The use of Twitter by the main candidates in the general election campaigns in Spain: 2011 and 2015. Is there a digital and generational gap?

El uso de Twitter por parte de los principales candidatos en las campañas electorales para las elecciones generales españolas: 2011 y 2015. ¿Brecha digital y generacional?

Laura Cervi. She is Associate Professor at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona in the Faculty of Communication Sciences, and she also has a Doctorate in Political Science from the Universita di Pavia, Italy, based on research entitled *Nazionalismo e mercato elettorale: il caso catalano* ("Nationalism and the electoral market: the Catalonian case"), in the area of Political Communication. Finally, Laura Cervi earned her Bachelor's Degree in Political Science from the Universita di Pavia, Italy with work and research conducted in the United States.
Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, España
laura.cervi@uab.cat
ORCID: 0000-0002-0376-0609

Núria Roca Trenchs. She is currently studying a PhD in communication and journalism at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. She has an Official Master's Degree in Research in Communication and Journalism from the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona as well. Roca holds a Bachelor's Degree in Audiovisual Communication from the Open University of Catalonia, a Postgraduate Degree in Digital Journalism from the same University, and a Bachelor's Degree in Philosophy from the Autonomous University of Barcelona.
Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, España
nuria.rocat@e-campus.cat
ORCID: 0000-0002-9389-5098

Abstract:

Do candidates use Twitter to communicate more directly with their electorate? In this investigation, we question the quantitative and qualitative way in which this social network was used by the main candidates during the Spanish electoral campaigns of 2011 and 2015. The aim is to establish whether there is a digital gap between the candidates of the "old" and "new" politics. Quantitatively, we analysed tweets, retweets, replies, followers/followings, and "likes". Qualitatively, we analysed the informative, deliberative and participative way in which candidates used this network. The results show that there is no digital gap, and that candidates were far from proposing innovative strategies for establishing more direct communication with voters.

Keywords:

Electoral campaigns, digital and generational gap, general elections of 2011 and 2015, Spain, Twitter.

Resumen:

¿Los candidatos usan Twitter para relacionarse más directamente con el electorado? En esta investigación nos preguntamos sobre el uso cuantitativo y cualitativo de esta red por parte de los principales candidatos durante las campañas electorales españolas de 2011 y 2015. Nos planteamos si existe una brecha digital entre los candidatos de la "vieja" y "nueva" política. Cuantitativamente analizamos los tuits, retuits, respuestas, seguidores y personas a quienes siguen, y los "me gusta" de los candidatos. Cualitativamente valoramos el uso informativo, deliberativo y de participación. Los resultados demuestran que no existe dicha brecha digital y que, de hecho, los candidatos estuvieron lejos de proponer estrategias innovadoras de comunicación más directa con los electores.

Palabras claves:

Campañas electorales, brecha digital y generacional, elecciones generales 2011 y 2015, España, Twitter.

1. Introduction

In Spain, 67.6% of the population was connected to the Internet in 2011: 31,574,855 people, according to Internet Live Stats[1] data, and by 2015 the figure reached 80.4% of the population with Internet access. This was a total of 37,060,103 people[2]. The EGM of October/November 2011[3] indicated that 52.4% of users utilized Internet to connect to Social Networks, and in the EGM of October/November 2015[4], the figure reached 64.2% of the population. The data indicate that the main Internet users are people between 25 and 44 years old. According to Statista, Facebook is the social network with the most users: 483 million in 2011 and 1,038 million[5] in 2015, while Twitter went from 117 million in 2011 to 305 million active users in 2015[6].

Although not the most widely used network, Twitter is the one that politicians prefer to use in running their online campaigns, and most importantly, in relating to the electorate through new means of communication (Abejón, Sastre y Linares, 2012; Casero-Ripollés , Miquel-Segarra and Alonso-Muñoz, 2016, Casero-Ripollés, Sintes-Olivella and Franch, 2017, Enli, 2017b, Enli and Skogerbø, 2013, Freelon and Karpf, 2015, Jungherr, 2014a, Jungherr, 2014b, Jungherr, 2016 Jürgens and Jungherr, 2016, Machado and Capdevila, 2016, Larsson and Moe, 2014, Skogerbø and Krumsvik, 2014, Vergeer, 2016, Zugasti and Sabés, 2015). These activities are above and beyond traditional campaign activities, which undoubtedly coexist with those online (Casero-Ripollés, Feenstra and Tormey, 2016; Enli, 2017a; Vergeer, 2016).

"Digital media introduces certain novelties into electoral campaigns because they offer new tools for political communication", as expressed by Casero-Ripollés, Feenstra and Tormey (2016: 7). Therefore, we consider Twitter to be a powerful tool for strengthening relations between politicians and citizens.

In addition, Twitter offers "free, immediate, massive dissemination, while at the same time offering interaction and an open and transparent exchange of information and ideas" (Zugasti and Sabés, 2015: 163). Moreover, according to what has been written by Rodríguez and Ureña (2012), the use of this social network indicates modernity, generates conversations with citizens and a sense of community, and humanizes the candidate. Twitter is transformed into a social barometer and converts users into opinion leaders.

And even more importantly, given the speed with which contents are distributed and the greater access of citizens to the Internet, voters are finding renewed interest in political affairs after years of decline in this respect (Abejón, Sastre and Linares, 2012, Barber, 1984, Davis, 2005, Enli, 2017a, Lilleker and Vedel, 2013, Swanson, 1995). The most democratic societies have become interested in politics once again, a factor that has been unleashed "[...] by an interest in online media and its decentralized nature, which offers the promise of empowerment", according to Carpentier (2016: 70), while "digital

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[1]   http://www.internetlivestats.com

[2]   In 2017, more than two thirds of the world's population were already using Internet, which means more than 3,570 million people

[3]   http://www.aimc.es/a1mc-c0nt3nt/uploads/2012/04/internet311.pdf

[4]   http://www.aimc.es/a1mc-c0nt3nt/uploads/2015/12/internet315.pdf

[5]   https://es.statista.com/estadisticas/636622/facebook-numero-de-usuarios-activos-diarios-a-nivel-mundial-de-2011-a/

[6]   https://es.statista.com/estadisticas/513581/twitter-usuarios-mensualmente-activos-por-trimestres/

tools enhance democracy by expanding citizen power and engagement" after a loss of democratic values has taken place, according to Persily (2017: 71).

Although the tool was created in 2006, Twitter exploded onto the scene in 2008 at the same time that Barack Obama's revolutionary electoral campaign was carried out against all odds, as he did not have the support of the party establishment, and it allowed him to secure the Presidency of the United States and the White House. Since then, his electoral campaign has been an example and a model for candidates of most democratic countries, and a considerable number of studies have been carried out or have referred to it, and also to the fact that social networks have become a benchmark for candidates in elections in countries with stable democracies (Beas, 2011, Casero-Ripollés, Feenstra and Tormey, 2016, Cervi and Roca, 2017, Costa, 2009, Enli, 2017b, Persily, 2017).

In this investigation we have focused on the electoral campaign of the Spanish general elections of 2011, in which Mariano Rajoy (PP - Popular Party) and Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba (PSOE-Socialist Party), the two main candidates, confronted each other; in addition, we have also considered the elections of 2015, which was a confrontation involving Mariano Rajoy (PP), Pedro Sánchez Castejón (PSOE), Albert Rivera (Ciudadanos) and Pablo Iglesias (Podemos), in order to analyze the quantitative and qualitative use these candidates made of their Twitter accounts. It should be added that the personal profiles of the candidates, rather than the party profiles, have been used due to the fact that electoral campaigns have become more personalized: "Social media such as Facebook and Twitter place the focus on the individual politician rather than on the political party, thus expanding the political arena for increased personalized campaigning", as observed by Enli and Skogerbø (2013: 758).

The research was carried out from a national perspective, so we must remember that the political, electoral and party system that the candidates endorse, as well as their political culture (Almond and Verba, 1963, Duverger, 1957, Kirchheimer, 1969; Lijphart, 1999, Lipset and Rokkan, 1967 and Sartori, 1980), can influence the way political candidates deal with electoral campaigns, as it is possible that limits will be established in their development.

According to the compilation of Hallin and Mancini (2004), the Spanish political system is considered a Polarized Pluralist model, and this must be taken it into account in order to understand the limits of Internet use, as well as the fact that this is a recent democracy with previously long periods of authoritarianism. In addition, we have seen that even though the campaigns are being personalized, the parties still have a lot of power in the development of campaigns, while the role of volunteerism is not fundamental in focusing the electoral campaign, nor do candidates need to ask for funding, as the campaigns are financed with public money.

The PP won the 2011 elections, in which 68.94% of the voters participated, and this party gained 186 Representative seats and 44.63% of the vote. Consequently, Mariano Rajoy won the election with an absolute majority. The PSOE, with Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba leading the bid, won 110 Representative seats and 28.76% of the vote.

The general elections on December 20, 2015 (with a slight increase in participation at 69.97%) represented a turning point in the history of Spanish politics. The election campaign was a struggle between the candidates of the so-called "old politics", Mariano Rajoy (PP) and Pedro Sánchez Castejón (PSOE), and the representatives of the "new politics" with candidates such as Albert Rivera (Ciudadanos) and Pablo Iglesias (Podemos), and there was a certain risk of breaking the bipartisan-

ship that had dominated Spanish politics ever since the restoration of democracy and the Transition that followed, as well as a risk of a transformation into a multi-party system.

Although the PP received the most votes at 28.71% and won 123 Representative seats, it did not have enough to govern alone, and had to try to reach an agreement with parties that were gaining large numbers of seats in Congress for the first time. Mariano Rajoy ruled out an agreement with the other big party in the country, the PSOE which received 22.01% of the vote and 90 Representative seats. Ciudadanos received 13.94% of the vote and 40 Representative seats, and Podemos won 12.69% of the vote and 42 seats. In the end, however, an agreement for a stable government was not reached, and the Popular Party candidate, which gained the most votes, called for new elections that were held on June 26, 2016.

The electoral results were not enlightening in a country where party transformation was starting to take place. Nevertheless, they highlighted the will of the citizens to renew the National Government. Thus, something changed during the elections that were called for by the president of the government at that time, Mariano Rajoy, and which took place on December 20, 2015. The deep economic recession that had plagued the country in previous years and the emergence of numerous cases of corruption led to a crisis that has been both social (increasing inequalities among citizens) and political. Citizens no longer feel represented by the two parties that have been pre-eminent since the Transition, which has led to the emergence of new parties in the political arena such as Ciudadanos y Podemos, who are ready and willing to be influential.

The votes of the citizens were divided according to the different profiles of the candidates and the parties they represent. A pre-election study by the CIS (Centre for Sociological Research) from October 2015 (the closest to the elections)[7] indicated that the PP had a voter profile of a person of more than 65 years of age, uneducated or with a primary school education, and there was a balanced number of votes between men and women. The PSOE had a voter profile of a person who was also uneducated or had a primary school education and was over 64 years old. This party was chosen more by women than by men. Ciudadanos had a voter profile of a person with a high school education, technical training or higher education, between 35 and 44 years old. More men than women voted for this party. Finally, Podemos had a voter profile of a person with a high school education, technical training or higher education, between 25 and 34 years old, and more votes from men than from women.

1.1. Questions, objectives and hypothesis

By comparing different periods and parties, this research aims to measure whether a generational or digital gap is reflected among the candidates based on three preliminary questions.

Question 1. To what extent do candidates use Twitter? Various research investigations have already dealt with the use of social networks by Spanish politicians (Abejón, Sastre and Linares, 2012, Casero-Ripollés, Miquel-Segarra and Alonso-Muñoz, 2016, Casero-Ripollés, Sintes-Olivella and Franch, 2017; Cervi and Roca, 2017).

Objective 1. Determine the quantitative use of Twitter by candidates.

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[7]   http://www.cis.es/cis/opencm/ES/1_encuestas/estudios/listaMuestras.jsp?estudio=14245

Hypothesis 1. The hypothesis we intend to verify is based on the profiles of voters and those of the candidates who use Twitter. According to Semiocast[8], in 2011 Spain already ranked 3rd in the world for having the most active Twitter users, just behind the Netherlands and Japan, and the user profile, verified by ONTSI[9] and Statista[10], remains substantially unchanged in both years, and in fact, Twitter is characterized as the preferred network of men between 35 and 44 years of age. The figures show that 90% are between 24 and 54 years old. This means that both millennials as well as older users are in fact excluded - and in more than 75% of the cases they have higher education. If we cross this data with the aforementioned voter profile of each party delineated by the CIS, we can assume that Ciudadanos, with a voter profile of between 35 and 44 years old, and Podemos, with a voter profile of between 25 and 34 years old, should be the most active parties on Twitter, respectively.

Question 2. How do the candidates use Twitter? In other words, do they use it as another unilateral means of disseminating information about their campaign, or do they take advantage of it to generate a new relationship and new forms of interaction with citizens?

Objective 2. Determine qualitatively how candidates use Twitter.

As we will see in more depth in the methodological section, the Internet offers many possibilities, but this does not mean that the issuer is interested in or capable of taking advantage of all of them. Specifically, as pointed out by Lilleker and Vedel (2013), among others, Twitter can be used on different levels: information, deliberation (discussion) and/or mobilization for participation.

Hypothesis 2. It is true that "traditional" parties tend to place participation more in the background within the public agenda by giving citizen involvement purely informative or advisory value (Font and Blanco 2005). Therefore, Podemos, which sees it as a necessary complement to representative institutions for the purpose of enriching the decision-making process, and Ciudadanos, which has made new dialogue with citizens its political banner, place participation at centre stage. That being the case, these varying attitudes should be reflected in the way candidates use Twitter.

In other words, we hope that the "younger" parties will make more "complete" use of the Internet by taking advantage of all the opportunities it offers to encourage participation.

Question 3. How does the presence of candidates of the new politics impact others in the use of Twitter? If, as shown by Talbot (2008), the massive use of Internet by the Obama team in some way forced Kerry to enter the "digital arena", can we predict a similar contagion effect in Spain?

Objective 3. Determine if the candidates of the "new politics" drag the candidates of the "old politics" into using Twitter.

Hypothesis 3. Pablo Iglesias and Albert Rivera had already been active on Twitter since 2010, while both Rubalcaba and Rajoy joined the social network only months or even days before the start of the 2011 campaign; therefore, if the "new" politicians had already been active on Twitter and had already generated a certain bidirectional relationship with citizens, we consider that the other candidates of the "traditional" parties may have been dragged into using this social network more

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8   https://semiocast.com/

9   http://www.ontsi.red.es/ontsi/

10   https://es.statista.com/estadisticas/513581/twitter-usuarios-mensualmente-activos-por-trimestres/

heavily and efficiently. Putting it in Gramscian terms, it can be said that if Twitter becomes a hegemonic instrument, all of the participants will feel somehow forced to join.

2. Methodology

This research is based on a comparative methodology that has been approached from a theoretical and practical perspective. Today there are highly-valued contributions regarding the comparative methodology from authors such as Hallin and Mancini (2004), Kluver et al. (2007), Lijphart (1971) Lilleker, et al. (2011), Negrine and Papathanassopoulos (1996), Sartori (1970), Schneider and Foot (2002), Vergeer (2016), Vergeer and Cunha (2009), Vergeer et al. (2013), which allow for an understanding of the candidates' strategies in a more comprehensive way during the electoral campaigns.

Thus, we agree with Enli (2017a), Larsson and Moe (2014), Strömbäck and Kiousis (2014), when they emphasize that there are not yet enough international studies on this topic and more research should be promoted. In addition, we must also take into account the theories posed by Anduiza (2009), Enli and Skogerbø (2013), Gibson and Römmele (2007), Hallin and Mancini (2004), Kaid and Holtz-Bacha (1995), Kalnes (2009), Lilleker and Vedel (2013), Negrine and Papathanassopoulos (1996), Norris (2000), Plasser and Plasser (2002), Scammell (1997), Strömbäck and Kiousis (2014), Swanson and Mancini (1996), and Vergeer (2016), regarding the fact that there is no unanimous theory that explains the transformation experienced by electoral campaigns.

The research is also based on an analysis that combines quantitative and qualitative data. The data under analysis are the publications made by the candidates on Twitter: Pedro Sánchez Castejón (PSOE), Albert Rivera (Ciudadanos) and Pablo Iglesias (Podemos) during the campaign period of 2015 (December 4-18, 2015), and Mariano Rajoy (PP) and Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba (PSOE) during the 2011 election campaign (November 4-18, 2011). It should also be stressed that in this research the focus is on the candidate, or in other words, we focus on the amount and way in which candidates use Twitter, leaving aside the impact that its utilisation may have on users, which could be the subject of another investigation.

Using quantitative analysis we wanted to evaluate to what extent Twitter is used; therefore, we have measured the number of tweets, retweets and replies that candidates made during the campaign period. The data has been collected from the website www.tweetstats.com, which stores all the data mechanically and allows these to be recovered much later. In addition, the number of followers, as well as people who the candidates follow, and the number of "likes", have all been collected manually.

To observe how candidates use this network, or in other words, what type of interaction they favour with their voters, we have applied a qualitative analysis. This analysis is based on a data collection system consisting of the preparation of a survey composed of a series of questions used to determine the manner in which candidates communicate with the electorate, that is to say, if they do so in a more hierarchical way or in a closer and more horizontal way. Thus, we adopted and adapted the three levels of communication proposed by Lilleker and Vedel (2013): information, deliberation (discussion) and mobilization for participation, in order to categorize the questions.

Lilleker and Vedel (2013) consider that there are three levels of possible interaction: the first and most basic is information, in which the user (in our case the candidate) uses social networks substantially as an "old" means of conveying information

without promoting any type of interaction with others; at the intermediate level we find deliberation, which as the word suggests promotes a bilateral exchange of opinion through the more or less open request for feedback; and finally, at the highest level, we find mobilization and citizen participation, in which the candidate openly encourages citizens to participate in the campaign, which could mean sharing or creating content, acting as a volunteer, etc.

The questions in our survey reflect these three levels. At the "information" level, characterized by a unilateral communication system, the voters basically become mere spectators of electoral campaigns. The questions that arise start with the biography of the candidate (personal life, academic career, professional experience, hobbies, etc.), campaign events (calendar, where and how to vote, rallies, meetings), electoral program (proposals, criticism of rivals), and audio-visual content (photographs, videos, infographics, etc.).

In contrast, at the "deliberation" level there is already some contact between political candidates and voters with feedback that allows for a bilateral exchange of opinion. Thus, we considered whether the candidates were actively involved in the process of dialogue with citizens and answered their questions, if users generated debate rather than just giving their support to the candidate, and if the candidate executed any other type of initiative to promote discussion. Finally, in order to assess the broader level of communication, which is "citizen participation", we questioned whether the candidate asked for the vote, if he promoted volunteering, if he asked for donations to pay for the election campaign, if he encouraged his supporters to retweet the contents published in his profile, or if the candidate carried out other initiatives related to promoting participation.

As we previously mentioned, the analysis is based on a data collection system consisting of the preparation of a survey composed of a series of questions that can be answered with a yes or no response. To process the data and give them an empirical value, a value of 1 was assigned to affirmative answers and 0 to negative responses. This method is based on the proposal used by Vergeer and Cunha (2009) and offers the possibility of measuring each category empirically through the use of a spreadsheet, which has allowed us to carry out a comparison on the quality of Twitter use by candidates. In order to do this, we have also focused on other research, such as that of Cervi and Roca (2016), Kluver et al. (2007), Lilleker et al. (2011), Lilleker and Vedel (2013), Schneider and Foot (2002) or Vergeer *et al.* (2013).

As shown in Table 1, a total of 17 questions were used, of which 9 related to the "information" level, 3 to the "deliberation" level, and 5 to the "participation" level.

Table 1: Parameters used to analyse the levels named as "information", "deliberation" and "participation"

INFORMATION	Yes (1) / No (0)	DELIBERATION	Yes (1) / No (0)	PARTICIPATION	Yes (1) / No (0)
1. Does the candidate fill in the space offered by Twitter to define him/herself?		1. Is the candidate actively involved in the process of dialogue with citizens? Does the candidate comment on the publications that users make? Does he/she answer questions?		1. Does the candidate ask for votes?	

2. Does the candidate offer details of his/her personal and family life? (Marital status, hobbies, academic career, professional experience, etc.)		2. From the publications of the candidate, do users generate debate (not only give their support)?		2. Does the candidate ask voters to become volunteers during the campaign and participate in the activities that are promoted?	
3. Does the candidate publish the campaign events (rallies, debates, meetings and conferences) that he/she attends?		3. Does the candidate carry out other initiatives to promote deliberation?		3. Does the candidate ask the user to make a donation to pay for the electoral campaign?	
4. Does the candidate announce in advance the campaign events that he/she plans to attend?				4. Does the candidate ask his/her followers to retweet the contents published in his/her profile?	
5. Does the candidate provide information about the voting process (where to vote, and how to vote)?				5. Does the candidate carry out other initiatives to promote participation?	
6. Does the candidate publish information related to topics such as his/her ideology or the electoral program?					
7. Does the candidate compare his/her proposals with those of his opponents?					
8. Does the candidate criticize his/her opponents?					
9. Does the candidate publish multimedia information?					
9.1. Does the candidate post pictures?					
9.2. Does the candidate publish videos?					
9.3. Does the candidate publish audio files?					
9.4. Does the candidate publish other types of multimedia information: infographics, signs, posters, etc.?					
	TOTAL		TOTAL		TOTAL
	9		3		5
	TOTAL YES		TOTAL YES		TOTAL YES
	TOTAL %		TOTAL %		TOTAL %

Source: Author-created

3. Results

3.1. Electoral campaign of 2011

In the 2011 election campaign, the candidates of the main parties were Mariano Rajoy for the Partido Popular (PP) and Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba for the Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE).

Mariano Rajoy started using Twitter in September 2011 just two months before the day of the election under the profile @ marianorajoy, and he defined himself in the following way: "I am the President of the PP and candidate for President of the Government of Spain. Welcome to my Twitter page where I am accompanied by my team".

Although he did not always sign his tweets, when he signed he used the initials MR and added a link to his website. His first message was the following: "I am in the AVE (high-speed train), arriving in Barcelona. In spite of my inexperience with this social network, I am excited about starting to use Twitter, because with this tool I can count on everyone. MR". In just four days, he had 30,000 followers.

The socialist candidate, however, joined Twitter (@conRubalcaba) just two months before his main rival in the 2011 general elections, specifically in July 2011, and his message was the following: "Hello, this is the Twitter page of the Rubalcaba electoral team". This was followed by, "We will be at this site to hear your suggestions and criticisms, and to listen". Initially, Rubalcaba was highly criticized because his profile was not very personal, since he was not accustomed to using social networks (nor did he use a Smartphone), but he was accompanied by a large team of people who managed his profile.

3.1.1. Quantitative analysis

As we can see in Table 2, Mariano Rajoy had a total of 112,176 followers, 33,256 of whom had been gained during the campaign, which outnumbered the total of his main rival, who had 77,751 followers and gained 26,473 throughout the election period. However, Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba was the candidate who followed more people at the end of the electoral campaign with a total of 7,354, while Mariano Rajoy followed just 2,657. During the electoral period, however, it was the PP candidate who began to follow more people: 152 compared to 129 for the socialist candidate.

Table 2: Number of followers and following on Twitter by each candidate in 2011

	Followers at the start of the campaign	Followers at the end of the campaign	Differential	Following at the beginning of the campaign	Following at the end of the campaign	Differential
Mariano Rajoy	78.920	112.176	**33.256**	2.505	2.657	**152**
Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba	50.678	77.151	**26.473**	7.225	7.354	**129**

Source: Author-created

Table 3 shows the amount of tweets, retweets and replies, showing that Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba was the candidate who tweeted and retweeted the most, while Rajoy answered 575 tweets, 66 more than Rubalcaba.

Table 3: Number of tweets, retweets and replies in 2011
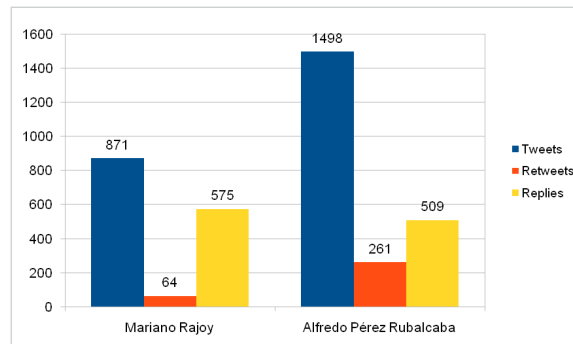
Source: Author-created based on Tweetstats

3.1.2. Qualitative analysis

If we focus on the way Twitter was used, we can see that Mariano Rajoy used this social network to disseminate information such as rally publications, meetings and debates in which he participated –accompanied by photographs, videos and audio recordings (in the case of interviews on the radio)– as well as to publicize the main proposals of his electoral program.

The research data, which can be seen in Table 4, shows that Mariano Rajoy was actively involved in the dialogue, so he established an exchange of information with his followers. Rajoy's followers asked him questions and at the same time showed fidelity, although some took advantage of the opportunity to criticize his policies.

One of the initiatives carried out to encourage deliberation was an interview through Twitter. Followers could ask the candidate questions under the hashtag #rajoyresponde. Of the 750 questions that were asked, Rajoy's team answered 6.

Having said that, the reality of the situation is that in the analysis, all of the questions related to the deliberation could be answered affirmatively. As such, we want to point out that many of the questions Rajoy answered referred to the electoral program, so there was no authentic feedback or open dialogue, as shown in the following image and text:

(We invite you to become familiar with measure 3 on page 40. You will like it. Thank you)

The Popular Party candidate did not hesitate to ask his followers for their vote, but there was no call for collaboration, nor were any donations requested.

Table 4: Level of "information", "deliberation" and "participation" by Mariano Rajoy
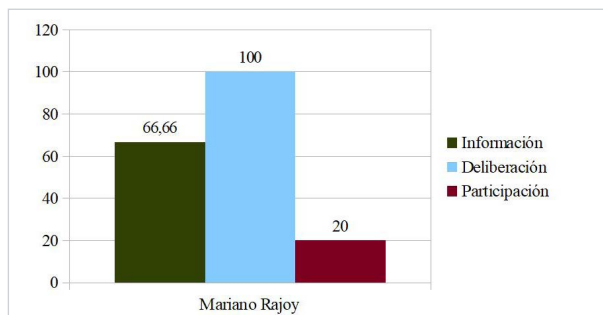
Source: Author-created

In Table 5, you can see the results of the qualitative use made of Twitter by Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba. The Socialist Party candidate took advantage of this tool to publicize the meetings, conferences and other activities related to the electoral campaign, while also publishing photographs, videos and audio recordings. In addition, Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba criticized Mariano Rajoy's proposals and publicized his own. Furthermore, the Socialist candidate published an agenda in which he disseminated campaign activities and used the hashtag #MitinsEnRuta to attract the attention of his electorate.

Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba held discussions with citizens through the proposal #yorespondo, in which his followers could ask him questions. Of more than 800 questions received, the socialist team responded to 70 of them via streaming. The socialist candidate also answered other questions, such as those seen in the following images and text:


(For those who do not pay taxes, we will create an office to fight against fraud)
(For those who commit fraud, this office will not be good thing)

Moreover, Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba also asked questions of the leader of the PP; questions that were never answered by his main opponent.

The Socialist candidate asked his followers to go to the polls, but in addition to asking for their vote he also asked the electorate to participate by giving him ideas and suggestions for the televised debate through the hashtag #undebatedecisivo. "There are 24 hours left before the debate. I am finishing it with my team. I would like you to send me ideas and suggestions".

Another proposal made by Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba was the "Twitter interview", which took place on November 11. Antoni Gutierrez-Rubí, a communication consultant, asked the candidate a series of questions, but he only had 9 seconds to answer each one. The "Twitter interview" was later published on the YouTube channel.

Table 5: Level of "information", "deliberation" and "participation" by Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba
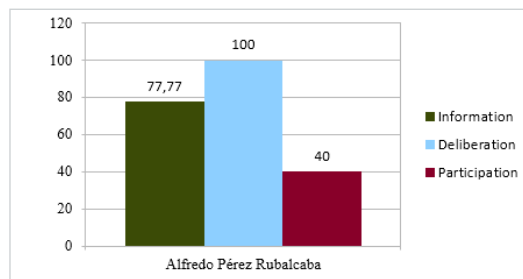
Source: Author-created

3.2. Electoral campaign 2015

The 2015 election campaign was characterized by the appearance of two new political players: Pablo Iglesias, leader and candidate of Podemos, and Albert Rivera, candidate of Ciudadanos. The PP, on the other hand, selected Mariano Rajoy once again to represent the party, and the PSOE chose Pedro Sánchez Castejón, who replaced Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba.

3.2.1. Quantitative analysis

Table 6 shows that Pablo Iglesias was the candidate with the most followers at the end of the 2015 election campaign with 1,408,513, and he gained 63,149 followers during the campaign. Mariano Rajoy had 1,043,083 followers at the end of the election campaign and was the candidate who gained the second highest number at 37,809. The socialist candidate, Pedro Sánchez Castejón, was the one with the fewest followers, 233,750, and the candidate who gained the least at 21,482.

Likewise, Mariano Rajoy was not only the candidate who followed more people with a total of 10,699 on the last day of the campaign, but he was also the one who more people started to follow during the days of the campaign with 225 people. Pedro Sánchez Castejón started to follow just 20 people; Albert Rivera followed 14; and Pablo Iglesias only followed 5, yet he followed 1,894 people at the end of the campaign.

Table 6: Number of followers and following on Twitter by each candidate in 2015

	Followers at the beginning of the campaign	Followers at the end of the campaign	Differential	Following at the start of the campaign	Following at the end of the campaign	Differential
Mariano Rajoy	1.005.274	1.043.083	**37.809**	10.474	10.699	**225**
Pedro Sánchez Castejón	212.268	233.750	**21.482**	5.799	5.819	**20**
Albert Rivera	410.555	443.581	**33.026**	1.962	1.976	**14**
Pablo Iglesias	1.345.364	1.408.513	**63.149**	1.889	1.894	**5**

Source: Author-created based on Tweetstats

According to the data in Table 7, Mariano Rajoy was the candidate who tweeted the most during the 2015 election campaign, followed by Pedro Sánchez Castejón, Albert Rivera and Pablo Iglesias, with the latter being the candidate who published the least number of tweets.

Rajoy was also the candidate who sent more retweets and clicked on more "likes". Albert Rivera, on the other hand, was the candidate who gave the most answers with a total of 21, while Iglesias only answered 2; Mariano Rajoy, 1; and Pedro Sánchez Castejón, none.

Table 7: Number of tweets, retweets, replies and "likes" in 2015
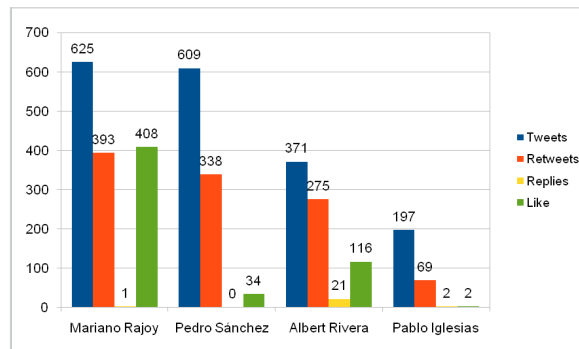
Source: Author-created based on Tweetstats

3.2.2. Qualitative analysis

Mariano Rajoy, as previously mentioned, was the only one who was seeking a second candidacy in the 2015 elections. Four years later, he defined himself on Twitter as: "President of the Government and of the @Ppopular. Candidate at # 20D. Married, and father of two children. I work for a better Spain, and my team works side by side with me. Join us". However, he did not disclose more details about his personal or professional life, and/or academic career, nor did he publish photographs or videos of him together with his family.

During the election campaign, the PP candidate disseminated his electoral program and delved into some of his proposals for government by promising stability, growth, employment, regional financing, dependency law, child protection, the fight against terrorism, etc., and his tweets used the hashtag # EspañaEnSerio.

Mariano Rajoy also took advantage of Twitter to promote the activities of the government in office and explained what measures had been taken during the previous four years by the Popular Party in its administrative duties, and to publish some of the activities included in his agenda, thereby summoning his supporters while at the same time broadcasting his program live via streaming.

During the face-to-face debate between Mariano Rajoy and Pedro Sánchez Castejón that was broadcast on television, the PP campaign team published tweets attacking the former PSOE government, saying that its management of the economic

crisis was disastrous and that the precarious situation that existed at that time had never been recognized. He also added that the PSOE could not be trusted by citizens.

Rajoy also addressed the Socialist candidate with the hashtag #PedroYaNoCuela as a way of criticizing the Socialist candidate. The campaign team also created a tool for comparing electoral programs and at the same time explained some differences between their party and the PSOE, an example of which was that the PP said it was committed to pensions while claiming that the PSOE had halted their growth.

During the election campaign, the PP candidate's team resorted to photographs, videos and posters to promote his candidacy. For example, summary videos of the candidate's weekly activities were made, while the main proposals and government actions carried out during the previous four years were explained verbatim, as shown in the following image and text:


> **Mariano Rajoy Brey** @marianorajoy · 23 h
> Hay que estar juntos en los grandes retos como normas constitucionales, defensa de #España y lucha contra el terrorismo #EspañaEnSerio

(We must be united in the great challenges such as constitutional regulations, the defence of Spain, and the fight against terrorism)

As shown in Table 8, Mariano Rajoy lowered the level of dialogue with citizens, although he did in fact appreciate the support he received from his supporters and assured that he had read all of the tweets that were published in his profile. In general, however, he did not answer the questions that were asked through this social network during the electoral campaign.

Regarding mobilization and citizen participation, Rajoy asked for the vote of his followers and supporters, while accompanying some tweets with the hashtag #VotaPP.

Table 8: Level of "information", "deliberation" and "participation" by Mariano Rajoy
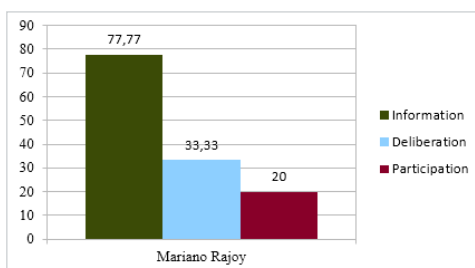
Source: Author-created

Pedro Sánchez Castejón (@sanchezcastejon) joined Twitter in August 2009, defining himself during the election campaign as follows: "Father. Doctor of Economics. Socialist candidate for the President of the Government. General Secretary of @PSOE. I work in a team, and here too".

The new Socialist candidate who replaced Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba as party leader, and who represented internal renewal, published rallies, interviews and different activities in which he participated. Moreover, although he did not announce
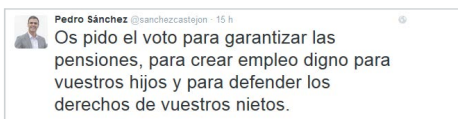
his daily agenda, he did give information in advance about some of the acts he would attend. All of the publications were accompanied by photographs and videos, while audio recordings were also published when he was interviewed on radio.

Sánchez did not disclose more details about his personal life other than his profession and his family situation in the biography section, but on the last day of the campaign he did have some words of gratitude for his family.

During the electoral campaign, the candidate concentrated on transmitting his main government proposals: abolition of the labour reform, the issue of dependency law, as well as matters related to energy, employment, etc. Pedro Sánchez Castejón also published a video in which he committed himself to his supporters. Finally, the Socialist candidate also criticized his main rivals and their proposals.

As we can see in Table 8, the socialist candidate promoted deliberation with citizens. Pedro Sánchez Castejón promoted an initiative in which his followers could propose a series of questions that the candidate subsequently had to answer through a video of about six minutes in which he promised to open the doors of the Palace of Moncloa (the official residence of the Prime Minister of Spain), making it more transparent. The candidate also gave thanks for the show of support.

The socialist candidate took advantage of Twitter to ask his supporters for their vote, as shown in the following image and text:

> **Pedro Sánchez** @sanchezcastejon · 15 h
> Os pido el voto para garantizar las pensiones, para crear empleo digno para vuestros hijos y para defender los derechos de vuestros nietos.

**(I ask for your vote to guarantee pensions, to create decent employment for your children,
and to defend the rights of your grandchildren)**

Finally, however, Pedro Sánchez Castejón did not take full advantage of this tool to communicate in a more horizontal way with the electorate and make them feel as if they were part of the electoral campaign.

Table 8: Level of "information", "deliberation" and "participation" by Pedro Sánchez Castejón
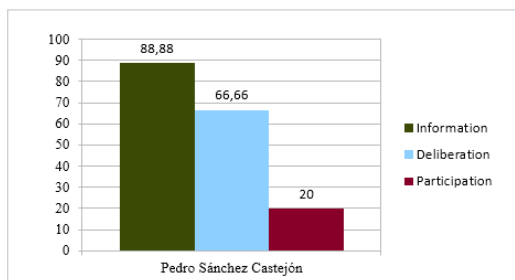
Source: Author-created

Albert Rivera (@Albert_Rivera) joined Twitter in January 2010 and defined himself during the election campaign as follows: "Official profile of Albert Rivera Díaz. President of Ciudadanos (C's) and candidate for the Presidency of the Government. Impossible is just an opinion".

The Ciudadanos candidate took the opportunity to promote his public figure but did not give details of his personal life, nor of his professional or academic career. Thus, the C's candidate concentrated on the electoral campaign and on his timeline. He published in advance the campaign events in which he would participate with posters announcing the time and place, as well as photos of the rallies.

Albert Rivera also disseminated and defended his electoral program, which among other proposals included his desire to create a common fund for the Autonomous Regions in order to finance health care and education.

The candidate made it clear that he was not going to make a pact with separatist parties nor with Podemos, which were defending a referendum for Catalonia. His objective was to renew a common project for Spain, but he did not publish the entire electoral program and his followers could not inquire about more detailed proposals. Rivera also defended the opportunity to feel a renewed hope toward Spain, as we see in the following image and text:

(There are only 15 days left for Spaniards to take advantage of the opportunity to be hopeful once again about our country)

The Ciudadanos candidate focused on promoting his public figure but also criticized a possible pact between the two parties that he called the "PPSOE".

Rivera used different slogans during the electoral campaign: "Vote with hope" or #AdelanteCiudadanos.

As we see in Table 9 regarding deliberation, the Ciudadanos candidate was open to the possibility of exchanging opinions with his supporters and responded to some of the questions they asked him.

Finally, however, Rivera did not actively encourage citizen mobilization and participation, and limited himself to asking for the vote of the party he presided over.

Table 9: Level of "information", "deliberation" and "participation" by Albert Rivera
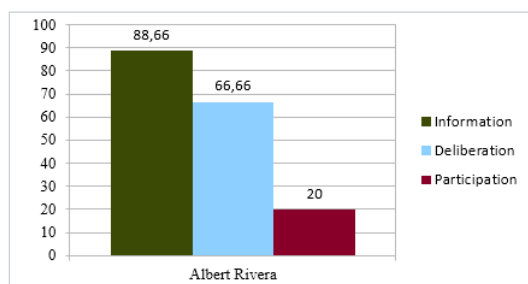
Source: Author-created

Pablo Iglesias (@Pablo_Iglesias_) joined Twitter in June 2010. The Podemos candidate defined himself as follows: "Secretary General @ahorapodemos and candidate for President of the Government. Honorary Professor of Complutense University of Madrid - UCM. The time has arrived for which we were born. Now we can do it!" The voters did not get more information about the personal and professional life of Iglesias, but he did publish a picture of himself when he was a child.

Table 10 shows the qualitative use made of Twitter by Pablo Iglesias. The Podemos candidate used this tool mainly to disseminate information related to campaign events in which he had participated, such as meetings, conferences, interviews, etc., which were announced in advance, and he used it even less to spread his government proposals. Iglesias did not publish the electoral program, although he did say that he would fight against corruption and gender violence, and was in favour of reviving the welfare state and making a change to the constitutional. The Podemos candidate criticized the government for being at the service of the few.

The photographs, videos and posters that the candidate tweeted supported his publications and referred to the campaign events in which he participated or to government proposals; he also published articles and videos of the interviews he gave to the media. In the following image a photo of a campaign event can be seen:


(In Cadiz, change is in the air. Thank you!)

During the election campaign, Iglesias responded to some comments made by supporters. Some debates were established among the followers, but most messages either supported the candidate or criticized him.

Regarding participation, Pablo Iglesias not only asked for the vote of his followers and supporters with the hashtag #VotaPodemos20D, but he also asked for a microcredit to finance the electoral campaign, stating that "our debt is with the people".

Table 10: Level of "information", "deliberation" and "participation" by Pablo Iglesias
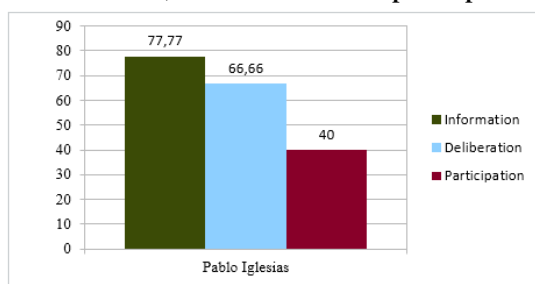
Source: Author-created

3.3. Discussion

3.3.1. Quantitative data

In relation to Table 11, the comparative analysis of the quantitative data regarding the 2011 and 2015 campaigns show that Pablo Iglesias was the candidate with the most followers, while Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba had the least. However, Rubalcaba gained more followers during the 2011 electoral period than his replacement Pedro Sánchez Castejón, who in turn was the candidate who got the fewest followers in 2015.

The data also shows that Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba was the candidate who followed more people, although he was no longer a candidate in 2015, which shows that none of the other candidates surpassed him. Mariano Rajoy was the candidate who followed more people and who started to follow the largest number of people, while Pablo Iglesias was the one who fewer people followed and the one who fewer people started to follow.

Table 11: Number of followers and following on Twitter by each candidate in 2011 and 2015, comparatively

	Followers at the start of the campaign	Followers at the end of the campaign	Differential	Following at the beginning of the campaign	Following at the end of the campaign	Differential
Mariano Rajoy (2011)	78.920	112.176	**33.256**	2.505	2.657	**152**
Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba (2011)	50.678	77.151	**26.473**	7.225	7.354	**129**
Mariano Rajoy (2015)	1.005.274	1.043.083	**37.809**	10.474	10.699	**225**
Pedro Sánchez Castejón (2015)	212.268	233.750	**21.482**	5.799	5.819	**20**

Albert Rivera (2015)	410.555	443.581	**33.026**	1.962	1.976	**14**
Pablo Iglesias (2015)	1.345.364	1.408.513	**63.149**	1.889	1.894	**5**

Source: Author-created

According to Figure 12, Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba was the candidate who posted the most tweets during the 2011 election campaign, and in 2015 neither his successor, Pedro Sánchez Castejón, nor any of the other candidates surpassed him. Moreover, it is interesting to note that Mariano Rajoy was the candidate who published the most tweets in 2015 (although less than in the previous campaign), while Pablo Iglesias was the one who generated the least activity.

Mariano Rajoy was the candidate who sent the most retweets during his electoral campaign in 2015 in which he retweeted the actions of his incumbent government, (for example, what had been accomplished from Moncloa, or tweets published by Vice President Soraya Sáenz de Santamaría).

Pablo Iglesias was the candidate who sent the least number of retweets, which referred to interviews he gave to the media or photos that other members of the party published in defence of the Podemos candidate.

Pedro Sánchez Castejón did not answer any of the questions that were asked, although Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba answered up to 509 questions that had been asked in 2011. It should also be noted that Mariano Rajoy lowered his activity considerably, as he answered only one question, whereas in the 2011 campaign he answered a total of 575. The candidate who offered the most answers was Albert Rivera, who answered 21 questions.

Pablo Iglesias was also the candidate who had the lowest number of clicks on "like" in Twitter, whereas Mariano Rajoy had the highest number in 2015.

Figure 12: Number of tweets, retweets, replies and "likes" by all candidates in 2011 and 2015
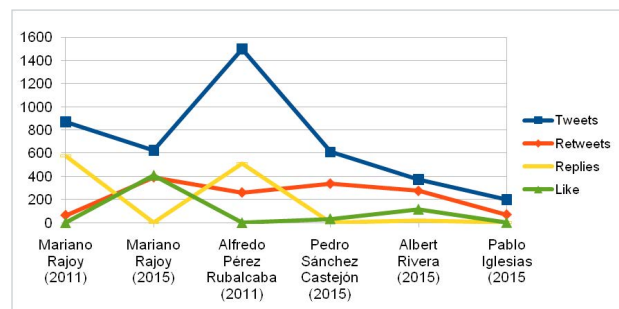

Source: Author-created based on Tweetstats

The quantitative data show that the candidates preferred to tweet and disseminate their electoral proposals. The number of retweets only shows that they tried to make the voters feel closer to the candidates, but in 2015 they did not establish a bilateral relationship of dialogue as high as in 2011, when both Mariano Rajoy and Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba set out to respond to their supporters. The number of "likes" was also very low in 2015 and does not determine a peer-to-peer relationship:

the user only knows that the candidate or his team has read the tweet, but the candidate does not necessarily show interest in talking to the user.

3.3.2. Qualitative data

Table 13 shows the results of the analysis of qualitative data in 2011, and we can see that Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba was the candidate who best disseminated the information in 2011, ahead of Mariano Rajoy. Both candidates made an effort to promote deliberation and get into direct contact with their followers, but it was the Socialist candidate who went a step further and promoted participation better than his political rival did.

Table 13: Comparison of the level of "information", "deliberation" and "participation" by Mariano Rajoy and Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba in 2011
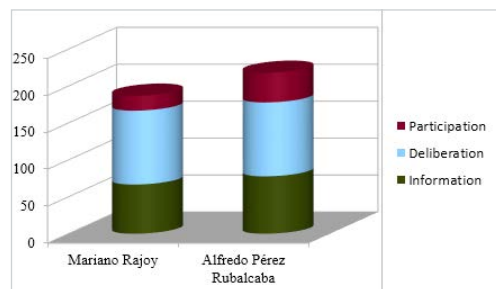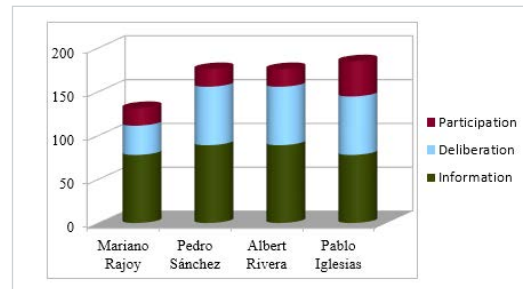

Source: Author-created

Pedro Sánchez Castejón and Albert Rivera were the candidates who made the strongest effort to disseminate all of the information related to the electoral campaign in 2015. Both candidates, together with Pablo Iglesias, were the candidates who tried hardest to deliberate with their followers, and Mariano Rajoy was the lowest in this category, with results that were lower than in 2011.

Pablo Iglesias was the candidate who helped the most in facilitating the contribution of citizens in the electoral campaign, together with Rubalcaba, who was the leader in this category in 2011. The rest of the candidates did not promote participation at the same level, as we can see in Table 14.

Table 14: Comparison of the level of "information", "deliberation" and "participation" between Mariano Rajoy, Pedro Sánchez Castejón, Albert Rivera and Pablo Iglesias in 2015
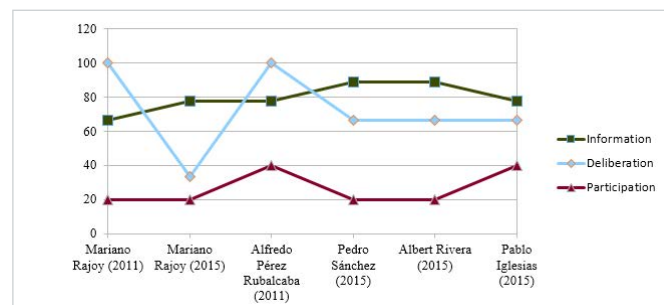

Source: Author-created

Table 15 shows a comparison of the qualitative data from the 2011 and 2015 campaigns. Pedro Sánchez Castejón and Albert Rivera were the candidates who disseminated the most information in the two electoral campaigns as a whole. It should be noted that the Socialist candidate improved with respect to Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba in 2011, and that Mariano Rajoy also improved.

Mariano Rajoy and Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba were the candidates who were best at encouraging deliberation in 2011, but in 2015 the results were lower.

Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba in 2011 and Pablo Iglesias in 2015 were the candidates who best promoted participation.

Table 15: Qualitative use of Twitter according to the categories of "information", "deliberation" and "participation" of all candidates in 2011 and 2015
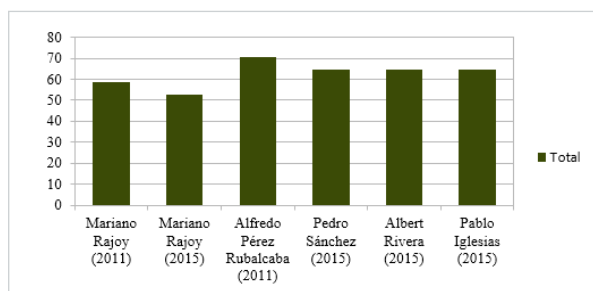

Source: Author-created

Table 16 shows the comprehensive qualitative results. Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba was the candidate who made the best use of Twitter, as 12 of the 17 questions could be answered affirmatively. Mariano Rajoy used Twitter less efficiently: in 2011, 10

questions received an affirmative response, but in 2015 only 9 questions could be answered affirmatively. Pablo Iglesias, Albert Rivera and Pedro Sánchez Castejón made the same use of Twitter: 11 of the 17 questions could be answered affirmatively.

Table 16: Total qualitative use of Twitter by all candidates. Comparison between 2011 and 2015

Source: Author-created

4. Conclusions

By comparing the general election campaigns of 2011 and 2015, as well as the various candidates involved: Mariano Rajoy (PP) and Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba (PSOE) in 2011; Mariano Rajoy (PP), Pedro Sanchez Castejón (PSOE), Albert Rivera (Ciudadanos) and Pablo Iglesias (Podemos), in 2015; the research set out to measure whether a generational and digital gap existed between the candidates, based on three preliminary questions.

Primarily, we wanted to measure the quantitative use of Twitter based on the hypothesis that candidates who target younger followers, such as Ciudadanos and Podemos, would make greater use of Twitter and use it more effectively, whereas candidates with an older target audience, such as the PP and PSOE, would use it less.

According to the quantitative results, no apparent correlation was found between the target voter group and the use of Twitter. In fact, even though Pablo Iglesias was the candidate with the most followers and Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba with the least, the latter gained more followers during the 2011 electoral period, and he was the candidate who followed the highest number of people. In the same way, on one hand Pedro Sánchez Castejón was the candidate with the fewest followers in 2015, and on the other hand Mariano Rajoy was the candidate who followed the highest number of people and who started to follow the highest number of people, while Pablo Iglesias was the candidate who followed fewer people and the one who started to follow fewer people.

Finally, Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba was the candidate who sent the most messages through Twitter in the two electoral campaigns, while Pablo Iglesias sent the least, and Mariano Rajoy was the candidate who sent the most retweets in the two campaigns and also the one who answered the most questions in 2011, although in 2015 he answered almost none. In 2015, Albert Rivera answered the most questions but failed to reach the level attained by Mariano Rajoy in 2011. The PP candidate was also the one who clicked most on "like", whereas Pablo Iglesias was the one who did so the least.

Therefore, in terms of quantitative use, we cannot affirm that there is a digital divide between candidates, but we must affirm that in some way it seems that the performance of 2011, especially those of the Socialist and Popular Party candidates, exceeded that of 2015. In certain terms, this data can be justified by the "Obama effect" (Beas, 2011, Casero-Ripollés, Feenstra and Tormey, 2016, Cervi and Roca, 2016, Costa, 2009, Enli, 2017b, Persily, 2017). The Spanish General Elections of 2011 were the first ones to take place after the 2008 US Presidential victory of the Democratic candidate Barack Obama, which was partly achieved thanks to novel strategies using the Internet, and consequently, candidates from nearly all countries tried to jump on the "band wagon" by imitating the same model.

In qualitative terms, we have asked ourselves whether candidates would use Twitter in the same way that they would use a traditional medium, or whether they would take advantage of it by generating a new relationship and new ways of interacting with citizens. The hypothesis we proposed was that the most participatory parties would promote more participation and deliberation, while the least participatory would limit themselves to merely providing information. In fact, Pablo Iglesias was the one who promoted participation the most, though with levels not very different from those of Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba in 2011.

As for deliberation, or dialogue with citizens, Mariano Rajoy and Alfredo Perez Rubalcaba had the highest results in 2011, but this was not repeated in 2015. In reality, we have to emphasize that even though there was a lot of feedback, the quality was not notable, or in other words, at no time was an open dialogue established. Mariano Rajoy, for example, answered different questions, but the questions were related to his electoral program. Therefore, no real dialogue was generated.

Finally, our hypothesis regarding the contagion effect, which implies that the candidates of the new parties who are supposedly more accustomed to the use of social networks would force the candidates of the "old politics" to use them more actively, has been discarded.

However, by comparing the results of 2011 and 2015, and taking into account the current situation of increasingly professionalized electoral campaigns in which the candidates are assisted by expert communication teams who determine the strategies to be followed on Internet, it is possible for us to affirm that if, in fact, the Obama effect of 2011 led to experimentation with new tools, it would not be surprising that once the medium were known, the traditional parties would take a step back, especially with regard to dialogue with citizens. This is especially evident in the case of Mariano Rajoy, who was already President of the Government in 2015 and had enough visibility to avoid having to rely as much on Twitter. Furthermore, from a strategic point of view, it would probably not be very profitable to open up new means of dialogue with citizens.

In conclusion, on one hand we can say that on a general level, and after a hopeful start in 2011, candidates do not seem to be taking advantage of the opportunities that Twitter offers for establishing new ways of interacting with citizens. This may be due to two factors. The first may be the Spanish political culture for which active participation is something new, both from the point of view of politicians as well as that of citizens. The second factor may be the discipline and hierarchy of each party, which does not encourage, but rather limits the freedom of candidates to manoeuvre.

On the other hand, our research was focused only on the candidates, so it would be interesting to analyze these same elections from the point of view of the users of social networks in order to see how they reacted to the input coming from the political world and if this input generated interest in new ways of relating to politicians and politics.

Given that social networks are already part of every citizen's daily life, if companies and marketing strategies in general have made huge steps forward in what they call engagement, considering Social Networks to be a vehicle in creating and improving relationships with consumers (Perks and Sedley, 2008), then politics will be forced to adapt. The development of online participation together with the enormous amount of data that social networks place at our disposal opens up new research opportunities.

Due to the fact that Internet studies are a new and inherently multidisciplinary field, there is no unanimity regarding the methodological system: the authors propose a large and varied number of practices that do not contribute to the unification of criteria. As pointed out by Jürgens and Jungherr (2016): "Only by being able to write and read code will you be able to directly interact with a service's API and thus be able to make and assess design choices while keeping in mind their consequences for the interpretation of patterns emerging from subsequent analyses". (Jürgens and Jungherr, 2016: 13).

Therefore, we need to refine our methodological tools to continuously improve the accuracy of the instruments at our disposal. In our case, for example, while measuring the levels of deliberation, we realized as previously mentioned that in spite of the fact that Mariano Rajoy and Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba obtained very high results in 2011 in this category, we discovered that in reality what they had mostly done was to refer to the electoral program instead of generating an open debate with citizens.

However, while we recognize that there is room for improvement, we consider that our methodological contribution is effective for the purpose of measuring the use that candidates make of Social Networks, and for this reason, with some adaptations it could be applicable to other social networks, one of which is Instagram, which is increasingly being used, both for corporate communication and for politics.

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