

Communication and Think Tanks: Web Interactivity Assessment of Latin American Think Tanks*

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Abstract

The proposals of think tanks nowadays carry weight in political actions worldwide. The communicative actions of these centers are crucial in the relationship with their diverse audiences for their initiatives to have a notable influence. Through a quantitative content analysis, the present study gathers communicative tools and measures the degree of interactivity promoted by these online research centers through their official websites, the medium that has the greatest impact on their visibility and influence. The research focuses on the 25 most influential think tanks in Central and South America, according to the 2020 Global Go To Think Tank Index. The results show that the level of interactivity offered by the unidirectional tools

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of these think tanks is considerably high. However, in the case of bidirectional resources, which provide a greater opportunity for interaction and dialogue with the web user, greater use is made of those of an asymmetrical nature. The level of interactivity achieved is still insufficient, as not all the opportunities offered by the digital space are leveraged.

Keywords

Latin America; research center; interactive communication; political communication; communication strategy; research institute; think tanks.

Comunicación y *think tanks*: valoración de la interactividad web de los laboratorios de ideas latinoamericanos*

Resumen

Las propuestas de los laboratorios de ideas (*think tanks*) hoy en día tienen un peso importante en las actuaciones políticas a nivel mundial, por eso las acciones comunicativas de estos centros resultan cruciales en la relación con sus diversos públicos, para que sus iniciativas lleguen a tener una influencia notable. El presente estudio, basado en un análisis de contenido cuantitativo, recoge las herramientas comunicativas y mide el grado de interactividad que fomentan estos centros de investigación en línea, medio que más incide en su visibilidad e influencia, para lo cual se analizan sus páginas web oficiales. La investigación se centra en los 25 *think tanks* más influyentes de Centroamérica y América del Sur, según el informe 2020 *Global Go To Think Tank Index*. Los resultados evidencian que, aunque el nivel de interactividad que ofrecen las herramientas unidireccionales de estos laboratorios de ideas es considerablemente alto, en el caso de los recursos bidireccionales –que aportan una mayor oportunidad de interacción y diálogo con el usuario web–, se hace mayor uso de los de naturaleza asimétrica, siendo aún insuficiente el nivel de interactividad alcanzado, al no aprovecharse todas las oportunidades que ofrece el espacio digital.

Palabras clave

América Latina; centro de investigación; comunicación interactiva; comunicación política; estrategia de comunicación; laboratorio de ideas; *think tanks*.

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Comunicação e *think tanks*: avaliação da interatividade na web dos laboratórios de ideias latino-americanos*

Resumo

As propostas dos laboratórios de ideias (*think tanks*) têm hoje um peso importante nas ações políticas em nível global, mas as ações de comunicação desses centros são cruciais no relacionamento com seus diversos públicos para que essas propostas possam ter uma influência notável. Este estudo, por meio de uma análise de conteúdo quantitativa, reúne as ferramentas comunicativas, bem como mede o grau de interatividade que esses centros de pesquisa on-line, meio que mais impacta em sua visibilidade e influência, para isso são analisadas suas páginas web oficiais. A pesquisa se concentra nos 25 *think tanks* mais influentes da América Central e do Sul, de acordo com o Global Go To Think Tank Index 2020. Os resultados mostram que, embora o nível de interatividade oferecido pelas ferramentas unidirecionais desses *think tanks* seja consideravelmente alto, no caso dos recursos bidirecionais — que proporcionam maior oportunidade de interação e diálogo com o usuário da web —, há maior uso daqueles de natureza assimétrica, sendo o nível de interatividade alcançado ainda insuficiente, pois nem todas as oportunidades oferecidas pelo espaço digital são aproveitadas.

Palavras-chave

América Latina; centro de pesquisa; comunicação interativa; comunicação política; estratégia de comunicação; laboratório de ideias; *think tanks*.

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Think tanks, as political and social actors, exert an influence at the global level that is indisputable although difficult to measure precisely, with effects on political decisions, the creation of public opinion, and areas beyond the political sphere (Abelson, 2006; Blanc, 2003; Boucher and Royo 2006; Cockett, 1995; Denham and Garnett, 1998; Landry, 2021; Lenglet and Vilain, 2011; Li, 2017; McGann et al., 2014; Oreskes and Conway, 2010; Ruser, 2019; Sagahaye-Biria, 2019; Stefancic and Delgado, 1996), impacting even the media and the general public (Almirón and Xifra, 2021). In fact, one of the most recurrent influencing strategies among think tanks is developing an increasingly active presence in the media (Cortés et al., 2023), which allows them to present their solutions and policy proposals (Salas-Porras, 2018) to the general public. Although think tanks can present their influence in diverse ways, their contributions undeniably represent the primary source of information for political, social and economic actors (La Porte, 2019).

There is a lack of consensus regarding a definition of the think tank concept that encompasses the diverse nature of these centers. However, with the intention of framing the term, in this research, we maintain a prescriptive definition—although not all organizations that qualify as such can be included—taking into account the contributions of Castillo (2009) and Xifra (2005; 2008). We understand think tanks, then, to be organizations made up of numerous leading intellectuals, analysts and opinion leaders from the political sphere, who, by contract or commission from public or private organizations, suggest research-based solutions for political intervention to institutions and implement strategies for direct or indirect communication with public opinion. According to this normative definition, the idea of creating expert knowledge destined for the common good and not for the good of the individual is key (Almirón and Xifra, 2021).

These think tanks, like any other organization, develop communication strategies and actions to disseminate their activities and thematic proposals and to manage relationships with their audiences (Castillo-Esparcia et al., 2020). In addition, they are affected not only by political and economic changes or the social contexts in which they operate but also by

digital processes. Starting from the premise that communication for these centers is one of the primary activities that encompasses, establishes and favors other political functions and roles within their relational environment, digital public relations are presented as a main instrument in their environment of action (Castillo and Smolak, 2017).

For these research centers, there are various communication options in the online space that strengthen their ability to attract the attention of potential consumers and political decision-makers, among which is their presence in social networks, with the website being the most well-known tool for public relations 2.0 (Aced, 2013; Holtz, 2002; Liberos, 2013). A website serves as a center's business card and enables different audiences to become familiar with the center. In the digital environment, the influence of an institution is directly linked to the reputation of the organization as a provider of reliable information (McNutt and Marchildon, 2009). In this sense, the web is the primary place where different audiences obtain knowledge about the think tank. Therefore, this tool is of special importance in organizational communication strategies.

The main objectives that the website must meet are to transmit the identity of the organization, support the management of the impressions or perceptions of target audiences and establish a solid link with these interest groups, or stakeholders, which constitute the purposes of public relations.

Unidirectional and bidirectional tools are housed in the digital portals of think tanks, as well as on the websites of other types of organizations. The use of such communications tools is important for obtaining support for think tanks' activities. Dialogical theory argues that, for the relationships between organizations and their various audiences to be optimal, the organizations must not only disseminate information—although this is a necessary activity—but also establish processes of listening and interaction with their audiences (Taylor and Kent, 2014). Thus, the online ecosystem can facilitate dialogue between the parties involved, provided that there is a broad awareness of this aspect and a high predisposition to establish such communication strategies.

On the other hand, although the theory of dialogic communication traditionally posits that organizations must connect with their audience through a dialog based on Grunig's concept of the bidirectional symmetric model of public relations, in which the central idea is the benefit and the mutual understanding of the parties involved, the academic community is expanding the theory with a postmodern approach. From this perspective, organizations must use digital media to show what their fundamental values are and thereby encourage public debate even though consensus is no longer necessarily sought (Wilcox, 2019). These actions offer greater transparency and allow different audiences to make decisions based on what the organizations reveal.

In relation to the dialogic process, it is necessary to note that, in this research, interactivity is differentiated as a process and as a product (Stromer-Galley, 2004). As a process, we refer to the dialog or conversation between people, and as a product, we refer to the interaction mediated by technology (López-Rabadán and Mellado, 2019). The first is collected in the study of dialogic resources, and the second is examined via monological tools and some bidirectional tools.

Among the studies of think tanks in Latin America, we find those of Levy (1995), Mato (2007) and Garcé and Uña (2007), which analyze the impact of think tanks on public policies in the region. A recently published study by Barreda and Ruiz (2022) highlights the most relevant think tanks that have contributed to the achievement of the objectives of certain political parties in Latin America. Mendizábal and Sample (2009) examine the relationship between political parties and think tanks in Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru. Fischer and Plehwe (2013) investigate the networks of right-wing intellectual think tanks in Latin America. Botto (2011) comparatively studies nine countries (Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Paraguay and Peru) to describe the context in which think tanks emerged in them, as well as their performances and functions. Martinis (2023) focuses on the research institutes with strong influence on educational policies in Uruguay. Merke and Pausel-

li (2015) focus on the role of think tanks in the foreign policy of Argentina, Brazil and Mexico, and Thompson (1994) analyzes the development of these centers in Argentina. In Colombia, Alvear (2007) relates think tanks with the implementation of neoliberal public policies, while Leal and Roll (2013) study their links with political parties, and Mercado (2017) investigate their impact on Colombian politics.

The role and status of Argentine think tanks are discussed by Braun et al. (2000), Uña et al. (2004) and Echt (2020). Other scholars, namely, Gárate (2008), Moreno (2010) and Aedo (2016), explore the influencing role of think tanks in Chilean politics, and Torres (2003) does the same in the context of Peru. There are also comparative studies between Europe and Latin America (Fischer and Plehwe, 2017) and the United States, Latin America and the Caribbean (Romano et al., 2020). Through the lens of communication, Castillo (2009) highlights the communication strategies used by the main research institutes in Latin America; Barreda et al. (2023) does so in the case of Chile; and Sánchez and Pizarro (2014) consider Europe, the United States and Latin America.

Studies that address the role and influence of think tanks in the Latin American territory are numerous, especially in recent decades. However, with respect to the field of communications, the existing studies are insufficient. Given that the communicative activity of these organizations is essential for establishing solid links and exerting influence on their different audiences, this study offers highly useful contributions.

This study aims to understand mainly the situation of communication in the digital environment through the official websites of Latin American think tanks in their online relational universe. Unlike previous scholars, we focused on the interactive and dialogical aspects and collected information about the current situations of these centers. In addition to this primary objective, the following *specific secondary objectives* are pursued:

- Find out whether the digital platforms of the think tanks considered to be the most influential in Central and South America have

evolved toward more interactive and dialogic communication models (Web 2.0) or continue to maintain monological communication models (Web 1.0).

- Examine the types of information dissemination tools (one-way communication) used in the websites of the different think tanks studied, as well as the resources used to interact and dialog with virtual users (two-way communication).
- Evaluate the degree of interactivity and dialogic communication implemented in the digital environment through the official websites of these think tanks.
- Identify the think tanks that offer the best opportunities to interact with their different audiences through their websites.

Methodology

To achieve the proposed objectives, a representative sample of the 25 most influential think tanks in Latin America is studied according to the ranking established by the *2020 Global Go To Think Tank Index Report* (McGann, 2021), a benchmark in this field worldwide. The report provides various classifications on the basis of different criteria. In this case, the 25 most influential think tanks are selected for comparative study to describe and interpret a phenomenon. In the social sciences and, specifically, in the field of communication, this comparative research approach is common and pertinent since it allows us to understand the similarities and differences of the object of study and discover its characteristics (Hallin and Mancini, 2004). The most influential think tanks in the ranking according to the McGann report are as follows: Argentina (n = 5), Brazil (n = 5), Chile (n = 3), Uruguay (n = 3), Ecuador (n = 2), Peru (n = 2), Colombia (n = 1), El Salvador (n = 1), Guatemala (n = 1), Paraguay (n = 1) and Venezuela (n = 1). The 25 websites analyzed, in order of appearance in the McGann ranking, are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Ranking of the most influential think tanks in Latin America

Think tanks	Country
1. Fedesarrollo	Colombia
2. Brazilian Center for International Relations (Cebri)	Brazil
3. Argentine Council for International Relations (CARI)	Argentina
4. Center for the Implementation of Public Policies for Equity and Growth (Cippec)	Argentina
5. Center for Public Studies (CEP)	Chili
6. Center for the Study of Economic and Social Reality (Ceres)	Uruguay
7. Association for Research and Social Studies (Asies)	Guatemala
8. Latin American Council of Social Sciences (Clacso)	Argentina
9. Center for the Dissemination of Economic Knowledge for Freedom (Cedice)	Venezuela
10. Brics Policy Center	Brazil
11. Institute of Applied Economic Research (IPEA)	Brazil
12. Salvadoran Foundation for Economic and Social Development (Fusades)	El Salvador
13. Uruguayan Council for International Relations (CURI)	Uruguay
14. Fernando Henrique Cardoso Foundation (FHC)	Brazil
15. Latin American Center for Human Economy (Claeh)	Uruguay
16. Foundation for the Advancement of Reforms and Opportunities (Grupo Faro)	Ecuador
17. Center for Analysis and Diffusion of the Paraguayan Economy (Cadep)	Paraguay
18. Development Analysis Group (Grade)	Peru
19. Corporation of Studies for Latin America (Cieplan)	Chili
20. Brazilian Center for Analysis and Planning (Cebrap)	Brazil
21. Freedom and Democracy Institute (ILD)	Peru
22. Chile Foundation 21	Chili
23. Center for State and Society Studies (Cedes)	Argentina
24. Ecuadorian Institute of Political Economy (IEEP)	Ecuador
25. Latin American Economic Research Foundation (FIEL)	Argentina

Source: McGann Report 2020 (McGann, 2021).

To achieve the determined objectives, a methodology based on the quantitative content analysis of the different websites is used, and analysis templates for collecting information regarding the object of study are es-

established in each case. Content analysis is considered one of the most relevant methodologies in the field of communication research. The objective of this method is to strictly and systematically analyze the characteristics of the messages exchanged in acts of communication (Krippendorff, 2004). The methodology used is based on a method that has been verified in previous studies evaluating the degree of interactivity of web pages (Capriotti et al., 2016), adapted to the type of organization studied and the tools used and with the elimination or synthesis of the various typologies according to their usefulness.

The communicative tools found are classified to establish the degree of involvement and interaction that these research centers can offer to virtual visitors. Twelve types of general public information dissemination tools and 21 resources for interaction and dialog are identified. The establishment of these resources for the analysis templates is justified by their appearance in an initial exploratory study of the websites of the 25 sampled think tanks.

To systematize the typologies of the communicative elements present on the websites, unidirectional (monological) tools, denoting the resources used by the think tanks to present and disseminate information, are investigated. These are typical linear informational structures that require no or little participation or involvement of the receiving public, where the flow of communication goes in only one direction and the degree of control over the established communication is almost absolute on the part of the think tank and not the web user. It is the research center that determines the content of the information. A connection with the website visitor is intended, but the sole purpose of such a connection is to show, disclose or disseminate information about the institution and allow the internet user to become informed. The degree of involvement of the website visitors is zero or very low, and the flow of communication goes from the think tanks to the users, who cannot send feedback or modify the information on the website. These tools are grouped into the following three categories:

- Expository. These are the resources that facilitate the dissemination of information to mainly passive and receptive website visitors. In this category, we differentiate between graphic tools and audiovisual tools.

- **Hypertextual.** These tools include links to other web portals and allow a greater degree of interaction than do expository resources since they facilitate an active search for additional information and contribute to the investigation of topics related to the center.
- **Participative.** These tools contribute to a greater degree of user interaction than the above tools do. They are aimed at more active and participatory website visitors are differentiated into interactive resources (graphics and infographics) and participatory resources (follow buttons on social networks that allow a web visitor to interact with content on the site in addition to that offered in the current space, which enables the visitor to access broader information and show greater interest in the organization).

Table 2. One-way (monological) tools on think tank websites

Categories	Tool types	
Present and disseminate information	Graphic exhibits	Publications: studies, thematic reports, books, articles, periodicals (journals).
		Informative brochure (presentation of the think tank).
		Institutional yearbooks (annual reports).
		Publication of events agenda.
		Virtual press room (press releases/notes).
		Blog without the possibility of user response.
		News published on the web.
		Photographs and images.
	Audiovisual exhibitions	Multimedia files inserted in the web page (audio, videos).
	Hypertextual	External links to other websites or centers.
Participatory	Interactive resources (graphics and infographics).	
	Participatory resources (tools/follow button in social networks)	

Source: Own elaboration based on Capriotti et al. (2016).

On the other hand, bidirectional (dialogic) tools refer to the resources used by the think tanks in their web portals to interact and dialog with virtual users. These are based on two-way communicative structures, both

asymmetric and symmetrical. They involve more interaction and dialog, with different possibilities of information exchange, discussion and collaboration. Among these, we distinguish the following categories, depending on the degree of involvement and participation of the website user provided or sought:

- *Connect.* These tools are limited to the user's request for sending information, with a very low level of interaction and involvement.
- *Share.* These tools allow users to distribute/share information from the think tank and allow users to follow the content that interests them the most, with the potential to customize the monitoring options. These tools provide slight involvement and participation on the part of the public user of the website.
- *Review/comment.* These tools allow website users to review, comment, evaluate and respond. The public visitors to the think tank website thereby acquire some freedom when consuming the website contents and begin to be participants in the communication with the think tank. Ultimately, these tools involve user actions that reflect a medium-low level of interaction and participation.
- *Participate.* Tools in this category allow communication to flow in both directions and support feedback, but the relationship between communicative actors is still unbalanced in favor of the initiator of the communication (the think tank). Although greater involvement and initiative on the part of the website users are encouraged, they still do not have control in the communication process or with regard to the website contents. These tools provide a high level of reciprocity between communicative actors.
- *Collaborate.* These tools provide users the opportunity to cocreate web content and establish an equal flow of communication, a characteristic of dialog. The public is provided with tools or spaces where they can modify or include information that the think tanks do not directly control. The involvement and initiative on the part of the user

is total, such that these tools present the highest degree of interactivity possible in the digital medium.

Table 3. Bidirectional (dialogic) tools on the think tank website

Categories	Tools
Connect (bidirectional, asymmetric)	Subscription forms for content syndication (RSS/newsletters).
	Registration to intranet.
	Web search.
	Download files.
	Registration for hiring researchers, services, projects, practices.
	Area dedicated to membership.
Share (bidirectional, asymmetric)	Tool/button to send information to external sites/tag.
	Share tool/button on social networks.
	Personalization of content (follow favorite authors and publications, etc.).
Review/comment (bidirectional, asymmetric)	Surveys.
	Possibility of making comments on the website.
	Blog with the possibility of user response.
	Possibility of evaluation/scoring of web content.
Participate (bidirectional, symmetric)	Space to make purchases.
	Signing of user requests.
	Space to request participation in events or request to view them online.
	Space dedicated to sending inquiries.
	Online space dedicated to support, financial donation, sponsorship.
	Space dedicated to user proposals.
Collaborate (bidirectional, symmetric)	Forum (online discussion sites).
	Space for collaborating as an online expert/volunteer or uploading content (cocreation of web content).

Source: Own elaboration based on Capriotti et al. (2016).

Once the categories of analysis were determined, a Likert-type scale, an instrument for measuring or collecting quantitative data in the field of social sciences, was established to assess the level of interactivity. Each type

of tool identified was assigned a weighted value from 1–5, where 1 corresponds to very low interactivity and 5 corresponds to very high interactivity.

To determine the presence or absence of these tools in each web page analyzed in each think tank, a dichotomous structure of “yes/no” was used, where presence = 1 and absence = 0. With this measure, a relationship was established with the categories according to the interaction potential of the websites—understood as the degree of involvement, interest or participation of the web users—taking into account the unidirectional (monological) tools used to present and disseminate information (Table 4). Thus, “graphics” were attributed 1 point (very low interactivity); “audiovisuals”, 2 points (low interactivity); “hypertext”, 3 points (medium interactivity); “interactive resources”, 4 points (high interactivity); and “participatory resources”, 5 points (very high interactivity).

Table 4. Interactivity of the think tank websites according to the unidirectional (monological) tools designed to present and disseminate information

Level of interactivity Unidirectional (monological) tools aimed at presenting and disseminating information					
Information presentation and dissemination tools	Interactivity scale (Likert scale)	Assigned Value (VA)	Presence (P)	Points received (PO)	Level of interactivity
			NO-YES	VA x P	= Media (X^-) (PO/S)
Graphics	Very low interactivity	1 point	0-1	VA x P	
Audiovisual	Low interactivity	2 points	0-1	VA x P	
Hypertextual	Medium interactivity	3 points	0-1	VA x P	
Interactive	High interactivity	4 points	0-1	VA x P	
Participatory	Very high interactivity	5 points	0-1	VA x P	

Source: Own elaboration based on Capriotti et al. (2016).

To determine the level of interactivity offered by the different websites in relation to the tools that allow interaction and dialog with web vis-

itors, weighted values were assigned to each of the categories established according to the interaction potential (Table 5). Therefore, “connect” was assigned a score of 1 (very low interactivity), “share” 2 (low interactivity), “review and comment” 3 (medium interactivity), “participate” 4 (high interactivity) and “collaborate” 5 (very high interactivity).

Table 5. Interactivity of the think tank website according to the bidirectional (dialogic) tools intended for interaction and dialog with users

Level of interactivity Bidirectional (dialogic) tools aimed at interaction and dialog with users					
Tools to interact and dialog	Interactivity scale (Likert scale)	Assigned Value (VA)	Presence (P)	Points received (PO)	Level of interactivity
			NO - YES	VA x P	= Media (X^*) (PO/5)
Connect	Very low interactivity	1 point	0-1	VA x P	
Share	Low interactivity	2 points	0-1	VA x P	
Review/ Comment	Medium interactivity	3 points	0-1	VA x P	
Participate	High interactivity	4 points	0-1	VA x P	
Collaborate	Very high interactivity	5 points	0-1	VA x P	

Source: Own elaboration based on Capriotti et al. (2016).

Subsequently, the average of the sum of the total weighted value of each resource on each think tank website is collected to yield the degree of interactivity of each one, measured on a scale of 0–3 points: a score of 0–1 is considered to indicate “low or poor interactivity”, a score between 1.1–2 “medium interactivity”, and a score of 2.1–3 “high or significant interactivity”.

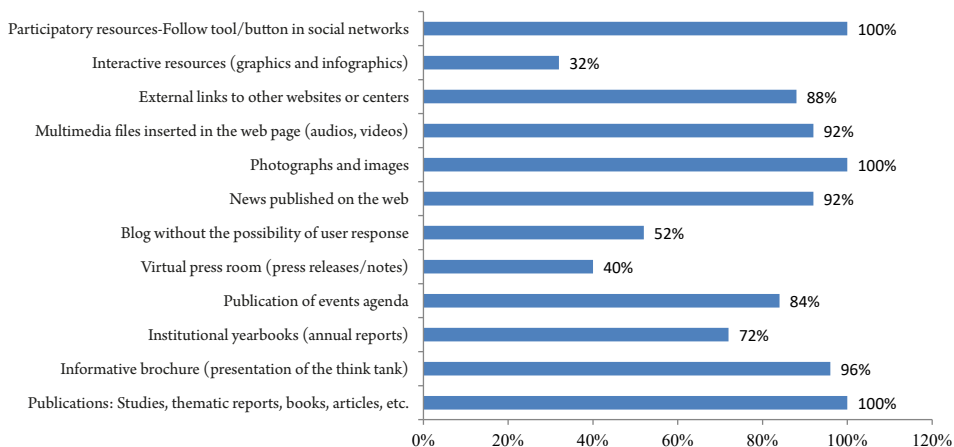
To validate the design of the analysis templates, a preliminary exploratory study of ten think tank websites was carried out. This first evaluation allowed us to consider the suitability of the methodology and potentially modify and readjust elements that made it difficult to achieve the proposed objectives.

Results

Unidirectional (monological) tools

Regarding the web resources intended for the dissemination of information, as shown in Figure 1, those of the expository-graphic typology stand out, since publications of a diverse nature (studies, articles, etc.) as well as photographs and images are present in the entire sample studied. In terms of frequency, they are followed by graphic tools, namely, information related to the presentation of the think tank ($n = 24$; 96%) and news publications about the center ($n = 23$; 92%), which are given with exhibition-audiovisual resources and usually linked to external websites. Participatory resources also stand out; these include buttons that redirect the user to the profile of the research center on social networks, which can be found on all of the websites. The least used resources are those that offer some type of interaction with the person ($n = 8$, 32%), the virtual press room ($n = 10$, 40%) and blogs ($n = 13$, 52%).

Figure 1. Use of unidirectional (monological) tools

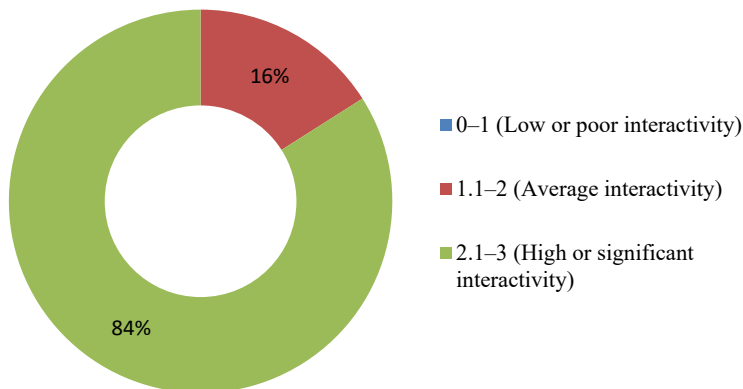


Source: Own elaboration.

After evaluating the level of interactivity provided by the web pages of the think tanks studied (Figure 2) with consideration of only the tools for presenting and disseminating information, it can be determined that a high percentage of these ($n = 21$, 84%) present high or significant interac-

tivity—the highest level within the established scale—followed by 16% that could be categorized as web portals with medium interaction. None of the websites had low or poor interactivity in this tool categorization.

Figure 2. Interactivity of the information presentation tools



Source: Own elaboration.

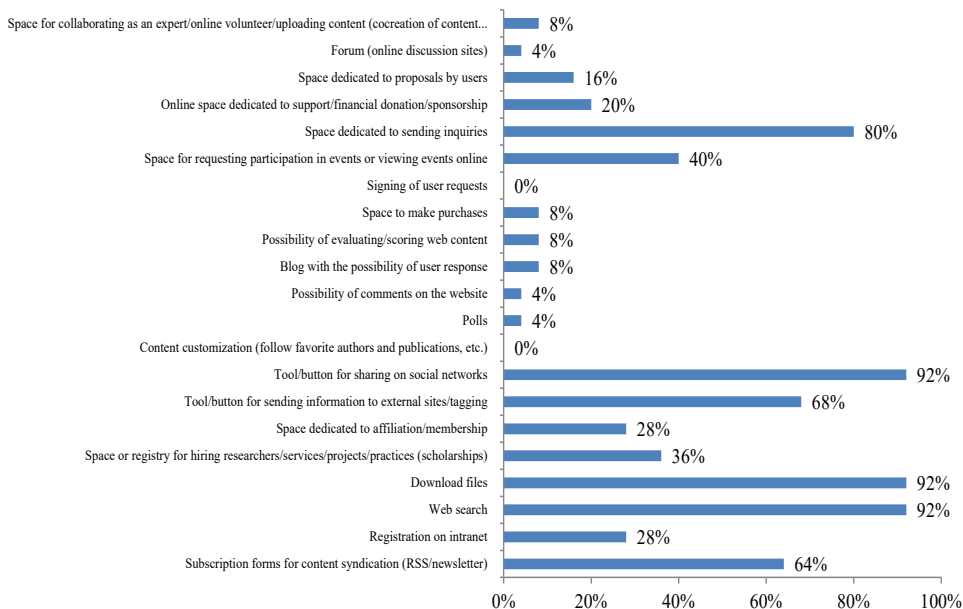
Bidirectional (dialogic) tools

With consideration of only the tools that promote greater interaction with website visitors (Figure 3), those that are categorized as asymmetric two-way communication tools stand out in frequency of use, with 92% (n = 23). Among them, “connect”, specifically downloading files and searching for terms on the web, and sharing, with the follow button for sharing contents on social networks, are noteworthy. Most of the websites (n = 20, 80%) also have spaces dedicated to sending queries to the think tank, which represent a tool that could be considered to have a two-way symmetric nature.

Less used resources (n = 1, 4%) include the possibility of conducting surveys, offered by Fedesarrollo de Colombia; the option to comment on a section of the website, offered by the Center for Analysis and Dissemination of the Paraguayan Economy (Cadep); and online discussion forums, which represent the highest degree of interaction (symmetric two-way communication), offered by the Center for the Disclosure of Economic Knowledge for Freedom (Cedice) of Venezuela. These forums and blogs, which allow the user to comment, usually require registration on the intranet.

The tools that allow greater personalization of the content according to user preferences and the signature of petitions are not present in any of the online spaces analyzed.

Figure 3. Use of bidirectional tools (dialogic)



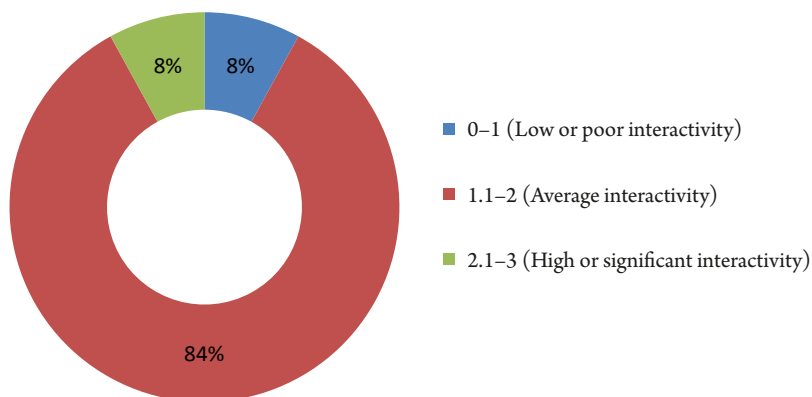
Source: Own elaboration.

Analysis of the interactivity offered by the tools that support greater interaction and dialog with website users shows that most research centers ($n = 21$, 84%) fall within the average interactivity level in the scale established in this study. Think tank websites above the average level and websites at the low or poor level each represent 8%.

Comparison between communication tools and level of interactivity

Table 6 shows, individually and in descending order, the differences presented by the websites of the think tanks according to the level of interaction presented, taking into account the monological tools used in these online spaces.

Figure 4. Level of interactivity of bidirectional communication tools



Source: Own elaboration.

Table 6. Interactivity ranking in the use of monological tools

Think tanks	Interactivity level	Think tanks	Interactivity level
Fedesarrollo Colombia.	3	Brazilian Center for International Relations (Cebri) of Brazil.	2.2
Center for the Implementation of Public Policies for Equity and Growth (Cippec) of Argentina.	3	Brazilian Center for Analysis and Planning (Cebrap) of Brazil.	2.2
Center for Public Studies (CEP) of Chile.	3	Institute for Liberty and Democracy (ILD) of Peru.	2.2
Center for the Study of Economic and Social Reality (Ceres) of Uruguay.	3	Chile 21 Foundation of Chile.	2.2
Association for Research and Social Studies (Asies) of Guatemala.	3	Center for State and Society Studies (Cedes) of Argentina.	2.2
Center for the Disclosure of Economic Knowledge for Freedom (Cedice) of Venezuela.	3	Ecuadorian Institute of Political Economy (IEEP) of Ecuador.	2.2
Latin American Council of Social Sciences (Clasco) of Argentina.	3	Latin American Economic Research Foundation (FIEL) of Argentina.	2.2
Brics Policy Center of Brazil.	2.2	Argentine Council for International Relations (CARI) of Argentina.	2.2

Think tanks	Interactivity level	Think tanks	Interactivity level
Institute of Applied Economic Research (IPEA) of Brazil.	2.2	Salvadoran Foundation for Economic and Social Development (Fusades) of El Salvador.	2
Fernando Henrique Cardoso Foundation (FHC) of Brazil.	2.2	Foundation for the Advancement of Reforms and Opportunities (Grupo Faro) of Ecuador.	1.8
Latin American Center for Human Economy (Claeh) of Uruguay.	2.2	Uruguayan Council for International Relations (CURI) of Uruguay.	1.6
Center for Analysis and Diffusion of the Paraguayan Economy (Cadep).	2.2	Corporation of Studies for Latin America (Cieplan) of Chile.	1.6
Group of Analysis for Development (Grade) of Peru.	2.2		

Source: Own elaboration.

Table 7 also shows the level of interactivity reached by these think tanks with consideration of only the resources of a dialogic nature. The data provided in Tables 6 and 7 indicate that two think tanks reach the maximum levels of interaction according to both scales: the Latin American Council of Social Sciences (Clasco) of Argentina and the Center for the Disclosure of Economic Knowledge for Freedom (Cedice) of Venezuela. Other centers achieve the highest level of interaction in the use of information dissemination tools, but none can match these two centers in the use of two-way communication tools.

Table 7. Ranking according to the level of interactivity in the use of dialogic tools

Think tanks	Interactivity	Think tanks	Interactivity level
Latin American Council of Social Sciences (Clasco) of Argentina.	2.4	Brics Policy Center of Brazil.	1.4
Center for the Dissemination of Economic Knowledge for Freedom (Cedice) of Venezuela	2.4	Uruguayan Council for International Relations (CURI) of Uruguay.	1.4
Fedesarrollo of Colombia.	2	Fernando Henrique Cardoso Foundation (FHC) of Brazil.	1.4

Think tanks	Interactivity	Think tanks	Interactivity level
Institute of Applied Economic Research (IPEA) of Brazil.	2	Latin American Center for Human Economy (Claeh) of Uruguay.	1.4
Foundation for the Advancement of Reforms and Opportunities (Grupo Faro) of Ecuador.	2	Group of Analysis for Development (Grade) of Peru.	1.4
Center for Analysis and Diffusion of the Paraguayan Economy (Cadep) of Paraguay.	2	Corporation of Studies for Latin America (Cieplan) of Chile.	1.4
Ecuadorian Institute of Political Economy (IEEP) of Ecuador.	2	Brazilian Center of Analysis and Planning (Cebrap) of Brazil.	1.4
Brazilian Center for International Relations (Cebri) of Brazil.	1.4	Chile Foundation 21 of Chile.	1.4
Argentine Council for International Relations (CARI) of Argentina.	1.4	Center for State and Society Studies (Cedes) of Argentina.	1.4
Center for the Implementation of Public Policies for Equity and Growth (Cippec) of Argentina.	1.4	Latin American Economic Research Foundation (FIEL) of Argentina.	1.4
Center for Public Studies (CEP) of Chile.	1.4	Freedom and Democracy Institute (ILD) of Peru.	0.6
Center for the Study of Economic and Social Reality (Ceres) of Uruguay.	1.4	Salvadoran Foundation for Economic and Social Development (Fusades) of El Salvador.	0.2
Association for Research and Social Studies (Asies) of Guatemala.	1.4		

Source: Own elaboration.

Focusing on the only two think tanks that achieve the greatest interaction with internet users in terms of monological tools, both have all the types of resources included in this category. However, in the case of tools supporting dialog (Table 8), these research centers do not have all the available tools. The Center for the Dissemination of Economic Knowledge for Freedom (Cedice) provides more tools ($n = 11$) than does the Latin American Council of Social Sciences (Clacso) ($n = 8$). No think tank has more resources on its website than Cedice does, but other research institutes do have more or equal numbers of dialogic tools. However, the type of category to which it belongs determines that it does not have a higher level of interactivity. This is the case for the Argentine Council for International Re-

lations (CARI) and the Ecuadorian Institute of Political Economy (IEEP), which have ten tools, and for Fedesarrollo de Colombia and the Brazilian think tanks Brazilian Center for Analysis and Planning (Cebrap) and the Applied Economic Research Institute (IPEA), with nine tools.

On the opposite side of the scale, as centers that offer less communicative interaction, Peru’s Institute for Liberty and Democracy (ILD) stands out in the first place, as it presents only three types of tools and has very outdated information on its website and social network profiles, followed by the Uruguayan think tanks CURI and ClaeH and the Salvadoran Foundation for Economic and Social Development, which present only four bi-directional tools.

Table 8. Dialogic tools used by the websites with the highest level of interactivity

Categories	Think tanks	Clacso (Argentina)	Cedice (Venezuela)
Connect	Subscription forms for content syndication (RSS/newsletter).	0	0
	Registration to intranet.	0	1
	Web search.	1	1
	Download files.	1	1
	Space or registry for hiring researchers, services, projects, practices (scholarships).	1	1
	Space dedicated to affiliation and membership.	1	0
Share	Tool/button for sending information to external sites/tagging.	0	1
	Tool/button for sharing on social networks.	1	1
	Personalization of content (follow favorite authors and publications, etc.).	0	0
Review/ comment	Surveys.	0	0
	Possibility of making comments on the website.	0	0
	Blog with the possibility of user response.	0	0
	Possibility of evaluation/scoring web content.	0	0
Participate	Space to make purchases.	0	0
	Signing of user requests.	0	0
	Space to request participation in events or request to view them online.	0	1
	Online space dedicated to sending inquiries.	1	1
	Online space dedicated to support, financial donations, or sponsorship.	0	1
	Space dedicated to proposals by users.	1	1

Categories	Think tanks	Clacso (Argentina)	Cedice (Venezuela)
Collaborate	Forum (online discussion sites).	0	1
	Space for collaborating as an expert/online volunteer or uploading content (cocreation of web content).	1	0

Source: Own elaboration.

Discussion and conclusion

The results of the study allow us to conclude that the digital space composing the official websites of the most influential Latin American think tanks, according to the report by McGann (2021), presents a high–medium interactivity index in terms of monological aspects. However, with regard to the use of bidirectional tools, which allow greater user participation and involvement, most websites present a medium level, with only two research centers reaching the upper level and with a strong presence of asymmetric resources.

Consistent with previous studies (Aced-Toledano and Lalueza, 2018; Capriotti et al., 2016; Capriotti et al., 2019; Navarro-Beltrá et al., 2020; Zeler, 2020), communicative behavior in the online environment of organizations, regardless of their nature, is currently based more on the unidirectional dissemination of information than on interaction and dialog. This implies few opportunities for a symmetrical bidirectional presentation between the integral parts of the communication process. In addition to what is suggested in the work of Shoai (2020), organizations—despite a long journey in the theorization of public relations, which highlights the potentialities of dialog with the relational universe of organisms, coupled with the possibilities that it offers the digital ecosystem—have not taken advantage of these opportunities, which would strengthen ties with the different audiences on which their survival depends. Although the online medium can provide great possibilities for organizations to approach and establish dialogical communication and obtain greater involvement or engagement on the part of various audiences, achieving optimal and effective communication depends more on the will of the organization than on the functionalities of the medium.

On the basis of the data collected, it can be concluded that, like other organizations, think tanks have not yet migrated to the Web 2.0 model, nor have they been able to exploit its many advantages. This communicative behavior greatly limits these organizations. Since they have to interact with public decision-makers, they need to increase their visibility and support to guarantee the success of their objectives and actions. The inability to adapt to an optimal bidirectional communication model, as well as an underuse of resources that promote interaction, can be associated with negative results in relationships with other audiences of these centers. Among the potential negative results is the impression of detachment between the organization and its audiences, which, in turn, could harm think tanks in terms of trust and loyalty. Therefore, think tanks must reorient their communication strategies toward more active and dialogical practices if they wish to achieve their goals.

The achievement of the objectives proposed in this study can be confirmed. We aimed to understand the online communication of think tanks based in Latin America through their official websites and examined the use of unidirectional and bidirectional communication tools. We thereby determined the level of interactivity achieved by each of these think tanks in the digital field and identified the leading think tanks in terms of interactive and dialogic strategies.

In relation to the limitations of this work, the studied sample could be extended to research centers in other countries and continents for comparison and consolidation of the results of the present investigation. To address these limitations, future studies of a comparative nature could be conducted to analyze the communicative behavior of think tanks in the global digital environment.

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