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Twitter as a public service medium? A content analysis of the Twitter use made by Radio RAI and RNE

¿Twitter como servicio público? Análisis de contenido del uso de Twitter por parte de RAI y RNE

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ABSTRACT: Twitter seems to be, among the other social media, one of the best new media for drawing back the audience from internet to radio and to improve the engagement with listeners. This paper analyses the practices of public radio in Social Media focusing on the use of Twitter by two European public broadcasters: RAI (Italy)

and RNE (Spain). PSM role in society is being questioned and asked to extend its service to include a new media strategy. The study aims to understand how public service operators adapt themselves to the new multi platform scenario which should drive them to change the relationship with their listeners.

RESUMEN: Entre los diversos medios sociales, Twitter se muestra como uno de los mejores para llevar la audiencia de internet a la radio y para una mejor relación con los oyentes. Este artículo analiza las prácticas de la radio pública en los medios sociales. El análisis se centra en el uso de Twitter por parte de dos radiodifusores públicos europeos: RAI (Italia) y RNE (España), en un contexto en el que el rol de los medios públicos está siendo cuestionado. Este estudio pretende comprender cómo los operadores públicos se adaptan a un nuevo escenario multiplataforma que exige nuevos modos de relación con los oyentes.

Keywords: Radio, Twitter, Radio RAI, RNE, social media, content analysis.

Palabras clave: radio, Twitter, Radio RAI, RNE, medios sociales, análisis de contenido.

1. Introduction¹

Over the past few years, Social Media have been increasingly used by radio broadcasters as an opportunity to engage with their audience and build communities of listeners. Among these new media, the microblogging platform Twitter has become one of the most popular services. This study analyses the practices of public radio in Social Media, focusing on the use of Twitter by two European public service media (PSM): RAI – Radio Audizioni Italiane (Italy) and RNE – Radio Nacional de España (Spain). This topic is relevant with regards to the transformation of radio, where the role of public broadcasters is being questioned. The analysis of RAI and RNE tweets should help us understand: 1) How these two public broadcasters use Twitter; 2) If Twitter can be used as a public service medium, matching the aims and values of public service communication. Given the rapid rate at which traditional media outlets are adopting Social Media, a better understanding of the dynamics and implications of social network sites like Twitter may serve as strategic knowledge for the public broadcasting sector, in order to integrate these new platforms and therefore legitimize their services.

This article aims to investigate how two national public service radio broadcasters (Spain's RNE and Italy's RAI) use Twitter, and to determine if Twitter can be useful as a tool for public service. We want to understand how PSM are adopting new technologies in order to extend their reach towards their audiences.

¹ Acknowledgments: the authors want to thank students Andrea Bertolucci and Tommaso Aimo for their work and insights.

This study also aims to understand how public service operators adapt themselves to the new multi-platform scenario, which should drive them to change their relationships with their listeners.

2. Literature review

2.1. Social network sites, journalism and media

Over the last decade, social network sites (SNS) such as Facebook and Twitter have been growing significantly and millions of people have integrated these platforms into their daily lives. Boyd and Ellison² define social network sites as “web-based services that allow users to (1) construct a public or a semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system”.

Within the SNS landscape, Twitter has become one of the most popular services, as a microblogging platform that allows users to publish short messages and share them with a network of followers. It combines elements of blogging, the immediacy of instant messaging, the connections of SNS and an easy integration with mobile phones. Twitter allows people to share and consume thousands of bits of information, and its flexible and real-time nature generates a dynamic environment for sharing content.

Although social network sites were originally developed to connect with friends, they have evolved into powerful tools for communication and for accessing the news. At the same time, mainstream media are exploring new ways of communicating with their audiences. SNS may be seen as an evolution of the public sphere, where online users transform the dynamics of publishing and distributing information³. In this context, social recommendation becomes a key element for users, who value the content they receive from their trusted network.

Social network sites are a dynamic and hybrid environment, with mass media, journalists and amateurs sharing time, space and content. The real time flow of information gives users ongoing alerts about current events that Hermida has described as ambient journalism, a “wide communication system(...) that allows citizens to establish and maintain a mindset of news and events around them”⁴. But as pointed out by Burns⁵, this does not make the expertise of journalists less necessary. Several authors have argued that the role of journalists and media should be to give value to this new context⁶.

² Cfr. BOYD, Danah M., ELLISON, Nicole B., “Social network sites: definition, history and scholarship”, *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, vol. 13, n° 1, 2008, pp. 210-230, p. 211.

³ Cfr. HERMIDA, Alfred et al., “Your friend as editor: the shift to the personalized social news stream”, Paper presented at The Future of Journalism Conference, Cardiff, 2011.

⁴ Cfr. HERMIDA, Alfred, “Twittering the news”, *Journalism Practice*, vol. 4., n° 3, 2010, pp. 297-308.

⁵ Cfr. BURNS, Alex, “Oblique strategies for ambient journalism”, *M/C Journal*, vol. 13, n° 2, 2010.

⁶ Cfr. BROWN, Carrie, “#Memstorm: Twitter as a community-driven breaking news reporting tool”, Paper presented at 13th International Symposium of Online Journalism, Austin, 2012; BRUNO, Nicola, *Tweet first, verify later: how real-time information is changing the coverage of worldwide crisis events*, RISJ, Oxford, 2012; BRUNS, Axel, “Gatewatching, not gatekeeping: collaborative online news”, *Media International*

Mainstream media have to deal with the challenge of being part of the trusted network of their publics. But SNS are also a space for communication and socialization that appeal to a change in the way media engage with their audiences. However, great amounts of research have revealed that media organizations are using social networks to promote their content, instead of exploring a new relationship with users. Noguera⁷ studied the Facebook profile of thirteen Spanish newspapers and concluded that there is little effective participation and low real conversation. The analysis of García de Torres et al. of thirty Hispanic media noted that Facebook is basically a channel used for unidirectional broadcast of contents, while Twitter is a more interactive platform⁸. Messner, Linke and Eford⁹ analysed the messages on Twitter from a hundred newspapers and a hundred TV broadcasters. Most of them have incorporated this microblogging service, but just for promoting the stories published in their websites. Likewise, 80% of 360 tweets analysed by Armstrong and Gao¹⁰ from nine American news organizations attempted to attract the audience to the site.

In the case of radio, Ferguson and Greer¹¹ studied the Twitter profile of a hundred of American stations and concluded that messages from music stations were mostly promotional, while talk radio stations focused their tweets on news contents, and Sellas¹² revealed how the structural factors influence the dynamics of the morning magazines on Twitter, a new platform that broadcasters use basically as an unidirectional channel of communication¹³.

Social media seem to be one of the keys of the radio industry's evolution, as well as multi-platform distribution, tablets apps and smartphones¹⁴. SNS extend the possibilities for the audience participation, while they are a way to engage with listeners, understand what they expect from the medium and enrich their experience¹⁵. We should keep in mind that, as

Australia Incorporating Culture and Policy: Quarterly Journal of Media Research and Resources, 107, 2003, pp. 31-44; NOGUERA, José Manuel, "How open are journalists on Twitter? Trends towards the end-user journalism", *Communication & Society / Comunicación y Sociedad*, vol. 26, n° 1, 2013, pp. 93-114.

⁷ Cfr. NOGUERA, José Manuel, "Redes sociales como paradigma periodístico. Medios españoles en Facebook", *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, vol. 65, 2010, pp. 176-186.

⁸ Cfr. GARCÍA DE TORRES, Elvira y otros, "See you on Facebook or Twitter? The use of social media by 27 news outlets from 9 regions in Argentina, Colombia, Mexico, Peru, Portugal, Spain and Venezuela", Paper presented at 12th International Symposium for Online Journalism, Austin, 2011.

⁹ Cfr. MESSNER, Marcus, LINKE, Maureen, EFORD, Asnel, "Shoveling tweets: An analysis of the microblogging engagement of traditional news organizations", Paper presented at 12th International Symposium for Online Journalism, Austin, 2011.

¹⁰ Cfr. ARMSTRONG, Cory L., GAO, Fanglang, "Now tweet this: how news organizations use twitter", *Electronic News*, vol. 4, n° 4, 2010, pp. 218-235.

¹¹ Cfr. FERGUSON, Douglas A., GREER, Clark F., "Local radio and microblogging: how radio stations in the U.S. are using Twitter", *Journal of Radio & Audio Media*, vol. 18, n° 1, 2011, pp. 33-46.

¹² Cfr. SELLAS, Toni, "Ràdio i xarxes socials: els magazins matinals a Twitter", *Quaderns del CAC*, vol. 16, n° 39, 2013, pp. 23-33.

¹³ Cfr. HERRERA, Susana, REQUEJO, José Luis, "Uses of Twitter by the main Spanish talk radio stations", Paper presented at 3rd European Communication Conference, Hamburg, 2010.

¹⁴ Cfr. EBU, European Broadcasting Union, *Public Radio and new media platforms*, EBU Press, Geneva, 2011.

¹⁵ Cfr. SHAW, Helen, "The online transformation: How the Internet is challenging and changing radio", in O'NEILL, Brian et al. (eds.), *Digital radio in Europe: technologies, industries and cultures*, Intellect Books, Bristol, 2010, pp. 215-236.

pointed out by Ala-Fossi¹⁶, the future of radio will ultimately depend on the willingness of listeners.

2.2. *Doing Public Service Media (PSM) in the age of the network society*

This paper defines providers of public services as radio companies that are institutionally separate from direct government control, though they depend on them for most of their support. A public service is different from State radio in that it operates in a competitive system within democratic states¹⁷. The economic model of a public service is based on state funding and a tax on household broadcasting devices, known as the licence fee.

If we want to consider the political structure of public services, as opposed to their goals, we may find the definition by Hallin and Mancini¹⁸ to be useful: they have compared the media and political systems in different western countries, and identified three macro-categories of public services: a) the “liberal” model, found in Great Britain and its ex-colonies, is a model where public services are independent from government politics; b) the “polarized pluralist” model, with considerable levels of politicization, State intervention and patronage, common in the public services of Mediterranean countries; c) the “democratic-corporative” model, typical of the Scandinavian countries, Holland, Austria, Switzerland, Belgium and Germany, strongly linked to the influence of organized social groups, partially independent from politics.

However, beyond the legal-organizational aspects, there has never been a common agreement on the definition of public service. According to the sociologist Tryne Syvertsen¹⁹, the definitions of public service can be historically summarized in three large categories: the first dates back to the dawn of the medium and of monopolies: the public service intended as public utility. The second meaning of public service revolves around the concept of public sphere and common good. The public channel is obliged to provide citizens with all the information they need to best fulfil their civil rights and responsibilities; this corresponds to the goal for inclusiveness of the most citizens possible.

The third meaning of public service revolves around the equation between public and audience, an operation that implies the assimilation of the public –understood in its units– as it consumes media content, even before the rights of citizenship. In this ecosystem, the public service is at the service of the listener/consumer, and its goal is to satisfy the interests and preferences of single consumers, rather than the needs of the community. This interpretation of the concept of public service –the transition from the cultural paradigm to that which is oriented towards the market²⁰– began gaining ground at the end of the 1980’s, when public radio had to begin to face competition from private media and the loss of listeners towards

¹⁶ Cfr. ALA-FOSSI, Marko, “Future scenarios for the radio industry”, in O’NEILL, Brian *et al.* (eds.), *Digital radio in Europe: technologies, industries and cultures*, Intellect Books, Bristol, 2010, pp. 153-171.

¹⁷ Cfr. HENDY, David, *Radio in the global age*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2000.

¹⁸ Cfr. HALLIN, Daniel C., MANCINI, Paolo, *Comparing media systems: Three models of Media and Politics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2004.

¹⁹ Cfr. SYVERTSEN, Trine, “The many uses of the ‘public service’ concept”, *Nordicom Review*, vol. 1, n° 99, pp. 5-12.

²⁰ Cfr. MURDOCK, G., GOLDING, P., “Common Markets: Corporate Ambitions and Communication Trends in the UK and Europe”, *Journal of Media Economics*, vol. 12, n° 1, 1999, pp. 117-132; SYVERSTEN, Trine, *op. cit.*

them; it is now the dominant interpretation, at varying levels, in the public service networks all over Europe. Despite this shift towards the market, Bardoel²¹ highlights how, at different latitudes and in different cultures, the goals stated by public services are now very similar: a) universality of listeners and coverage of the territory; b) pluralist, innovative, and diversified programming, independent from both political and market forces; c) attention towards national cultural and linguistic identity, but also reflection on the multiethnic nature of society; d) responsibility towards society and the public.

Now, in the age of network societies, these traditional definitions of PSM need to be updated. All PSM are facing an audience drain, above all among youth.

According to Scannell²², a BBC historian, the mission of the public radio service should be the search for that basic rule of all democracies: inclusiveness. For a radio service to be inclusive, it must dedicate itself to guaranteeing access to its broadcasts to all resident citizens, to the upkeep of the signal's cleanliness and area, and to shaping an editorial strategy capable of culturally and socially including all its citizens.

Some countries still maintain large shares of the public (United Kingdom, Germany, Scandinavian countries), but there is a general tendency towards an inescapable drop. Today, the inclusiveness idealized by Scannell is an illusion, and its decline risks becoming a political problem as well: how can you justify public funding for a medium that is only popular with the minority of the Nation?²³ A problem shared between the European public service media is that of the constant aging of listeners and the progressive escape of youth, not so much towards the commercial networks as to other technological platforms (53% of those aged 12-35 report preferring the Internet over the radio as the primary medium for the discovery and use of music – EBU, 2011). Still according to EBU data, from 2006 to 2010 in Italy, young listeners (ages 14-25) of the public broadcasting stations dropped by 13% (in France and Spain by 7%, in the UK by 17%, while in Sweden – land of the music streaming service Spotify – by 27%).

Some of these public stations are attempting to curb the escape of the prized young age range through custom-made offers of FM and digital thematic networks (BBC Six in the UK, Le Mouv' in France, Radio Tres in Spain, Radio Wave in the Czech Republic) and with an increased presence on social networking websites.

Mediterranean PSM hold the lowest audience rates²⁴. Audience engagement and participation become increasingly important assets to legitimize the existence of PSM.

As Gunn Enli suggests²⁵, public service in the age of social media should add a fourth dimension to the well-known Reithian principles (Inform, Educate, Entertain), that of “participation”. Gunn Enli sheds light on the emergence of audience participation as a strategy for institutional legitimacy and platform expansion.

²¹ Cfr. BARDOEL, Jo, “Public broadcasting systems”, in DONSBACH, Wolfgang (ed.), *The International Encyclopedia of Communication*, Blackwell Publishing, Malden/Oxford, 2008, vol. 7, pp. 3259-3261.

²² Cfr. SCANNELL, Paddy, *Radio, television and modern life*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1996.

²³ Cfr. BLUMLER, Jay G., GUREVITCH, Michael, *The Crisis of Public Communication*, Routledge, London, 1995.

²⁴ EBU, *op. cit.*

²⁵ Cfr. GUNN, Enli S., “Redefining Public Service Broadcasting. Multi-Platform participation”, *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, vol. 14, n° 1, 2008, pp. 105-120.

3. Research design and methodology

3.1. Contextualizing public service radio broadcasting and social media presence in Italy and Spain.

The two countries under study, Spain and Italy, were selected for both analytical and practical reasons. They both belong to the same media and political system that was investigated by Hallin and Mancini²⁶, the “polarized pluralist” model, with considerable levels of politicization, State intervention and patronage. The penetration rate of radio listening among their population is quite similar: 59.3% in Spain and 64% in Italy²⁷. Their public service audience shares are among the lowest in Europe, since RAI holds 18% of the daily audience and RNE 6%²⁸. They differ for the presence of advertising in their programmes. The Spanish national public radio service does not rely on advertising incomes, while the Italian public broadcaster RAI allows advertising for a maximum of 12% per hour and 4% per week.

RAI offers three national radio stations in FM, Digital Audio Broadcasting (DAB) and internet streaming: Radio1, a news & talk station (4.5 million listeners per day, Eurisko 2012) targeting listeners over 54; Radio2, that provides indie music shows and light entertainment programmes (3.1 million listeners per day, Eurisko 2012); Radio3, a cultural and talk station (1.4 million listeners per day, Eurisko 2012).

RNE offers six radio stations in AM, FM, DAB, satellite and internet streaming: Radio Nacional (called Radio 1 until 2008), a news & talk station (1.7 million listeners per day, EGM 2012); Radio Clásica (called Radio 2 until 1994), mostly focused on classical music (150,000 listeners per day, EGM 2012); Radio 3, the station that provides indie music and other non-mainstream genres (450,000 listeners per day, EGM 2012); Radio 5, the all-news station (350,000 listeners per day, EGM 2012); Radio 4, a Catalan talk-radio station only transmitted in the autonomous region of Catalonia; and Radio Exterior de España, the public radio service provided through AM, satellite and the Internet and intended for Spaniards living abroad.

All the four channels selected (Radio Nacional and Radio 3 for Spain; Radio2 and Radio3 for Italy) are present on the two main social media, Facebook and Twitter.

As far as we could observe in October 2012, the activity of the four channels on Facebook doesn't seem intense, with the exception of Radio 3 RNE. Radio 2 RAI has more or less the same number of fans (22.731, 24 October 2012) that it has on Twitter. Radio 3 RAI has 7090 fans (24 October 2012); Radio Nacional has 3051 fans (24 October 2012). Radio 3 RNE has the widest audience on Facebook, 115.000 fans (almost a third of its FM audience) and enacts the best use of the social media platform, trying to interact with its listeners. All the four channels use Facebook mostly for broadcasting their contents and schedules, without any dramaturgic sense of publishing²⁹. All the four channels have a specific social media strategy.

²⁶ HALLIN, Daniel C., MANCINI, Paolo, *op. cit.*

²⁷ EBU, *op. cit.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ For a description of the dramaturgical use of Facebook by European public service media cfr. BONINI Tiziano, “Doing radio in the age of Facebook”, *The Radio Journal*, forthcoming, 2014.

As showed by Sellas & Bonini³⁰, that interviewed many social media managers at Spanish and Italian public service radio, the main common strategies emerged by their survey were: 1) to be where the listeners are; 2) to interact with the listeners while avoiding simplification; 3) to tune in to the listeners' voice; 4) to bring traffic to the website.

3.2 Sampling

There are four Twitter profiles chosen for the survey, two for each country. Two belong to music radio stations: @rairadio2 (the Italian Radio2 RAI) and @radio3_RNE (the Spanish Radio 3); and two to talk radio stations: @radio1_RNE (Radio Nacional, the main talk&news radio station of RNE) and @radio3tweets (Radio3 RAI, the Italian culture-oriented station). We have chosen these four stations because they are the ones that most resemble each other: Radio Nacional (Spain) and Radio3 (Italy) both share a talk-oriented format and target older audiences; Radio 3 (Spain) and Radio2 (Italy) are both music-oriented and target a younger audience. The four Twitter profiles corresponding to these stations are also more active than the others. Overall, we believe that the similarities and differences between these two national broadcasting companies will provide a more fruitful context in order to better understand the use they make of Twitter.

In order to achieve this, a content analysis of the tweets of these two broadcasters was employed as the primary tool for examination. Data for the study were gathered in two different sets: the first collected all the tweets published by the four Twitter profiles identified between 18 and 24 June 2012; the second repeated the sampling process four months later, between 8 and 15 October 2012.

We chose the week period as a format for the sampling because it represents the week format that every radio schedule normally uses. We observed that every Twitter profile analysed starts to repeat the same flow of promotional tweets about their radio programmes every Monday. The dramaturgy of the tweets follows the radio schedules. We chose June and October purposively, because the first one represents the last month of the regular radio season and the second one is at the beginning of the new season. Radio scheduling often changes a lot during its summer months: July, August and mid-September. From September onward a new season starts for radio and new programmes are often launched. In this case – the four radio stations analysed – schedule between June and October didn't observed any change. An interval of at least four months between the first and second recording of tweets was also chosen to see if the use of Twitter had been modified in the meantime. The choice of sampling two different sets in two different periods was done to find recurrent patterns of communication. No specific events happened in Italy and in Spain in those two periods seem to have affected the way the radio stations used Twitter, a part from a music Festival event organized by Radio3 (Spain), which was highly supported by its Twitter profile.

³⁰ SELLAS, Toni, BONINI, Tiziano, "Masters of Brand: A Study of Social Media Workers in the Italian and Spanish Radio Industries", in OLIVEIRA, M., STACHYRA, G. & STARKEY, G., *Radio. The resilient medium*, Sapere Press, forthcoming, 2015.

By comparing the two data sets, collected in a reasonable lapse of time, our aim was to prove that the Twitter-based communication strategies of each radio station analysed followed well-established rules. The two data sets analysed contain 842 tweets by four Twitter profiles.

There are very few existing literature reviews on radio and Twitter use and/or content analysis of tweets related to radio broadcasters/listeners that have emerged only recently, and a common method of analysis has not yet emerged. Drawing from the experience of Ferguson and Greer³¹, we have extended their content analysis model, adding tools for discourse analysis based on the linguistic functions studied by Jakobson³². Tweets are texts of 140 characters, sent by an addresser to an invisible audience of receivers with a specific purpose and, as texts, can thus be analysed through the Jakobson's model. We believe that understanding the linguistic functions embedded in the public broadcasters' use of the language inside the Twitter format can reveal more about the way the channels perceive themselves, their identity and their mission.

Jakobson's model of the functions of language integrates Bühler's tripartite system³³ (Emotive, Conative, and Referential) and Malinowski's concept of Phatic communication³⁴. Jakobson claimed that all acts of communication, be they written or oral, are contingent on six constituent elements: Context, Message, Addresser, Receiver, Contact, Code. Each of the constituent elements of the communicative act has a corresponding function: Referential, Expressive (alternatively called Emotive), Conative, Poetic, Phatic, Metalingual.

The Referential function can be equated with the cognitive use of language, which privileges the informational content of an utterance.

The Expressive, or Emotive, function adds information about the addresser's (speaker's) internal emotional state.

The Conative function is centred on the second person, the addressee, engaging him directly, and is best illustrated by vocatives and imperatives.

The Phatic function is centred on the contact between the sender and the receiver, as Miller highlights: "Phatic exchange is a term first used by Malinowski to describe a communicative gesture that does not inform or exchange any meaningful information or facts about the world. Its purpose is a social one, to express sociability and maintain connections or bonds"³⁵. Miller also claims that the popularization of social media is contributing to the rise of a Phatic media culture: "In Phatic media culture, content is not king, but keeping in touch is"³⁶.

The Poetic function (which should not be confused with poetic discourse) valorises the signifier, foregrounding what might be called the decorative or aesthetic function of language; in Jakobson's words, the message for its own sake. It can be found in the creative use of language made by advertisers.

³¹ FERGUSON, Douglas A., GREER, Clark F., *op. cit.*

³² Cfr. JAKOBSON, Roman, "Implications of language universals for linguistics", in GREENBERG, Joseph (ed.), *Universals of language*, 1963, MIT Press, Cambridge, pp. 263-278.

³³ Cfr. BÜHLER, Karl, *Theory of Language: the Representational Function of Language*, John Benjamins publishing, Amsterdam, 1990.

³⁴ Cfr. MALINOWSKI, Bronislaw, "On Phatic Communion", in JAWORSKI, Adam, COUPLAND, Nikolas (eds.), *The discourse reader*, 1999 [1926], Routledge, London, pp. 302-305.

³⁵ Cfr. MILLER, Victor, "New media, networking and phatic culture", *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, vol. 14, n° 4, 2008, pp. 387-400.

³⁶ MILLER, *op. cit.*, p. 396.

The Metalingual function is focused on the verbal code itself. The 842 tweets have been coded according to different parameters:

- Jakobson's distinction of linguistic functions
- the goal of the tweet
- the genre of the tweet (presence/absence of internal/external links and multimedia contents like photo, video, audio).

3.3. *Coders, training and reliability*

Given the relatively small research sample, only two students of mass communication research methods served as coders for this survey. They were selected from a class of 20 students. All were asked to code the tweets produced by a single radio station in a day. The two best students were asked to take part in our research as coders. They were both bilingual (Spanish-Italian). The two selected coders participated in two 60-minute individual training sessions where the coding procedures, linguistic functions, goals and genres of tweets were discussed and refined. The students ended each training session by coding a series of tweets of a public service radio station not included in the sample. Before starting the coding, the sample coders met individually with one of the authors in order to address any questions. During these meetings they also separately coded the same sample of 50 tweets from public service radio. Discrepancies were discussed, and a common way of coding was agreed upon. Coders were asked to identify, for each single tweet, its linguistic function, its main goal and its genre (presence/absence of links, mentions and hypermedia contents like audio, photo, video)

3.4. *Coding linguistic functions of tweets*

Each tweet from the two data sets was coded under one of the following functions:

- A) The Referential function contains tweets broadcasting information about radio, broadcasting opinion, and broadcasting content produced by the channel (without promoting, just presenting, i.e. tweets that don't use imperatives).
- B) The Expressive function contains tweets expressing emotions and affect.
- C) The Conative function contains tweets that push users to participate/act/do something, and that promote the channel's contents and products, i.e.: "Call this number to join the discussion/Download the latest podcast/Follow our speaker/Click to view the video of the live concert/Want to win two tickets for the concert?".
- D) The Poetic function contains tweets that play with language, using calembours and creative ways of expression.
- E) The Phatic function only contains the automatic retweets of a follower/listener, which are tweets that strengthen ties with listeners.
- F) The Metalingual function contains tweets centred on the medium itself.

3.5. *Coding the goals of the tweets*

Still, the Jakobson model did not result to be the finest tool for defining every tweet. Under the same linguistic function we coded tweets that had different goals. Therefore, we integrated the linguistic functions model with the single definition of the goal of each tweet, so that each component of the two data sets (842 tweets total) was also coded according to its primary goal. We found that all the tweets recorded could be coded under the following list of goals:

Informing the audience about radio schedule; Informing the audience about the guests of a programme; Informing the audience about the topics of a programme; Broadcasting news; Broadcasting listeners' opinions; Broadcasting information about radio; Advertising an external event; Sensitizing users on a social issue; Replying to users giving just information; Pushing the listener to take action and visit a link to internal content; Strengthening the relation with the listener; Strengthening the relation with speakers and producers of the station.

3.6. *Coding the genres of the tweets*

Finally, the whole record of tweets was coded according to genre. They were divided into four main categories, following the method previously used by Sellas³⁷: 1) Retweets (with or without comments); 2) Mentions (linked or not to the programme or channel); 3) tweets containing links (related or not to the programme or channel's internal content); 4) tweets containing additional content (audio, video, photo links embedded in the tweet).

3.7. *Intercoder reliability*

The reliability sample was chosen randomly and contained 29.92% (n = 252) of the tweets of the final sample. The reliability coders were two researchers in mass communications belonging to the same University as one of the authors. Intercoder reliability was calculated manually according to percent agreement index³⁸. The reliability for linguistic functions was 97.2% (n = 245); the reliability for the main goals of the tweets was 87.3% (n = 220); the reliability for the genre of the tweets was 100% (n = 252). The discrepancies were solved by the reviewers themselves, after a long meeting.

³⁷ SELLAS, Toni, *op. cit.*

³⁸ NEUENDORF, Kimberley A., *The content analysis guidebook*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, 2013.

4. Findings

4.1. The Twitter communication strategies of RAI and RNE radio stations

Before moving on to the presentation and comparison of the results of the content analysis for each broadcaster, we will present an overall description and comparison of the information contained in each profile, regarding issues such as the amount of tweets per week, the amount of Twitter followers (called “Twitter audience”), the total amount of tweets produced at the end of each sampled week, and the increasing percentage of followers for each week analysed:

Table 1. Twitter Audiences in the Two Sampled Weeks Compared to FM Audiences

Broadcaster	FM audience in millions (2012)	18-24 June 2012			8-15 October 2012		
		Tweets per week (24 June 2012)	Followers (24 June 2012)	Percentage of increase in followers	Tweets per week (15 oct 2012)	Followers (15 oct 2012)	Percentage of increase in followers
Radio2 RAI	3.2	77	93615	.86%	72	105109	1.34%
Radio3 RAI	1.4	129	7886	1.24%	178	9885	1.74%
RNE 1	1.61	18	21782	.95%	21	25437	.76%
Radio3 RNE	.37	255	68797	1.14%	92	81127	.83%
Total		479			363		

4.1.1. Radio2 RAI

The use of Twitter by Radio2 RAI resulted as being extremely homogeneous in the two sampled weeks. The number of tweets was constant: 77 in the first sample, 72 in the second one, with an average of 10 tweets per day, less than one per hour. The goals of the tweets and use of language was quite limited. There were four main goals of the tweets, all related to broadcasting the channel's contents: 1) informing the audience about radio schedule; 2) informing the audience about the guests of a programme; 3) informing the audience about the topic of a programme (the main goal in both weeks analysed); 4) pushing the listener to take action and visit the embedded link.

The analysis of the linguistic functions of the tweets revealed a clear predominance of Referential and Conative tweets: 73% (n = 56) Referential, 23% (n = 18) Conative in the first week; and 73% (n = 53) Referential, 26% (n = 19) Conative in the second week. No traces were found of Phatic language in the whole set of tweets analysed. This reveals the broadcasting approach to Twitter taken by Radio2 RAI: its Twitter timeline is a proprietary broadcasting tool with no space for listeners' voices. Radio2 RAI on Twitter considered neither the feedback nor the connection with its public: the profile didn't reply to followers,

nor did it retweet their tweets. The retweets, when they occurred, were self-referential: they came from the Twitter profiles of the channel's hosts and programmes. 55% (n = 42 in the first week; n = 40 in the second week) of the tweets contained links, with no variation between the first and the second week analysed. These links were mostly internal (between 90% - n = 69 - and 95% - n = 68 - in the two sampled weeks), addressing content published on the official website of Radio2 RAI. The flow of communication from the Twitter profile of Radio2 RAI is mainly oriented towards the channel itself. Communication is almost completely self-referential.

Due to the need to push listeners to consume the contents produced by the channel, tweets from Radio2 RAI contained much additional content (audio, video, images): 33% (n = 25) of tweets in the first week and 54% (n = 38) in the second week. The use of links aimed to drive traffic towards the official website. The content analysis allowed us to recognise recurrent patterns and strategies in the way Radio2 RAI uses Twitter: its use is fairly basic and broadcasting-oriented, self-referential in content and not at all participative.

4.1.2. *Radio3 RAI*

Radio3 RAI's Twitter use followed similar patterns during both weeks analysed. This channel's tweets were the ones with the widest range of goals and the broadest use of language. The cultural imprint of the broadcaster was also found in its tweets. The tweets aimed towards a large variety of goals: 1) informing the audience about radio schedule; 2) informing the audience about the guests of a programme (main goal in the second sampled week); 3) informing the audience about the topic of a programme (main goal in the first week analysed); 4) pushing listeners to take action and visit the embedded links; 5) broadcasting news; 6) broadcasting listeners' opinions; 7) broadcasting information about radio; 8) advertising external cultural events; 9) sensitising users on a social issue; 10) replying to users; 11) strengthening relations with listeners (this goal grew consistently in the second sample, becoming the third main goal of the broadcaster's tweets).

The analysis of the linguistic functions of the tweets revealed a clear predominance of Referential, Conative and Phatic functions: 78% Referential (n = 101) and 18% (n = 24) Conative in the first week; 74% (n = 131) Referential, 14% (n = 25) Phatic and 11% (n = 19) Conative in the second week. In the first week, 6% (n = 4) of the total number of tweets produced were re-tweets of listeners' messages. Retweets of listeners' voices increased in the second week, reaching 18% (n = 10) of the total in the second sample. 25% (n = 32, second week) and 30% (n = 53, first week) of tweets contained links. These links were mostly internal (between 63% - n = 81 - and 69% - n = 122 - in the two sampled weeks), addressing content published on the official website of Radio3 RAI. Communication was mainly, but not totally, self-referential.

Radio3 RAI tweets mostly lacked additional content: only 20% (n = 26; n = 36) of the total tweets (with a small variation between the first and second week) were not text-only and contained audio and video links. Audio links were used the most, addressing broadcaster's podcasts. From an email conversation with the Head Director of Radio3 RAI, Marino Sinibaldi, we discovered a unique and experimental practice in the broadcaster's management of its Twitter profile: the task of content publishing on Twitter is managed by a group of

people, the producers of the programmes. Radio3 RAI doesn't have a social media manager; everyone working with the radio contributes to its management.

This practice doesn't prevent the channel from developing a coherent social media profile. In fact, even in the case of Radio3 RAI, we have recognised recurrent patterns and strategies in the way the channel uses Twitter. The collective intelligence³⁹ of the people working with the radio and publishing on Twitter enriches the language and the width of communication purposes of the Twitter profile. The collective management of the profile is the reason for the wide use of linguistic functions made by Radio3 RAI.

4.1.3. *Radio Nacional - RNE1*

The use of Twitter by Radio 1 RNE revealed to be the most limited among the four profiles analysed, and very similar to the Radio2 RAI pattern. The regularity of the profile starts with the number of tweets: 18 in the first sample, 21 in the second one, with an average of between 2.5 and 3 tweets per day, even less at the weekend. The Twitter activity of the main talk radio station of RNE was only one-way, lacking any kind of interactivity with listeners. The main goal of the messages was the same in 100% of the tweets: to push the listener to take action and visit the embedded link. The analysis of the linguistic functions of the tweets also revealed a similar model, since all 39 messages (from the first and second week together) were Conative.

This lack of connection with the audience turned into a lack of retweets and mentions to other users. This trend was also reflected by the kinds of links delivered in the messages that take the user to the content broadcasted by the station: all the tweets had an internal link, and most of them addressed audio content published on the official website of Radio 1 RNE as podcasts.

In short, the Twitter profile of Radio 1 RNE is almost completely self-referential, broadcasting-oriented and devoid of interaction with its audience. From a phone conversation with the RNE Chief Editor of Participation and Social Media, David Varona, we discovered that Radio 1 RNE is basically used to spread content and news, due the structure and dynamics of this department. This Twitter account doesn't have an exclusive community manager, and is managed collectively by the social media staff, as well as other accounts owned by the station. Apart from that, Radio Nacional de España (RNE) has a general corporative profile (@radionacional), which is used as a sort of an umbrella account to engage more actively with followers.

4.1.4. *Radio 3 - RNE3*

Within the RNE group, Radio 3 is a unique station. Throughout its history, it has been characterized as a musical and cultural reference and a trendsetter, with quality, independent and alternative programming. Radio 3 RNE is not a station for the masses, but a channel with a strong identity and a loyal audience. This framework is also reflected in its dynamics on

³⁹ LÉVY, Pierre, *Collective Intelligence. Mankind's Emerging World in Cyberspace*, Perseus Books, Cambridge, 1997.

social network sites. Its Twitter use is much more diverse than that of Radio 1 RNE, both in regard to the goals of its messages and their linguistic functions.

The analysis of the use of Twitter by Radio 3 RNE revealed some differences between the two samples, because the first sample included a large number of tweets related to “The Day of Music”, a live music show organized by RNE itself. This is the reason why the first sample had 255 messages, while the latter did not reach 100. The tweets were aimed towards a large variety of goals: pushing listeners to take action and visit the embedded links, strengthening its relationship with the audience, and broadcasting information about radio were the main goals in the first sample, while in the second sample the main objectives were to inform the audience about the guests of a programme, to inform about topics, and to push listeners to take action and visit the embedded links.

Radio 3 RNE’s profile diversity also concerned the linguistic functions of its tweets. Its messages included almost four of the six functions described by Jakobson's model, with a predominance of Referential and Conative tweets: 31% (n = 78) Referential, 37% (n = 95) Conative in the first week and 41% (n = 38) Referential, 48% (n = 44) Conative in the second week. The first sample also revealed a rather significant number of Phatic (24%, n = 61) and Expressive (8%, n = 21) tweets, in order to express emotions or to strengthen the relationship with followers during the broadcasting of “The Day of the Music”.

Radio 3 RNE has its own social media manager, because of its unique and well-defined fan community. Its audience is very active and involved with the station, proud to share the Radio 3 culture. This sort of community requires a great amount of focus, so Radio 3’s Twitter account is managed specifically from within the station by a specialist. This strategy turns into stronger activity on social network sites, as compared to the rest of RNE accounts. Concerning the engagement with followers, in the first week 56% (n = 51) of the total number of tweets produced were re-tweets, and 67% (n = 62) were mentions of other users (54% linked with the station, 23% not linked). This dynamic continued during the second week of the analysis, when Radio 3 RNE’s Twitter timeline corresponded to more daily activity by the station: 26% (n = 24) of messages were re-tweets and 62% (n = 57) were mentions of others. The dynamism of the Twitter profile of Radio 3 RNE was also reflected in the use of links (64% - n = 163 - in the first sample, 58% - n = 53 - in the second one) and additional content (between 49% - n = 125 - and 56% - n = 51 - in the two sampled weeks). The types of links were quite different when comparing the two samples, with more external sources in the first week analysed. The first sample also showed more content beyond audio, such as videos or pictures related to guests, artists, presenters of programmes or live performances.

4.2. *Linguistic functions: broadcasting without connecting*

The analysis of the linguistic functions of all the tweets posted by the four Twitter profiles allowed for the discovery of a common pattern among them. All are using the new medium for broadcasting, without engaging with their listeners. Only Radio3 RAI and Radio3 RNE did some re-tweets of listeners' messages or directly replied to them, but these two practices of connecting with listeners were episodic. Radio3 RNE made a wide use of Phatic communication on a very special occasion: “The Day of Music”, a music festival organized by the channel itself. Referential and Conative languages are by far the two most used communication models by all broadcasters, as shown in the table below:

Table 2. Linguistic Functions of the Tweets. Comparative Analysis

Linguistic Functions	18-24 June 2012				8-15 October 2012			
	Radio2 RAI	Radio3 RAI	Radio1 RNE	Radio3 RNE	Radio2 RAI	Radio3 RAI	Radio1 RNE	Radio3 RNE
Referential	56	101	0	78	53	131	0	38
Expressive	1	2	0	21	0	2	0	3
Conative	18	24	18	95	19	19	21	44
Poetic	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Phatic	0	2	0	61	0	25	0	2
Metalingual	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	4

4.3. Goals and genres of the tweets

The analysis of the main goals of the messages on Twitter reveals the stations' approaches to this medium. In this sense, the results complement the analysis of the linguistic functions and confirm that the four channels use Twitter as a tool for a mostly unidirectional model of communication. As shown in the graphs below, the stations studied use the microblogging platform as an additional channel for distribution and in order to get users to visit the corporate website, as well as to inform them about the schedule, guests or topics covered in the programmes. Only Radio 3 RNE (in the first week) and Radio 3 RAI (in the second week) published a large number of tweets in order to strengthen their relations with their audiences.

Table 3. Main Goals of the Tweets. Week 1. 18-24 June 2012

Goals of the tweets	Radio2 RAI	Radio3 RAI	RNE 1	Radio3 RNE
Informing the audience about radio schedule	20	12	0	15
Informing the audience about the guests of a programme	14	7	0	15
Informing the audience about the topics of a programme	24	49	0	9
Broadcasting news	1	25	0	0
Broadcasting listeners' opinions	0	3		2
Broadcasting information about the station	0	1	0	46
Advertising an external event	0	2	0	0
Sensitising users on a social issue	0	1	0	0
Replying to users	0	1	0	7
Pushing the listener to take action and visit the embedded link	18	24	18	100
Strengthening the relation with the listener (RT)	0	4	0	61
Total tweets	77	129	18	255

Table 4. Main Goals of the Tweets. Week 2. 8-15 October 2012

Goals of the tweets	Radio2 RAI	Radio3 RAI	RNE 1	Radio3 RNE
Informing the audience about radio schedule	12	5	0	11
Informing the audience about the guests of a programme	17	59	0	19
Broadcasting news	24	29	0	7
Broadcasting listeners' opinions	0	22	0	3
Broadcasting information about the station	0	4	0	0
Advertising an external event	0	5	0	1
Sensitising users on a social issue	0	0	0	0
Replying to users	0	7	0	0
Pushing the listener to take action and visit the embedded link	19	19	21	46
Strengthening the relation with the listener (RT)	0	28	0	5
Total tweets	72	178	21	92

5. Discussion

The net predominance of Referential and Conative functions reveals the inner nature of the communication strategy chosen by the Italian and Spanish public broadcasters. Twitter is mainly perceived as a platform for informing listeners in real time about the contents offered by the radio flow, and for driving listeners towards the consumption of recorded contents. Most of the tweets simply show off products to the listeners/consumers and ask them to consume them. Connection and engagement with the public is not the main issue, aside from some rare efforts made by Radio 3 RAI and Radio 3 RNE.

The lack of a fluent conversation with users on Twitter is also reflected in the types of links and in the additional material published. Quantitatively, the use of these resources is still quite poor, given the possibilities of a hypermedia channel like Twitter; qualitatively, there are mostly self-referential links and contents, based on the audio broadcast by the stations and consistent with the main goals described above. Radio 3 RNE (in both samples) and Radio 2 RAI (in the second one) are the stations with a broader variety of additional content.

The use of Twitter could be of strategic importance, especially for cultural programmes and channels like Radio3 RAI and indie music channels like Radio3 RNE, because it can provide potential listeners with a frame of reference for their listening experience. As Lazarsfeld already discovered⁴⁰, listeners informed in advance about the contents of a “serious listening” programme were far more likely to listen to it. The proper frame of reference, including a list of information about the contents of the upcoming programme, can positively influence the listening of what Lazarsfeld called “serious” programmes (educative, cultural). Most of the

⁴⁰ Cfr. LAZARFELD, Paul, *Radio and the printed page*, Duell, Sloan and Pearce, New York, 1940.

tweets by the broadcasters analysed contributed to providing listeners with the right frame of reference for their contents.

The Twitter profiles of the four channels did a great job of framing the listening experience of their followers, reminding them before the beginning of a show what they were going to offer and then, during the show, reporting in real time what was going on, what opinions were emerging, who was talking in that very moment, what kind of book was being read, etc.. Radio3 RAI was brilliant in this live reporting activity, but as far as we know –as Greer and Ferguson (2011) demonstrated by observing more than 100 U.S. radio stations’ activities on Twitter– the average quarter hour share and the number of followers show only a weak correlation. Greer and Ferguson pointed out that Twitter is not performing well in widening the FM audiences⁴¹, but Lazarsfeld told us that a good frame of reference could help listeners to be prepared and to better understand “serious” programmes. What we can learn from Greer and Ferguson is that radio stations don't benefit from Twitter in a quantitative way (increase of FM listeners), but their benefits in using it could be qualitative: putting the listeners in the right frame of mind for experiencing, listening and engaging directly with the show.

We showed that all of the stations analysed spent most of their tweets framing the listener's experience, using Twitter to talk about themselves (their content). Good framing of radio content on Twitter may help to convert followers into listeners, but this is still to be proved. We need more literature on this emerging issue –the use of social media made by broadcasters– in order to make more consistent statements. So far, no one has been able to discover the “transformation rate” of Twitter followers into listeners. Framing content through the use of Referential and Conative messages is surely a fundamental activity on Twitter, but it cannot distinguish a public service medium from a commercial one. What should the role of Twitter be in the social media management strategy of a public service medium? It will only be possible to transform Twitter into a public service medium if broadcasters accept to engage with listeners and start to claim for their participation, enhancing the interaction with them, both on air and on social media.

6. *Conclusions: less broadcasting more connecting?*

Twitter is probably not a powerful tool of audience building yet, but it can still be an important tool for serving audiences, connecting listeners among each other, letting them join the conversation and be part of the Twitter timeline.

The four public broadcasters analysed performed very well in broadcasting their contents, but did very badly –with some ephemeral exceptions– in engaging with their publics. They didn't allow their followers to join the conversation, because what they played on the stage of Twitter was mostly a monologue. They were good at framing high quality content (informative, educative, entertaining) but they were poor in listening to their audiences. Our findings show that social media are mostly perceived by radio stations as a promotional tool,

⁴¹ Cfr. GREER, Clark F., FERGUSON, Douglas A., “Using twitter for Promotion and Branding: A Content Analysis of Local Television Twitter Sites”, *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, vol. 55, n° 2, 2011, pp. 198-214.

but this cannot be the only use of Twitter for public service broadcasters who are facing an increasing legitimacy crisis all over Europe.

The Twitter performance analysed maps a use of Twitter slightly different from the social media strategies expressed by the Italian and Spanish public service radio⁴². These strategies underlined both the importance of broadcasting and listening. The social media strategists interviewed seemed to be quite aware of the role of public service. They seemed to understand the real value of social media for radio: they are tools for managing the relationship with a community of listeners who like to engage with their contents and brand. They seemed quite aware of the role of public service media, as one Spanish social media manager put it: “As a public medium, our obligation is to be where our listeners are and to get an audience for our content. We try to use the SNS not only as a promotional tool, but also as a new channel for interacting with the audience”⁴³. Nonetheless, we have demonstrated that Italian and Spanish PSM on Twitter are far more able to broadcast and far less able to listen and enhance participatory practices.

Retweeting, replying to and commenting listeners' messages means accepting people's voices on the official timeline of the channel, making their opinions and ideas public, extracting the embedded value (in terms of user-generated contents to be integrated in the radio flow). We might also ask how the production routines determine the use of social network sites, so that future research on the management structure of these channels may help to understand these results. In our new study about social media managers in public service media⁴⁴ we show that social media managers in Italian and Spanish public service radio are not valued as highly strategical job profiles. Their wages are lower than the ones of radio producers and speakers and they are asked to manage more social media profiles at the same time. More people in the social media team, with higher wages, could make the difference and substantially improve the service. The working conditions of the social media managers may explain the bad performance of the channels analysed in connecting with listeners on Twitter. The social media managers interviewed were aware of the best practices but they were asked to bring traffic to the website and they had to sacrifice time spent in developing creative strategies of engaging with listeners.

For Twitter to be a public service medium it should not only be used as a loudspeaking tool, an amplifier room for the broadcaster, but also as a platform where publics can meet and connect with each other. Giving space to listeners' General Intellect, to their comments, opinions, affects, criticism and ideas, means - as Gauntlett highlighted in his book *Making is Connecting*⁴⁵ -connecting with the listeners, nurturing and fertilizing them. Maintaining a rich and fertile networked public⁴⁶ means accomplishing this with the renewed function of public service emerging in the age of the networked society, i.e. contributing to creating ties not only with listeners but also among listeners, helping them to find links to interesting content and brilliant Twitter profiles of inspiring people. As pointed out by the Head of the BBC Newsroom, Mary Hockaday, public service broadcasters are “shifting to a new formulation: Inform, Educate and Connect”, which means that they are “no longer just trying to draw

⁴² Cfr. SELLAS, Toni, BONINI, Tiziano, *op. cit.*

⁴³ *Ibidem.*

⁴⁴ *Ibidem.*

⁴⁵ Cfr. GAUNTLETT, David, *Making is connecting*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2011.

⁴⁶ BOYD, Danah M., ELLISON, Nicole B., *op. cit.*

people in, but also more confidently reaching out on social networks, and a full range of distribution platforms that work for audiences, and that some of our journalism is done in partnership with the wider world"⁴⁷.

In conclusion, we shall attempt to answer the two questions posed at the beginning: 1) How the two public broadcasters use Twitter; 2) If Twitter can be used as a public service medium, matching the aims of public service communication. A concise response could be that all the Spanish and Italian public radio services use Twitter as a broadcasting and self-referential tool, failing (some more, some less) to use it as a contemporary public service medium. As Gunn Enli⁴⁸ already claimed, public service in the age of social media should add a fourth principle to the Reithian ones, that of 'participation'. We believe that the real value of the integration of Twitter into radio production routines lies in its potential for connecting, not for broadcasting. A new but thus far underestimated value is embedded in the Twitter networks attracted by broadcasters.

We showed the recurrent patterns of communication in the Twitter use made by Italian and Spanish public service radio: a promotional, consumer-oriented, almost unidirectional, broadcasting-only, self-referential use. More research should be done in the next years to verify if public service social media communication strategies will finally embrace more connective practices or not. Will public service media change their traditional broadcasting attitude towards its listeners? We suggest they would benefit from a more network based communication model. We cannot be sure of our conclusions, because the issue lacks more literature and research, but we hope this study can pave the way towards a deeper understanding of the value of Twitter for public service radio.

⁴⁷ HOCKADAY, Mary, "BBC News: Why good journalism matters in the digital age", Talk at the London School of Economics, London, 2012., p. 7.

⁴⁸ GUNN, Enli, *op. cit.*

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