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Artivism plus Grassroots. Study of the case: The Municipal Campaign of Manuela Carmena

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Abstract

The object of the present study is the case study: "Artivism plus Grassroots", performed in the election campaign of Manuela Carmena during Municipal Elections of Madrid in 2015, where these two terms merged, art and citizen participation, innovating in political communication as has never been seen before in Spain.

Also, in this context, there will be delving into the campaign of the political party *Ahora Madrid*, to which the aforementioned candidate is affiliated. It is revealing to account for the use of digital platforms as communication tools by the new parties, in this case *Ahora Madrid*, during the elections, to identify the activity generated therein and its character and, likewise, to observe whether they promoted the horizontal and bidirectional communication characteristic of this environment 2.0.

For Manuel Castells (2012) in the past two decades there was a revolutionary transformation in terms of technology and organization of the socialized communication. "Said transformation can be defined as the shift from masses communication to self-communication of masses" (p.23). A relevant issue to be developed in this article.

And in all this environment of changes in communication it is noteworthy that in the political behaviour of Spanish there is a before and an after since the 15M movement. The professor Antonio Gutiérrez-Rubí (2011) is worth mentioning, who considers the resurgence of a new public space is observed as a consequence of the use of social networks and Internet for the civic action.

This entails "the loss of the exclusive privilege of the political action by politicians" and he adds "they must have seen that it is possible to organize politically without them; to communicate in an efficacious manner without mediatic intermediation or against some myopias; and to create contents of value

without clear leaderships nor official sources.” (p.14)

Keywords:

Artivism, Grassroots, political communication, citizen participation, art

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Article translated by **Yuhanny Henares**
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1. Introduction and state of the art

This study starts by defining the concepts: “Artivism *plus* Grassroots”, performed in the Electoral Campaign of Manuela Carmena in the Municipal Elections of Madrid in 2015, where these two terms, art and citizen participation, merged for the first time in Spain and the keys of the campaign “*Ahora Madrid*” are highlighted.

- What is artivism? It is created from the combination of “art” and “activism”, therefore we can deduce it is a phenomenon that makes protest a creative revendication. Art as protest or revendication is not new, as evidenced by the History of Art. Works of art have served a purpose often focused on critique or aimed to denounce a fact. According to Barbosa de Oliveira (2007), artivism leads the logics of the artistic performance to the ultimate consequences, to which it is attributed the capacity to produce *desterrito - rialización* and *dislocamiento* (banishment – realization and displacement).

“These characteristics are not observed in the actions we reflect on and differentiates these productions from other performances. These are strongly rooted in the territory, act in the core of the citizen’s public life and are based on the memory and recent and present history of political activity” (Barbosa de Oliveira, 2007: 106).

- What is the *Grassroot*? Vázquez and Vommaro (2012) were the first authors to mention said term which refers to the creation of a movement of citizens who, in a voluntary manner, support a specific cause and serve as its communicator.

In the United States, where it originated, the Grassroots movements exist at local scope, composed of volunteers from the community, who donate their time to support a local political party, that will later support a party at a national scope. There will be further delving into both terms throughout the study.

The participation of the Spanish citizen and the implication in social and political movements has increased since then. On his part, Lucas Marín (1982) also performs an analysis about political culture in Spain, and comments that “(...) it is marked by different factors that comprise family tradition until the reality of the moment they live in. The socialization routes and convey of values composing the political culture are very diverse, including from primary (family and school) to secondary agents, as well as peers (group of equals), media and others. All those are the agents conveying values on which the political attitudes or political culture are founded” (p. 82-83). And

the art and participation are not unconnected from this involvement in the political behaviour.

The interest of the subject dealt with in this communication is the fact that, when studying the political communication of the past times, there is observed a change of language due to the technological revolution, the development of new channels and media, and the implication of citizens in social and active movements, through phenomena such as Artivism and Grassroots, focus of this study and all that promoted to a great extent on the Internet.

Pérez Martínez (2009) indicates that the cyberspace is the new world agora. In this same line, Cotarelo (2010) comments that it is constituted by the blogosphere, social networks and the large service platforms, where the digital versions of traditional media can be included.

There are five elements that characterize this new space of communication and that entail a relevant change in the relationship citizen - politics:

- **Multilaterality:** the actors of the cyberspace are not limited to the figure of traditional agents of the public/ political life, today many agents intervene, either in a collective or individual manner, that have broadly widened the scope of participants therein. Collectives, associations and individual citizens are able to issue opinion, share, move and act in an endless offer of political and social causes. In the topic dealt with in this paper, multilaterality is key for the development of the citizens political action.
- **Interaction:** all these actors act in a plane of equality, they interact between them. Institutions get in contact with individuals or groups while these, at the same time, access to all information and social life expecting to establish relationships of exchange. And this is where the term Politics 2.0 appears.

“... the participants, in any relationship with the institutions, as governors, governed, justiciable, audiences, readers, clients, users are used not only to present their requests but also that they are heard of and to establish dialogues with the other parties about their exchanges”. (Ureña, 2001: 29-30)
- **Spreading:** the great extension of the cyberspace is characteristic, as well as its huge capillarity. Not even one aspect of the social life is outside the reach of Internet. Thus, every communication increases its reach potential. In the case of this paper, the spreading of the action of citizens had consequences on audiences.
- **Immediacy:** it is a very typical characteristic of the cyberspace where there is no place for the usual temporal mediation of the cause - effect social action. The Internet user is used to information in real time.
- **Free-of-charge:** refers to the generalised expectation that the consumption of goods and services in Internet is for free. This may actually be so for the access to information by the citizen, but not for the entity generating that content.

All these theoretical characteristics have manifested in the action performed in the focus of this study,

where the citizen, as individual or collective, anonymous and artists, in an immediate, free manner and reaching great visibility, have achieved that an anonymous candidate obtained awareness indexes deemed impossible until then.

“The irruption of Internet entails a challenge for politics, a challenge for traditional media – they are also on Internet, and face innovative and imaginative formulas of communication, they no longer control-, and a challenge for the new citizenship of democracy, which participation in the public debate has shifted towards Internet”. (Rey, 2008: 303). As will be seen in the fieldwork, Internet plays a very relevant role in the case studied.

No wonder it is an environment that generates very positive possibilities for the party since it fosters the dialogue with citizens and their own sympathisers. So much so, that we can “think about forgetting the word “activist” and open a more extensive sphere, that of the cyberactivist” (Caldevilla, 2009), able of spreading information and turning into an essential actor within the communication strategy of organizations and parties.

Gutiérrez-Rubí (2009) indicates that in the Spanish political parties, platforms are being created from the social media to approach sympathisers and volunteers to the political action. The cyberactivism, crowdsourcing and its typology of crowdfunding are key objectives in this medium.

On the one hand, cyberactivism refers to the group of communication techniques and technologies, essentially based on Internet and mobile telephone, associated to the collective action and civil disobedience, either on the virtual space, or the real plane. As a key example of this term, it is noteworthy, the duel of the North-American democrat primary elections that have strongly impacted in the Spanish politics. In this sense, parties question themselves about the capital of the political and organizational energy that digital activists entail and the possibility to enrol them as digital militants.

There is a wide consensus about the fact that a considerable part of the success of Barack Obama resides in the intelligent use of the tools of the 2.0 culture. Obama understood the political capacity of digital social networks, starting by his capacity to mobilize followers or to collect donations.

And on the other hand, in 2009, specialized websites such as *Puromarketing* already mentioned that “The Web 2.0 and Social Networks have a good part of their foundation in the baseline idea of crowdsourcing.

According to López-Trigo (2013) this concept “is something similar to that practice that, sometimes, we see on television contests and that tends to be called “public’s wild card”, applied to companies and organizations in general, and with Internet as platform and scenario. It consists of an anonymous, volunteer and spontaneous multitude performs specific functions or tasks that, are usually developed by technical staff, managers from the company or other personnel from the organization” (p.187).

It is the collective funding through the Internet. It is a cooperation, carried out by a group of people to collect money (or other resources), gathering efforts and initiatives of other individuals or organizations.

In short, it is to request a wide and indefinite collective of people outside the organization, to solve our problems, clarify doubts or allow us to progress when the best way to do so, is not clear for us.

The casuistic registered up until now indicate us that this work performed by the ‘public’ can be remunerated or not and, given the case it is, this action can be executed using money, gifts, honours, etc. A considerable part of the grounds of the Web 2.0 and Social Networks is based on the idea of crowdsourcing, as we will see later in the case analysed.

This section is closed by manifesting that this new era, the era of digital, is transforming the vital world in all its manifestations in an accelerated manner. And the last trend, focus of this work, is the *Grassroots*, a movement that has its source of cooperation and mobility in the digital arena.

“Grassroots organizing’s power is in the sense of justice about an issue and the power of ordinary folks to influence people in powerful positions, whose power always depends on cooperation from many, many people. Its power is not of money, issue expertise, or relationships to decision-makers”. (Poggi, 2015: 1).

2.- Methodology

Rodríguez (2011) indicates that the scientific method is the journey of the researcher to generate the theories about phenomena observed in reality. In this sense, “a good research must be innovative, which can be achieved either by dealing with a unstudied theme, delving into a theme that is scarcely or moderately known, or by providing a different or an innovative approach to a problem regardless it has been examined repeatedly” (Hernández, Fernández and Baptista, 2010: 3).

Likewise, these authors also indicate a differentiation between exploratory, descriptive, correlational and explanatory researches.

In the study conducted, a descriptive research was decided, where there is an examination about how the phenomenon object of study is, as well as the parts that compose it. This kind of studies are comprised within the so-called qualitative researches, that “(...) aim to gather the meaning of the action of subjects. There is prioritising of the feeling or the reasons of an individual to perform a specific action” (Berganza and Ruiz, 2005: 32).

The qualitative research aims for subjectivity, and to explain and understand the interactions and individual or group subjective meanings. To explain or understand, we humans need frameworks of reference where we perform these actions. “Schwandt suggests classifying interpretative frameworks into two main groups: 1.- constructivists, 2.- interpretatives, the case of study belongs to these latter since they share, from their original postulates, the need to understand the meaning of social phenomena” (Álvarez-Gayou, 2013: 10).

Through the descriptive research there is aim of providing the view of the event that concerns us, using non-participant observation of facts prior to the municipal elections in the Community of Madrid in 2015. Where, as mentioned earlier, the two concepts, activism and grassroots, focuses of this research, coexist by making the candidate to become an active and known character, and

at the same time, to analyse the political party she is affiliated to, “*Ahora Madrid*”.

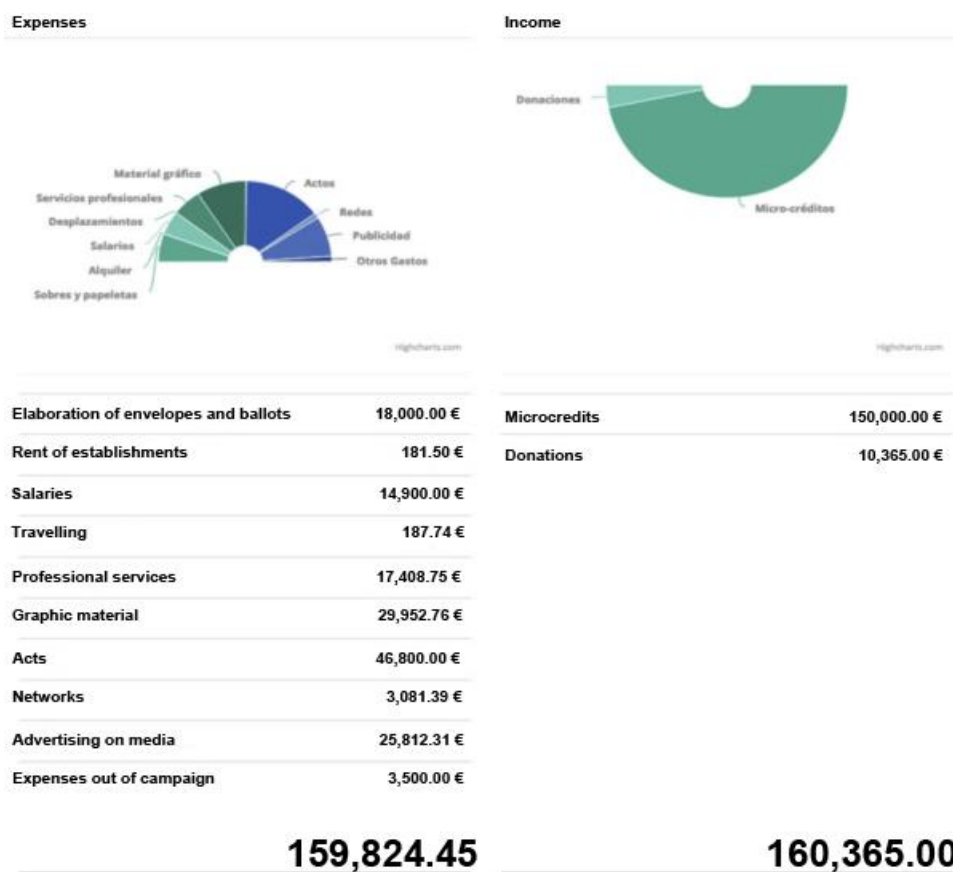
“In the qualitative methodology, the researcher views the scenario and people in a holistic perspective. People, scenarios or groups are not reduced to variables, but considered as a whole. The qualitative researcher studies people in the context of their past and the situations they are in” (Álvarez-Gayou, 2013: 6).

3.- Analysis and results

As starting point of the fieldwork in this study, we would refer to the use, very extended today, of channels 2.0 as tool of political propaganda, to grant validity and coverage to Artivism and *Grassroots*.

As mentioned earlier, the Obama campaign #Yeswecan of 2008 caused a drastic change in the way of communicating, persuading and seducing actual and potential followers of the American Democratic party. In that moment, there was a confirmed change of paradigm in political communication and thus, it was considered as guideline by most political parties and their leaders, who attended in many countries to the different subsequent electoral appointments.

Figure 1. Budget *Ahora Madrid* for the municipal elections of 2015



In Spain, the first surprise in that sense was the campaign of the European elections of 2014 where

a practically unknown party for majorities, and coming from a citizen movement (the 15M), obtained unexpected results positioning in the European Parliament. The intelligent management of social networks and online channels had a lot to do with this surprising result. As was also observed in the focus of this study.

Figure 2. Graphics used during the citizen campaign



Source: Google Images

When the following electoral convocation of 2015 approached (municipal elections in Spain and

autonomic elections in different autonomous communities), an electoral struggle between the two large political parties (PP and PSOE) was foreseen and this is precisely where there started the new way of making politics and to communicate it.

In the municipal elections of Madrid (May 2015), there coincided the two large majoritarian political parties up until then, *PP* led by Esperanza Aguirre and *PSOE* led by Antonio Luis Carmona, besides other political parties with less relevance up until then, such as *Ciudadanos* and the new citizen candidacy *Ahora Madrid* that resulted from the merger of *Ganemos Madrid*, *Podemos* and *Equo* and part of *Izquierda Unida*, with Manuela Carmena as leader.

As indicated on its own website, *Ganemos Madrid*, they defined themselves as: “(...) a space where there participate women and men citizens, people from social movements, parties and collectives with the aim of winning the city of Madrid. *Ganemos Madrid* emerges with a desire: to promote citizen protagonism to start up a government opened to participation, that allows to position democracy and rights in the centre. That returns the sovereignty as society” (*Ganemos Madrid*, 2015-2017).

In this sense, and like this paper, Dader, Cheng, Campos, Quintana and Vizcaíno-Laorga (2014) state that the analysis of the websites of political parties in campaign constitutes the witness of the evolution of communication strategies not only from the party, but it also represents a contribution to a general level within the study of the political communication.

Figure 3. Action in Facebook on 19 May 2015



Source: Facebook

A leading social movement and a candidate Manuela Carmena, who achieved the leadership with 63% of votes in primary elections, a convocation prior the elections held between 26 and 30 March 2015 with the participation of more than 15,300 individuals belonging to the social and neighbour movements of Madrid. A politically unknown candidate but with a professional background in judicature and an indisputable national and international prestige.

Regarding the electoral funding, the national numbers published by the parties for this campaign, ranged from a minimum of 185,000 euros for *UPYD* up to a maximum of 20.8 million Euros of *Partido Popular*. In general, funding was looked for through the banks or by legally authorised donations. And this is where the beginning of the change mentioned earlier, initiates.

In only 22 days and using the crowdfunding system, the collective *Ahora Podemos*, collected 150,000 Euros, through citizen donations that ranged between 100 and 10,000 Euros, which was the minimum budget established by the entity.

And with these data the following questions arises: how is it possible that with these scarce resources there could be a campaign against very well positioned and potent rivals such as PP and PSOE?”. The answer is conclusive, only by using tools as potent and innovative in the political dispute such as Artivism and *Grassroot*, we mentioned earlier in this study.

Figure 4. Guerrilla Marketing actions in outdoor media



Source: Google Images

According to the Dattio report (Social report on politics in Spain and the municipal and autonomic elections) published on 18 May 2015, namely, six days before elections; among other conclusions and regarding the conversation on Internet, it is affirmed that PP is the party with a greater leading role in social conversation, and Esperanza Aguirre is the candidate with the greatest volume of mentions, far from the second candidate Manuela Carmena.

Despite this data, it is the direct participation of citizens that extoled Carmena, blowing up any advertising strategy, media planning, and creative tactic regardless of their persuasiveness, used by her political rivals and overlooking the great resources and advertising budgets.

A campaign that turned Manuela Carmena into a sociological phenomenon, it was not a single campaign, but instead there were hundreds of independent campaigns coming from the political acronyms and from citizens as well, emerging spontaneously, unplanned and that were executed in

record timing.

In this regard, Gutierrez-Rubi defines a new and innovative concept called *artivism*: “(...) the extraordinary potency of collective creativity and the mobilizing nature of political art and the influence of *street-art*. The quality, variety and plasticity of contributions is generating a stimulating and optimistic effect around the campaign...” (in El País-Ideas, 2015).

And artivism explodes with the first free convocation on the Internet, constituted in a record timing and depicted on different citizen organizations of volunteers, artists, graphic designers, communicators, singers, photographers, poets, litterateurs and musicians. In this sense, we deem noteworthy the “*Movimiento de Liberación Gráfica*” of Madrid and “*Madrid con Manuela*”, where about 1,000 illustrators, professionals and amateurs published portraits, posters and animated gif formats that represented the candidate Manuela Carmena.

These platforms opened to all citizens invited to elaborate communication pieces to promote her with complete freedom; namely, outside the image of official nature of the candidacy campaign of *Ahora Madrid*.



Source: Google Images

The gestation of these movements was done in conversations on social networks and consolidated in barely 15 days. An unprecedented graphic display and of audiovisual creation, performed both by amateur and acclaimed artists, that comprised the complete multidisciplinary scope possible and that reaffirmed the idea that “the lack of budget of the candidate of *Ahora Madrid* for the position of mayor of the capital was compensated by a profusion of creativity” (El País, 2015).

Ahora Madrid uses and makes the most of social networks and it published an average of 1.5 posts per day during the electoral campaign on Facebook, being especially active on the days prior elections (21

and 22 May), respecting the reflection day and the same day of elections.

A spontaneous movement that was successful in achieving that the users of social networks, like Facebook, participated in a virtual event created and organized by this network for 19 May. It consisted of changing the profile picture of every user in the social network by that of the candidate Manuela Carmena under the slogan “*Por Manuela cambio mi foto*”, (“I change my profile picture for Manuela”) and generating the *hahstag* #DoymicaraporManuela.

Another of the conventional media, from the off-line scope scheduled in the political communication campaign, and that always had a great relevance, is the outdoors advertising. The aforementioned graphic contributions available on the websites of said movements allowed the free impression of every illustration, every gif, every picture, every poster, provided so that the voter could use it as deemed convenient, bursting in with many unprecedented pieces in a new way of executing and disseminating outdoor advertising. Printed graphic pieces, edited and spread through “sticking” across the streets and neighbourhoods made by the neighbours.

It can be said that the leading role of this campaign was left in the hands of the people from Madrid, that its copywriters and authors were the neighbours and that its communication channels, were the walls of every corner of the city’s neighbourhoods. An outdoor advertising that jumped out of conventional platforms to flood the complete Town and Court with the interpreted and the re-interpreted figure of Manuela Carmena.

Figure 6. Example of meme used in the citizen campaign



Source: Google Images

In this area, we cannot omit the action performed by the artistic group *Vértice Curvo*, who carried out a *transmedia*¹ [01] operation in its entirety. This action, a mix of outdoor and *guerrilla* marketing, consisted of the visual projection of different graphic images mentioned earlier, covering the façades of every building in the centre of Madrid every night, during the whole electoral campaign. The

phenomenon became viral and generated news on mass media for free. A complete publicity phenomenon.

Videos, music, songs, poetry, memes... the transmedia narrative at its peak, looking for transversality through the different platforms, the added value of every network. Examples can be seen in the.

A multi-disruption interpreted by the subjectivity of women and men from Madrid, the authentic protagonists of the electoral campaign of *Ahora Madrid*. In this sense, Felipe Gil and Francisco Jurado state that “(...) a collective and uncontrolled construction –even within the logic of representation. We could talk about the collective design of the profile of a candidate as a metaphor of the yearning to design a city jointly.” (El Diario, 2015).

4. Discussion and conclusions:

In this synopsis three conclusions of the study analysed are developed:

- 1.- The “Grassroots” model gets its maximum expression in our country in the campaign analysed and it is positioned as a key to consider for the development of future actions.
- 2.- Likewise, activism is one of the most political and controverted artistic dimensions. Many actions are sometimes incomprehensible for some or brilliant for others, but what it is true, is that it tends to be an art intrinsically united to the most immediate present and it is in continuous movement in Internet and, increasingly more, on social networks. As a consequence, the art united to the activism seems to be a very wise and efficacious manner, both of protest as well as of personal expression.
- 3.- The profile of the candidate is considered from another perspective by citizens. Proximity and credibility are prioritised over the rest of political slogans. Citizens acquire a leading role and the relationship with the candidate is such that its own electors develop, produce and convey the electoral campaign. The collaborative actions foster loyalty among citizens towards the candidate and the campaign is a continuous work in progress by adding, without prior censure by the candidate and her party, all sorts of innovative forms of communication. *Ahora Madrid* knew how to harness this for its campaign.

We conclude with a key idea of the campaign analysed: the disruption in political communication is possible and has been successful. The coexistence of the two concepts analysed: Activism and *Grassroots* is a reality in this case, and the party *Ahora Madrid* knew how to make the most of it. The campaign is from and for citizens, the candidate in this case, a woman candidate adds herself to this movement, reaching a level of credibility and acceptance unknown up until now. Political scientists, communicators, advertisers, journalists, advisors and politicians are left outside this discourse.

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