The appeal to emotions in the discourse of populist political actors from Spain, Italy, France and the United Kingdom on Twitter

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Western democracies live a populist impulse. In this context, the consolidation of digital technologies plays a key role due to their possibilities of efficiently spreading messages. This research examines the role that emotions play in the communication strategy on Twitter of populist actors from four European countries: Spain, Italy, France and the United Kingdom. The sample comprises the messages shared by four European political parties: Podemos, 5 Star Movement, National Front and UKIP and their respective leaders during the analysis period. In total, 9,128 messages are analyzed. The main findings show that fear, uncertainty or resentment are the emotions most frequently used by populist parties and leaders. Likewise, negative emotions have been observed in those messages whose primary actor is the political, economic and media classes, the European Union or immigration, while positive emotions, such as joy or pride, are associated with the figure of the leader and the party.

1. Introduction

The populist phenomenon has marked the political debate during the last decades, especially in Europe, where far-right populist parties increased their presence in the prior elections to the European Parliament (Mudde, 2019). In Italy, the 5 Star Movement was the option with the majority of electoral votes in the 2018 elections and managed to govern thanks to Matteo Salvini's League (Chiaramonte et al., 2018). In France, Marine Le Pen's National Front obtained 7.5 million votes and managed to advance to the second round of the 2017 presidential elections (Ivaldi, 2018), a success repeated in 2022 when votes increased by almost one million. In Spain, Podemos managed to enter the Spanish Parliament in 2016 (Casero-Ripollés et al., 2017; López-Rodríguez et al., 2021). Since the 2019 elections, it has governed together with the Socialist Party, elections in which VOX obtained representation and became the third most-voted political option. These are just a few examples of an expanding phenomenon (Mudde, 2004) that implies the development and consolidation of new populist movements, both from the left and the right, that seek to break the status quo that has prevailed until now (Gerbaudo, 2018).

A transition is taking place between the old, embodied by neoliberalism, and the new, populism as the dominant narrative (Gramsci, 1971). These new political movements, which emerged after the representation crisis, seek to fill the void left by the establishment parties. In this context, popular sovereignty functions as a link between progressive and conservative populists (Gerbaudo, 2017) who, in both cases, seek to regain control of their territory and the autonomy lost in an extremely globalized world, in which the interconnections

between countries oppress the decision-making capacity of the States. It is a phenomenon, therefore, that involves numerous challenges at the political and social level, but also at the communicative level.

Scholars specializing in the field of populism consider that it is a modern phenomenon, which emerged at the end of the 19th century in Russia and the United States (Walicki, 1969; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). However, Europe does not have a long populist tradition. At the start of the 20th century, small agrarian movements appeared, however, most of them were repressed by authoritarian movements (Mudde, 2012). In the 1980s, some political parties emerged that responded to this phenomenon, mostly because of the social movements that had been formed in the previous decade. Despite not being their central ideological trait, the environmentalist parties used populist rhetoric to capture the attention of the citizenry. The parties of the radical right, which had been characterized by their elitism until then, reinvented themselves in the mid-1980s and presented themselves as the defenders and voice of the people (Betz, 1994; Mudde, 2007). Although the first European populist parties, such as the Flemish Bloc in Belgium and the National Front in France, managed to enter Parliament in the 1980s, it was not until the 1990s that they began to occupy a prominent place within European politics. The Italian Northern League was the first populist force to enter the government in 1994 and the Austrian Freedom Party followed suit in 2000 (Mudde, 2011).

In this context, social media plays a fundamental role. Existing studies emphasize that populism draws on the inherent values of the digital media system to favor its communication (Engesser et al., 2017a). This is because it is extremely difficult for them to circumvent the filter of the conventional media, as well as to introduce their messages without restrictions in the agenda that they set (Mazzoleni, 2008; Shoemaker and Vos, 2009; Aalberg and de Vreese, 2017), especially for far-right parties (Jungherr et al., 2019; Pérez-Curiel et al., 2021; Pérez-Curiel and Rivas-de-Roca, 2022), who find in digital platforms a space in which to share extremist messages (Tateo, 2005; Schroeder, 2018). In general, the use of social media by populist political actors is mainly limited to self-promotion of their ideas and criticism of their political rivals (Vaccari and Valeriani, 2015; Casero-Ripollés et al., 2017; Alonso-Muñoz and Casero-Ripollés, 2018; Alonso-Muñoz, 2020). However, some authors also maintain the possibility that they incorporate the characteristics of the populist phenomenon (appeal to the people, criticism of the elites, exclusion of minorities or Euroscepticism) to their communication strategy on digital platforms (Esser et al., 2017; Alonso-Muñoz and Casero-Ripollés, 2020, 2021; Alonso-Muñoz, 2021).

1.1. Populist rhetoric in the digital era

Populism is characterized by its heterogeneity (Caiani and Graziano, 2016; Mudde, 2019), which has generated an arduous academic debate. Some approaches agree that populism is a form of political organization distinguished by the presence of a charismatic leader who governs with the direct support of the people (Taggart, 2000; Weyland, 2001). Others consider it a communicative style

(Jagers and Walgrave, 2007; Bos et al., 2011; Moffitt, 2016). Several authors define it as a moldable ideology (Abts and Rummens, 2007; Mudde, 2007; Albertazzi and y McDonnell, 2008; Aalberg and de Vreese, 2017) that consider that society splits into two homogeneous and opposing groups: the good people and the corrupt elite (Mudde, 2004).

Despite the fact that all these approaches consider that appealing to the people and criticizing the elites are the two fundamental pillars of the populist phenomenon (Rooduijn, 2014; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017; Hameleers, 2018; Alonso-Muñoz, 2021), the study of populism over the last decade has shown the existence of other characteristics that are gaining importance in the communication strategy of populist political actors, such as the narrative of the crisis, the exclusion of minorities or euroscepticism (Alonso-Muñoz and Casero-Ripollés, 2020, 2021). Likewise, Engesser et al. (2017b) state that the populist communicative style is mainly characterized by being simple, emotional and negative. Populist actors tend to reduce the complexity of the messages they send (Canovan, 1999), often placing themselves in binary positions: black and white, with me or against me, etc. (Hawkins, 2009). This dichotomous thought serves them, for example, to present and defend the antagonism between the 'people' and the 'elite': either you are with 'us' or you are the establishment. Likewise, they adopt positions of exclusion with particular groups. This behavior enables them to differentiate themselves from traditional political rhetoric (Oliver and Rahn, 2016).

The use of simple and colloquial language, with understandable terms for all social classes, and the inclusion of stereotypes (Strömbäck, 2008; Oliver and Rahn, 2016) are also frequent in the messages launched by populist actors. They often use vulgar language, which can even be insulting toward the enemy. The objective is to move the citizenry's conscience to demonstrate the essence of the evil suffered by "the people" or to identify the culprits (Charaudeau, 2009).

The appeal to emotions is another of the elements that characterize the rhetoric of populist actors. Fear, uncertainty or resentment are frequent in their messages (Wodak, 2015; Caiani and Graziano, 2016; Hameleers et al., 2016; Alonso-Muñoz and Casero-Ripollés, 2020). The use of this type of emotions helps them to differentiate themselves from the rest of the actors. Negative emotions are related to the actors, the establishment and the groups that are not part of the people. On the contrary, the positive ones are usually associated with the figure of the leader or the party (Engesser et al., 2017a). On many occasions, they even seek to provoke polemics and controversies to address particular issues when using emotional language (Haller, 2015).

Among other reasons, the use of negative emotions results from the fact that populist actors convey the idea that the system does not work correctly, portraying the reality of citizens as desperate. For the populist message to have an effect on citizens, the situation does not need to be difficult but merely to appear so. In this regard, Elchardus and Spruyt (2016) have detected that populist actors mainly promote two attitudes with this communicative style: rejection and relative privation. The first alludes to the opinion that society develops negatively, highlighting the system deficiencies. On the other hand, relative privation refers to the fact that some

society members live better than others and therefore have a better position than oneself. Along the same lines are the theses of Charaudeau (2009, p. 264), who considers that populist discourse is a "manipulation strategy" that "plays with emotions to the detriment of political reason".

In this context, some authors consider that the success of populism lies in its communicative strategy (Jagers and Walgrave, 2007; Casero-Ripollés et al., 2017; de Vreese et al., 2018; Rúas-Araújo and Casero-Ripollés, 2018). Conventional media, such as television, the press and radio, offer political actors a way of contacting citizens (Krämer, 2014). However, it is hard for populist actors to get past the filter of journalists and introduce their messages without restrictions (Shoemaker and Vos, 2009). But social media enable them to bypass the conventional media (Groshek and Engelbert, 2013; Engesser et al., 2017b), making it easier for their messages to reach the public directly (Bennett and Manheim, 2006; Vaccari and Valeriani, 2015). Populist politicians capitalize on the power and influence of social media in shaping citizen opinion by disseminating populist ideas, such as attacking 'elites' or defending the 'people' (Engesser et al., 2017a). Thus, platforms such as Twitter, where 98% of world leaders are present (Burson Cohen and Wolfe, 2020), have become essential tools for populist actors since they enable them to communicate directly, quickly and easily with their voters (Esser et al., 2017), while proposing their agenda and framing (Gainous and Wagner, 2014; Alonso-Muñoz, 2020).

In accordance with what is described in the literature, the following research questions are posed:

RQ1: Do European populist political actors use emotions in messages they post on their Twitter timeline?

RQ2: What emotions prevail in the Twitter messages of populist political actors?

RQ3: The messages published by populist political actors on Twitter that contain any emotion, how are they framed?

2. Data and method

To answer the research questions raised in this paper, both quantitative and qualitative analyses were conducted. The objective is not only to know the presence of emotions in the communication strategy on Twitter (RQ1 and RQ2) but also to understand the framing of this type of message (RQ3).

To answer research questions 1 and 2, quantitative content analysis is used. The implementation of this technique will allow knowing in an objective, systematic and quantitative way the content of the analyzed tweets, in such a way that its operation will be known and, therefore, its degree of influence will be determined (Bardin, 1996; Igartua and Humanes, 2004). Additionally, to answer the third research question, critical discourse analysis is used (Wodak and Meyer, 2003; Van Dijk, 2012). This type of analysis is fundamentally focused on the existing power relations between groups, considering discourse as a way of articulating symbolic power. In this sense, discourse is seen as one of the most important determinants of public opinion as it is a key tool in the social construction of reality (Van Dijk, 2006).

To conduct the quantitative content analysis, an analysis protocol has been designed that includes the primary emotions collected by the literature in the field of psychology, which defines two types of emotions: basic and social emotions. Basic emotions are the non-complex emotions that a human being can feel throughout the day. Fernández-Abascal et al. (2002) and Palmero and Fernández-Abascal (2002) collect six basic emotions:

1. Fear. It occurs when there is a stimulus, event or situation that, after being valued by an individual, is related to the physical, mental or social threat.
2. Joy. It occurs as a consequence of the positive assessment that the goals or objectives to be achieved are close, can be maintained, or can be recovered.
3. Surprise. It occurs after the reaction to something unexpected or strange.
4. Anger. It occurs when an individual assesses a particular stimulus or situation, concluding that some goal or possession, material or immaterial, is threatened by an external agent or by the inexperience or incapacity of the individual himself.
5. Sadness. It occurs when an individual perceives that he has lost something important.
6. Revulsion. It occurs when an individual feels a marked aversion produced by something significantly unpleasant or disgusting.

On the other hand, social emotions make sense in their relationship with others. They arise in a specific social context, where meaning is provided, and they need the analysis of others to be properly understood (Chóliz and Gómez, 2002). Chóliz and Gómez (2002) and Etxebarria (2002) list six emotions of this type:

1. Guilt. Caused by the desire to make amends, guilt promotes a certain sense of moral worth and respect for the rights and feelings of others.
2. Shame. Caused by the desire to escape from a situation, it promotes adherence to norms about laudable conduct and points out behaviors that threaten honor or self-esteem.
3. Pride. It occurs when an individual feels that he has achieved an important achievement.4. Jealousy. It occurs when an individual feels that a desire that he intends to achieve is obtained by another person.
4. Envy. It occurs when an individual longs for something that others possess and wishes that those people suffer some misfortune for it.
5. Empathy. It occurs when an individual can understand how another individual is and acts accordingly.

The sample of this research contains the messages published on Twitter by four European populist political parties and their respective leaders during three random time periods. Social media have sharpened the dynamics of the permanent campaign (Larrondo-Ureta, 2016). The strategic management of digital platforms such as Twitter helps political actors to maintain their initiative in the communication field (Larsson, 2016). For this

reason, since the objective is to analyze the usual communication strategy of the selected political actors on Twitter, an attempt has been made to avoid any relevant political event that could alter it, ruling out electoral periods. In this context, the tweets published during May 2016, November 2016 and March 2017 are analyzed.

Specifically, the profiles chosen to carry out the analysis are Podemos and Pablo Iglesias (Spain); 5 Star Movement (5SM) and Beppe Grillo (Italy); National Front (NF) and Marine Le Pen (France); and the UK Independence Party (UKIP), Nigel Farage (party leader until 30 November 2016) and Paul Nuttall (leader from 30 November 2016 until 9 June 2017) (United Kingdom).

Three criteria were considered for the selection of the sample: (1) the ideological axis, that allows us to know if there are differences in communication between progressive and conservative political actors; (2) the old-new axis, taking into consideration the history of the political formations; and (3) the relevance of their countries in Europe according to data from the International Monetary Fund (France, the United Kingdom, Italy, and Spain are the four European powers).

Podemos emerged in 2014, in a context marked by the economic crisis, the credibility crisis of public institutions and numerous cases of corruption (Gómez-Fortes and Urquizu, 2015; Pavía et al., 2016). Its irruption significantly transformed the Spanish political landscape, which has gone from being a two-party system to a multi-party one in which four political forces capitalized more than 80% of the vote (Cordero and Montero, 2015; Orriols and Cordero, 2016). Classified as a left-wing populist party, Podemos has numerous characteristics typical of traditional social democracy and Eurocommunism, such as the use of a patriotic discourse (Bassets, 2015). Its internal organization was like the organizational structure of a social movement, where citizen participation in decision-making is promoted (Torreblanca, 2015), although over the years the decision-making process has been institutionalized (Muñoz-Sánchez and Pérez-Flores, 2016). After the electoral repetition due to the lack of agreement between the different political forces in 2019, Podemos and the Socialist Party agreed to form a coalition government.

On October 4, 2009, the comedian Beppe Grillo and Gianroberto Casaleggio, an Italian entrepreneur specializing in communication and internet, founded the 5 Star Movement (5SM), which they classified as a "free association of citizens". The 5SM defines itself as an environmental, Eurosceptic and anti-euro movement. They are against the classic political parties and the corruption and support direct democracy (Grillo, 2010). Considered a left-wing populist party, it managed to consolidate itself in 2018, when it obtained more than ten million votes, being the most voted party. After months of negotiations, the 5SM and the Lega closed an agreement to form a government. However, the legislature was marked by disagreements between them. In the elections held in 2022, the 5SM was one of the big losers, getting only 4 million votes.

The National Front was founded in 1972 with the aim of introducing French nationalism as a key element and bringing together right-wing political forces. It was not until 1986 when a change in the electoral law favored them and they entered the National Assembly for the first time. After this first electoral victory, the party and its leader, Jean-Marie Le Pen, began to gain some

notoriety in the media for their controversial statements against immigration. In January 2011, the NF decided to renew itself and the bases chose Marine Le Pen to lead the party and give it a new air of modernity. The objective was to separate the NF from the controversy surrounding its father and previous leader, Jean-Marie Le Pen, in order to capture the youngest vote. The regional elections of December 2015 gave a glimpse of a stronger NF, which gathered more support than the party had previously achieved. This trend was consolidated in the 2017 and 2022 presidential elections where they managed to advance to the second round. On June 1, 2018, the party was rebranded as Rassemblement National.

The United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) is a right-wing populist political party (Clarke et al., 2016), founded in 1993 by Alan Sked. The formation was born as a split between members of the Anti-Federalist League and the Eurosceptic wing of the Conservative Party, contrary to the Maastricht Treaty and the adoption of the euro as a common currency. After years of ups and downs, UKIP has no representatives in the British Parliament. However, his greatest achievement is not negligible, since they have managed to get many citizens residing in the United Kingdom to vote in favor of leaving the European Union, one of the basic principles that the party has defended since its creation. UKIP suffered a major split at the hands of the Brexit Party in 2019 and lost all representation after the European Parliament elections.

The messages were downloaded using the Twitonomy web application, which in its paid version enables to download the tweets, retweets and responses of the selected profiles. 9,128 units are analyzed (2,348 belong to the leaders and 6,780 to the parties), which include both tweets and responses but not retweets since they serve to redistribute information published by other users (Larsson, 2015), a useless aspect for answering the research questions posed here (Table 1).

The analysis has been carried out using the statistical package SPSS (v.25).

3. Results

3.1. The appeal to emotions in the Twitter discourse of European populist political leaders

The existing literature has defined the appeal to emotions as an element that represents the rhetoric of populist political actors (Wodak, 2015; Caiani and Graziano, 2016). The leaders analyzed share this vision and appeal to emotions in more than 70% of their messages (Table 2).

UKIP leaders are those with the highest values (80.08%), followed by Marine Le Pen (75.04%), Pablo Iglesias (73.75) and Beppe Grillo (70.33%) (Table 3). In this sense, the use of emotions in the messages shared by the leaders moves in a range of 10%. Thus, the differences lie in the type of emotions in the messages (Table 3).

Pablo Iglesias shows different emotions in his messages (Table 3). There are positive and happy tweets (54.72%) especially linked to the so-called soft topics, such as sports, movies or literature, and more personal topics. The leader of Podemos shows

TABLE 1 Distribution of the sample analyzed.

Temporary period	Type of message	Podemos	NF	5SM	UKIP	P. Iglesias	M. Le Pen	B. Grillo	N. Farage	P. Nuttall	Total analyzed
May 2016	Tweets	2,020	507	80	435	155	412	97	145	–	3,851
	Replies	4	0	0	0	26	0	0	0	–	30
	Total	2,024	507	80	435	181	412	97	145	–	3,881
November 2016	Tweets	1,190	582	143	107	175	174	114	66	–	2,551
	Replies	7	0	0	0	39	0	0	0	–	46
	Total	1,197	582	143	107	214	174	114	66	–	2,597
March 2017	Tweets	726	698	57	146	145	643	89	–	45	2,549
	Replies	78	0	0	0	23	0	0	–	0	101
	Total	804	698	57	146	168	643	89	–	45	2650
Total analyzed		4,025	1,787	280	688	563	1,229	300	211	45	9,128

TABLE 2 Appeal to the emotions of European populist political leaders on Twitter.

Appeal to emotions	P. Iglesias (%)	B. Grillo (%)	M. Le Pen (%)	N. Farage + P. Nuttall (%)
Yes	72.86	68.33	74.87	78.91
No	26.25	29.67	24.96	19.92

TABLE 3 Type of emotions present in the tweets shared by European populist political leaders.

Emotion	P. Iglesias (%)	B. Grillo (%)	M. Le Pen (%)	N. Farage + P. Nuttall (%)
Joy	55.39	2.44	15.21	51.98
Anger	29.41	39.51	73.38	33.66
Sadness	3.19	2.93	1.34	1.98
Shame	3.68	26.34		1.49
Pride	6.86	28.78	7.61	7.92
Empathy	1.47		2.46	1.49
Astonishment				1.49
Total	100	100	100	100

pride in his team and everything they are achieving together. This feeling emerges in numerous messages in which he talks about the initiatives developed by the Cádiz city council, led by José María González (Kichi). Also, when he speaks about the schemes run by the Madrid and Barcelona consistories, led at that time by Manuela Carmena and Ada Colau, both members of the confluences aligned with Podemos in the elections in those cities (Figure 1).

Negative feelings such as anger (29.06%) or shame (3.63%) relate to messages where Iglesias denounces corruption cases affecting the Partido Popular or controversial actions. For example, the story of an aged woman who died after a fire broke out in her house when she could not pay for the electricity. This fact motivated the harshest messages from Iglesias, both against the Government and Isidro Fainé, director of Gas Natural, from whom he demanded an explanation.

Beppe Grillo holds a wide range of emotions in his messages (Table 3). However, unlike the data presented by Pablo Iglesias, the Italian leader exhibits high values in three categories: anger (39.51%), pride (28.78%) and shame (26.34%). Negative feelings, such as anger and shame, are always linked to the actions of political rivals, particularly those of the Democratic Party and Matteo Renzi (Figure 1). Grillo is angry at the government's mismanagement of public resources, while poverty increases among Italians. Also, the leader of the 5 Star Movement is ashamed of the corruption involving the conventional parties as these cases remember the spirit of the "tangentopolis", one of the most significant cases of corruption experienced in Italy. This case was strong enough to overthrow the First Italian Republic. This is in line with the fundamental principles of the party, where they advocated direct democracy and the tireless fight against political corruption, considered one of the endemic problems of Italian politics. On the contrary, positive feelings, such as pride, are linked to the achievements of the party and its members. Thus, Grillo is proud of the collegiate decision-making that defines the party, the positive performance of Virginia Raggi as mayoress of Rome or the ethical code they have and to which they strictly comply.
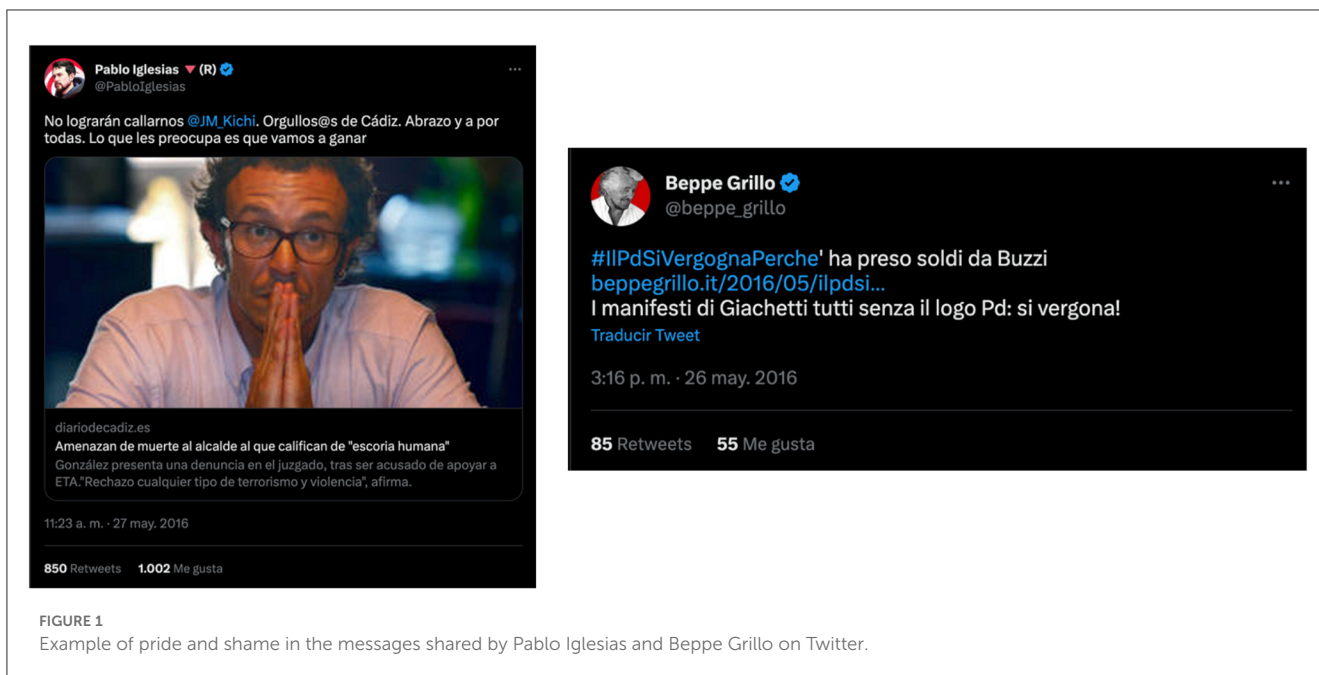
FIGURE 1
Example of pride and shame in the messages shared by Pablo Iglesias and Beppe Grillo on Twitter.

TABLE 4 Appeal to the emotions of European populist political parties on Twitter.

Appeal to emotions	Podemos (%)	5SM (%)	NF (%)	UKIP (%)
Yes	72.91	50.71	86.40	40.84
No	27.09	49.29	13.60	59.16

TABLE 5 Type of emotions present in the tweets shared by European populist political parties.

| Emotion	Podemos (%)	5SM (%)	NF (%)	UKIP (%)
Joy	12.45	2.15	7.22	28.83
Anger	70.24	28.57	83.33	65.33
Sadness				
Shame		47.14		
Pride	17.32	22.14	9.45	5.84
Total	100	100	100	100

Marine Le Pen is angry in 73.38% of the messages (Table 3). Her irritation is closely related to three types of actors. First, her political opponents. In particular, she seems furious with Emmanuele Macron, whom she considers her direct rival. Le Pen harshly criticizes his political program accusing him of presenting vague proposals without specifying any action when gaining the Elysee. Secondly, she is upset with the European Union and with prominent members such as Angela Merkel, whom she accuses of not looking out for the general interest, but only for Germany's. She blames the European Union for the migratory flow and the presence of refugees in France. Third, and linked to the above, she complains about immigrants in general and Muslims in particular, with whom Le Pen is angry for refusing to adapt to the customs of France while trying to impose their own, such as the use of

the burqa among women. Le Pen is in favor of recovering the national sovereignty of France to be able to legislate on matters such as the closure of borders, which would allow it to limit the free movement of people. Although to a lesser extent, she also presents happy messages (15.21%) and pride (7.61%), always linked to the party's achievements.

Nigel Farage and Paul Nuttall are the leaders who present a greater variety of sentiments in their messages (Table 3), most of them positive. Joy (51.98%) and pride (7.92%) account for a large part of the tweets of both leaders. Farage and Nuttall tie the positive sentiments to Brexit issues, claiming credit to be the only force "fighting for the future of the British people". They also show joy when sharing messages about electoral visits and feel grateful for the number of people who support them. Negative feelings, such as anger (33.66%) or shame (1.49%), have two clear recipients: the EU and immigration, linked to the terrorist attacks the United Kingdom suffered in 2016 and 2017. In the same way as the French leader, Farage and Nuttall are in favor of closing borders and not allowing immigrants to enter the United Kingdom.

3.2. The appeal to emotions in the Twitter discourse of European populist political parties

Although the data reveals that populist leaders present high values in terms of the appeal to emotions in their messages, there is a massive disparity in the profiles of the parties analyzed. Podemos

FIGURE 2
Example of messages showing emotions on the Twitter timeline of European populist political parties.
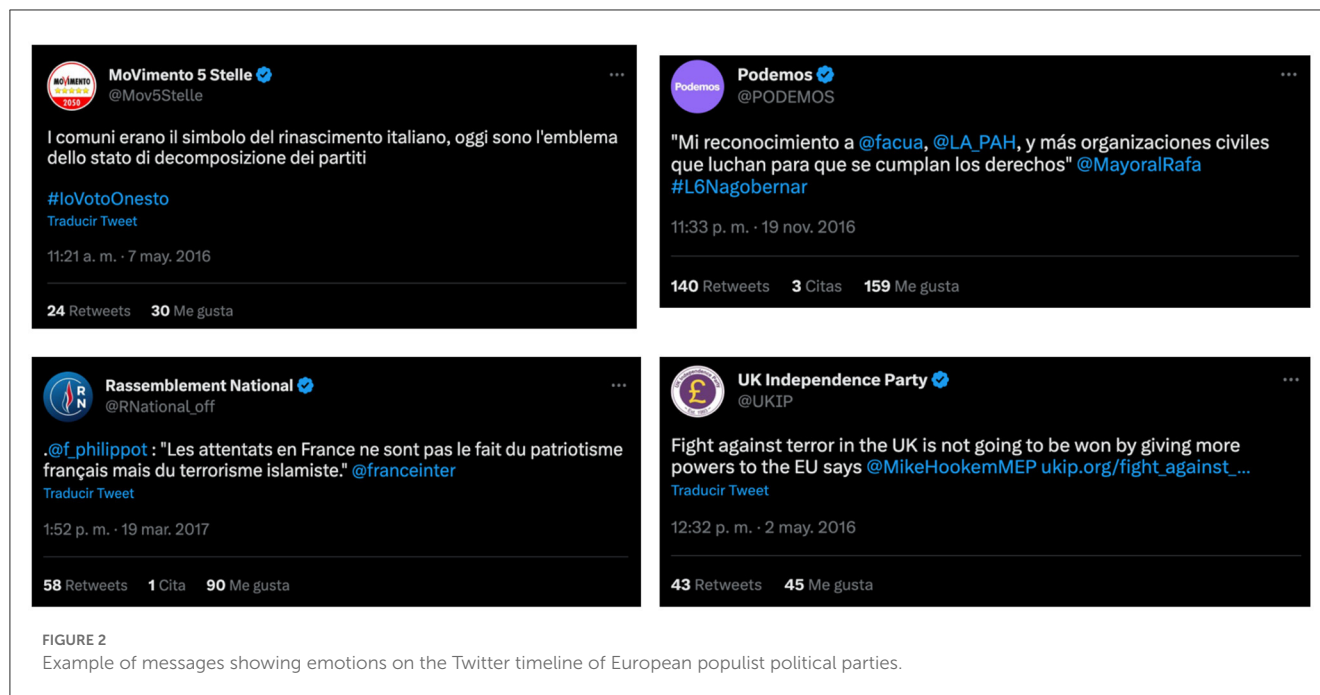
(72.91%) and Front National (86.40%) are the two parties with a more prominent presence of emotions in the messages they share on their Twitter profiles (Table 4). The percentage decreases in the profiles of the 5 Star Movement (50.71%) and UKIP (40.84%).

All the parties present values with the same emotions, and only the 5 Star Movement presents a slightly different strategy from the rest (Table 5). To a greater or lesser extent, the four profiles show anger, pride and joy, and the 5 Star Movement also has high shame values.

Joy and pride are used positively to highlight the achievements of the party and its members. Also, these emotions are used to thank the supporters and their presence at the events they organize. Thus, for example, the 5 Star Movement and Podemos show special pride in the democratic regeneration they represent concerning the previous "regime" (Figure 2). They show pride for all the achievements obtained during the few years of life that both formations have. In this sense, both political parties consider that if it had not been for their work, issues such as corruption would not have been addressed, nor would improvements have been achieved in their respective countries. In addition, Podemos's profile displays the emotion of pride when the messages deal with achievements related to groups linked to civil society, such as 15M or the Platform for People Affected by Mortgages. In both cases, Podemos recognizes the great work that social movements have done and is proud of the people who work for them (Figure 2).

Negative feelings, such as anger and shame in the case of the 5 Star Movement, are used when tweets deal with aspects related to political rivals or those groups part of the 'elite'. The UKIP and the National Front display anger with the candidates of other political formations and specific groups or institutions. In this sense, the National Front is significantly upset with the rise of "mass immigration" in France, as they blame immigrants for stealing the rights of French citizens (Figure 2). UKIP is annoyed with the European Union and its policies, especially the ones concerning anti-terrorism and immigration (Figure 2). In both cases, the messages are in line with what was expressed by their political leaders on their Twitter accounts. Showing an alignment in the arguments and messages published by the political parties and their respective leaders.

In short, it has been observed how, generally, populist political parties use emotions in their messages with a similar strategy in the four cases. They use positive feelings such as joy and pride when sharing tweets that refer to aspects related to training or organizations. However, when talking about political opponents and, in some cases, about particular groups or collectives, the messages are framed under the umbrella of anger, constantly linking them with negative aspects.

4. Conclusion and discussion

The analysis conducted in this research has enabled us to verify that European populist political actors massively employ emotions in the messages they share on Twitter. Thus, in responding to RQ1, both in the accounts of the parties and leaders, countless messages were detected where emotions can be clearly and explicitly observed. However, the percentage of messages of this type is slightly higher in the profiles of the leaders, who present more similar values between them.

Regarding the type of emotions that prevail in these messages (RQ2), fear, uncertainty, or resentment are the most frequent in their communication. These findings conform to what previous studies revealed (Wodak, 2015; Caiani and Graziano, 2016). Likewise, it is interesting to highlight the significant differences concerning the leaders. Pablo Iglesias and the UKIP leaders show joy in more than half of the messages they share with users, while Marine Le Pen shows anger in more than 70% of her tweets. However, Beppe Grillo presents a more compartmentalized and balanced use of emotions, where, although anger prevails, shame and pride are also present.

Among the messages shared by the parties, the use of emotions is similar. In the case of Podemos, the National Front and UKIP, anger prevails, complemented by messages of pride and joy. The 5 Star Movement presents a different strategy and three-quarters of their messages gravitate between anger and shame.

Regarding how the European populist actors analyzed (RQ3) frame these messages, the analysis reveals that regardless of the ideological axis in which they find themselves, the use of positive and negative emotions is conducted likewise and with the same objective. In this sense, we can observe how negative emotions appear in those messages whose main actor is the political, economic and media classes, the European Union or immigration. That is when talking about groups that do not belong to the 'people'. With the use of emotional language, they seek to provoke controversy and debate when addressing controversial issues, as is the case of immigration in the profiles of conservative populists (Haller, 2015). On the contrary, positive emotions, such as joy or pride, are associated with the figure of the leader and the party (Engesser et al., 2017a). In this case, they seek reaffirmation in front of the citizens to present themselves as an option capable of governing. In addition, in the case of Podemos, pride appears when they spoke about affiliated groups such as the Platform for People Affected by the Mortgage or the 15M. These are movements with which they share some of their programmatic axes. Many of the messages they share remain between anger and shame.

Data availability statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

Author contributions

LA-M collected data, conducted data analysis, developed the concept of the manuscript, and wrote the paper. AC-R reviewed the paper and obtained the research fundings. All authors contributed to manuscript revision, read, and approved the submitted version.

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Conflict of interest

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