

## Chapter 5

# Political Messaging in Digital Spaces: The Case of Twitter in Mexico's Presidential Campaign

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Political messaging is adapting to new digital spaces. However, the power of citizens through the use of this digital spaces is still unknown. Many citizens criticize political candidates using Facebook or Twitter, others build networks in Snapchat and some others try to collaborate with candidates using Periscope or WhatsApp. This research is focused in understanding this adaptation of political message on this platforms, analyzing the case of the presidential candidate Enrique Peña Nieto (PRI) in Mexico who won the presidency with a large participation but without the support of Twitter users. After two online protests against this presidential candidate - #IamnotProletariat and #Iam132 – political image could have been undermined and voters could have thought differently. But this was not the case and despite of this, the candidate won. The challenge to understand this online protest and its link to the political message is addressed in this paper.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The use of computers to predict voters behavior is not new (Farrell, 2012; Jon B., 1998; Macintosh, Malina, & Farrell, 2002). Although, the use of technology to interact with voters and expand the political message is more recent and expands very fast (Best, Krueger, & Ladewig, 2007).

Nowadays the spread of the use of internet and web 2.0 technologies are changing the way politicians conduct their political campaigns using websites, forums and chats to deliver their message and interactions with citizens (Baldwin-Philippi, 2013; Bimber & Copeland, 2013).

The use of digital spaces through different platforms such as videoblogs (vine) online chats (snapchat, What'sApp) YouTube, Twitter and Facebook became a new trend for political strategies (Fox & Ramos, 2012). The Obama campaign is the stepping stone of the novel use of social media communications

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inside a successful political campaign (Harfoush, 2009; Karlsen, 2013; Katz, Barris, & Jain, 2013) The Trump vs Clinton presidential campaign in the U.S. has not being and exemption. Otherwise increase the use of this digital spaces to continue the debate and expand the ideas of this two candidates.

Several scholars have followed the Obama campaign replications in different countries such as the German election in 2009 (Jungherr, Jürgens, & Schoen, 2011), and the debate about the use of the Twitter platform to forecast electoral results (Tumasjan, Sprenger, Sandner, & Welpe, 2011b). This intrusion of technological participation using Twitter and Facebook has change the organization and structure of political campaigns, adding new elements to the complex system of attracting and convincing voters (Mashable, 2012; Towner, 2012).

A different path in the political field is the use of technology for social protests. The most studied examples are the Arab Spring revolts in Egypt, Tunisia and Iran (Anderson, 2011; Andrea Kavanaugh, Yang Seungwon, & Edward Fox, 2011; Gilad, Erhardt, Mike, Devin, & Ian, 2011). The introduction of the technological element as a new communication channel, different from the traditional media, has empowered citizen's capabilities of organization, information sharing and collaboration to reach collective goals. However, these social protests also have the cyberactivism component that starts its own transformation (Khamis & Vaughn, 2012; Michael D. yers & Maccaughey, 2003; Sandoval-Almazan & Gil- Garcia, 2013).

Mexico has not been excluded from the influence of technology in politics and social protests. The oldest example is the use of emails by the Zapatista army in 1995 (Cleaver, 1998) to expand their influence using a combination of new technologies – email – and the traditional media, the worldwide newspapers that received letters and provided coverage to the indigenous uprising (Garrido & Halavais, 2003).

In 2009 when the Mexican Senate had to consider a large group of citizens who gathered on the Twitter's social network, managing to stop an Internet tax which had been approved by the House and the senators stopped just on time (Riva-Palacio, 2009). After having gathered more than a hundred thousand messages through this network, the Mexican Twitters put on so much pressure that senators had to attend the claimers. The Senate had to stop the tax on Internet. This way, Twitters activists achieved their objective using information technology (Sandoval-Almazan and Alonzo, 2011).

The Senate's case is a clear example of the Morozov's (2011) idea of the perils to open government debates into public and the use of technology to pressure government or citizens. The case of the city of Veracruz shows Morozov's idea of net delusion clearer when the government used technologies to make authoritarian behaviors and control internet ideas in order to maintain peace and security (Sandoval-Almazan & Gil-Garcia, 2012).

Most recently, the Ayotzinapa scandal in which 43 students remain lost or hijacked in Mexico is an ongoing trend on twitter in Mexican politics. Every day at 10 pm many journalists, NGOs related to human rights start sending images and the names of the 43. In order to claim for justice or actions from the Federal Government (Fernández-Poncela (2015).

The use of Twitter to make and state official postures about facts and the use of law to entrench citizens freedoms are examples of this clear condition of internet control (Morozov, 2011).

Previous cases in Mexico and the Arab Spring present the long lasting friction between citizens and governments. Both try to control each other, putting pressure, neutralizing, promoting, establishing boundaries and limiting actions. The main difference is that information technologies are in the middle of the friction. Some citizens' groups are using it more efficiently than governments. In other cases the governments are more clever and powerful. But the statement is clear, web 2.0 technology is the middleware of this battle (Bannister & Wilson, 2011; Dutton & Peltu, 2007; Evans & Ulbig, 2012).

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