
- (6) Baselines (and headlines). Owing to their use of graphics, campaign slogans usually have more relevance in political than in commercial advertising, occupying prominent and initial positions in messages and chaining the function of the baseline with that of the headline (Kreiss, Lawrence, & McGregor, 2018).

Based on our objectives and the context described, we pose the following research questions:

RQ1. To what extent are slogans complex and specific in the framework of the 2019 Spanish elections?

RQ2. In terms of semantic density, how do the number of words used compare with prior scholarship?

RQ3. Which are the main focus points and strategies of political slogans?

3. Method

This research, which focuses on electoral ad slogans as its object of study, is framed in the academic field of political advertising. The content analysis technique has proven to be efficient in achieving our research objective in this area, as it is a procedure “to make replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use” (Krippendorff, 2004 [1990], p. 18). This technique is especially useful in this case, insofar as it is not invasive, being sensitive to the context of emission in order to understand data as symbolic phenomena. It is, hence, highly suitable for analyzing creative products generated in advertising communication (Evans & Clark, 2016; Rivas-de-Roca & García-Gordillo, 2020).

The units of analysis were manually content-analyzed from a mixed quantitative and qualitative approach. We employed the statistical software SPSS to provide an automatic analysis of frequencies, but the collection of the data was carried out by the authors following linguistic categories, as the sample analysis was performed on a corpus of 197 advertising slogans. These slogans were obtained from publicly available material (accounts on social networks and website information of the political parties), accessed manually by the authors.

The distribution of slogans employed by the political parties winning seats in the elections held in Spain in 2019 are: 34 slogans correspond to the two general elections (with 17 apiece) held on 28 April and 10 November, while 73 slogans correspond to the regional elections, 78 to the local elections and 36 to the European elections, all held on 26 May. In the case of the general, European and regional elections, all the parties with parliamentary representation were taken into account. Lastly, as for the local elections, the slogans used by those parties that obtained council seats in Spain's main cities –Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia, Seville, Zaragoza, Malaga, Murcia, Palma de Mallorca, Bilbao and La Coruña– were included in the corpus.

The sample included the main advertising slogans defined by the parties in the various elections held in Spain in 2019, considering all the parties with representation after the conclusion of the electoral processes. It may be noted that not all the elections were held on the same day or month, although the official campaigning period was the same for all of them, as stated by the Spanish law. We collected official slogans of the political parties during the electoral campaign, covering 15 days before polling day. These items were visible on social networks or public events. Some parties use more than one slogan; hence, our research explores the presence of double and triple slogans, assessed as a proof of complexity.

For the content analysis, a worksheet was designed with the following variables (Table 1):

Table 1. Categories used for the analysis of political slogans.

Full list of categories	
Presence or absence of slogans	Political party
Complete text of the slogan	Presence of double or triple slogans (complexity)
Specificity of the slogan	Language(s) employed
Total number of words	Proportion between lexical and function words (semantic density)
Presence of the candidate and the party	Core focus (candidate, party, ideology/program or voters)
Main topics (issues tackled)	Presence of rhetorical devices
Use of typographic resources (upper- and lowercase letters, italics or corporate colors)	Presence of images, symbols or icons

Source: Own elaboration.

Data from this study comes from the work of two researchers collaborating together. The reliability of the created categories was evaluated through a previous round of training on aleatory units of analysis (10% of the sample). For all the variables, the intercoder agreement exceeded 82%. This training was planned in order to add information in the codebook and improve the aforementioned categories. New details in the coding manual were considered

in an attempt to refine the instructions in ensuring the categories were as exhaustive as possible. Nevertheless, it should be considered that the material was coded at the same time by two academics, ensuring the homogeneity of the results.

4. Results

4.1. Complexity, specificity and semantic density of political slogans

The content analysis performed on the corpus resulted in a huge amount of data. The first notable finding is that political slogans were used in all examined cases. Therefore, it can be deduced that political parties in Spain (at least those winning seats) still place trust in slogans as a fundamental strategy of political advertising. Regarding the type of slogans used, in Table 2 it is possible to observe that the main Spanish political parties tended to employ a sole slogan in their campaigning (73.1% of the cases), using it exclusively in different campaign materials: in posters, on lecterns, as rally backdrops, etc.

In 22.35% of the cases, however, two slogans appeared together. For instance, in the 28 April general elections, both the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (hereinafter, PSOE) and the People's Party (hereinafter PP) employed double slogans: 'Haz que pase' [Make it happen] and 'La España que quieres' [The Spain you want], and 'Valor seguro' [A safe value] and 'Contamos contigo' [We're counting on you], respectively. There were even three cases in which three slogans were used, for example, in the regional election campaign of United Left (hereinafter IU) in Aragon: 'Tu izquierda' [Your Left], 'Todo el poder para lo público' [All the power for the people] and 'Un Aragón que lucha' [An Aragón that fights].

Table 2. Slogan complexity in the 2019 elections in Spain (frequencies and percentages).

COMPLEXITY	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
One slogan	144	73.09
Double slogans	44	22.35
Triple slogans	9	4.56
TOTAL	197	100.0

Source: Own elaboration.

An interesting point of political advertising is to determine the specificity of slogans in relation to the constituency for which they have been designed (see Table 3). The rhetorical adaptability to a particular community has been widely studied as a feature of slogans (Song & Jeon, 2018). In other words, whether national parties adapt their slogans to each constituency or employ the same ones across the board in their campaigns with slight modifications depending on the region.

In this study of the 2019 election campaigns, specific slogans were generally used for each constituency (50.3%), while a generic slogan for all constituencies was employed in 26.4% of cases. As expected, the former option was more common in the regional elections, accounting for 57.5% of the total ('La Asturias de las oportunidades' [The Asturias of opportunities], of the party Ciudadanos), and representing 62.8% in the local elections, ('Tú y yo. Juan Espadas, alcalde' [You and I. Juan Espadas, mayor], of the PSOE in Seville).

A third option, accounting for 23.4% of the total, involved adapting generic slogans to the constituency in question while maintaining an element common to all of them. For instance,

Ciudadanos employed the expression ‘¡Vamos!’ [Come on!] as the baseline for its slogans in the general elections held on 28 April (‘¡Vamos! Ciudadanos’ [Come on! Ciudadanos]), as well as in the regional (‘¡Vamos! Castilla y León’ [Come on! Castile and Leon]) and local elections (‘¡Vamos! A Coruña’ [Come on! Corunna]) held on 26 May. Hence, Ciudadanos strongly interpellated or motivated voters to act.

Table 3. Slogan specificity in the 2019 elections in Spain (frequencies and percentages).

SPECIFICITY	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Specific slogans per constituency	99	50.3
Generic slogans adapted to constituencies	46	23.4
Generic slogans not adapted to constituencies	52	26.4
TOTAL	197	100.0

Source: Own elaboration.

As pointed out in the background, conciseness is a distinctive characteristic of slogans. This was also the case in this study, where the slogans employed in the 2019 elections in Spain contained 3.43 words on average, namely, lower than in those of previous studies performed on commercial ad slogans (see Table 4): 5.16 in 1988, 4.36 in 2000, 3.97 in 2005 and 4.59 in 2011. Hence, there was a trend towards using slogans containing three words (accounting for 31% of the corpus), followed by two-word slogans (26.4%).

As for semantic density (see Table 4), it was very high, whereby 59.85% of the words were lexical words (nouns, verbs, adverbs, adjectives, etc.), versus 40.15% function words (determiners, conjunctions, prepositions, etc.). Although this does not mean that none of the slogans occasionally broke this rule, as was the case with ‘Navarra, clave en España. Súmate a la mayoría’ [Navarre, key to Spain. Join the majority] of Na+ and ‘Per la llibertat, ni un voto enrere’ [For freedom, not one vote backwards] of JxCat. Both were applied in the general elections held on 20 November 2019.

Table 4. Semantic density and average number of words in the slogans employed in the 2019 elections in Spain.

SEMANTIC DENSITY	Díez de Castro & Galán (1988)	Garrido (2000)	Garrido & Ramos (2006)	Garrido, Rey & Ramos (2012)	2019 elections in Spain
Lexical words (%)	45.16	57.11	60.18	65.20	59.85
Function words (%)	54.84	42.89	39.82	37.50	40.15
Total (%)	100	100	100	100	100
Average no. of words	5.16	4.36	3.97	4.59	3.43

Source: Own elaboration.

Regarding the language employed in the slogans, the results were as follows: 77.7% of the slogans were in Spanish, 18.3% in other languages and 4.1% in Spanish and another language (such as, for example, 'Nos mueve Bilbao. Bat eginik' [Bilbao drives us. Together] of EAJ-PNV). The proportion of slogans in Spanish rose to 91.7% in the European elections and dropped to 71.8% in the local elections, in which 25.6% were written in other languages, including Basque ('Zurekin Bizkaia gara' [We are Biscay with you] of EH-Bildu), Catalan ('Reimpulsem Barcelona' [Let's relaunch Barcelona] of ERC) and Galician ('Agora A Coruña' [Corunna now] of BNG).

4.2. Focus and strategies of political slogans

The presence of candidates in the slogans is another point studied here, in line with the personalization of politics (McAllister, 2007; Kruike-meier *et al.*, 2013). The results reveal that their names only explicitly appeared in 8.1% of the slogans ('Mejor con Page' [Better with Page] of PSOE Castile-La Mancha) and implicitly in 4.1% ('Un alcalde a tu altura' [A mayor worthy of you] of PODEMOS-EQUO in Murcia). In other words, the candidates were not reflected in the slogans by and large (87.8%), even though this was in a secondary or supplementary manner to all the information that they contained. Regarding the political parties, these appeared explicitly in 9.1% of the slogans (for example, 'Unidas Podemos cambiar Europa' [United we can change Europe] of Unidas Podemos in the European elections), and implicitly in 4.1% (as in 'Luchamos por Canarias' [We fight for Canarias] of CCa-PNC). At any rate, in nearly three-quarters of the slogans (72.6%), the parties were conspicuous by their absence.

Delving deeper into these issues, this study also included a variable relating to the core focus (candidate, party, ideology/program or voters) of the slogans. The cornerstone of slogans is key to understand how they work and can determine which rhetorical devices are applied (Garrido, 2000). Citizens have been traditionally targeted in this field (Dimitrova & Matthes, 2018), but personalization could also be a trend, as mentioned before.

As can be observed in Table 5, a little over half of the slogans (51.3%) focused on the electorate, at whom the political messages were aimed, as in the case of those employed by the PSOE ('Haz que pase' [Make it happen]) and Unidas Podemos ('La historia la escribes tú' [History is written by you]) in the general elections held on 28 April. On the other hand, 32% of the slogans revolved around ideology/program ('Asturias por la izquierda' [Asturias on the Left] of IU and 'Por una Valencia cómoda y abierta' [For a comfortable and open Valencia] of Ciudadanos).

Following at some distance, 8.6% of the slogans focused on candidates ('Jo amb Ribó' [I'm with Ribó] of Compromís and 'Ahora, Pepu' [Now, Pepu] of the PSOE) and 7.6% on the parties ('Lo hacemos posible' [We make it possible] of ASG Canarias). Accordingly, we observe that the individual figure of the candidate is present in local campaigns, which overlap with the idea that people in nearby communities vote more for the person than for the party. These results in the field of political communication tie in with the relevance of consumers or users in commercial communication. Recent research on commercial slogans indicates that the sender cannot be indifferent to the climate of opinion. There would be no way to reach the consumer if they did not detect a certain emotion in the message (Eguizábal, 2018).

Table 5. Core focus of the slogans employed in the 2019 elections in Spain (frequencies and percentages).

CORE FOCUS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Candidate	17	8.6
Party	15	7.6
Ideology/program	63	32.0
Electorate	101	51.3
Indeterminable	1	0.5
TOTAL	197	100.0

Source: Own elaboration.

In relation to the use of rhetorical devices, 46 were found in 42 slogans, which shows that in a little over one-fifth (21.13%), at least one such device was used. This is quite a bit lower than in commercial ad slogans as 44.53% contain rhetorical devices (Garrido, Rey & Ramos, 2012). The following rhetorical devices were the most frequently used:

- Metaphor (14): ‘Aire fresco para Valencia’ [Fresh air for Valencia] (PSOE).
- Personification (5): ‘Un Aragón que lucha’ [An Aragon that fights] (IU).
- Dilogy (5): ‘¿Mato por Coruña?’ [Mato for Corunna?] (PP).
- Parallelism (4): ‘En Europa, por España’ [In Spain, for Spain] (VOX).
- Metonymy (4): ‘Con cabeza y corazón’ [Knowledgeably and wholeheartedly] (PP).
- Pun (3): ‘Jo amb Ribó’ [I’m with Ribó] (Compromís).
- Anaphora (2): ‘Ahora, Gobierno. Ahora, España’ [Now, Government. Now, Spain] (PSOE).
- Hyperbole (2): ‘Imparables’ [Unstoppable] (Compromís).
- Asyndeton (2): ‘Erabaki. Para avanzar’ [To decide. To advance] (EH-Bildu).

Additionally, the recourse was frequently found to have exclamatory (25.9%) and imperative (22.3%) statements, although interrogatives were rarely used (0.5%). The use of exclamatory statements was mostly monopolized by Ciudadanos, which used the expression ‘¡Vamos!’ [Come on!] as the baseline in most of its slogans, adapting it to each election call (‘¡Vamos! Europa’ [Come on! Europe]) or constituency (‘¡Vamos! La Rioja’ [Come on! La Rioja]). It was normal for imperatives and exclamations to appear simultaneously.

The presence of images, symbols or icons (differing from those of the image of the political parties) employed together with the slogans in all their election applications was also analyzed. In brand image, this could be called ‘imago type,’ namely, the harmonic and stable conjunction of the textual and iconic components. Nevertheless, in this case, the concept was transferred to another ad copywriting element, namely slogans, which were occasionally accompanied by an image, symbol or icon. Specifically, this was observed in 50 of the 197 slogans analyzed here, accounting for 25.4% of the total. The political parties that resorted most to this resource included the PSOE (in 18 of its 30 slogans) and VOX (in 13 out of 16), this being much less in the case of the PP (in 5 out of 35) and Ciudadanos (in 2 out of 21).

The ways in which this iconic component was associated with the textual slogans were very diverse. For instance, the PSOE opted for simple symbols, such as a heart or the symbol for progress (>>). However, there were also icons substituting letters, as in the case of a

campaign launched by this party in the regional elections in Aragon, in which the letter 'o' in 'Juntos por Aragón' [Together for Aragon] was substituted by a map of Spain with the colors of the region's flag in the background. As for VOX, it conveyed its Spanish nationalism with the incorporation of the Spanish flag, on its own or linked to the European flag in the European elections. In other cases, resources inherent to the digital discourse on social media were employed, such as the hashtag sign (#) appearing in VOX's slogan for the regional elections in Asturias ('#AsturiasViva') and that of Nueva Canarias for the regional elections in the Canary Islands ('#CanariasconFuturo').

Other stylistic resources were also observed, including the use of uppercase or lowercase letters in the selected font. In this connection, there was a preference for uppercase letters, either exclusively (55.8% of the slogans) or combined in the same phrase with lowercase letters (21.8%), versus those slogans using only lowercase letters (22.3%). The combination of uppercase and lowercase letters was put to different expressive uses. For example, Adelante Málaga's slogan for the local elections, 'RECUPERA Tu Ciudad' [RECOVERATE Your City], occupied two lines, the first in a normal font with uppercase letters, and the second with the expression 'Tu Ciudad' in an italicized font with a handwritten appearance. Thus, the second part of the slogan was connected with feelings of belonging to a community.

The corporate colors of the political parties were also used in the font of the slogans (65.5%). Likewise, in 29.9% of the slogans, a standard color differing from that of the corporate colors was employed, chiefly black. Only in 4.6% of the slogans was a color that gave messages a symbolic value used, as was the case of VOX's slogan, 'Por España' [For Spain], for the general elections held on 28 April, whose font was formed by the colors of the Spanish flag. A very striking use of color was also to be found in ERC's slogan 'Tornarem més forts' [We will become stronger], used for the general elections held on 20 November, featuring a yellow font mirroring the yellow bows being used by the Catalan independence movement.

Some of the slogans also used the font to make the text more expressive. Specifically, 8.6% of 197 slogans used only italic fonts, which added expressiveness, personalization, action and even emotion to the messages. This was the case with Adelante Sevilla's slogan, 'La esperanza en tus manos' [Hope is in your hands], for the local elections, and PODEMOS-EQUO's slogan, 'UN ALCALDE a tu altura' [A MAYOR worthy of you], for the local elections in Murcia, in which the italics stressed the idea of proximity.

Moving on to the cornerstone of this study, the distribution of main issues or topics of interest in the semantics of the slogans can be seen in Table 6. The two dominant topics included, on the one hand, democracy and the citizenry's participation in the elections (41.1%) and, on the other, the nationalism, localism, Europeanism or any other identity-related manifestation (32%). In short, close to three-quarters of the slogans used these two issues: 'Vota República!' [Vote for República] (Front República), 'Contamos contigo' [We are counting on you] (PP), 'Un paso más' [A step further] (EH-Bildu) and 'Haz que pase' [Make it happen] (PSOE), in relation to democracy and election participation; and 'Por España' [For Spain] (VOX), 'Ya toca Teruel' [It's Teruel's turn] (¡Teruel existe!), 'Cantabria gana' [Cantabria wins] (PRC) and 'Centrados en Europa' [Focused on Europe] (PP), relating to the second issue.

Table 6. The distribution of issues or topics of interest in the slogans used in the 2019 elections in Spain (frequencies and percentages).

TOPICS OF INTEREST	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Employment/Unemployment	1	0.5
Ethical values	12	6.1
Democracy/Participation	81	41.1
Change	21	10.7
Nation/Nationalism/Europeanism/Localism	63	32.0
Social justice	1	0.5
Other/Indeterminable	18	9.1
TOTAL	197	100.0

Other topics aroused less interest: 10.7% focused on the idea of change ('Sevilla merece el cambio' [Seville deserves a change] of PP-Sevilla and 'Asturias cambia y avanza' [Asturias is changing and advancing] of Foro Asturias); and 6.1% were concerned with values or ethics ('Va de llibertat' [It's about freedom] of ERC-Barcelona, 'Vota bonito' [Vote beautiful] of Más Madrid and 'Confianza' [Trust] PP-Valencia), or other topics such as unemployment and social justice, which hardly got a look in ('Por un futuro aquí' [For a future here] of PODEMOS-IU-EQUO in Extremadura).

5. Discussion and conclusions

This article has aimed to examine the use of political slogans in the specific electoral context of general, regional and local elections held in Spain in 2019. Our main conclusion is that slogans are still universally employed in political advertising in Spain, insofar as we have been able to establish that all the political parties winning seats in the elections analyzed here used them as a core communication element in their campaigns. This absolute (100%) presence of slogans in the 2019 elections in Spain is far above their use in Spanish commercial advertising during the first two decades of this century: 72% in the year 2000 (Garrido, 2000), 64.7% in 2005 (Garrido & Ramos, 2006) and 60.5% in 2011 (Garrido, Rey & Ramos, 2012). Therefore, the continued validity of slogans in political advertising contrasts with their progressive decline in commercial advertising.

This study contributes to current discussions on slogans within political discourse, providing four additional interrelated findings. First (RQ1), unlike what normally occurs in commercial communication, a significant proportion (26.91%) of the analyzed slogans appeared with others in the campaign. In these cases, the political parties used a generic cohesive slogan identifying them at a national level together with another specific one for each individual constituency. These second and third slogans served to contextualize the parties in a particular geographical area, normally stressing some or other topic in order to sway the local electorate more effectively.

Regardless of the number of slogans simultaneously employed by parties in their political advertising, their adaptation to the constituency is the common trend in most of cases (50.3%) and sometimes adapting generic slogans to a specific electoral area (23.4%). In conclusion,

nearly three-quarters of the slogans were specific in order to engage with the voters of a particular geographical area. This also explains the noteworthy use of languages other than Spanish in the electoral slogans making up the corpus on their own (18.3%) and sometimes combined with those in Spanish (4.1%).

Secondly (RQ2), the slogans analyzed here complied with the semantic density (59.85% of lexical words) which, along with their extreme conciseness (3.43 words on average), shaped a very brief discourse that is useful in the current digital society characterized by accelerated communication (Fuchs, 2017). Therefore, slogans are consistent with today's digital media as they are brief and work like impact messages on social networks. According to our study, in a quarter of the slogans, iconic resources did not accompany nor were part of the text, such as in the case of recognized emoticons and hashtags present in numerous campaigns. This did not prevent political advertising from resorting, to a lesser degree, to more classic resources. One-fifth of the slogans featured some or other rhetorical devices, such as metaphors, personification and metonymy.

In current political communication, the presence of candidates is predominant in all campaign elements (Kruikemeier *et al.*, 2013). Thus, in this study, our intention has been to determine whether or not this is also the case in campaign slogans. As a third contribution (RQ3), we found that political parties do not use slogans to talk, implicitly or explicitly, about their candidates (in our study, this only occurred in 12.2% of the slogans) or even about themselves (27.4%). The presence of candidates is used for other campaign elements, specifically in static or moving images, while slogans serve to convey ideological or programmatic values (in 32 of the slogans in our corpus) and, above all, to focus on the voters, who have become the core target (in 51.3% of the slogans analyzed here). This relevance of the voters in election campaigns also explains why many of the slogans resorted to imperative phrases (22.3%) in order to mobilize them.

Besides that, a key element of our study is the issues or topics of interest addressed in the slogan content. Our fourth contribution also offers insightful evidence for RQ3, showing that the dominant issues were with regards to the political situation in Spain when the elections were held in 2019. The purpose of a very high proportion of the slogans (41.1%) was to mobilize the electorate, mostly disappointed with the political class that had been incapable of forming a stable government during too many months and had repeatedly called elections. While another significant proportion (32%) focused on identity-related and nationalist issues, which is logical bearing in mind that the political debate and agenda setting in Spain in the past few years has focused on the territorial Spanish state, especially following the unilateral declaration of independence by Catalonia in October 2017.

It is understandable that many of the slogans analyzed here showed the devotion to Spain, nationalism, independentism, Europeanism (pro-Europe as a solution to the conflict) or localism of the party employing them. However, another illustrative evidence is that key issues for society, such as social justice and unemployment, were hardly mentioned at all in the analyzed slogans, particularly at a time when social justice issues have become so relevant in the global political discourse. The inclusion of ethical values was also low (6%) at time when there have been many accusations of corruption in Spain.

In this sense, our findings are in line with prior scholarship that has pointed out the role of slogans as instruments for political discourses (Hartig, 2018) in a time of mediatization of politics. Conventional and social media are the spaces where political campaigns take place, so slogans are specially designed for this type of mediatized debates. By contrast, the candidates were not present in the slogans, opposing the well-known strategy of personalization (McAllister, 2007).

The literature also states that most campaign slogans refer to voters (Dimitrova & Matthes, 2018), which has been checked as 75% of these messages on the sample, created to promote direct engagement with citizens. The growing disaffection of citizens towards

politics (Tucker *et al.*, 2018) allows the understanding of why voters are given such a leading role in slogans by political parties, which try to reactivate this formula of communication. The approximation to consumer persuasion revitalizes slogans and transfers market characteristics to the political sphere, which can move democracy towards parameters of commercial competition.

Furthermore, this research prompts the question of the progressive disappearance of the written code compared to the audiovisual one, due to the force with which slogans are used at least in electoral advertising communication. Slogans followed the pattern of having lexical words together with function words (Curto, Fuentes & Sabaté, 2008), but the semantic density was more concise than in previous studies (Garrido, 2013). This may overlap with the aforementioned trends of acceleration of political communication and disaffection of citizens. More visual and spectacular practices are introduced to bridge the gap between politicians and voters.

On this backdrop, our contributions provide insightful findings on the current shaping of slogans, which could be also relevant for phenomena such as populism (van Kessel & Castelein, 2016). Their importance in populist politics is visible, especially on social media (for example, Trump's Make America Great Again in the United States). Populism works as a thin-centered ideology that questions elites and the globalization of Western politics (Pérez-Curiel, Rivas-de-Roca & García-Gordillo, 2021). The rise of populism may explain the role that identity and national slogans have in most of slogans analyzed. The adaptation to the sort of communication carried out on social media (D'heer & Verdegem, 2014) makes it interesting to go deeper into how political parties apply these strategies in polarized contexts, as is the case of Spain (Hallin & Mancini, 2004).

Finally, some limitations of this study should be noted. The sampling method is limited, as we only covered the slogans of the elections held in Spain in 2019. Therefore, the national context can influence the results. This means that the high presence of slogans in the electoral discourse has to be interpreted with caution compared to the earlier findings on commercial advertising slogans. In addition to that, the connection between political slogans and populism is barely studied here since we do not offer disaggregated data according to the political party.

In short, future research faces the challenge of furthering our understanding of the role of slogans in political polarization and disinformation, also taking into account the incidental exposure to these messages on social media (Fletcher & Nielsen, 2018). The analysis of slogans may serve as a key point on which to advance the study of political campaigns, specifically in a time of turmoil for democracy. Using more extended time frames over the years and considering several countries would expand the scope of this research in addition to providing details about the communication practice of populist parties and leaders regarding slogans.

Considering our insights together, we argue that the use of slogans was vigorous and connected with each constituency in the framework of the 2019 Spanish elections, but these messages were shorter than before. Some evolutions of formal and content-related aspects were detected, showing how slogans adapt to the current trends of political communication. The consolidation of social media may serve as milestone in their strategy and creativity.

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