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«POLITICS AS A RIGGED GAME». AI GENERATED PRP DURING THE LAST SPANISH ELECTION

In April 2013, the American journalist Matt Taibi published an article in «Rolling Stones» entitled: *Everything is rigged: the biggest price-fixing scandal ever* about finance and conspiracy theories. In 2016, Hbo launched the dystopian series *Westworld* with the claim: «The world is a rigged game, so you best learn to play dirty» echoing sentiments and opinions circulated on social networks. The three main dimensions of this discourse are: the lack of rules and «ethics» in the political arena; the dimension of the game as a metaphor and as a narrative form of political action; the importance of new technologies and «machines» as an aid in this rigged game. The rise of Artificial intelligence (Ai) has taken this dynamic to even more sophisticated levels than before. In recent years, one of the most worrying challenges has been the impact of Ai-powered disinformation on public opinion, electoral processes and democratic accountability. While public attention and expert analysis has mainly focused on the generation of fake news or distorted narratives, the use of Ai has dramatically increased the scope and potentially the effectiveness of the individual voter behaviour manipulation and microtargeting techniques that political campaigns have used since the early 2000s (e.g., reinforcement learning, services like Clogger Inc.). This article aims to shed light on these different and complementary strategies of using Ai in the construction of electoral consensus with a specific focus on their role in the last general elections held in Spain on 23 July 2023. The political dynamics of the elections, with Pedro Sanchez's government defending its actions against the right-wing opposition parties Partido popular and Vox, offer a relevant scenario to explore how Ai-generated content and tools can influence and shape electoral behaviour. The analysis will not only be limited to the identification of themes, narratives and patterns of Ai-generated disinformation, but will try to provide examples of what can be defined as the Ai-generated paradoxical reinforcement process.

KEYWORDS *Ai, Political Communication, Spanish Politics, Ai-Powered Communication, Ai-Technology.*

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1. Introduction

In April 2013, the American journalist Matt Taibbi published an article in *Rolling stones* entitled: «Everything is rigged: the biggest price-fixing scandal ever» about finance and conspiracy theories (Taibbi 2013). The expression in the title, rather than the theses and information in the article, quickly became successful and spread unexpectedly. In 2016, Hbo launched the dystopian series *Westworld* with the claim: «The world is a rigged game, so you best learn to play dirty» echoing sentiments and opinions circulated on social networks. The three main dimensions of this discourse are:

- the corrupt and structurally obscure character of the political system;
- the dimension of the game as a metaphor and as a narrative form of political action;
- the importance of new technologies and machines as an aid in this rigged game.

The first point is the core of every contemporary populism and conspiracy. Politics is described as a field of no-holds-barred struggle, in which actions and narratives are used, systemically and pragmatically (Urbinati 2022), to gain an advantage and control not only over the opponents who aspire to govern but also over those who are governed. What emerges and is communicated is thus always a fictional construct that hides other interests or even a plot consistent with obtaining an ultimate goal. This premise provides the basis for equally reckless and fictitious reactions: everything is possible and justified once it is accepted that the game is rigged. The second point refers to the forms of play, particularly agonistic or mimicry play, according to the famous categories introduced by Roger Caillois (1967). The competition for consensus is mainly based on performative forms which create an engaging and aggregating narrative. This competition increasingly uses digital tools and in particular Ai devices (third point).

In this paper we will try to provide some examples of how the advent of Ai has amplified the polarisation of political communication and the effort to activate engagement effects. In particular, we have taken the opportunity of the recent Spanish elections to ask how Ai tools are used in the electoral season. Rather than focusing on covert and surreptitious uses, we preferred to select examples of explicit and overt uses of Ai as an engagement trigger (section 4). For this reason, we have privileged the actions of those non-governmental organisations, newspapers, movements, etc. that aim to influence the political agenda despite not being directly involved in electoral contention. In their attempt to create effective and engaging narratives, these actors have increasingly resorted to the potential of Ai in different ways that we will present in the

following paragraphs. We were therefore not so much interested in attempts at manipulation or misinformation, we did not aim to explore the «dark» side of Ai and Machine learning (Ml) uses, but instead turned our attention to the light side both in the sense of the manifest and visible uses, and because they claim to be guided by deontological or ethical principles. In other words, we aimed to explore the ways in which Ai and Ml can enter the mainstream of political communication and engagement building. Besides, our analysis has mainly focused on the identification of autopoietic communication processes (Luhmann 1986), i.e. those that have the capacity to reproduce themselves through their own operations, and in particular of what we have defined as the «Paradoxical reinforcement process» (Prp). Some recent reflections on the relations between digital communication and political discourse have pointed to frequent processes of «circular projection» (Solinas 2023), i.e. communicative forms that reinforce starting beliefs, thus increasing their axiological strength. Observing the recent elections in Spain, there are numerous examples of these communicative processes to which Ai devices increasingly contribute. Due to a lack of space, the analysis of the selected cases will only focus on the first part of the process of observing the forms of communication (Iervese 2006) that arise in identity narratives (Somers 1994). This method of analysis, therefore, requires the observation of communicative interactions and their sedimentation into narratable and reproducible contents. In this contribution, we will give some examples of how this process is activated by generative Ai and creates paradoxical reinforcement dynamics of the initial communications and narratives.

2. Ai and the paradoxical reinforcement processes

The academic discourse on Ai is teeming with increasingly fascinating insights regarding what Ai truly represents, the ethical dilemmas it raises, the ways in which it contributes to our societies (Floridi and Cowls 2021). However, the main emphasis has been on concerns that Ai may play an uncontrollable and unprecedented role in altering democratic political processes (West 2023). One of the most worrying challenges has been the impact of Ai-powered disinformation on public opinion, electoral processes, and democratic accountability (Kertysova 2018). From this perspective, disinformation generated by Ai not only threatens to mislead the public, but also to erode an already struggling information ecosystem, flooding it with inaccuracies and deception.

On the one hand, public attention and academic works have mainly focused on the generation of fake news or distorted narratives. On the other

hand, the use of Ai has dramatically increased the scope and the effectiveness in influencing the behaviour of individual voters and micro-targeting that political campaigns have used since the early 2000s. (e.g., reinforcement learning, services as Clogger Inc.). While not denying the importance of these alarms and concerns, it is important to deeply research the various possible applications of Ai and its functions for every social system, especially for the political one. It is in this sense that a number of studies are focusing on the transformative impact of Ai on democratic processes both in terms of negative impact on democratic engagement and by looking at Ai as a catalyst of democracy (Adam and Hocquard 2023). In this regard, the use of Ai technologies should not only be considered in instrumental terms but rather in creative-productive terms. Simplifying the thought of Martin Heidegger in «The question of technique», a famous lecture given at the Maximum auditorium of the technische hochschule in Munich (Heidegger 1953), recent digital devices cannot be understood merely as functional tools for the resolution of a purpose, but rather as a creative act, a means of production: *techné* as an act that «unveils», i.e. that brings about the appearance of something that did not exist before. In Heidegger's terms, *téchne* is a mode of *aletheuein*. It reveals that which is not produced by itself, which is in potency, but which is not yet before us. This philosophical perspective fits the history of the technological, economic, and institutional development of so-called artificial intelligences:

> As researchers in the second half of the 1950s worked to develop an intelligence that was artificial (i.e., technically produced, nonbiological), two main approaches emerged: a «symbolic» approach and a «subsymbolic» or «connectionist» approach. They differed not only in how each understood the very idea of an «Ai» but also for a series of technical, institutional, economic, and political reasons that, over the following years, heavily conditioned the allocation of funding (Somaini 2023, 78).

The «symbolic» approach argues that computers can replicate certain functions and operations of human thought (e.g., solving problems, making judgements, taking decisions) by processing symbols and combinations of symbols. On the other hand, the «connectionist» approach uses computer algorithms to produce new data from the recognition of patterns within previous data sets. The latter approach is currently the most widespread and consists mainly of modifying or generating new images (still and moving) and texts from the multiple combinations of other images and texts. We cannot go into the technical details of these devices here, but to understand how paradoxical reinforcement processes (Prp) work, it is important to mention that: Ai is a macro set that contains two subsets, Ml and Deep Learning (Dl), they are

two ways of learning and processing input data to obtain output predictions. The connectionist approach is based on generic or dedicated datasets, i.e. on a semantic inventory that is the result of previous communications. In other words, each new communication produced with Ai depends on the dataset that is used and the relationship between input data and output predictions. In most cases, this results in more or less explicit expectation confirmation phenomena such as filtering bubbles, i.e. customisation systems that effectively isolates individuals from different opinions or materials, resulting in their exposure to only a select set of content. This filtered outcome recommendation system «can lead to the reinforcement of existing attitudes, beliefs, or conditions» (Areeb *et al.* 2023). Similarly, there are several studies that focus on «cognitive biases» in data sets that replicate in Ai-generated outputs. Whether technical, pre-existing or emergent biases (Martin 2022), several studies demonstrate: «a feedback loop causes bias in inputs of results of the past to replicate itself in the outputs of an algorithmic system» (Muñoz *et al.* 2016, 8).

As mentioned above (section 1 and section 2), we consider it necessary to distinguish communicative products (e.g., posts, memes, videos, etc.) with political content from the communicative and narrative interactions and processes of which these products are a part (e.g., feedback, hype, debate, etc.) and finally from the cognitive and social reinforcement processes that are the political precipitate in terms of consent or dissent (e.g., polarization of political conflict, stereotypes, media mythologies, etc.). These communicative processes generated by Ai, in which artifactual contents can produce reality effects with sensitive political consequences, often take the form of: «Prp», based on four basic steps:

- creating more or less plausible transmedia content (e.g., Couldry 2017);
- transforming them into activators of «playful» forms of communication capable of creating engagement (e.g., Egelhofer 2019);
- generating processes of reinforcement of general narratives, confirming personal prejudices and beliefs (e.g., Hameleers *et al.* 2021);
- impacting collective perceptions and aggregations (e.g., López-López 2023).

This article aims to present and analyse some examples of Prp in electoral consensus building, with a specific focus on the last general and municipal elections held in Spain in 2023. The political dynamics of the elections, with Pedro Sanchez's government defending its actions against the right-wing opposition parties Partido popular and Vox, offer a relevant scenario to explore how Ai-generated content and tools can influence and shape, not only in a negative way, electoral behaviour. Spain is a particularly interesting country for

the observation of electoral behaviour. In fact, the Spanish population is distributed very unequally: it is highly concentrated in a few points and is almost non-existent in a large part of the Country (Del Molino 2016). In fact, after the great urbanisation that only took place between 1950 and 1970, there was a strong difference between the overpopulated areas and the so-called España vacía («empty Spain»), a vast territory that has no cities and really few inhabitants. This characteristic, also found in other countries but particularly prominent in Spain, leads to a strong discrepancy not only in electoral attitudes but also in electoral issues, communication streams and political engagement. One of the first experiments in this direction dates back to the 2016 elections when Politibot was created, a conversational bot that specialises in political content, also via telegram (Sánchez and Sánchez 2017). But it is in 2019 that the first real «automated journalism» project which makes use of Ai systems (Aramburú-Moncada *et al.* 2023) started in Spain. The first pilot experience was carried out for the 2023 municipal elections and focused on the area of so-called España vacía. It is an applied research project developed by the public broadcast Rtve and the Spanish company Narrativa inteligencia artificial sl, a start-up qualified in generating articles from data and information processed by Ai. The piloting consisted in automatically generating news from electoral data and the main topics of political debate for around five thousand small municipalities with a maximum of 1.000 inhabitants.

According to Pere Vila Fumas, director of «Technology, strategy and innovation» of Rtve, the Ai-tools they designed would be useful to give news coverage to a wide area that would otherwise not be reached. The news would be based on data perceived to be of priority interest to the target population and in forms that would trigger involvement and participation. The result of this feedback would be used to better define trend narratives to focus on and to create a spirit of community sharing (*ibidem*). Four steps that coincide, quite closely, with those of the Prp, which we can further summarise as follows: stimulation, narrativisation, perceptual reinforcement, aggregation. These four steps can be triggered by stimuli of different types, but increasingly they appear as a loop fed by the very capability of Ai tools to produce new inputs from previous aggregations of information, images, narratives. Although Rvte managers assure that the use of Ai tools is guided by deontological rules, that in this way journalists will be able to spend more time on research and in-depth journalism (Van Dalen 2012) and that the media will cover certain news stories that usually do not have a place in their agenda, such as small events followed by a minority audience, the paradoxes contained in the activation of these dynamics of «automated journalism» that massively use Ai tools should however be observed (Ronderos 2019). There is little research on this new phenome-

non due to the scarcity of observable examples over a sufficient period of time and on a significant sample. Nevertheless, many argue that forms of automated journalism will lead individuals to increasingly consume the same information, as algorithms only provide content that users read willingly or agree with. As a result, people will be less likely to encounter information that challenges their views or contradicts their interests, which could pose risks to the formation of public opinion in a democratic society. At the end of the election period, some Spanish analysts admitted that the use of Ai in journalism needs forms of «rebalancing and process control» that avoid the effects of distorting the scope of some news and the mere confirmation of user-customer expectations (Peña-Fernández *et al.* 2023). A stance that clearly alludes to the activation of Prp.

3. The Spanish election and the use of Artificial intelligence

On July 23rd, 2023, Spain went back to the polls. After the legislature led by Pedro Sánchez, marked by pandemic containment measures and economic labor market reforms (Lo Cascio 2022; Khenkin 2021), the Spanish Congress renewed its occupants (Cliffe 2023). With a voter turnout of 70.4%, the election results favored the Partido popular, led by Alberto Nuñez Feijoó, which secured 136 seats. The Socialist party (Psoe) obtained 122 parliamentary seats. Vox, the far-right party led by Santiago Abascal, was weakened by the results, losing 19 seats compared to the November 2019 elections[1]. The election campaign in the preceding months and weeks was marked by an unprecedented use of contents produced by Ai. In general, Spain is considered one of the countries with the greatest propensity to use Ai, so much so that it has become, after Brexit, one of the leading countries in this field and the first to discuss a strategy for the control and governance of Ai (Gobierno de España 2020).

The use of Ai in the Spanish media and political system becomes a crucial theme with the decision by the newspaper El mundo to publish an image, created by the collective United unknown, depicting Yolanda Díaz and Pablo Iglesias walking arm in arm[2]. On the front page of April 4th, at a time when the two leaders were clashing over their different views on how to stand in the elections, the newspaper decided to publish it. The photo created with the support of Ai, opened up a wide debate on the potential of the use of Ai in

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[1] The results are available at the following link: https://elpais.com/espana/elecciones/generales/ (last accessed on 3rd January 2024).
[2] The idea behind this project is available at the following link: https://unitedunknown.com/revista-papel/ (last accessed on 3rd January 2024).

the information sphere. When the photo began circulating on the web, particularly on social media like X (formerly known as twitter), it generated very different reactions. Photojournalist Bruno Thevenin wrote that it amounted to a genuine attack on journalism, and it was intolerable (Nicolás 2023). In contrast, his colleague Carlos Spotorno assumed a totally different perspective. He wrote that the development of these tools needs greater professionalism in the creation and post-production of photographs in the media and represents a big chance for human creativity (Nicolás 2023). In this debate, the authors of the photo, the United unknown collective, also participate. In an interview with the Huffington post, they consider reactions like that of Bruno Thevenin to be exaggerated (Machuca 2023).

Fig. 1   Yolanda Díaz and Pablo Iglesias smiling and having a beer together as two friends. The image was published by the newspaper El Mundo.
Source: https://www.elmundo.es/papel/uture/2023/04/03/642aeb05fdddffe7598b457c.html.

However, the use of Ai-generated content by political parties has been limited. Instead, digital collectives, actively involved in the country's political life, have extensively used this type of content. This misalignment between digital activism and political parties could be attributed to two primary reasons: a limited proficiency in the tools needed to produce such content by the political party's communication staff and a certain reluctance to use these contents to prevent the parties from appearing artificial and inauthentic in their communication.

Besides these remarks, there is probably the one which interests us most in this paper. Contents created with Ai tools are often designed to provoke a

participatory narrative with their target users (Wanless and Berk 2020). These narratives, most often conflicting, have to be followed, nurtured, reinforced, etc. in a process and «battle of attention» (Nolte 2005) that most political parties are unable to govern, at least openly. The uses of Ai tools in politics must therefore be divided between overt or covert, i.e. between overt use or «malicious» use (e.g., Malicious use of ai, Muai; Brundage 2018). In this article, we deal only with cases of the former type, aware that the latter are the most dangerous and controversial, especially when they rely on forms of automation to manage, revive and augment communication streams (e.g., bots).

4. The case studies

As mentioned in the previous paragraph and anticipated in the introduction to the methodology in the second (section 2), one of the first principles of our analysis was to identify examples with sources and declared authorship, as well as more or less official media channels to which the origin of the content put into media communication can be traced.

These groups and individuals of online countercultures can be regarded as agents of meaning-making, who contest hegemonic social understandings and communicate marginalised understandings of society and its members' relationships (Hatakka 2019). This approach does not shelter these groups from forms of populism or the generation of Prp paradoxes. In the article, some twitter accounts will be considered (like the one of @unitedunknow and the one of @ecamcit). These accounts made explicit use of and relayed Ai-produced content and thus allow us to analyse how they intervened in political-electoral communication by conditioning its communicative forms.

United unknown – Parody as populist frame

United unknown is a collective founded in 2010, «which uses visual activism and political satire as a weapon of mass subversion»[3]. In Spain, it has been collaborating with various media companies for years, and it is a group that has produced a significant amount of political content using Ai. Several examples of the use of Ai-produced content during the recent Spanish elections start from this anonymous collective. Given the high tension surrounding the election, the collective humorously envisioned the world of politics as a boxing ring. This project has been called: «Lucha libre en el congreso de los diputados».

[3] Available here: https://unitedunknown.com/info/ (last accessed on 3rd January 2024).

Fig. 2   Pablo Echenique, member of Podemos, represented as a Box fighter.
         Source: https://unitedunknown.com/luc.

Fig. 3   Pedro Sánchez, Premier and leader of Psoe, represented as a Box fighter.
         Source: https://unitedunknown.com/luc.

In this content, which obtains about 2 million views, the collective United unknown envisions various political leaders in combat uniforms. The series of pictures produced suggests a parody of politics as a battlefield often simulated for spectacular effects. Adopting the stylistic features and forms of wrestling, each protagonist of the Spanish political scene is characterised with a nickname that highlights their main features, revealing their image-building strategies. This operation is cross-cutting across the different political parties and does not even stop at certain taboos of political satire (e.g., gender diversity, disability, etc.). For example, one of the protagonists of this mockery is Pablo Echenique, a politician suffering from spinal muscular atrophy from birth and forced to use mobility and communication aids, described as a kind of cyborg, a creature on the borderline between man and machine, typical of science fiction imagery. The unprejudiced construction of these characters is preparatory to the activation of a fantastic narrative based on a few elements taken from the news and political debates.

Moreover, the reference to wrestling alludes quite explicitly to that very «rigged game» mentioned at the beginning of this article. In this sense, politics would be a simulation of a contest on a media stage where every blow is allowed to conquer the audience's favour.

Over the years, the expression «political arena» has found its place in the media, establishing itself as the preferred metaphor for identifying and narrating political competition. Consider, for example, the following headlines: «Las apariencias en la arena política» (Muñoz Rojas 2016) o «Del parquet a la arena politica» (Lopéz Jorda 2019). The adoption of this terminology, far from being random or accidental, offers a very clear idea of how both traditional media and social media view electoral competition. It portrays a clash, a battle that transforms into a media spectacle. Far from being taken for granted, the adoption of a visual semantics of political struggle represents a clear and explicit choice. Employing a rhetoric of struggle rather than a rhetoric of confrontation is an element that cannot be considered secondary. The collective United unknown, with this choice, guides the Ai in creating content whose outcomes align with its expectations.

The communicative stream is here activated by triggers that have very similar characteristics to those of transmedia narratives (Jenkins 2009) or role-playing games (Sheldon 2023). In these cases, rather than stories, narrative worlds and protagonist profiles are created, with the prosumers being given the task of collaborating on these stories on participatory platforms. This is what partly happens in this first example, which activates a series of narrative combinations of an exaggerated conflict between masks acting without a fixed script. Improbable clashes to the last blood can thus be invented on the basis of arguments actually used in the campaign. The Ai is in this case an «assembler

of stereotypes» in a creative and parodistic form as well as an activator of a narrative that works precisely because it generates «playful» forms of communication capable of creating engagement and generates processes of reinforcement of general narratives, confirming personal prejudices and beliefs. How much this process influences collective perceptions and political aggregations could not be observed, also because no specific propensities for a party or coalition were found. From the other actions and communication flows on social channels, however, it is quite evident how a peculiar form of Prp takes place, based above all on parody as a critical distance from political dispute.

The amused view of the events in the political arena does not lead to the polarisation of messages as much as to a sceptical view of differences and the sincerity of political action. In this sense, one can speak of the construction of a populist frame «as a political style that fuses matter and manner, message and package» (Moffit 2016). The widely misunderstood and abused term populism can be understood here as: «a thin-centered ideology that always includes an idea of confrontation between the people and the establishment, of which the latter is somehow guilty of obstructing the general will of the common people» (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2012, 8-9).

This approach can help us understand the interactive nature of populism, since a thin-centered ideology can easily be linked to different «thicker» narratives (e.g., ideologies) through «pieces of cultural information that pass from person to person, but gradually become a shared social phenomenon» (Shifman 2014). This mechanism is exactly what links media populism to social network forms such as memes, understood as groups of digital objects with common characteristics that are imitated, spread, and remixed via the Internet.

Ngo's – provoking a desired reality

Another striking example of Ai usage during the election campaign is that produced by Amnesty international. The Spanish section of the most well-known Ngo funded a deep-fake video created with artificial intelligence, in which presidential candidates deliver unprecedented messages from the government's media podium[4]. A deep-fake Pedro Sánchez promises to shed light on the hundreds of deaths and disappearances among immigrants who had tried to cross the walls of Melilla in the previous year. He pledges a migration policy that respects human rights to the point of being unbeatable[5].

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[4] The project is available at the following link: https://unitedunknown.com/amnistia-internacional/.
[5] The video is available on YouTube at the following link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cnSpqrbYCr0&embeds_referring_euri=https%3A%2F%2Funitedunknow

Fig. 4   Deep-fake Pedro Sánchez addressing to the public with an invented speech.
        Source: https://unitedunknown.com/amnistia-internacional/.

«This video is not real, but we would like it to be». So ends the video made for Amnesty international in which, through Ai, a clear commitment to human rights is put into the mouths of the candidates of the parties most likely to be represented in parliament in the next general elections. That this operation is based on the production of a fake video is also made clear by the writing at the beginning of the video and the fact that this content is part of a larger campaign entitled: «El país donde quiero vivír» which has so far gathered tens of thousands of signatures from people demanding the next government to defend human rights[6]. Through the campaign, Amnesty international is sending all political parties 14 priorities for the next legislature, including issues such as the right to housing, the fight against discrimination and hate speech and acts, the fight against gender-based violence, the right to health, the need to decisively tackle climate change and the need to protect freedom of expression and assembly. As explained by Miguel Ángel Calderón, Amnesty international Spain's director of communications: «We expect all three candidates to make this commitment through unequivocal public statements, it is up to them to do so. It is only a question of political will that these speeches become real policies in favour of human rights and that they are implemented in the next legislature».

n.com%2F&source_ve_path=OTY3MTQ&feature=emb_imp_woyt.
    [6] The Document is available on the following link: https://www.es.amnesty.org/actua/acciones/el-pais-donde-quiero-vivir/.

In this statement, as well as from the materials accompanying Amnesty international's campaign with United unknown, it is clear that the strategy here is to provoke an effect on political reality in terms of conditioning the agenda and creating narrative forms that are as unavoidable as possible. The Prp, in this case, is related to the gap between political expectations and public performance. Simulating discourses that were expected but did not take place (the fake video) led a number of subjects involved in this campaign to bring out and thematise the disappointed expectations of their political side and to expect adequate responses capable of taking a position on the issues raised. In this sense, one can speak of a provocation of reality by projecting and suggesting desired narrative scenarios.

Following in the footsteps of Amnesty international, Greenpeace also moves in this direction and entrusts an advertising campaign to the collective United unknown. The election campaign takes place during summer, with temperatures soaring. So, right in the middle of a heatwave, Greenpeace enters the campaign for the July 23rd election, emphasizing the urgency of acting in the face of the climate emergency. Specifically, the advertising campaign that emerges is titled as follows: «¿El cambio climático os la suda?» («Do you don't give a damn about climate change?»). On the 14-meter banner that is hung on July 11th at the Puerta de alcalá, in the Plaza de independencia in Madrid, the heat-distorted faces of Pedro Sánchez, Yolanda Díaz, Alberto Nuñez Feijóo, and Santiago Abascal are once again prominently displayed (Fig. 5). In this case as well, there is an evident provocative pragmatism in the use of Ai.

Fig. 5   Work by United Unknown commissioned by Greenpeace Spain.
              Source: https://unitedunknown.com/greenpeace/.

Another example of using Ai for political reasons is what fundacions Arrels produced on the eve of the municipal elections for the city of Barcelona. Since its founding in 1987, the foundation has been dedicated to defending the rights of the homeless population in the Catalan city. Always interested in raising awareness among the public and institutions to support housing policies that reduce the number of homeless individuals, the foundation, on the eve of the elections, found itself without an explicit political reference, having seen its expectations disappointed by the Ada Colau administration.

The foundation's choice, therefore, is to ask Ai to imagine how the faces of the different candidates would change if they had experienced homelessness. This use of Ai serves as a form of visual storytelling to draw attention to the issue of homelessness and advocate for better housing policies.

Fig. 6   Ada Colau's electoral poster, redesigned by the United Uknown Collective.
Source: https://unitedunknown.com/arrels-fundacio/.

According to the information provided by the foundation itself, this advertising campaign aimed to draw attention to proposals to address the systematic violation of the basic rights of homeless individuals. The images on the posters, appropriately altered in both visual and written content, are interesting to consider in terms of content creation logic. In this case, Ai transformed the faces of the candidates, following creative patterns that fall within a certain way of imagining homelessness: long beards, greasy and unkempt hair, dark faces, stern expressions, and deep wrinkles etched into the face. These re-

sults align with shared expectations within a collective imaginary that often depicts and reproduces homeless individuals in these forms. Ernest Maragall, who goes from being the «mayor for all» to the «mayor for none», as well as Ada Colau, Javier Trias, and Jaume Collboni, are affected by this counter-campaign, which clearly aims to bring the collective's expectations to the forefront of the city's political agenda. These three examples, different in form and content, are however similar in the positioning strategy they adopt and the communication processes they wish to activate. From desired scenarios to those to be avoided, the Ngos use new technologies to expose and anticipate the effects of an unresponsive or unwise policy on some issues not on the electoral agenda. We cannot say if this is an effective strategy, but it is certainly a change from the history of humanitarian campaigns in recent years, which has reproduced over time the post-colonial distinction between a «we» and a «them» (Chouliaraki 2006). In the examples proposed in this section, the emphasis is all on changing the «we in terms of the simulation of an expected political discourse (shift in semantics: e.g., Amnesty international's campaign), in terms of projection into the future (temporal shift: e.g., Greenpeace's campaign) and in terms of putting oneself in the shoes of others (shift in point of view: e.g., fundacions Arrels's campaign). The general intention is to activate a process that ends in the consolidation of a community of destiny (Beck 2013) through the perception of a common risk.

Individual activist – building a community of risk

Not only Ngos and political groups make use of this type of content, but also activists whose political actions are directed towards social media. A few hours after the end of the election count, David Ruiz, Lgbtqi+ activist, posts a video on his twitter profile, featuring a sequence from Quentin Tarantino's *Inglourious bastards* in which Hitler, holed up in his bunker, discovers that the allies have entered Berlin. In the published video, Hitler is replaced with Abascal, and the nazi officials close to him become Espinosa de los Monteros, Jorge Buxade, Alvise Pérez, Rocio Monasterio, and other members of the ultra-nationalist Vox party[7].

[7] The video is available at the following link: https://x.com/ecamcito/status/16821 09379519053829?s=20.

Fɪɢ. 7   A frame of the video created by David Ruiz.
Source: https://x.com/ecamcito/status/1682109379519053829?s=20.

The visually altered sequence created with Ai is accompanied by Spanish subtitles that convey a dialogue intended to be ironic and clumsy. While one of the generals says: «Santi! You are the centre of the west!», Abascal-Hitler answers: «And you are more useless than turning the square in tetris». This video, with unclear aims and certainly not related to a political campaign, had a massive spread and several reactions, thus becoming a viral case. The reasons for this success, however, are to be sought not so much in the quality of this single video as in the sequence of audiovisual narratives of which this video is the last step (which not by chance evokes the end of a story and a conflict). In the preceding weeks and months, in the accounts linked to David Ruiz's one can in fact observe other videos and comments similar in form and content to the video we are analysing, in a sort of game emulation able to hold together: references to Spanish politics (in particular, criticism of extreme right-wing parties), film quotations and skills in generating synthesised content through Ai tools. The combination of these components produces a creative challenge and the reinforcement of certain narratives that are particularly felt by a community that is not uniform but able to unite around a common sentiment. It is perhaps through these non-formal and non-pre-structured initiatives that it is possible to observe spontaneous Prps and the rise of certain communities of risk without a clear transition into communities of destiny.

5. Conclusions

In the analysis proposed in this paper, we have intentionally selected cases of explicit use of Ai tools from the broad area of civic engagement and counterculture. Rather than the content, however, what is important here are the forms and processes activated by Ai tools. These should not only be considered as tools for creating images and texts, but for their power to generate and condition communicative processes. The Prp cycle is structured around the four basic steps described above and which we have tried to recognise in the examples shown briefly. The contents produced by United unknown or by other Ngo's and individual activists aim to garner media attention and online engagement by creating provocative content that leverages the novelty of artificial intelligence as a promotional tool.

In this initial phase of using Ai in political communication, Ai is not entrusted with the task of independently crafting messages and contributions. Instead, Ai is asked to generate original content that helps stand out in the information overload of the internet. The logic behind the use of Ai is a logic of provocative entertainment.

Deepening these topics, which are still deeply rooted in the tradition and tools of political discourse analysis, requires broadening the toolbox by opening up to other fields that are not only socio-political. The knowledge of Ai and Ml tools, the analysis of communicative and narrative processes, the observation of forms of engagement and gaming are the cornerstones of a research that can only coincide with increasingly complex and multidimensional practices. An urgent and necessary challenge not only on a scientific level but also on that of governing the dynamics of democratic coexistence.

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