

# Constructing counter-hegemony on *Twitter*: Discourse of Ibero-American political women of “change” in the digital environment

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## Abstract

Women are occupying more and more space in the public sphere, not only through pressure on the streets, but increasingly in digital spaces. It is at this intersection that different ways of engaging in politics coalesce with the presence of women who demand their own voice and visibility beyond the mechanisms of traditional politics. Those requiring a transformation of the current political reality are the political women “of change.” One of their main attributes is that they generate and spread counter-hegemonic narratives as a form of empowerment and a way to question the dominant political discourse through digital media. Our objective herein is to analyze, in a comparative way, the use of this communicative strategy to understand its articulation and mechanisms. To do this, we study the discourse of ten Ibero-American political women on *Twitter* who are linked to social change. The methodology is based on the application of the content analysis technique that combines a quantitative dimension with another of a qualitative nature focused on critical discourse analysis. The results show that criticism and denunciation, to give voice to the voiceless and make social problems visible, are the main components of these political actors’ counter-hegemonic discourse on *Twitter*. Likewise, they display a practical and constructive counter-hegemony oriented in applied and positive terms. Finally, the institutional position in the government–opposition axis sharpens or minimizes the use of these types of communication strategies.

## Keywords

Political communication; Counter-hegemony; *Twitter*; Political women; Ibero-America; Social media; Discourse; Social change; Public agenda; Activism; Cyberactivism; Political movements; Strategies; Political communication; Feminized politics; Narratives; Political and social change; Gender; Social inequalities.

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## 1. Introduction

Despite relevant social and cultural conditioning, women have gained prominence and visibility in public spaces. In recent decades, gender differences in the political arena have decreased notably, especially thanks to the entrance of women to the world of work and the progressive equalization of the educational levels of women and men (**Verge-Mestre; Tormos-Marín**, 2012). This process has led women to increasingly occupy different spaces in governments or parliaments in Western democracies thanks to parity or quota laws implemented in some Ibero-American countries (**Vinuesa-Tejero; Abejón-Mendoza; Sánchez-Calero**, 2011; **Freidenberg; Lajas-García**, 2015).

This has resulted in women playing various roles: working closely with elections, orchestrating campaign rallies, participating in marches and demonstrations in unprecedented numbers, and, of course, increasingly, running for leadership and top positions in the internal structures of political parties (**Rodríguez**, 1999). This phenomenon of integration of women into the democratic procedure, called the feminization of politics (**Rodríguez-García; Navarro-Yáñez**, 2012; **Ochoa**, 2021; **Quevedo-Redondo**, 2021), has been seen as a positive aspect to make it look more human while neutralising the discredit of it. Likewise, citizens expect more sensitive and competent positions from women politicians regarding social policy issues or issues related to feminist demands (**Huddy; Terkildsen**, 1993; **Lawless**, 2004; **Larrondo-Ureta; Orbezo-Terradillos; Peña-Fernández**, 2019). These values that historically have been attributed to women (**Quevedo-Redondo**, 2022) have generated substantial changes in political communication (**Herrnson; Lay; Stokes**, 2003; **Childs**, 2004; **Orbezo-Terradillos; Larrondo-Ureta; Morales-i-Gras**, 2020).

Social and political mobilization has not come alone. It has been the consequence of political and technological transformations that have enabled the emergence of movements that warn of the need for change or transformation (**Castells**, 2009; **Casero-Ripollés**, 2015). Women have participated in most of them, and in many others, women have been the protagonists of marches, demonstrations, mobilizations, or popular movements such as #YoSíTeCreo (**Larrondo-Ureta; Morales-i-Gras; Orbezo-Terradillos**, 2019), #Niunamenos (**Chenou; Cepeda-Másmela**, 2019), #Abortolegal (**Laudano**, 2018), or #Metoo (**Jaffe**, 2018), calling for an end to social discrimination and violence against women.

These feminist movements that emerged on the internet sometimes move to the streets and result from the history of organized women incorporating activism trends (**Rosales**, 2018). Therefore, being a political actor today means using social platforms to gain public visibility more than ever (**Núñez-Puente**, 2011; **Crossley**, 2015; **Kavada**, 2016; **Barker-Plummer; Barker-Plummer**, 2017). In addition, this is where many women politicians could take advantage of the possibilities that digital media provide them, allowing for them to improve their political and social participation (**Friedman**, 2003; **Núñez-Puente; Vázquez-Cupeiro; Fernández-Romero**, 2016) while becoming an “engine” for women’s movements (**Martin; Valenti**, 2013; **Crossley**, 2015).

In addition, digital platforms are relevant in citizens’ political mobilization, proposing themselves as an instrument that citizens can actively use to promote their causes and demands (**Casero-Ripollés; Moret-Soler**, 2022). Thus, the strategic use of digital tools (**Barker-Plummer; Barker-Plummer**, 2017) offers women politicians another way to communicate, expressing their concerns but also introducing their issues on the public agenda (**Aruguete**, 2017; **De-Aguilera; Casero-Ripollés**, 2018) from a different perspective. In this context, the different ways of doing politics emerge as a need for the social transformation of current politics. The political women “of change” demonstrate other possibilities for political intervention beyond the traditional or vertical ones. Instead, they can be associated with those logics of a horizontal nature, which seek to undermine the hegemony of established political forces, betting on socioeconomic stimulation and alternative policies (**Feenstra**, 2016).

Thus, the appropriation of digital media challenges those narratives established by political elites (**Castells**, 2009; **Sampedro**, 2014). This possibility of autonomously and instantly producing and distributing their speeches in digital environments offers, in this case, the women “of change” an active role as producers of their content (**Cammaerts**, 2018).

The traditional political sectors and the mainstream media focus on building and maintaining the dominant discourse (**Van-Dijk**, 2003). From their position of power, they seek to extend their domination not only through economic factors (laws, lobbies, media pressure, etc.), but also through the control of the senses and meanings that circulate socially (**Casero-Ripollés**, 2009). Digital activism and the alternative media openly fight to stop this status quo and promote different visions of a counter-hegemonic nature by disseminating critical voices and alternative manifestations of reality (**Treré**, 2016), offering another way of conceiving and understanding society.

Hegemony is the situation of a class that achieves solid ideological and political unity, allowing it to establish ascendancy over other groups and classes (**Gramsci**, 1972). Its construction is based on discourse and crystallizes in common sense (**Mouffe**, 2008). Hegemony is subjected to consensus and simultaneous processes of resistance (**Elbaum**, 1997). Opposite the ruling class, an alternative class can emerge that aspires to found another “world vision” (**Campione**, 2005), since every hegemonic order can be challenged by counter-hegemonic practices that try to dismantle it to install another form of hegemony. Thus, discourse is a substantial space for analyzing communication strategies to construct counter-hegemony.

Counter-hegemonic discourses question the traditional ways of doing politics in our society

Through social media spaces, counter-hegemonic narratives can emerge, thus giving voice to those who have never had one (Fuchs, 2014). Counter-hegemonic narratives are discourses of ruptures against the established order. They emphasize the subaltern character (Moraña, 1998) of the voices that testify to problems of social significance and expose a space of resistance (Colanzi, 2018). This conflict against the hegemonic order involves a double dimension: first, the symbolic part, related to ideas, and second, the material part that relates to the practices and objective positions of activism (Avalos-González, 2019). Thus, these generate new forms of mobilization, leadership, and rhetoric, as well as new forms of approaching electoral campaigns, and therefore, a different place to exercise politics emerges. This “new” way of doing and thinking about politics as a space for building a counterpower (Castells, 2009) enables us to reconceptualize citizenship and democracy entirely.

Counter-hegemony can also be expressed through communicative practices that call for disobedience, to create rhizomatic activism, or to propose an alternative agenda

These communicative dynamics introduce and promote participation actions, placing citizens—in this case, women and their claims—at the centre of the communicative process while endowing them with unprecedented capacities to produce and reproduce messages (Casero-Ripollés, 2015). This represents a step towards public empowerment, as these political actors have an active role as content producers. This use of digital media allows for the generation of a counter-power (Alonso-Muñoz; Casero-Ripollés, 2016), disputing the hegemony held by the traditional media and the political elites, thus generating new meanings and framings activating counter-hegemony. Thus, the public visibility of other ways of engaging in politics and conceiving society increases, challenging hegemonic and unequal discourses (Turley; Fisher, 2018).

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Objectives

Our general objective is to study and compare how *Twitter* enables the construction of counter-hegemonic narratives, giving voice to other social actors, specifically women politicians, to change and transform social reality while generating new forms of citizen empowerment.

From this, we can formulate two specific objectives:

- O1. Explore how political women “of change” use *Twitter* to build an alternative counter-hegemonic political discourse and narrative.
- O2. Analyse what dimensions and components of the counter-hegemonic discourse are present in the communication strategies of the women “of change” on *Twitter*.

### 2.2. Research techniques and sample

The methodology relies on the application of the content analysis technique, understood as an interpretive procedure of different communicative products (Piñuel-Raigada, 2002) aimed at exposing, based on objective data, reproducible and valid inferences, based on the characteristics of a set of messages (Krippendorff, 2013). This technique combines a quantitative dimension with a qualitative nature focused on critical discourse analysis (Van-Dijk, 1993; 2006; 2013; Fairclough, 2010). This perspective understands discourse as a form of symbolic power capable of conditioning public opinion as it is a primary tool in building a reality.

This interpretive methodology focuses on delving into the content of public discourse and not on the effects on the public consuming them. The approach focuses on social problems, fundamentally on the role of discourse in the production and reproduction of the abuse of power or domination (Van-Dijk, 2003). Therefore, it is especially suitable for analysing the configuration of counter-hegemonic discourses that seek to dispute the established power.

We understand hegemony as a dynamic based on a dialectic between consensus and conflict of interests (García-Canclini, 1984). It is acquired and has to be constantly maintained through discourse. To this concept must be added counter-hegemony or alternative hegemony (Williams, 1980), which aspires to discredit hegemonic schemes and provide credible alternative understandings that question them (De-Sousa-Santos, 2014). The methodology relies on this concept in order to convert it into a set of operational variables that enable quantitative measurement of its presence in the discourse. We use three large blocks that group 11 variables: the construction of alternative discourses, counter-hegemonic practices and self-proclamation as subjects of change.

To analyse the construction of the counter-hegemonic discourse over a broad period and to better examine its conformation, the period that includes the year 2020 is analysed. We select a constructed sample that alternates by one week each month. In this way, a routine period is chosen, avoiding relevant political events such as electoral periods, to observe how their discursive strategy works. The total number of tweets analysed is 1,559. The sample tweets were obtained using the *Twitonomy Premium* software. The analysis of each of the tweets was performed manually and not automated.

This research takes as its sample a study of the *Twitter* profiles of ten women politicians “for change” in the Ibero-American context:

- Myriam Bregman (Argentina);
- Vilma Ripoll (Argentina);
- Camila Vallejo (Chile);
- Ana Erazo (Colombia);
- Ada Colau (Spain);
- Teresa Rodríguez (Spain);
- Martha Tagle (Mexico);
- Verónica Mendoza (Peru);
- Marisa Matias (Portugal); and
- Verónica Mato (Uruguay).

There are three reasons for this choice. First, they define themselves as critics of the traditional practice of politics and defenders of causes linked to social change. Second, this selection introduces a high geographical diversity by incorporating representatives from eight Ibero-American countries. Finally, it responds to different profiles of presence in the political system (government opposition). These criteria ensure a sample that offers more scope for applying a comparative approach and achieving significant and representative results.

### 2.3. Model of analysis

The quantitative content analysis is obtained by coding each *Twitter* message in the sample using dichotomous response variables (Yes/No). Table 1 shows the variables enabling the operationalisation of the different dimensions that counter-hegemonic narratives could adopt in the communication strategies of the women politicians studied.

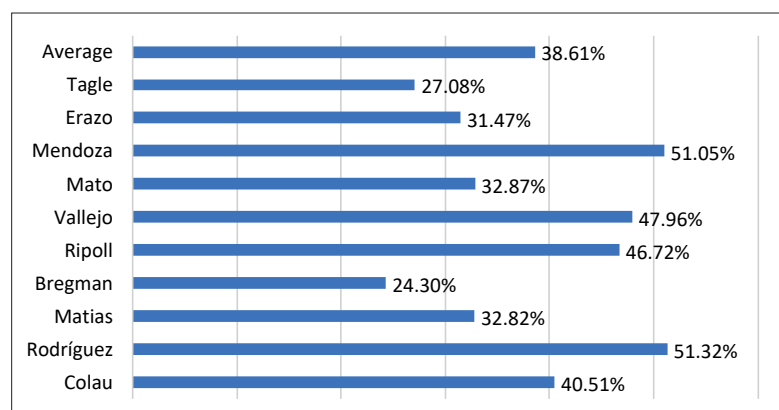
Table 1. Counter-hegemonic discourse analysis model

Nº	Variable
1	<b>It sustains a discursive strategy of differentiation between “us” and “them”:</b> There is a discursive construction that maintains differentiation between who enunciates the tweet and to whom it is transmitted.
2	<b>It criticizes the established power and the economic, political and social elites:</b> it criticizes the power of the political, economic, social or judicial elites.
3	<b>It positions itself as an interlocutor for the voiceless:</b> it positions itself as the spokesperson for those who cannot do so and gives visibility to the problems of those who suffer.
4	<b>It openly denounce inequalities:</b> It make visible and openly denounce inequalities to avoid or lessen the great evils that hunger, violence, racism, and sexism produce.
5	<b>It openly denounces inequalities:</b> It makes visible and openly denounces inequalities to avoid or lessen the great evils that hunger, violence, racism, and sexism produce.
6	<b>It expresses “other” forms and/or values of acting in politics:</b> It exposes new forms of political activity, explaining itself, arguing (this variable links to transparency, accountability, rejecting political privileges or the greater visibility of daily work).
7	<b>Active extra-representative or non-conventional forms for political participation:</b> it invites citizen action and mobilization in which she is also a participant.
8	<b>It vindicates its political condition as a subject “of change”:</b> Her ways of doing politics, and her proposals for transformation are exposed to the public to change the current situation.
9	<b>It proposes an alternative thematic agenda:</b> It is capable of including its themes or defining “other views” in terms of historical memory, city model, environment, industrialization, technology and consumption, housing crisis, decent work, diverse identities, etc.
10	<b>Promotes rhizomatic activism:</b> it proposes, supports, or forms part of self-organization networks, collaboration networks, citizen movements, social pressure systems, etc., linked to network activism.
11	<b>It represents democratic renewal:</b> It is proposed as a representative of a new way of doing things far from political profiles and traditional discourses. They are the antithesis of traditional politics, bringing new values and visions of politics and democracy.

### 3. Results

Our analysis focuses on three central questions that will enable us to identify counter-hegemonic features in the actors’ discourse. First, we will ask ourselves if they build an alternative discourse. Second, if they communicate counter-hegemonic practices and, finally, if they define themselves as subjects of change or social transformation.

The content analysis applied to the sample shows some relevant aspects in how the women politicians use *Twitter*. Although



Graph 1. Average of the comparison between the categories

all these political actors present themselves as critics of the system, corruption and traditional parties, and they offer alternative proposals in their political discourse, not all the analysed women politicians present aspects qualified or defined as counter-hegemonic discourse. Comparing the results (Graph 1) between the categories in which their discourse clearly enunciates critical traits or breaks with the average (38.61%), only half of the analysed political actors conform to this profile. In this respect, Teresa Rodríguez (51.32%) stands out with a strategy framed in the alternative, criticism, disobedience and questioning established discourses. Along the same lines are Verónica Mendoza (51.05%), Camila Vallejo (47.96%), Vilma Ripoll (46.72%) and Ada Colau (40.51%).

### 3.1. The construction of an alternative discourse as a communication strategy

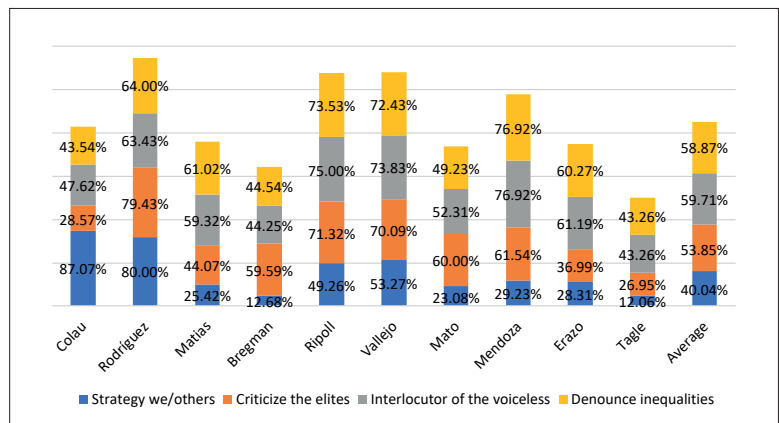
The Ibero-American political women of “change” hold a discursive strategy of differentiation between “us” and “them”. This is a fundamental category in the counter-hegemonic discourse enabling us to observe an understanding of politics, but also the conflict or duality between those who are outside ideology, the ways of seeing and understanding the world and those who do not. Alternative discourses establish distinctions between winners/losers, corrupt/honest, guilty/victims, workers/businessmen, ordinary citizens/established elites or, even more, between traditional and new politics.

Here, Ada Colau (87.07%) and Teresa Rodríguez (80.00%) stand out as the political actors who use this type of practice the most, followed by Camila Vallejo (53.27%) and Vilma Ripoll (49.26%) (Graph 2). All exceed the average of the data analysed in this category (40.04%).

Analysing the data, the fundamental difference between the two Spanish politicians and the two South American ones is their trajectory. Colau and Rodríguez emerged on the political scene from activism or militancy in parties where the differentiation with “others” or the “castes” is constantly present. These are political options born from a commitment to differentiate themselves from those traditional parties of a more institutional nature. Farther away are Ripoll and Vallejo, both belonging to parties with a historical trajectory on the left (*Chilean Communist Party*–Vallejo–, and *Socialist Movement of Workers*–Ripoll–, Argentina) where a historical differentiation is also being built, as long as the oligarchy, the traditional parties in power or “the right” are “the others” for these women politicians.

In the case of Ada Colau (Image 1), the “we” is proposed, in general, as her government group, her work team, and her legislative initiatives, not as belonging to a specific class, but as a member of a team along with the legislative proposals that her group has made together with other similar parliamentary groups. The construction of the “others” is proposed as the opposition, the right, the extreme right, and also those who “scream” in front of “us” who have chosen the “only path”, a space of knowledge and belonging. Her speech refers to the road as the place of “we” that ends the “confrontation”.

In Rodríguez, similar to Colau, there is a profound recurrence of the “we”, but unlike the latter, here “we” is represented by other subjects: “the Andalusians”, “the working classes”, the “ordinary people” and “common people”. Instead, the “others” is used with a clear differentiating intention: “the rich”, “the banks”, “the vulture funds”, “royalty”, “the Crown” and “the central government”. There is a constant appeal to belonging to “her” class, her neighbourhood and her land. In this case, we find the construction of “we” of an ideological and populist nature. In the example analysed (Image 1), there is a tweet accompanied by a photo of a member of the



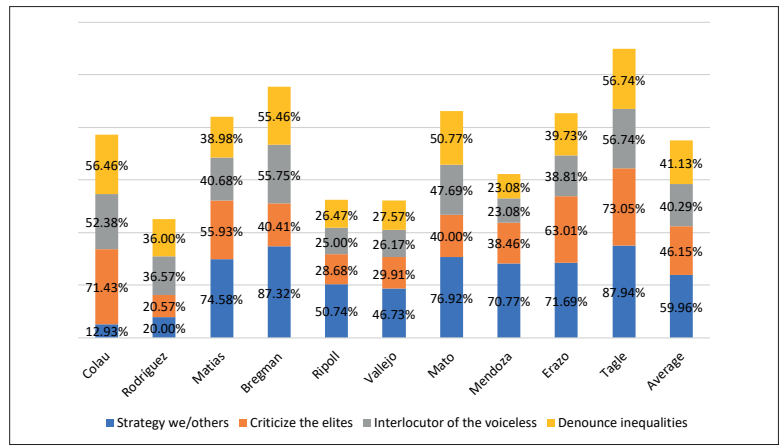
Graph 2. Construction of an alternative discourse as a communication strategy. Positive values



Image 1. We/they discursive construction  
<https://twitter.com/AdaColau/status/1213384065224708099>  
[https://twitter.com/TeresaRodr\\_/status/1240309276037582848](https://twitter.com/TeresaRodr_/status/1240309276037582848)

Royal House, where “they” are the ones who have “taken advantage” to announce “their shame”. In this case, the “we” represented the “united country”, fighting against the “virus” (COVID-19), while they, the Crown, the King, are the “others”, who are talking about money laundering, commissions or fortunes to launder.

The second category of this block enables us to describe whether there is criticism of the established power and the economic, political and social elites. This is another indicator that distinguishes the counter-hegemonic discourse insofar as criticism of the elites. Also, it is significant in political discourses distinguishing a need or search for change. In general terms, this principle is fulfilled and six out of the ten political women analysed criticise the elites and the established power (Graph 2). It should be said that they exceed the average of 53.85%: Teresa Rodríguez (79.43%), Vilma Ripoll (71.32%), Camila Vallejo (70.09%), Verónica Mendoza (61.54%), Verónica Mato (60.00%) and Myriam Bregman (59.59%).



Graph 3. Construction of an alternative discourse as a communication strategy. Negative values

Regarding the communication strategy on *Twitter* to criticise the elites, in general terms, differentiation cannot be made by continents or countries as discourses with traits critical of the elite are common. But there is a specific differentiation between those that do not criticise the elite or do so to a lesser extent (Graph 3), from those that articulate an explicit criticism of the elite, maintaining a detailed questioning profile of the various political and social powers. The latter share the trait of being political actors located outside the government party. However, it is impossible to differentiate the country or continent oriented towards criticism of established power.

Another common characteristic is that the political women of “change” who use this function share common targets of their criticisms. In the profiles with the highest levels of criticism, there is uniformity in the direction of criticism: the opposition, the government in office, the police or the army, businesses, large corporations, health ministers in times of pandemic, international institutions such as the European Union or in Latin America the International Monetary Fund. The following examples reflect these issues.

Thus, the opposition deputy, Verónica Mato, criticises “los legisladores del *Cabildo Abierto*” (the city hall legislators) for preventing judicial action on clarifying the facts during the last Uruguayan Military Dictatorship (Image 2). The criticism relates to certain legislators who implemented “measures” to hinder the task of justice for the actions of certain military and police officers in investigations of crimes against humanity. This type of criticism and denunciation shows how certain powers prevent or block the action of justice to solve the crimes committed by Latin American dictatorships, and is significantly present in the politics of southern Latin America, especially in Argentina, Chile and Uruguay. The call for justice for the crimes committed in dictatorships, and the criticism of the powers that for more than thirty years continue to prevent the facts being uncovered, is present transversally in the counter-hegemonic narrative of these political actors.

Another example of the criticism of elites is the legislator Myriam Bregman from Buenos Aires, an opponent of the Government of the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires. Image 2 shows the criticism of the elites and political powers, in this case, international. The economic interference of the United States on the peoples of Latin America or the Middle East is denounced. The criticism aims at politicians who meet the deadlines to repay *IMF* loans and at creditors who toast this “with champagne”. It uses irony to attack the economic sectors interested in continuing to earn money despite the recession that the country is experiencing and the devastating consequences of economic adjustment that this entails for citizens. On the issue of external debt, this legislator calls for a refusal to comply with payment responsibilities.

The next aspect that enables us to characterise this type of discourse is the categories where the extent to which political



Image 2. Criticism of the elites  
[https://twitter.com/Veronica\\_Mato/status/1285400685580881920](https://twitter.com/Veronica_Mato/status/1285400685580881920)  
<https://twitter.com/myriambregman/status/1228060738100527104>

actors position themselves as interlocutors of the voiceless are analysed and whether they denounce inequalities. Here another characteristic of the counter-hegemonic discourse is evident: it not only recognises the level of social conflict by giving voice to these problems but also positions itself against it. These are specific aspects of the discourses that break with the common sense that operates in society because they tend to expose the most relevant social problems while highlighting the level of conflict and inequality. For this reason, we present both categories together, given their relationship.

The data reveals that the average in the category “interlocutor for the voiceless” is 59.71% (Graph 2), with the following politicians exceeding the average: Verónica Mendoza (76.92%), Vilma Ripoll (75.00%), Camila Vallejo (73.83%), Teresa Rodríguez (63.43%) and Ana Erazo (61.19%). Here a differentiation is detected between the voices of South American politics and European ones. This category is strongly represented by the former because it is closely related to the situation in South American countries of poverty, marginalisation, violence, police, military and human rights abuses.

The category of denouncing inequalities obtains an average of 58.87% (Graph 2). Verónica Mendoza’s percentage (76.92%) is higher. Vilma Ripoll (73.53%), Camila Vallejo (72.43%), Teresa Rodríguez (64.00%), Marisa Matias (61.02%) and Ana Erazo (60.27%) posted a high number of tweets with complaints about social, political or economic inequalities. We cannot make a geopolitical distinction in this category as women politicians from both continents had high percentages. This type of practice – denouncing inequalities – is standard in the profile of more than half of the politicians studied.

Most messages express condemnation of world hunger, wars, immigration, refugees or the violation of human rights. Likewise, they denounce current problems such as unemployment, homelessness, Covid-19 and the lack of access to education. This category, like the previous one, seeks to give visibility or speak out against the problems of the countries regardless of their geographical position. With this vision, the problems highlighted range from the concentration of wealth and the worsening living conditions of families due to the pandemic crisis to the refugee crisis or wars.

In Image 3, we can see how Ana Erazo condemns the proposal for a salary increase for workers made by the Government of Iván Duque in Colombia and contrasts it with the salary rise made to congressmen, contrasting the “misery” of the workers and the “similar” increase for parliamentarians. Vilma Ripoll makes a



Image 3. Report inequalities

[https://twitter.com/vilma\\_ripoll/status/1313520196871753731](https://twitter.com/vilma_ripoll/status/1313520196871753731)

<https://twitter.com/AnaErazoR/status/1343975244785135618>



Image 4. Positioning as an interlocutor of the voiceless

[https://twitter.com/mmatias\\_/status/1301124915995856903](https://twitter.com/mmatias_/status/1301124915995856903)

[https://twitter.com/camila\\_vallejo/status/1329803847766708224](https://twitter.com/camila_vallejo/status/1329803847766708224)

similar point, “the miserable 7%” increase that the Argentine government proposes for state workers, while economic inflation forecasts reach 40%. This highlights the situation and the standard of living of South American workers. Both leaders use their *Twitter* profiles to complain how low workers’ salaries are and the constant rise in prices they suffer.

The counter-hegemonic discourse of Ibero-American political women of “change” is also positioned as an interlocutor of the voiceless since these political actors put themselves forward as spokespersons for those who cannot do so. The first example (Image 4) is that of Marisa Matias, drawing attention to the immigration crisis and the situation of vulnerability and risk of death, especially in children. Remembering the body “of little Aylan Kurdi on a Turkish beach moved the world” she laments: “The foam of the days erased the image too quickly”. And she regrets that good intentions “also died”. This shows how this political actor denounces and echoes a problem that has not ended. To this day, children continue to arrive alone on the shores of Europe. Continuing the theme of childhood, Camila Vallejo’s tweet also stands out, warning about child crime. This political actor alleges that “no kid is born a thief”, but rather society and the structural and everyday circumstances affecting children push them into crime.

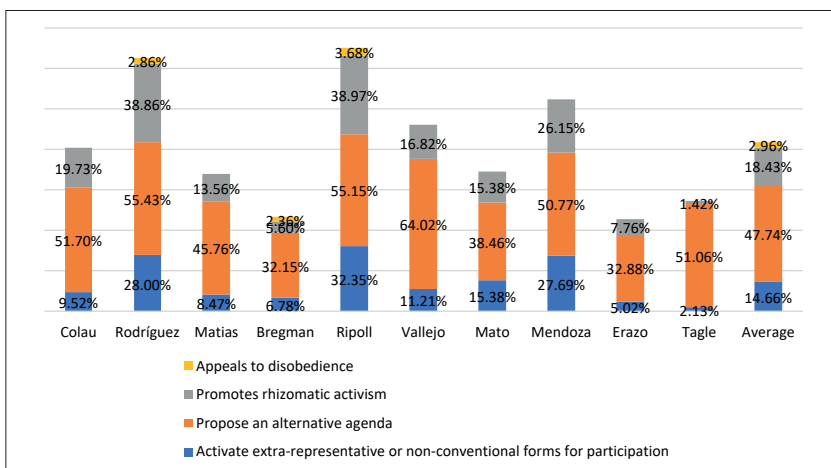
### 3.2 Counter-hegemonic communication practices for an alternative politics in the digital environment

Counter-hegemony can also be expressed through communicative practices that call for disobedience, to create rhizomatic activism, or to propose an alternative agenda. Therefore, we first analyse whether the tweets of Ibero-American women politicians of “change” contain content that addresses issues or problems characterised as an alternative agenda.

In this category (Graph 4), the politicians who stand out above the average are: Camila Vallejo (64.02%), Teresa Rodríguez (55.43%), Vilma Ripoll (55.15%), Ada Colau (51, 70%), Martha Tagle (51.06%) and Verónica Mendoza (50.77%). They employ *Twitter* to build a discourse that challenges the significant issues raised by media corporations or traditional discourses whether on the agenda of the leading parties or in the conventional media. Therefore, six of the ten women politicians studied appear in this dispute to shape or dismantle current narrative structures.

The posted tweets focus on various problems or issues, which often do not establish differences between the countries or regions of origin of the women politicians since they are common across the world. Among these tweets are condemnations of abuses by employers during the pandemic, the importance of the work of social organisations, the struggles of indigenous peoples, historical memories and human rights, access to digital connectivity among the poor, the ecological crisis or excessive environmental exploitation, the lack of investment in public services, and many other issues, such as the work overload women had to endure during the health crisis or cleaning work in hospitals and medical services.

Concerning these aspects, an example is Image 5, containing the tweet of the Peruvian politician, Verónica Mendoza, demanding a “universal bonus immediately” with the active support and “participation of social organisations”. It calls for the inclusion of the neediest, those who cannot make demands and an inclusive proposal to all social organisations to consider supporting the most vulnerable. Another example within this category is the tweet from Argentinian Vilma Ripoll. In this case, the issue



Graph 4. Counter-hegemonic practices oriented towards an alternative politics in the digital environment. Positive values



Image 5. Alternative agenda proposal  
[https://twitter.com/Vero\\_Mendoza\\_F/status/1258939809852162049](https://twitter.com/Vero_Mendoza_F/status/1258939809852162049)  
[https://twitter.com/vilma\\_ripoll/status/1329554413770465281](https://twitter.com/vilma_ripoll/status/1329554413770465281)





of the environment, ecology and sustainable development is a recurring theme in her messages. Ripoll expresses her support for mobilisation against mega-mining due to the environmental impact in the Chubut region, giving visibility to this issue in her tweets.

Another practice that can be identified as alternative political communication is to know whether the analysed women politicians promote “extra-representative” or unconventional forms of participation in their speeches, such as manifestos, petitions, boycotts, strikes, occupations and street blockades. In this case, the data reveals that only three of the ten politicians propose or activate this type of action in their political communication (Graph 4). Exceeding the average (13.43%) are only Vilma Ripoll (32.35%), Teresa Rodríguez (28%) and Verónica Mendoza (27.69%). In contrast, seven of the ten women do not show signs of encouraging this type of practice in their discourse (Graph 5).

The difference between political actors on *Twitter* promoting or supporting this extra-representative communication from those who do not, connects to their position in public life. Vilma Ripoll (32.35%) and Verónica Mendoza (27.69%) participate in political activity outside the institutional framework. Although both are visible leaders in their party, they do not participate in parliament or official organisations. On the other hand, Teresa Rodríguez (28%) is a regional parliamentarian, but she occupies a minor position far from the government. Another explanatory factor is its link with activism. This is the case of Rodríguez, whose past as an anti-capitalist activist brings her closer to unconventional practices.

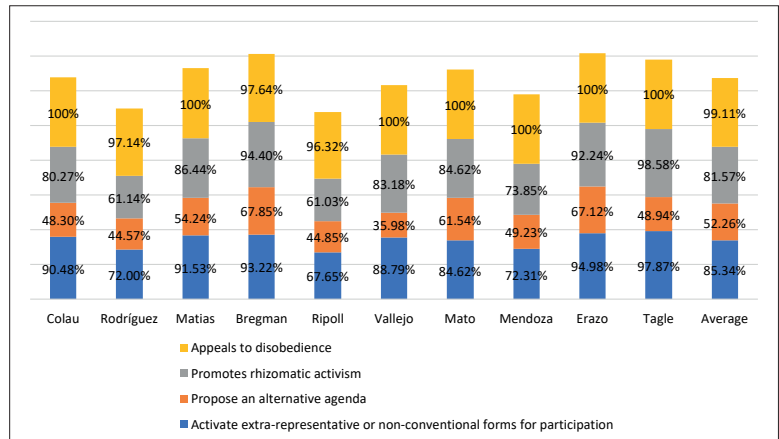
One of the -proponents of this type of extra-representative practice is Vilma Ripoll. She constantly resorts and appeals to promote, participate in and communicate these activities on *Twitter*. In this case, it relates to the resistance to unemployment by the workers of the historic Bauen Hotel on 300 Callao Street in the City of Buenos Aires (Image 6). She claims to feel “proud to have accompanied the struggle in each eviction attempt”.

Those politicians without features in their discourse defined as extra-representative (Graph 5) have institutional positions within political life. Tagle, deputy of the Mexican Parliament; Erazo, Councillor of Cali; Colau, Mayor of Barcelona; Bregman, Buenos Aires legislator; Matias, MEP and Vallejo and Mato, both MEPs in their countries. This factor can cause these political actors to limit their political communication to conventional political practices.

On the other hand, within this scope, we analyse whether they use *Twitter* to promote rhizomatic activism. Four of the ten political actors studied (Graph 4) exceed the average (18,43%). They are Vilma Ripoll (38,97%), Teresa Rodríguez (38,86%), Verónica Mendoza (26,15%) and Ada Colau (19,73%). Comparing this category with the previous one, we find the same political actors promoting rhizomatic activism in their communication practice. Therefore, there is a connection between both types of counter-hegemonic practices in the communication strategies of Ibero-American political women of “change”.



Image 6. Activation of extra-representative or non-conventional forms of participation  
[https://twitter.com/vilma\\_ripoll/status/1314245668832186368](https://twitter.com/vilma_ripoll/status/1314245668832186368)



Graph 5. Counter-hegemonic practices oriented towards an alternative politics in the digital environment. Negative values



Image 7. Promotion of rhizomatic activism  
[https://twitter.com/TeresaRodr\\_/status/1239879284333989890](https://twitter.com/TeresaRodr_/status/1239879284333989890)  
[https://twitter.com/Veronica\\_Mato/status/1271232558882336771](https://twitter.com/Veronica_Mato/status/1271232558882336771)

The political actors that activate this counter-hegemonic practice share information on their *Twitter* accounts and invitations to different activities or events to build ties and help others. They promote, sponsor or invite social and solidarity actions in their messages despite the pandemic crisis: from ordering food or donations to solidarity networks to supporting victims of sexist violence. Thus, Teresa Rodríguez spreads the idea of “support networks” for those who need care, donations or company, generating spaces for interaction and mediation with civil society (Image 7). Likewise, Verónica Mato recalls that “the people need our solidarity”, inviting them “not to give up”. Thus, she stimulates alternative spaces and institutions that help those affected or without resources.

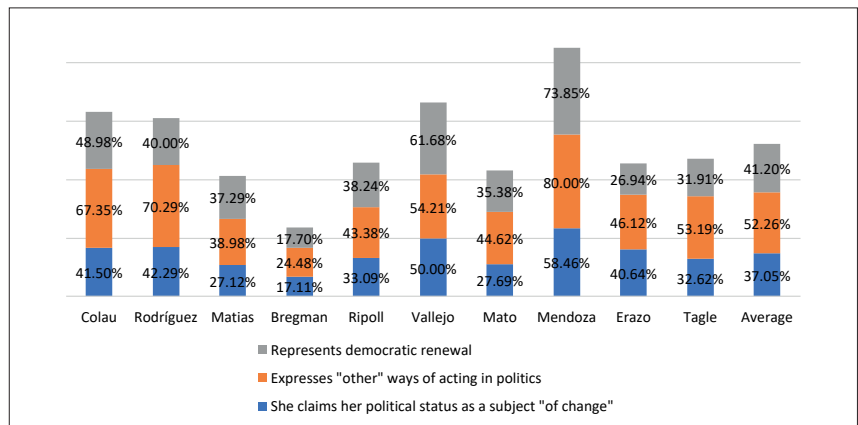
The last aspect in this section analyses the discursive construction of insurgency or disobedience in the tweets of Ibero-American political women of “change”. It is the least used category (Graph 5). Only three of the ten politicians studied have some indications in their political communication on *Twitter* that invites disobedience (Graph 4). Most of the women politicians maintain a discourse following those established within the canons of traditional political discourse. There are no insinuations or statements in favour of civil disobedience, except for marginal percentages.

### 3.3. Discursive self-proclamation to be agents of “change” or social transformation

This section studies how political actors position themselves or proclaim themselves as agents of “change” or social transformation in their *Twitter* profiles. First, it is analysed whether they express “other” forms and/or values of acting in politics. Five of the ten politicians studied exceed the average (52.26%) (Graph 6). They are Verónica Mendoza (80.00%), Teresa Rodríguez (70.29%), Ada Colau (67.35%), Camila Vallejo (54.21%) and Martha Tagle (53.19%). Half of the political actors build a narrative to express other forms or values in political action. In some cases, they reach 80% as in the case of Verónica Mendoza.

Verónica Mendoza stands out (Image 8) with a speech on changing political proposals. The discourse includes her hometown, peasants, merchants, teachers and workers from all regions, while speaking about ecology, diversity and human rights. She shows an interest in the community and the biosphere of her region and her concern for the people who live there. She explains that the mining project to be developed in the area of Lima “would store toxic waste” and calls on the Judiciary to decide “whether it will protect or put water and life at risk”. Two issues emerge in her speech. First, there is an interest to preserve the environment and its surroundings. Second, there is a direct appeal to justice institutions to show what side they will take. Something similar occurs with Teresa Rodríguez’s tweet about *Bankia* in which she proposes other possible policies in this case. There are several values that the analysed women politicians describe in their *Twitter* accounts which enable them to appear as actors who seek to exercise alternative politics that focus on issues close to the people and their interests. These practices can be understood as an alternative approach to social transformation.

The next category seeks to establish whether these political actors claim their political condition as a subject “of change”. Above the average (37.05%) are Verónica



Graph 6. Discursive self-proclamation to be agents of “change” or social transformation. Positive values

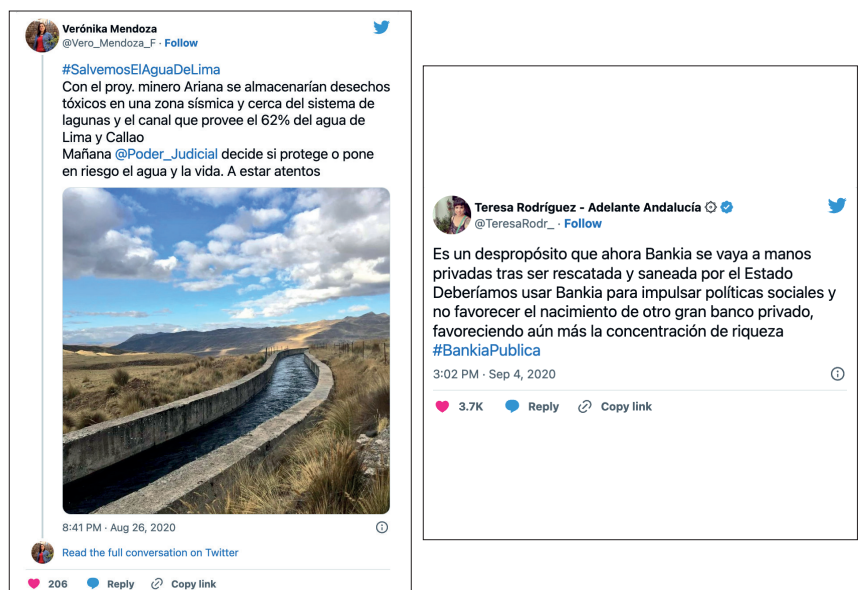


Image 8. Expression of “other” forms and/or values of acting in politics  
[https://twitter.com/Vero\\_Mendoza\\_F/status/1298691953136218118](https://twitter.com/Vero_Mendoza_F/status/1298691953136218118)  
[https://twitter.com/TeresaRodr\\_/status/1301868352554627072](https://twitter.com/TeresaRodr_/status/1301868352554627072)

Mendoza (58.46%), Camila Vallejo (50.00%), Teresa Rodríguez (42.29%), Ada Colau (41.50%) and Ana Erazo (40.64%). Half of the policies studied construct a discourse to proclaim themselves as agents of change and generate messages to give visibility to such an issue (Graph 6).

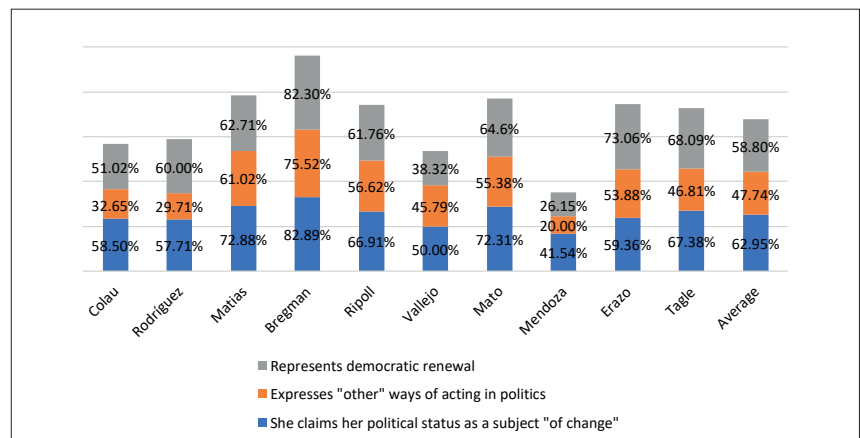
Among these political actors, we can distinguish two groups. On the one hand, Vallejo, Mendoza and Rodríguez generate a narrative from an opposition discourse and pose demands to their countries’ governments. They also highlight actions or legislative proposals to improve citizens’ lives. On the other hand, we find Colau and Erazo, who are representatives of the Government or a part of it and give themselves visibility as subjects of change in their political work. This type of discourse defines itself as change, as a policy of doing things differently from previous governments while being very evident in the political communication on *Twitter* of these political actors. Here the change is understood institutionally, that is to say, as an improvement concerning the previous government and not so much as a process linked to social change, as was the case of the former group of politicians.

The qualitative analysis enables us to observe how Verónica Mendoza expresses the demands of Peruvian civil society that is tired of cases of corruption and the lack of responsibility in traditional politics, asking for “a new democracy and a new State that guarantees citizens’ rights and puts life ahead of profit” (Image 9). She calls on citizens to support a new constitution to foster the country’s regeneration, promoting a profound change in her country. Likewise, Camila Vallejo appeals for a transformation of the budget setting process. She affirms that “because of our Constitution, only the Executive can propose how the money is spent while Congress approves or rejects it”. Also, she criticises that only the Executive can decide how Chilean money is spent. This connects with a significant aspect of democracy: budget transparency.

Finally, the last category of this block aims to show whether the political actors build a story in which they represent democratic renewal. The results show (Graph 6) that only three of the ten politicians outline a discourse in line with the self-proclamation of democratic renewal or transformation. The three politicians exceeding the average (41.20%) are Verónica Mendoza (73.85%), Camila Vallejo (61.68%) and Ada Colau (48.98%).

Of the three leaders who have appealed to this type of narrative, two participate in institutional politics –Camila Vallejo and Ada Colau– while the third –Verónica Mendoza– operates outside parliamentary politics. When analysing their discourses, they deal with issues such as the State model or institutional reorganisation, constitutional reform, human rights, equality policies, autonomy, the independence of the judiciary from other powers or the growing dissemination of disinformation by some media. But they also address other issues, such as repressing vulnerable populations and minorities, original identities or oppressed peoples.

The reforms or new models that they propose make them look more open and committed to citizenship and civil society. Challenging traditional politics, the three leaders favour a discourse of opposing democratic decline, in favour of transparency. However, analysing the general data, we can see that most of the women politicians – seven out of ten – focus on building a critical discourse and proposals related to the insti-



Graph 7. Discursive self-proclamation to be agents of “change” or social transformation. Negative values



Image 9. Claiming the political condition as a subject “of change”  
[https://twitter.com/Vero\\_Mendoza\\_F/status/1328524266569158656](https://twitter.com/Vero_Mendoza_F/status/1328524266569158656)  
[https://twitter.com/camila\\_vallejo/status/1328397620813963264](https://twitter.com/camila_vallejo/status/1328397620813963264)

tutions where they can collaborate rather than proclaiming themselves as protagonists of a democratic renewal (Graph 7).

Thus, Ada Colau advocates a debate on a historical question: the monarchy or a republic (Image 10). She brings to light the issue of the state model, alleging that in Barcelona there is “a broad republican majority” that is against honouring the monarchy. She is appealing to another type of discourse: direct criticism of the Crown. She also calls for a “thorough investigation into the malpractice” of the institution, as well as “promoting legal changes to end impunity and the privileges of the Crown”. She claims to promote legal changes so that the monarch is not exempt from responsibility for his or her acts, whether they refer to matters of a public or private nature. By formulating these questions, the narrative of this political actor shows an intention to democratise both the institutions and the people who compose them to avoid abuses such as excess power.

#### 4. Conclusions

This research has sought to make original and relevant contributions to the counter-hegemonic dimension of the discourses of political actors on social networks, especially women politicians “for change” on *Twitter*. Our first contribution is transforming the theoretical concept of counter-hegemony into a set of measurable variables permitting quantitative analysis of its characteristics. The resulting analysis model helps trace attributes of counter-hegemonic or alternative narratives in communicative strategies, which will help the empiric study of this object in future research.

Secondly, the findings permit us to describe the type of counter-hegemonic discourse put into practice by the Ibero-American political women “of change”. The communication strategy of these political actors reveals an intention to differentiate, criticise and denounce since all hegemonic order is susceptible to being questioned by counter-hegemonic practices that try to dismantle it to undermine existing discourses and practices (Mouffe, 2008). Their messages mainly focus on criticising political and economic elites and denouncing inequalities and social conflicts. This last aspect is substantial. Thus, it is evident that this communication strategy recognises social conflict by giving voice to these problems. In addition, this strategy causes the political women “of change” to position themselves against them as these problems cause inequalities. Therefore, they build a discourse to break the status quo or the hegemonic common sense imposed by the dominant elites (Van-Dijk, 2003).

Another relevant finding is that most women politicians –seven out of ten– guide the practice of counter-hegemony towards creating a critical discourse with proposals for social transformation. Moreover, they have a low tendency to proclaim themselves as protagonists of democratic renewal and subjects of change. Their communication is thus more practical than theoretical. In addition, despite promoting counter-hegemonic strategies, Ibero-American political women “of change” restrict their communication within the margins of traditional politics since they hardly make calls for insurgency or insubordination. Most *Twitter* messages of these political actors maintain a discourse complying with the established channels. There are no invitations, insinuations or declarations in favour of civil disobedience, except for marginal percentages. This shows that they employ a counter-hegemony of a positive or constructive nature, rejecting subversive or disruptive modalities.

A fourth relevant contribution is that there are no distinctions in geopolitical terms. All the analysed counter-hegemony variables cross over among regions. Thus, the issues addressed and the criticism recipients are similar regardless of the territorial component. This reveals that Ibero-American women politicians “of change” share a similar agenda concerning counter-hegemonic communication strategies, despite their geographical origin.

Instead, the position of the political actors in the government-opposition axis offers relevant differences in the activation of counter-hegemonic communication strategies on *Twitter*. Thus, those in government opt for more standardised formulas and fewer alternatives, presenting lower levels of variables related to activism. On the other hand, those in opposition or further away from the institutional framework promote unconventional forms of political participation, demands for social change from governments and criticism of elites and established powers. This way, they more actively promote ways of doing and thinking about politics as a space for building a counter-power (Castells, 2009). With this, they finally contribute to the feminisation of politics from social denunciation to promoting democratic regeneration (Quevedo-Redondo, 2022).

The conclusions show that criticism and denunciation to give voice to the voiceless are the main ingredients of the counter-hegemonic discourse on *Twitter* of Ibero-American political women “of change”. This way, they make inequalities and social conflicts visible. Likewise,



Image 10. Representation of democratic renewal  
<https://twitter.com/AdaColau/status/1298967593479483392>

“ The politics analyzed employ a counter-hegemonic discourse of a positive or constructive nature ”

these political actors display a practical and constructive counter-hegemony directed towards its application to social problems in positive terms. Finally, the geographical factor does not cause significant differences in these communication strategies, but the position concerning institutional policy does. This last factor sharpens or minimises operating some of the traits of counter-hegemony in its digital communication.

“The women politicians analyzed pursue exercising another way of doing politics on *Twitter*, focusing on issues closer to the people and their interests”

This research helps identify the characteristics of the counter-hegemonic communication strategies of Ibero-American women “of change”. It represents an original contribution to digital political communication because it allows detecting, measuring and defining alternative discourses that question the established power. However, it has limitations since it leaves pending the analysis of these messages on the public. In addition, the influence of this narrative in the digital conversation needs to be studied. Our approach focuses on content analysis, making novel contributions. However, it does not allow us to offer knowledge of other essential aspects to measure the incidence of counter-hegemonic communication on social networks. New research will be necessary to shed light on this relevant topic.

## 5. Note

1. A rhizome is a descriptive or epistemological model in which the organization of the elements does not follow lines of hierarchical subordination –with a base or root giving rise to multiple branches–, but rather any element can affect or influence any other.

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