Chapter 35
Using Twitter in Political Campaigns:
The Case of the PRI Candidate in Mexico

Rodrigo Sandoval-Almazan
Autonomous University of the State of Mexico (UAEM), Mexico

ABSTRACT

Social media has invaded elections in Mexico. However, the power of citizens through the use of this platform is still unknown. Many citizens criticize political candidates using Twitter, others build networks and some others try to collaborate with candidates. This research is focused in understanding this kind of behavior, 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 campaign is addressed in this paper.

1. INTRODUCTION

Technology in politics has been used since information and communication technologies became commercial and popular. 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 (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 expand their presence and interactions with citizens (Baldwin-Philippi, 2013; Bimber & Copeland, 2013).

The use of internet platforms such as blogs, 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 inside a successful political campaign (Harfoush, 2009; Karlsen, 2013; Katz, Barris, & Jain, 2013).

Several scholars have followed the Obama 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).

A more recent case took place 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.

The Veracruz case started with a message from the official hashtag #verfollow which confirmed: "in the primary school named Jorge Arroyo an armed group kidnapped five kids" (Monroy-Hernández, 2011). This message was re-tweeted by 12 more people and this hashtag @VerFollow had more than 5,000 followers. This one was created by the police department of Veracruz to report violence in the state. The viral influence of this tool spread the news in two hours. Many parents went to pick up their kids earlier from school in order to save them from this threat, causing massive traffic, chaos and panic across the city (Sandoval-Almazan & Gil-Garcia, 2012).

That same day, the government's website published a list of sixteen Twitter accounts involved in the rumor and threatened to take legal action against them. The statement also mentioned the names of the persons associated with the account @gilius_22 named Gilberto Martínez Vera and María de Jesús Bravo Pagola (@maruchibravo). The governor used his personal Twitter account to clear the situation four hours later and disqualified the citizens who took part in the communication mess. Next Saturday,

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