
Martín Echeverría

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6071-8725>
echevemartin@yahoo.com.mx
Benemérita Universidad
Autónoma de Puebla

Evelia Mani

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8098-4323>
evelia.mani@gmail.com
Benemérita Universidad
Autónoma de Puebla

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Effects of Traditional and Social Media on Political Trust

Abstract

Political trust is essential for a democratic regime to work, and a declining asset in Western countries. It has been confirmed theoretically and empirically that news media are an important source of influence on political trust, though literature have not considered social media, in which the circulation of false or misleading information, and propaganda, might have a negative effect on political trust, to be relevant channels of news consumption. In order to explore the effect of social media on political trust in comparison with that of traditional media, an ANOVA test and hierarchical multiple linear regression models were run on a three-wave panel survey, during the presidential elections of 2018 (N = 701) in Mexico. The findings indicate that the election campaign had a positive effect on institutional trust, growing as the campaign developed, and that there was a positive influence from social media, followed by television.

Keywords

Political trust, media, media effects, social media.

1. Introduction

Trust in those who govern is an important element if a democracy is to work, in so far as it provides those exercising power with enough leeway for the execution of programs, as well as legitimacy and governability. Although a dose of healthy incredulity and even skepticism is recommended if there is to be a critical, less easily manipulated citizenry,

support for governing actors and institutions, and the continuity of the social contract between the sovereign people and their rulers, are valuable assets for resolving problems of public policy and in the end for consolidating a democratic regime (Hetherington, 1998).

However political trust is a diminishing asset today. A number of studies show an uninterrupted decline of trust in the political sphere in all countries: declared confidence in individual politicians, in political parties, the government, the political system, and even democracy, has been reduced from 71% in 1956, to 22% in 2012, just in the U.S.A. and from 52% to 37% in Canada during the same period of time (Dalton, 2017). In the case of Latin America, trust in the various political institutions has tended to reduce: in the case of the executive government, from 44% in 1995 to 22% in 2018; from 38% to 21% for the legislature; from 37% to 24% for the judiciary; from 27% to 13% for political parties and, between 2006 and 2018, from 51% to 28% for the electoral authority (Latinobarómetro, 2018). This means that most people in Latin America distrust their institutions, and increasingly so as time passes.

From a historical point of view, the massive consensus between elites and citizens that there was after the second world war has been dissipated, while a popular feeling of generalized dislike –irrespective of party affiliations or levels of government– has gotten stronger: from a lack of confidence in the workings of the government to pure skepticism and

then cynicism and an *a priori* negative predisposition towards the political realm, with complaints by the general public against politicians for indifference, incompetence and corruption (Herman, 2010).

Some explanations have been given in the literature for this rather worrying situation: the greater complexity of the political systems of a technocratic government, which makes it seem more esoteric and suspect to the general public; permanent economic uncertainty that has left the average citizen in an unstable economic environment and with the impression that public powers are incapable of controlling it; the dilution of social cohesion into individualistic anonymity (Rosanvallon, 2006); and the loss of an ideological point of reference that would create firm loyalties and affiliations between citizens and political parties (Cueto, 2007).

However, another factor often considered relevant is the media: the basic assumption here is that the transmission of political reality through the media has consequences for public opinion, and it changes attitudes to democratic actors and institutions, at a moment in history when these media are the main source of knowledge about politics (Strömbäck, 2005). The theories that can be found about their negative consequences, to the extent that they undermine citizens' trust in politicians and create cynicism towards them, or about their positive effects, in so far as they motivate citizens politically, have gained empirical support in certain situations (Kleinnijenhuis, van Hoof & Oegema, 2006; Mutz & Reeves, 2005), although the problem is contingent.

The subject thus gets more complicated when the role social media play in political coverage is considered, as these have become important platforms for publishing and consuming political information (Newman, Fletcher, Kalogeropoulos, Levy & Nielsen, 2018). While it is true that much of this information comes from established journalistic sources, there are times, according to critics, when the information they give is deceptive, false or politically biased, and comes from politically committed sources with hidden agendas (Dahlgren, 2015). As some parts of the social media' audiences do not scrutinize the information very carefully or critically, and the information flows through a hybrid system of communication consisting of traditional and digital media, established journalism and sources of doubtful origin (Chadwick, 2013), we believe the public representation of the performance of political institutions must be a difficult subject, and so are the effects that such information can have on the confidence with which they are regarded.

These concerns are explored in the present article, with two aims. Firstly, a comparison is made between the effects that attention to traditional media and that attention to social media have on the trust citizens place in political institutions. Secondly, an update is provided of the empirical knowledge available on the effects that attention to mass communications media has on political trust, and in particular, the effects of electoral campaigns in the media, in the specific case of Mexico, a subject that has not been explored very much academically with regard to these considerations. The Mexican context is representative of an acute and almost endemic lack of trust in the political system, produced by a semi-authoritarian regime lasting over 70 years that gradually decayed until it ended in a democratic transition, and by a succession of corruption scandals that occurred in the last five years, at the highest level. These two components make research into the role of the media in this area of the political culture of the nation relevant and topical.

The theoretical framework to be used combines elements of political science and of communication studies to define what political trust is and its relevance in a democratic regime, the role played in it by the media and the theories to explain it, as well as recent empirical studies that support or refute them. The empirical evidence comes from a panel survey conducted nationally during the 2018 presidential election, that has variables both of confidence in institutions and of media consumption and is submitted to statistical treatments to reveal semi-causal relations between variables. Finally, our findings will be

discussed in relation to published literature on the subject in order to establish parallels and certain patterns.

2. Political trust. Definition and relevance in a democratic regime

A number of authors agree that political trust can be defined as a reflection of how citizens evaluate the way political actors and institutions are working (Hetherington & Husser, 2012). The evaluation is made by comparing how well the performance of political actors and institutions corresponds to the expectations of society, especially with regard to their competence, reliability, and concern for attending the interests of citizens (Levi & Stoker, 2000).

Political trust is of fundamental importance in democracies and their institutions, as it is “a central indicator of the underlying feeling of the public about their political system” (Newton & Norris, 2000, p. 53), which crystallizes the state of the social contract assumed by citizens and their government (Dalton, 2017). Government institutions benefit from citizen confidence by becoming more efficient and, of course, legitimate (Blind, 2007). Empirical evidence shows that trust is translated into approval of the governments, giving them greater freedom and leeway, as well as more support for their decisions, so they can operate smoothly and effectively (Bauer & Fatke, 2014). Trust in institutions also results in public support for democratic principles and the democratic regime, in its legitimacy and stability, and implicitly provokes a rejection of non-democratic alternatives (Mishler & Rose, 2005). Particularly in regimes of representative democracy, citizens who delegate power to institutions and political representatives are acting in good faith on the basis of trust in those who represent them. As a result, a lack of trust in these representatives may have an impact on trust in the regime as a whole and its legitimacy.

In spite of its importance, the level of political trust internationally is rather precarious and this affects most institutions and political or governmental actors (Hetherington & Rudolph, 2008). In the United States the lack of trust started in the last thirty years of the twentieth century with economic crisis and political scandals (Kanji, 2002), while in Europe it applies to nearly all public institutions (Dogán, 2005). Latin American democracies do not escape these tendencies, as the data of Latinobarómetro since 1995 have shown a continuing decline of trust in political institutions, with rates of approval among the lowest in the world (Latinobarómetro, 2018).

3. Factors that have an impact on political trust, and the roles of traditional and social media

The central question, therefore, is what factors are behind this decline. The predominant theories in political science suggest two approaches: the institutionalist and the culturalist (Almond & Verba, 1963; Coleman, 1986; Putnam, Leonardi & Nanetti, 1994). The first of these sees trust as being endogenous and associated with the performance of institutions: so, it will depend on the reported benefit to individuals stemming from their satisfactory action. On the other hand, for the culturalist theory, trust is exogenous, and originates outside the political sphere on the basis of norms transferred to individuals during the process of socialization. It is seen as an expansion of interpersonal trust, which is projected onto institutions, and involves socio-demographic factors, the national context, and the subjective perception of welfare or even the religion that is professed (Inglehart, 1997).

The current concerned with institutional performance concentrates on economic and political aspects as being the factors that determine the way in which citizens pronounce judgement on the work of the government and its actors (Hetherington & Rudolph, 2008). In this theoretical vein, evaluations of performance are important for citizens to be able to trust the government, and as these arise mainly from citizens' perceptions, rather than from facts, the mass media may be able to contribute to an increase or an erosion of trust by amplifying

the impact of events involving political actors and institutions (Moy & Pfau, 2000). This claim rests on two assumptions, one of them cognitive and the other one a question of attitude. Firstly, the assumption that most people depend on the media for the information they have about politics, in the shape of proposals, discourses and actions by politicians, and also for facts, opinions and criticisms relating to them. But on the other hand, it may be assumed that the media give shape to what citizens think and feel about a topic, stimulating them to evaluate the quality of democratic governance and summarizing whether the performance of the government is seen positively or negatively (Norris, 2011).

In respect of which, scholars have shown increasing concern about the way in which the contents of the news media and the uses they are put to affect levels of confidence in political institutions and democracy. Here the theory relating to the effects of the media on political trust is divided into two great currents, that of video malaise, which points to negative consequences, and that of the virtuous circle, pointing to positive repercussions. The expression video malaise was coined by Robinson to describe the dual phenomenon of a loss of trust in political institutions and an increase in the dependence of individuals on television for obtaining information about politics (Holtz-Bacha, 1990), this being a medium that bombards its audiences with interpretational, sensational, aggressive and anti-institutional news (Robinson, 1976, p. 426). Later on, there was evidence that this kind of coverage contributed to what Cappella and Jamieson (1997) called a “spiral of cynicism,” a mutually enforcing process combining the discourse of politicians aimed at producing sound bites, with the press coverage of campaign strategies. The process feeds discontent and a lack of trust, as it is impossible for citizens to establish a clear limit between the faults of politicians and their exhibition in the media. As a result of this process the “cynical citizen tends to maintain that the political system is corrupt; its players are Machiavellian party members uninterested in the public good and their procedures are moved by a concern to win, not to govern” (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997, p. 17).

Afterwards, various publications stuck to this line of showing the pernicious effects of news media (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 1995; Iyengar & Kinder, 2010), gathering empirical evidence about how the journalistic treatment of political processes, centered on the candidates’ strategies, and the discourtesy of the discourses broadcast by the media, reduced the trust of citizens in political institutions and actors (Kleinnijenhuis *et al.*, 2006; Mutz & Reeves, 2005).

Although these studies produced significant results, there were also research projects that cast doubt on the application of this theoretical perspective to all cases of media exposure. One of these used theories of political mobilization, that claim there are positive effects on trust and participation from news media consumption. By the nineteen nineties, Holtz-Bacha concluded that “the relation between exposure to political information on television and in printed media is linked to a less aligned vision of politics and to higher levels of participation” (1990, p. 83). Newton (1999), in turn, found that the readers of newspapers showed greater knowledge, interest, and political trust, and were less cynical, while watching a lot of television was not associated with a lack of political trust or a lack of respect for democracy.

Following this line of tracing the positive effects, on the basis of analyzing 28 Western democracies, Norris proposed the existence of a virtuous circle between media consumption and political commitment, stating that “the use of the communications media is positively associated with a wide range of indicators of political knowledge, trust and mobilization” (Norris, 2000, p. 17). So, the citizens most exposed to news media would develop greater commitment and political trust. Once there is trust in politics, interest in the news increases, thus giving rise to an incremental reciprocal relation between the use of media and political trust. For Norris, “those who are most informed politically, trusting and participative are the most liable to tune in to the coverage of public affairs. And those most attentive to the

coverage of public affairs are the most involved in civic life” (Norris, 2000, p. 17). This theory has also produced important empirical evidence that demonstrates a positive relation between political trust and news consumption (Camaj, 2014; Strömbäck, Djerf-Pierre & Shehata, 2016).

Subsequent empirical evidence found important moderating variables that lessen or intensify these effects and are able to refine the postulates of the theories. For example, personal factors such as interest in politics, a high level of education, political preferences, social networks, and values, all work as mediators of the positive or negative effects on trust (Floss, 2008). Similarly, the effects vary if the source of news is the printed press or else television (Avery, 2009), and it has been found that the effects on political trust increase with the consumption of printed media (Moy & Pfau, 2000), especially early morning papers and public television (Aarts & Semetko, 2003), though they are not significant for commercial television news (Strömbäck *et al.*, 2016).

In academic literature from Latin America, both the theories outlined have gained empirical support. Concerning the possibility of video malaise, Moreno (2008) emphasizes that political news combined with the political polarization that took place during the 2006 elections in Mexico, spread to a lack of trust in the electoral authorities. Gómez (2018) has found that when public opinion is informed about political life and political affairs, it is difficult for there to be trust in the figure of president. Overall a large proportion of the works published also support the idea that exposure to the media has a virtuous quality: there is evidence that it provokes mobilization (Corduneanu & Muñiz, 2011; Díaz, 2017), greater trust in institutions (Guerrero, Rodríguez & Machuca, 2012; Moreno, 2010), or else increases levels of political knowledge, political discussion and electoral participation, in spite of the use of strategic framing and negative contents (Díaz & Muñiz, 2017).

However, these theories and empirical studies do not cover contemporary channels through which citizens consume, share and interpret collectively political information, i.e. social media such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram (Newman *et al.*, 2018). If, as we have said before, the channels and the formats are relevant variables that moderate the effects of public information, these platforms should not be ignored in gathering information about our object of study.

With regard to the impact of social media on public trust, empirical research is still insufficient though it does seem to replicate the patterns found for traditional media. On the one hand it has been proved that online interactions can not only enrich public deliberation, but also generate positive impacts on it (Warren, Sulaiman & Jaafar, 2014). On the other hand it is recognized that news consumption through social media decreases political trust, while its consumption through web pages increases it (Ceron, 2015). Overall, a concern about the networks that has not been explored very much is the way in which they might be used by certain groups to distort and bias political information, for the sake of propaganda. The open and therefore not very professional nature of the operation of social media leads to the introduction of false, deceptive, and not very rigorous, or definitely negative, news, elaborated by shadowy agents deliberately trying to undermine the credibility of certain figures or institutions (Dahlgren, 2015; Schulz, 2014). Thus, the news environment of the social networks might contain elements aimed at reducing trust in certain figures or political institutions, through procedures that might be surreptitious or open.

In conclusion, while certain explanations have been found for the decline in trust, in economic or socio-political variables, as certain theoretical currents deriving from political science affirm, the variable of media plays a fundamental role, in so far as these contribute to the visibility and the construction of perceptions of the effectiveness of institutions and actors, which form the basis of political trust. An empirical exploration of this problem is therefore worth undertaking, in order to provide a deeper explanation of their impact on political trust.

4. Political trust in the context of Mexico

As in most democratic countries, in Mexico public opinion and scholars are showing concern over the phenomenon of an increasing distrust of politics. Efforts to measure and comprehend the fluctuations in political trust gained importance during the last forty years or so following the political changes that took place in the country.

Mena (2015) notes that in Mexico distrust has its roots in the constant acts of abuse of power perpetrated during colonial times, after independence and following the democratic transition. Nevertheless, until the nineteen sixties there had been a basic degree of trust in Mexican society that was kept up by relative political stability and social peace. However, worldwide transformations, social movements, economic crises and the decay of the hegemonic one-party system, led to gradual changes in the attitudes of citizens to politics.

In recent decades, various changes have made trust in politics increase or decrease. The democratizing process that the country lived through following the political reform of 1977, brought a sustained increase in political trust from 1996 to 2000, when, after a general election that ended the period of authoritarian rule, it reached the highest point that has ever been recorded (Mena, 2015). It managed to do so thanks to the design of a complex system headed at that time by the Federal Electoral Institute and the Federal Electoral Tribunal, which they themselves promoted as being among the most reliable in the world and, for a while, provided widespread credibility.

However, by the end of the government of President Vicente Fox, political trust had decreased, as a result of the disappointment of citizens that was provoked by the contrast between results and the high expectations that his campaign had created. Political parties, which had been formed as central figures in the transition to democracy, were affected by this disappointment, as they registered a fall in public trust of over ten percent between 2000 and 2004 (Palma, 2006).

Electoral processes had also contributed to an erosion of public trust. The 2006 election ended with a difference of 0.56% in favor of right-wing presidential candidate Felipe Calderón, which sparked off a nasty post-electoral conflict with his left-wing opponent Andrés Manuel López Obrador, who said the election had been fraudulent. This conflict “might have formed the basis for an increase in distrust, disaffection, and a reduction of interest in politics among certain strata of the Mexican population” (Arugete & Muñiz, 2012, p. 134), while it also affected the little credibility that the elections, and the institutions in charge of organizing them and validating them, still had (Córdova, 2008). Accusations of fraud also marked the 2012 presidential election and kept up during the whole of the ensuing six-year administrative period.

Finally, the performance of the federal government during the period of 2012-2018, perceived by public opinion as being one of the most corrupt, violent and inefficient in recent years, (Aragón, Fernández de Lara & Lucca, 2019), made distrust an increasing and practically endemic feature of Mexican political culture: according to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), trust in the Mexican government fell from 43% in 2006 to 28% in 2016, while confidence in the judicial system and tribunals of the country diminished from 35% to 32% in the same period, which is still one of the lowest rates in OECD countries (OECD/CAF/ECLAC, 2018).

Empirical research into the impact of the media on political trust includes a recognition of the part played historically by the traumatic events mentioned. There is no doubt that disillusionment with the transition towards a democracy, the idea that the presidential elections were fraudulent and the inefficiency and corruption of the most recent government, have made the Mexican inclination to not trust institutions more acute. However, measuring and verifying these relations is more complicated, especially when what is required is a sustained longitudinal measure for doing so.

It is therefore proposed that these effects should be verified more on the basis of a micro level exploration of the effects of the media in the specific context of election campaigns, in this case those of 2018. There are three reasons for doing this that justify the proposal. Firstly, electoral processes in Mexico can be considered points of inflection for the trust held in democratic institutions, as has been shown to be the case for the elections of 2000, 2006 and 2012, as they are able to contribute to building and maintaining it. Secondly, election campaigns are moments when media influence tends to increase, as the result of an increase in media coverage of the election and the need for political understanding that citizens have to have before making an electoral decision (Matthes, 2011). Finally, recent studies have suggested that changes in levels of trust might be short term occurrences, just during electoral campaigns (Banducci & Karp, 2003), as it is during these processes rather than at other times that the citizen has an incentive to think about the performance of the government (Riker, 2008).

While it would not be possible to generalize the findings of our study to all historical and structural processes of a decay in political trust, they are backed by evidence for the relation between media attention and trust, at least in part and when applied to the most important moment of the electoral campaigns. Thus, two hypotheses can be formulated for this study. The first one combines antecedents relating to the negative results of recent elections in Mexico, with studies showing the negative effects on political trust of the media (Moreno, 2008; Gómez, 2018):

H1. Citizens' attention to traditional and social media during the campaign, diminishes trust in institutions.

The second hypothesis derives from studies demonstrating the positive effects of traditional media on trust (Guerrero, Rodríguez & Machuca, 2012; Moreno, 2010), along with those studies that assume political information circulating in social media may not be reliable or is poor (Dahlgren, 2015; Schulz, 2014).

H2. Attention to social media during the campaign may diminish trust in institutions, to a greater extent than attention to traditional media.

5. Methodology

The present study uses the methodological design of an analytical survey. Rather than elaborating inferences from representative samples of large populations, the interest of this method lies in the search for associations between variables and their patterns of behavior, in determining the directions they move in, testing the hypotheses and creating new hypotheses, among other aims. As in experimental designs, this method favors internal validity over the external validity, or generalization, of its findings.

To conduct the study, a market research company called Survey Sampling International (SSI) was hired in order to have a large representative sample of the population of Mexico, as well as guaranteeing the participation of citizens at the different stages of the study, through the application of questionnaires on line to a panel previously constituted by the company. The company conducted a panel study in three waves. The first was during the week before the official start of campaigns, beginning on the 23rd of March and ending on the 30th of March. The second took place during the month of June 2018 (from the 11th to the 25th), with the aim of recording attitudes and behaviors with respect to the first two months of campaigning. The third was applied once the election was over and the national vote counting had been completed, so the field work began on the 9th of July and ended on the 19th.

The sample consisted of participants who were adults (≥ 18 years old) and registered in the census as voters in the Nation. In this sense, citizens from all the states of the Nation took part in the final sample ($N = 701$). 54.8% of the sample were men ($n = 384$), with 45.2% women ($n = 317$), aged between 18 and 80 ($M = 42$, $DE = 13$). The sample included participants with different levels of education, the majority being people with professional studies ($n = 424$,

60.7%) or who had finished high school ($n = 130$, 18.6%). 43.4% of those taking part reported monthly incomes of between 500 and 1,500 US dollars ($n = 285$), 30% received less than 500 dollars ($n = 202$) and 25.4% earned over 1,500 dollars ($n = 166$).

In order to test the hypotheses proposed, we determined: 1) the effect of the campaigns on measurements of trust, at three moments: before, during and after the campaigns; and 2) the weight of each of the communications variables studied at the level of trust in institutions (overall trust and trust by institution). For the first undertaking we elaborated descriptions of mean and standard deviation, as well as the ANOVA test of repeated measurements with the Bonferroni correction. For the second, multiple hierarchic linear regressions were made, allowing independent variables to be introduced into the equation at different moments, so as to observe the specific weight of each of them for the dependent variable, in this case, that of trust in the institution. Variables that would be used as controls were introduced into the first block; these consisted of the different socio-demographic aspects measured (Model 1). The second block included the composite variable "following social media" (Model 2), and the third block had the variables concerned with the consumption of the printed press, digital news media, and television news (model 3). The model presented satisfactory proofs of non-correlation of residuals in the regression (Durbin Watson=1.96).

With regard to the variables used in the instrument, their formulation and descriptive results are described below:

Following social media. Those taking part were asked to state the frequency with which they had used certain social media to stay informed of the presidential campaign, through a Likert scale that oscillated between never (1) and very often (5). In concrete terms, they were asked about keeping up with the news in these social networks: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, and WhatsApp (Wave1, $M = 3.1$, $DE = 1.2$, Wave2, $M = 2.9$, $DE = 1.2$, Wave3, $M = 2.9$, $DE = 1.2$).

Consumption of the printed press, digital newspapers and television news. We measured the intensity with which these media were used during the campaign, asking how many days a week each of them was used to find out about affairs affecting the nation. The scale was from 0 to 7 days. (Television, Wave1, $M = 4.8$, $DE = 2.3$, Wave 2, $M = 4.9$, $DE = 2.3$, Wave3, $M = 4.9$, $DE = 2.2$. Printed press, Wave1, $M = 2.5$, $DE = 2.4$, Wave2, $M = 2.5$, $DE = 2.4$, Wave3, $M = 2.5$, $DE = 2.4$. Digital newspapers, Wave1, $M = 4.2$, $DE = 2.4$, Wave2, $M = 4.2$, $DE = 2.4$, Wave3, $M = 4.2$, $DE = 2.4$).

Trust. Following the proposal made by Camaj (2014), we built an index of institutional trust, based on trust in the electoral authority, the electoral process¹, the legislature (Congress of the Union), the federal government, the democratic system, the President of the Republic, politicians in general and political parties, on a Likart scale that went from 1 (complete lack of trust) to 6 (complete trust) (Wave1, $\alpha = .945$. Wave2, $\alpha = .948$. Wave3, $M\alpha = .936$).

Control variables. Finally, the use of a series of control variables of a socio-demographic nature was considered. Participants were asked to state their sex (0 = male; 1 = female) and their age in completed years. Also, to say how much was approximately what the nuclear family earned in a month, on a scale that ranged from under 300 dollars (1) to over 1,500 dollars (4). They were also asked about the level of studies completed, on a scale ranging from none (1) to postgraduate (7).

¹ The reason for including this reagent is that public opinion in Mexico tends to evaluate the credibility and integrity of every election, from the campaigns to the polling station results, bearing in mind the antecedents of simulated and often fraudulent elections by the authoritarian regime for 70 years.

6. Findings

The exposition of findings here is divided into three sections. The first contains observations on the descriptive data, in an aggregate and disaggregated way. The second presents changes in trust before, during and after the campaign. The third section distinguishes the effects of the consumption of different types of media on trust in the aggregate, and on trust in some institutions.

Considering the second wave of the panel, when citizens have been exposed to half the campaign, it can be stated that the general attitude towards the various institutions and political objects indicated is one of distrust, closest on the scale used, to “complete distrust” ($M= 2.4$, $DE= 1.2$). However, there is a relevant difference between the types of institution not trusted, that may be classified in terms of their position above or below the mean (Table 1).

A subsection below the mean consists of the President of the Republic ($M= 2.3$, $DE = 1.5$), politicians in general ($M=2.1$, $DE=1.3$) and political parties ($M=2.1$, $DE= 1.3$), which as it happens are the most visible in the media. Above the mean are more abstract or less visible institutions or processes such as the democratic system ($M=2.5$, $DE= 1.4$), the federal government ($M=2.6$, $DE= 1.4$), Congress ($M=2.6$, $DE= 1.4$) and the ongoing elections ($M=2.6$, $DE=1.5$).

The figures also show that the campaign has a statistically significant effect on institutional trust, $F(2,2100) = 19.80$, $p = .000$. However, though the changes are incremental, they turn out to be minimal and are accentuated in the stage following the election. Thus, the mean of trust goes from 2.37 in Wave1 to 2.44 in Wave2, and increases in Wave3 to 2.75 (Table 1). This lightly positive trend is similar when disaggregated for each of the institutions measured, except the federal government, $F(2,2011) = 2.08$, $p=.125$, and the Congress, $F(2,2011) = 2.42$, $p=.089$, that do not register statistically significant changes.

Here the effect presents a pattern similar to that of the descriptive data: the more visible the institutions are in the media, the less there is any increase in trust. In this way, as shown in Table 1, while the campaign did have an effect of increasing trust in the President, this was marginal; whereas confidence for the electoral process variable underwent a remarkable increase, as did trust in the democratic system.

With regard to the particular effects of the traditional and the social media (Table 2), there was a generalized effect of the media as a whole on institutional trust, but again, this was not very relevant, as it only explains 8% of the variance. Of the socio-demographic variables, only age was significantly associated with confidence in a negative way, ($\beta = -0.136$, $p < .01$) which indicates that the greater the age of those interviewed, the more their trust in the institutions diminished.

Consumption of digital newspapers presents coefficients of hardly any significance for trust in institutions ($\beta = 0.013$, $p = .168$), while the variable “following social media” has a greater effect on that trust ($\beta = 0.134$, $p = .000$), as does consumption of the printed press, ($\beta = 0.201$, $p < .01$), whose coefficients are those with the greatest explicative weight in this model. The results for consumption of television ($\beta = 0.09$, $p < .01$) suggest that this variable is not going to be such an important predictor of trust. While the explicative level of the model is modest ($R^2 = .009$), when the variables for attention to the media are aggregated, its predictive power increases to $R^2 = 0.063$ for the variable of following social media, and to $R^2 = .120$ when the rest of the variables are integrated.

However, as we have noted previously, not all objects of (dis)trust behave in the same way, and it is therefore possible for these relations to register relevant variations. On the basis of this assumption we have elaborated independent models for each institution or object considered in the survey, in relation to the same variables of media attention (Table 3).

Table 1: Means and one path ANOVA, institutional trust by waves.

Ola	Mean	DE	F	Sig.
Overall Institutional Trust	1	2.37	1.2	
	2	2.44	1.2	19.8 .000
	3	2.75	1.2	
President	1	2.2	1.4	
	2	2.3	1.5	7.9 .000
	3	2.5	1.5	
Federal Government	1	2.4	1.4	
	2	2.6	1.4	2.1 .125
	3	2.6	1.5	
Congress	1	2.5	1.4	
	2	2.6	1.4	2.4 .089
	3	2.7	1.4	
Political Parties	1	2.1	1.2	
	2	2.1	1.3	9.3 .000
	3	2.3	1.4	
Politicians in general	1	2	1.2	
	2	2.1	1.3	8.4 .000
	3	2.3	1.3	
National Electoral Institute	1	2.8	1.5	
	2	2.8	1.5	20.7 .000
	3	3.2	1.5	
Mexican democratic system	1	2.4	1.4	
	2	2.5	1.4	33.7 .000
	3	3	1.5	
Electoral process	1	2.5	1.4	
	2	2.6	1.5	64.3 .000
	3	3.3	1.5	

N= 701

Source: Own elaboration.

Table 2: Explicative variables for institutional trust.

Variable	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>B</i>	$\frac{SE}{B}$	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
Age	-0.013	0.004	0.144**	-0.01	0	-0.101	-0.01	0.004	0.136**
Sex	-0.068	0.098	-0.028	-0.05	0.1	-0.022	-0.05	0.096	-0.022
Monthly income	0.062	0.058	0.048	0.04	0.06	0.031	0.036	0.056	0.028
Level of studies	-0.038	0.075	-0.022	-0.04	0.07	-0.024	-0.05	0.074	-0.032
<i>Attention to media</i>									
Following social networks				0.207	0.39	.205**	0.136	0.044	.134**
Consumption of printed press							0.05	0.022	.097*
Consumption of digital newspapers							0.007	0.021	0.013
Consumption of news on TV							0.048	0.023	0.09*
<i>R</i> ²		0.019			0.059			0.08	
ΔR^2		0.019			0.04			0.02	

Source: Own elaboration.

Note: N=701. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

In the context of these measurements, once the election is over, the coefficient of attention to social media is positive and significant for creating trust in political parties ($\beta = 0.197$, $p < .01$), politicians in general ($\beta = 0.170$, $p < .01$), the President, ($\beta = 0.101$, $p < .05$), Congress ($\beta = 0.122$, $p < .05$), the democratic system ($\beta = 0.120$, $p < .05$) and the electoral process ($\beta = 0.089$, $p < .05$). Digital newspapers are not shown to have any effect on the institutions measured.

The consumption of television for being informed about the campaign does have an effect, although a moderate one, for the President ($\beta = 0.108$, $p < .05$), the government, ($\beta = 0.077$, $p < .05$) and the democratic system ($\beta = 0.084$, $p < .05$), and is not significant for other institutions. The printed press only has a positive effect for political parties ($\beta = 0.140$, $p < .05$) and politicians in general ($\beta = 0.112$, $p < .05$). In fact, the model as a whole has a greater impact on these two institutions, as they explain 14% and 11% of the variance respectively, while their repercussion on other institutions is minimal, at under 1%.

Even though the coefficients of regression are moderate, which means that the weight of the independent variables included in the model does not have a powerful effect on trust in institutions, it is clear that the level of trust suffers incremental variations in relation to media consumption and that the significance does not depend only on the type of medium but also on the type of institution.

7. Discussion and conclusions

Trust in their rulers by those governed is a crucial asset for the functional development of democracies. Defined as the result of evaluation by the citizens of the performance of political institutions, the news media have an outstanding role in its development as they contribute to elaborate public perceptions of these institutions. Considering that electoral campaigns are special moments of influence by the media on political attitudes, that traditional media have been shown to have both positive and negative effects on citizen trust, and that little is known of the effects of social networks on the same, we conducted our study during the 2018 Mexican presidential election, to learn what the impacts of the media in general and of the different types of media in particular, whether traditional or social media, were on institutional trust.

Firstly, our findings do not support hypothesis 1, which predicted a diminishing of institutional trust based on attention to the media during the campaign. Quite the reverse, in fact trust increased as the campaign advanced and so did attention to the media by citizens, although marginally. This is demonstrated by observing the incremental increase in trust during the campaign, and the effects of the media on it. From this it may be inferred that the intensification of media consumption during the campaign appears to moderately ease political distrust, a longstanding feature of Mexican political culture.

Overall, at a disaggregated level it is important to point out a nuance: those institutions whose performance is more visible in the media, that are more concrete than abstract, and that have a greater executive capacity, receive less trust by the general public, and this barely increases during the campaign. This applies to institutions such as the President, political parties, and politics in general, but is not relevant for the democratic system or the electoral process. This supports the hypothesis that a high presence in the media by institutions is linked to public perceptions –more changeable and media dependent (Strömbäck, 2005).

With respect to the second hypothesis, which expected attention to social media to diminish institutional trust to a greater extent than attention to traditional media, this is also refuted. In spite of the worries that the former have awakened recently in terms of false information, fake news or hidden agenda, according to critics (Dalhgren, 2015; Schulz, 2014), these media have in fact shown a greater positive effect on trust than television, the printed press and digital newspapers, in that order. They have also shown a positive effect for six of the eight institutions specifically measured, with an emphasis on political parties and politicians in general, while television had an influence on only three and the press on two. However, we did not find that these effects were moderated by socio-demographic factors as in the case of other studies (Wilkins, 2000). This might be related to the structural nature of the distrust in the Mexican context, because, as we have shown, the effect of the campaign modifies the state of political trust very little.

These findings confirm for Mexico and specifically for the phenomenon of institutional trust, the correctness of the theory of a virtuous circle of political communication, while also confirming the findings in international (Camaj, 2014; Luengo & Coimbra-Mesquita, 2013; Norris, 2000; Shen & Guo, 2013; Strömbäck *et al.*, 2016), and national studies on the subject (Aruguete & Muñiz, 2012; Guerrero *et al.*, 2012; Moreno, 2010), especially those that like ours find differences in these effects when applied to the press (Moy & Pfau, 2000) or television (Aarts & Semetko, 2003). However, there is no confirmation of the studies that show the influence of networks to be no more than that of traditional media (Muñiz, Tellez, Marañón & Maldonado, 2016).

The definite conclusion is that at least during the electoral campaigns the so-called hybrid media system (Chadwick, 2013) has a positive though modest influence on institutional trust, especially for political parties and politicians in general.

Our study upholds certain limitations that condition its applicability. The non-representative character of the sample makes it difficult to make inferences for the population of Mexico in general. The consumption of social media is not limited to specific networks such as Twitter which are more politicized and tend to have distinctive political effects (Muñiz *et al.*, 2016). Also, the analysis was only of the effects of consuming channels of communication and not of their content, which might have differentiated effects on trust according to how it is treated; designs of the “natural experiment” type, that would link the results of content analysis statistically to measures of attention to different media, might be able to overcome this limitation (Camaj, 2014). Finally, the fact that the data were gathered during the campaign might condition the findings, as those times tend to be richer in information, polarized, and with a greater level of public involvement than times of ordinary governance. We can be sure the work presented is a contribution of relevance to the topic and may serve as the forerunner of more detailed studies of this question.

Table 3: Explicative variables of trust in different categories.

Variable	Parties		Politicians		President		Government		Congress		Electoral authority		Democratic system		Electoral process	
	β	EE	β	EE	β	EE	β	EE	β	EE	β	EE	β	EE	β	EE
Age	-.164**	.004	-.184**	.004	-.079	.005	-.092*	.005	-.181**	.004	-.112*	.005	-.079	.005	-.064	.005
Sex	.039	.098	-.011	.099	-.031	.119	-.025	.117	.070	.108	-.040	.121	-.064	.116	-.074	.120
Income	-.054	.058	-.003	.058	.022	.070	.018	.069	.022	.063	.080	.071	.028	.068	.063	.070
Level of studies	-.054	.076	-.043	.077	.001	.092	-.017	.090	-.061	.083	-.014	.093	-.034	.089	-.005	.092
<i>Attention to media</i>																
Following social networks	.197**	.045	.170**	.046	.101*	.054	.082	.054	.122*	.049	.062	.056	.120*	.053	.089*	.055
Consumption of printed press	.140*	.023	.112*	.023	.070	.028	.050	.027	.080	.025	.081	.028	.081	.027	.062	.028
Consumption of digital newspapers	.002	.022	.020	.022	-.026	.026	.021	.026	.016	.024	-.002	.027	.028	.025	.031	.026
Consumption of news on TV	.063	.023	.051	.024	.108*	.028	.089*	.028	.079	.026	.066	.029	.084*	.028	.076	.028
R ² Total	.141		.111		.047		.038		.092		.041		.061		.048	
Δ R ² Total	.024		.017		.018		.012		.015		.012		.017		.012	

Source: Own elaboration.
 Note: N=701. *p < .05. **p < .01.

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