
Carlos A. Ballesteros Herencia
cballesteros@hmca.uva.es
Professor. Department of Early
Modern History, Modern History
and History of America,
Journalism and Audiovisual
Communication and
Advertising. University of
Valladolid, Spain.

María Díez-Garrido
maria_mdg@hotmail.com
Researcher. Department of
Early Modern History, Modern
History and History of America,
Journalism and Audiovisual
Communication and
Advertising. University of
Valladolid, Spain.

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We need to talk. Engagement 2.0 on Facebook during the Spanish cyber campaign of December 20, 2015

Abstract

The political context in the wake of the General Elections of December 20, 2015 was changed significantly due to the emergence of the political parties Podemos and Ciudadanos. As the internet was used in previous campaigns, it was predicted that it would continue to play a key role in these General Elections. Of all the possibilities that the internet has to offer, social networks have the potential to allow politicians to establish a two-way communication with citizens without intermediaries. This work aimed to explore the depth of the dialogue between the main Spanish political parties and Facebook users. To achieve this, a quantitative statistical analysis was carried out of the messages published on Facebook by political parties and their candidates during two weeks of the electoral campaign. The validity and reliability of the Engagement 2.0 scale was able to be verified, in accordance with previous studies. Contrary to our initial hypothesis, this dialogue remained at minimum levels, despite being revealed as a suitable strategy to increase the diffusion of the posts. The distinction between traditional and emerging parties was not a key factor in improving communication with followers.

Keywords

Cybercampaigning, Political Engagement, Social Networks, Political Communication, Political Parties, Elections.

1. Introduction

Within Spanish electoral campaigns, the internet is already regarded as one of the fundamental platforms where political parties develop their communicative strategy. (Dader *et al.*, 2014). Social networks, like Twitter and Facebook, allow the candidates to establish a more direct connection with the electorate, broadcasting information without any intermediaries. They have become an essential platform to solicit the vote (Bode & Dalrymple, 2014; Gamir, 2016).

The main objective of this investigation is to study the dialogue that existed between candidates, political parties and the users of the social

network Facebook during the election campaign for the General Elections 2015, which were held on December 20.

The Spanish political context was very different from that of previous general elections, as bipartisanship found itself at a crossroad. Two new parties, Podemos and Ciudadanos, came together with grand expectations after obtaining a substantial number of the votes in the European elections in 2014¹ and in the Municipal and Regional Elections in 2015². This represented a significant threat to the parties Partido Popular and the Socialist Party (Partido Socialista), as well as, a profound uncertainty about forming a future government.³ In addition, sometimes these two new parties have been highlighted for having a greater control over digital tools than traditional parties (Zamora et al., 2017). This investigation took into account the debates established between the users of Facebook with the six main political parties and their candidates.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Cyberspace as a new terrain in the game of politics

For many years the influence of new technologies in the relations of power between citizens and politicians has been studied and, according to Castells (2009), they have changed: the messages have become horizontal, multi directional and function in a network. This means that communication flows from the masses to the masses and not in a single direction like what generally occurs with traditional mediums of communication. These relations between politicians and the governed have been partially influenced by the horizontal nature of the Internet (Castells, 2009).

As such, the internet emerges as a space in which the government and politicians can improve their democratic development by allowing greater participation by citizens, through greater accountability and greater transparency; all of which are the main foundations of an *e-government* or electronic government. (Bonsón *et al.*, 2012).

Like the rest of the population and organizations, politicians have had to adapt themselves to the new digital stage, which has experienced a significant development now referred to as the so-called Web 2.0 (Gamir, 2016). This is a term defined by O'Reilly (2007) as those websites which encourage interactivity, with a design focused to facilitate user navigation and the possibility of sharing content on the profiles of social network users. While the Web 1.0 only offered information, the Web 2.0 allows the user to take part in this process in some way.

In 2006, *Barrero et al.* already noted the possibility of Web 2.0 creating connections between politicians and citizens, until then the notion had not existed and it has been confirmed through the years. This is especially true on social media where the confidence and engagement of the electorate increases (Painter, 2015). Actually, it is very uncommon to find a politician without a profile on social media (Muñiz *et al.*, 2016).

Some authors speak about a Politics 2.0 and a Democracy 2.0 (Caldevilla, 2009; Túnñez & Sixto, 2011; Larsson, 2016). In both of these '2.0' concepts have a place on the internet and focus their attention on the participation of users within many democratic and political contexts and is measured by the diffusion of information (Larsson, 2016).

It's no coincidence that the rise of Politics 2.0 has occurred at the same time as a crisis of political legitimacy, taking into consideration that the internet allows the creation of new connections between the electorate and government (Smuts, 2010). This represents

1 Source: <http://elecciones.mir.es/resultados2014/99PE/DPE99999TO.htm> (Consulted: 17/02/2017)

2 Source: http://elpais.com/elpais/2015/05/25/media/1432564487_961595.html (Consulted: 17/02/2017)

3 source: http://www.cis.es/cis/export/sites/default/Archivos/Marginales/3120_3139/3128/es3128mar.pdf (Consulted: 17/02/2017)

something positive for politicians because “the power of the societal network is the power of communication” (Castells, 2009: 85). Therefore, they can use new technologies to recover the trust and legitimacy from the citizenry thanks to the proximity offered by the new social media (Haro-de-Rosario et al., 2016).

This use of social networks by political leaders in order to promote their different activities becomes even more visible during electoral campaigns (Dader *et al.*, 2013; Valera & López-García, 2014; Muñiz, 2015). It is during this period that a larger debate is sparked by the ideas, pragmatic answers and rivalries of political parties in all mediums of communication (Muñiz, 2015) and, therefore, also between those present online.

According to Valera and López-García (2014), the content on the social networks of politicians has focused, on many occasions, on the informative and persuasive with the overall objective of obtaining a high-profile. They hope to create a solid media agenda in accordance with the content they publish and, also, replicate the patterns of the offline campaign in the online campaign.

On occasion, social networks have been perceived by academics as a platform used more for the publication of information and for carrying out an electoral campaign, but Muñiz *et al.* (2016) highlight that these tools also allow citizens to become more involved in the political process and feel part of the political scene.

Even though it has already existed since the middle of the 1990s, the cyber-campaign started to receive attention after 2000 (Xue, 2014). Xue author stresses the first years - around 2004 - in which many politicians used *blogs* to ask for votes and donations, especially in the United States. The peak of the cyber-campaign arrived in 2008 with Barack Obama’s presidential campaign in the United States (Xue, 2014) which received the attention of academics from all over the world for his innovative use of social media (Castells, 2009; Xue, 2014; Vaccari, 2010).

The team of the democrat leader realized the potential that Facebook had, especially between young people aged between 18 and 25 who were very disassociated from politics. The social network allowed Obama not only to promote his pertinent messages throughout the electoral campaign, but it was also a platform for public debate and exchange of ideas between the users and the candidate (Smuts, 2010).

In Spain it has taken politicians longer to adapt to social networks compared with Anglo Saxon countries and some European countries (Gamir, 2016). The main Spanish political parties, PP and PSOE, didn’t have websites until around 1997. The websites of Spanish political parties were basically informative until 2007, when they included some mechanisms of participation. In the 2008 General Elections, they already included elements of Web 2.0 and videos on Youtube and blogs were the grand protagonists (Gamir, 2016). In the 2011 elections, the political parties had a stable presence online and social networks eclipsed other tools that had previously had more success and were one of the most important cornerstones of the cyber-campaign (Túñez & Sixto, 2011).

In the elections of December 20, 2015, Dader et al. (2017: 460) pointed out a different commitment to online campaigns by the digital leaders of each party. Only Podemos and Izquierda Unida considered digital communication as "decisive", while the rest of the parties qualified it as "important". In addition, the cybercampaigns of the different parties showed great organizational diversity and very different economic and human resources, going from parties with minimal teams to others that contracted specialized services in digital electoral consultancy (Ibid., 2017). According to this study, although digital managers said that they prefer Facebook because it provides more information about the users, the analysis they did showed "a great effort to spread messages through Twitter, probably as a result of their obsession to find echo in the media and their conviction that the press pays more attention to what is said on Twitter" (Ibid., 2017: 461).

In this same electoral campaign, Campos et al. (2017) highlighted that some candidates for the presidency of the Government (Mariano Rajoy, Pedro Sánchez) had autonomous teams that were also coordinated with the political training teams. The rest of the candidates personally managed their own networks, even though someone like Pablo Iglesias had a support group (Ibid., 2017)

The success of digital and social media coincides with the grand crisis of legitimacy of traditional mediums which are adapting slowly to the new digital ecosystem (Campos-Freire, 2015). The online mediums have the advantage of offering a range of different types of information; not only text, but also video, audio and photography, which can boost the interaction of the users (Xue, 2014). Facebook is represented as the most favourable social network for the development of this phenomenon. According to the study by Haro-de-Rosario *et al.* (2016) about digital citizen participation in the largest 80 councils in Spain, the popularity, the engagement and the virality was much larger on Facebook than on Twitter. Therefore, the councils had better results relating to engagement on Facebook.

2.2. Citizen Participation on Social Networks: the challenge of Engagement 2.0

Social networks allow politicians and citizens to engage in conversations, mutually contribute ideas and reinforce their knowledge. The capacity to set up a dialogue with the rest of social network users is one of the main advantages that Facebook offers and many politicians have known how to take advantage of this. For example the case of Barack Obama who created a flow of communication that allowed him to observe the needs expressed by public opinion (Smuts, 2010). Túñez and Sixto (2011) suggest that the horizontal nature of web 2.0 has transcended the borders of the internet and is now present in 'offline' politics also.

Haro-de-Rosario *et al.* (2016) emphasize the importance of politicians using social networks to interact with users, respond to their questions and suggestions and initiate conversations if they wish to obtain greater involvement instead of just using social networks to publish information in a unidirectional way. However, the technical and theoretical possibilities of social networks for dialogue seem far from being materialized in political practice according to numerous authors (Islas, 2006; Casero, 2007; Túñez & Sixto, 2011; Criado et al., 2012; Fábrega & Paredes, 2013; Graham et al., 2013; Congosto, 2014; Zamora & Zurutuza; 2014; Ballesteros et al., 2016). For Túñez and Sixto Engagement 2.0 is:

Interaction as an implicitly assumed behaviour that transforms the user: it's accepted that the engagement will pass from an attitude of participation to an action of participation. Engagement 2.0 is based on participation in the surrounding 2.0 environment that does not end with the presence of creators and users, but rather demands their active contribution, the exchanging of opinions and content, in a way in which obtains benefits; in full harmony with the concept of marketing (2011: 87).

Engagement 2.0 is therefore the ability of politicians to respond and open a dialogue with the users that participate in their publications on social networks. This achieves "interaction beyond the simple appreciation and dissemination of both personal and campaign information... Thus, it enables a profound conversation that achieves a better understanding of political knowledge maintained by the followers through the transmission of information in adequate quantity and quality" (Muñiz *et al.*, 2016: 139). Studies done up until now have shown that Engagement 2.0 is low in Spain (Díez-Garrido and Ballesteros, 2016; Haro-de-Rosario *et al.*, 2016; Túñez & Sixto, 2011). Thus, Gamir (2016) detected that the interaction through responses of politicians to the comments received was practically nil, while Valera (2017) pointed out that, although the Facebook profiles of the candidates for the 2011 general elections did not satisfy the deliberative criteria, they had democratic benefits,

like citizen self-expression and the reinforcement of the social cohesion between activists and supporters. Abejón et al. (2012: 158) concluded that the challenge was to get citizens to break "that inertia of distancing from the political class, and networks are an excellent element to achieve it. But you have to know how to use them and want to do following the rules of the game of the networks and not with the mere interest of using them for your own benefit".

Túñez and Sixto (2011) investigated the Facebook pages of the deputies in Congress where they marked the level of Engagement 2.0 of the profiles on a scale of 1-10; so that if the levels of information, activity and interaction were high, they obtained a high level of Engagement 2.0. The authors concluded that Engagement 2.0 was lacking/absent in 83,7% of the cases. In the same vein, the studies of Ballesteros *et al.* (2016) and Díez-Garrido and Ballesteros (2016) showed an almost non-existent Engagement 2.0 and contribution to cyber-campaign knowledge in Castilla y León from the two autonomous parties and candidates of 2015 who only responded to two messages from users during the 18 days studied.

Nevertheless, there have been diverse investigations (Muñiz *et al.* 2016; Fernandes *et al.*, 2010) that have demonstrated that Facebook could manage to increase the engagement of citizens in political debates. According to the study by Štětka and Vochocová (2014) a significant number of the messages received by politicians on social networks are from followers of the party, in this case messages of support, although there is no homogeneity in this sense: "This suggests that the mobilization on Facebook not only produces self-closed communities of party advocates, but it often becomes a space of contestation with a strong presence of dissident and critical voices (Štětka & Vochocová, 2014: 1371). The investigation of these authors about the Czech Republic 2013 Elections confirmed that the alternative parties exercised a major Engagement 2.0 and responded more to users through Facebook.

The emergence of new political parties in Spain could lead to changes in the digital sphere as some authors are beginning to point out. Deltell (2012: 5) confirms that in 2011 the newly created environmental party Equo used social networks in the election campaign of that year "in a creative and attractive way" making its online campaign the most followed, and "being a trending topic on Twitter for several days, the most visited Spanish party on Facebook (also the one with the most 'likes') and the one that presented the greatest number of initiatives on YouTube ". In the European elections of 2014, a "surprise" was provided by another new party, Podemos, "which used social networks very efficiently" (Congosto, 2014: 24). Finally, in the regional elections of 2015, Zamora et al. detected the inclusion of more creative ideas and political concepts in the social networks of the new political parties, as well as a greater use of certain network functions such as hashtags or retweets (2017: 246).

3. Objectives and Hypothesis of the Investigation

The investigation has the overall objective of verifying if the social network is used for interacting or contributing to a public conversation between the voters and political parties beyond other possible functions such as spreading relevant information about the campaign messages or mobilizing the electorate.

To that end, both the level of activity on Facebook that the parties and candidates maintained during two weeks of the 2015 electoral campaign was analyzed and the level of interaction with internet users the level of centrality was then generated. This was based on their degree of participation with the Facebook comments depending on their level of activity.

The more specific objectives of the investigation dealt with determining the applicability of the Engagement 2.0 in the case of the Spanish General Election of 20 December 2015. It measures the establishment of a dialogue through the posts of the candidates and the political parties from a quantitative point of view (degree of contribution

to dialogue) but also qualitative (quality of the contributions in where they refer to shared knowledge and their level of argumentation).

The objectives were attempted to be met through achieving concrete answers to a series of investigative questions:

- Q1. Was the use of comments on Facebook by candidates and political parties a strategy in the electoral online campaign in December 2015?
- Q2. Do politicians contribute to the improvement of knowledge and the encouragement of dialogue through their comments on their Facebook pages?

It began with the idea that the increase in levels of access, interaction and civic instruction that social networks offer can create an, “architecture of participation,” (Jackson & Lilleker, 2009: 232). As such, the investigation attempted to empirically contrast the following hypothesis:

- H1: The main political parties that joined the general elections of 20 December 2015 developed a relevant degree of Engagement 2.0 as a part of their cyber-campaign strategy.

Therefore, a similar evolution was expected to that already detected by Muñiz et al. (2016) between 2011 and 2015 in the state elections in Mexico, where there was an increase in the contribution to political knowledge and greater involvement and interaction of the candidates with their followers. It was also hoped that the passing of time over previous studies would have made candidates and parties aware of the importance of maintaining direct communication with the electorate, especially after the development of social networks in recent years.

- H2: ‘New’ or ‘emerging’ parties will have a higher Engagement 2.0 compared with ‘older’ and more ‘traditional’ parties.

It has been described that the new political parties are making more efficient use of the characteristics of social networks than traditional parties (Deltell, 2012, Congosto, 2014, Zamora et al., 2017). Therefore we expected a greater use of the digital potential, such as the function of commenting on the messages of users, as Štětka and Vochocová (2014) describe.

4. Methodology and planning of the Investigation

The conclusion of this quantitative study was reached by means of statistical analysis of a series of variables obtained from monitoring the Facebook profiles of the candidates and political parties that were represented in the General Elections of 20 December 2015 in Spain. The investigation included the six main parties and their respective Presidential candidates: Popular Party (PP), Socialist Worker Party (PSOE), United Left (IU), Union, Progress and Democracy (UPyD), Podemos and Ciudadanos. The candidates of these parties were, respectively; Mariano Rajoy, Pedro Sánchez, Alberto Garzón, Andrés Herzog, Pablo Iglesias y Albert Rivera. In total 12 Facebook profiles were analyzed.

The period of analysis took place over two weeks between two different times. Firstly, the period between 16 to 22 November 2015, a month before the elections were held. Then the week immediately before the electoral date, between 14 and the 20 December 2015, which was the second week of the actual electoral campaign.

The codification of all the posts published by these actors are shown below, a total of 913 divided between the 579 posts from the parties and the 334 posts from the candidates themselves (see the data in tables 1 and 2). PP, IU and Podemos were the parties with the most posts published, while Ciudadanos had the least. In the same vein, the websites of the candidates of IU and Podemos, Garzón and Iglesias, were those that offered the most messages, however the PP candidate, Rajoy, was the one with the least.

Table 1. Number of posts by parties

Political Party	November	December	Total
PP	52	116	168
IU	25	111	136
Podemos	44	61	105
PSOE	31	51	82
UPyD	25	27	52
Ciudadanos	20	16	36

Source: Own investigation

Table 2. Number of posts from candidates

Candidate	November	December	Total
Garzón	48	70	118
Iglesias	33	50	83
Sánchez	22	31	53
Herzog	18	18	36
Rivera	6	18	24
Rajoy	7	13	20

Source: Own investigation

What's more, the comments on these posts were thoroughly searched for comments made by the candidates themselves and their parties. Therefore, the 913 posts on the Facebook pages received a total of 188,562 comments, 37.04% of these directed to the parties and 62.96% directed at the candidates (see data in tables 3 and 4).

Table 3. Number of comments to the parties

Political Party	November	December	Total
Podemos	11,576	22,412	33,988
PP	978	12,682	13,660
PSOE	1,059	8,210	9,269
IU	500	6,543	7,043
Ciudadanos	1,736	3,187	4,923
UPyD	139	826	965
Total	15,988	53,860	69,84

Source: own investigation

Table 4. Number of comments to the candidates

Candidate	November	December	Total
Iglesias	5,297	49,315	54,612
Rajoy	832	20,180	21,012
Garzón	2,238	15,060	17,298
Sánchez	1,636	15,233	16,869
Rivera	1,368	7,145	8,513
Herzog	111	299	410
Total	11,482	107,732	118,714

Source: own investigation

In this universal total of 188,562 comments made in response to the messages uploaded by parties and candidates, only 28 comments made by the actual creators of the Facebook pages can be located; 21 of those on the pages of the parties and 7 of those on the candidate's pages (see the data in tables 5 and 6).

Table 5. Number of comments from the parties

Political Party	November	December	Total
Podemos	11	3	14
UPyD	1	2	3
IU	0	2	2
PSOE	0	1	1
PP	0	1	1
Ciudadanos	0	0	0
Total	13	8	21

Source: own investigation

Table 6. Number of comments from the candidates

Candidate	November	December	Total
Iglesias	0	4	4
Garzón	0	1	1
Sánchez	0	1	1
Herzog	0	1	1
Rivera	0	0	0
Rajoy	0	0	0
Total	0	7	7

Source: own investigation

The codification of all the material was carried out by thirteen coders⁴, following the definitions of the code book that was created for this investigation. To consolidate the reliability of the codification the codifiers were trained together with the objective of ensuring that they came to the same conclusion when faced with different messages containing the variables that needed categorization. The principal parts of the code book were the following:

a) Basic Identification Data

For each of the analyzed posts the date and origin were recorded and whether or not they were posts from parties or candidates and the transmitter of the message (PP, PSOE, IU, UPyD, Podemos y Ciudadanos).

b) Content of the post

It was observed if the post contained: the presence of text, photography and video, links to other external websites, contacts or tags were included in the post. Also, the amount of times the content received a "like", how many times it was shared and how many comments it received were also measured. Subsequently, the number of comments were divided by the number of messages to obtain the "Centrality of communication", taking Wasko and Faraj (2005) as a reference.

c) 2.0 Engagement Scale

The Engagement 2.0 scale was applied and maintained by the electoral candidates and political parties on their social networks, in this case Facebook, based on the proposals of Díez-Garrido and Ballesteros (2016), Muñiz, Dader and Salazar (2016) and Muñiz and Ballesteros (2016). The proposal made by Túñez and Sixto (2011) about including the measurement of politicians' engagement, in terms of the degree of participation and interaction with other members of their social network, was used as a reference point in both investigations. The Engagement 2.0 indicator of the electoral candidates was created from the addition of four elements related, on the one hand the Participation, and, on the other hand the Contribution to actual knowledge by the candidates, and counted using a theoretical range of variation from '0' (minimal engagement) to '8' (maximum engagement). It indicates the operationalization of the four constitutive variables of the indicator.

When candidates and parties participated on their social network two elements were used that allowed us to determine the level of participation from the candidates and/or parties with internet-users and this was done in as much a quantitative way as a qualitative. The quantitative part was codified by the 'number of comments made by the candidate' in their posts, using the study of Wasko and Faraj (2005) as a reference. After obtaining the data, the variable was recodified in three categories; '0' in case the candidate didn't comment on any post, '1' in case the candidate had less than half of the comments obtained in all their other posts, and '2' when the candidate wrote more than a half of the comments. The quality of the participation from the candidate or party was codified by '0' when they generated a message (a post) but didn't reply to previous comments in order to enter a dialogue, a '1' when the candidate encouraged a superficial dialogue, by leaving a single comment, and a '2' if they encouraged a profound dialogue using additional documents.

The second component of Engagement 2.0 was made up by the Contribution to knowledge by the candidates and/or parties on their social networks. It was also composed

⁴ Dafne Calvo, Eva Campos, María Díez, Marta Redondo, Michelle Goulart Massuchin, Dunia Etura, Cristina González, Cristina Renedo, Alicia Gil, José Manuel Sánchez Duarte, Lydia Morán, Érika Fiuri, Paloma del H. Sánchez and Rocío Zamora.

of a quantitative and a qualitative part. The quantitative component was measured by the level of contribution to actual knowledge by the candidate, taking as a reference the contribution of knowledge on social networks by Wasko and Faraj (2005). To this end, it's codified as '0' when the candidate doesn't leave comments, '1' when they add comments to boost the exposure of their original post, showing gratitude or taking note of what was shared by the users or to respond to questions from users, but only repeating what has already been stated in the original post. Finally, they were codified as '2' when the candidate provided extra knowledge than that included in their original post by means of new arguments or complementary documentation.

The same that was done with regards to the participation developed by the candidate or party on social networks, was done to evaluate the qualitative component of this contribution to knowledge. Varela (2014) was taken as a reference about the level of argumentation on social networks. In this vein, this 'quality of the contribution to knowledge' tried to measure the level of argumentation shown by the party or candidate, being codified as '0' when the contribution was null because the candidate didn't leave comments, as '1' when the contribution was low, since it only contained information about the candidate, program or spoke about what was happening now or what can happen, often with quotes or declarations without making a more detailed explanation or showing reasoning to support it. Examples include: "I'm from the village like you" or "will we create new jobs." Finally, they were codified as '2' if reasoned information was provided, meaning the candidate clearly contributed their opinion about the information, argued a point of view or position with clear quotes or descriptions about the subject or content.

Validity of the Political Engagement Scale 2.0

The validity of the scale, described earlier, was confirmed by a factorial analysis with orthogonal varimax rotation of the four variables, which generated a component capable of explaining the 97% of the variance. Furthermore, the reliability of the scale was verified by means of the calculation of the internal consistency through Cronbach's alpha test that generated a value of 0.969.

Once the validity and reliability were checked, the values of Engagement 2.0 were calculated. Even though the theoretic range oscillated between 0 and 8, the effective range of the comments left by the political parties and their candidates in this electoral date was limited to a variation between 0 and a maximum of 6, never rising to the maximum of 8. Furthermore, the average value of Engagement 2.0 was very low ($M=0.14$, $SD=0.824$). These values are also confirmed when checking that both mode, the value most repeated, and the median were 0. Thus, 886 messages didn't receive any comments from their own author, so their indicator on Engagement 2.0 was void; 9 messages rose to a value of 4 in this scale, 14 messages had a value of 5 and 6 messages had a value of 6.

5. Analysis of the Results

5.1 Centrality of Communication

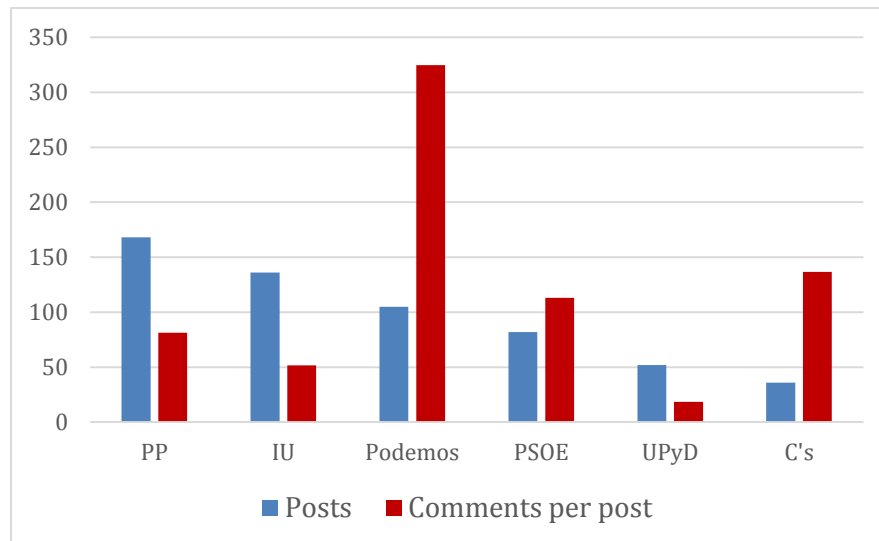
Political parties used their Facebook pages more than their Presidential candidates during the 20 December 2015 general elections. The parties emitted a total of 579 posts in the two weeks under investigation, compared with just 334 from the candidates. However, the candidates' posts received more comments than those of the parties. The candidates received a total of 118,712 comments, which means that each party received, on average, almost 20,000 during the two weeks that were analyzed ($M = 19.785$, $SD = 18.607$). On the other hand, the posts of the parties barely surpassed half of this figure, with less than

70,000 comments in total ($N = 69.939$, $M = 11.656$, $SD = 11.779$). Therefore, while each post from the parties received an average of 120 comments, the candidates received 355 per post.

Each party and candidate posted an average of 76 messages ($SD = 47.58$); between the parties, Partido Popular had the largest number of published posts (168) and Ciudadanos the least (36) Garzón was the candidate with the highest number of posts (118) and Rajoy with the least messages left (20). Each of these messages received 203 comments on average ($SD = 324.59$), oscillating between the 325 comments per post by Podemos and the small number of 18 from UPyD. Between the candidates, it was highlighted that Rajoy had 1,050 and Iglesias 657 comments per post in sharp contrast to the 12 of Herzog (see graphs 1 & 2 for the data).

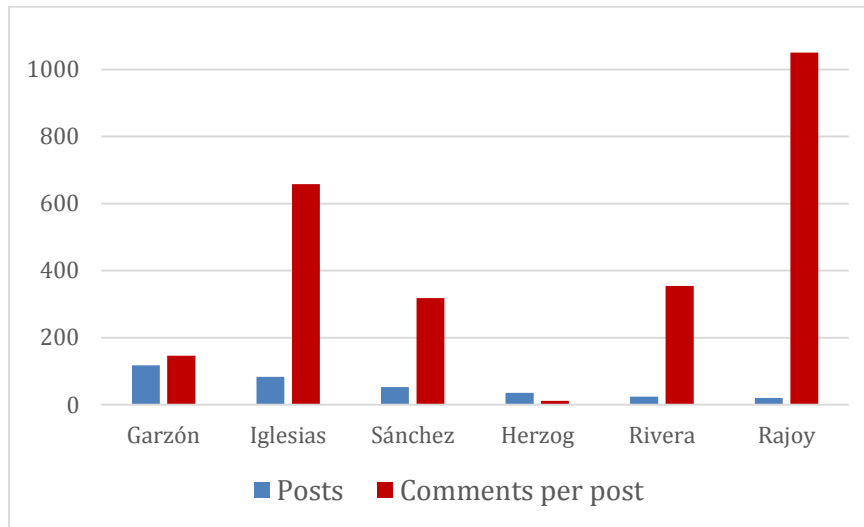
Therefore, internet users left a higher number of comments in response to candidates' messages (355.4 comments per post) than to those of the parties (120.6 comments per post). This initial exploration of the data reveals a possible tendency on the part of internet users towards personalization that inclines them to leave the majority of comments on the Facebook pages of the candidates. The number of comments per post generated different ratios according to the party and candidate, but these ratios were not found to be an explicative factor. For example, the parties with fewer posts could obtain a better ratio because their followers concentrated their comments in a reduced number of messages, therefore a correlation was not found between the number of posts and the number of comments received on these posts (Pearson's $r = 0.19$). This lack of correlation between the number of posts and the number of comments for each post is visualized in graphs 1 and 2 where the number of posts are shown in a descending order; a relationship with the number of comments per post is not maintained.

Graph 1. Number of posts and comments per post from the parties



Source: own investigation

Graph 2. Number of post and comments per post from the candidates



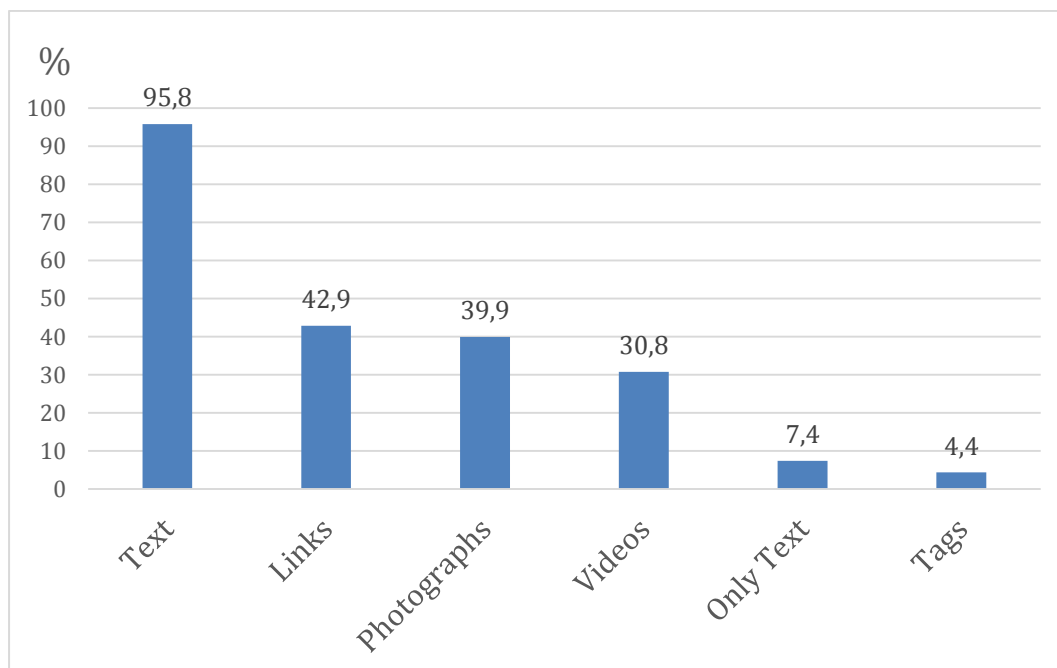
Source: own investigation

Internet users left the majority of the comments (98.6% of the total) in comparison with 0.4% comments written by candidates and their teams; this is discussed further in summary 4.3.

5.2 Content of posts

The most common content of the posts was the presence of text (95.8%), followed by the inclusion of a link (42.9%), a photograph (39.9%), and a video (30.8%). It was much less common to find a post that only included text (7.4%), or those that *tagged* other users (4.4%) (see graph 3 for the data).

Graph 3. Content of the posts



Source: own investigation

A negative covariance was produced between the five content elements, regarding the presence of text and links, the accompaniment of a photo or video and the *tagging* of other users. In this way, the presence of one of these elements usually meant the absence of the rest of the elements.

Significant statistical differences were detected in the use of the five variables by the different parties and candidates, resulting in the following values of chi squared per text: ($\chi^2(11) = 74.856$, $p < 0.001$), photographs ($\chi^2(11) = 163.639$, $p < 0.001$), links ($\chi^2(11) = 246.445$, $p < 0.001$), videos ($\chi^2(11) = 70.733$, $p < 0.001$), and tagging users ($\chi^2(11) = 67.070$, $p < 0.001$).

The values of the corrected residuals signaled that Ciudadanos (in 75.0% of their posts), PP (66.7%) and Albert Rivera (66.7%) used more photographs than what was statistically expected. Pablo Iglesias (2.4%), UPyD (17.3%) and Alberto Garzón (17.8%) used less photographs than expected, while the rest of the pages moved in the central tendency.

The inclusion of a link, which was the second most frequent element in the posts, was more common than what was expected with PP (88.4%), Rajoy (72.2%), Garzón (59.3%) and Iglesias (60.2%) and less than the expected with PSOE (13.4%) and Rivera (8.3%). Only UPyD and Herzog generated results inside the average.

Similarly, the presence of videos in 30.8% of the sample had maximum values of 52.4% (Podemos) and 51.9% (UPyD) and minimum values of 19.5% (Garzón) and 11.3% (Sánchez). *Tagging* contacts on Facebook pages was a strategy more common than what was statistically expected in the cases of Ciudadanos (13.9%) and Iglesias (16.9%) and below the expected values with PP (1.2%) and IU (0.0%).

However, when relating the significance of these results to the total number of messages from each party, we found cases such as Alberto Garzón. Despite being the candidate with the most videos and the second in number of photographs, he also included these two contents on fewer occasions than statistically expected, because he was the candidate with the largest number of posts. In other words, Garzón's website didn't upload less audiovisual material than its competitors, but as he also uploaded a lot of other kind of content, the percentage of videos and photographs of the total was reduced (See data in tables 7 and 8). Therefore, a deeper analysis was carried out to try to obtain some type of trend or model.

Table 7. Content of the posts of parties

Political Party	Text	Videos	Photographs	Links	Tags
PP	164	42	112 ⁺	135 ⁺	2 ⁻
Podemos	105 ⁺	55 ⁺	42	19 ⁻	4
IU	136 ⁺	43	53	24 ⁻	0 ⁻
PSOE	72 ⁻	37 ⁺	36	11 ⁻	3
C's	32 ⁻	6	27 ⁺	8 ⁻	5 ⁻
UPyD	48	27 ⁺	9 ⁻	26	0
Total	557	210	279	223	14

Source: own investigation. Total values. Value of the corrected residuals: + Above statistically expected. - Under.

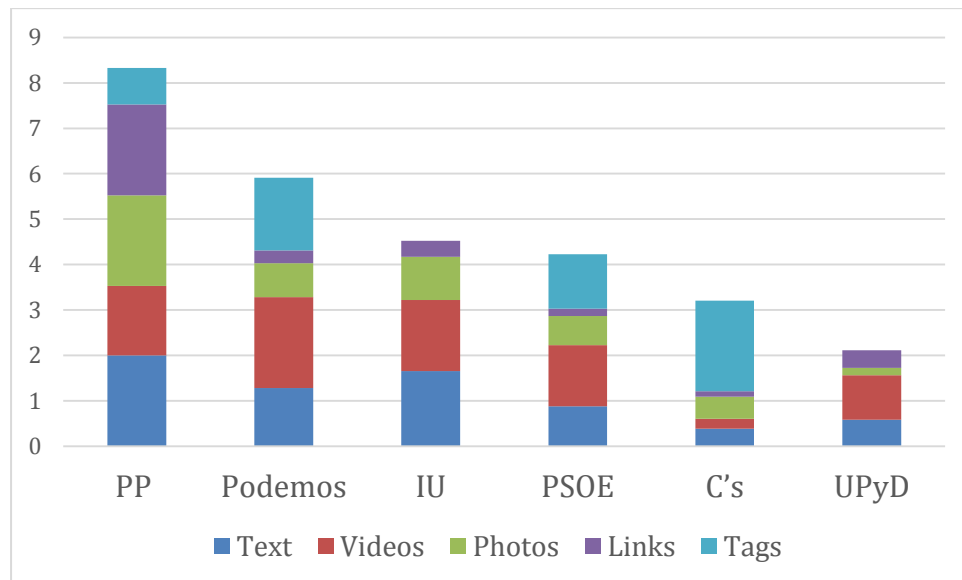
Table 8. Content of the posts of candidates

Political Party	Text	Videos	Photographs	Links	Tags
Garzón	116	23 ⁻	21 ⁻	70 ⁺	12 ⁺
Iglesias	82	18	2 ⁻	50 ⁺	14 ⁺
Sánchez	49	6 ⁻	26	13 ⁻	0
Herzog	34	8	11	19	0
Rajoy	20	9	9	15 ⁺	0
Rivera	17 ⁻	7	16 ⁺	2 ⁻	0
Total	318	71	85	169	26

Source: own investigation. Total values. Value of the corrected residuals: + Above statistically expected. - Under.

To achieve this, the value of each content variable, exposed in the columns of the two previous tables, was recalculated in a range of 0 to 10, in order to add homogeneous values of the rows, and the mean was calculated. The intensity of use of the resources offered by Facebook messages by each candidate and party was obtained. In this way, it was detected that, among the parties, the Popular Party made the most use of these characteristics, highlighted in all the variables except in contact tagging, while UPyD was the one that most poorly used them. Ciudadanos also obtained minimum values in all the contents, except in contact tagging (See data in Graph 4).

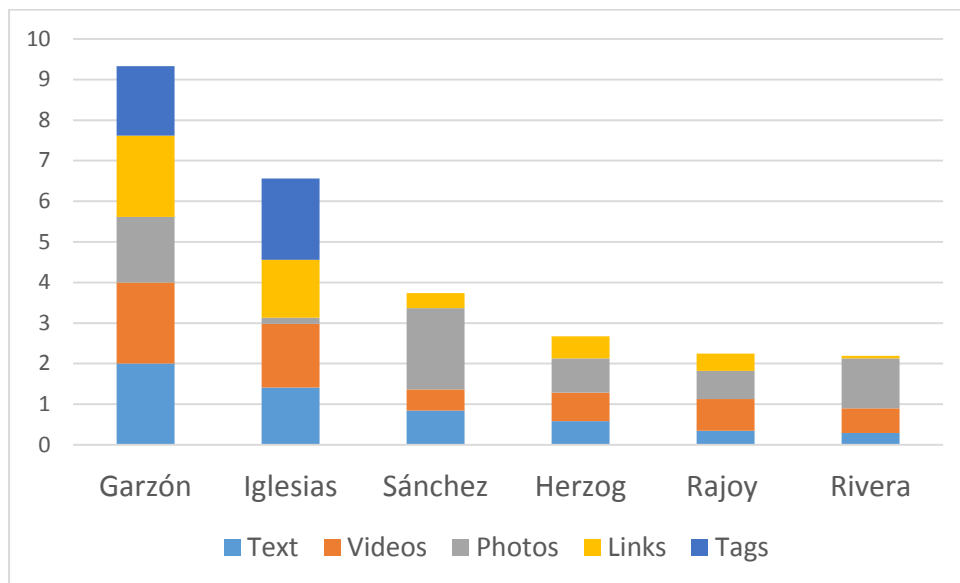
Graph 4. Content of the posts of parties



Source: own investigation.

Among the candidates, Alberto Garzón was highlighted with high or maximum values in all the variables, followed by Iglesias; they were the only two candidates who tagged some of their contacts. The page of Pedro Sánchez made great use of photographs, but did not stand out in any other content (See data in Graph 5).

Graph 5. Content of the posts of candidates



Source: own investigation.

5.3 Engagement 2.0 in the strategy of the online electoral campaign

As was shown in tables 5 and 6, the number of comments made by parties and candidates were very low; this is shown again in the descriptive values of the variables that constitute the Engagement Scale 2.0 (see the data in table 7). This limits the interpretation of the obtained statistical results. Thus, the first variable - the number of comments made by the candidate - only obtained values in two of their three categories; either no comments were made ("0") or only a single comment was made ("2"). This value of "2" is a number of comments higher than the average ($M=0.03$, $SD=0.169$). As a consequence, there was no case that registered a number of comments less than the average, because the average was less than 1.

This situation meant that the second variable, with what it addressed by measuring the qualitative element of the participation of the candidates and politicians had identical distribution to what the previous variable measured quantitatively. In other words, candidates and parties either made no comments or they only encouraged a superficial dialogue after making a single comment, something that happened on 27 occasions.

Regarding the quantitative measurement of the contribution of knowledge, there was a tendency to contribute extra knowledge two times greater ($n=18$) than not giving new information ($n=9$). This fact was registered in the limited number of comments by the candidates and parties ($n=27$). As was shown in the description of the variables, when politicians added comments to boost the exposure of the original post it was codified as ('1') if it didn't contribute new information. For example by showing gratitude, taking note of what was expressed by the users, or responding to a question proposed by a user, but only repeating what was expressed in their original post.

We can find a paradigmatic example from this category in unit 320 of the analysis, regarding this post: "Cooperate here: <http://yonotengounbarcen.es>. We are the only party that is financed solely by public donations which guarantees our independence from banks resulting in a politics that serves the majority. In these elections Spain's future for the next decade is at stake: we are faced with very powerful adversaries and to have the same opportunities as them we need you" (Podemos, 18/1/2015).

The only comment left by the party on this post consisted in a sparse: “Cooperate at: <http://yonotengounbarcnas.com/>”. UPyD also made a comment that was categorized in this category in unit 538 of the analysis, whose original post consisted in the following text: “Andrés Herzog the lawyer of #UPyD wants to prove the polls wrong.” The party only wrote one generic comment in response to all 38 comments left by users: “Thank you everyone for your support! On Sunday we’ll give you the surprise!”

The most numerous category was the one which was supposed to have the maximum level of contribution to knowledge (‘2’) where the candidate or party provided extra knowledge than what was shown on their original post, via new arguments or complementary documentation. For example, Pedro Sánchez’s message on 17/12/15 (UA 589): “Good morning! Two days to go until the end of the campaign and four days for the uniting change to begin. And before everything else, I would like to take a moment to connect with all of you live.” This was commented on 237 times, it also had a comment from the candidate himself who added a new argument about voting alongside the two initial arguments of change and digital contact: “I want to say thank you to everyone, to those who have supported me with enthusiasm every day through the networks, and to those who give us constructive criticisms that helps us improve. Allow me to ask you something. City to city, street to street, door to door, let’s concentrate the vote in the only party that guarantees change: PSOE. A huge hug to everyone.”

Of the eighteen codified in this category, there were eight occasions when Podemos provided complementary documentation that contributed to comments by including a link to the original source of the information cited in their initial post. For example, unit 314 of the analysis (19 November 2015), corresponded to a post with the following text: “The wage gap between men and women would take 118 years to close according to the current rhythm. It’s necessary to adopt measures to reduce it. Nacho Álvarez, responsible for economics: “We have guaranteed the reconciliation between work and personal life, not only to eliminate the inequalities between men and women but to take advantage of the potential that our economy has.” It was complemented with the following comment in the same vein: “One of the news articles that corroborate the data about the inequality that we have to reduce http://elpais.com/economia/2015/11/18/actualidad/1447872182_528635.html”.

On three other occasions, parties used online resources from their own party such as; the transcription of an interview with Alberto Garzón (UA 461), a link which streamed a rally by Pablo Iglesias (UA 305) and the email address to inform people how to be a UPyD representative (UA 5546) in order to interconnect the party itself. All of this information was not offered in the original post.

Finally, with regards to the quality of information contributing to knowledge, it was determined that on 23 occasions the comments did not offer argued information. Only on four occasions did comments emit this argued information, meaning they clearly contributed an opinion about the information, and argued a point of view or position backed up with clear quotes and descriptions. One of the latter belonged to Pedro Sánchez (UA 589) and another to his party (UA 193: 17/12/2015) in his simple initial post: “The best thing about the campaign is contact with the people, Pedro Sánchez Pérez-Castejón.” The party itself left the most extensive and argued comments: “Hello, Lerneo! Our priority is to fight against energy poverty. Because of that, we will legislate a framework for welfare services regarding the minimum supply for energy (electricity and gas), that guarantees that no home can be deprived of the minimum welfare subsistence between the 1 November and 31 March. What’s more, we will propel an audit about the integrated costs of traffic energy, to know exactly what is being paid and what is being received...”

Table 9. Descriptives of the variables constituting Engagement 2.0

Variables of Engagement	Frequency	Percentage
Number of Comments from Candidate		
Didn't Comment	886	97.0
Higher than the average	27	3.0
Interactivity of the Communication		
Comments without Answering	886	97.0
Superficial Dialogue	27	3.0
Level of contribution to Knowledge		
No Comments	886	97
No New Information contributed	9	1.0
Added Extra Information	18	2.0
Quality of the Contribution to Knowledge		
No Comments	886	97
Information without arguments	23	2.5
Argued Information	4	0.4

Note: N = 913. Source: own investigation

Whether or not variables were associated with a post being commented on by a candidate or party was calculated. Thus, the Mann-Whitney U test showed that the importance of the post, measured via the presence of audio, videos, photos, etc., received similar values in the 886 posts that didn't have comments from the party or candidate compared to the 27 that did. On the other hand, an association was detected between the inclusion of a comment by the author of the page and the variables of the number of times that the post received *likes* ($U=8.235, p<0.01$), that it was shared ($U=6348, p<0.001$) and that it was commented on ($U=6743, p<0.001$).

These three variables were not distributed normally and because of this the Mann-Whitney U test was used. In three cases the posts that received a comment from the candidate or party got a higher number of *likes*, shares and comments than those that didn't (the average data is shown in table 8 instead of the average range with those that operate statistically in the U test showing the actual units that appear on the Facebook pages).

Table 10. Participation of the users according to the presence of comments from the candidates

	The post includes comments from the candidate	Average	Typical Deviation
Number of likes	Yes	4.897	5.039
	No	3.144	5.332
Number of shares	Yes	2.521	3.508
	No	871	2.110
Number of comments	Yes	628	1336
	No	194	621

Source: own investigation

Faced with this data, it was calculated if whether or not the Engagement 2.0 index was associated with other variables that were also taken into account during the study. Firstly, whether or not this index was correlated with other variables on the scale was investigated, detecting a significant association between the number of likes received ($\rho=0.91$, $p<0.05$), shares ($\rho=0.138$, $p<0.001$) and comments ($\rho=0.128$, $p<0.001$). This made it possible to verify that the majority of engagement entailed much participation from the followers. While the messages with an engagement index of nil (=0) received an average of 3,144 likes, the messages with a higher index received more likes. This is the same that happened with the variables that addressed how many times the post was shared and the number of times it was commented on (See the data in table 11).

Table 11. Participation of the users according to the Engagement 2.0 scale

Engagement 2.0 scale	N	Average number of likes	Average number of shares	Average number of comments
0	886	3,144	872	194
4	9	5,149	2,192	894
5	14	3,997	1,869	282
6	4	7,482	5,546	1,243
Total	913	3,196	921	207

Note: N=913. Source: own investigation

In order to answer the second hypothesis of the investigation, a variable was generated that grouped together the parties considered as 'traditional' (PP, PSOE, IU and UPyD) or 'emerging' (those that came forward for the first time in the general elections; Podemos and C's). Significant differences were found between the two categories of this variable with respect to the number of comments made by the party itself ($\chi^2(1) = 18.023$, $p<0.001$, $\phi = 0.141$), and therefore also with respect to Engagement 2.0 ($t=-4.069$, $p<0.001$). The traditional parties obtained an Engagement 2.0 index of 0.08 (SD=0.616) and the emerging parties received a value of 0.32 (SD=1.201).

Table 12. Number of comments made by parties

Number of Comments		Traditional Party	Emerging Party	Total
0	Count	655	231	886
	Corrected residue	4.2	-4,2	
1	Count	10	17	27
	Corrected residue	-4.2	4.2	
Total		665	248	

Note: N=913. Source: own investigation

Separating the previous variable into its component categories, it was verified that the statistical association didn't correspond so much with the 'emerging' or 'traditional' characterization, but more with the *party* itself. Thus, Podemos and Pablo Iglesias obtained the highest indexes of Engagement 2.0, while Ciudadanos and Albert Rivera obtained the lowest (see the data in tables 11 and 12).

Table 13. Engagement 2.0 of the political parties

Political Party	Average	Typical Deviation
Podemos	0.59	1.585
UPyD	0.25	1.027
IU	0.07	0.604
PSOE	0.07	0.663
PP	0.02	0.309
Ciudadanos	0.00	0.000

Source: own investigation

Table 14. Engagement 2.0 of the candidates

Candidate	Average	Typical Deviation
Iglesias	0.22	0.988
Herzog	0.14	0.833
Sánchez	0.11	0.824
Garzón	0.05	0.552
Rajoy	0.00	0.000
Rivera	0.00	0.000

Source: own investigation

6. Conclusion

The use of Facebook as a tool in the electoral cyber campaign on December 20, 2015 was heterogeneous and disparate, with great differences among political parties. It could be said that the recognized potential for interaction that is offered by Facebook was wasted during this campaign.

Parties exploited this potential in varying degrees, for example the Popular Party and Alberto Garzón used this social network five times more than those who used it the least (Ciudadanos and Rajoy). However, there were still stark differences between the number of messages left by political parties and their candidates, as is the case with Rajoy and the Popular Party. The five possible contents of a post (text, photographs, videos, links and contact *tagging*) were used in significantly different ways by the political parties under investigation, showing various ways of taking advantage of the resources offered by Facebook posts.

The typical message from the cyber campaign always contained text and the following complementary content: links to news from the media, photographs or videos. Messages that only contained text didn't rise above 10% and the tagging of other users didn't reach 5%.

It was also found that the political parties and their candidates used Facebook characteristics in different ways. For example, Garzón heavily used links and tags, something that IU barely did while Rajoy, Rivera and Sánchez never tagged, yet their parties did. Sánchez was the candidate who added the most photographs while the Socialist Party was among those who added the least.

Firstly, a very different intensity of use and exploitation of the characteristics of Facebook was detected by each political party. Secondly, these differences exist also between political parties and their own candidates. The results were consistent with the different importance digital managers gave to online campaigns in these elections (Dader et al., 2017), as well as the existence of separate campaign teams between the party and its candidate (Campos et al., 2017).

In addition, it was verified that during the cyber campaign of 20 December, 2015 that while the political parties posted a greater number of messages on Facebook than their candidates for president of the Government (73.3% more). However the users of this social network posted almost three times more comments in response to the posts of the candidates than to the posts of the parties. This preference to comment on the candidates' messages seems to indicate an attempt to personalize communication by followers, using the ability of social networks to humanize information (Berrocal, 2003; Bor, 2013). With this in mind, political parties could connect with the users by responding to this demand via personalization of their messages, generating a real interaction in the process.

However, studies conducted on the regional and General Elections of 2015 show that the personalization and localization of messages through Facebook was a strategy rarely used by political parties and their candidates (Ballesteros et al., 2016; Ballesteros et al., 2017).

The statistical reliability and validity of the Political Engagement Scale 2.0 was verified in line with the results obtained by Muñoz *et al.* (2016). The level of Engagement 2.0 was maintained in very low levels, like those already shown in the regional elections from six months before before in Castilla y León (Díez-Garrido & Ballesteros, 2016) therefore refuting the first hypothesis. From the beginning, it was estimated that the low levels detected in Castilla y León were due to the lower level of regional resources, and that the previous elections in most of the regions could serve as a base to develop higher engagement levels at the national level six months later.

Abundant previous literature (Islas, 2006; Casero, 2007; Trejo, 2010; Túniz & Sixto, 2011; Criado et al., 2012; Fábrega & Paredes, 2013; Graham et al., 2013; Congosto, 2014; Valera, 2014; Zamora & Zurutuza, 2014; Ballesteros et al., 2016), agrees about the low genuine

dialogue between candidates and citizens. However recent studies done in diverse electoral calls in Mexico (Muñiz *et al.*, 2016) show the positive evolution of interaction. Yet, the persistence of very low levels of Engagement 2.0 on 20 December indicate that the establishment of a fruitful dialogue between representatives and voters through this social network does not form part of the online electoral campaign strategy of the Spanish political parties.

When the candidates and parties only left a single comment in response to the users, it was categorized as a superficial engagement. Quantitatively, in these 27 comments if the candidate or party left a comment it doubled the contribution to knowledge compared to those who didn't leave a comment therefore not contributing new information. Two out of three times this new information was offered through a link to an original source, for example; the media or through links to online resources from the party itself: videos, broadcasts via streaming and email. Therefore, it seems that in the few cases when the political parties decided to respond to the users, they tend to do it in order to add more information. However, on a qualitative level, it was verified that this new information didn't usually offer argumentation.

Thus the low rate of interactivity displayed by the political parties, both on a quantitative and qualitative level, reinforces the idea that the increase in the levels of access and interaction offered by this social network does not translate into what Jackson and Lilleker (2009: 232) called an "architecture of participation" which is an authentic conversation between politicians and their digital followers using the new technological resources of interaction

On the other hand, in response to the second hypothesis of the investigation, it was detected that the parties categorized as 'emerging' (meaning it was the first time they took part in a general election), obtained Engagement 2.0 and left a number of comments significantly higher than those from traditional parties. Although it must be specified that these results were only due to the higher number of comments from Podemos, who left 14 of the 21 comments, while Ciudadanos didn't leave any. In the same vein, the Political Engagement of Podemos was the highest of all the parties and Ciudadanos received a void value. Therefore, differentiation between party types ("emergent", "new" versus "traditional", "old") matters less than the differentiation between the parties themselves. Only one of the two "new" parties developed the greater interactivity that was predicted, while the other did it to a lesser degree than even traditional parties. Thus the more intense and efficient use of social networks by new Spanish parties, indicated by different authors (Deltell, 2012; Congosto, 2014; Zamora, 2017), does not seem to have achieved a greater dialogue between candidates and citizens in all cases. Nor do the findings of other countries such as those described by Štětka and Vochocová (2014) or Muñiz *et al.* (2016).

Finally, it was shown that the messages with a high level of Engagement 2.0 from the party transmitters, received a higher level of participation and engagement from the users. When a politician commented on a message both the number of shares, likes and comments of the original post increased. Despite Engagement 2.0 being under-developed it has revealed itself as an adequate strategy to increase the propagation of the original post.

Therefore, we can conclude that the electoral cyber-campaign which was developed by the six main parties through Facebook in the general elections of 20 December 2015 did not establish a dialogue between politicians and users, wasting the potential of citizen participation and interaction that the Web 2.0 allows. Despite the limited data, statistical observations could be made. These observations showed that when politicians develop a high Engagement 2.0 the users participate more via social networks. They participate through "*liking*", sharing and commenting on the posts which can multiply the diffusion of the messages.

The development of an enriched and fluid public conversation between the voters and their representatives through Facebook is still waiting for the political parties to initiate it. It will be initiated either with the immediate goal of obtaining votes during the electoral campaigns, or with the less tangible objective of improving the quality of decision making within the democratic system by increasing interactivity and dialogue with citizens.

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