

Social networks and electoral campaigns in Latin America. A comparative analysis of the cases of Spain, Mexico and Chile¹

Redes sociales y campañas electorales en Iberoamérica. Un análisis comparativo de los casos de España, México y Chile

Redes sociais e campanhas eleitorais na América Latina. Uma análise comparativa dos casos de Espanha, México e Chile

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ABSTRACT

In this article, we made a comparative analysis of the research on social networks and electoral campaigns in the Ibero-American context in three cases of study: Spain, Mexico and Chile. From a bibliographic analysis, similarities and differences were identified, contributing to the generation and consolidation of the theory regarding such a recent, and in a continuous process of change, study object, such as the technologies that have produced it. We observed a widespread implementation of the use of diverse and changing digital platforms, as well as a superficial application of the social communication tools.

Keywords: social networks; electoral campaigns; Chile; Spain; Mexico; Twitter; Facebook; YouTube.

RESUMEN

En este artículo se analizó comparativamente la investigación sobre redes sociales y campañas electorales en el contexto iberoamericano para tres casos de estudio: España, México y Chile. A partir de un análisis bibliográfico, se identificaron similitudes y diferencias, contribuyendo a la generación y consolidación de la teoría respecto de un objeto de estudio tan reciente y en continuo proceso de cambio, tal como las tecnologías que lo han producido. Así, se observó tanto una implantación generalizada del uso de diversas y cambiantes plataformas digitales como una aplicación superficial de las herramientas sociales de comunicación.

Palabras clave: redes sociales; campañas electorales; Chile; España; México; Twitter; Facebook; YouTube.

RESUMO

Este artigo fez uma análise comparativa da pesquisa em redes sociais e campanhas eleitorais no contexto ibero-americano em três estudos de caso: Espanha, México e Chile. A partir de uma análise essencialmente bibliográfica, identificamos as semelhanças e diferenças que surgem em cada caso, contribuindo para a geração e consolidação da teoria sobre um objeto de estudo recente e em contínua mudança assim como as tecnologias que o produziram. Desta forma, observou-se uma tanto uma implementação generalizada do uso de plataformas digitais diversas e como uma aplicação superficial das ferramentas de comunicação social.

Palavras-chave: redes sociais; campanhas eleitorais; Chile; Espanha; México; Twitter; Facebook; YouTube.

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INTRODUCTION

The use of information technologies and social networks has spread widely around the world. The most well-known experiences are the stories in which its effective and successful use in electoral campaigns is observed, such as the Howard Dean primaries in 2004 (Sey & Castells, 2006; Dader, 2009; Valera, 2010), or Obama's presidential elections in 2008 (Delany, 2009; Peytibi, Rodríguez, & Gutiérrez-Rubí, 2008; Hendricks & Denton, 2010; Williamson, 2010; Túñez & Sixto, 2011; Kreiss, 2015; Dader, 2016). In 2007, in France, socialist candidate Ségolène Royal stood out for her willingness to get involved through photos with some of the concerns of citizens (Sineau 2006, p. 4, cited by Montero, 2009, p. 27). However, in other latitudes, the adoption of technological platforms in campaigns has been much more nuanced and limited than it is believed, depending on the different national political cultures and the digital media used.

In this context, this study is proposed as a research question: What are the uses of social networks in the electoral campaigns observed in the complex Ibero-American scenario and how to develop a theoretical model based on the experiences narrated in literature? The question implies integrating in some approach categories of analysis for American and European countries, of very different size and population, with parallel or divergent political, economic and social paths. We have selected three case studies: Mexico, Chile and Spain.

Our main objective is to describe the differences and detect the coincidences both in the interests of the academic researchers and in the practical applications, in order to contribute to assess the theoretical knowledge of the use of digital technologies applied to electoral campaigns, changeable by nature and of accelerated updating. On the other hand, the repertoire of objectives and research questions, and therefore of methodologies used, is so wide and varied that a comparative study is needed to establish what are the similar interests and tools to approach the electoral reality in the countries studied.

Among these practical applications, specialized literature (Casero Ripollés, 2007; Westling, 2007; Williams & Gulati, 2007; Gueorguieva, 2008; Delany, 2009; Lappas, Kleftodimos, & Yannas, 2010; Sudulich, Wall, Jansen, & Cunningham, 2010; Lilleker & Jackson, 2011; Bronstein, 2013; Bor, 2013; Katz, Barris, & Jain, 2013; Gerodimos & Justinussen, 2015; Sánchez Duarte & Magallón, 2016) has identified at least three main

functions: disseminating and sharing information; collecting donations, and mobilizing for action and recruiting volunteers. Thus, we intend to identify in each study case if these uses are observed in different contexts and platforms, as well as their evolution over time.

ADAPTING ELECTORAL CAMPAIGNS TO THE NEW DIGITAL SCENARIO

The comparison made by Vaccari (2013) on the electoral processes held between 2006 and 2010 in Australia, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States concluded that no campaign had been able to handle the Internet in the same way and with results comparable to those of the Americans. However, this situation could be a matter "of only a few more years of delay; in the same way as other innovations, such as the management of websites and electoral blogs by parties and candidates, it has entered intensely in the confrontation of campaigns in countries such as Spain, with a delay of between four and eight years compared to the pioneers" (Dader, 2017, p.22).

If the adoption and success of the introduction has been limited in online portals and the use of electronic mail, it is also due to the fact that the way of inserting social networks in the electoral field gives the candidates and political parties ample room for maneuvers, with diverse consequences. It is usual to conclude that within the European scope there has been a more limited use of digital tools, as noted by Graham, Broersma, Hazelhoff and Van't Haar (2013) when describing that candidates use networks as a unidirectional way of communication and only exceptionally for mobilization or consultation.

Among the distribution platforms that have attracted the most interest, Facebook and Twitter appear as the most studied. While Williams and Gulati (2007) find that the site more used by the candidates in 2006 was Facebook, the micro-blogging format of Twitter became, in a very short time, one of the most used communication tools for political campaigns (Jungherr, 2016). According to the work of Vergeer (2015), there are at least three clear trends in the relationship between Twitter and politics: study the content of the tweets, analyze the networks created between users, and explore the relationship between Twitter and the election results. Within the latter, most of these works analyze the American case. There is also a large recent literature interested in its use during general elections in countries such as The Netherlands (Vergeer & Hermans, 2013), Switzerland (Rauchfleisch

& Metag, 2015) and Denmark (Larsson & Moe, 2014), where both the Internet access as the use of Twitter stand out. Van Dalen, Fazekas, Klemmensen and Hansen (2015) confirm the growing use of Facebook in Western European elections, while Vepsäläinen, Li and Suomi (2017) consider it a crucial tool in the 2015 elections. Thus, MacWilliams (2015, p. 580) ensures that Facebook “is no longer simply a social medium; it has become a social utility that campaigns are using to reach, activate, and mobilize voter”. A number of authors (Valenzuela, Park, & Kee, 2009; Vitak et al., 2011; Vesnic-Alujevic, 2012) find a correlation between increased activity on Facebook and an increase in offline political activity. Finally, Lilleker, Koc-Michalska, Zajac and Michalski (2016) defend the academic interest in this social network, claiming that the data that can be obtained from Facebook allow researchers to know the dynamics of user interactions, while Twitter does not offer the same data disaggregation or range of user actions. In Latin America, YouTube – due to the popularization of broadband in the subcontinent as of 2008– has also been an element of study, mainly due to its use for dirty campaigns (Meneses & Bañuelos, 2009; Sandoval, 2012; Islas, 2015; Espino -Sánchez, 2016) and Google began to actively participate both informatively and commercially, with the site Google Elections, in political campaigns since the 2014 Colombian presidential election, a page that added content of parties and candidates (Google.com, 2014).

METHODOLOGY

Our hypothesis is that social networks in electoral campaigns in Latin America are used mainly as a vertical communication space, as an extension of traditional campaigns and as a bridge to impact traditional media. We have focused on identifying the uses of the candidates’ social networks and of their teams (dissemination, fundraising, mobilization and recruitment), and describing the contextual factors that would be at the basis of this decision. Among them there are historical factors (date and manner in which social networks are integrated into campaign strategies).

In order to study this topic, we conducted a comparative analysis of the current state of campaign strategies in social networks in the three countries mentioned. We searched for the main studies that address the use of social networks in the electoral campaigns, and we detected the milestones that mark the beginning in the use of these tools, the differences

in the new platforms and the main topics investigated. Next, we identified and described the contextual variables that help to understand the integration of these platforms in the campaigns. Finally, the differences in cultural and historical terms should allow us to examine whether there are contextual variables that help to better understand the more or less rapid adoption of the use of social networks in electoral campaigns.

SPAIN: A GAP DIFFICULT TO CLOSE

The role of social networks within the electoral strategy of Spanish parties has been recognized since their first experiences (Peytibi, et al., 2008; Tüñez, & Sixto, 2011; Valera, 2010; Vallespín, 2011). According to Tüñez and Sixto (2011), social networks are the ideal place for political debate for several reasons: number of participants, ease of use, closeness and direct relationship between users.

However, in 2010 Spanish politicians still doubted about the electoral effectiveness of social networks, as the Report on Politics and Social Networks (Intelligence Compass, 2010) showed, in which 69% of the 784 politicians surveyed did not believe that Obama’s online marketing model could be replicated in Spain. In addition, only 20% valued social networks as outstanding as a way to reach the citizen, and 78% gave them a notable. Their evaluation as central axis of the campaign was somewhat lower, since only 17% considered them outstanding. Through a series of interviews with those responsible for the digital campaigns, Campos-Domínguez, Redondo, Cala, Rodríguez, Fiuri and Risueño (2017) affirmed that the use of the most popular social networks such as Facebook or Twitter was considered important, but not decisive, “that is to say, they still did not consider that they were the determining variable for winning an election” (p. 259). Only *Podemos*, “a party that owes, to a large extent, its rising to social networks or IU², which does not have a high visibility in traditional media” gave them the qualification of “decisive” (Ibid., p. 259).

The first digital experiences of Spanish politicians date from 1995, in the Catalan parties *Partido de los Socialistas de Cataluña* (PSC, by its Spanish acronym) and *Convergència i Unió* (CIU, by its Catalan acronym), and from 1996 in the rest of the country (Peytibi et al., 2008; Gamir, 2016); it is not until the local and autonomic elections of 2007 that political parties started using video platforms such as YouTube, blogs or forums (Díez-Garrido & Ballesteros, 2016). The Catalan

autonomous elections of 2010 were the scenario for the first online debate between candidates, despite the fact that “the technical failures and the dull interventions of the leaders marked a debate with hardly any interaction, since the candidates limited themselves to answer the questions of the Internet users, without relating to each other” (Varela & Enériz, 2010).

López, Sampedro and Muñoz (2011, p. 88) state that it is after the demonstrations for the terrorist attack of March 11, 2004, “summoned through mobile phones and the network”, that the parties incorporated ICTs into their campaigns, in a slow but systematic way, until reaching a use that they qualify as “normalized” in 2008, while Peytibi et al. (2008, p. 28) refer to it as “important, not primordial (...) because the electoral campaign has continued to be promoted by traditional media, such as television and the press”.

The key period begins with the general elections of 2008 and 2011. When they finished, an extended use of digital tools could be verified among all the political parties (García, García, & Varona, 2012; Criado, Martínez-Fuentes, & Silván, 2012; Aragón, Kapler, Kaltenbrunner, Laniado, & Volkovich, 2013; García Ortega & Zugasti, 2014; Sampedro, López Rey, & Muñoz, 2012; Díez-Garrido & Ballesteros, 2016), moving on to an even more intensive use of from the electoral processes of 2014 (Zugasti & Pérez, 2015; Pérez Arozamena, 2015; Machado, Estrada, & Machado, 2015; Dader, 2017). *Podemos'* electoral success in the 2014 European Parliament elections turned the attention to its electoral strategy, which put Twitter at the center of its campaign, along with profuse appearances on television and a direct and renewed message (Bernal & Congosto, 2014).

Finally, the general elections of 2015 witnessed a greater degree of professionalism regarding the use of Twitter, “although its leadership continues to be, we could say, subsidiary and not always central to the campaign plan” (Calvo, Zamora Medina, Sánchez Cobarro, Moreno, & Vizcaíno-Laorga, 2017, p. 145). Although the three basic functions of the social networks were used in the general elections of 2015, it was in a way much lower than that of the North American cybercampaigns (Ballesteros Herencia, Zamora Medina, Goulart, Gil, & Díez, 2017a), and the personalization was a scarcely used strategy (Ballesteros, González-Pedraz, Etura, Díez, & Renedo, 2016; Ballesteros Herencia et al., 2017a).

Nowadays, we find Facebook and Twitter among the most common platforms along with YouTube and

WhatsApp (Dader, 2017), and there is a debate about the relevance of each of them. Zamora, Sánchez and Martínez (2017) point to the growing importance of Twitter in online campaigns, while Zugasti and Pérez (2015) maintain that Twitter has become the preferred social network for politicians and journalists, citing Rodríguez and Ureña (2012) and Noguera (2013). Also, Abejón, Tejedor, Gómez Patiño, Risueño, Osuna and Dader (2017, p. 120) point out the “priority dedication” that Spanish political coalitions give to it, relegating to a second level their web pages “and even” Facebook.

In contrast, García Orta (2011) or López Rey et al. (2011) show cases in which Facebook has been the main network used by Spanish parties. Also, Campos-Domínguez et al. (2017, p.192) point to Facebook as “the platform preferred by the parties, as it provides more information about its users, which allows for better segmentation and getting the message to the target audiences. Twitter is still present, especially in formations like *Podemos*, but it is not the main bet of any of the coalitions”. Dader et al. (2017, p. 297) refer to the contradiction between the preference for Facebook pointed out by the digital leaders of the parties and the great effort of disseminating messages through Twitter, “probably as a consequence of their obsession to find echo in the media of maximum audience”. The experts could have verified, after the elections of 2015 and 2016, that in front of the great effort made in the microblogging network, Facebook would contribute more for the analysis of data, contact and profiling of potential voters.

During these years, the question of how are social networks used in electoral contexts has been posed. Lilleker and Jackson (2010, p. 84) pointed out how citizen intervention offers, in general, “were aimed at encouraging visitors to swallow party messages and to repeat them, and not to develop ideas or expand dialogue”. Within the European scope, Graham et al. (2013) agree that political candidates use digital platforms as a unidirectional form of communication and only exceptionally for mobilization or consultation. This underutilization of the interactive potential of social networks was confirmed in Spain by several authors (Casero Ripollés, 2007; Tuñez & Sixto, 2011; Criado et al., 2012; Congosto, 2014; Zamora & Zurutuza, 2014; Ballesteros et al., 2016; Cheng, 2017; Dader, 2017).

Another way to answer the question about uses is to examine what Tuñez and Sixto (2016) have defined as the degree of participation and interaction of politicians with other members of their social network. In their

study on the Facebook pages of the Congress deputies, they concluded that this commitment 2.0 was null or nonexistent in 83.7% of the cases. Similarly, Ballesteros et al. (2016) and Díez-Garrido and Ballesteros (2016) pointed to an almost null commitment 2.0 in the cybercampaign of the regional elections of Castilla y León in 2015. In their comparative study, Muñiz, Campos-Domínguez, Saldierna and Dader (2017) found an almost anecdotal commitment 2.0 between the Spanish parties, as opposed to a solid online participation of the different actors of the Mexican campaign.

Finally, there is the question about the link between social networks and electoral results. The initial study by Hanson, Haridakis, Wagstaff, Cunningham, Sharma and Ponder (2010) pointed out a direct relationship between the number of followers and the votes obtained in the elections. In this regard, the Catalan elections of 2010 were used by Congosto, Fernández and Moro (2011) to investigate the potential of Twitter to predict electoral results, while the general elections of 2011 served Borondo, Morales, Losada and Benito (2012) to confirm that the activity on Twitter was related to the votes obtained.

On the contrary Abejón, Sastre and Linares (2012) found no link between an increased activity of the candidates on Facebook during the regional elections of 2011 in the Community of Madrid and the election results. Neither did Deltell (2012, p. 3), who found that the “excellent campaign on the Internet” of the party *Equo* did not match its number of votes. Also, Calvo et al. (2017, p. 145) conclude “that there is not (yet) a direct relationship between the results obtained in the elections and the increase in followers”. In contrast, Ballesteros et al. (2017a) have shown the existence of significant statistical correlation between the engagement or implication index (found based on the number of Likes, Shares and Comments from users in the posts of the political parties) and the variation of the electoral result between the elections of 2011 and 2015. These results agree with those already obtained in the autonomous elections of Castilla y León in 2015 by Ballesteros et al. (2016).

MEXICO: THE LEGACY OF TELEVISION DIRTY CAMPAIGNS AND THE EMERGENCE OF DIGITAL ACTIVISM

From 1996, the first analyzes and studies on the use of Internet, politics and online campaigns appeared in Mexico (Trejo, 2006), but it was in the 1988 election

that the Internet became an obligatory information front for the main candidates for the Presidency of the Republic, given that their campaign teams made a propaganda effort via email. In 1994, there is another antecedent: The Internet pages and the global impact discourse of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) and Subcomandante Marcos (Gutiérrez, Islas, & López, 2000). It was not until the 2006 federal election that the use of Internet for electoral purposes began more consistently. Islas (2016) noted that, in the 2006 election, the common denominator of the websites of the candidates for the presidency of the Republic was the disregard for establishing any form of dialogue with citizens, but that Internet was used as an excellent secondary medium, subordinated to propaganda strategies designed for television. *Parametría* conducted a survey (cited by Islas, 2007) that reported that 7% said they had learned about the election on the Internet, 58% on television and 32% on newspapers and radio. Islas (2007) concludes that black propaganda was the constant in the election and this activity was extended from traditional media, where it was more intense, to the Internet. For example, the site of the leftist candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador, was the target of cyberattacks and an intense confrontation took place in sympathizers’ blogs.

According to several authors, the network campaigns of the four Mexican candidates in 2012 were marked by attacks and the inability of some of them to react to the crisis. Those who were able to properly use hashtags on Twitter stand out, but few responded to the doubts and criticisms of citizens on Facebook and on websites. At the end of the campaign, the teams of the leading candidates, López Obrador and Peña Nieto, generated intense attacks that affected them and generated disqualifying verbal battles between what they called *pejzombies* and *peñabots* (Liceaga, 2016; Bárcenas, & Donovan, 2016; Pepper, Restrepo, Pavón, & Palestina, 2016; Pimienta & Vásquez, 2016). Although this presidential campaign is considered one of the most competitive in the modern history of Mexico, the messages disseminated by the network were far from promoting democratic deliberation, by sticking to the disqualifying discourse that prevailed in television spots (Meneses, 2009).

This situation can be partly explained by the lack of legal regulation in the sector. Trejo (2010) affirms that the Mexican electoral legislation did not include Internet among the mediums susceptible to be regulated during campaigns and that one of the main tools was

the use of electronic mail. He recognizes the valuable interaction possibilities of the platform but states that, in practice, a limited discussion of ideas and a broad echo of the negative campaigns was detected.

During the 2009 mid-term elections, YouTube was the new protagonist. According to Meneses and Bañuelos (2009), it became an electoral garbage dump, that is, everything that did not fit on television³ was uploaded there. Politicians uploaded multimedia products, turning it into an authentic dumping site of political videos destined to the defamation of the opposite candidate inserted in the culture of dirty war and the promotion of black campaigns (Meneses & Bañuelos, 2009). In addition to YouTube, starting in 2008, Facebook and Twitter began to become popular. Valdez, Huerta and Aguilar (2011) studied the use of Twitter in these intermediate elections, where the parties used social networks to try to influence the behavior of voters, articulating virtual rallies, television channels and radio on the Internet as alternative mediums to try to add votes or have a presence. Gandlgruber and Ricaurte (2013) analyze the importance of social movements and citizen organizing strategies with a notable impact in the Mexican political world, especially digital. For example, in addition to the movement to annul originated during the 2009 elections, others such as #InternetNecesario or the citizen proposal *Cuidemos el voto*, state that in societies such as the Mexican, where the institutional forms of citizen participation are structurally closed, social networks have allowed citizens, in a creative and proactive manner, to find ways to “generate and disseminate content in real time and articulate strategies of organization, denunciation, actions and proposals that affect the social, political, legal and cultural world” (Gandlgruber & Ricaurte, 2013, p. 69). Rojas also (2013, p.94) highlighted that the activism of young Internet users of the #YoSoy132 movement represented a breaking point in the rules of the game of political communication and the accommodation of its actors, which would be positive for Mexican democracy. Galindo and González (2013) called the phenomenon that emerged on YouTube as an aesthetic movement of communication systems that configured a new social space where social relations took directions and constructive vectors different from the traditional ones. Castillo (2014) acknowledges that two parallel worlds of the electoral process, the physical and the virtual, were shown, and there was also diffusion and activism in both fields; however, little literature was detected on the way in which the

political messages of political campaigns or contexts are used or appropriated on the Internet by these social actors, especially youth groups (Rodríguez, 2017). The use of second generation networks or mobile devices is still little analyzed, despite being a growing area, whose impact is relevant and in full expansion. In 2010, the first studies on candidates who used social networks began. Vázquez (2013) analyzed the Twitter accounts of 13 governor candidates in the 2010 elections, when he considers that the candidates opened their accounts or at least started to use them more frequently because they were competing for a popular election post. A relevant element is that Twitter served to interact with citizens, given that approximately a third of the analyzed submissions were responses that candidates sent to their followers, although with a disparity of some very active and others almost inactive. In parallel, the phenomenon of black propaganda on the Internet emerged. According to Islas (2015), during the campaign of Eruviel Ávila, the center party candidate, *PRI*, in 2011, certain despicable practices of dirty marketing emerged in Mexico, such as systematic disqualification without any intention of dialogue. This technique is a legacy of what Espino-Sánchez calls videopolitics, whose use on the Internet has been traditional (Web 1.0), in some rudimentary cybernetic strategies in which users do not have much participation (Espino-Sánchez, 2012, p. 57). In 2011, the author conducted an evaluation of Internet resources, blogs, email and social networks of various accounts of relevant figures of the Mexican political class and, among the results, the most used resources, in order of importance, were the biographies of Wikipedia, accounts on Facebook and Twitter, email and personal channel on YouTube.

Salgado (2012) analyzed the use of Twitter in the Presidential electoral campaign and stressed that, although it is less popular than Facebook or YouTube in quantitative terms, it is a more efficient platform in political terms. The author adds that some of the trends on Twitter determined the media agenda of the political contest, which reveals the interest of a population, mostly young, willing to use social networks to make their demands heard for a true democracy (2012, p. 230). One of those projects, in this case of the *Observatorio Electoral de la UNAM* [Electoral Observatory of UNAM] (2012), alerted of an atypical activity in the social networks accounts during the 2012 election, after it detected an unusual growth of followers of the presidential candidates. For example, the candidate of the party *Nueva Alianza*, Gabriel Quadri, gained

–in one day–more than 60 thousand subscribers on Facebook and Twitter, a disproportionate growth of 113%; at the end of April, Vázquez Mota and Peña Nieto gained more than 90 thousand and 40 thousand subscribers in one day, 19% and 8%, respectively. According to Moreno and Mendizábal (2013), the presence of social networks was important for the Mexico campaign, since after the 2008 blog boom, Facebook and Twitter became key social networks for campaign strategies, especially for young voters, with a higher level of education, strongly connected online, politically more independent and more volatile. The movement generated by the youth of the Universidad Iberoamericana, which questioned pluralism in the media and candidate Peña Nieto, indirectly benefited López Obrador (Moreno & Mendizábal, 2013, p. 239). For Domínguez, Greene, Lawson and Moreno (2015), there are three lessons from the 2012 election: there were massive changes of intention to vote during the race, voters continue to vote for the characters or candidates and their ideas, and the voters are captive in the few options given to them by the parties.

In 2015, the six candidates without a party, known as independents, had a relevant role in social networks and Internet. Cárdenas (2015) points out that, although they were few, their triumph in the 2015 elections coincided with several factors: a discourse against traditional political parties, the uncertainty of the allocation of resources and the intelligent use of new social media and the Internet. He also highlights the new legal context, which favored the launch of independent candidacies, and the popularization of social networks. Cárdenas cites the statistics of the National Electoral Institute on the 2015 election in Mexico, which show that independent candidates had only 0.38% of the spots, compared to the 66.86% that the political parties had. Although some candidates won due to inequality in the allocation of resources, we do not intend to assert that the use of social networks has been the central cause, but it is considered as one of the elements that helped the Mexican process of democratic transition, added to the equity in the contest, both in resources and in access to mass media⁴. For example, Susana Ochoa, communication coordinator for candidate Pedro Kumamoto in the 2015 election, explained that his candidacy was forged since 2013 as an indirect consequence of the #YoSoy132 movement and as part of a youth political group called Wikipolitica.mx. Its importance lies in the fact that, unlike most other independents who were part of

the political class, the new local deputy was a young candidate who had not been active in any political party, apparently without close ties to powerful groups, and it was not clear that he could obtain resources. Ochoa explains that during the campaign they did not hire political marketing consultants and that their campaign was a successful combination of on-the-field work and use of social networks as an element of mobilization and interaction. The efficient use of mobile tools, such as WhatsApp, plus the meetings with neighbors, facilitated the direct communication with potential voters. The fact that Kumamoto did not hire a political advertising consultant, but an independent youth group, is an example of the possible new stream of campaigns that Molina and Pareja (2007) foresaw. These authors argued that the development of the research of political cybercampaigns in Mexico has been linked, on the one hand, to the changes in the political system, and, on the other, to the processes of globalization and, therefore, to the introduction of the marketing techniques. They identified two aspects: research in commercial communication, commercialized and viewed as a business and theoretical-academic research, subject to the need to quickly obtain results that serve to demonstrate the increase in productivity that the sponsorship programs and academic institutions required.

Percastre and Dorantes (2016) analyzed the digital political communication of the elections in 2015 in Mexico City, and a first conclusion regarding Internet and the elective processes suggests that, although the campaigns have integrated digital platforms into their traditional political communication routines, what they basically achieve is to reinforce the messages conveyed by the traditional offline channels and diminish the power of traditional media, who are increasingly disturbed by its effects on the agenda setting and framing. This is due, among other reasons, to the fact that the web, through its various platforms –for example, blogs and online newspapers– “have allowed new opportunities for people different from traditional political actors to set agenda topics and frame their own points of view” (Brundidge & Rice, 2009, p. 148, cited by Percastre and Dorantes, 2016).

CHILE: MODERATE ENTHUSIASM, MARKED PREFERENCES

According to data from various studies, Chile is probably one of the countries with the highest Internet

penetration rate in Latin America. The statistics of connectivity and access to the network have not stopped increasing, and 84.1% of the population has some type of Internet access (Subtel, 2016). It is almost natural, then, to think that social networks have been seen as a fertile ground for political campaigns. However, the history of its use has begun recently. In addition, it is clear that the preferences for some platforms – Twitter – over others – Facebook and YouTube – express the preferences of specialists and candidates, rather than reflecting the tastes of the audience.

According to studies specialized in the topic of networks and electoral campaigns, the story begins with the presidential elections of 2009-2010. These elections saw the first triumph of a right-wing candidate, Sebastián Piñera, after a long period of dominance of the *Concertación de Partidos por la Democracia*. According to González-Bustamante and Henríquez (2012; 2013), it was precisely this candidate who used Twitter for the first time and with greater intensity during his presidential campaign in the first and second presidential elections. Without a doubt, he was not the only one; as Bustamante and Henríquez point out, there were at least three digital commands: Jorge Arrate, Eduardo Frei and Sebastián Piñera, all candidates for the presidency (2012, p. 35). It is also noted that, during this campaign, the televised debates were followed closely on Twitter, thus promoting the well-known phenomenon of dual screening. In this context, it was considered that the digital campaign represented much more a branding tool than one of political participation (González-Bustamante & Henríquez, 2012, p. 39). Thus, their political commitment is still far from commitment 2.0. (Diez-Garrido & Ballesteros, 2016).

At the epoch, there were already evident trends in the use of Twitter, for example. According to a survey conducted by the Diego Portales University (González, Azócar, & Scherman, 2010), Twitter users are essentially young adults from wealthy sectors, a sector in which certain center-left political opinions would be overrepresented. This makes it inappropriate to make statistical inferences from the activity on Twitter, since they would not be representative of the voting population.

Since then, the penetration, at different levels, of Twitter among politics has increased. According to Fábrega and Paredes (2013), about 70% of Chilean congressmen have an account in social networks. Considering a list of accounts composed of congressmen, ministers and the then President of the Republic, the

authors reconstruct a network of conversations on Twitter, discovering quite relevant issues. First, there is a high degree of homophily (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001), in addition to more broadcasting than communication strategies with citizens. Although this dialogue is possible, the messages broadcasted by the politics are mainly influenced by traditional media, which are not the center of networks (Fábrega & Paredes, 2013, p. 199). Because of this, the authors acknowledge on Twitter a tool that could allow “to modify the mediated policy” (Fábrega & Paredes, 2013, p. 200).

It is coherent that it is during these years that there is an increasing tendency to personalize campaigns, which combined certain traits and personality attributes of the candidates and the public perception of them, as well as the image that the media projected (Portales, 2011). Subsequent research has insisted on this idea, specifying its definition based on the analysis of the thematic the campaigns coverage made by the media, which vary between personalization and the privatization of the candidate’s image (Porath, Suzuki, & Ramdohr, 2014; Porath, Suzuki, Ramdohr, & Portales, 2015). It is in this context that the increasingly intense use of social networks can be understood as tools to project, in different ways and with different tones, the image of candidates during campaigns.

The 2011 milestone seems to have reoriented the link between social networks and politics, having inspired an important group of works that analyze the use of social networks for protest and collective action (Valenzuela, Arriagada, & Scherman, 2012, 2014). The so-called digital activism (Millaleo & Velasco, 2012) has traditionally been studied separately from electoral campaigns. As some researches focused on the use of Facebook have shown, activism, while not incompatible with the participation in elections, maintains a conflictive relationship with institutional politics (Cabalín, 2014; Bacallao-Pino, 2016). In parallel, there has been a sustained decline in the participation of these segments of the population in elections (Contreras & Morales, 2014) and, in general, in institutional policy, phenomena that have been exacerbated by the implementation of the system of voluntary voting (Navia & del Pozo, 2012), which poses a real challenge for the elaboration of campaigns that manage to mobilize the increasingly elusive electorate (López-Hermida & Fierro-Zamora, 2016). The combination of these factors has installed the idea that the use of social networks would be divorced from formal political participation. This means that

these platforms are a kind of refuge for slacktivists, that is, users who actively participate in the networks but do not vote. This situation acts as a disincentive for political parties and candidates to invest heavily in riskier digital strategies. On the other hand, a recent study (Navia & Ulriksen, 2017) shows that, although the use of networks can be positively linked to electoral participation, when this indicator is observed along with the consumption of media, the latter explains the predisposition to vote much better.

Among the few studies that exist on the use of social networks by candidates most focus on the use made by candidates for the Presidency of the Republic. González Bustamante (2015) shows, for example, that the adhesion on Twitter to Michelle Bachelet in the 2013 election does not necessarily coincide with her real political support. There are no studies on the use of networks in elections of deputies and senators, and only recently there has been a collection of evidence of its use for municipal elections in the Metropolitan Region (Jara, Faure, Beltrán, & Castro, 2017). In this case, the use of Twitter during the campaign period is best explained by variables of a political nature, such as sponsorship and the level of responsibility, rather than by individual variables, such as age or gender of the candidate.

The use of Twitter as a campaign tool was recently studied in the context of the legal primaries of May 2017. Although in 2013 a consultant, Brandmetric, already tried to develop studies in conjunction with the newspaper *La Tercera* to predict the results of the primary elections of the *Democracia Cristiana* through its political behavior on Twitter, during the last year the attempts to study in a serious and systematic way the use of networks by the candidates have multiplied. For example, several universities have created research groups –whose studies have been disseminated by the press and on Internet sites– which seek to monitor campaigns in the network. This is the case of *Tren Digital*, of the Universidad Católica and Medainteractive; of *Interbarómetro*; of the *Termómetro Digital*, of the Universidad Central and the digital newspaper *El Mostrador*; of the CISEC of the University of Santiago, and of the *Centro Demodata*, of the University of Concepción. However, there are certain signs that account for the lack of awareness of the growing importance of networks to conduct campaigns. In Chile, for example, there is still no regulation that rules or authorizes the use of social networks in campaigns (López Hermida,

2017), so much so that its use was first prohibited by the Electoral Service. In fact, the electoral laws, since 1990, have regulated in detail the ways of campaigning, also consecrating spaces for political advertising. The measure was opposed by the candidates and public opinion, so the measure was finally taken down.

CONCLUSIONS

The use of social networks in electoral campaigns remains far from horizontal elements and conversation and participation in the Ibero-American context. In some cases, there are signs that the gap is beginning to narrow, for example in Spain, with actions such as the hiring by the *Partido Popular* in the 2016 general elections of the company of Jim Messina, one of the main responsible for Obama's data analysis in 2012, as well as of Cameron in the United Kingdom and of the independent candidates in Mexico and, that same year, of Mauricio Macri in Argentina, who applied detection techniques of potential voters and advertising contact with these through Facebook (Dader, 2017).

In general, there are technical and strategic advances in the research on the effects of social networks on Spanish campaigns, while the characteristics of the political systems and the flaws of media and electoral systems in Chile and Mexico seem to be discouraging their intensive and multifunctional use. It stands out that the few empirical studies that exist for these cases are still very far from the global research agenda. As Fuentes (2011) argues, in the first decade of the 21st century, the research of political communication in Mexico has undergone transformations in its reference objects and suffered the insufficient provision of scientific-academic resources to give a systematic and socially useful account of them, although there are new methodologies that have revitalized the analysis in the context of the privatization actions conducted by marketing agencies that do not share software or knowledge (García, 2011; Rodríguez, 2016; Muñoz, Dader, Téllez, & Salazar, 2016).

In the first place, we continue to observe superficial and inefficient uses of networks by the political class; for example, some infrequent messages obtain greater involvement (Likes, Shares and Comments) from the users of social networks than others, more usually uploaded by political parties, with little approval by users (Ballesteros, Zamora, Sánchez, & Gil, 2017b). This, along with elements of visual saturation with the excessive use of photographs and the scarce interaction

and debate that the parties maintain with their followers, should lead the political coalitions to reflect both on the effectiveness of their communicative effort and on the wide margin of improvement to communicate with citizens in pursuit of a higher quality democracy.

The use of Internet and social networks in campaigns is, therefore, more a discursive claim than a real strategy at present. It is undeniable that certain digital reflexes have been integrated (having a website and, more recently, a fan page, a Twitter account, a YouTube channel), but the uses of these tools are not very transparent, they are still very intuitive –more due to the strategies used than to lack of knowledge–, since the majority hires private specialized advisors. Sometimes, as in the Mexican case, these uses have been oriented more to the disqualification of the political rival than to the debate. The attitude of political parties and candidates continues to be traditional, an issue that is explained by several reasons that international literature has collected abundantly, although the contrast of the use of digital media by social movements that have overshadowed their passivity stand out (Islas & Ricuarte, 2013).

Second, there is a lack of understanding of the real role that social networks can play in a campaign. It is usual that the use of the network continues to reproduce the media logic that politicians establish with traditional media, leaving aside the possibility of direct interaction with audiences. There are some exceptions, especially in outsiders and independent candidates and in the case of social movements that arise as a reaction to public policies or acts related to the violation of fundamental rights. It is a use made from society, which does not necessarily directly involve the political class, but which does affect the media. Third, the high social and geographical segmentation in the use of social networks and the lack of binding methodologies among researchers also stands out. Finally, it should be noted that the ways of informing have evolved dramatically. The sustained decline in television ratings, press readership rates and, in parallel, the emergence of new information practices via digital media is a constant in all three countries, but the campaigns continue to rely on traditional media, with the exception of some candidates.

DISCUSSION

There is a proven agreement that the Internet, and more specifically social networks, are an optimal tool to

generate political debate and interaction with citizens (Túñez & Sixto, 2011). However, this technical and theoretical potential contrasts with the research results that show the scarce dialogue between candidates and citizens in online election campaigns (Islas, 2006; Casero, 2007; Túñez & Sixto, 2011; Criado et al., 2012; Fábrega & Paredes, 2013; Graham et al., 2013; Congosto, 2014; Zamora & Zurutuza, 2014; Ballesteros et al., 2016; Cheng, 2017; Dader, 2017).

In general terms, the digital platforms that have been used have varied according to the arrival, to each country, of the successive technological innovations, beginning with mail (Gutiérrez et al., 2000; Dader, 2003), web pages (Dader, 2009), forums or blogs, and ending in different social networks and platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Telegram or Whatsapp. Their adoption seems to be related, in addition, to the emergence of certain political groups (*Podemos* in Spain), with the existence of highly polarized and competitive campaigns (Mexico in 2006 and Chile in 2009) or with the characteristics of the political systems in which they are inserted (parliamentarism and autonomies in the Spanish case, semi-presidential regime in the Chilean case, federal state in the Mexican case).

On the one hand, politicians continue to question the real effectiveness of social networks in electoral campaigns, while on the other hand their uses reflect a clearly partisan management, including the dissemination of disqualifiers messages against their political adversaries. Its use seems to have been consolidated in the three scenarios studied from the middle of the first decade of the 2000s and, especially, at the beginning of the second. The use made of them seems to be complementary, not central, to the campaign strategy (Islas, 2006; Calvo et al., 2017), although digital media could be reducing the power of traditional media to set the agenda and achieve a certain framing of political information. Meanwhile, the intensity of the relationship between the use of digital networks and electoral results does not seem clear, and research on that subject points to different directions.

In the Spanish case, although the three types of uses (dissemination, fundraising and mobilization) are observed, only the first seems really fundamental. In the case of digital campaigns in Mexico, the main milestones were the Zapatista movement and its impact on the Internet in 1994, the email attacks in the 2006 presidential election, the penetration of YouTube and the polarization campaigns in the elections of 2009, the student movement #Yosoy132 in the 2012 election

and the emergence of independent candidates and their digital campaigns on Facebook and Twitter in the state elections of 2015. Due to low connectivity levels, and despite their presence on YouTube since 2008 and an important use of Twitter and Facebook since 2012, what has stand out is the dissemination and polarization and, in exceptional cases, multiplatform strategies linked to an extension of traditional campaigns. The presence of strategies that mobilized other formats (mail and web pages), as well as the phenomenon of dirty campaigns, seem to have captured the interest of researchers in the field. In the case of Chile, there is a slight predominance of Twitter over Facebook, which brought with it a much more marked tendency to privilege the dissemination function. However, in the current presidential and parliamentary campaign, the use of new tools (such as live transmission via Facebook), as well as the mobilization of adherents via Telegram, implies that we are probably witnessing a change in the uses given up to today to social networks during campaigns.

The use of second generation media and its impacts on mobile communication, the content of messages between users and candidates in social conversation spaces, the role of digital media during political

campaigns in the dynamics of the new public space and the way in which the debate with audiences is addressed remains to be explored.

On the other hand, there is a need to identify mechanisms to exchange methodologies and theoretical proposals among field researchers, given that the interactive dynamics of social networks generate the need to the expand studies and the methodological and theoretical approaches, especially with analysis techniques to manipulate large amounts of information. A challenge that, based on comparative experiences and the exchange of knowledge, would avoid depending on models that are not adaptable to the Ibero-American reality. In this dispersion scenario, when technology already provides vertical and horizontal tools and the traditional media audiences are in decline, the very varied employment experiences of the digital possibilities that have been described and studied are still far from a total expansion and consolidation, coexisting with a certain orientation towards television, radio and press. The capacity of Ibero-American political parties to organize campaign teams where the online strategy develops all the potential that digital tools allow, will mark the position of these platforms in the current media ecosystem in upcoming electoral races.

FOOTNOTES

1. The article is part of the Proyecto *Fondos Basales Mecesus USA-1555*.
2. IU stands for Izquierda Unida, a left-wing political party.
3. The dates of popularization of YouTube coincide with the broadband Internet access in Mexico, which facilitated the possibility of watching videos. Between 2006 and 2009, the connections per 100 inhabitants went from three to 11, almost three times more. By 2016, there were 13 connections per 100 thousand inhabitants (Banco Mundial, 2016).
4. The successful cases that won with innovative campaigns on the Internet stand out: Manuel Clouthier (federal deputation), Jaime Rodríguez (governor) and Pedro Kumamoto (local deputation).

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