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Mass cultural communication: the case of the Cervantes Institute and its digital diplomacy via Twitter

Abstract

The Cervantes Institute and its branches abroad have become a powerful tool of cultural diplomacy and representation of Brand Spain across the world. Founded in '90s, the institution has developed many online communication platforms, making it the most forward-looking and far-reaching institution in its field. The aim of this study is to analyse how the Cervantes Institute communicates through its network of Twitter accounts during a determined period. To this end, two studies were conducted: a quantitative analysis of the tweets ($n = 13.913$) from the institution's accounts (during the period 01/01/2017 - 06/31/2017) and an analysis of the content of the tweets (during the month of September 2017) ($n = 3.014$). We concluded that the use of Twitter as a communication tool by the Cervantes Institute is a reality. Its 48 accounts, with more than 330,000 followers, not only reach people where they are physically located, but also anywhere worldwide. The tweets it disseminates are eminently educational and cultural, showing that, thanks to social media, interesting digital diplomacy actions are undertaken at the service of Spanish public diplomacy.

Keywords

Digital diplomacy, public diplomacy, international communications, social networking sites, cultural centres, Cervantes Institute.

Digital diplomacy today exceeds the objectives of influence and power or image-country that the academy establishes. It has components of survival and modernization of the service, and of deep change, especially in the working methods and in the democratization of the contents of our foreign policy (Femenía, 2016, p. 20).

1. Introduction

The advent of the Internet changed the way people communicate (Chadwick, 2006; Rice & Katz, 2000; Morris & Ogan, 1996), and years later social media and networks yet again changed communication practice and expression (Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Flew, 2007; Hanna, et al., 2011). The sphere of international relations has been judiciously making inroads into social media and social networking as a form of

communication with a fundamentally tactical and asymmetrical approach. Until not so long ago, international relations were traditionally associated with diplomatic activity conducted behind closed doors, which led to some reluctance to adopt digital communication channels. The publication of diplomatic cables by WikiLeaks and the rise of social networks marked a turning point, confirming the impression of inevitability and generating a movement of openness and a spirit of transparency. Hence, despite social media's early detractors, due to possible uncertainties and insecurities, opinion gradually came to accept that the adaptation to the network society was not an option and that the rewards far outweighed the risks. As Fergus Hanson indicates, the use of Internet technologies and new communications is an equally indispensable means for pursuing the traditional goals of diplomacy (2012).

As Medcalf points out, 'A 21st century foreign service that does not seriously use social media is a bit like a pre-1914 diplomatic network that kept its hands clean from newspapers and the telephone' (2011).

Foreign services can no longer afford to ignore the digital platforms that are democratizing the way information is collected and shared. The control and secrecy of information is no longer the exclusive domain of foreign affairs departments; on the contrary, the increasing demand for greater transparency has seen citizens taking a role in it.

In the case of Spain, this reality has been slow to take hold, although the initiative was taken up in fields such as culture with an evident projection from the perspective of public diplomacy, where the possibilities of expansion granted by the use of the Spanish language, and its cultural implications, has harnessed technologies to open up new horizons.

2. Cultural diplomacy and the Cervantes Institute

While traditional diplomacy builds links between governments, public diplomacy involves governments establishing ties with other actors, businesses, NGOs, or directly with public opinion in other countries. In short, public diplomacy is a government communication process aimed at foreign audiences (Manfredi, 2014) to convey an understanding of a country's thought, ideals and objectives, as well as its institutions and cultures and current policies (Tuch, 1990) while seeking to influence the attitudes of foreign audiences (Malone, 1988; Rubio, 2012).

All public diplomacy must combine and interrelate five components: listening, advocacy, cultural diplomacy, exchange and international broadcasting (Cull, 2008).

For this reason, besides embassies and consular offices, many countries choose to manage their foreign policies by opening cultural centres on foreign soil.

Cultural centres, with their considerable power of persuasion and seduction, have always been instruments of great visibility with which to reach people and communities; hence, their recognition as an effective tool of public diplomacy. In the late 19th century, several countries began forging networks of cultural institutes across the world with the aim of disseminating their knowledge and languages and culture to the host country. Moreover, depending on the international political scene of the time, these institutions would also serve as an instrument of foreign policy by contributing to bilateral relations and to the specific needs of the country in which they were located.

France pioneered the concept of cultural diplomacy with the establishment of physical and cultural spaces in foreign countries, the first of which, the Alliance Française, opened its doors in 1883 (Cull, 2009). This was followed by the Italian Balassi Institute, the British Council, and so on. Today, more than thirty countries make use of these tools, accounting for a network of more than two thousand centres whose tentacles extend to almost every corner of the world (Prieto-Gutiérrez & Segado, 2016).

It took until 1991 for Spain to follow suit with the Cervantes Institute (CI), which currently has a network of official centres (87 between Cervantes Institutes and the 'Aula Cervantes' lecture halls) and accredited centres (170 associate entities) for the promotion and teaching of Spanish and Spain's co-official languages, as well as the dissemination of Spanish and Latin American culture, for which it boasts branches in more than 80 cities in 50 countries on the five continents. Since its creation, the CI has spearheaded Spain's foreign cultural action (Prieto-Gutiérrez, 2013).

As an agent dedicated to public diplomacy, the CI has carried out a multitude of communication actions that have placed it at the forefront of international digital diplomacy, making it one of the institutions that has best harnessed the essence and potential of the digital medium. This is reflected in various projects and the use of different channels and formats such as its successful Virtual Classroom (AVE) and Virtual Centre (CVC), both multimedia educational and cultural environments. From its beginnings, the CI was a trailblazer in the digital model for the external actions of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation (MAEC) and its dependent bodies.

Cultural diplomacy has a long history as a means of promoting a country's soft power (Nye, 2008), which seeks to promote its resources abroad. From the early 20th century up to the present, Spain cultural initiatives and actions have been aimed at enhancing Spain's image abroad. (Delgado, 2014). In this context, the configuration of Spanish cultural diplomacy is spearheaded by the CI, together with the Cultural and Training Centres dependent on the Spanish Agency for International Cooperation, the Institute for Foreign Trade, the Council Foundations, think tanks, and so forth. In short, cultural diplomacy is the best ally of a strong foreign policy (de la Riva, 2012).

In recent times, cultural diplomacy has broadened its scope of action to focus on its potential audience and its dissemination channels. Initially focused on language and the arts, current cultural diplomacy programmes include a wider range of themes, such as intercultural dialogue, inequality, racism, social cohesion, immigration, the cultural dimension of religious issues, and climate change (Green, 2012).

3. The digital expansion of the Cervantes Institute, a pioneer of Spanish digital diplomacy

The Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs is aware that the change in the balance of power is, in large part, indebted to the current technological revolution:

Hence, after bolstering Spanish public diplomacy, the Ministry has striven to adapt itself to an external action that has been democratized – with more actors participating in the design and implementation – and become more visible by covering international events through new and old media. The digital dimension is now part of Spain's external action strategy. (Manfredi & Rubio, 2018).

In 2015, after a long period of reflection and analysis, the MAEC made a strategic commitment to digital diplomacy. By then, however, some ministry-dependent bodies, such as the Spanish Agency for International Cooperation and Development and the CI, already had years of experience in the use of digital tools for the design and execution of their mandate. Like in other times, innovation comes from the periphery and not from the centre.

Indeed, the existence of the IC has gone hand in hand with advent of the Internet. In 1995, despite there being only seven million computers connected to the World Wide Web, the CI made a decisive commitment to ICTs, thus marking the commencement of its digital diplomacy spearheading the exterior action of Spain and Latin America in the field of culture.

The first digital public diplomacy actions emerged from the Cervantes Virtual Centre (CVC), a virtual headquarters opened in 1997, which sought to bring the CI's activities to the world through the Internet.

With a view to virtualizing the CI model, the new online portal aimed to create the structure of a physical institute. Thus, from the outset, the website had several 'departments' and services, including a teachers' room, a library, an auditorium, an exhibition room and a forum designed for people who did not have a physical branch of the Institute in or near the places where they lived.

With only 2% of webpages in Spanish at that time (Millán, 1998), one of the CVC's main objectives was to increase the presence of the Spanish language on the Internet. Thus, this unique project, which began life as a tool for external action, extended its tentacles, surpassing many similar equivalent institutions (2016).

In its first four months of life, the CI's portal was accessed from more than seventy countries and more than 1.4 million files were downloaded, resulting in half a million page views. Since then the portal receives more than 10 million page views a year and its forums contain more than 2 million messages.

The launch of Web 2.0 in the noughties marked the CI's transformation from providing static and unidirectional information and documentation to becoming participatory and interactive, and 2001 saw the launch of specific websites for each branch of the CI. Since then, the CI has gradually incorporated other digital tools. In 2003, for example, it set up the Virtual Spanish Classroom (AVE), a virtual didactic space serving as a hub for both blended learning and distance learning. (Basterrechea, 2003). The flexibility of the teaching resources, adapted to new curricula, public demand and online communication systems led to its expansion within the institution's sphere of influence (Basterrechea, 2005). The virtual nature of the AVE space also offers access to a multitude of students and workers from private companies (Coto, 2014).

That same year saw the launch of the 'Portal del Hispanismo', a database of Spanish departments and Hispanic studies across the globe, which has gradually broadened its scope to academic activity and research in this field.

The AVE continued to adapt itself to the communication demands of the 21st century by creating 'AVE Social', which hosts a community of nearly 100,000 users with a keen interest in Spanish culture and language (Juan, 2009). In recent years, however, the technological development of the tool has failed to keep up with new user experiences, such as mobile, smartphone and tablet usability.

To summarize, the CI's online presence has made the institution the dean of Spanish digital diplomacy.

4. The Cervantes Institute on social networks

The emergence of social networks in the late noughties brought some disruption to the CI's traditional communication models (Campos, 2008). However, the Institute lost no time in adapting itself, becoming once again a pioneer of the new media.

The experience offered by social networks has been used by all the groups and areas of the institution, from students to teachers, librarians to library users, as well as individuals seeking information about exhibitors or artists.

The CI currently has profiles on global networks, including Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn, Google+ and Tumblr. Likewise, with the same goal of reaching more specific audiences (linguistically or culturally), it has set up accounts on domestic platforms such as Youku, Sina weibo, Douban and QQ in China; Orkut in Brazil; Mixi in Japan; and V Kontakte in Russia.

The CI opened its first social network accounts in 2009 (Training, Library, CVC and 'Rutas Cervantes'), although it was not until 2011 that the Institute's official profile appeared on Twitter (<https://twitter.com/instcervantes/>) and Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/InstCervantes>). By the time the Ministry of Foreign Affairs launched its official profiles in 2013, the CI already boasted 42 official accounts on Twitter, which currently number 48 with 329,516 followers. In 2013, in order to restructure and formalize the CI's presence on the social networks, it deleted some accounts using the name of the Cervantes, thus strengthening its unique corporate identity (names, logos and bios). It also ensured greater coordination of existing accounts by training managers, setting up work teams, creating content, and so on.

The CI has a greater presence on Facebook – besides the institutional account (CS), most of its branches have their own accounts – with more than half a million followers (550,269). The institutional account has the largest number of followers (48,138), followed by the Cairo branch (22,318) and the Brasilia branch (20,043). On average, the CI branches post once or twice a day, while the institutional account averages more than three posts a day.¹

Lately a number of branches, such as New York, Chicago, London, Brussels and Hamburg, have opened accounts on Instagram, where, the choice of names indicates a certain imitation effect within countries and little coordination.

The CI is also very active on the LinkedIn professional network. Institutionally, the CI has few profiles; several are maintained by its branches (Sao Paulo, Budapest, New York, Berlin, London, Sydney, Munich, Hamburg, Harvard and London) and its general company profile, on which some 1,500 personal profiles of current employees, examiners and collaborators mainly depend. A fine-tuned search yields approximately 550 to 600 current employees on the Internet, or 60% of the total workforce.

In the case of the YouTube network, the CI has a strong presence, with most of its branches having a channel to stream videos of their classes, services, teaching methods, certifications, and so on. The CS account, for example, has more than 5,000 subscribers and 120 videos available, some with more than 2 million views. However, as is the case with the Facebook and Twitter profiles, there is room for improvement regarding coordination when it comes to creating the name of the channel.

In short, the more than 800,000 followers² on social networks could turn the IC's communication action on these platforms into a powerful tool for digital public diplomacy. Therefore, if the key to the successful use of social networks in foreign policy is based on four areas: communication, community, cooperation and participation (Rubio, 2011), the CI can be said to conduct a genuine external action by reaching each community in a clear way. It also pursues, as Seib argues, real time diplomacy (2012); even a diplomacy 3.0 in which citizens are the owners of the power of communication, relationship and connection (Nye, 2013).

¹ The four most numerous and active accounts on Facebook (Cairo, Brasilia, Manila and Curitiba) do not match the number of followers and amount of activity on Twitter. They are followed by London and Rio de Janeiro with an active and numerous presence on both platforms. By contrast, the highly successful Twitter accounts, such as those of the New York, Tokyo, Dublin and Paris branches, are secondary on the follower scale and Facebook activity (from number 17 onwards). This indicates the diversity of strategies on social networks.

² Of the almost 900,000 users following the IC, it would be necessary to eliminate those that follow the IC on more than one platform (such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram). On Twitter, as will be seen below, we estimate that the number of 'repetitions' is not very high, although it is far more difficult to estimate these numbers for Facebook and Instagram.

5. Research objectives and methodology

Twitter stands out above all other social networks as the most effective tool in international relations and diplomatic activities (Lichtenstein, 2010; Parmelee & Bichard, 2011), both for political communication and citizen participation.

The aim of this research was to describe how the Cervantes Institute uses Twitter as a tool for mass communication and public (digital) diplomacy. To this end, from data collected on October 17 2017, we studied static variables including: date of creation of the accounts, their verification, their number of followers and number of those followed by them and lists in which the accounts are included. To demonstrate the communication activity within a given timeframe (01/01/2017–30/06/2017) we studied dynamic variables, such as the number and percentage of messages, message growth during the study period, messages, retweets (RTs), commitment and dialogue.

In addition, a secondary objective of this study was to ascertain the traffic from the Institute's accounts. For this purpose, we selected a sample of tweets sent during September 2017 to quantify the volume of messages, interactions, content, dialogues and tone of the messages.

The active accounts dependent on the CI and recognised as such by the Institute were used as the sample for the study. We found a total of 48 accounts (see Annex 1), most of which belong to branches of the CI located outside Spain (43) on five continents, as well as accounts managed by Central Services (5). This segmentation of coverage, audience and location allowed us analyse two groups, the Central Services (CS) accounts and those of the 43 branches outside Spain.

The data were selected through an online data collection service (Fanpage Karma) and Followerwonk was used to locate users common to more than one account.

To achieve the secondary objective, we download all the messages generated on thirty consecutive days (1/09/2017 to 30/09/2017) by the 48 CI accounts. Other tools (Audisense and Twitonomy) were used to study the content, for which a coding scheme was developed to extract and record the key themes throughout the month, which we classified as educational and cultural, economic, international relations and tourism fields. In order to preview the context of the tweets, we used the same process to detect the most frequently used words and sets of three words (trigrams) forming phrases contained in the tweets.

6. The Cervantes Institute's reach on Twitter

The Cervantes Institute's sole and well-intentioned purpose on the Twitter network was to have a presence and disseminate its activities and services, despite the fact that this led to duplication, dispersion and abandonment of accounts and a resulting structure that had no other logic other than an immediate response to a short-term need. This hasty approach, lack of coordination and, ultimately, of 'control' of the content posted placed the institution's global reputation in jeopardy, as is borne out by Internet accounts that are still active as 'Cervantes Institute' profiles but which the Institute does not recognize as such in its 'official' list (<https://twitter.com/InstCervantes/lists/centros-ic>).

Twitter offers the institution a wide range of benefits, the most important of these being: a professional connection with linguists, learning support, maintenance of personal and institutional relationships, marketing and socialization campaigns, branding, and local contact through public diplomacy actions. In short, rather than just post the daily activities and agendas of each Cervantes branch, the CI can also use Twitter to tailor its actions and messages to wherever their branches are located, thus boosting its ability to exert influence.

In mid-2017, 48 of the 64 CI branches had a social network account. The first Twitter account was activated in 2008 by the Rio de Janeiro branch, followed immediately thereafter by the Toulouse branch, prompting the first wave of accounts that included those of Central

Services (Training, Library, CVC and 'Rutas Cervantes') as well as some other branches abroad (Rome, Sao Paulo, Chicago, Brasilia, Cairo, London, Bremen, Porto Alegre and El Salvador).

The director and secretary general of the CI as well as the vast majority of the directors of the CI branches are noteworthy for their absence on Twitter. In contrast, the directors of the Tel Aviv branch, Carmen Álvarez y Utrecht and Pilar Tena, and the director of the London branch, Ignacio Peyró, stand out for their activity and number of followers. Thus, it would appear that the opportunity to give a personal and more friendly touch as well as provide a different and complementary perspective to digital diplomacy, as many of the world's ambassadors do, is being squandered by the CI.

According to our observation, the creation of Twitter accounts responds to a contagion effect of a national level that, with the exception of Europe, is also happening on a continent-by-continent basis (see Table 1).

Table 1. Static data from the Twitter accounts of the Cervantes Institute

	Accounts	Followers	Average followers	Users followed by CI accounts	Tweets
Europe	21	33,414	1,591	7,247	49,383
Asia	4	11,490	2,872	2,876	14,901
Oceania	1	2,542	2,542	768	6,477
America	12	25,367	2,113	3,802	38,267
Africa	5	7,350	1,470	1,247	7,247
Total Branches	43	80,163	10,588	15,940	116,275
Central Services	5	249,353	49,870	2,476	48,744
Totals	48	329,516	6,864	18,416	165,019

Our first analysis of the CI's presence on Twitter showed two clearly differentiated groups that respond to different rationales and dynamics, hence we divided the 48 accounts into two main groups: the accounts of the CI branches outside Spain (43) and Central Services accounts (5) (see Annex 1). As can be seen, the 48 accounts have 329,516 followers, which, considering that some users follow more than one account, leads us to conclude that the direct global reach ranges between 300,000 and 320,000 users.³ These are mainly concentrated in the CS accounts, accounting for 75% of the CI's followers, with the CI's Madrid headquarters totalling 171,845 followers.

The verification of the accounts is an important security measure that should not be overlooked, thus we were requested to verify their status as official channels of the organization. It was surprising to find a low level of verification of the CI's Twitter accounts. Only the CS accounts (with the exception of 'Ruta Cervantes' account) and those in Manila, New Delhi and Istanbul – all on the Asian continent – were verified. Once again, we observe the division of the accounts in two clearly differentiated groups and the regional or imitation effect, referred to when analysing the creation of the accounts.

³ A comparison of some accounts showed that the main accounts of the SC (InstCervantes, cvc_cervantes and Bibliotecas_IC have 11,676 identical followers (5.8% of the total of these three accounts). Something similar occurred when comparing the followers of the CS account (InstCervantes) and the two most followed branch accounts in London and Tokyo, where the coincidence rate (0.3%) was negligible. Finally, a comparison of the accounts in a single country, revealed that the coincidences were not representative either, thus in the United States, Chicago, New York and Harvard share 297 followers (3.7%) and London, Leeds and Manchester share 384 (4.6%).

Another interesting element for measuring relevance is to check the number of lists in which the accounts are included. Inclusion in these lists is indicative of the degree of interest, as is the number of followers, although the lists are usually concentrated in specific sectors and directly linked to the communication purposes of the accounts. The criteria for inclusion in these lists are the capacity to generate interest and to interact with the actors in the sector, thus providing us with a valid indicator. Table 2 shows the most important lists and the followers of the branches.

Table 2. Static data on followers and list.

Name of account	Date of creation	Followers	Lists	List/Followers ratio
instcervantes	mar-11	171845	2654	0.01544415
cvc_cervantes	may-09	47969	1562	0.032562697
bibliotecas_ic	abr-09	21308	857	0.040219636
Ic_formaele	may-09	7170	264	0.036820084
ic_newyork	feb-10	5594	218	0.038970325
cervanteslondon	jul-09	6094	204	0.03347555
cervantestokio	may-10	5551	156	0.028103044
icbelohorizonte	may-10	1515	132	0.087128713
ictoulouse	dic-08	2031	117	0.05760709

That the number of accounts followed is highly disproportionate, both in total numbers and in percentages of followers, which was one of the common ratios used to measure this, confirmed a lack of control in this respect. Furthermore, we did not detect a huge difference between the two selected groups.

It is interesting to note the activity of the different accounts (Annex 1). The tweets generated by the CI since the creation of the accounts stood at 165,019. Given that the number of tweets is not relevant, since it depends on the date on which the account was set up, we focused on the average number of tweets per day (1.44 tweets). Thus, the CS accounts stand out again (4.2), especially those belonging to the institutional CS (8.93) and the Virtual Centre (8.45), as compared with the branch accounts around the world. Indeed, the branches were clearly located in another range of activity (1.1), where major differences were observed between the continents, with the exception of Oceania, which, with only one account, is not significant; the rest average about one tweet a day. The most important cities were Chicago (6.19), London (3.62), Dublin (3.01), Tokyo (2.79) and Naples (2.57). Finally, the branches tweeting more than twice daily included Sydney and Sao Paulo (both 2.36). The least active accounts, those with a weekly or lower level of activity, included Lyon (0.02), Berlin (0.11), Munich (0.21), Porto Alegre (0.24), Bremen (0.26) and Albuquerque (0.27). In this regard, it is worth noting the strikingly low activity of the 'Rutas Cervantes' account (0.22), despite its forming part of the CS.

7. The Cervantes Institute's activity on Twitter

As we already mentioned, as of 17/10/2010, the total number of CI followers stood at 329,516. During the analysis period, we observed a 5.28% increase in followers, 17,407 more than at the beginning of 2017 (see Table 3). The study of this growth again revealed a huge difference between the accounts managed by the CS and those by the IC branches. A marked contrast was also observed in growth rates. The five CS accounts had 249,353 followers (75.6% of the total), which, during the period under study, increased by 15,917 (91% of the total), i.e. a

growth of 6%. For their part, the branches, with 43 active accounts, had 80,163 followers (24.4% of the total number of followers), which, during the same period, increased by 1,490 followers (a mere 9% of global growth) and an increase of 1.8% over their initial figures as of 1 January 2017.

Table 3. Total number and growth of followers in Central Services and branches.

	Set of CI accounts	Central Services accounts	Branch accounts
Followers	329,516	249,353	80,163
6-month growth	17,407	15,917	1,490
% growth of followers	5.28%	6.3%	1.8%

During the six-month study period, 13,913 tweets were posted, resulting in millions of interactions. The average number of tweets/day per branch rose from 0.15 to 1.59, indicating that activity remained stable over time since the start of the CI's Twitter activity. The two study groups also saw a minimal rise in tweets from the branches (1.11 to 1.30) and a slight fall in those tweets sent from the CS, (4.27 to 4.06). By continents, we observed an increase in activity in the African branches (from 0.64 to 1.06) and a sharp fall in the Oceania branch (2.3 to 0.3). By branches, a sudden increase was observed in Leeds (1.69 to 4.02), London (3.62 to 7.66), Harvard (1 to 2) and Chicago (6.19 to 9.06). Also noteworthy was the substantial decline in activity in all of Brazil's branches, with the exception of Porto Alegre (0.24 to 0.39).

On this point, we can confirm that the CI Madrid was the most active profile (2,168 messages) during our six-month study. In contrast, accounts showing little, even passive activity included Albuquerque (4 tweets in 6 months), Berlin (5) and Curitiba (5).

Table 4. Tweets in six months, average number of tweets in six months, Number of likes, number of likes per tweet, numbers of retweets, retweets per tweet. Classified by the CS and branches.

	All CI accounts	Central Services accounts	Branch accounts
Number of followers	329,516	249,353	80,163
Tweets over 6 months	13,913	3,677	10,236
Average tweets / day in 6 months	1.6	4	1.3
'likes'	45,908	33,752	12,156
Average 'likes' /tweet	1.43	5.18	0.99
Retweets	34,649	27,174	7,475
Average retweet/tweet	0.96	4.12	0.6
Average conversation	1.75%	3.96%	1.5%

Another important figure concerns the audience response to the tweets by the CI, both 'likes' and 'retweets' (RT). The overall average 'likes' per tweet numbered 1.43 out of a total of 45,908 'likes' over the six-month period. The practice of retweeting is very widespread among followers of the CI accounts, as is borne out by the 34,649 RTs generated in six months, totalling an average of 0.96 per branch and message. The fact that this is so close unity indicates that almost all the information tweeted by the institution was retweeted by the other accounts. (See Table 5)

The exchange of ideas and knowledge together with dialogues and social interactions allowed us to clarify Twitter's potential a diplomatic tool for the CI.

Thus, our analysis shows that the 'likes' generated by the CI's tweets over the six-month study period totalled 45,908: 33,752 from the CS and 12,156 from the branches. This represents a global average of 1.5 'likes' per tweet, which, divided into 5.18 for the CS and 0.99 for the branches, reveals a huge difference. This suggested that the tweets from the CS generated a greater interest in the followers, provided useful and important information, set trends, and so on. Our calculation of the feedback generated by the two groups of accounts showed that the CS received almost 2.5 times as many 'likes' as those received by the branch accounts.⁴

It is also important to highlight the tweets sent by the Madrid general account of the CS (with 12.9 'likes' per tweet), the Cervantes libraries (5.4 'likes' per tweet) and Tokyo (4.8 'likes' per tweet) At the other extreme, we found several branches, such as Berlin, Curitiba, Stockholm and Belo Horizonte, with 0 'likes' per tweet.

The interaction through the RT analysis showed, upon first examination, an identical situation: the CS posted a total number of 27,174 RTs, whereas the branches retweeted 7,475 times. Thus, the CS retweeted or disseminated eight times more messages than those from the branches: 4.12 versus 0.6. This indicates that the tweets were more attractive and meaningful than those posted by the overseas branches. Hence, yet again, the institutional account numbers ranked highest (10.4 retweets per tweet), followed by the Cervantes Libraries (4.4) and the CVC (3.6). In contrast, the branches in the cities of Rio de Janeiro, Curitiba, Stockholm, Belo Horizonte and Lyon generated 0 RTs.

By weighting these figures⁵ according to the number of followers, which undoubtedly favours interaction, we obtained different figures. The number of RTs generated by the central accounts remained slightly three times higher than the TRs generated by the branches headquarters, but far from the previous figures.

To identify the CI's audience, we needed to have data that quantifies the dialogues. These are manifested by a relationship between the tweets posted published from each profile and the replies generated by each one of them. The mean for all the CI accounts was 1.75%, but a comparison of the two groups created for this study shows the dialogues originating from the CS accounts was 3.96% as opposed to 1.5% for the CI headquarters accounts.

The analysis of data from the different accounts also allowed us to know the metrics generated daily by the CI. Table 5 summarizes the data from the five continents where the CI has a presence and from the CS. The CS was the most active group with 4.06 daily tweets per account, and America was the continent that stood out most, with an average of 1.5. The most active and responsive accounts were managed in Madrid (12 tweets a day), Chicago (9)

⁴The calculation was done by dividing the number of 'likes' by the number resulting from multiplying the number of tweets by the number of followers.

⁵The calculation was done by dividing the number of RTs by the number resulting from multiplying the number of tweets by the number of followers.

and London (8). Conversely, the Oceania branch, with 0.3 communications per day, is located at the opposite end of the scale. The most passive accounts were: Albuquerque, Curitiba, Belo Horizonte, Berlin and Stockholm, with 0.02 messages per day.

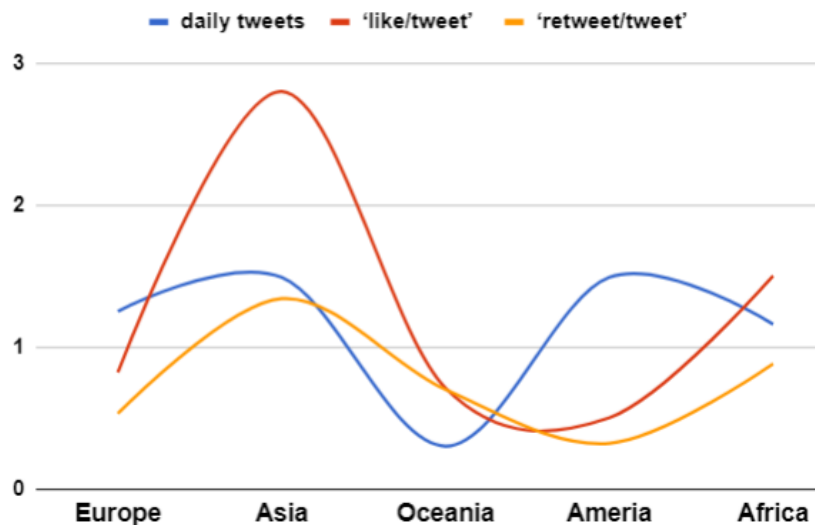
On the other hand, our analysis of communication-generating activities yielded more advanced metrics such as 'like/tweet' and 'retweet/tweet' (Table 5). The first case was highlighted in Asia, where each tweet received an average of 2.8 'likes'. In the second, Asia led with an average of 1.34 retweet per tweet, followed by Africa with an average of 0.88 retweets per tweet.

Table 5. Daily information on the tweets from the accounts on the continents and the CS

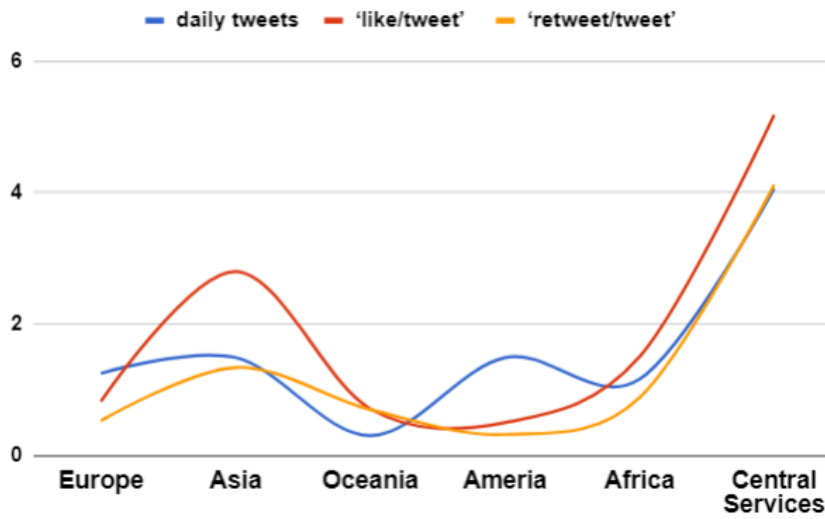
	Nº Branches	tweets in 6 months	Average tweet /day	Nº 'likes' / tweet	Retweet / tweet	Conversation
Europe	21	4783	1.25	0.82	0.53	1.96%
Asia	4	1,089	1.49	2.8	1.34	0.96%
Oceania	1	56	0.3	0.71	0.69	0
America	12	3247	1.49	0.5	0.32	1.48%
Africa	5	1,061	1.16	1.5	0.88	0.31%
Central Services	5	3,677	4.06	5.18	4.12	3.96%

Graph 1 shows the actions of the five continents in relation to the average daily messages and the 'like/tweet' and 'retweet/tweet' metrics'. The review by continent shows that Asia surpasses the other regions of the world.

Graph 1. Comparison by continent of the average daily tweets and the 'like/tweet' and 'retweet/tweet' metrics.



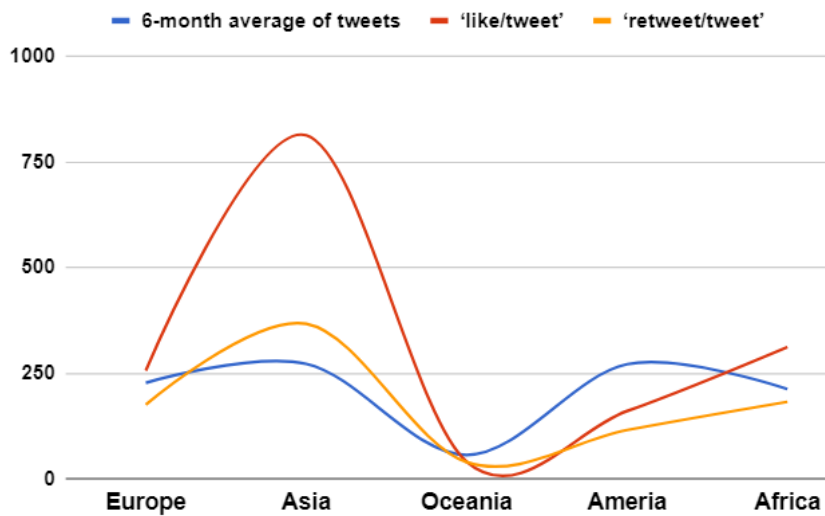
Graph 2. Comparison by continent and CS of the average number of daily tweets and the 'like/tweet' and 'retweet/tweet' metrics.



Graph 2 compares the data in Graph 1 and presents the figures provided by the CS. This demonstrates their hegemony over the continental branches, doubling or even tripling the tweets posted by the CI branches outside Spain.

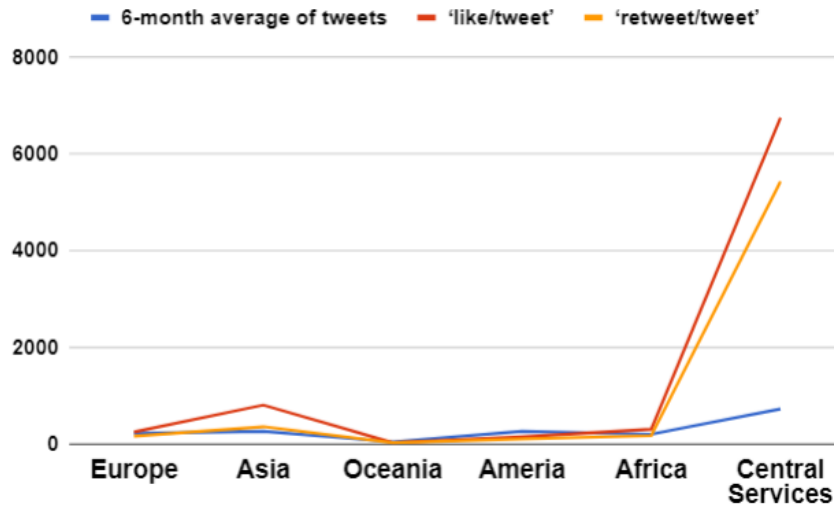
As to the average number of messages tweeted by the five regions over six months, Graph 3 compares the situation according to the tweets posted, the 'likes/tweet' and the 'retweets/tweet'. The tweets 'liked' in the Asian continent show a twofold increase over those in Africa and fifteen times more than those from the Oceania branch, once again showing a clear predominance over the rest of the areas. The curves produced by the tweets and the RTs are somewhat analogous across the five continents.

Graph 3. Comparison by continent of the 6-month average of tweets and the 'like/tweet' and 'retweet/tweet' metrics.



Graph 4 shows the CS variable in relation to Graph 3. The extensive results indicate interest in the messages sent from the CS in 'likes/tweet' and 'retweets/tweet', multiplying the continental data by approximately four.

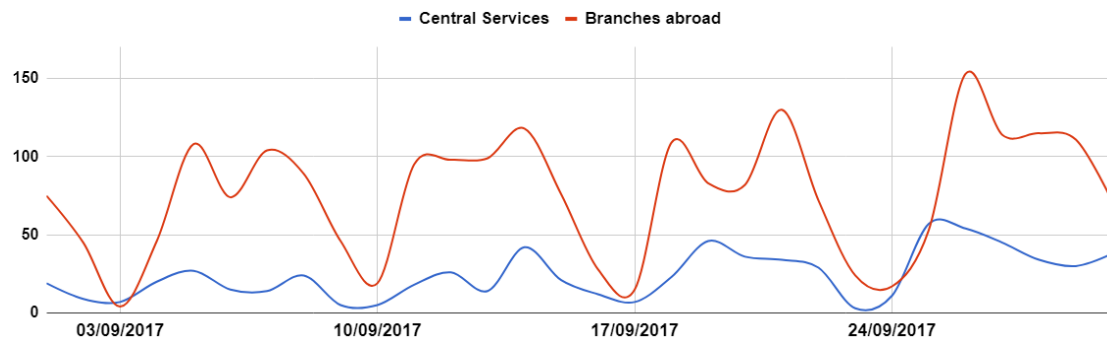
Graph 4. Comparison by continent and CS of the 6-month average of tweets and the 'like/tweet' and 'retweet/tweet' metrics.



8. The Cervantes Institute's Dialogue

In order to meet the second objective of the study, we analysed the tweets sent from the CI accounts in September 2017. During this period, 3,014 tweets and retweets were posted, averaging 62.7 messages per branch and 100 messages per day as a whole. Graph 5 shows the daily activity and growth of messages. As can be seen, tweets were not limited to weekdays but extended to the weekend, although to a lesser extent.

Graph 5. Number of tweets during the month of September.



The breakdown of the messages into the two groups under study showed that 2,288 tweets were posted by the branches and 726 by the CS. A total of 55% of the posts from the 43 CI branches (1,239) were RTs. In total, 306 RTs originated from the CS accounts: 143 from the Madrid headquarters, 107 from the Library, 47 from the CVC, 8 from the ELE Formation and 1 from the 'Rutas Cervantes'. Also noteworthy were the RTs from CI branches (324), ICEX (87), Turespaña (84) and Spanish embassies (27). These data show some coordination among

the CI branches in retweeting tweets from the CS; in addition, 511 posts (22% of the total) feature one of the five CS profiles.

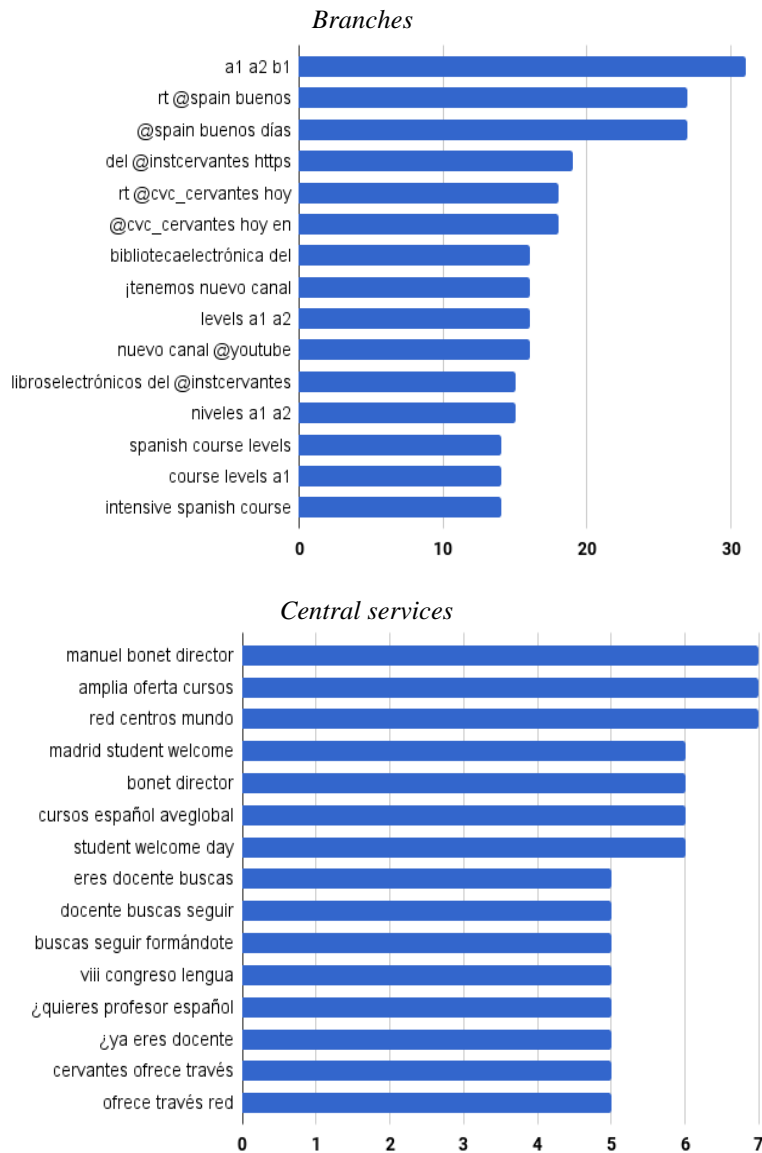
On the other hand, some 45% of the tweets (1,049) posted in September were original. In 92% of the cases (2,113), links were included to diverse content including photographs, other websites, videos, etc. Some 2,000 posts (88%) used Spanish as the vehicular language. The study of the content shows that nearly 90% of the tweets provided information about the CI and its services, including teaching of Spanish, diplomas and certificates, exams, activities, and so on; 8% of them concerned the Spanish economy, with nearly 100 messages mainly referring to ICEX; 2% to tourism; and a smaller number concern international relations.

The analysis of tweets from Central Services (726) appears to yield different results. Of the total tweets, 373 were retweets, accounting for 51% of the total. The breakdown of these data show that only 7 retweets were posted from the 43 accounts of the branches abroad: 58 from the CI headquarters in Madrid, 49 from the Libraries, 21 from the CVC, and the rest from a wide range of accounts. A total of 38% of tweets (277) contained a link. As for the content of the generalized tweets, we observed three main themes: 85% of them were about matters related to education, culture and linguistics, while the rest (some 15%) concerned international relations (40 messages) and tourism (30 messages).

Two-way communication is fundamental to digital diplomacy. The results of the analysis show a low level of reciprocity on the part of the CI: 118 messages (4% of the total) began with @, inferring that they were answering or responding to users, which indicates that Twitter is mostly used as a one-way channel. The few accounts that interacted with users were: @InstCervantes, @ObserESHarvard and @ICManchester.

It was also interesting to know what complete word was repeated most often in the 3,014 tweets. @instervantes was used 308 times (3%), español 294 times (3%), spanish 222 times (2%), @bibliotecas_ic 113 times (1%) and @cervanteslondon 104 times (1%). The five most often mentioned words from the CS accounts were @instervantes 102 times (6%), español 39 times (2%), cervantes 30 times (2%), @caroycuervo 26 times (1%) and caroycuervo75años 22 times (1%).

Finally, we classified the most commonly written three-word phrases, also called trigrams, in tweets. Graph 6 compares the fifteen most commonly repeated trigrams by the branches and the CS. As can be seen, the trigrams used on the CI accounts showed a definite rationale as to the content included in the messages. Most of the information tweeted from the institution was centred on disseminating the teaching of Spanish and the services offered by the branches.

Graph 6. Comparison between the branches and the SCs of the most repeated trigrams.

9. Conclusions

The content of the tweets posted shows that Twitter is an effective tool of public diplomacy. A large number of the tweets were about language and culture, although tourism, the Spanish economy and international relations were topics in which the CI exercises its digital sway.

The exhaustive review of the data gathered during the study period yielded a sufficient sample to affirm that Twitter is a suitable channel for Spanish cultural diplomacy. As shown by high number of tweets and RTs, the output and transmission of real-time information generates dialogue while building a learning community among the Cervantes Institute's different audiences.

Of the 48 accounts, divided into branch accounts and Central Service accounts, the tweets posted by the CS were more interesting for the community of followers than those

tweeted by the branches, since they were shared more often and received more "likes".⁶ This situation has its rationale, given that the CS forms part of the central government's roadmap, but for a smooth functioning diplomatic activity, the 43 branches should be more active by producing their own content with an emphasis on the places where they are located. This brings us to the question of the marked difference in the way these two groups are run; whereas the CS have sufficient means and are well coordinated, the branches are light years away from the CS' management capacity and their performance is extremely erratic and sporadic.

In the light of the findings, we can establish a correlation between the activity and the results in terms of response. Thus, the CS were 3 times more active than the IC branches, both in RTs and 'likes', and their tweets generated 3 times more 'likes' and RTs than those from the branches.

This study has also allowed us to pinpoint some factors that explain our findings; first, the size and diversity of the institution is an issue; second, there is a lack of resources dedicated exclusively to this endeavour, especially as to the profile of the account administrators, their training, lack of coordination tools, and so forth. The administration of each account rests on the availability, position and willingness of the person in charge of it. Such a precarious situation precludes the possibility of responding to the specific communication needs of each CI branch (its markets, people and languages). The CI, therefore, needs to increase its use of local languages, which is minimal compared to Spanish. In this connection, we would highlight the lack of coordination, with the absence of common guidelines, as seen, for example, in unverified the accounts, the diversity of names chosen and the evident disparity in the volume of activity. There also appears to be no internal coordination at the branch level.

Our study also confirmed that the Cervantes Institute mainly uses Twitter to send one-way messages. The prevalence of unidirectional messages observed in our sample runs counter to the meaning and scope of digital diplomacy, which stresses the strength of social networking in community building. Given this situation, it is advisable to adapt and modify the IC branches' performance to meet public demand, since it has been shown that users seek dialogue, invite feedback or wish to become involved in both face-to-face and online activities.

Lastly, we have noted the focus of the CI branches' twitter accounts, as much for the type of tweets messages and the structures of their respective communities, is mainly local. This is a strategic decision that may limit the efficacy of this network of accounts as a tool for digital public diplomacy.

To summarize, our analysis indicates that to capitalize on the opportunities that social networks have to offer in the sphere of digital diplomacy, there is need for an effective and coordinated communication strategy, one that will make a more decisive commitment to these tools. This can be achieved by dedicating more human resources and providing them with the tools and appropriate training.

⁶ By weighting these figures according to the number of followers which undoubtedly favours interaction (dividing the number of RTs+ 'likes' by the number resulting from multiplying the number of tweets by the number of followers), the response (RTs) generated by the central accounts was 2.5 times higher than that generated by the branches.

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Annex 1. Breakdown of Twitter account of each center 17/10/17

Branch location	Name of account	Date of creation	Followers	Lists	Users they follow	Tweets	Average tweets/day	Verification
Europe								
London	cervanteslondon	07/2009	6094	204	152	10,866	3.62	
Munich	cervantesmunich	02/2017	44	2	61	51	0.21	
Berlin	ic_berlin	05/2011	1555	51	240	267	0.11	
Bremen	ic_bremen	07/2009	1099	43	205	793	0.26	
Brussels	ic_bruselas	12/2010	1938	34	537	2,859	1.14	
Budapest	ic_budapest	09/2011	1129	25	77	2,156	0.97	
Leeds	ic_leeds	12/2012	983	31	328	3,002	1.69	
Milan	ic_milan	12/2012	1032	28	302	1,601	0.	
Palermo	ic_palermo	12/2013	301	11	108	1,168	0.83	
Stockholm	ic_stockholm	06/2011	1203	31	469	997	0.43	
Athens	icatenas	05/2011	1471	24	254	3,220	1.38	
Bordeaux	icbordeaux	03/2013	773	22	355	529	0.31	
Dublin	icdublin	10/2010	3009	89	1,412	7,734	3.01	
Lyon	iclyon	02/2012	348	16	75	46	0.02	
Manchester	icmanchester	10/2012	2038	73	398	4,722	2.57	
Naples	icnapoles	02/2013	556	18	208	964	0.56	
Sofia	icsofia	01/2010	930	35	201	3,128	1.11	
Toulouse	ictoulouse	12/2008	2031	117	231	1,299	0.4	
Utrecht	icutrecht	11/2011	1246	33	605	1,863	0.86	
Paris	paris_ic	09/2011	2716	81	649	640	1.17	
Rome	romacervantes	06/2009	2918	90	380	1,478	0.48	
Asia								
Tokyo	cervantestokio	05/2010	5551	156	511	7,561	2.79	
Manila	ic_manila	11/2010	1834	56	290	1,603	0.63	X
New Delhi	icnuevadelhi	10/2010	2455	79	1,929	4,210	1.64	X
Istanbul	icestambul	02/2011	1650	81	146	1,527	0.63	X
Oceania								
Sidney	ic_sydney	04/2010	2542	68	768	6,477	2.36	
America								
Rio de Janeiro	cervantesrio	2008	2970	92	99	1,182	0.39	
Brasilia	ic_brasilia	06/2009	2140	45	184	3,051	1	
Curitiba	ic_curitiba	06/2010	1111	32	247	809	0.3	
El Salvador	ic_salvador	09/2009	1286	40	605	2,020	0.69	
Belo Horizonte	icbelohorizonte	05/2010	1515	132	65	1,771	0.66	
Puerto Alegre	icportoalegre	10/2009	249	8	62	697	0.24	
Recife	icrecife	03/2010	1946	54	475	1,498	0.54	
Chicago	chicago_ic	06/2009	1511	29	356	18,838	6.19	
New York	ic_newyork	02/2010	5594	218	485	4,593	1.64	
Sao Paulo	instcervantessp	06/2009	2501	92	1,043	1,441	8.452.36	
Albuquerque	cervantesabq	02/2010	1907	56	104	748	0.27	
Harvard	obseresharvard	09/2013	1637	29	77	1,619	1.08	
Africa								
Cairo	lccairo	10/2009	1630	40	319	1,559	0.53	
Casablanca	ic_casablanca	09/2012	1264	45	361	1,100	0.59	
Rabat	ic_rabat	02/2011	2153	44	285	2,177	0.89	

Tangier	ictanger	11/2011	1426	31	165	1,299	0.6	
Tunis	ictunez	09/2012	877	0	117	1,112	0.6	
Central Services								
Training ELE	ic_formaele	05/2009	7170	204	299	7,170	0.74	X
Library IC	bibliotecas_ic	04/2009	21308	857	418	9,393	3.03	X
Centro Virtual Cervantes	cvc_cervantes	05/2009	47969	1562	56	14,940	8.45	X
Cervantes Institute (Madrid)	instcervantes	03/2011	171845	2654	1,605	21,496	8.93	X
Rutas Cervantes	rutascervantes	09/2009	1061	0	98	640	0.22	

Annex 2. Breakdown of Twitter account of each branch from 17/01/01 to 17/06/30

Accounts	Growth Followers	Tweets	Average tweets /day	Nº Likes	Nª likes / tweet	Re-tweets	Retweets/ tweet	Conversation
Europe								
cervanteslondon	439	1388	7.66	2108	1.51	1559	1.12	0.94%
cervantesmunich	15	37	0.2	38	1.02	14	0.37	8.11%
ic_berlin	64	5	0.02	0	0	1	0.2	0%
ic_bremen	4	229	1.26	226	0.98	131	0.57	0.44%
ic_bruselas	33	455	2.51	438	0.96	252	0.55	0.66%
ic_budapest	16	54	0.29	4	0.07	1	0.01	0%
ic_leeds	38	728	4.02	399	0.548	304	0.41	0%
ic_milan	9	52	0.28	34	0.65	20	0.38	0%
ic_palermo	10	45	0.24	86	1.91	36	0.8	2.22%
ic_stockholm	20	5	0.02	0	0	0	0	0%
icatenas	9	233	1.28	307	1.31	190	0.81	1.29%
icbordeaux	9	12	0.06	6	0.5	7	0.58	0%
icdublin	30	257	1.41	302	1.17	156	0.6	0.39%
iclyon	8	8	0.04	1	0.125	0	0	0%
icmanchester	40	380	2.09	521	1.37	407	1.07	2.89%
icnapoles	9	26	0.14	9	0.34	9	0.34	0%
icsofia	-2	286	1.58	226	0.79	109	0.38	0.7%
ictoulouse	5	110	0.6	57	0.51	24	0.21	0.91%
icutrecht	9	89	0.49	99	1.11	118	1.32	8.99%
paris_ic	46	305	1.68	432	1.41	303	0.99	0.98%
romacervantes	11	79	0.43	78	0.98	33	0.41	12.66%
Asia								
cervantestokio	97	354	1.95	1719	4.85	550	1.55	1.41%
ic_manila	17	269	1.48	597	2.21	344	1.27	1.12%
icnuevadelhi	85	215	1.18	596	2.77	393	1.82	0.93%
icestambul	43	251	1.38	346	1.37	181	0.72	0.4%
Oceania								
ic_sydney	2	56	0.3	40	0.71	39	0.69	0%
America								
cervantesrio	-5	27	0.14	2	0.07	0	0	0%
ic_brasilia	5	16	0.08	6	0.37	2	0.12	0%
ic_curitiba	10	5	0.02	0	0	0	0	0%

ic_salvador	-2	233	1.28	33	0.14	21	0.09	0.43%
icbelohorizonte	9	5	0.02	0	0	0	0	0%
icportoalegre	5	71	0.39	40	0.56	39	0.54	0%
icrecife	2	43	0.23	10	0.23	4	0.09	0%
chicago_ic	20	1640	9.06	368	0.22	215	0.13	0.06%
ic_newyork	74	677	3.74	602	0.88	386	0.57	0.74%
instcervantessp	53	164	0.9	72	0.43	42	0.25	0%
cervantesabq	11	4	0.02	4	1	1	0.25	0%
obseresharvard	101	362	2	788	2.17	674	1.86	16.57%
Africa								
iccairo	11	238	1.31	19	0.07	16	0.06	0%
ic_casablanca	54	172	0.95	548	3.18	268	1.55	1.16%
ic_rabat	21	284	1.56	349	1.22	243	0.85	0%
ictanger	35	269	1.48	548	2.03	305	1.13	0.37%
ictunez	10	98	0.54	98	1	78	0.79	0%
Central Services								
Ic_formaele	94	399	2.2	499	1.25	397	0.99	0.25%
bibliotecas_ic	316	428	2.36	2325	5.43	1888	4.41	4.91%
cvc_cervantes	2547	622	3.43	2789	4.48	2242	3.6	7.07%
instcervantes	12937	2168	11.97	28030	12.92	22574	10.41	7.56%
rutascervantes	23	60	0.33	109	1.81	73	1.21	0%