

E-Social Work in Spain: An analysis of the professional blogs

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Abstract. The digital revolution and new technologies of information and communication have changed, in a very short time, the means of learning, the inter-professional relationships and the professional-user interactions in the area of social work. A pioneer study has been presented, focused on one of the least researched dimensions up to now, on the *E-Social Work*: blogs specialised in social work in Spain. This is an exploratory study that seeks to, first, identify the scope of blogs of social work in the overall context of the Internet (through the use of global analytical tools Alexa and Majestic) and, secondly, exploring (through an online survey, bloggers of social work in Spain), if there is a thematic virtual community in social work, what their characteristics are, and if the blogs are, or can become, new tools of professional socialisation. The results show some differences by bloggers/blogs and prove the fact that virtual networks are increasingly denser among professionals who collaborate in the creation of a shared professional culture.

Key words: E-Social Work; blog; blogosphere; professional cyberculture; virtual community.

[en] *E-Social Work* en España: análisis de los blogs profesionales

Resumen. La revolución digital y las nuevas tecnologías de la información y la comunicación han modificado en muy poco tiempo los medios de aprendizaje, las relaciones interprofesionales y las interacciones profesional-usuario en el ámbito del trabajo social. Se presenta un estudio pionero en el campo profesional, centrado en una de las dimensiones menos investigadas hasta ahora del *E-Social Work*: los blogs especializados en Trabajo Social. Se trata de un estudio exploratorio que pretende, en primer lugar, identificar el alcance de los blogs de Trabajo Social españoles en el contexto global de Internet (mediante la utilización de las herramientas analíticas globales Alexa y Majestic) y, en segundo lugar, explorar (mediante una encuesta *on-line* a blogueros de Trabajo Social en España), si existe una comunidad virtual temática en trabajo social, cuáles son sus características, y si los blogs son, o pueden llegar a ser, nuevas herramientas de socialización profesional. Los resultados muestran algunas diferencias entre los blogueros y sus bitácoras y evidencian el hecho de que las redes virtuales cada vez son más densas entre profesionales que colaboran en la creación de una cultura profesional compartida.

Palabras clave: *E-Social Work*; blogs; blogosfera; cibercultura profesional; comunidad virtual.

Summary: Introduction, 1. Blogs as an object of social research. 2. The blogosphere and the blog culture. 3. Methodology. 3.1 Sample. 3.2 Analysis. 4. What do global metrics tell us about the professional blogosphere in Spain? 5. What is inside the professional blogosphere of social work? 6. Conclusions. 7. References.

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Introduction

We live in a digital society determined by the information technology paradigm (Castells, 2009), in which, in a very short time and as a consequence of the new information and communication technologies (ICT), the means of learning, inter-professional relationships and professional-user interactions in all spheres of human relations have been modified.

In the last decades, information and communication technologies (ICT) have penetrated all fields of social reality, giving rise to a new era (the information age) and a new social structure (and morphology) that can be properly referred to as 'network society' (Castells, 2009). The widespread use of digital communication technologies in Web 2.0 (social networks, wikis and blogs) have made it possible for new forms of socialisation in general, and professional socialisation in particular to emerge, to which social work is not a stranger. In this ubiquitous and ever changing context, it is necessary to investigate various dimensions of *E-Social Work*, which is one of the emerging professional and disciplinary challenges in the 21st century.

In this 'internet galaxy' tools of various kinds that enhance the interaction between all people, both personally and professionally, have proliferated. This is the case of blogs, which, although they started as private instruments, nowadays they address the occupational field, constituting a novel and interesting fact which has been investigated in the last few years in fields such as politics, education, or journalism (Cabero *et al.*, 2009; Aguaded and López, 2009; Casas, 2010; Aznar and Soto, 2010; Remondino, 2012; Collussi, 2013; García-Martín and García-Sánchez, 2015) but which has not yet been analysed in the Social Work area.

1. Blogs as an object of social research

While the virtual world as a 'culture of simulacrum' was already present in Baudrillard's (1983) work, publications about internet and other forms of computer-mediated communication in cyberspace emerge in the second half of the 1990s (Turkle 1995; Porter, 1997; Rheingold, 2000; Silver, 2000). At the same

time, new forms of social research in cyberspace were explored and new data collection tools were proposed (Coomber, 1997, Hewson *et al.*, 2003, Mann and Stewart, 2000). At that time, some papers (Hine, 2005; Johns *et al.*, 2004; Jones, 1999) had already shown that cyberspace offered a new and exciting frontier for social research.

The weblog is a tool which expanded from 1999 (Hookway 2008), and is considered by social scientists as one of the richest sources of qualitative data for being an online self-presentation tool that provides chronologically sorted information and constitutes an expression of 'common knowledge' (Serfarty, 2004, Bar-Ilan, 2005; Orihuela, 2006). The ease of access, the public availability of its contents on a global scale, the immediacy and the low cost in the data collection, as well as its naturalistic character in text format (which avoids the expensive recording and transcription work in another type of qualitative data collection), together with the possibility of reaching geographically or socially distant populations by the researcher (Hessler *et al.*, 2003; Mann and Stewart, 2000), make blogs an object of study and social research of great interest. Nevertheless, research in the 'blogosphere' implies ethical aspects such as the authenticity of data and contents, or the privacy/anonymity of authorship, as well as the recruitment of participants that must be taken into account (Hookway, 2008).

Although blogs can be considered logs or journals of life, they present notable differences with the traditional diaries and personal documents that historically have been used in social research (in the field of history and anthropology basically, although in sociology there are also classic works such as that of W.I. Thomas and F. Znaniecki⁴). The difference between blogs and journals and other personal documents (mainly letters) that have been used in social research as data sources for a century, is that blogs are written for an implicit audience, when not openly explicit (Hookway, 2008). Therefore, the ways to approach the treatment of these texts, cannot be the same as when analysing private or personal letters or diaries. In fact, the blog is already considered a new genre (Miller and Shepherd, 2004; Gurak *et al.*, 2004), which also allows a certain co-production between authors and readers.

⁴ Published between 1918 and 1920, *The polish peasant in Europe and America*, is a classic piece of social research, based only on the analysis of letters.

According to the display device blogs can be, among others: Openblog, Fotolog, Videoblog, Audioblog, Moblog, Tumbleblog, or Microblog (MECD, 2017). Depending on the privacy settings, blogs can be of three types: private, just for friends, or public. This third type of blog is what constitutes our object of study. The aspects related to the anonymity allowed by the cyberspace have been treated extensively in the scientific literature (Holenbaugh and Everett, 2008; Nosko et. al., 2010), but are not relevant in our study, given that for the selection of blogs the established inclusion criteria is the identification of their authorship and the possibility of communicating with the author of the blog by e-mail. However, one of the challenges which the social blog research presents is the 'unmanageable multiplication of voices' that it entails and that makes the researcher face a real 'black hole', which is one of the most serious challenges of the blogosphere (Hookway, 2008, p.8). Jameson (1991) described the disorientation and anxiety provoked by postmodern spaces and, confronting the blogosphere as a field of study, is undoubtedly one of those spaces generating anxiety and disorientation.

2. The blogosphere and the blog culture

The blogosphere is the communication sub-space generated in the network through blogs. The blog, as a format or evolutionary stage of the Web, is still a relatively important step towards

The construction of a new 'textuality', multimodal (the text transcends as a format in its path towards the visual and the multimedia) and fragmentary (in the content, but also in the processes of creation or distribution), typical of a new generation of digital natives who need not be aware of its existence (Fumero and Sáez-Vacas, 2006, p.68).

The key principles which define cyber culture, according to Lévy (1997), are interconnectivity, virtual communities and collective intelligence. These principles

Provoke a new order of knowledge and individual and collective experience, a cultural model that articulates as the third stage on an evolutionary scale ranging from small closed

societies - oral culture - to those civilized or imperial - where writing has a significant role – up to reaching cyber culture, which corresponds to a stage of specific globalisation of societies, of coexistence between the local and global levels (Ardèvol, 2003, p.7).

The relations of info technology with activities in the infocity alter the usual social networks, to form new types of networks, as is the case of blogs. The blogosphere is another structure of information (Sáez-Vacas, 2005). An emerging culture based on sharing, including blogs, wikis, open sources, etc. With this, millions of people who were formerly mere receivers have become very active participants, as well as co-authors or co-producers in different social networks.

Since Rheingold (1993) coined the term 'virtual community', several researches have been made trying to explain the dynamics and relationships existing in the different types of communities. Blogs are not an exception and are shaped as catalysts for the emergence of a new type of community, with a social dynamic of the new technological environment (Blanchard, 2004; Fumero and Saez-Vacas, 2006: 71). White (2006; cited by Fumero and Sáez Vacas, 2006, p. 71) distinguishes three types of virtual communities: Single Centric Community Blog/Blogger (they appeared first and are populated with commentators who could eventually decide to edit their own blog); Central Connecting Topic Community (a natural extension of the CoP - Communities of Practices - or communities of interest that encounter the explosion of the blog in a sociotechnical context different from the traditional one), and Boundaried Community (isolated community).

E-Social Work

As a result of the increasing addition of New Management approach to the sphere of social services (Steyaert and Gould, 1999; Langan, 2000; Jordan and Jordan, 2000), the professional practice and provision of welfare services relationships, have been affected by information and communication technologies (Humphries and Camilleri, 2002, Harlow, 2003, Webb, 2003, Garrett, 2005, Rafferty and Steyaert, 2007, Harris and White, 2009; Coleman, 2011; López Peláez y Díaz, 2015), in ways not without controversy (Sapey, 1997; Garret,

2005; Dustin, 2008; Ferguson, 2008; Harris and White, 2009), giving rise to new characterisations of social work such as '*Liquid Social Work*' (Ferguson, 2008) or '*The McDonaldisation of Social Work*' (Dustin, 2008). In any case, a new approach or perspective of social work called *E-Social Work* is emerging, of which the virtual community thematic of social work bloggers, constitutes one of its de facto manifestations.

Coleman (2011) established an exhaustive characterisation of *E-Social Work*, based on the systematic observation of the social work developed in 'Contact Centres', however, the definition proposed by Lopez Peláez and Díaz (2015), seems more timely and adjusted to the diversity of the professional intervention:

E-Social Work is a specialized sphere of social work that aims to analyze, assess and intervene in the on-line environment by developing strategies to reach out to users, assess their needs, and design the appropriate dynamics to intervene and empower them in the online context. The ultimate aim is to provide assistance to a population that is defined as digital natives, in both online and offline environments' (...) 'E-Social Work can be defined as the use of new information and communication technologies in the field of social work and social services. E-Social Work includes online research, patient treatment (individual therapy, group and community dynamics), the training and teaching of social workers, and the monitoring of social service programs (López Peláez and Díaz, 2015, p. 44).

In this sense, the thematic community of social work bloggers constitutes in itself a relevant and susceptible element of systematic investigation of *E-Social Work*.

3. Methodology

The research process has been developed in four phases:

- Exhaustive bibliographic review which supports and structures the theoretical framework, the discussion of results and selection of procedures and data collection techniques.
- Search and systematic identification of social work weblogs in Spain, France, Portu-

gal and Italy, throughout online search engines and expert consultation.

- The selected blogs (from February 10th to March 1st, 2017) have been analysed through three international instruments measuring quality and global relevance: Google PageRank (<https://www.pagerank.net/pagerank-checker/>), Rankin Alexa (<https://alexa.com>) and Majestic (<https://majestic.com/>).
- In view of the risks and obvious limitations of the available global metric tools, an online survey (from February 22nd to March 5rd, 2017) was conducted, aiming 32 social work Spanish blogs identified with authorship and e-mail address.

3.1 Sample

The youth of the weblogs and their dynamism goes beyond any representative sample delimitation; therefore, the search for specialized weblogs has followed two parallel procedures. The first one consisted of the use of keywords in Google: 'social work', 'social service', 'social assistant', 'social worker' and 'assistant of social service' (in the four official languages of the countries object of this study). The second has focused on direct contacts with other bloggers through the Spanish *BlogoTSfera* officially recognised by the Spanish General Social Work Council (using the private Facebook group and WhatsApp instant messaging group the platform has) and Facebook groups (public and private, with 15,000 members in total) dedicated to social work and social work blogs in Spanish around the world.

With the initially obtained list (45 Spanish blogs), the following criteria were applied as general criteria of inclusion: authorship of social work; being blog or weblog; addressing issues related to Social Work; inclusion of the author's own contributions on Social Work; and addressing useful topics for basic or specialized training in Social Work.

After this first screening of weblogs, a second one was carried out applying the criteria established by *BlogoTSfera* (Arredondo, 2016): that the author is a social worker or practicing profession; the authorship of the blog being identified; minimum age of the blog being three months; regularity in the publication of articles; being free of invasive ad-

vertising; and respecting the professional code of ethics. As a final result of these selection processes a list of 32 weblogs was obtained.

3.2 Analysis

The international metric tools Ranking Alexa, Majestic and Google PageRank have been applied. The significant absence of social work weblogs in Google PageRank has allowed us to use only Ranking Alexa and Majestic. There have been 24 weblogs finally selected (6 per country). The sample has been comparatively analysed in Ranking Alexa and Majestic. The latter provides information about the trust of a page (Trust Flow), the quantity (Backlinks) and quality of links (Citation Flow). Although Majestic shares with Alexa the measurement of the number of links and keywords, their results do not always concur.

For this reason, an online survey has been included as a complementary research technique to evaluate, in a proper measure, the situation of weblogs within the *e-social work* area. It has been distributed through Google Form in Spanish and English to the 50 bloggers who made up the sample prior to the final selection. Twenty-three questionnaires were received between February 22nd and March 15th, 2017, with a response rate slightly higher than 78%. The statistical analysis,

performed with SPSS, was descriptive given the small sample size.

4. What do global metrics tell us about the professional blogosphere in Spain?

When considering the study, we thought that once the international standard analytical tools Ranking Alexa and Majestic had been applied, we would be able to establish the scope of social work Spanish blogs, on the set of all Internet Sites.

A first comparative result, which has been verified from traffic data (visits and visitors), is the **Reputation** of the blog: this data (Sites Links) refers to the number of links the blogsite receives. For this ranking there is no pre-established standard score range, but allows to compare and prioritise a set of blogs, as shown in Table 1. Alexa's problem is that it doesn't allow comparing the 32 elements on the list since it only offers data of 8 Spanish blogs.

The Alexa analytical tool also allows you to evaluate the scope of blogs in the global context. Unlike **Reputation**, in **Global Rank** the lower the figure, the better overall positioning the blog⁵ has. That is, the higher the number, the worse positioned a blog is on the Global Internet. Alexa's sampling problema is bigger here, since it only offers data of 7 Spanish blogs.

Tabla 1. Ranking Sites Linking en Alexa

Reputation (Sites Linking) en Alexa	Rank
israelhergon.com	37
lascuatropiedrasangulares.wordpress.com	30
belenvarro.es	25
nosoyasistentia.com	16
ehquidad.org	13
lasonrisavacia.blogspot.com.es	12
espacioservisoci.blogspot.com.es	10
tribulacioneschino.blogspot.com.es	10

Tabla 2. Global Rank Alexa

Global Rank in Alexa	Rank
nosoyasistentia.com	1,640,902
trabajo-social.es	1,773,332
todotrabajosocial.org	3,494,007
inmaculadasol.com	3,553,168
belenvarro.es	7,458,358
lascuatropiedrasangulares.wordpress.com	7,517,542
israelhergon.com	7,587,629

Source: Self-elaboration, based on global indicators and metrics Alexa (Uploaded data: 02/03/2017)

⁵ Less than 100.000 is the best result; less than 500.000 is the very good result; and less than 1.000.000 is not bad result.

In the first place, it is noted that none of social work blogs is amongst the blogs with the largest global range. An expected fact, given that blog search engines do not include the ‘Social Work’ category / tag, and none of the ranking categories or tags for blogs in global search engines⁶ include similar topics. However, the fact that 2 social-themed blogs with a value below 2,000,000 appear in Alexa’s *Global Rank*, would indicate that ‘we are on the right track’, according to the creators of Alexa.

The difference in results⁷ between these two global Alexa indicators shows that such global metrics are not risk free, therefore, should not be taken as definitive indicators. To address these limitations, it is advisable to use several global metric tools, which allow us to adjust and contrast the results so that the analysis can be better refined. Regardless, the small number of blogs metrics that Alexa allows us

to compare, make it an ineffective tool for our study object.

Considering the complementarity with Alexa, and the higher indicator richness and power to collect data from a higher number of social work blogs (all of them), we have also analysed the scope of social work blogs with Majestic. The most useful scope and positioning indicators for social work offered by Majestic are the *Citation Flow* (an indicator from 0 to 100 used to measure the equivalence of links or “power” which the website or the link carries), combined with the *Trust Flow* (a quality indicator on a scale from 0 to 100) which is Majestic’s trademark. Another useful indicator is the *Backlink* (incoming link coming from a website or web domain other than the analysed blog). The results obtained from those Majestic indicators (only applied to the 5 blogs that Alexa let us analyze), are show in Table 3.

Table 3. Variations in ranking of 5 blogs in Alexa, based on Majestic indicators

Blog	Trust Flow	Blog	Citation	Blog	Backlinks
lasonrisavacia	17	israelhergon.com	31	israelhergon	278
israelhergon	14	nosoyasistentia.com	21	belennavarro	190
belennavarro	8	belennavarro.es	20	nosoyasistentia	171
nosoyasistentia	8	lasonrisavacia	10	lasonrisavacia	77
tribulacioneschino	7	tribulacioneschino	7	tribulacioneschino	71

Source: Self-elaboration, based on global indicators and metrics Majestic (Uploaded data: 02/03/2017).

The *Trust Flow* and *Citation* data allows us to generate a comparative ranking among blogs and among countries. However, we observed that the list does not match, so it will be necessary to be cautious with this type of metrics, whose result varies according to the type of indicator used. If we pay attention to the relative importance of the two indicators established by Majestic, its brand indicator is the *Trust Flow*. However, in light of the results, it cannot be said that *Trust Flow* is a more powerful or credible indicator than *Citation*. These two indicators use data on the number of links (power) which the site has internally. But if we consider the number of external links

(outside the blog itself) that lead to the blogsite (which could be considered external impact of the blog from the number of sites that link it from outside the blog itself) then the *Backlinks* indicator would be the most appropriate to measure the external impact of the blog in question.

Having in mind that both Alex and Majestic offer metrics of external impact (measured in both cases by the number of external links which lead to a specific blog), we have had interest in comparing both results (Table 4) to observe the behaviour of both tools (at least considering the 8 blogs Alexa let us analyze).

⁶ The most frequent categories/menus of blog search engines are: technology, hobbies, shows, health, science, education, NGO, government, marketing, software, human resources, business, motor, etc. As social work blogs can be included in several of them, it is really difficult to find Social Work themed blogs with any of these tools.

⁷ As we can see by comparing Reputation and Global Rank, the blog listings that emerge best positioned according to these variables, are not identical.

Table 4. External impact of the blog, according to Alexa & Majestic (Number of external links which lead to the 8 blogs analysed)

Impacto externo del blog en Alexa		Impacto externo del blog en Majestic	
Reputation (Sites Linking) Alexa	Rank	Backlinks Majestic	Backlinks
israelhergon.com/	37	israelhergon.com/	278
lascuatropiedrasangulares.wordpress.com	30	belennavarro.es/	190
belennavarro.es/	25	nosoyasistenta.com/	171
nosoyasistenta.com/	16	lasonrisavacia.blogspot.com.es/	77
ehquidad.org/es/blog	13	tribulacioneschino.blogspot.com.es/	71
lasonrisavacia.blogspot.com.es/	12		
espacioservisoci.blogspot.com.es/	10		
tribulacioneschino.blogspot.com.es/	10		

Source: Self-elaboration.

In spite of considering the same type of data (external links which lead to a blog), neither the blogs nor the listings by country match. Moreover: they vary a great deal from one to another. This analysis advises not taking any of these metrics as final indicators, much less using it to establish possible quality levels among blogs and among countries. We make this statement, as we have to have in mind (as mentioned in the methodology section) that Majestic indicators have been obtained only for blogs previously evaluated with Alexa, sin-

ce we expected to check the level of coincidence between both global tools. In this respect we can state, in view of the results, that there is no consistency between Alexa and Majestic, nor among Alexa’s or Majestic’s own indicators.

In order to strengthen the analysis of these results, another consistent measuring exercise has been carried out, consisting of applying Majestic’s indicators without conditioning them to the previous filter of the list of Alexa blogs. That is, Majestic indicators have been used on the 32 Spanish blogs that match the sampling criteria). The results are shown in table 5.

Table 5. External impact of the 32 blogs in Majestic (Backlinks in *Majestic*)

URL/Dominio/Blog	Backlinks
mariajoseaguilaridanez.wordpress.com	5534
lascuatropiedrasangulares.wordpress.com	669
israelhergon.com	278
belennavarro.es	190
nosoyasistenta.com	171
trabajosocialdospuntocero.blogspot.com.es	139
trabajo-social.com	136
lasonrisavacia.blogspot.com.es	77
tribulacioneschino.blogspot.com.es	71
trabajosocialpenitenciario.blogspot.com.es	55
raizmandragora.blogspot.com.es	45
espacioservisoci.blogspot.com.es	45
pasionporeltrabajosocial.com	24
trabajo-social.es	18

emprendertrabajosocial.wordpress.com	18
trabajosocialmq.blogspot.com.es	17
pablodelarosa.blogspot.com.es	15
rociocdamas.com	14
vademecumsocial.blogspot.com.es	9
tiempodetrabajosocial.wordpress.com	6
trabajosocialcorporativo.com	5
thinkingonsocialwork.weebly.com/blog	5
peritajesocialmadrid.com	4
socialvirtualwork.wordpress.com	2
ehquidad.org/es/blog	2
itrabajosocial.com	2
rtsocial.wordpress.com	2
todostrabajosocial.org	2
mitrabajoessocial.blogspot.com.es	1
eldiaadiadeunatrabajadorasocial.wordpress.com	1

Source: Self-elaboration.

Finally, if we compare the Alexa and Majestic rankings for the 12 best-positioned blogs

in Majestic and the 8 blogs which Alexa offers metrics from, the result is as follows:

Table 6. Alexa & Majestic blog listing with major impact on external links

Alexa	Rank	Majestic	Rank
israelhergon.com/	37	mariajoseaguilaridanez.wordpress.com/	5534
lascuatropiedrasangulares.wordpress.com	30	lascuatropiedrasangulares.wordpress.com	669
belennavarro.es/	25	israelhergon.com/	278
nosoyasistenta.com/	16	belennavarro.es/	190
ehquidad.org/es/blog	13	nosoyasistenta.com	171
lasonrisavacia.blogspot.com.es/	12	trabajosocialdospuntocero.blogspot.com.es	139
espacioservisoci.blogspot.com.es/	10	trabajo-social.com	136
tribulacioneschino.blogspot.com.es/	10	lasonrisavacia.blogspot.com.es/	77
		tribulacioneschino.blogspot.com.es	71
trabajosocialpenitenciario.blogspot.com.es			
raizmandragora.blogspot.com.es		55	
espacioservisoci.blogspot.com.es		45	
		45	

Source: Self-elaboration.

In view of the results obtained, we question the goodness and/or relevance of the metrics we borrowed from traditional media (generally created in the field of online marketing) and which, in general, are still used to quantify the impact of a set of tools and communication spaces which - supported in its supposedly conversational dynamics - transcend the concept of 'audience' (Fumero and Sáez-Vacas, 2006: 72). For that reason, we have expanded our study on E-Social Work in the professional blogosphere, conducting a fast online survey, aimed at the 32 bloggers who had an e-mail contact on their blog and that matched all the sample selection criteria.

5. What is inside the professional blogosphere of Social Work?

The 25 bloggers who answered the survey, do not exactly match the list of blogs analysed with Alexa and Majestic, which is why we will examine the results of this survey separately from those of global positioning on the Internet. This quick poll has been carried out to provide us with non-public information and data, but which can be very useful to establish the blogger profile in social work in Spain; to know whether or not there is a possible virtual thematic community in social work in our country; whether blogs can be a space for online professional socialisation; and other aspects that cannot be observed with global metric tools (such as Alexa or Majestic); nor analysing the public view of blogs.

Considering that the first blog on the Internet dates back to 1996, and that the worldwide bloom of blogs occurred from 1999 (Hookway, 2008), **the professional blogosphere is relatively young**; since only 8% of social work blogs were created before 2010, and 40% are less than three years old. These data show that the incorporation blogs as professional tools in the field of e-social work is very recent (all blogs are less than 10 years old). We could therefore say, that the blogosphere of social work

is a 'baby' compared to the global blogosphere, which would be a 21-year-old 'young adult'.

Regarding **the blogger profile in social work**, 52% are women⁸, which represents a nearly-identical distribution in the general population but that is not adjusted to the gender distribution of a highly feminized profession. They all are university graduates in social work; from which less than a quarter (24%) have, in addition, another university degree on of social sciences (sociology and political science, law, philosophy and social education). 28% have postgraduate studies at a master level, and almost 8% of bloggers also hold a doctorate degree. These data show a higher and more skilled level of bloggers than the average academic level of all professionals in Spain⁹. A great majority (80%) perform only one type of professional activity (whether in the public, private or third sector), but one fifth (20%) perform two or more types of professional activities: either combining the free exercise of their profession or consulting work, with teaching and research; or professional practice in the public or private sector with teaching and research, or consultancy. The social worker blogger profile also stands out for its social commitment, since more than half (56%) do some kind of volunteering, apart from their professional practice and paid employment. This voluntary service is, in most cases, social activism committed to the defence of human rights, feminism or social transformation; or voluntary service with specific social groups. With this profile, it is not surprising that the **target audience (audience) of the professional blogosphere** are both social workers, professionals from other disciplines and fields of social intervention, as well as students and public in general. That is, the interest and influence of the blogosphere goes beyond the professional space, until in some cases it reaches society as a whole.

The **average audience size** of professional blogs is low: 32% are unaware of the number of followers their blog has. Almost half of the blogs have less than 1000 followers (44% have

⁸ For that reason, from now on we will use the female plural to refer to the social work Spanish blogosphere as a whole.

⁹ According to the most recent study regarding the profile of female social workers in Spain, made by Alba Torices in 2011 with a sample of 485 collegiate, only 4,74% of professionals had post-graduate studies and only 1,24% had a post-graduate diploma. In that study (winner of the I Social Work Research Price Ana Díaz Perdiguero, published as a book by the Social Work General Council in 2012), it was proven that 75,16% of professionals had not coursed any other studies apart from social work. Cfr. A. Torices (2011). *Las trabajadoras sociales en el siglo XXI: su perfil actual, Humanismo y Trabajo Social*, 10, 181-203. A similar study, carried out in 2014, although circumscribed exclusively to "La Rioja", showed similar results to those presented by Torices in 2011.

less than 100) and only 8% have more than 10,000 followers. That is, only 24% have more than 100 followers. The size of the audience is quite low, when compared to blogs from other fields such as education or health. Having said that, as far as blog connectivity with social networks is concerned, all bloggers have linked their blog with at least one social network (either Facebook, Twitter or LinkedIn), and 80% have it linked to two or more social networks. The networks preferred by social work bloggers are, in this order: Facebook (38%), Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn.

Social work bloggers have a very variable posting frequency, although almost 48% published less than 10 posts in 2016 and another 48% published between 11 and 50 post. In terms of visits, (36% don't know that data), more than quarter (28%) received less than 10,000 visits in total in 2016 and a 36% received between 10,000 and 100,000 visits that same year. If we take into account the number of **visitors** (data which is unknown to 68% of bloggers) a fifth has between 1,000 and 10,000 visitors a year, compared to 4% with less than 1,000. That is to say, there are two types of professional blogs: blogs with little audience/visitors and blogs with a moderately wide audience, not seeming to be balanced. With regards to the geographical origin of the visitors, 12% come from Spain; 36% from Spain and Latin America. The others have their audience spread between Europe and America (36%) and a 16% have readers across all continents.

As expected, the age of the blog is positively related with the number of visits and visitors, but not with the number of followers, which is a factor independent from the blog's year of creating. That is, the oldest the blog the higher number of visits and visitors, but not a higher number of followers. The number of followers is related to the type of contents and the interaction-feedback between the author and the audience.

The **interaction between author and reader** is important to determine if the blogosphere in social work is a space of professional socialisation or not. In this sense, although most blogs embrace the possibility of the reader to contact privately with the author, the truth is that only 56% allows public comments to be written on the blog by the readers. Comments are scarce (44% didn't receive any comments in 2016, 48% have received less than 50 com-

ments in total and only 8% have received more than 100 comments).

More than 90% of posts have an average of less than 4 comments, and only 4% have an average higher than 10 comments per post. The number of comments is neither associated to the age of the blog nor to the number of published posts. That is, the author-reader interaction is defined more by the profile and style of the blog than by its age or number of publications

The topics in the professional blogosphere are, in this order, as follows: social work (16.3%); social services (12.4%); social policy (11.7%); welfare state (10.8%); defence of rights (9.3%); ethics (8.5%); gender (8.5%); education (7%); health (5.4%); employment (5.4%); and others 5% (art, migration, entrepreneurship, computer applications, social communication, social theatre). The predominant **original contents** published are: theoretical and conceptual reflections (25%); experiences and professional practice (25%); topical issues (16%); methods and techniques (14.3%); reports and defence of rights (14.3%); or others (5.4%).

6. Conclusions

Finding blogs is undoubtedly the first step of any research within the blogosphere, but in the absence of the specific category 'Social Work' in web-based online services (blog classification categories are usually much broader, such as 'celebrities', 'leisure and entertainment', 'politics', 'health and welfare, 'education', 'technology', etc.), our challenge has not been fully solved with BCMS online tools (Blog Content Management Systems). The existence of a *BlogoTSfera*, officially recognized by the Spanish General Social Work Council, as well as the fact that there are two Spanish Facebook groups focused on professional blogs with thousands of members, has enabled us to successfully solve the search.

The most reliable global analytics tools, such as Alexa and Majestic (Google PageRank does not yield results for identified social work blogs), have not proved valid for reliable comparisons by blogs. These are useful tools to know certain aspects related to the impact, measured in terms of links that the blog receives, but the lack of coincidence in the obtai-

ned results advises to use these tools only with exploratory character and as a complement to other types of sources.

Having been our first empirical study of the social work Spanish blogosphere, we cannot contrast the results obtained with any other similar study in the field of e-social work. Nor are there studies like ours, or comparative by countries, in other nearby professional fields. The results obtained with the applications Alexa and Majestic, show that the best positioned blogs are usually institutional, which publish content not always original (job offers, call announcements, links to press articles, newsletters, etc.); not the personal ones, that constitute our study object.

Among personal blogs, it has not been possible to separate those that are strictly social work, from others that - written by social workers - are a much broader journalistic type of blog. In addition, the fact that in France, the term 'travail social' covers all social professions, in contrast to Spain or Portugal where the expression 'social work' only applies to a specific profession, forces us to be cautious with the lists obtained.

The online survey has proved to be a useful tool to know aspects of the professional blogosphere that would otherwise have remained hidden (since certain data cannot be obtained by browsing each blog).

Taking into account that our survey has been answered by 25 Spanish bloggers (de un total de 32), we can anticipate that the professional blogosphere is, in all cases, an informational space. And in certain cases (only in the case of blogs where there is evidence of more

interaction between author and reader) it can be said that apart from being an informational space, the blogosphere would also be a space for professional socialisation, although still under construction.

On the other hand, the linguistic community is another relevant element to consider in future studies of the blogosphere, since the language is a decisive geographic factor of the audiences.

The existence of a Spanish Blogosphere, officially recognised and supported by the General Council of Social Work of Spain, where the bloggers' community holds face-to-face meetings at national social work conferences, joint publications (Arredondo, 2016), or launches global activities (such as the blogging festival in 2017 on the occasion of World Social Work Day), constitutes an experience of enormous interest that should be taken into account in other linguistic communities, as a practice which tends to construct a new space for professional socialisation within the framework of e-social work.

The social work blogosphere is very young compared to the educational or sanitary blogosphere, however it indicates a great dynamism and a great growth potential. This circumstance would advise to carry out more exhaustive studies by country or linguistic community. The selection of blogs which we have studied, in view of the audiences received in the blogs, suggest that the Ibero-American community (where Spanish and Portuguese are spoken) has a better chance of constituting itself as a shared space of professional socialisation.

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