

## Villoro, Velasco y Volpi: las letras mexicanas y las redes sociales virtuales

*Villoro, Velasco y Volpi: mexican letters and virtual social networks*

*Villoro, Velasco e Volpi: cartas mexicanas e redes sociais virtuais*

**Rocío Leticia Cortés Campos**

Universidad Autónoma de Yucatán, Facultad de Ciencias Antropológicas, México

[rocio.cortes@correo.uady.mx](mailto:rocio.cortes@correo.uady.mx)

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9647-474X>

**Celia Esperanza Rosado Avilés**

Universidad Autónoma de Yucatán, Facultad de Ciencias Antropológicas, México

[celroavi@correo.uady.mx](mailto:celroavi@correo.uady.mx)

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9681-1996>

### Resumen

Las redes sociales virtuales (RSV) tienen múltiples aplicaciones y pueden ser utilizadas con distintos propósitos por parte de usuarios con perfiles diversos. Entre estos es posible encontrar cuentas oficiales de artistas que emplean las RSV para difundir su obra y credo. Es el caso de Juan Villoro, Xavier Velasco y Jorge Volpi, tres reconocidos escritores mexicanos que utilizan Twitter como una forma de mantener contacto con sus audiencias. Este trabajo tiene como propósito estudiar el manejo de esta RSV por parte de dichos autores, con especial atención en el tipo de publicaciones que realizan y la interacción que entablan con sus seguidores de esa red. Entre los resultados se aprecia un uso diferido por parte de cada autor; sin embargo, como aspecto en común destaca que los tres autores utilizan las RSV para promover su trabajo literario y periodístico, así como también su credo y/o activismo político.

**Palabras clave:** interacción, Internet, literatura mexicana, redes sociales virtuales, Twitter.

## Abstract

Virtual Social Networks (RSV in spanish) have multiple applications and can be used for different purposes by users with different profiles. Among these, it is possible to find official accounts of artists who use RSV to spread their work and creed. This is the case of Juan Villoro, Xavier Velasco and Jorge Volpi, three well-known Mexican writers who use the RSV Twitter as a way to maintain contact with their audiences. The purpose of this work is to study the management of this RSV by these authors, with special attention to the type of publications they carry out and the interaction they engage with their followers of that network. Among the results we can see a deferred use by each author, however, as a common aspect, the three authors use RSV to promote their literary, journalistic work, as well as their creed and/or political activism.

**Keywords:** interaction, Internet, Mexican literature, Virtual Social Networks, Twitter.

## Resumo

As redes sociais virtuais (RSV) têm vários aplicativos e podem ser usadas para diferentes finalidades por usuários com diferentes perfis. Entre eles, é possível encontrar relatos oficiais de artistas que usam o RSV para divulgar seu trabalho e credo. É o caso de Juan Villoro, Xavier Velasco e Jorge Volpi, três renomados escritores mexicanos que usam o Twitter como forma de manter contato com seus públicos. O objetivo deste trabalho é estudar a gestão deste RSV por estes autores, com especial atenção para o tipo de publicações que realizam e a interação que eles envolvem com seus seguidores dessa rede. Entre os resultados, podemos ver um uso diferido por cada autor; No entanto, como aspecto comum, vale ressaltar que os três autores utilizam o RSV para promover seu trabalho literário e jornalístico, bem como seu credo e / ou ativismo político.

**Palavras-chave:** interação, Internet, literatura mexicana, redes sociais virtuais, Twitter.

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## **Introduction**

Users of RSV virtual social networks such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube turn to them for several purposes: consumption and dissemination of information, proselytizing, search for affinities and establishment or maintenance of affective bonds, or, for purposes of sociability and interaction, among many others. One of the uses that has also been granted to these RSV is to maintain contact with opinion leaders. For example, of politicians, activists and artists who gather thousands and millions of followers in their RSV.

In this direction, in the artistic-literary sector, several writers have joined the world of RSV to maintain contact with their public in order to promote their work and activities. This counteracts the idea that RSVs only promote extensive or superficial reading, distancing the individual from a truly intensive reading, without considering that at the same time the RSV are being used by the authors themselves to maintain closeness with their audiences, feedback and encourage the reading of his work.

As part of the debate about the repercussions of RSV in different areas of knowledge, this paper analyzes the presence of three well-known Mexican writers: Juan Villoro, Xavier Velasco and Jorge Volpi in the RSV Twitter. In particular, the number of followers they have, the type of publication they make and the interaction they establish with their followers are studied. At this point it is important to note that not only male writers have a recognized presence in the Twitter network, but also there are prominent Mexican writers with important presence; among them we can mention, for example, Margo Glantz, Guadalupe Netel and Cristina Rivera Garza, who use Twitter for purposes similar to those used by the writers referred to in this research. In that sense, the study of the presence and activity of Mexican writers in virtual social networks is undoubtedly a pending issue, which will be developed in future research. For the moment, this paper studies the participation of these three writers who share several aspects in common: they are contemporary Mexican authors highly recognized nationally and internationally, they are of more or less similar generations (although Villoro is a little older than Volpi and Velasco); they also have active participation in Twitter; They also stand out not only for their literary work, but also for the cultivation of journalism and political criticism, as well as for their work as activists in different areas.

The purpose of this research is to reflect in a general way on the use of RSV by these three Mexican writers to maintain close contact with their audiences. Specifically seeks to understand what are the uses that give to the RSV Twitter in two main aspects: 1) for the dissemination of their artistic work or activism, and the transmission of their creeds and ideologies; as well as 2) in terms of the interaction they engage with their followers. The results of the work will be presented later.

### **Information society, RSV and literature**

The prominent place that information and communication technologies (ICT) occupy, and in particular RSV in the lives of people, happens within the framework of the information society, which occurred due to a great technological revolution that generated fundamental changes in socio-economic terms in practically the entire world. The information society brought important innovations in products and in the realization of processes in a virtual way on the Web (Castells, 2006), in a completely different environment until what was previously seen.

Among such changes can be seen the appearance of integrated information systems, teleinformatic infrastructure and the development and implementation of technological tools (Nava, 2007, p.48). In this direction, the Internet and mobile telephony emerge as the main protagonists in this new technological paradigm, due to the great impact on society, in almost all kinds of organizations.

This context allowed the emergence and positioning of RSV, which acquired great importance in the way in which people interact and communicate. With the advent of the Internet and RSV, communication between individuals would no longer only take place face to face, by stationary phone or by letter; not one to one. The supports and digital formats allowed remote communication in a horizontal and network form, uniting people with the same interests and goals in practically any place in the world. On this point, Boyd and Ellison (2008) state that among the aspects that characterize the RSV are the various possibilities that allow the user to interact with other contacts in the world, which is self-presented by configuring a personal profile that he designs based on his tastes and preferences.

In this sense, RSV can be defined as those systems of relationships established by

people with different contacts, with whom they interact through electronic Internet platforms (Cortés, 2014, 2015). The reasons why individuals connect to some RSV are very diverse, depending on the interests of each user.

They are used for mere sociability (Cáceres, Ruiz and Brändle, 2009): to share good and bad news or to meet people. They can also be used for organizational purposes and for citizen convergence to address common causes (Galindo and González, 2013); as social, ideological, religious, ecological struggles, etc. They can be used for academic or educational reasons, and even for the professional opportunities offered by RSV (Cortés, 2014, 2015, Alonso and Alonso, 2013, Cancelo, 2013, Valenzuela, 2013, Sánchez and Pinochet, 2017). For these and other reasons is that people interact in some RSV such as Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter, to mention some that have become part of the daily life of the common user, who can access them almost from various electronic devices practically in anywhere on the planet where the Internet signal arrives.

However, despite the great popularity of RSV in the world, they have also been the target of multiple criticisms, often well-founded. Highlights, for example, the famous quote by Umberto Eco about RSV, of which he said: "Social networks give you the right to speak to legions of imbeciles"; the above in an interview granted to the Italian newspaper *La Stampa*, in 2015 (Sánchez, February 20, 2016).

Along with Eco, other writers have spoken out about the problems that RSVs entail not only in people's daily lives, but specifically around linguistic and literary issues. This is the case of the Peruvian writer Mario Vargas Llosa, who once referred to them as "a caricature of the language", and even explained that RSV implies the very negation of literature. This during the presentation of one of his books, at the University of Princeton, in the United States, in 2017 (Agencia EFE, September 20, 2017).

Juan Villoro himself has been critical of the age of RSV and the Internet, and in particular has pointed out the false sense of citizenship that the user may incur by assuming that participation in this type of media could be considered as activism. In an interview with the newspaper *La Vanguardia* (DPA, July 25, 2017), Villoro says:

Many times people, instead of expressing discontent in the public square or in real activism, limit themselves to sending a tweet and believe that they have already expressed a conviction. They are fireworks. We are increasingly in a split of reality.

Notwithstanding the above, Villoro recognizes the advantages and opportunities of RSV, since he maintains active participation in a Twitter account, in which he publishes tweets of diverse content, which will be analyzed in this investigation later.

With respect to the strong criticisms that these writers make of RSV, it must be acknowledged that their arguments have not weak foundations. For example, today it is very common for many users of these communication channels to comment and share news and information without much reflection on the source of this news, or on the specific situation being addressed, becoming heroes, redeemers, victims or martyrs to any individual with a history worthy of being shared. In the age of RSV, all users become judges and part of the daily whirlwind of digital entropy, armed with the various applications, filters and cameras of our smartphones.

However, despite the great vicissitudes of the RSV, especially for the literary and linguistic context, the truth is that they also have many strengths that can help spread the work of renowned writers such as those studied in this work, and whose Participation in RSV is worthy of recognition.

## **Methodology, research subjects and scenario**

### **The writers**

Given that the purpose of this research is to present in a general way the use granted by three well-known Mexican writers to the RSV Twitter, the methodology used is quantitative, in the sense that quantitative data extracted from the own accounts of said writers are analyzed. . Specifically, the interaction of each writer is studied in consideration of the number of tweets they have published, the followers they have, the number of contacts they follow and the "likes" they have given to various publications. All this information is publicly stored in the profile of each Twitter user. Likewise, a general review of the publications of these authors is carried out in the months of March and April of 2018. Only two months are selected due to the large amount of information that occurs daily in said

network, which can be obtained a sufficient corpus that allows the exploration of the activity and participation of these writers on Twitter; apart, with the limitation of months it is possible to develop a general and updated outline of the type of publications made, thereby meeting the objectives outlined in this research. To complement this information, some published tweets are retrieved that allow us to exemplify their messages and contents, as will be appreciated later.

In this sense, in order to obtain a better context of the research topic, this section presents some general aspects of the biography and work of the selected authors.

### **Juan Villoro**

He was born in Mexico City in 1956, and studied Sociology at the National Autonomous University of Mexico. He has worked as a novelist, essayist, journalist and political activist. He has received several recognitions for his literary work. Some of his works can be mentioned: *Materia dispuesta* (1997), *The witness* (2004), *Arrecife* (2012), *The utility of desire* (2017) and *Palms of the fast breeze: a trip to Yucatan* (1989).

### **Xavier Velasco**

He was born in Mexico City in 1964. He has been a writer and journalist since he was very young. Among his most outstanding works can be noted the following: *The age of the sting* (2012), *I can explain everything* (2010), *Guardian Devil* (2003) and *the years vermin* (2016), among others.

### **Jorge Volpi**

He was born in Mexico City in 1968. He has a degree in Law and a Master's Degree in Mexican Literature from the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM); He also holds a PhD in Hispanic Philology from the University of Salamanca. From a young age he has done work in journalism and literature. Some of his works include: *A criminal novel* (2018), *Las elegidas* (2015), *Memorial de engaño* (2014) and *Leer la mente. The brain and the art of fiction* (2011).

## The Twitter network

According to Alexa (Amazon company dedicated to digital media marketing), the network Twitter network ranks 13th in the scale of the most popular websites in the world. It also reports an average time of 6 min 25 s in the RSV by the active user; and according to Alexa, it has about 6,000,000 sites that link to that RSV.

Among the main features of Twitter is its brevity and immediacy, since it allows the user to make short publications in a maximum space of 280 characters, also known as tweets (tweets, colloquially in Spanish); and also allows the option of retweets, that is, when another user shares among their contacts the original publication of someone else in the same network. As with many other RSV, Twitter can be used both on computers and mobile devices, such as smartphones and tablets, through which the RSV sends the user interaction notifications (direct messages, a favorite, a retweet).

In our days, Twitter is an important vehicle for the transmission of different types of information: personal, academic, news, political, sports, entertainment, etc. In recent years it has been widely used by politicians and figures from the artistic and sports milieu to make official pronouncements on various subjects. For example, lately the most controversial figure that has used this RSV to express opinions and generate debates is the American president Donald Trump, who repeatedly uses Twitter to make statements of all kinds.

On the importance of RSV Twitter, the Mexican writer Margo Glantz (2013) highlights its role as a space for catharsis, both for public figures and for the common user:

The tweet allows perhaps to abolish psychoanalysis, especially the Lacanian who usually devotes just 10 minutes of his time. With the tweet, newspapers almost cease to exist; Quinceañeras do not need to buy notebooks with lock to consign their most secret thoughts: the tweet has abolished privacy, although we had been accustomed to it before by the reality shows of international television.

Based on this scenario, the information obtained from the accounts of each writer was systematized in the form of tables, textual citations and screen captures, to later make a comparison that would allow a better understanding and interpretation of the use that the selected writers grant to their account on Twitter, as it is presented in detail in the following sections.



## Results

In this section some of the main findings derived from the exercise of the analysis and comparison that the authors give to their official Twitter account are exposed. Regarding the age of the accounts of each author, it is worth noting that the oldest one in this RSV is Volpi, who joined her in 2009; it is followed by Villoro, who created it in 2011, and finally Velasco, who created his account in 2012. On the way in which these writers present themselves on their Twitter profile, we find very specific characteristics of each author, according to their personalities, tastes, preferences and interests.

In the profile picture of Volpi's account, the cover image of *A Criminal Novel* is seen, a recent work by the author. As a cover we can see the image of what appears to be the worn paint of a portrait, of which only one eye can be seen. As a description, only the legend "Writer" can be seen under the name of Volpi, and in which the link to the Spanish blog *El Boomeran (g)* is hyperlinked, in which it usually participates.

Note that next to the name of Jorge Volpi is the official verification stamp issued by Twitter (the icon can be described as a white dove enclosed in a blue circle). In fact, of the three writers referred to, the only one who has such verification is him. It is important to note that the verification is not made by the user, but is granted by the RSV itself when it considers that the user has the meritorious participation and interaction to obtain it. For example, characters like Donald Trump, Enrique Peña Nieto, Beyoncé and Madonna, to mention some examples, present the official verification of Twitter.

Figura 1. Captura de pantalla de la cuenta oficial de Jorge Volpi en Twitter



Fuente: Elaboración propia

Figure 1 shows the number of followers (242,000), the tweets (5168), the contacts that follow (631) and the interactions made by Volpi (854). In the last publication we can see a retweet of the author to one of his events organized by the UNAM.

For his part, Xavier Velasco positions in his profile picture a side image, in which he hugs his already famous dog. In addition, under his name, the legend is observed: "Author of the novels Devil Guardian (2003), This one that you see (2007), I can explain everything (2010), The age of the sting (2012) and The years ververijas ( 2016) ". In the cover photo, a promo is presented in capitalized, stylized red letters from the Prime Video series, based on his novel Diablo Guardián.

Figura 2. Captura de pantalla de la cuenta de Xavier Velasco en Twitter

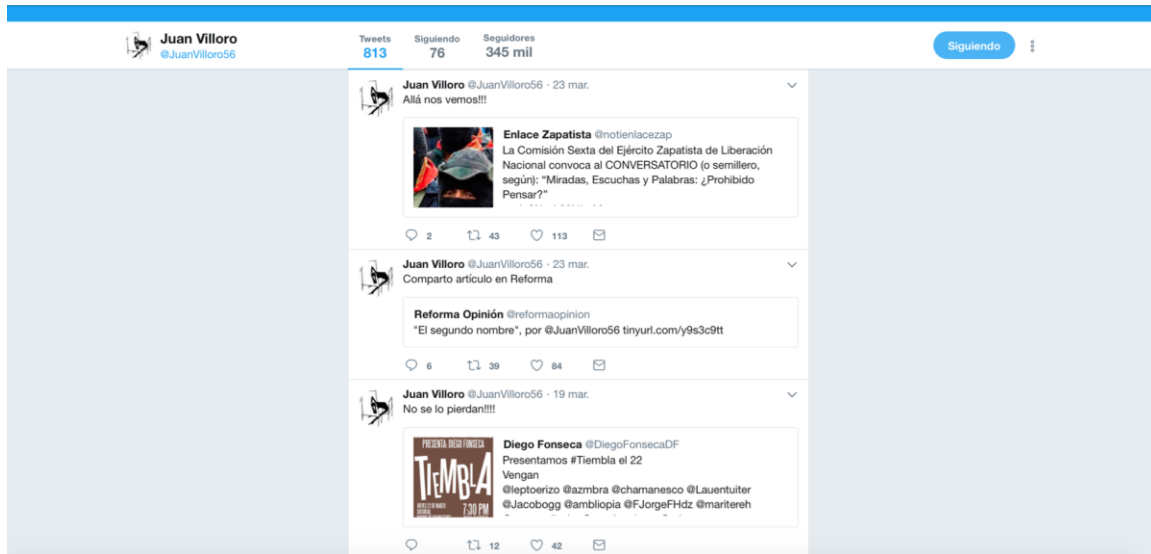


Fuente: Elaboración propia

In figure 2, on the other hand, it is observed that the author has 41 100 followers; has published 13 500 tweets; follows 306 contacts and has interacted with 1698 users. His latest publication is a retweet from the *Diablo Guardián* series, based on the novel he wrote.

The Twitter profile of Juan Villoro presents the black and white line drawing of a writer sitting in front of his desk, with his hands on his head, meditating tortuously. Under the name of Villoro is only read the legend "Mexican journalist and writer" and the link to its official site, [juanvilloro.com](http://juanvilloro.com). It does not have a cover photo.

Figura 3. Captura de pantalla de la cuenta oficial de Juan Villoro en Twitter



Fuente: Elaboración propia

In figure 3 it can be seen that Villoro has 341 followers, has made 799 tweets and follows 76 contacts. He has not made any interaction. His latest publication is a retweet from the newspaper Reforma about an opinion article about the writer Sergio Pitól, who died shortly before.

Regarding the topic of interaction, it is important to highlight different degrees of interaction between one author and another. Thus, for example, it is observed that the writer who publishes the most tweets is Xavier Velasco (13 500), followed by Volpi (5198) and, finally, Villoro (799). In another point of comparison, Volpi stands out as the writer who follows a greater number than contacts with 631; continues Velasco that follows 306 contacts and third place Villoro, who is barely 76.

On the issue of the authors' popularity in RSV, there are important differences. The indicator to determine this point is the number of followers of each writer. At this point, the case of Villoro, who has 341,000 followers, is striking; Volpi follows with 242 000, and then Velasco is located with 41 100, as can be seen in table 1.

With respect to another topic of interaction, specifically around the feedback and participation in the RSV Twitter, it can be seen that Velasco is the most committed writer in this area. One of the important indicators on this topic is the amount of "I like" granted by

each author. It is noted that Villoro has not given a single to any publication, while Volpi has granted 854 and Velasco has granted 1698 to different publications. All the information referred to can also be seen in Table 1.

**Tabla 1.** Interacciones a abril de 2018

<b>Escritor</b>	<b>Tweets</b>	<b>Siguiendo</b>	<b>Seguidores</b>	<b>Me gusta</b>
Xavier Velasco	13,500	306	41,100	1,698
Juan Villoro	799	76	341 mil	No registra
Jorge Volpi	5,168	631	242 mil	854

Fuente: Elaboración propia

Another aspect that is interesting to observe in terms of interactions and interests of the authors is the type of contacts that follow. On this there were also striking findings. According to an exploration carried out on the Twitter profile of each author, it is seen that Villoro follows characters such as Francisco Barrios (Mexican singer-songwriter), Carmen Aristegui and various media and independent journalists, such as Rafael Pérez Gay and Carlos Puig. Javier Corral (governor of Chihuahua), Billy Crystal (American actor), Alberto Chimal (Mexican writer), Sasha Sokol and Julieta Venegas (Mexican singers) are other users to which this Mexican writer follows.

For his part, Velasco follows José Antonio Mead (Mexican politician), Carlos Ballarta (Mexican comedian), Jaime López (Mexican singer), Leopoldo López (Venezuelan activist), J. K. Rowling (author of the Harry Potter saga); and also follows digital media such as Milenio and El País, as well as various media and independent journalists. He also follows the writer Jorge Volpi.

Meanwhile, Volpi follows Mexican politician Ricardo Anaya, Donald Trump; he also follows Literaty Hub (RSV's account of contemporary fiction literature in English). He also follows digital media such as El deforma, Milenio.com, and various journalists affiliated with recognized and independent media, such as Raymundo RivaPalacio, Katia D'Artigues and Daniel Moreno, among others. He also follows Xavier Velasco. In this last point it is observed that there is greater interaction between these last two authors, since they follow each other on Twitter.

With regard to the type of publications they make, it can be seen that Villoro publishes and shares tweets of literary and journalistic content, but also about political activism. Among his publications are tweets and retweets where he shares his literary work, such as the promotion of a theater play for children, authored by Villoro, presented at the Teatro La Capilla. Likewise, messages about conferences and presentations that would be made in different scenarios are observed.

In addition, Villoro publishes tweets and retweets in which he shares journalistic articles of his authorship, but also of other journalists, such as Daniel Moreno, for example. On the other hand, retweets in support of causes of the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN), or retweets in support of the collection of signatures for Marichuy Patricio Martínez, as an independent candidate for the Presidency of Mexico, are also on your account. This last topic stood out among the last tweets of this renowned Mexican writer until the moment in which this work was carried out.

As a journalist, Juan Villoro makes different publications in the media to capture his political creed; In this sense, RSV Twitter also serves to promote this work, since it shares the link of the article in question, as it happens with the retweet to his article on Sergio Pitol, of which he only writes: "Article on Reforma on Sergio Pitol" , followed by the tweet of the newspaper mentioned. On the other hand, Villoro also uses the network to promote the article or pronouncement where another collaborator presents some idea of their interest.

The same case occurs with issues such as the missing students of Ayotzinapa, in which he also shares an article of his own in the Reformation; or in the case of the search for the independent candidacy of Marichuy Patricio, about which it is pronounced in an article published in The New York Times, in its Spanish version. In this, in the retweet add: "I share article published in the NYTimes. Opinion: It is forbidden to vote for an indigenous woman <https://nyti.ms/2F52N7A> via @nytimesES @suvozesmivoz ", and tag a series of users related to the topic, specifically the newspaper and the official Twitter account that promoted the independent candidacy of Marichuy Patricio.

**Figura 4.** Captura de pantalla de un retweet de Juan Villoro. En la imagen puede observarse el retweet que realiza el escritor a un promocional de su obra de teatro



Fuente: elaboración propia

For his part, Jorge Volpi shares tweets and retweets about his journalistic and literary work, as well as interviews and reports about his work by international digital media. In addition, it shares publications (especially retweets) of artistic and cultural content, predominantly from the UNAM. An example is the homage that this house of studies makes to Juan José Arreola for the 100 years of his birth.

In addition to the above, Volpi shares articles and tweets of literary themes from other authors, or from publishing houses in different languages, especially in Spanish and English. He also shares publications about cinematography, such as reviews and retweets about the film *La forma del agua*, directed by Guillermo del Toro. It also shares reflections and retweets of political content; his latest tweets on these issues were about security in Mexico and the demands that citizens make about it.



**Figura 5.** Captura de pantalla de un retweet de Jorge Volpi. En la imagen se aprecia la publicación que comparte el escritor sobre una reseña de Almudena Grandes, acerca de *Una novela criminal*, de la autoría de Volpi



Fuente: Elaboración propia

The publications on Twitter that Xavier Velasco makes, as with the previously mentioned writers, are related to his literary and journalistic work; but also publishes tweets and retweets about politics. In his last interventions on this subject, he presents several publications (retweets on everything) of Andrés Manuel López Obrador, as well as he also replied some satirical memes of the National Regeneration Movement (Morena).

In the same topic, Velasco shared a tweet from Isaac Katz on the issue of the liberation of gasoline costs in Mexico, that is, the so-called gasolinazo gasoline. However, despite these issues in common with Volpi and Villoro, Velasco also publishes on other very different issues, such as photographs with his followers, who label it in these images for him to share them in his account. Added to this, and in accordance with Velasco's cause in the fight for the protection of animals, he often publishes tweets in support of the search for lost pets (especially dogs). In that sense, he emphasizes that Velasco has much more interaction with his followers on Twitter than Velasco and Volpi, as was already seen in the list of tweets and "I like" that he shares.



**Figura 6.** Captura de pantalla de un retweet de Xavier Velasco. En la imagen se aprecia el retweet del escritor sobre el promocional de Editorial Océano de su novela *Diablo Guardián*



Fuente: Elaboración propia

## Conclusions

As could be seen in the previous lines, despite the bad reputation of the RSV around its repercussions on language, literature and even in terms of truth, the truth is that its advantages seem to overcome its disadvantages. The handling of RSV Twitter by the writers analyzed in this paper helps to demonstrate this point.

In that direction, it is necessary to delimit some main ideas. In common, it is observed that both Velasco, Villoro and Volpi use Twitter to promote their literary and journalistic work, but also to spread their political creed. It should be noted that in the publications of the three authors the retweet proliferated well above the tweet. And above all there were retweets in which articles or works in general were disseminated about his artistic work, or about his political thought.

Regarding the deferred use that each author gives to the RSV Twitter, it is observed that Villoro uses this RSV with much emphasis on his political activism, with special attention to the denunciation of violence and insecurity in the country, human rights and in dumbbell with the EZLN. In the case of Jorge Volpi, it is observed that he also uses Twitter

to carry out diverse artistic-cultural dissemination work; not only of its authorship, but also of other writers. Velasco, as previously indicated, also uses the network to promote the rights and care of animals, and to interact more closely and personally with his diverse followers, with whom he maintains a closer relationship..

Finally, there are only a couple of ideas to point out: regardless of the uses that these and other writers give to RSV, and despite the great risks of misrepresentation that can be generated in them, the great impact they have between contemporary audiences, especially among the youngest; which is why, contrary to limiting or ignoring RSV, the important thing is to recognize its potential and use it for a main purpose, such as the one used by Velasco, Volpi and Villoro: to approach audiences with the author's own voice, in the context of the great digital ecosystem of the 21st century, with its diverse repercussions on literature and communication.

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Rol de Contribución	Autor(es)
Conceptualización	Rocío Leticia Cortés Campos y Celia Esperanza Rosado Avilés. Mismo grado de contribución.
Metodología	Rocío Leticia Cortés Campos
Software	NO APLICA
Validación	Rocío Leticia Cortés Campos y Celia Esperanza Rosado Avilés. Mismo grado de contribución.
Análisis Formal	Rocío Leticia Cortés Campos y Celia Esperanza Rosado Avilés. Mismo grado de contribución.
Investigación	Rocío Leticia Cortés Campos y Celia Esperanza Rosado Avilés. Mismo grado de contribución.
Recursos	Rocío Leticia Cortés Campos y Celia Esperanza Rosado Avilés. Mismo grado de contribución.
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Escritura - Preparación del borrador original	Rocío Leticia Cortés Campos y Celia Esperanza Rosado Avilés. Mismo grado de contribución.
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Visualización	Rocío Leticia Cortés Campos
Supervisión	Rocío Leticia Cortés Campos y Celia Esperanza Rosado Avilés. Mismo grado de contribución.
Administración de Proyectos	Celia Esperanza Rosado Avilés
Adquisición de fondos	Celia Esperanza Rosado Avilés