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The digital interactivity of US think tanks' communications

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The communicative actions of think tanks play a fundamental role in shaping public policies and social discourse, with their capacity for interaction with diverse audiences being vital to maximizing their influence. This study conducts a quantitative content analysis of the communication tools utilized on the websites of the 25 most influential think tanks in North America, as identified in McGann's (2021) report. It assesses the degree of interactivity fostered by these platforms in their relationship with users, revealing that, while the interactivity of one-way tools is notably high, the options for bidirectional interaction remain at a moderate level, characterized by a predominance of asymmetric resources. The findings suggest that, despite effective information transmission, think tanks must adopt more dynamic and participatory communication strategies that promote genuine dialogue and greater collaboration, thereby adapting to a constantly evolving digital environment that demands stronger connections with diverse audiences.

KEYWORDS

think tanks, digital communication, political communication, interactivity, United States, lobby, monologic communication, dialogical communication

1 Introduction

Currently, the positioning of think tanks as actors of significant influence in the social and political spheres is undeniable, especially in countries with stable democratic systems. They exert considerable influence on policymakers and the public policy formulation process, as well as in shaping public opinion (Abelson, 2006; Blanc, 2003; Boucher, 2004; Cockett, 1995; Denham and Garnett, 1998; Landry, 2021; Lenglet and Vilain, 2011; Li, 2017; Oreskes and Conway, 2010; Ruser, 2018; Stefancic and Delgado, 1996), even becoming what some refer to as the "fifth power" (McGann, 2016). This influence has been particularly pronounced in English-speaking democracies, primarily in North America, and in Western European states to which these organizations have expanded (Xifra, 2005). However, adaptation in these latter regions has not been entirely optimal (Xifra, 2008).

In scientific literature, there is no consensus on the definition of think tank that encompasses the variety of forms these centers can adopt. However, to narrow down the term for this research, we adopt a prescriptive or ideal perspective (Almiron and Xifra, 2021), while acknowledging that it does not encompass all the types of organizations that self-identify as such. These research centers, which combine expert analysis with political advocacy, perform the following key functions, which vary depending on the context and country in which they are situated: the provision of specialized knowledge across various fields to offer solutions to social problems, acting as intermediaries between academia and politics, and providing recommendations and advice to public officials (McGann and Weaver, 2000). This role grants them a pivotal position to influence policy formulation (Kelstrup, 2016), and in many cases, their ties to political parties or business groups enhance their capacity for influence

(Medvetz, 2012). Additionally, some think tanks serve as mediators, engaging in consensus-building among actors with divergent interests and facilitating dialogue among various sectors of society on governance and public policy issues (Abelson, 2016; Campbell and Pedersen, 2014; McGann, 2016; Stone, 2001). Moreover, they possess a notable ability to influence the formation of the public and political agenda (Åberg et al., 2021; Garsten, 2013), as they can identify, prioritize, promote, and advocate for specific issues to be included in political and public discussions, even defining the framework for such discussions. In this regard, think tanks contribute a particular narrative or approach to addressing the proposed problems (Daviter, 2011; Foye, 2022). This is all facilitated by their prominent presence in mass media (Lalueza and Girona, 2016; Misztal, 2012; Rich and Weaver, 2000) and social media (Zhao and Zhu, 2023).

It is evident that for these research centers, communication management is crucial, and they follow specific communication strategies that fulfill a series of distinct functions (Castillo, 2010). In this communication planning, the digital environment stands out, where think tanks find a key platform to execute these communicative actions aimed at disseminating knowledge and specific proposals, influencing public policies, and strategically coordinating their relationships with various audiences (Castillo-Esparcia et al., 2020). In this online landscape, the website emerges as the most significant 2.0 public relations tool (Aced, 2013; Holtz, 2002; Liberos, 2013); it is utilized as a resource for identity creation and organizational image management (Gatti et al., 2012; Lawrence and Weber, 2013), where both content and design are key factors in generating interest in the organization (Cober et al., 2003). Therefore, it is important for these centers to have effective websites for communication with their relational universe (Marín and Lasso, 2017). To achieve this, the key factors that contribute to effective communication between the organization and its users are primarily usability and ease of navigation, appropriate and useful content for the reader, and interactivity (Díaz et al., 2008; Hassan, 2006; Kaplanidou and Vogt, 2006; Marín and Lasso, 2017; Palmer, 2002).

In relation to interactivity, the website will host both unidirectional and bidirectional communicative tools, although it is the latter that will contribute to the interactive process that fosters and consolidates relationships between the organization and its respective audiences (Guillory and Sundar, 2014; Huertas and Xifra, 2009). It is important to clarify this aspect, as it is essential to distinguish between interactivity understood as a process and as a product (Stromer-Galley, 2004). As a process, interactivity refers to dialogue or direct communication between individuals, whereas, as a product, it alludes to interaction facilitated through technological means (López-Rabadán and Mellado, 2019). In this study, the first perspective is adopted for the analysis of dialogic tools, and the second is used to examine monologic resources and some bidirectional ones.

Focusing on the object of study, think tanks have particularly thrived in the United States due to the specific characteristics of its political system, which has created a unique niche for these social and political actors (Åberg et al., 2021). This structure is marked by high pluralism and lower ideological and institutional cohesion (Chuliá, 2018). Additionally, these organizations have greater access to political decision-makers compared to other countries, benefit from a favorable tax regime that incentivizes private sector donors through tax deductions, and experience significant advantages from the system of revolving doors present in the country, which facilitates personnel

exchanges between public institutions and these research centers (Abelson, 2019).

The analysis of American think tanks in recent decades has been captured in numerous contributions from a political perspective, including those by Smith (1991), Fischer (1991), Abelson (1996, 2002, 2006), Haass (2002), Mella (2003), McGann (2007), Teitz (2009), Medvetz (2012), Drezner (2015), and McGann and Weaver (2017). Other studies following this perspective focus on the research of a single state, such as Wiarda (2015) in Washington, a single American center, as in O'Connor (2008) analysis, the influence of several think tanks in the country (McGinnis, 2023; Zaytsev et al., 2022), or a specific field, like Nicander (2015), who analyzes the impact of American think tanks on security policies. There are also scholarly works that make comparisons between think tanks in Canada and the United States (Abelson, 2009, 2010), China and the United States (Qi, 2018; Wan and Wu, 2018), and Europe and the United States (Lahrant and Boucher, 2005; Rastrick, 2018). Additionally, some studies focus on the media visibility of these centers, such as those by Rich and Weaver (2000) and McDonald (2014), as well as on communication strategies (Castillo and Trujillo, 2012; La Porte, 2019; Jang et al., 2022). However, there are few existing studies that approach this communicative perspective to date (Castillero-Ostio et al., 2024, 2025; Serna-Ortega, 2024). Given that these organizations have consolidated as political agents and, moreover, as highly relevant communicative figures (Almiron and Xifra, 2021), analyzing the communicative activity of these research centers or institutes and foundations within their relational universe in the digital realm is crucial for supporting and enhancing the effectiveness of their actions. Therefore, this study explores the current state of digital communication among the 25 most influential North American think tanks, as ranked in the 2020 Global Go To Think Tank Index Report (McGann, 2021), the leading and most recent international index that assesses the work and impact of think tanks and is the result of an open nomination process followed by a review of the nominations by a committee of experts. The analysis has been carried out through their websites, with a focus on interactivity and dialogue within their digital relational environment. To this end, the following research questions have been formulated:

Q1. To what extent have influential American think tanks evolved towards interactive communication models (Web 2.0), or do they maintain monologic approaches (Web 1.0)?

Q2. What types of unidirectional tools and bidirectional do these centers employ on their platforms for information dissemination and interaction with users?

Q3. What is the level of interactivity and dialogic communication implemented on the official websites of these think tanks?

Q4. Which think tanks provide the greatest opportunities for digital interaction with their audiences?

2 Methods

A methodology based on quantitative content analysis of different websites was employed, with specific analysis templates designed to

collect the necessary information in each case. This methodology was suitably adapted to the type of organization studied, similar to previous studies that evaluated website interactivity (Capriotti et al., 2016; Castillero-Ostio et al., 2024, 2025; Moreno-Cabanillas et al., 2024).

To classify the communication tools, the levels of involvement and interaction that research centers offer to online visitors were determined. Twelve types of information dissemination tools aimed at the general public were identified, along with 21 resources that facilitate dialogue and interaction.

Regarding the communication elements found on websites, we analyzed the one-way (monologic) tools used by think tanks to present and disseminate information. These tools are linear and require little or nothing to get the audience involved. The communication flow is one-way, with think tanks controlling almost all interaction, and the informational content is determined by the organization.

The goal is to engage the user, but only for the purpose of presenting, sharing, or distributing institutional information. User participation is either absent or extremely limited. Communication moves in one direction—from the think tank to the user—who has no ability to contribute or alter any content on the website, resulting in a lack of feedback. These one-way tools are grouped into three categories:

1. **Informative:** Resources that provide information to a passive and receptive web visitor. Informative tools range from graphic and audiovisual tools. These include publications such as studies, thematic reports, books, and articles, as well as informational brochures, annual reports, event calendars, online press rooms, blogs without comment options, news articles, and image galleries.
2. **Hypertextual:** Tools that include links redirecting users to other websites, allowing for greater interaction by enabling users to actively search for additional information on related topics. External links play a key role in this category by giving users more control over their browsing experience.
3. **Participatory:** Tools that encourage more interaction than the previous two categories, such as interactive graphics, infographics, and participatory tools like social media "follow" buttons. These tools allow users to engage with the website's content and demonstrate interest in the organization.

We also classified the dialogic tools used by think tank websites to engage and communicate with online users. These tools, whether asymmetric or symmetric, are built on two-way communication models. They promote greater interaction and dialogue, offering opportunities for exchanging information, engaging in discussions, and fostering collaboration—key features of dialogic communication. Dialogic tools are classified into five categories:

1. **Connectivity:** Tools that allow users to request information. The level of interaction and engagement is extremely low. These includes subscription forms, search engines, or registration forms, with a low level of interaction and connectivity tools such as member areas and file downloads.
2. **Sharing:** Resources that enable users to share information or personalize the content they wish to follow, slightly increasing

their level of participation. Social media sharing buttons allow users to redistribute content found on the websites.
3. **Reviewing/Commenting:** Tools that allow users to leave comments, fill out surveys, and provide feedback by commenting and allowing a user response, providing more freedom in content selection and interaction with the institution, although control over the overall content remains with the organization. In summary, users are provided with tools that allow for moderate to low levels of interaction and participation.
4. **Participatory:** Tools that facilitate more balanced communication between the organization and users, such as sections where users can inquire about events or make requests, but the think tank still holds most control. While users are encouraged to participate more, they lack control over the communication process or website content. These tools offer a high degree of reciprocity between the parties. These includes tools such as support, shop section, sign petitions, suggesting section or sponsorship sections.
5. **Collaborative:** Spaces where users can co-create content alongside the organization, such as forums and sections where users can upload information or collaborate as online experts. Users can modify or add information, independent of think tanks, giving them full involvement and initiative. These tools offer the highest level of interactivity. This represents the highest level of interactivity an organization can provide online.

Once the analysis categories were established, the level of interactivity was assessed using a Likert scale, where each tool type was assigned a weighted value. The values ranged from 1 to 5, with 1 indicating very low interactivity and 5 representing very high interactivity.

A binary 'yes/no' structure was applied to determine the presence or absence of these tools on each think tank website analyzed, where 1 indicated the tool was present and 0 indicated it was absent. This approach was used to correlate the categories with the interactive potential of the websites, considering the one-way tools used to present and disseminate information (see Table 1). In this way, 'graphics' were assigned 1 point (very low interactivity), 'audiovisuals' 2 points (low interactivity), 'hypertextual' 3 points (medium interactivity), 'interactive resources' 4 points (high interactivity), and 'participatory resources' 5 points (very high interactivity).
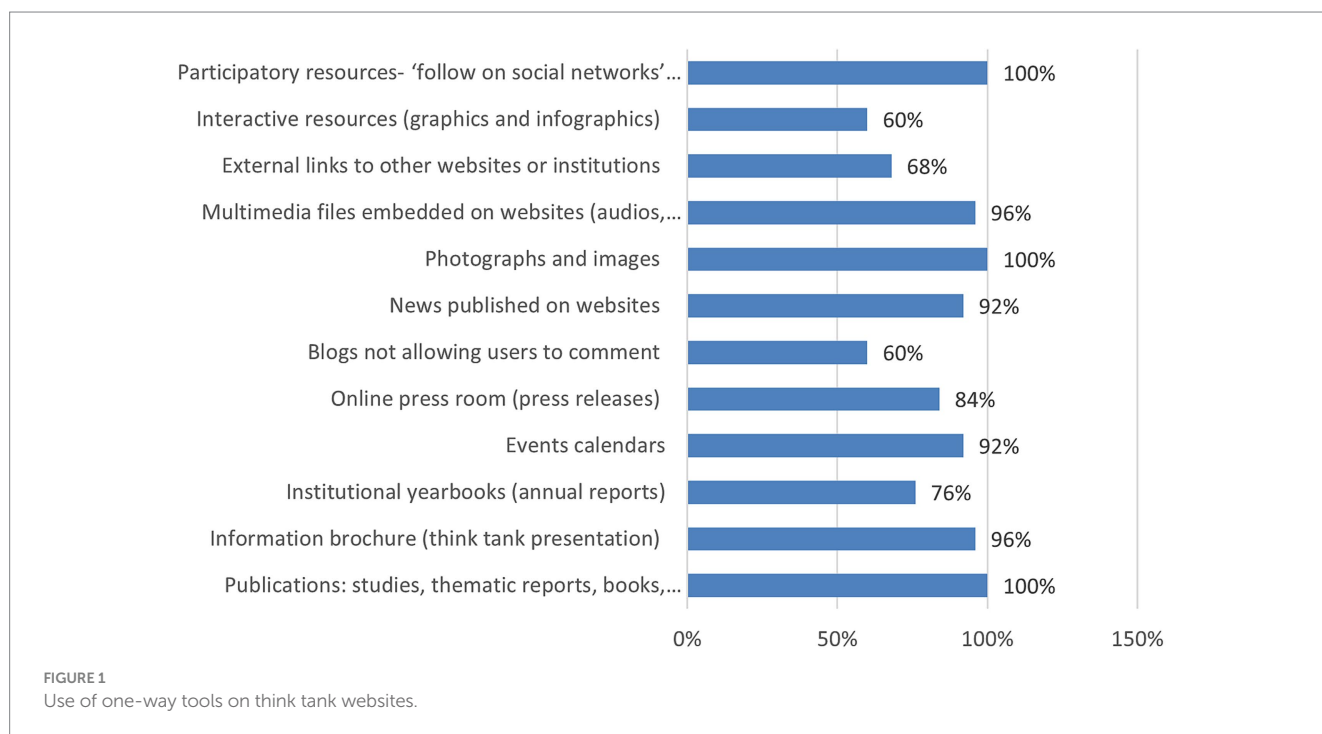
To determine the websites' level of interactivity in relation to the tools that allow interaction and dialogue with users, weighted values were assigned to each category based on the websites' potential for interaction (see Table 1). Thus, 'connectivity' was assigned 1 point (very low interactivity), 'sharing' 2 points (low interactivity), 'reviewing and commenting' 3 points (medium interactivity), 'participatory' 4 points (high interactivity), and 'collaborative' 5 points (very high interactivity).

The average of the total weighted values assigned to each website resource was calculated to determine the interactivity level of each resource. This was measured on a 0–3 point scale, where 1 represents 'low or poor interactivity, '1.1–2 indicates 'moderate interactivity, 'and 2.1–3 reflects 'high or significant interactivity.'

An initial exploratory study of ten think tank websites was conducted to validate the design of the analysis templates. This preliminary evaluation helped assess the appropriateness of the

TABLE 1 Evaluation of the interactivity level of think tank websites.

	Tools for presenting/disseminating information	Interactivity scale (Likert scale)	Assigned value (AV)	Presence (P)	Points	Interactivity scale (Likert scale)
One-way (monologic)	Graphics	Very low	1			
	Audiovisual	Low	2			
	Hypertextual	Medium	3			
	Interactive	High	4			
	Participatory	Very high	5			
Two-way (dialogic)	Connectivity	Very low	1	0–1	AV x P	= Mean ($\bar{X}$) (PO/5)
	Sharing	Low	2			
	Reviewing/commenting	Medium	3			
	Participatory	High	4			
	Collaborative	Very high	5			

FIGURE 1
Use of one-way tools on think tank websites.

methodology and allowed for adjustments to address any issues that could have hindered the achievement of the research objectives.

3 Results

3.1 One-way (monologic) tools

After analyzing the level of interactivity presented by various think tanks on their respective websites in relation to the use of tools in the category of information presentation and dissemination, it can be determined that 84% ($n = 21$) of these websites show a high or significant level of interactivity, as they present levels between 2.1 and 3, the range that represents the maximum level within the established scale. Meanwhile, 16%

($n = 4$) display medium interactivity with values ranging between 1 and 2 points.

Figure 1 shows the percentage of presence of various monologic tools on think tank websites, focused on presenting and disseminating institutional information without active user participation. In this regard, the use of tools that allow for a greater degree of interaction with the user, such as the "follow on social media" button, stands out, as it is present on all of the websites analyzed. Publications, such as studies, thematic reports, and books, have the highest prevalence, present on 100% of the sites, indicating a clear trend toward disseminating extensive and detailed content.

Multimedia files embedded on the websites, such as audio and video files, and informational brochures presenting the think tanks also have a notable presence, with a 96% ($n = 24$) appearance, highlighting the importance of visual resources in presenting

information. Images and photographs also reach 100% (n = 25), while published news and event calendars have a high prevalence, with 92% (n = 23), reflecting the think tanks' interest in providing visual content and keeping their users updated on their activities and events. In terms of reports, institutional annual reports (76%, n = 19) and online press rooms (84%, n = 21) are also among the most widely used tools, highlighting the focus on institutional transparency and the dissemination of public interest information.

On the other hand, simpler tools, such as blogs without a comment option, show a 60% (n = 15) presence, indicating that while some think tanks have blogs, they limit the possibilities for user feedback or interaction. Meanwhile, external links to other websites or institutions, at 68% (n = 17), show a lower priority in using external resources as part of their communication strategy.

3.2 Two-way (dialogic) tools

The analysis of the level of interactivity displayed by various think tanks on their respective websites, in relation to the use of tools that promote interaction and dialogue, reveals that the majority—96% (n = 24) of the think tanks evaluated—show a medium level of interactivity. Only one (4%, n = 1), the Peterson Institute for International Economics (PIIE), falls into the lower level of interaction, considered low or poor.

Figure 2 illustrates the use of dialogic interactivity tools aimed at promoting greater participation and exchange between the organization and users. Newsletter subscriptions are one of the most

common tools, present on 100% of the websites analyzed. This reflects think tanks' interest in maintaining continuous communication with users, keeping them informed about their activities, research, and events. Contact forms and requests to attend in-person events stand out as the most widely used tools, with 96% (n = 24) of websites featuring them, encouraging participation in events, whether online—mostly—or in person. Similarly, contact forms are equally frequent, with a 96% presence. These areas allow users to interact directly with organizations, either to obtain more information about their activities or to resolve queries, strengthening the connection between think tanks and their audiences. Likewise, 100% of the websites include a search function, a fundamental tool to improve the user experience and ensure that the vast amount of published information is easily searchable.

Another prominent tool is the section dedicated to job recruitment or internships (fellowships), present on 96% of the websites, not only seeking to attract users interested in their publications but also generating opportunities for collaboration, employment, or financial support.

Lastly, a very important section for organizations like think tanks is the donations or support section, present on 80% (n = 20) of websites, underscoring the importance of obtaining financial support from the community. However, tools such as petition signing (8%, n = 2) and online stores (20%, n = 5) are very rarely found on think tank websites, with Cato Institute being the only one with an official store, primarily selling books authored by members of the organization.
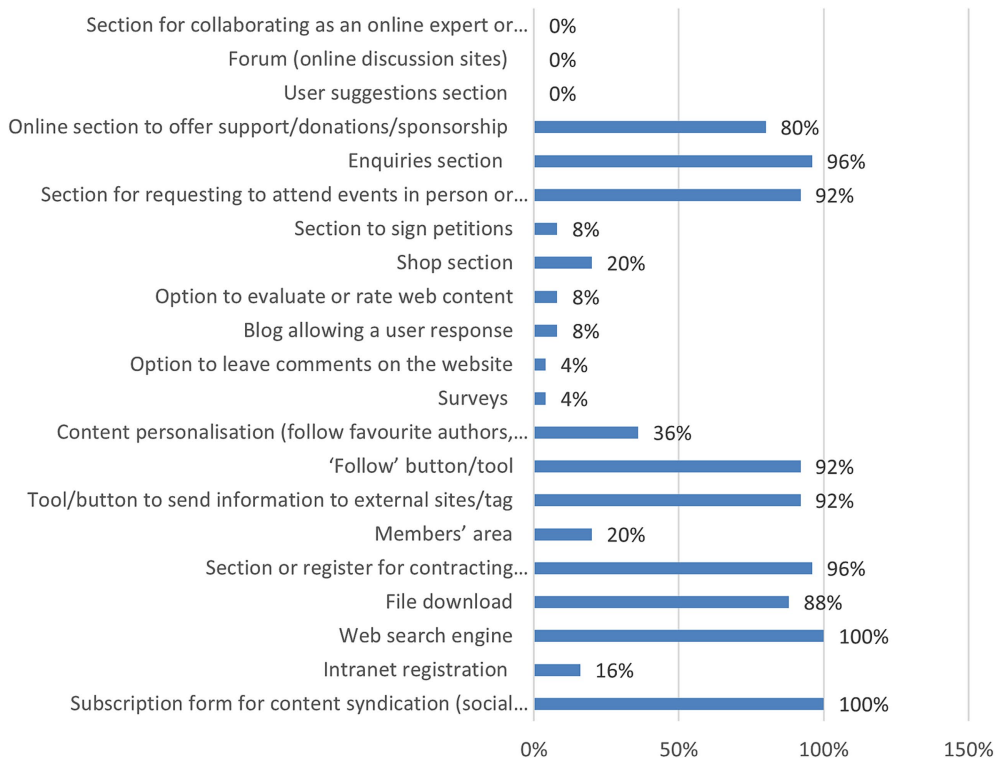

FIGURE 2
Use of two-way tools on think tank websites.

Other tools, like file download options, reach an 88% ($n = 22$) usage rate, indicating an effort to facilitate access to informational materials. However, content personalization, such as the option to follow favorite authors, is only found on 36% ($n = 9$) of the sites, demonstrating limited adoption of more advanced features that allow users to tailor the experience to their preferences.

Buttons to follow on social media or tools to share external information, both with a 92% ($n = 23$) presence, suggest significant integration with external platforms to broaden communication reach. However, comment sections and surveys, which promote greater user feedback, show very low presence (4%), with Urban Institute being the only one that features this tool. Similarly, the option to evaluate content or blogs with response capabilities (8%, $n = 2$) is limited to two think tanks, again Urban Institute and McKinsey Global Institute and Mercatus Center, respectively. This indicates that while information dissemination is encouraged, few opportunities are provided for users to directly influence site content by evaluating or offering feedback.

On the other hand, tools such as discussion forums, collaboration sections like online experts, and suggestion boxes are nonexistent (0%), highlighting a tendency to avoid fully open communication or deep interaction between users and think tanks. Similarly, intranet access (16%, $n = 4$) and members-only areas (20%, $n = 5$) are present on a few websites, limiting the possibility of creating more exclusive communities or offering additional content for registered members.

3.3 Comparison of communication tools and the level of interactivity in think tanks

The individual-level observation of online communication on think tank websites allows for determining the differences that may exist between the organizations analyzed based on their level of interaction. Table 2 shows, in descending order, the level of interactivity in the monologic and dialogic tools offered by the various think tanks on their web portals.

On both scales, Hoover Institution and McKinsey Global Institute are the think tanks with the highest level of interactivity in both aspects analyzed. There are other research centers that have reached similar levels, but none have attained the maximum level in both scales. However, as previously mentioned, these levels correspond to high interactivity in information dissemination tools and medium interactivity in tools that promote user interaction and collaboration.

In general terms, most think tanks seem to prioritize monologic communication tools over dialogic ones. In other words, they focus more on information transmission than on fostering two-way dialogue with users. Only a small number of institutions show a medium level of interactivity in both categories, while the majority have a notable gap between monologic interactivity (which tends to be high) and dialogic interactivity (which is predominantly low).

This suggests that, although think tanks are effective at sharing information, in many cases, they have yet to fully leverage interactive tools that could enable greater exchange of ideas and public participation.

4 Discussion

The results of this study suggest that the digital environment, comprised of the official websites of the most influential North American think tanks, according to McGann (2021), demonstrates a high or significant level of interactivity in its monologic aspect. However, regarding the use of bidirectional tools that encourage greater user participation and engagement on the web, the majority of cases are at a moderate level. None of the research centers reach an advanced level, and there is a notable prevalence of asymmetric resources. These findings are consistent with those obtained in previous studies on the digital communication of European and Latin American think tanks (Castillero-Ostio et al., 2024, 2025), albeit with certain particularities. Among the symmetric bidirectional tools, North American think tanks stand out with high percentages in areas related to support, financial donations or sponsorship, submission of inquiries, and requests to attend events or view them online, in contrast to the studies cited. However, although they prioritize these tools for moderate interaction, they generally do not provide many options for users to engage more actively in content creation or open discussion, limiting opportunities for genuine bidirectional dialogue. This suggests that, in many cases, they have yet to fully leverage the interactive tools that could facilitate greater idea exchange and public participation, as indicated by other previous studies across a variety of organizations (Aced-Toledano and Lalueza, 2018; Capriotti et al., 2016; Capriotti et al., 2019; Navarro-Beltrá et al., 2020; Zeler, 2020).

This study also reveals that the top-ranked think tanks in interactivity with bidirectional tools are those affiliated with universities and funded by diverse sources, such as the Hoover Institution (Stanford University), which is also considered a "vanity think tank"—centers created in honor of a political figure or intended to fulfill an unrealized political legacy (Xifra, 2008)—, and the Mercatus Center (George Mason University). The Urban Institute is also included, which, while self-identifying as an independent institute, is reported by various sources to hold a liberal ideology, with its primary contracts and funding sourced from this perspective (Rich, 1988; Tevelow, 2005; Xifra, 2008). The only think tank at the top of this ranking that is fully independent and shares its findings freely is the McKinsey Global Institute. At the opposite end, with a less interactive website, is the Peterson Institute for International Economics, which is also declared an independent center.

This finding aligns with previous studies (Castillero-Ostio et al., 2025), as information dissemination is common among think tanks, but a dialogic approach is evident in those with an academic profile or greater political influence. To fulfill their role, these organizations must adopt more dynamic and participatory communication strategies that foster shifts in thinking (Quintana and Castillo, 2019) and encourage behaviors that support their ideas, thereby securing the loyalty of their audiences. However, online dialogic communication should not merely aim to attract those with specific political or ideological inclinations; rather, all think tanks should strive for bidirectional communication with diverse audiences to ensure their sustainability. This is especially relevant for U.S. think tanks, as events like the September 11 attacks reshaped their role in foreign policy, highlighting a surge in public interest in international affairs. Think tanks had to adapt to this new context, engaging a broader audience beyond political elites and investing significantly in infrastructure,

TABLE 2 Classification of think tank websites based on their level of interactivity in the use of one-way and two-way tools.

Think tank	Scale - interactivity level of monologic tools	Think tank	Scale - interactivity level of dialogic tools
Hoover Institution	3	Hoover Institution	2
McKinsey Global Institute	3	McKinsey Global Institute	2
Heritage Foundation	3	Mercatus Center	2
Wilson Center, FKA Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars	3	Urban Institute	2
RAND Corporation	3	RAND Corporation	1,4
Stimson Center	3	Stimson Center	1,4
Council on Foreign Relations (CFR)	3	Council on Foreign Relations (CFR)	1,4
German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF)	3	German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF)	1,4
Resources for the Future (RFF)	3	Resources for the Future (RFF)	1,4
Human Rights Watch (HRW)	3	Human Rights Watch (HRW)	1,4
Atlantic Council	2,4	Atlantic Council	1,4
Cato Institute	2,4	Cato Institute	1,4
Peterson Institute for International Economics (PIIE)	2,4	Wilson Center, FKA Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars	1,4
Urban Institute	2,4	Heritage Foundation	1,4
Mercatus Center	2,2	Hudson Institute	1,4
Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)	2,2	Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)	1,4
Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs	2,2	Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs	1,4
Baker Institute for Public Policy	2,2	Baker Institute for Public Policy	1,4
Center for a New American Security (CNAS)	2,2	Center for a New American Security (CNAS)	1,4
American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research (AEI)	2,2	American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research (AEI)	1,4
National Bureau of Economic Research	2,2	National Bureau of Economic Research	1,4
Freedom House	2	Freedom House	1,4
Carnegie Endowment for International Peace	1,6	Carnegie Endowment for International Peace	1,4
Center for American Progress (CAP)	1,6	Center for American Progress (CAP)	1,4
Hudson Institute	1,6	Peterson Institute for International Economics (PIIE)	1

interactive websites, and specialized personnel for strategic communication (Drezner, 2015). Thus, U.S. think tanks must adjust to the necessity of communicating with diverse audiences and move away from past practices focused solely on information dissemination.

Regarding the objectives set for this research, it can be concluded that they have been met, as this study examines the online communication landscape of North American think tanks through their official websites.

The asymmetry between the monological and dialogical tools employed by think tanks has profound implications for their democratic role. Although these organizations are key actors in the generation and dissemination of knowledge, their preference for monological tools reflects a tendency to prioritize the transmission of information over dialogue with their audiences. This may limit their

ability to foster meaningful citizen participation and undermine their role as mediators in political and social debates. Monological tools offer unidirectional access to elaborated content, but restrict the possibility of feedback or co-creation by users. On the other hand, dialogic tools, although available, are often underutilized or limited to superficial interactions, leaving few opportunities for the active participation of audiences. This dynamic generates an asymmetric communication model where think tanks control the flow of information, reducing the possibilities of building relationships of trust and collaboration. To strengthen their democratic function, it is essential that these organizations adopt strategies that promote bidirectionality and co-creation, using tools such as forums, interactive surveys and discussion spaces. By integrating more inclusive and participatory communication, think tanks can not only

broaden their impact, but also contribute to a more equitable public sphere, where the voices of diverse sectors are heard and incorporated into the policy-making process.

A preliminary digital communication model for think tanks in the United States could focus on integrating monologic and dialogic tools to maximize interactivity and audience engagement. This model would highlight three main pillars: informational transparency, dialogic interaction, and collaborative participation. Informational transparency would rely on monologic tools such as well-structured websites, detailed reports, and multimedia resources to ensure clarity and accessibility. Dialogic interaction would include comment forums, interactive surveys, and live Q&A sessions, promoting direct dialogue with users. Finally, collaborative participation would focus on co-creation initiatives, such as expert panels and spaces for user-generated content.

Future research could explore how this approach could be adapted to different cultural contexts, measure its impact on public policy formulation, or analyze its effectiveness in building trust among stakeholders. Longitudinal studies could also be conducted to assess how these strategies evolve over time and how emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence, can be integrated into the model.

Data availability statement

The datasets generated and analyzed for this study can be found in the Harvard Dataverse Repository [https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/LHZXDK]. Access to the dataset can be requested, and the researchers will provide the database upon reasonable request.

Author contributions

EC-O: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Software, Supervision, Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. AM-C: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Software, Supervision, Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. LR-F: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Software, Supervision, Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

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