Are you there?

In search of a quality engagement on internet between international development organizations and their social media audience through dialogue and active participation

Roberto Carrera Hernández
Abstract

Social media have become one of the most important tools for international development organizations when it comes to spreading their message and reach a greater number of followers around the world. However, the connection between the users and the organization is mainly based on one-click basic interactions which does not guarantee a strong commitment. The goal of this study is to check whether initiating a dialogue with users increases participation. We want to observe if there are noticeable improvements in the engagement that justifies a more frequent use of the conversation with the subscribers within the social media channels of the organization.

We will analyse the work of UNESCO, the United Nations' specialized agency for education, science and culture. We have worked from within on the social media campaigns analysed.

This research uses a mixed method combining quantitative results, such as statistical analysis, and qualitative results through content analysis and interviews with six experts in the management of social media. The Social Media Engagement Theory by Di Gangi and Wasko will provide the theoretical framework for this work.

Keywords

engagement, dialogue, active participation, interaction, social media, clicktivism, development, communications, international development organizations, UNESCO
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Introduction

“A hammer can be used to build a house or to crush someone’s skull. Depends on how we decide to use the technology. Social media can be (and have been) used effectively to generate social change. They’ve also been used to control, to atomize isolate people, and in all sorts of other ways.” (Noam Chomsky, 2018)

The answer given by the famous political activist and American linguist Noam Chomsky when we contacted him to collaborate on this thesis clearly reflects the great power that internet has achieved in contemporary society. A new social environment that also has a great impact on the development sector.

Social media is already a consolidated reality in the daily work of international development organizations. “The term social media refers to the online tools that are designed to facilitate the dissemination of content through social interaction between individuals, groups and organizations using Internet and Web-based technologies to enable transformation of broadcast monologues (one to many) into social dialogues (many to many)” (Botha & Mills, 2012, p.85 as cited in Smith & Gallicano, 2015, p.83). They are a fantastic tool for the communications’ teams to spread their messages to a large audience and to prove with stats (likes, shares, retweets…) how efficient their work is.

Nevertheless, despite of the optimism that usually comes when the statistics show impressive figures, there are still great challenges for communication specialists when it comes to understanding the results obtained.

International development organizations are aware of the limitations of some of the interactions on social media, and they often struggle to understand how big is the real commitment or loyalty of their audience. The current studies on this topic shows an unstable and low engagement that encourages new researches to strengthen the

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1 Mr. Chomsky kindly declined to make the interview since this is not his field of expertise, but he shared with us some general reflections on social media.
commitment and integrate the audience in a more interactive way within the virtual communities created on internet.

Searching for this higher quality engagement through a more active participation has led us to use dialogue to connect deeper with our followers. Asking questions to our audience to build up a stronger commitment and promote active participation.

This study will be focused on the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural organization (UNESCO). My experience after two years working with the communications team at UNESCO has motivated me to move forward and try to find solutions for the lack of interaction with the users on social media. We will use its digital platforms to analyse two different campaigns. The limitations related to this specific context will be analysed in the chapter for Methodology.

This is an organization-centred (top-down) study. The text is focused on how organizations communicate with the users. Even if user’s comments will also be analysed, it will always be from an organization perspective.

**Research question:**

*Can we have a more active and participatory engagement in UNESCO’S social media channels by initiating a dialogue with the audience through questions?*

We will first review several academic articles that have already worked directly or indirectly within this field of study, followed by an analysis of the theoretical framework that we have used on this research.

Afterwards we will introduce the research methods chosen for this thesis to finally evaluate the most important conclusions drawn from the study.

*All opinions written in this work are personal and do not reflect in any case an official position of UNESCO, unless otherwise specified.*

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2 UNESCO works to build peace through international cooperation in Education, the Sciences and Culture. UNESCO’s programs contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals defined in Agenda 2030, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2015 (UNESCO, n.d.)
Ethical considerations

The privacy of users has been respected without exception on this research. All data collected, available on UNESCO platforms, are treated anonymously without specifying any information about the authors.

A few users have been contacted on Instagram. We have introduced ourselves and explained the project. Explicit consent has been requested to use the information provided. We have identified ourselves as researchers (the reason for which the contact was made) but not as a worker of UNESCO to avoid affecting the answers in a negative way.

The interviewees have been informed of both aspects.

UNESCO’s social media channels are open and accessible to all users. Since there is still a debate on whether to consider public or private the interactions that happen on these channels (Towsend & Wallace, 2016, p.5), we have deleted any reference that can identify any user in a particular way.

Neutrality on the analysis has been guaranteed though an objective selection of data.

ComDev and social media engagement

The digital revolution that is happening since the beginning of the century has also affected the field of communication for development. The expansion of internet and the emergence of social media has changed the old rules. Organizations focused on development have been forced to adapt themselves to a new context in which interactions with their followers are now competing at the same level as the traditional one-way communication.

"Traditionally, development communication has been associated with large institutions, bilateral or multilateral, and/or smaller NGOs that have worked closely with or been completely dependent on these larger institutions. Now, this ‘invited
space for participation’, which the institutionalized ComDev practices have offered [to] citizens is being severely challenged by the citizen-driven spaces, or the social movement media” (Dowing, 2010, as cited in Hemer & Tufte, 2011, p.6).

This thesis wants to analyse and find solutions in this new context within ComDev. The users are becoming the main characters and international development organizations must know not only how to present the information of their campaigns but also how to manage the interactions and the new information generated by their audience.

"The still common understanding of ComDev, as strategic communication interventions by development agents from the developed world [...] in developing countries [...] is obviously obsolete" (Hemer & Tufte, 2011, p.6). The new technologies allow social change to emerge from any place at any time, as we have seen during the Arab Spring in 2010 or the movement of the Indignados in Spain in 2011, among many others.

International development organizations are sometimes hidden under a halo of impenetrable elitist bureaucracy far away from the reality of the average user (The Guardian, 2016). Now, they have to learn to handle direct interactions of people from any part of the world and use them to expand their message and areas of influence.

The challenge of modernizing the traditional ComDev, in organizations where sometimes even the most conservative communication is not fully implemented, is gigantic. However, it is essential if we want communication for development to evolve at the same pace as society.
The bibliography chosen for this thesis establishes an academic framework for key terms such as engagement, interaction, and participation through the analysis of quantitative and qualitative studies. It gives us a solid background to start the searching for a higher quality engagement.

**Finding the most appropriate bibliography**

We have always taken into account the purpose of this thesis when selecting the different articles. The searching was always connected to the field of development, paying special attention to international development organizations. The concept of engagement in social media has been the key word when choosing the different texts. The presence of international development organizations in the articles has been combined with business, governmental or commercial researches in order to have a broader spectrum of examples. We have used Google Scholar and ScienceDirect platforms to find most of the articles used.

**Limitations of the bibliography**

The research in social media still has a lot of space to fully develop, and current theories continue to evolve. It is complicated to establish methodological guidelines over time when the context of analysis can change significantly in a few months. A research conducted a year ago may be partially obsolete nowadays.

In a qualitative analysis, the challenge to define a working methodology may increase. “The study of the internet cuts across all academic disciplines. There are no central methodological or theoretical guidelines, and research findings are widely distributed and decentralized. As a consequence, qualitative researchers may find it challenging to locate previous studies that might prove to be useful in the design and enactment of their own studies” (Given, 2008, p.454). Even though the situation is much better ten years after Given’s text, researchers still have to face the challenge of the unknown.
Most of the case studies analysed below reflect in their conclusions the need for a deeper investigation, asking for more time to reach more significant conclusions within the unstable and changing world of internet. It is important to be aware of this special context which will require a constructive criticism of the selected texts.

**What is engagement?**

“Despite the growth of research on social media engagement [...] studies have failed to define exactly what engagement is” (Smith & Gallicano, 2015, p.82). Even if we can collect tons of data from the social media channels of any organization, it is not easy to know the degree of adhesion between an international development organization and its audience. What do we look at? What information should we take more into account? And, above all, what do we want to achieve with our activity on social media? Depending on how we answer the previous questions the definition of engagement could be very different.

We want to show in this section two clearly different approaches to engagement through two main publications that we will use as a reference for our work, together with other articles which will add different reflections on the topic discussed.

The study *Twiplomacy - International Organizations on Social Media 2017* introduces itself as "the only global study about international organizations on social media" (Lüfkens, 2017, p.55). It analyses the activity of 97 international development organizations (UNESCO included). They have established different rankings that monitor the online activity of the organizations on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, the three platforms that we will use later on in our research. It is a very convenient first step in our journey towards a participative engagement because the study is based on one of the most common ways to measure success in social media: the statistics of the quantified interactions in the different social media platforms.

On Twitter, to know "the most engaged International Organizations", the authors of the report calculate the total number of interactions. For Twiplomacy, that means
adding the number of *likes* and *retweets* of each organization. It is interesting to note that messages from users are not taken into account. For Facebook, the section dedicated to engagement is called "the most effective International Organizations", and here, in addition to the *likes* and *shares*, the study does take into account the comments of the followers. But if we treat *comments*, *likes* and *shares* at the same level, we are ignoring the bigger commitment required to write a message comparing with the other two interactions. Comments are most of the times significantly less numerous than the other two indicators because they require a much greater effort from the user.

The *Twiplomacy* report was distributed among UNESCO's communication officers (therefore, it is an influential study in the organization) and some of the most well-known international development organizations worldwide have collaborated with different articles.

A quantitative analysis can work if increasing statistics are the ultimate goal of campaigns in social media, but it may be not enough if we want to have a deeper influence in our audience.

Smith and Gallicano (2015) start from another very different perspective in their study "*Terms of engagement: Analysing public engagement with organizations through social media.*" They run away from stats to find an engagement that "involves cognitive and emotional immersion" (p.82). By touching the emotional part of the user, we enter into a deeper and more complex definition of engagement, where "social media activities like viewing, commenting, and even sharing social media content, may not be the same thing as being engaged" (p.82). From this context, interactions such as *likes* or *shares* are a means to engagement, but they are not the engagement itself. This distinction creates a new path in the relationship between organizations and users on social media, studying a deeper understanding that analyses the emotions of the followers and not just automated reactions. We go from studying the figures to searching for "feelings of persistence, vigor, energy, dedication, absorption, [and] enthusiasm" (Macey & Schneider, 2008, p.12 as cited in Smith & Gallicano, p.83). In the interviews carried out the participants expressed the engagement as a feeling of
"wanting to tell people" [about the content], "being really into something." An engagement based on emotions encourages the researcher to delve beyond the data, but we have to understand that this approach also offers less concrete conclusions. Terms such as "spontaneous" or "impulsive" are repeated to define the concept of engagement, showing the challenges when working with human feelings in an analytical way. The study offers a different vision of how to understand engagement, but it does not clarify why the basic interactions (those actions that only require a couple of clicks to carry them out, such as likes and shares) are not useful to measure it.

The dark side of the statistics

If we want to move towards a qualitative study of engagement, it is important to reflect about the limitations of the stats and why the figures alone cannot explain the level of commitment of our audience with our goals. Studies such as "The Structure of Online Activism" by Lewis, Gray and Meierhenrich (2014) allow us to observe the hidden reality behind stats in social media. In their analysis, the authors research about the level of activity of users who followed "one of the largest Causes on Facebook, with more than 1 million members who had collectively donated more than $100,000" (p.2). These analyses on the engagement are essential to understand the relationship between users and international development organizations. In this case the example is even more interesting since we are able to define two different kind of users, those who joins the cause without any financial contribution, and those who also participate with a donation. The results are conclusive: "99.76 percent of members never donated" (p.2). Another action that could be understood as active participation is the recruitment of followers. According to the study, 80.76 percent of the members were recruited by other members, but almost half of them (45.57 percent) only recruited one person. The conclusion of the report is very revealing. "The vast majority of the Cause's size and income can be attributed to a very small number of hyperactivists" (p.2). This study is especially relevant since they are analysing a
campaign to collect funds, where the main objective is to raise money and not increase the number of followers.

Why do users support and share a campaign in which they themselves do not collaborate? One of the participants in the study by Smith and Gallicano (2015) affirms that he or she "post a lot of positive things every day [...] I'm doing it for myself. It makes me feel more secure. It makes me feel like I'm complete" (p.85). This positive self-image that we want to show on internet can be a problem for international development organizations when it comes to understanding engagement with their audience. "If I like something, that tells people what kind of person I am" (p.86), but this certainly does not imply that the user goes beyond a simple basic interaction.

Another clear example of this superficial activism is the second most popular visual tweet of 2017 (according to Twiplomacy), with 28,224 interactions. The text literally says "only some 3890 tigers left in the wild. Urgent action is needed to protect these magnificent creatures" (Lüfkens, 2017, p.4). The message is shown together with a photography of a tiger (see image on the right). The tweet is a call to action, but it does not offer any mechanism for the user to be involved. When a follower clicks on the like button or the share button, what information are they giving us? Are they showing their moral support to the cause? Do they like someone making a call to action? Are they interested in photos of tigers? What does it mean to interact with a call to action without any established means of collaboration?

Perhaps in addition to the desired self-image that we build of ourselves on internet, the answer lies in what Lewis, Gray and Meierhenrich (2014) called the "paradox of community life" where "socially minded participants have little incentive to contribute
because they assume that the millions of other members will” (p.5, as cited in Oliver, 1984).

And even worse than an inactive user is a fake user. One of the figures that first stand out when analysing any organization on social media is the number of followers. It is common for accounts to launch special tweets or posts when they reach round figures, but how many of those followers are real? The Twiplomacy report says that "UNESCO has recorded the second largest growth, at 75 percent increase" (Lüfkens, 2017, p.5) on Twitter. In March 2018, while this text was being written, we quickly analysed the most recent fifty followers placed at the top of the UNESCO’s twitter account. If we understand the limitations of such a short and random study, we can extract very interesting data. We have found out that only one follower tweeted something in his/her account and only one account had followers (one). Only two of the fifty had some profile information, and only seven had a profile picture. Seven accounts were temporarily restricted. This pattern of ghost community is worrying if what we want is to increase the quality of the engagement (e.g., more thoughtful interactions).

"According to a study by the University of Southern California and Indiana University, there could be as many as 48 million bots on Twitter” (Lüfkens, 2017, p.43). These bots can be harmless, but they can also be used for buying-selling followers or “to amplify
fake news or intimidate users" (Lüfkens, 2017, p.43). This information makes the number of followers unreliable if we want to improve the interaction between user and organization.

It is important to clarify that bots are very complicated to block, and the fact that one account has fake subscribers does not mean that the organizations are involved on this issue. It is by no means stated that UNESCO has had any responsibility for the presence of suspicious profiles, a very common problem in large accounts. However, if we know that there is also the possibility of buying users and even interactions, we must treat these data with special care if what we want is to analyse the engagement.

It is legitimate to think that basic interactions or the number of followers hide a big issue regarding reliability which makes difficult to fully trust this information. "Data is always something that needs to be interpreted; it is not an objective window of truth" (Walker, 2017, p.23). Stats alone cannot explain engagement, and should not be the ultimate goal of any international development organization when planning its social media strategy.

The endless fight to have the highest figures on social media can also be misleading not only because of the behaviour of users or the fake accounts, but also by the organizations' own communication strategies. Even if buying users or interactions is not acceptable, advertising is more than welcome for those organizations with enough budget to invest in promotional messages. According to Mica White (2010), "the obsession with tracking clicks turns digital activism into clicktivism", with strategies that accept that "the tactics of advertising and market research used to sell toilet paper can also build social movements." This proximity to commercial marketing is also visible with paid campaigns on social media. As explained in the Twiplomacy report, "the organisations can pay to play and promote their tweets to garner more interactions" and as Maria Lazarte (ISO social media manager) said "algorithms evolve to favoured promoted posts" (Lüfkens, 2017, p.6).

In an increasingly competitive sector, we cannot expect our message to achieve its goal simply because of its importance or the way in which it is visually designed. "Reaching people on social media networks have gotten harder over the past few
years, both because of the competition for attention has gotten fiercer, and because social networks are trying to earn more money. By paying to promote your content or account, you can get a clear advantage. If done right, it can be money well spent" (Lüfkens, 2017, p.19).

Moving towards a paid advertising does not imply that the relationship between the organization and the user cannot be partially analysed by the statistics, but if the engagement has to be valued only with these figures the results can be misleading if, as we have seen, a greater number of interactions do not contribute to a greater commitment.

Engagement through dialogue and participation

After the case studies previously analysed, we can conclude that combining basic interactions with a more emotional, real and personal strategy with the audience can be the most effective method to both understand and build engagement with users. This is a major challenge for organizations with millions of followers, but the possibilities offered by social media to connect with users in a more active way should not be ignored.

Sam Waterton, Social Media Content Strategist of UNICEF mentioned in Twiplomacy (2017) that his organization was not "just a broadcast channel. We carefully read through comments and, although we can’t answer to each one, we try to sum up sentiment with a reply or two” (p.36). Some participants of the Smith and Gallicano (2015) study said that they "wished companies would show appreciation for people's time" or "people like to be heard" (p.86). Interacting with followers could appeal to the cognitive part of engagement without affecting other more basic interactions. In his ten tips for building proximity and trust on social media, Timo Lüge (2017) advise to "demonstrate that you are willing to engage in a dialogue with others. Ask questions and respond comments" (p.4).
A question is the first step to generate dialogue. Could it be the key to achieve a more active collaboration? Could dialogue with the audience be the road to a stronger engagement?

Dialogue is defined in the Cambridge dictionary as "a discussion or exchange of ideas." Something that feels tricky and dangerous for organizations as politicized as UNESCO, where any diplomatic mistake could be a huge problem. But interactions such as likes, shares or retweets create a low level dialogue, and the most we can get from them is the user’s hypothetical satisfaction on a specific post. If we want to experiment with dialogue to see if we can have greater interactions, the most attractive strategy is using the comments sections of the social media channels.

Handling the comments of the audience is one of the most sensitive issues for international development organizations. In communities with such a high number of users, it is not easy to establish a pattern that works for all of them. In addition, this strategy requires an important investment in staff and it also needs a developed digital culture within the management positions of the organizations. If only one of those two conditions are not available, our interaction strategy on social media will certainly need a lot of luck to succeed.

Generating and controlling dialogue requires dedicated people. We need a budget that many organizations focused on development do not have or do not want to spend on this task. "The reality of not having enough staff or time is a barrier for many other non-profits and corporations, calling for the need for more staff to be assigned social media implementation. Without consistent staff strategically managing social media it is difficult, if not impossible, for organizations to achieve commitment, which improves organizations-public relations through showing that organizations are dedicated to online engagement" (Hallahan, 2008 as cited in Briones et al., 2010, p.41). This is why is more common to see these interactions in the private sector, where "companies such as Pizza Hut, Comcast and Southwest Airlines are hiring people to monitor the Twitter sphere for negative comments and respond instantaneously. [...] Comcast now has a team to monitor comments about the company being posted on Twitter and Dell
has hundreds of people who talk to customers through Dell Twitter accounts" (Siegler, 2009 and Reisner, 2009 as cited in Fischer, 2010, p. 3).

As we have mentioned before, another challenge can be the possible resistance of senior staff who are not familiar with the changes of the internet era and who cannot fully understand the use of social media to promote the messages of the organization. Even if this problem is becoming smaller each day, we still need to take it into account. Some of the participants in the study of Briones, Kuch, Fisher and Jin (2010) "felt that one reason it was difficult to generate approval and understanding [regarding social media usage] was because board members were from an older generation" (p.40). In the study of Obar, Zube and Lampe (2012) "a number of participants noted that why they believe that social media have the potential to help facilitate civic engagement and collective action, various generational and digital literacy gaps are inhibiting organizations from realizing these goals" (p.16). Even if UNESCO has a diverse and open-minded staff, the strong hierarchy and the dependence on the Member States can be a powerful barrier when being creative to move a step forward in the relation with its followers.

However, the way we approach the audience does not need to require an unattainable effort. "Acknowledge messages on your social media profiles, even if it is just by liking a comment (if appropriate), or saying 'Thank you for your message'." (Lüfkens, 2017, p.6). Increasing interaction, even with pre-defined comments, can improve the engagement between organization and the audience without requiring a large financial investment on staff.

Moving from one-way to two-way communication would directly affect the engagement with the audience, but international development organizations can only implement these changes in a progressive and controlled way.

If, as we said earlier, a question can initiate a dialogue, it can also lead the following steps. It is possible that if we focus on encouraging the users to make a concrete action, we can have more control over the whole conversation.
We are still talking about a more meaningful participation than one *like* or *share*. We want a commitment where the user should collaborate beyond a basic interaction. Dialogue is a fantastic tool to encourage participation, but the same question arises once again: is social media an adequate platform to create and promote dialogue? We still need to compile more information to find an answer that justifies the next steps of this thesis.

In their study of how advocacy groups in the United States use social media, Obar et al. (2012) define civic engagement as the process that "involves moving an individual away from disinterest, distraction, ignorance, and apathy and toward education, understanding, motivation, and action" (p.2). A definition that follows what we have previously defined as a higher quality engagement, and that also fits the global goals of most international development organizations.

Jinyun Chen (2016) mentions in his analysis on the Wechat platform (social network mostly used by Chinese audience that combines elements of Facebook, Twitter and Instagram) that the application "can provide users with additional tools with which to learn about civil activities and develop civic skills that are necessary for civic engagement. [...] the interest and capacity of civic engagement can be fostered by social media" (p.495).

Mossberger, Wu and Crawford (2013) focused on local governments in major US cities. Although they think that there is still a lot of space to explore user behaviour and governmental strategy, they send a positive message affirming that the "social media, open data portals and other interactive features online promise to raise new challenges and opportunities for local public administrators and elected officials to provide more open government and opportunities for citizen participation" (p.356).

The participants in the study by Obar et al. noted that “the interactive nature of social media, which enables groups to engage in two-way ‘conversations’ with members and prospective members, was identified as being another major reason that social media can help advocacy groups accomplish organizational goals that involve engaging individuals in the issues that matter to the organizations" (p.20).
We cannot find any ultimate research or conclusions that will guarantee that experimenting with dialogue and participation will lead us to better results. However, the literature analysed does offer enough hope about the great possibilities that we can find in the interaction with the followers.
Theoretical framework

As we have reflected in the literature section, the research on engagement that we can find on internet is significantly more limited than in other fields, something that of course also affects when trying to develop a theoretical framework for this work.

For this thesis, we will use as a reference the work of Paul M. Di Gangi and Molly Wasko, "Social Media Engagement Theory: Exploring the Influence of User Engagement on Social Media Usage" (2016), based on the research of Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004).

The authors develop a complete analysis trying to explain the factors that can lead to a greater engagement on social media, besides studying to what extent the engagement can affect the social media behavior.

The study is not focused on international development organizations, but its global nature fits perfectly with the objectives of this thesis.

Social Media Engagement Theory (SMET)

Social media have turned user interactions into an essential tool to build commitment among the audience. As we have seen in the previous section of this thesis, the definition of engagement is not an easy task for researchers. The study of Di Gangi and Wasko aims to offer a deeper vision of the concept, making engagement apart from other terms that sometimes have been treated at the same level. "The SMET theoretical model outlines distinctions separating the factors that form the user experience, user engagement, and usage" (p.3). "The model predicts that the user experience will influence user engagement, which subsequently influences usage behavior." (p.4)

The authors have created eight different hypotheses that we will analyse below. They have used a mixed method approach through surveys and semi-structured interviews
to analyse their effectiveness.

Figure 1. Research Model (Source: Di Gangi & Wasko, 2016)

User experience

The SMET considers social interactions and technology the most important factors to understand the user's experience on social media.

Social interactions

"Social interactions among the users are what provide meaning and guide the user in evaluating how intensely involved they wish to be" (p.3). Social interactions create a personalized relationship between users and offer numerous possibilities when analyzing engagement.
Di Gangi and Wasko establish four categories that theoretically should affect positively the engagement.

**Personalization**: "the caring, individualized attention users perceive" (Kettinger & Lee, 1994, as cited in Di Gangi & Wasko, 2016, p.5). We need to offer a content that is relevant to the interests of the user.

**Social accessibility**: It includes the ability to access social resources and the presence of a critical mass of social acquaintances. The users can see that those people important to them participate in the interactions.

**Perceived risk**: perception of potential damage that the user may suffer using social media (privacy, identity threads, professional issues...). The lower the risk, the better the engagement.

**Transparency**: the perception by the user of being in a trusted community.

**Technical features**

On the other hand, technological evolution has allowed the development of social platforms where communication between users happens every second. "Technical features include the flexibility to use features for multiple purposes, the ability to integrate content, and the evolvability of the features to meet users' specific needs" (p.3).

The four categories for this section that should increase engagement are:

**Completeness**: The user can easily access interesting information.

**Flexibility**: possibility of using the technical resources available in different ways.

**Evolvability**: the development of new functionalities to improve the user experience.

**Integration**: "The degree to which content is intermixed from various sources" (p.5)
"When organizations support the creation of the user experience to meet user’s needs, higher user engagement occurs" (p.3). Di Gangi and Wasko, as in the previously analysed work of Smith and Gallicano (2015), want to escape from a traditional definition of engagement by understanding the concept as "a user's state of mind that warrants heightened involvement and results in a personally meaningful benefit" (p.4). They divide the engagement into two psychological components: individual involvement (how the user perceives their role within the social media platform, increases the motivation to participate) and personal meaning, i.e. "the degree to which a user perceives the fulfilment of his/her needs and interests.” (Battsita & Almond, 1973, Debats, 1998, as cited in Di Gangi & Wasko, 2016, p.4).

"The central premise of SME theory is that higher user engagement leads to greater usage of the social media platform" (p.4). The authors define usage as the frequency in which a user contributes in the social media channel. The more frequent it is, the greater the value will be for the organization.
The results of this research leave very interesting conclusions for the study of engagement. Of the eight hypotheses formulated (related to the influence in the engagement of the eight categories mentioned before), access to social resources, transparency, flexibility and integration do not seem to affect engagement significantly.

Social accessibility has been the most outstanding category when it comes to increase the engagement through access to a critical mass of acquaintances. Positive results were also obtained with the personalization of contents, and two of the hypotheses within the technical features, completeness and evolvability.

The most surprising result is surely the perception of risk by the user, which has positively influenced the engagement in an unexpected way (more risk equals to more
engagement). Perhaps the attraction of the younger audience to discover new environments has influenced this surprising result (the participants in the study are between 18 and 27 years old).

We will use these results to optimize the effectiveness of this thesis. Di Gangi and Wasko’s work gives us a well-defined framework where we will be able to develop our research.
One of the most special features of this thesis is the possibility of conducting the research from an international development organization. This project not only seeks to complete an academic analysis of engagement, but also reflects one more step (among many others previously carried out) to achieve a higher quality interaction between UNESCO and its followers.

Even if this work is written from within, it is important to reflect through UNESCO's official literature the institutional values that explain the will of this United Nations agency to have a more responsive approach with the audience.

It is not difficult to find on internet a strong relationship between UNESCO and dialogue. The section "Introducing UNESCO: what we are" mentions dialogue up to four times and it is the most repeated word. The initial sentence leaves no doubt about the mission of the organization: "UNESCO works to create the conditions for dialogue among civilizations, cultures and peoples, based on respect for commonly shared values" (UNESCO, n.d.).

Unfortunately, UNESCO does not currently promote interaction with users. On its website (www.unesco.org) there is no space for external comments, as it happens with the YouTube channel. On their other social platforms, conversations with users are almost non-existent. This communication strategy is important when defining our research, since it forces us to find a way to start the dialogue without the possibility to continue the conversation.

As we have mentioned before, a question can be the first step towards dialogue and active participation. Why not to develop a social media campaign around the same event with posts that will use questions and posts that will not? It will be a strategy
easy to manage and very convenient to evaluate the influence of dialogue on the engagement. Using the same event, same platforms and same period of time we can reduce as much as it is possible the external factors that can affect the interaction with the users. We will also encourage the individual involvement of the users, one of the most important factors in Di Gangi and Wasko’s theory to obtain a higher engagement.

**Searching the perfect event**

UNESCO is involved to a greater or lesser extent in all international celebrations promoted by the United Nations, but not all events are treated at the same level.

We needed one in which the Education Sector has a leading role, within the time that we had to carry out this study and in which we could participate actively by working in the creation of the communication strategy of the campaign.

The International Mother Language Day (IMLD) brings together almost all these conditions. It is not one of the largest events or the one that has the biggest impact, but it is a campaign led by UNESCO. We will be able to create more posts than usual, an ideal environment to be able to experiment with our audience.

"On International Mother Language Day 2018, held every year on 21 February, UNESCO reiterates its commitment to linguistic diversity and invites its Member States to celebrate the day in as many languages as possible as a reminder that linguistic diversity and multilingualism are essential for sustainable development" (UNESCOc, n.d.)

On February 21, UNESCO’s social media channels are flooded with messages related to this celebration. Linguistic diversity also facilitates interaction with users by escaping from technical concepts and touching an emotional and very important part in every human being such as their mother tongue. As we have seen in the Social Media

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3 UNESCO’s Education Sector is the largest in UNESCO with some 400 staff working at the Paris headquarters and spread across a global network of 53 field offices and specialized institutes and centres (UNESCO, n.d.). The campaigns analysed will be developed by the communications team of this sector.
Engagement Theory, personal meaning is another essential element to increase the user’s engagement.

This year the IMLD campaign will also have a sub-campaign that can be very useful to use as the second indicator for the comparison that we are going to analyse in this study.

This sub-campaign is based on the UNESCO’s leadership and global coordination of the Education 2030 Agenda. The goals of this agenda are summarized in the ten targets of the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4), which aims to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" (UNESCO, n.d.).

These ten targets were used to design several promotional products that the UNESCO’s Education Sector launched in December 2016. In collaboration with the French artist Yacine Ait Kaci and his digital character Elyx (the first digital ambassador of United Nations) we have produced videos, posters and other related secondary materials that continue to be translated into several languages nowadays. Requests for new languages comes from the Member States or from colleagues in the field, but it is a very appropriate product to spread on social media and move the campaign towards our external audience by asking their help to get new translations. The SDG4 multilingual campaign is a perfect match to combine with the IMLD.

Creating the social media campaigns

Using dialogue to achieve a more active participation is challenging. We must use questions that will favour clear answers and that will not require necessarily more participation from our side as much as that can be possible.

We will have two campaigns for this study: the IMLD and the SDG4. We will use each campaign for a different purpose. The IMLD will be the one chosen for the informative messages and the SDG4 for those messages with questions. In both cases we will use different audiovisual materials (images or videos) together with messages that promote the official IMLD website and the official hashtag.
It should be clarified that the communication strategy has not revolved around this study at all. This thesis is the one that has been lucky to be compatible with UNESCO’s aspiration of finding new ways to connect with users. Therefore, it is not UNESCO’s creating a campaign to feed with data this analysis but on the contrary, this study exemplifies one more action in the strategy of the organization to connect with its audience.

Selecting messages for the analysis

UNESCO has three main social media channels: Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. Other platforms such as Google+, YouTube or LinkedIn have a lower activity and a much smaller number of followers. For this analysis we will exclusively use the accounts in English, discarding the channels in Spanish and French that are also available.

Twitter and Facebook usually have an average of 5-10 posts per day, while Instagram usually has a new image every 2-3 days. But the IMLD is an event in which UNESCO takes the initiative within the United Nations agencies, so the number of posts published has been higher than usual.

On February 21, 2018, the campaign that we have called IMLD had 13 tweets (+ 5 retweets), 4 posts on Facebook and 2 images on Instagram. Ten other messages were published the day before and the day after the event. On the other hand, the SDG4 sub-campaign published two tweets, a post on Facebook and an image on Instagram.

Since our goal is to compare the campaign and the sub-campaign, we will use all the messages published for the SDG4 campaign and the same number of posts extracted from the IMLD campaign. We have chosen those messages that were published one after the other, although the influence of the time zone in which our audience is located is impossible to control.

The chosen eight

Our final objective is to study the response of users, both quantitatively (statistics of interactions) and qualitatively (analysis of the messages), and observe if through questions we can generate greater participation. Therefore, in this section we will
introduce the selected messages in a brief and purely descriptive way. Although we are aware that the text and the image itself can affect to the user's response, we believe that if we can maintain a neutral and similar discourse, we will still have solid conclusions about the effectiveness or not of asking questions to the users to start the dialogue. We will reduce the visual impact by making the questions clearly visible even in the audiovisual material.

For this study we will analyse four messages from the IMLD campaign and four from the SDG4 sub-campaign. The messages will be named from I1 to I4 for the IMLD, and from S1 to S4 for the SDG4.

We will present the eight messages grouped by the platform where they have been published.

**TWITTER**

**Message I1** - Published on February 21, 2018 at 6:20 (CEST)

*Link:* [https://twitter.com/UNESCO/status/966316624755220480](https://twitter.com/UNESCO/status/966316624755220480)

*Text and image:* "Extinct" means “last spoken within the past sixty years” [#DoOneThing](https://twitter.com/UNESCO/status/966316624755220480) for cultural diversity: Save mother languages everywhere! 21 February is International #MotherLanguageDay. [http://on.unesco.org/2Et5zEc](http://on.unesco.org/2Et5zEc)

*Brief analysis:* Call to action without any concrete commitment. Interesting graph on the situation of world languages today.
**Message S1** - Published on February 21, 2018 at 8:31 (CEST)

**Link:** [https://twitter.com/UNESCO/status/966349595306549248](https://twitter.com/UNESCO/status/966349595306549248)

**Text and image:** Can you help us? We want to promote the 10 targets of the Sustainable Development Goal 4 in as many languages as possible. Write a comment & tell us about your mother tongue! 📌

[https://on.unesco.org/2Et5zEc](https://on.unesco.org/2Et5zEc)

**#MotherLanguageDay #SDG4**

**Brief analysis:** First question asking for help. Explanation of what we need and final message encouraging the audience to write comments. The image is a composition based on the ten GIFs created for the SDG4.

**Message I2** - Published on February 21, 2018 at 5:15 (CEST)

**Link:** [https://twitter.com/UNESCO/status/966300274657775616](https://twitter.com/UNESCO/status/966300274657775616)

**Text and image:** Mother languages are the lens through which the 🌍 is first understood & voiced. They matter for our identities. 📌

[https://on.unesco.org/2Et5zEc](https://on.unesco.org/2Et5zEc) **#MotherLanguageDay**

**Brief analysis:** Message emphasizing the importance of mother tongues together with an image and a quote from Nelson Mandela. It is not the first time that UNESCO includes the South African activist in its messages. Statistics are often well above average.
Message S2 - Published on February 21, 2018 at 2:57 (CEST)

Link: https://twitter.com/UNESCO/status/966265689370701824

Text and image: How many languages can you recognize in the video? People have the right to receive education in their native language. Celebrate #MotherLanguageDay by spreading this message! http://on.unesco.org/2Et5zEc #Education2030

Brief analysis: For the second post we have an initial question that encourages the participation together with a call to action (sharing the message). The video shows the ten targets in different languages already available.

FACEBOOK

Message I3 - Published on February 21, 2018 at 6:45 p.m. (CEST)


Text and image: Too many people today are denied the opportunity to learn in their Mother Language. Education in Mother Languages is vital in bolstering respect for cultural diversity in societies everywhere. Join the celebration, 21 February is International Mother Language Day!

Brief analysis: Another informative message with a visual about multilingualism.
Message S3 - Published on February 21, 2018 at 12:18 (CEST)

Link:

Text and image: How many languages can you recognize in the video? People have the right to receive education in their native language. Celebrate #MotherLanguageDay by spreading this message! Would you like this video to be available in your mother language to enable your community to know about SDG4? Comment this post, share with us your mother tongue and let's work together to make this happen!

Brief analysis: We have a question right at the beginning of the message which is also part of the video. Call to action (sharing the post). We have added another question encouraging the users to comment on new languages to start the dialogue.

INSTAGRAM

Message I4 - Published on February 21, 2018 at 12:18 (CEST)

Link: https://www.instagram.com/p/BfeFmQMHQPH/?hl=es&taken-by=unesco
Languages connect the world! 21 February is International Mother Language Day. This is an opportunity to recall our commitment to defending and promoting languages. [...] Promoting multilingualism also helps to stop this programmed extinction. Let us celebrate the power of mother languages to build peace & sustainability! Let us celebrate the linguistic diversity and multilingualism that make up the living wealth of our world! [+ several different hashtags]

Brief analysis: Informative message of 235 words (full message available on the link). Fun and carefree photography of two children.

Message S4 - Published on February 21, 2018 at 12:18 (CEST)

Link: https://www.instagram.com/p/Bfdo6-XHQmO/?hl=es&taken-by=unesco

Text and image: How many languages can you recognize in the video? People have the right to receive education in their native language. Celebrate Mother Language Day by spreading this message! Would you like this video to be available in your mother language to enable your community to know about SDG4? Comment this post, share with us your mother tongue and let’s work together to make this happen! [+ several different hashtags]

Brief analysis: New double question added both in the video and the message. We have included a question at the end encouraging to collaborate and spread the campaign.
Once all the messages that will be part of this analysis have been presented and we know what we are going to research on, we can move forward and select the most appropriate method to understand the results.

**Research methods**

There will never be a 100% effective formula that will allow researchers to fully control the social variability. Engagement is a complicated concept that we have to evaluate understanding that all previous research could generate partially different conclusions nowadays, even the most recent ones. This is particularly evident when we deal with social media.

We approach this thesis from the hope of moving one step further towards a quality interaction between organizations and users, assuming the limitations of the study (an issue which will be analysed in a later section), but with the optimism of achieving more interactive communication strategies.

Within the uncertainty of all social research, there are some proved elements that we must take advantage of to build our methodological framework. After reading the articles mentioned in the literature section, it seems advisable to use mixed methods that combine quantitative and qualitative studies when analysing engagement.

Lüfkens (2017) and Lewis et al. (2014) based their work on quantitative studies using statistics on social media; Fischer and Reuber (2010) combined interviews with statistics; Smith and Gallicano (2015) and Briones et al. (2010) used in-depth interviews with university students; Chen (2016) chose online survey questionnaires; Mossberger et al. (2013) and Guo and Saxton (2010) used content analysis, and Obar et al. (2012) made online surveys.

“Quantitative methods are best able to deal with the settings and social contexts of social behaviour while qualitative methods are better suited to dealing with the social dynamics of situations, behaviour and interaction” (Layder, 2013, p. 13).
Combining the advantages of both methods will be the strategy that we will follow in this project. Because our field of research is perfectly defined, a mixed analysis is realistic and feasible.

The statistics can help us to understand some of the reactions to the two campaigns and compare basic interactions. We will extract all the data such as likes and shares of each message, and we will also quantify the number of comments.

On the other hand, regarding the qualitative analysis, we will have to choose the most suitable methods to work with. Since we have selected a reduced sample of messages, we can also analyse them more accurately and completely than if we had opted for a larger number of posts.

After studying different options, we will combine the statistical figures obtained in the two campaigns together with two different research methods: content analysis and interviews.

**Content analysis**

“Content analysis is the intellectual process of categorizing textual data into clusters of similar entities, or conceptual categories, to identify consistent patterns and relationships between variables or themes” (Given, 2008, p.120).

Through content analysis we intend to establish different categories that help us understand the results of the campaign by studying the user messages. Establishing different variables is a simple way to compare the two campaigns regarding the level of engagement and it will also make it easier to quantify the results.

This method requires the interpretation of the text analysed. "In qualitative research, content analysis is interpretative, involving close reading of text. Qualitative researches using a content analytic approach recognize that text is open to subjective interpretation, it reflects multiple meanings and it is context dependent." (Given, 2008, p.120).
We have been inspired when structuring this research by case studies as the one done by Wick and Harriger (2017), "A content analysis of images and text on Tumblr on Tumblr", and other literature related.

Creating categories

In order to reduce the subjectivity of interpretations and to avoid wrong conclusions, we have to design categories that fits our research goals and where personal decisions do not play a relevant role. The creation of categories is an "iterative process, so the researcher spends time reviewing categories identified previously and combining or dividing them, resolving contradictions, as the text is analysed over and over" (Given, 2008, p.120).

After an exhaustive analysis of the 561 comments registered between the two campaigns, we have established two initial categories and five sub-categories to organize all the data collected in the most useful way for this research.

Any qualitative analysis presents difficulties when interpreting texts or when assigning a specific category for a specific comment. Sometimes the researcher has to decide through an interpretive process based on context and experience. In addition, comments on social media "involve people who are not in the same space at the same time, and this connects with a certain absence of cues as to how each comment is to be read. So unlike face-to-face communication, we have no access to tone of voice or facial expression or body language, and we have only the text to go on" (Meikle, 2016, p.19). We have clearly differentiated the categories to avoid mistakes or confusions and to make the decisions as straightforward as possible.

Category 1: Comments related to the content of the campaigns.

In this category we will include all the comments that have answered with information related to the International Mother Language Day. There should be a clear connection between the message and the comment.
**Subcategory 1:** Participatory comments.

We will add to this subcategory all the comments which have information related to the messages, either with answers to the questions asked or with comments related to the text of the post.

**Subcategory 2:** Informative comments

Comments related to the campaigns but not focused on the information written in the messages (new topics). All the messages that include original/new information related with the campaign will be included in this category.

**Subcategory 3:** Protest comments

Here we have placed all the comments that promote a certain complaint / demand / political or social aspiration that, although they are related to the theme of the event, they are not directly related to the message of the campaign. As it could be understood that these demands are also a requirement for UNESCO to act, this section also includes complaints or criticisms about the organization that are within the framework of the IMLD.

**Subcategory 4:** Basic comments

Answers that do not go beyond a basic interaction such as the use of smileys or expressions of approval with no further content.
**Subcategory 5: Promotional comments**

Here we will add the comments that promote other external campaigns or the work of other organizations as long as they are related to the campaign.

**Category 2: Comments not related to the content of the campaigns.**

In this category we will add all the messages unrelated to the campaign, whether they are informative, protest or promotional. In this section we will also include those indecipherable messages, meaningless texts or messages in unknown languages that cannot be translated with the applications available on internet.

*It is important to specify that the same comment can be part of two or more subcategories if the message clearly fits in different sections.*

We will collect all the data manually from the selected messages of both campaigns. We will compare the information and finally we will write the conclusions.

Although unlikely, it is possible that new comments showed up after conducting our study, so there is a small possibility that some comments did not take part of this analysis.
Interviews

We will use interviews to complement the results extracted from the two campaigns. We have decided to conduct six interviews with different experts in the field of social media and communications.

The interview is a research method that has been used in many of the articles analysed. For this thesis, our goal is to carry out an individual analysis of each conversation in order to strengthen the arguments of this research. "The qualitative research interview has become one of the most widespread knowledge-producing practices across the social scientific disciplines. Although interviewing was a marginalized practice in many social science disciplines for years, it is part of the mainstream today" (Given, 2008, p.470).

With interviews we can have a customized analysis of what we have seen in the literature section and it will also add new reflections to improve the quality of our results. However, they have also received criticism from the academic world regarding its reliability as a research method.

We have found specially interesting the text "Ten standard Objections to Qualitative Research Interviews" by Steiner Kvale (1994), which gives a more open vision of what interviews can do for a research. The Norwegian psychologist mentions the most common criticisms against interviews to refute them by a solid argumentation. It is a highly recommended article for any academics who has doubts about the effectiveness of the interviews in their research.

Interviews are nowadays recognized as a valid method and therefore accepted by the academic community, so it is not useful to spend time with deeper explanations to justify why qualitative methods as interviews are important. As Kvale (1994) explains, "an automatic rejection of qualitative research as unscientific reflects a specific limited conception of science" (p.151). "Science, is not seen as an activity of following methodological recipes that yield acceptable results. Science becomes the creative search to understand better, and it uses whatever approaches are responsive to the

**Selection of interviewees**

The new technologies have managed to break down borders and bring people closer, and nowadays it is easier to connect with experts otherwise impossible to reach without internet.

The interviews were carried out in live, by phone call, Skype, through audio recordings in WhatsApp and one of them using the Twitter messaging service.

Except for this last interview, where the interviewee wrote the answers via Twitter, no interview has been fully transcribed. Each dialogue has been heard and analysed several times to extract the information that can be useful for this investigation.

The questions put the focus on engagement and dialogue in social media, although conversations have been customized to know more in depth the particular experience of each expert.

The six experts interviewed are (in alphabetical order):

Calero Benítez, Ernesto. Founder of the YouTube channel *Nekojitablog*

Fernández Guerra, Carlos. Digital & Social Media Director at Iberdrola and former Social Media Strategist of the official Twitter account of the National Police of Spain.

Ledner, Nicholas. Digital Communications Officer in UNICEF HQ.

Lüfkens, Matthias. Author of the Twiplomacy report, one of the references used on this thesis.

Trujillo Fernández, Alfredo. Responsible for all the activity in UNESCO`s social media.

Yohannes, Aezana. Digital Communication Specialist at UNESCO.

*A short profile of each interviewee can be found in the Annex.*

We would like to highlight two different issues concerning our list of interviewees.
First, we need to clarify that we have chosen the most interesting profiles for this research that we have been able to contact. Due to circumstances beyond our responsibility, all interviewees are men. We do not have specific data on the percentage of women and men working in this sector, but it is obvious that the presence of women working on social media is massive. As gender was not an element that has been taken into account when contacting the interviewees, the result is just one of the possibilities that could have happened.

Secondly, we want to make clear that all the opinions of the interviewees are personal and they do not reflect in any case an official position of the organizations or companies in which they work. All answers are based on personal experiences and they are not necessarily linked to their current job.

**Research limitations**

The sample that we have chosen has been limited to a framework that could be completely controlled by a single person within a specific time limit (less than half a year). Therefore, the results could provide conclusions that need further investigation to be more precise. The knowledge of the platforms and the organization analysed are essential when recognizing unusual patterns. It allows us to filter and avoid results that do not respond to the daily reality of UNESCO and that may have been produced by circumstances beyond the scope of this research.

Despite launching all the selected messages on the same day, the use of different texts and audiovisual materials (images or videos) can also influence the result by favouring or not the interaction with users beyond the questions formulated. This is especially relevant, as we will see, with the use of celebrities within the campaign. We gave the maximum prominence possible to our questions in order to reduce the visual impact.

Several interviews have been conducted in Spanish, which has required a subsequent translation to include them in the investigation. Although the message is the same,
different expressions or cultural references cannot be accurately reflected in this work for a global understanding. Small nuances could get lost in the translation process.

Some of the languages that appear in the comments could not be translated with the applications available on internet, so they have not been evaluated.

Finally, being part of the organization analysed has restricted the use of alternative methods such as surveys. We had to avoid any suspicion about the possible use of stored data of UNESCO´s users for the benefit of this thesis, so any mass message delivery has been ruled out. Contacts with users were personal, individual, and they have only occurred when it has been believed that they could provide new information in very specific contexts, as it can be read in the results section.
Results

We will first compare each pair of messages both quantitatively and qualitatively. A small interpretative reflection will be written below each table of results. Afterwards we will make a global analysis of all the results and highlight the conclusions that may or may not have been drawn from this study together with the most relevant information selected from the interviews conducted.

Before the tables of results, we will briefly evaluate the current situation of UNESCO in each of the platforms used on this research.

It should be noted that during the analysis we have perceived a difference between the number of comments that social media platforms show on the main stats and the actual available messages. This may happen because some comments have been deleted by their authors or by the organization. We have manually counted all the comments to assure that we are working with the right numbers.

Messages on TWITTER

Twitter is the social network with the largest number of subscribers within UNESCO, with more than three million. The number of daily tweets varies considerably depending on the number of events happening that day, but it is clearly the most used social media platform by the organization. The messages on Twitter are always a priority in any communication plan on social media in UNESCO.

Message I1 vs Message S1

Quantitative analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Message I1</th>
<th></th>
<th>Message S1</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Likes</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>Retweets</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>Retweets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retweets</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>Comments</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>Comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments</td>
<td>2*</td>
<td></td>
<td>40*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Number of comments in the official stats: 3 | * Number of comments in the official stats: 44
Qualitative analysis of comments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Message I1</th>
<th>Message S1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Related comments: 2</td>
<td>Related comments: 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participatory</td>
<td>Participatory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informative</td>
<td>Informative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protest</td>
<td>Protest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic</td>
<td>Basic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotional</td>
<td>Promotional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unrelated comments: 0</td>
<td>Unrelated comments: 10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

First couple of messages and we can already observe interesting data for our study. Although the basic interactions are very similar, the difference in the number of comments is more than significant. Asking the users seems to be, according to this first table, a good strategy when encouraging a greater effort from the audience. None of the two comments in the IMLD campaign were involved in a participatory way.

Message I2 vs Message S2

Quantitative analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Message I2</th>
<th>Message S2*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Likes</td>
<td>Likes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>673</td>
<td>365</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retweets</td>
<td>Retweets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>443</td>
<td>279</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments</td>
<td>Comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6*</td>
<td>8*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Number of comments in the official stats: 14 | * Number of comments in the official stats: 10

* The video has been played 6704 times

Qualitative analysis of comments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Message I2</th>
<th>Message S2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Related comments: 6</td>
<td>Related comments: 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participatory</td>
<td>Participatory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informative</td>
<td>Informative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Although both messages have more likes and retweets than the previous ones, the influence of a globally recognized personality like Nelson Mandela has clearly affected the results. The question that we have used in the video did not work and the stats are not satisfactory. However even if the I2 message has much better figures with basic interactions, the S2 message has got two more comments in total.

**Messages on FACEBOOK**

UNESCO's Facebook page has more than 600k followers. The activity is lower than on Twitter and the organization usually does not publish more than five posts per day.

**Message I3 vs Message S3**

**Quantitative analysis**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Likes</th>
<th>Retweets</th>
<th>Comments</th>
<th>Likes</th>
<th>Retweets</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>240</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>2*</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>15*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Number of comments in the official stats: 5 | * Number of comments in the official stats: 17

* The video has been played 3523 times

**Qualitative analysis of comments**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Related comments: 2</th>
<th>Related comments: 14</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participatory</td>
<td>Participatory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informative</td>
<td>Informative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protest</td>
<td>Protest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Once again the basic interactions are not significantly different, but the SDG4 post has had a clearly greater response in the comments section. In addition, if we analyse these comments, the participatory level has been very high. We can perceive a much better opportunity for interaction in the SDG4 message even if we are using such a small sample.

Messages on INSTAGRAM

The Instagram page has a similar number of followers than Facebook with almost 700k subscribers. UNESCO uploads an average of 3-5 images per week.

Message I4 vs Message S4

Quantitative analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Message I4</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Message S4*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Likes</td>
<td>11089</td>
<td>Shares</td>
<td>2519</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not visible</td>
<td>62*</td>
<td>Not visible</td>
<td>426*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Number of comments in the official stats: 319  |  * Number of comments in the official stats: 610
* The video has been played 13799 times

Qualitative analysis of comments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Message I4</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Message S4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Related comments:</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>Related comments:</td>
<td>407</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participatory</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Participatory</td>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informative</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Informative</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protest</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Protest</td>
<td>369</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Basic</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Instagram proves to be a platform with very different interaction ratios than Twitter and Facebook. In terms of *likes*, the figures are much more numerous than in any of the other two social media channels. The I4 message multiplies by four the results of the message of the SDG4 campaign with more than 11k, and despite the fact that the video has been played almost 14,000 times, the *likes* do not reach 3k. The comments section has been conquered in both publications by a campaign in defence of the Turkish language in Iran, but the SDG4 message has had eight times more comments. We will analyse this phenomenon in more depth in the global results (later section). If we discard messages of protest, the SDG4 campaign has had almost seven times more comments than the IMLD campaign (27 and 4 respectively).

GLOBAL ANALYSIS

*Quantitative analysis*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“I” messages</th>
<th>“S” messages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Likes</td>
<td>Shares</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11089</td>
<td>668</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Bar chart showing likes, shares, and comments for “I” and “S” messages]
Statistics should be treated with special care in such small samples, but they do allow us to develop the reflections previously made. Even though most of the comments have been made about the same protest (and that has certainly increased the numbers), we just have an interaction of this kind every 25 likes. The graphic allows us to visually understand the differences we are dealing with. The number of shares is significantly lower, although on Instagram you cannot see the total figures.

The results obtained confirm in first place the existence of a significant majority of followers who do not have any interaction with the messages. For those who do react in a quantifiable way, likes (the explicit acceptance of the promoted content) becomes the most accessible interaction, shares (the promotion of the campaign in their channels, it often requires one more click than likes) are considerably more difficult to get and comments are undoubtedly the least used tool to interact with the content.

Regarding engagement, we have found on this comparison that a greater predisposition for dialogue by the organization remarkably improves the results (489 comments against 72), although it could affect negatively to the number of likes (11,089 versus 3,237). It seems logical that when the message has a question, the audience is more reluctant to show their approval without participating in the dialogue. Using a video instead of an image on Instagram (the platform with more interactions) can also explain this difference.

**Qualitative analysis of comments**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>“I” messages</th>
<th>“S” messages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Related comments:</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>459</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participatory</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informative</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protest</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>381</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotional</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unrelated comments:</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The SDG4 campaign has up to seven times more participatory messages, a substantial number that in most cases has provided real collaboration with the followers, sharing their knowledge in their mother tongue and commenting about the event’s theme.

The different requests for new translations, the translations made by users, or all the comments regarding the Mother Language Day have made the SDG4 campaign a more comfortable meeting place for the subscribers than the IMLD campaign.

There is no doubt that the study has been affected by the claim in favour of the Turkish language in Iran (see image on the left). We had hundreds of almost identical comments on Instagram, making it difficult for a greater connection among the other followers. For this study we have contacted hldn_17, the only user of the 25 followers that we have sent a direct message who has agreed to answer some questions about this joint action. For this small interview we have introduced ourselves as academic researchers and not as UNESCO workers.
“I wanted to see on the UNESCO page that the oppressors will not triumph. In our country (Iran), we cannot learn our mother tongue (Turkish). We ask for our right. We want to teach our mother tongue in our schools for our children.” UNESCO was used as a showcase for a protest that was actually related to the theme of the event. Same as for the rest of the comments, there was no special treatment or action from the organization. All comments remain visible and there is no official interaction. When asked if he would be interested in helping with the Turkish translation of the SDG4 campaign, the user quickly showed total availability to help with the task. If we move to a more direct contact, we can transform a comment into a positive and participative engagement. The possibilities that dialogue opens are endless.

The fact that this protest campaign has not affected other platforms such as Facebook and Twitter is explained by the blocking policies of certain websites in Iran. As explained by Aday, Farrell, Lynch, Sides, Kelly and Zuckerman (2010), "the national government [of Iran] imposed a filtering regime that makes it difficult for citizens to access large numbers of Web sites" (p.9). Something that was confirmed by hldn_17.

Beyond this protest, the comments of the users have allowed us to expand the information of the original post and give them more prominence, although it has not generated a subsequent dialogue among the audience.

In this first phase of engagement analysis through dialogue, in which UNESCO is only involved in the first message, the results have shown a path full of opportunities and risks. The differences in the kind of engagement obtained are clear even at a small scale, and it encourages us to have a further research on this field to gain a deeper understanding of the real usefulness of a direct conversation with users for international development organizations.

Almost all interviewees have highlighted the possibilities of dialogue to increase engagement. At a more institutional level, Aezana Yohannes (UNESCO) affirms that "the audience must know that there are actual people listening behind the logo of the organization and that their comments and reactions are not just in vain." Something that also mentioned Carlos Fernández (Iberdrola), emphasizing that "logos do not speak. We must create a communication from people to people, build trust and take
advantage of the opportunities that the conversation produces." Even Matthias Lüfkens (Twiplomacy), coordinator of a report based mostly on statistics, prioritizes dialogue. "It is the two-way dialogue which I think it is really important. Of course it is very difficult to do in big accounts, but I think that small accounts can start the interaction by asking questions about different topics. ‘What would you want to hear from us?’." As we have seen before, accounts with a greater number of subscribers can also use this strategy in a positive way, without being excessively uncontrollable (at least for the current flow of information generated).

And if someone knows the ins and outs of managing thousands of interactions are the YouTubers (influencers with a giant number of subscribers on this video platform). Ernesto Calero seeks a personal relationship with his audience despite the huge amount of questions and messages that he receives every day (one of them made possible the interview with us). And even at these amazing levels of interaction it seems that a close relationship is possible. "We feel that we always talk to the same users, we can even remember their avatars and identify them. In the end we feel that this is a family in constant growth, but the usual ones are there every day [...] I try to answer all the messages, especially the comments with a question."

That level of attention is not easy to achieve in other contexts. Dialogue is a great challenge for all community managers of an international development organization and it is not easy to find the resources to handle it. Alfredo Trujillo (UNESCO) mentioned that "dialogue is worthwhile, but to what extent is it possible to do it? If you want that kind of follow-up on a regular basis you need to invest in staff at a level that is not always possible for the organization." Nicholas Ledner (UNICEF) joins this discourse and he talks about the "capacity, budget and focusing on one specific audience" as the greatest challenges for international development organizations. “We are not selling something. Advocacy is somehow a blurry area."

Despite of these challenges, the goals do not change for most of the organizations and they are not complicated to define. "The objective should be to communicate their work and impact to a large audience that might not be aware of their mandate" (Yohannes). "To make ourselves known, we want people to know why UNESCO is
important to them in their lives, what is its real impact. We want to reach people that in other circumstances would not know about us" (Trujillo).

Social media allows people to know the organizations’ work but it also allows the organizations to know the people who is behind their campaigns, at least in a quantitative way. Statistics are still one of the favourite resources to measure the effectiveness on social media and they are part of the daily work to a greater or lesser extent of the interviewees. The statistics "are a way of knowing that people like your message and consider it relevant enough to share it with their followers" (Trujillo). Nevertheless, as we have seen before, this information is very limited and unstable if it is not combined with a qualitative analysis of the information. "In order to really engage the user needs time to analyse and process the information. There is also an emotional level to engagement. If you don’t connect with the user emotionally, the content is lost" (Ledner). Lüfkens goes even further. "It does not matter how many followers you have. [...] Don’t focus on the numbers, look at the engagement, look at the comments, the interactions."

We need to make a comprehensive analysis of our social media to find a more authentic engagement. "Social media editors should be able to select only engaging content and be able to provide elaborate replies to comments in an informal tone and create a sense of community with the followers" (Yohannes). The development of a community requires fostering a group feeling, and it is an essential factor when it comes to increasing engagement with users. "We need to establish a long-term relationship of trust and create a community. Like a football team, a political party or Apple" (Fernández). Initiating and coordinating a community is not an easy task in organizations with a high number of followers with very different profiles but, for this study, we have proven its effectiveness with a simple experiment. A basic message in a group of WhatsApp under the name #YouthLeadSDGs (where there are 169 people somehow working for the promotion of the UN Sustainable Development Goals) was enough to generate a higher quality interaction than in the two campaigns that we have analysed together. We have received up to nine messages offering help to collaborate on the project, and currently more than 15 new languages are being translated through this channel. As Lüfkens expressed, "a social media manager needs
to focus on that small group of dedicated followers who will interact with your content in a more substantial way."

Building a strong community of followers is a slow process and full of complications, especially when we try to connect with the most active users through dialogue. Short-term communication strategies do not work, and engagement should be understood as a road with many curves where it is not always easy to find the right direction. "Engagement is something that cannot be measured in one tweet or in one post, it has to be measured in the long term" (Fernández).

The power of dialogue to generate an active and collaborative communication beyond the basic interactions has been positively reflected in this study, although a more exhaustive follow-up is necessary to obtain more solid results.

Nobody can predict what is going to happen on social media in five or ten years. International development organizations have to build up a flexible and highly dynamic communication team ready to constantly improved the communication strategies.

The great challenges nowadays for international development organizations are based on "cutting through the noise and making their content engaging" (Yohannes), "having a content that really helps people" (Trujillo), "create content that fits the audience's desire and needs" (Ledner). And if the way of managing the comments is structured, it is made on a regular basis and it is done in the long term, direct interaction with the audience becomes a resource of great versatility and influence on the engagement between organizations and users.
Conclusion

UNESCO moves forward. After a long period of analysis, the organization has finally decided to give greater prominence to dialogue. Less than two weeks after concluding the International Mother Language Day campaign, the document "Education Sector’s digital engagement strategy and moderation guidelines" was written. The Education Sector "will start interacting with users who are sharing positive comments and mentions on education related content via UNESCO’s global social media channels in order to tap into the engagement potential of its large following and active communities. This will help spread UNESCO's messages and role in education and will increase its overall digital engagement." Full dialogue is still a utopia, but these are new important steps heading to a richer communication with the audience.

The results of this study have reaffirmed dialogue as a powerful tool in social media, and if we respond to comments from users we can have a deeper evaluation on how it affects to the engagement. If the engagement is higher, as this research predicts, the consequences will be very noticeable for the organization.

Following the Social Media Engagement Theory that we have used for this thesis, the international organizations can achieve through a greater engagement (based on strategies focused on the individual involvement and the personal meaning), a higher
quality and more frequent commitment and participation of the audience, reducing
the current indifference and passivity of most of the users. Results have shown a
higher participation and a more proactive community when we have used dialogue,
even at this basic level.

This is of course a non-radical change for UNESCO, and the benefits will come, if they
come, with more modest results due a conservative approach. For instance, the
messages of protest (the most frequent in the two campaigns analysed), will be still
ignored regarding dialogue. It is very complicated for an international development
organization to show any kind of reaction to controversial issues. However, in studies
such as that of Mossberger et al. (2013), conducted within the United States, they
found out that "participation in the US often occurs only when individuals are
dissatisfied" (Hibbings & Theiss-Mrorse, 2001 as cited in Mossberger et al., 2010,
p.356), something that we also experience very often.

Working on dialogue and participation, even at the risk of reducing some basic
interactions, is necessary to disseminate the mandate of the organization and involve
the supporters of UNESCO’s objectives. International development organizations are
sometimes stuck in a fundraising vicious cycle where social change or interactions with
the general public are forgotten.

This lack of interest in the audience also implies very low percentages of visitors
coming from social media platforms to the website. Dialogue and participation can also
work to reactivate these communication channels and expand the work carried out by
the organizations.

International organizations need to understand that a communication plan based on
informative messages will look old-fashioned and useless within social media platforms
if it is not implemented together with a participatory and engaging strategy. Working
for development implies making the leap towards a more interactive communication
where the few active users need to be contacted to make the message go further and
to reaffirm the organization’s own social value.
"Communication for Development is a social process based on dialogue using a broad range of tools and methods" (as cited in McGall, 2011, p.13). The best known definition of communication for development, drawn from the World Congress in Rome (2006), perfectly reflects the spirit of this thesis. And in the 21st century, this dialogue cannot escape from social media and internet.

Future research has to determine the way forward. Constant experimentation will be the only key to get a deeper and more interactive engagement. As Mike Hanley expressed in his article written for the Twiplomacy report, "the best thing about digital is that it's always changing, what works one day doesn't work the next. Keeping the plates all spinning is a constant, exciting challenge" (Lüfkens, 2017, p.33). A challenge that international development organizations cannot ignore if they wish to continue the long and convoluted path towards achieving their goals.


Lewis, K., Gray, K., & Meierhenrich, J. (2014). The Structure of Online Activism. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.15195/v1.a1


Smith, B., & Gallicano, T. (2015). Terms of engagement: Analyzing public engagement with organizations through social media. doi:https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2015.05.060


doi:https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2017.11.005

Appendix

Profile of the six interviewees

_Calero Benítez, Ernesto - Nekojitablog_

Mr. Calero is the founder of the YouTube channel _Nekojitablog_. He works together with his wife to spread the Japanese culture through videos with different themes, taking advantage of his personal experience in the country. He works exclusively in Spanish, so the vast majority of his audience is located in Spain or Latin America. In May 2018, his channel had 1,797,000 subscribers, with an average of 400,000 views per video. His Twitter account has 168,000 subscribers and his Facebook has 125,000 likes.

_Fernández Guerra, Carlos - CM Iberdrola_

Mr. Fernández is currently the Digital & Social Media Director at Iberdrola, one of the biggest electric utility companies worldwide. But his name became well known as the Social Media Strategist of the official Twitter account of the National Police of Spain (@policia), position that he kept for more than six years. Mr. Fernández combined the information with tweets that used humour to answer to serious issues, attracting a large number of followers that made the Spanish _policia_ the most followed police force on Twitter. The second one, the American @FBI, is nowadays more than one million followers away (May 2018).

_Ledner, Nicholas - UNICEF_

Mr. Ledner is a Digital Communications Officer in UNICEF HQ. As we can read in his LinkedIn profile he is “a creative social media marketing professional.” He is working in
UNICEF from 2010 “collaborating with UNICEF offices globally [...] to create high performing online content and interactive experiences” and “helping to substantially grow global social media communities through new creative approaches and strategic outreach strategies, devising & supporting the creation of social media campaigns with low budgets” among other tasks.

Lüfkens, Matthias - Burson-Marsteller

Mr. Lüfkens is the person in charge for the Twiplomacy report, one of the references used for this thesis. Before joining Burson-Masteller he was leading the digital outreach of the World Economic Forum. “I have advised numerous international organizations including the Global Fund, the ICRC, ITU, OECD, UNCTAD, UN Foundation, UNICEF and WWF.”

Trujillo Fernández, Alfredo - UNESCO

Mr. Trujillo is responsible for all the activity in UNESCO’s social media. He works as part of the Department of Public Information. He is also in charge of coordinating all the social media campaigns of the five sectors of UNESCO. Before joining the organization, he worked at CNN +, El País and the telecommunication company Wannado.

Yohannes, Aezana - UNESCO

Mr. Yohannes holds the position of Digital Communication Specialist. He is responsible for coordinating all the campaigns of the UNESCO’s Education sector. He is the intermediary between the different teams in the sector and the Department of Public Information. Before starting his career at UNESCO, he worked at UNICEF in New York and at the International Labour Organization (ILO) in Geneva.