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The Inter-American Human Rights System's Digital Communication: Presence, Performance and Legacy

Isabela Gerbelli Garbin Ramanzini* and Warley Gian da Silva Matos*

Latin America has been regarded by its long entrepreneurial role in promoting human rights internationally. A less noticed achievement – albeit equally relevant – is that the Inter-American Human Rights System also pioneered digital communication among existing regional human rights systems. This article assesses digital presence and performance at the Inter-American Human Rights System to understand by which means digital communication can be strategic to advance human rights in the region. More than twenty years of digital experimentation at the Inter-American Human Rights System has left a worthy digital legacy, whose assessment offers empirical subsets for theoretical propositions in International Relations, practical contribution to international organizations, and social benefits beyond academic and international bureaucracy realms.

Keywords: Human Rights, International Organizations, Inter-American Human Rights System, Digital Communication.

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Introduction

Latin America has been regarded by its long entrepreneurial role in promoting human rights and values internationally. The region anticipated to the world significant norms, tools and procedures, such as the American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man, the idea of international duties, the right to justice enclosed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the strategy of a mobile international human rights tribunal, to name just a few innovations with the Latin American imprint. A less noticed achievement – albeit equally relevant – is the fact that the Inter-American Human Rights System also pioneered digital communication among existing regional human rights systems.

Digital communication comprises the set of practices of communication by digital means planned and organized by an international bureaucracy, whereby it represents itself, claims authority and establishes dialogue with external actors. The Internet Revolution has launched debates over international organization´s reactions and even a 'migration' to new communicative environments: the virtual spheres or digital realms. With the enlarging of the notion of public spheres to virtual ones, actors are increasingly pushed to publicly explain and justify their behaviour, especially in the human rights issue-area, where international political bureaucracy often merges with some sense of *advocacy*. Given the stakes of human rights in international politics, communication has always been essential for international organizations to advance more altruistic preferences and inform public action. However, communication per se is not a sufficient condition to promote the desired impacts, even when the most up-to-date digital tools are employed. How can international human rights organizations maximize their potential at digital communication, then?

The Inter-American Human Rights System stands as an interesting case to investigate this question due to its avant-garde when it comes to digital communication among other existing regional human rights systems. Within its recently completed 60 years of activity, the Inter-American Commission and the Inter-American Court have gone the last third on digital mode as well, holding the oldest websites among all international human rights bodies and keeping highly active profiles at social media. Despite the vast digital legacy, it remains practically unassessed.

Our aim is to discuss digital communication for international human rights organizations in the light of literature-related concepts and theoretical propositions. For that, we take the Inter-American Human Rights System as a case to (1) make a historic recovery of the digital presence at the Inter-American Human Rights System and (2) evaluate this regional system's

digital performance in comparison with other existing systems. We mapped the digital presence in websites and on social media of three regional human rights systems and later we assessed digital performance through Twitter, when we monitored the most followed institutional account of each regional human rights body during four months. We arrived at a sample of 2.273 tweets, collected from November, 1st, 2018 to February, 28th, 2019 and examined it through content analysis.

The article unfolds in three sections. First, it discusses the main theoretical marks regarding public and digital communications in the literature. Second, we move on to circumvent this literature to the human rights issue-area. Turning to the empirical part, the third section displays the results of our analysis of digital communication by regional human rights system, with particular emphasis on the Inter-American Human Rights System. Finally, the article concludes with the main achievements, limitations and prospects for future research venues.

1. Digital Communication and International Organizations

International organizations are going public and there is no other way around. The application of digital technologies in communicative processes transformed the way actors get involved in international relations. The Internet Revolution introduced the notions of immediacy and interactivity that now dictate the pace of world affairs (Deibert 1998; Kingston and Stam 2013). As a result, actors are increasingly pushed and rushed to publicly explain, justify their behaviours, and react to transformations taking place in a click-time.

The literature displays an array of terms and concepts in reference to the arrival of actors to the online world, which include: 'net diplomacy', 'virtual diplomacy', 'cyber diplomacy', 'public diplomacy 2.0', and 'digital diplomacy' (Wehrenfennig 2012; Potter 2002; Hallams 2010; Kampf et al. 2015). The choice of the term 'diplomacy' for denoting public digital communication recalls a strong tradition in International Relations, which concerns the prominent role of diplomacy by states at relating to each other through official and pacific means. Whichever denomination, today, states, international organizations and other non-state actors routinely use digital means to understand cultures, attitudes and behaviours; to build and manage relationships; and, to mobilize actions that advance one's interest (Gregory 2011). In this sense, diplomacy, public relations and communications share common features, such as the idea of representation, dialogue, counselling and influence (L´Etang 2007; Dimitrov 2014).

In this paper, we define digital communication as the set of practices of communication by digital means planned, organized and strategized by an international bureaucracy, whereby it represents itself, claims authority and establishes dialogue with external actors. We arrived at this concept by adapting a definition from Squatrito (2021), which analyses a tangential - albeit similar - issue: the judicial diplomacy practised by international courts. The idea that international courts engage in judicial diplomacy to address other actors beyond adjudicative cases suits well to communicative processes in other contexts, since international courts are, in essence, specific kinds or derivations of international organizations.

Finally, as a concept, digital communication complements rather than opposes 'regular' or 'traditional' communication in international organizations. As much of the communicative processes in international organizations deal with public information, regular communication presented in annual or thematic reports, press releases, newsletters and public statements are shaped to assume other formats more suitable to the new digital language and environment. Contrasting concepts for digital communication in international organizations would be internal or organizational communication, that is, all kinds of in-bound, private or secretive communication. However, given the more recent democratic governance stand at international organizations and the ubiquity of digital technologies in the near future, digital communication tends to become commonplace, almost unnoticeable, and no longer noteworthy part of communication dynamics distinguishing within and outside bureaucratic settings (Young and Åkerström 2016).

Relevant studies on the latest inclination of international actors towards digital communication tried to understand the processes and reasons for such endeavour. In general, the role of world leaders, ministries of foreign affairs, diplomats, activists and NGOs has received more attention than the role of international organizations in digital communicative processes. Nonetheless, existing literature tackling the case of international organizations advanced on the motivations for these actors to foster public communication. For some, international organizations get involved with public communication to raise institutional transparency (Altides 2009); provide information and lower the world informational asymmetry (Buchanan and Keohane 2006); convey normative ideas and induce change (Lehmann 1999; Keck and Sikkink 1998; Alleyne 2008); to legitimise themselves (Zaum 2013) and gain public support (Squatrito 2021), given the increasing levels of contestation of the multilateralism (O´Brien et al. 2000). Critical studies, on the other hand, raised the question that more proactive public communication by international organizations can turn out problematic, in the sense that the prioritization of official narratives and particular voices might marginalize

criticism and facilitate biased perceptions of the democratic credentials and the depoliticization of inequalities in international organizations (Ecker-Ehrhardt 2018a; 2018b).

Another strand of studies builds on the processes by which actors engage in practices of public communication and, more specifically, of digital communication. This literature seeks to follow the institutional evolution from more traditional forms of communication to the new communication environments, highlighting how transformation takes place and which challenges might arise. Again, the role of some actors has received more attention than the role of international organizations in digital communicative processes (BCW 2017; Thrall et al. 2014; Golbeck, Grimes and Rogers 2010; Manor 2016). However, existing empirical studies demonstrate that the assimilation of technological transformations required international organizations to adapt themselves to deepened institutionalization (Dimitrov 2014) and more complex forms of relations (Karns and Mingst 2013). This article contributes to this body of research by assessing the empirical case of the Inter-American Human Rights System. Also, understanding how the Inter-American human rights bodies made the transition to the online world represents an opportunity to test some of the hypotheses brought up in the theoretical studies.

Less than twenty years ago, international organizations started to migrate to virtual environments, each at its own pace. While some started owning websites, others took further steps in social media additionally. Among the existing practices of digital communications, the engagement on social media stands out for facilitating social interaction or 'two-way communication', which characterizes the gradual process of communication, whereby actors progressively recognize each other as equals, moving from rhetorical behaviour toward dialogue (Risse 2000). As such, social media can be transformed into policy arenas where issues are debated and defined (Park and Reber 2008). Either way, hosting a website or a social media account guarantees presence, but does not tell anything specific about digital performance of international organizations. While digital presence captures the static notion of a structure of information at various virtual environments; digital performance rests on the willingness to virtual interaction, made possible through engaging with a virtual environment and listening to the online audience (Manor 2016). It is precisely the digital performance that enables international organizations to transition from mere broadcasters of public information to effective digital communicators (McNutt 2014). This process, by which international organizations start conducting activities that transmit information and convey meaning via digital channels, represents the essence of the so-called digital communication (Kostić and Šarenac 2020).

Hence, the use of digital tools on communicative processes can be more than a means to modernize international organizations. By assisting them to overcome major limitations (power boundaries, financial dependency and geographical scope), digital communication can be strategic in the pursuit of the multiple mandates entrenched into their constitutive Charters. Earlier studies have found that groups and institutions can still be efficient, even lacking finances and infrastructure, when they know how to communicate strategically (Dimitrov 2008a; 2008b). The question, then, is about learning what are the potentials and challenges of digital communications and how international organizations can explore them.

We organized six categories to accommodate the potential of digital communication for international organizations, as shown on Table 1. International organizations can build up their institutional image and narrative (Branding); share information, raise awareness and inform public opinion (Diffusion); communicate with other actors (Network); and reframe existing issues (Framing). Also, digital communication is useful at listening and responding to the online audiences (Dialogue) and finding out about their own performance and upcoming events (Gather Information).

TABLE 1. Potential of Digital Communication for International Organizations

ENGAGEMENT	Branding	Manage image and reputation; Author institutional narrative.
	Framing	React to events framing them accordingly; Circumvent local press.
	Diffusion	Communicate norms and information; Target mass and niche audience.
	Network	Draw information from a range of actors; Take part in transnational networks.
LISTENING	Dialogue	Engage with online audiences; Channel citizen participation.
	Gather Information	Collect information; Assess performance.

Elaborated by the authors based on Manor 2016.

On the other hand, digital communication often provokes defiance to international organizations. Exposure to new virtual environments and communication to online audiences figure novel tasks in which international organizations lack background. In the same way as before, we organized five

categories to set the challenges of digital communications by international organizations on Table 2.

TABLE 2. Challenges of Digital Communications for International Organizations.

ENGAGEMENT	Training & Resources	Specialized communications staff; Intensive training of senior staff.
	Coordination	Coordination of efforts and content among peer IOs.
	Coherence	Between Affiliated International Organizations; Within the International Organization.
LISTENING	Assimilation	Control over criticism; Accommodation of feedback.
	Transparency	Openness to request and pressure for private/secret information and archives.

Elaborated by the authors based on Manor 2016.

Migration to the online world requires international organizations to invest in specialized communication teams, skilled not only in digital literacy and languages, but also attuned to the institution's mission. In some cases, this challenge unfolds in an additional financial dare (Training and Resources). Also, as the number of international organizations in world affairs keeps expanding the demand for coordination of work and content between international bodies and mother- or peer-organizations operating online is crucial (Coordination) Likewise, since coherence plays a significant role on the credibility of international organizations, international bodies and agencies must guard against contradiction, a tough task to hyper-structured and multi-purposed international organizations. In the light of this, guidelines of policy recommendations for the web can align practices within international organizations (Coherence). While these three challenges refer to the willingness of engaging with the virtual environment; listening to the online audience adds greater challenges to international organizations. Virtual interactions might lead to unexpected criticism, flood of information and greater pressure for transparency (Assimilation Transparency). Managing to control over criticism during the communication process and accommodating feedback are important measures for international organizations in order to realize full potential at digital communication. The unpredictability of online

audiences remains a decisive factor inhibiting international organizations to deepen virtual interactions with online audiences.

Whether general international organizations face challenges at experimenting with digital communication, in the human-rights niche, digital communication assumes more daunting features. International politics on human rights - either on regular or digital mode - is not for the simple-minded. Let us demonstrate why the topic of human rights adds yet more nuance to the processes of digital communication in international organizations.

2. Advancing International Human Rights Through Digital Communication

Many decades before the urge of digital communication, the efforts to move human rights up in the international agenda started with the delicate arrangement between states, newly-established international organizations and few other actors. In 1948, in light of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights at the United Nations, the process of building international consensus involved an intense flow of ideas, information and people (Castillo and Valverde 2019). It also depended heavily on the coalition of Latin American democracies and newly independent countries, which joined active negotiation, despite being far from the circles of high politics at the time (Glendon 2003; Humphrey 1984). For two years, keeping the momentum for policy change (the sense of urgency) on human rights represented a major challenge once international politics back then depended on traditional diplomacy in a realm of low available technology. Even so, the development of the international human rights project turned out successful (Pinker 2018; Sikkink 2017). Until the mid-40s, human rights were deemed almost completely domestic affairs; a few decades later, an 'industry of human rights' was set forth (Engstrom 2010). Today, more than hundreds of international human-rights treaties, international organizations and human rights bodies, a dozen major human-rights NGOs and uncountable activists work to define human rights norms and, ultimately, protect individuals and groups around the globe.

In today's world, it has become harder for states to simply avoid human rights, not least because of the body of overlapping human rights institutions or due to the increasing connection of human-rights issues with other spheres of state's interest, like trade, environment, international aid or participation in elite clubs (Hillebrecht 2019). It is precisely the advancement of communications technology that restricts choice and time of decision-making for governments that plays an important part in international human

rights policy. A state's foreign policy is always the result of mixed motives, even if the state is bonded to a stronger or lesser extent to international human-rights treaties. Sometimes states engage in human rights diplomacy for genuine and valid moral reasons, like in the case of Latin American states and the approval of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights in the late 40s. But most of the time, this move is driven primarily by strategic interests, meaning that non-human rights matters can affect states' diplomacy on human rights. Differently, international organizations' approach in the pursuit of human rights is generally single-minded: the focus is previously set on a rule-guided behaviour towards the realization of human rights norms. Such mismatching puzzles over multiple- *v.* single-minded interests between states and international organizations is rarely solved in the traditional diplomacy field. Rather, digital communication turns out to be strategic to reconcile these diverse logics of social interaction among states and international organizations, by facilitating dialogue towards the recognition of norms and legitimate behaviour.

By posing that, we do not disregard the need of traditional diplomacy to create new human rights norms and policies, to refine existing ones, and mostly, to bring actors to fulfil their responsibilities. However, when international organizations frame events as human rights claims through digital communication and target specific actors (repressive governments, violent groups, or corrupt companies) they can be more effective at limiting states' response. In this case, digital communication - like tweeting, for instance - can potentialize the effect of private reprimands because, more than sounding public, it works at mobilizing online audiences to real-time pressure. In this sense, digital communication instils an updated version of the old naming-and-shaming, with the virtuosity of closing the time gap. Within this logic, digital tools can be used as a political weapon to try to delegitimize target governments as well as advance the cause of human dignity in a more balanced and even-handed process (Forsythe 2017).

Another reason why digital communication works in the advancement of human rights relates to the nature of influencing through non-violent ways. International human rights regimes must guide states (and other actors) towards desired behaviour without resorting to violence. Accordingly, digital communication rests on the idea of influence, which refers to the ability of affecting others without appeal to force. In this sense, international human rights regimes and digital communication can be both linked to the concepts of social power, soft power or smart power (Van Ham 2010; Nye 2009). As such, digital communication suits international human rights bodies in many ways, like collecting and analysing information, monitoring trends and

performance, delivering services, providing forums for debate, negotiation and decision-making, as discussed in the previous session.

However, besides low-cost and potentially high-effective, digital communication comes at a political cost for international human-rights organizations, especially when employed by secretariat office and agency heads. Along with international human rights bodies, these bureaucrats are expected to undertake appropriate action, either by engaging with traditional diplomacy and publicly speaking out through digital communication. At the same time, these personnel are hoped to directly maintain the support of the member states to the international organization. As such, while communicating through digital means, they must calculate when, how and who to engage so as not to push key members too far. The risk of backlashes is real: after public reprimands, the United States quit the United Nations Human Rights Council in 2018; Brazil cancelled its financial subsidies to the OAS in 2012; and, the Brexit proceedings are projected to affect human-rights issues throughout Europe. History has shown that withdrawals - albeit manifest - were insufficient to deter movements pushing human rights forward (Pinker 2018; Sikkink 2017). Criticism and praise among international actors can be expected as part of the dynamics involving human rights in world affairs. Let us move on now to understand how the Inter-American Human Rights System pioneered and evolved through the dynamics of digital communication.

3. Digital Communication at The Inter-American Human Rights System

The Inter-American Human Rights System is not a digital born. Besides that, it aged well. This regional system - which oversees the human rights situation in 35 countries in the Americas - was created in 1948, with the adoption of the American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of the Man, under the umbrella of the Organization of the American States (OAS). It comprises two main bodies: the Inter-American Commission (1959, based in Washington, D.C.) and the Inter-American Court (1979, based in Costa Rica). Functioning since 1959, when its first body was created, it was not until the end of the 1990s that the Inter-American Human Rights System set its first endeavours in the digital scene. The Figure 1 gives a visual notion of the pathway traced by the Inter-American Human Rights System at establishing its digital presence over the years.

But before assessing the evolution of digital communication in this regional system, we must recall some earlier definitions. Digital communication encompasses two ideas: (1) building digital presence and (2) managing

digital performance. As stated in section 1, digital presence captures the static notion of a structure of information at various virtual environments, like a set of websites and social media accounts owned and operated by an international organization. Digital performance, on the other hand, refers to the dynamic notion of managing virtual environments and interacting with online audiences through digital tools. As such, it brings up the actions of engagement and listening. Digital presence and performance vary among regional human rights systems according to the historical background, institutional design and political contexts. In the light of the Inter-American Human Rights System's experience with digital communication, we turn, therefore, to examine how such variations occur.

FIGURE 1. The evolution of websites at the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights
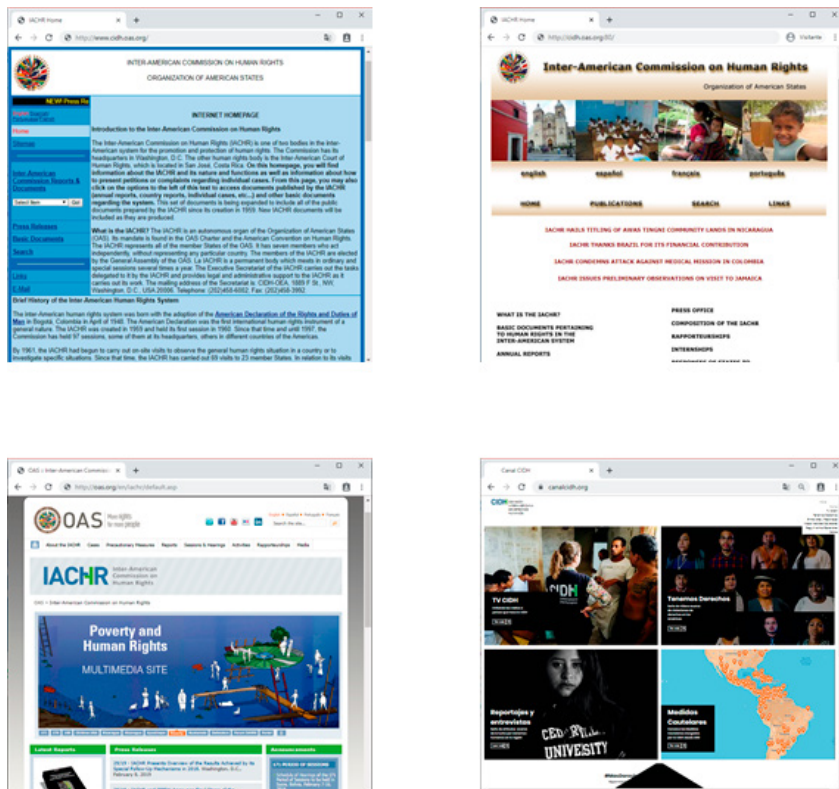
Top Row, left to right: IACHR homepage in 1999; IACHR homepage in 2009 (The WayBack Machine 2019). Bottom Row, left to right: IACHR homepage in 2019; Canal CIDH Homepage in 2019 (IACHR 2019).

3.1. Digital Presence of the Inter-American Human Rights System

Despite pioneering digital presence by migrating to the web as early as 1998, the Inter-American Human Rights System today - along with other regional human rights systems - own a range of websites and social media accounts. Table 3 gives a sense of digital presence at social media by regional human rights systems. The mapping of digital presence at regional human rights bodies indicates that the Inter-American System's digital presence is the oldest and broadest among the three regional systems, in terms of audience reach and variety of digital tools.

Regarding audience reach, the Inter-American Human Rights System counts with a substantive number of followers and subscribers, 20.8 times larger than the European Human Rights System's audience and 118 times larger than the African Human Rights System's audience. This number is particularly outstanding, considering the problems of internet quality and unequal access in the region (ECLAC, 2018). As to the range of digital tools, both the Inter-American Commission and Court secured equivalent digital presence through official websites and a variety of social media as well.

In the early years, websites and social media accounts served the purpose of presenting the institutional framework, mainly through texts and hyper-texts. This initial move helped the Inter-American Human Rights System not only to overcome spatial limitations, but also to become perceived and acknowledged as an institutional channel throughout the region. However, like many governments and corporations' websites, the first website versions at the Inter-American Human Rights System were organized around their bureaucratic structure, rather than the kinds of information users seek, like the number of state condemnations, the percentage of compliance with the system's decisions or the average of financial reparation at the regional system. Over time, the Inter-American bodies started to expand the depth and breadth of their posts through the incorporation of images and videos. More recently, interactive websites and the innovative IACHR Channel, a novel website on the activities of the Inter-American Commission, display a variety of multimedia contents: on-site photographs, short testimonies, interactive maps and interviews contribute to the promotion of human rights in the region.

TABLE 3. Digital presence on Social Media - Regional Human Rights Systems

Regional Human Rights System	Regional Human Rights Body	Social media Platform	Followers and subscribers	Audience per human rights body
Inter-American Human Rights System	Inter-American Commission on Human Rights	Twitter (3 acc)	519.212	1.072.587
		Facebook	540.916	
		YouTube	9.530	
		Instagram	808	
		LinkedIn	1.616	
		Flicker	505	
	Inter-American Court of Human Rights	Twitter (2 acc)	328.205	867.189
		Facebook	534.349	
		Vimeo	763	
		Instagram	3.576	
		Flicker	54	
		SoundCloud	242	
European Human Rights System	Commissioner on Human Rights	Twitter	36.300	46.838
		Facebook	10.538	
	European Court of Human Rights	Twitter (2 acc)	41.700	46.440
		Youtube	4.740	
African Human Rights System	African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights	Twitter	841	841
	African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights	Twitter	6.119	15.565
		Facebook	8.196	
		Youtube	1.250	

Compiled by the authors on Sept. 9th, 2019.

Beyond making the Inter-American Human Rights System known in the region, it is important to highlight that these new communication strategies stress on the system's ability to build empathy, vicinity and inclusiveness with online audiences. Such a move potentially leverages the Inter-American Human Rights Commission to the reach of ordinary citizens, which traditionally alleged multiple obstacles to formally access the system. The enhancement of digital communication - through compelling content in multiple formats for easy media and public consumption - helps to convince, persuade and capture screen-time from followers, an important asset for less privileged actors to take a first step, acknowledge the regional system, engage in frequent contact and potentially dialogue with it.

3.2. Digital Performance of the Inter-American Human Rights System

Such robust digital presence assumes an intense activity for the Inter-American bodies. But how do the Inter-American Commission and Court make use of digital tools? How does that differ from other regional systems? We assessed digital performance through Twitter, which is the single common social media used by all three existing regional human rights systems, serving as a comparative parameter for digital performance.

We monitored the most followed institutional account of each regional human rights body during four months, during 118 days between November, 1st, 2018 to February, 28th, 2019, arriving at a sample of 2.273 tweets, which comprises 1713 tweets from the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights account (@cidh); 134 tweets from the Inter-American Court of Humans Rights account (@corteidh); 85 tweets from the Council of Europe Commissioner of Human Rights account (@commissionerHR); 279 tweets from the European Court of Human Rights selected account (@ECHR_cedh); 31 tweets from the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights account (@achpr_cadhp); and 31 tweets from the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights account (@court_afchpr). Here are some important methodological notes. First, regarding different language usage, the Inter-American system accounts tweet mostly in Spanish, although having other accounts dedicated to informing audiences in other languages, like Portuguese and English. Regarding the European human rights bodies, tweets are mostly written in English, although frequently translated into other languages, notably Polish, Russian and German. As for the African human rights bodies, tweets are tweeted exclusively in English. Second, with reference to institutional functions, selected bodies

from each regional system do not necessarily perform the same functions of a correlated body in other regional systems, whilst in some cases (courts), functions can coincide. These differences do not prevent significant comparisons relating to digital communication between regional human rights bodies.

FIGURE 2. Tweeting Frequency at the Regional Human Rights Bodies
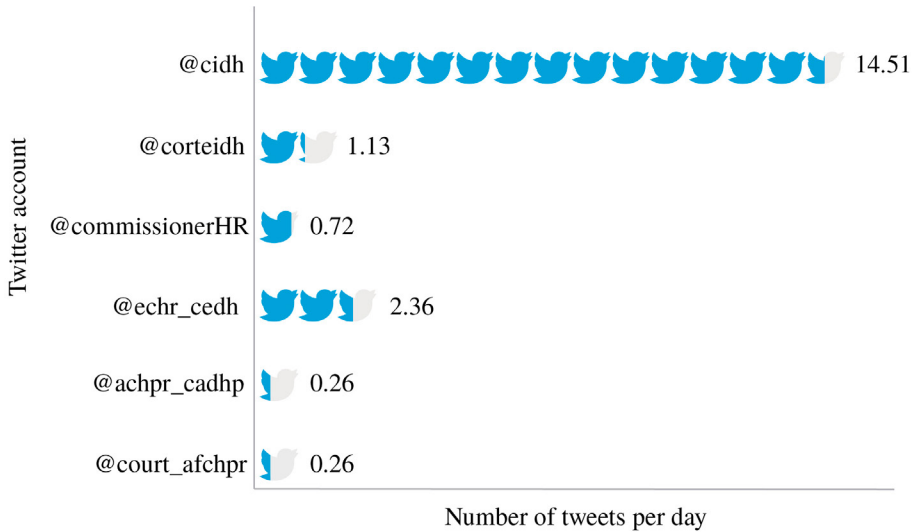
First question to assess digital communication, then, was: how many tweets can regional human rights bodies tweet a day? We found that the Inter-American Commission tweets approximately 15 times a day, way more than other regional human rights bodies, as displayed on Figure 2. However, it is hard to evaluate if almost 15 tweets a day are overly, ideal or below expected. Once there are no manuals of good practices for tweeting for international organizations, the parameters of the most active international organization in general help to fill this gap. The World Economic Forum tweets an average of 106.64 times per day, tending to repeat the best performing tweets up to 10 times over different days and in different time zones to reach the largest possible audience (BCW 2017). Notwithstanding, this industrial-style does not necessarily guarantee the public's attachment to the cause. When hyperactivity translates into automatism and impersonality, the expected result is low interaction and scarce attention, both undesired effects for human rights promotion.

The Twitter accounts that we monitored are far from hyperactivity examples. But automatism and impersonality produce perverse effects

on them as well. Let's take the case of the European Court of Human Rights' account for a moment to examine the relation between frequency and efficiency in digital communication. When comparing the European Court to the Inter-American and African Human Rights Courts' accounts, the first tweets twice as many as the others. Still, the European Court of Human Rights has one of the lowest amounts of likes and retweets per tweet among regional human rights bodies, as seen on Figure 3.

FIGURE 3. Retweets and Likes at the Regional Human Rights Bodies

Average of retweets and likes per tweet
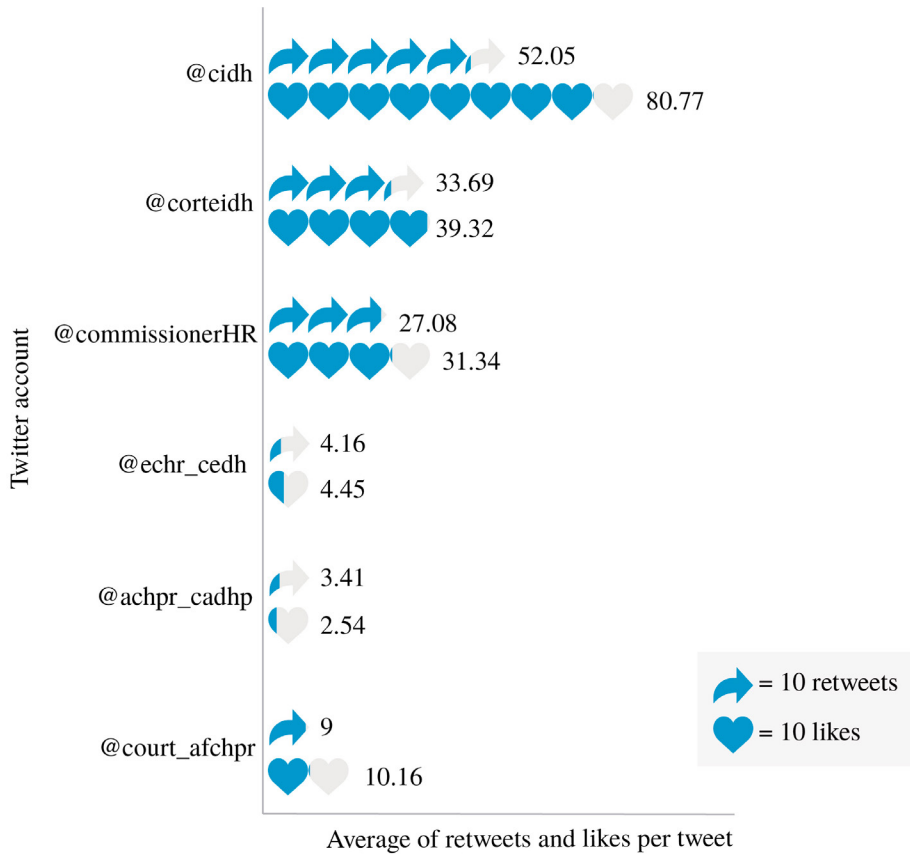
A possible explanation relates to the use of the RSS broadcaster tool, which converts the European Court of Human Rights website's content (usually the title of press releases) into automatic tweets. In our sample, the majority (80,4%) of the tweets from the European Court of Human Rights were created through this tool, while in the other courts, no automated

tools were used. As a result, the automatization of digital communication by the European Court of Human Rights leaves this body with the lower interactions in the sample.

The following question concerns efficiency: how efficient are regional human rights bodies at getting their message across? On Twitter, efficiency can be readily measured by the number of average retweets and likes per tweet. From our sample, we learn that Inter-American Commission is more effective than other regional human rights bodies, as displayed on Figure 3. Again, it is tough to evaluate what the average number of 52 retweets and 81 likes per tweet represents in terms of the Inter-American Commission´s efficiency. Comparatively though, tweeting almost at the same speed (12.13 tweets/day), UNICEF (@UNICEF) was considered the most effective international organization in 2017 with an average of 222 retweets per tweet (BCW 2017). However, putting in perspective, while UNICEF has a potential reach of over seven million followers, the Inter-American Commission restricts to half a million. Then, proportionally, the Inter-American Commission is more efficient than UNICEF when it comes to the attachment of its online audience to the organizations' cause.

Now that we know about tweeting frequency and interaction, how about digital communication in practice? To answer this question, we organized the content of tweets according to the potentials of digital communication for international organizations, displayed on Table 1. Each potential represents a kind of usage of digital tools. We excluded the potential of Gathering Information (Table 1), since internal data on how international human rights' staff collect information and/or assess performance was not publicly available. The 280-characters policy on Twitter may sound limiting at delivering the most content to diverse online audiences. However, brevity seems ingrained into Twitter's practice. When skilfully tailored, one tweet can serve multiple purposes and target various addressees. Whenever this happened, we counted more than one use in a single tweet.

From the organization of the tweets´ contents according to the potentials of digital communication in Table 1, the content analysis returned the following results, as displayed in Figure 4. Each circle represents a regional human rights body assessed through its most followed institutional account on Twitter. The visualisation of colours in each circle aims at demonstrating the uses of digital communication by regional human rights bodies on Twitter. As such, the more colours present in one circle; the more different uses of digital communication by a human rights body. Similarly, the grey arches, whenever present, represent most frequent combinations of multi-purposed tweets by a regional human rights body.

FIGURE 4. Tweeting at the Regional Human Rights Bodies
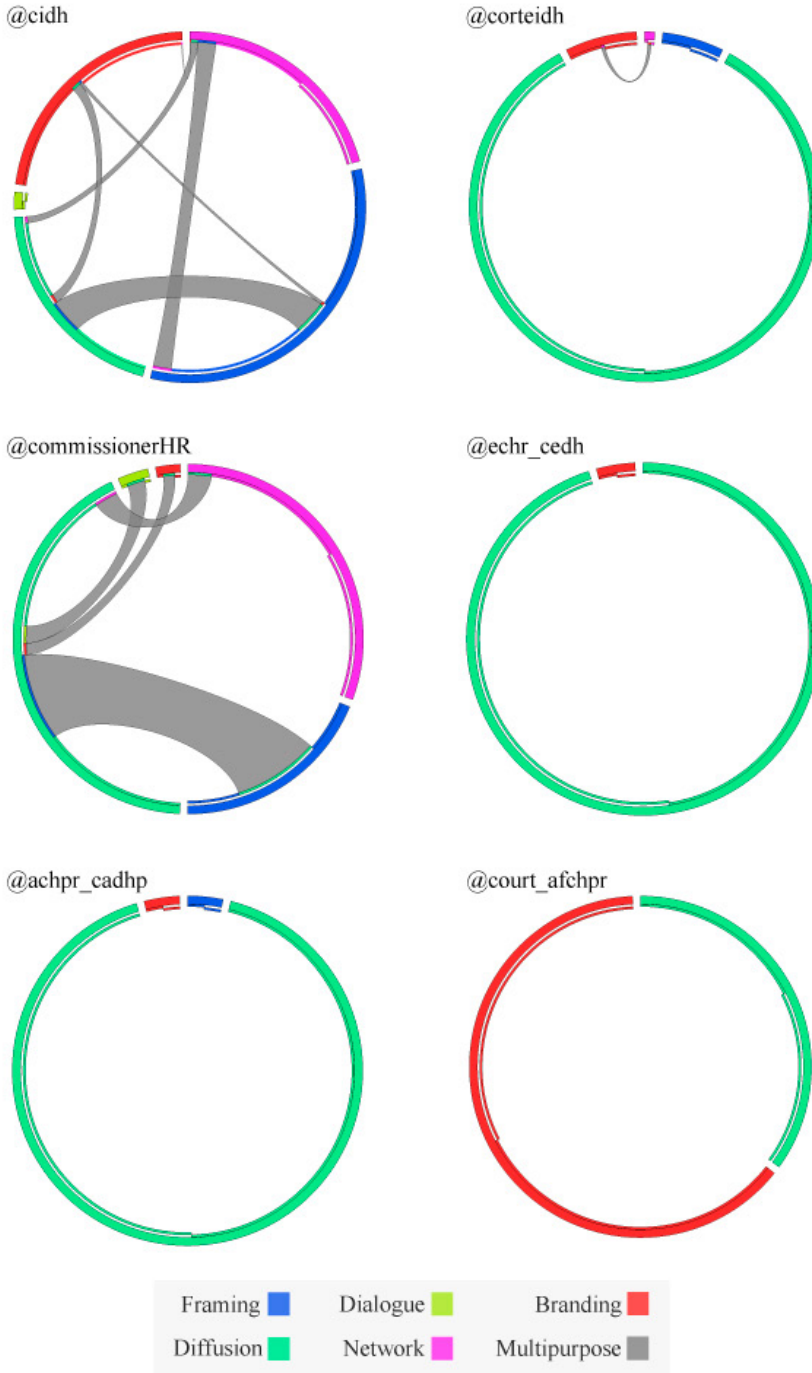
The results from our sample suggest that the Inter-American Commission tweets for multiple purposes, but mostly for Framing (666 tweets). This strategy is an expressive finding, demonstrating the Inter-American Commission readiness to construct a human-rights narrative to important events taking place in the region. Branding, Network and Diffusion are also common and fairly distributed uses (417; 410; and 405 tweets respectively) at the Inter-American Commission. Through these uses, the Inter-American body turns important information available and connects with its online audiences. These data validate the original and distinguished bond set between the Inter-American Commission and civil society. The Inter-American Human Rights System originated in one-of-a-kind scenery, when most of the countries in the region were authoritarian governments. The adverse political context resulted in the rapprochement of the Inter-American Commission to the civil society, since many governments were unsupportive for the regional system at the time. Civil society provided crucial services for the incipient Inter-American Human Rights system, including documenting violations, initiating litigation, lobbying and monitoring (Haddad 2012; Hillebrecht 2012; Goldman 2009; Farer 1997) and this dynamic goes on until today (Ramanzini and Yildiz 2020).

On the other hand, data on the Inter-American Court's performance on Twitter shows that tweeting is almost always single-purposed and for Diffusion (133 tweets) mainly. This result was expected for international courts once their utmost interest would be spreading international jurisprudence. Besides tweeting for Branding (11 tweets), Framing (9 tweets) and Networking (2 tweets) to a lesser extent, these uses differentiate the Inter-American Court from other regional human rights courts. The European Court follows a strict policy for digital practice informed by its institutional guideline for Twitter (European Court of Human Rights 2019). Hence, in this system, data shows an even pattern of diffusion predominantly (Diffusion: 269 tweets; Branding: 10), meaning that tweets simply promote the latest posts on the European Human Rights Court's website. For the African Court, Branding stands out even before Diffusion (20 tweets), possibly due to the need for consolidating the tribunal as a legitimate authority in the region. Since the Inter-American Court acts more liberated on Twitter than its judicial counterparts, exploring the Networking potential could be an interesting strategy to enhance the tribunal's monitoring performance. Once this task coincides with the Inter-American Courts' mandate, the tribunal could use tweets for networking with key-actors at domestic levels, in order to push states towards compliance.

In common, both Inter-American bodies tweet in a non-automatic way, which means that a single tweet depends on the creation of a content (craft

of information specifically designed for Twitter) and on the timely decision of when to post it. This suggests that the Inter-American Human Rights System acknowledges the importance of performing digitally in strategic ways, acting and reacting near real-time to events. Although increasing the demand for a consolidated working routine (personal resources and training in digital skills), this investment provides the Inter-American Human Rights System to take part in the 'battle of ideas' on the web. It also represents a best practice, since automatically generated tweets tend to lose the opportunity to close the time gap for framing, convincing and influencing in a competitive process of norm definition and implementation.

Another general trend of digital performance at the Inter-American Human Rights System regards tweeting for engagement with the virtual environment (Framing, Diffusion, Network and Branding) more than for listening (Dialogue and Information Gathering). In our sample, the use of Twitter for Dialogue appears in the Inter- American Commission and European Commissioner's accounts only. The explanation here relates to the fact that the European Commissioner and the Inter-American Commission, as promotional bodies, can be more vocal when it comes to human rights violations. Even though this empirical assessment has found that the digital communicative processes offer human rights systems means for listening to the online audiences, data has left clear that they still do it minimally.

The empirical data on the digital communication of the regional human rights systems confirms most of the hypothesis brought up by the literature about the motives that lead international organizations to engage in communicative processes. The organization of categories of potential uses of digital communication in our study demonstrates that when regional human rights bodies communicate through digital means they seek to raise institutional transparency (Altides 2009) by providing critical information (Buchanan and Keohane 2006); to convey normative ideas and induce change (Lehmann 1999; Keck and Sikkink 1998; Alleyne 2008); to legitimise themselves (Zaum 2013), gain public support (Squatrito 2021), and react to contestation (O´Brien et al. 2000). Adding to this literature, our research reveals that international organizations might have mixed motives for doing so. The assessment of digital communication at Twitter reveals that even short digital communicative pieces can convey more than one reason for going public at a time.

The finding that regional human rights bodies engage minimally into listening to online audiences confirms the strand of literature affirming that public communication can turn out problematic. However, as long as some argue that problems occur due to the prioritization of official narratives and particular voices (Ecker-Ehrhardt 2018a; 2018b), our study slightly diverges

from this part of the literature, in the sense that the logics of international human-rights bodies differs substantially from general international organizations. In the human rights niche, generally, international organizations leverage minority narratives against state´s official narratives, giving voice to the marginalized. Then, the challenge for international human rights bodies in public communication regards guaranteeing the already existing vocalization of multiple voices. Indeed, the empirical exam of the Inter-American Human Rights System digital communication offers many examples of strategies for building empathy, vicinity and inclusiveness with the online audiences.

Conclusions

The Inter-American Human Rights System's broad digital presence and timely performance brought modernization and means to overcome limitations on the promotion and protections of human rights in the region. More than adapting to the complexities of the new world affairs, the evaluation of the Inter-American Human Rights System´s case suggests that this regional system recognizes the importance of effective digital communication as a game-changing opportunity. While securing an indispensable and increasingly authentic digital presence on the web, the Inter-American Human Rights bodies morphed their pure institutional website into up-to-date digital communication. The visually rich layouts, interactive contents and more human faces are important strategies at creating empathy, vicinity and inclusiveness with online audiences. Despite that, improvements on the listening of online audiences could enlarge the system's digital impact. As long as communication remains one-way, any digital move resembles traditional top-down communiqué. The path to stay ahead indicates full interactivity, and by reacting to this unavoidable challenge, the Inter-American Human Rights System can continue to set its course towards a deep-digital and an increasingly humane future.

More than twenty years of digital experimentation at the Inter-American Human Rights System has left a worthy digital legacy. Our research provided an organization of the available empirical data regarding digital communication at the Inter-American Human Rights System. Such a subset of data offers a testing case for important theoretical propositions in International Relations, like the ideas of constituency mobilization, norm diffusion, social reconstruction, the power of discursive narratives and the uttering of democratic global governance. More specifically, it also represented an opportunity to test some of the hypotheses brought

up in the more theoretical studies of why international organizations engage with digital communication. Likewise, this analysis offers practical contribution to international organizations, especially in the human rights issue-area, as the main findings can provide means for internal assessments of communication´s policy from within and best practices or trends can transcend from one regional system to another. Finally, our study displays social benefits beyond academic and international bureaucracy realms. As we tracked the digital presence and main uses of digital communication by regional human rights bodies, our research presents a roadmap for citizens and activists to strategize their actions towards the available channels of access in the existing regional human rights systems.

One of the main limitations of this study is the impracticability of collecting specific data on the audience and its interactions with the Inter-American Human Rights System. By the proposed methodological design, we could not track information about who are the followers of the Inter-American bodies. As a result, it was impossible to track challenges faced by users at the digital realm of the Inter-American Human Rights System, like availability of internet in the region or language competences (official idioms and native languages). Interviews and surveys could help understand those features.

Future research can adapt our approach to explore ways in which specific strategies can enhance digital communications by international human-rights organizations. The use of hashtags remains an unexplored venue. Hashtags are known for helping to call attention to last-minute clashes and also to grow the audience, leading tweets to the most talked about international topics. As a fast sorting mechanism, hashtags might favour or bloc serendipitous encounters. International human-rights organizations generally circumscribe themselves into echo chambers, rarely succeeding at reaching people with different points of view to engage with human-rights conversation. Mastering the craft of hashtag might be a helpful strategy for international organizations to overcome online polarization, improve human rights norms diffusion and give an extra stimulus to human rights realization.

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