
Santiago Giraldo Luque

santiago.giraldo@uab.cat
Professor. Universitat
Autònoma de Barcelona, Spain.

Isabel Villegas Simón

isabelmaria.villegas@uab.cat
Professor. Universitat
Autònoma de Barcelona, Spain.

Tomás Durán Becerra

tomas.duran@uab.cat
Professor. Universitat
Autònoma de Barcelona, Spain.

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Use of the websites of parliaments to promote citizen deliberation in the process of public decision-making. Comparative study of ten countries (America and Europe)

Abstract

This study develops a longitudinal research (2010–2015) on 10 countries – 5 European countries (France, United Kingdom, Sweden, Italy and Spain) and 5 American countries (Argentina, Ecuador, Chile, Colombia and the USA). The aim is to compare how the parliaments use its official websites in order to promote the political participation process in the citizenship. The study focuses on the deliberation axe (Macintosh, 2004, Hagen, 2000, Vedel, 2003, 2007) and in the way that representative institutions define a digital strategy to create an online public sphere. Starting with the recognition of Web 2.0 as a debate sphere and as a place of reconfiguration of the traditional –and utopian– Greek Agora, the study adopts the ‘deliberate’ political action axe to evaluate, qualitatively and quantitatively –using a content analysis methodology– the use of the Web 2.0 tools made by the legislative bodies of the analysed countries. The article shows how, which and what parliaments use Web 2.0 tools – integrated in their web page – as a scenario that allows deliberation at the different legislative processes that integrate the examined political systems. Finally, the comparative results show the main differences and similarities between the countries, as well as a tendency to reduce deliberation tools offering by representative institutions in the countries sampled.

Keywords

Parliaments, Internet, Citizen participation, Public sphere, Deliberation, Deliberative democracy.

1. Introduction: Deliberation as the centre of the democratic process

Internet-mediated political participation has been identified under three fundamental categories: informing, deliberating and deciding (Hagen, 2000; Vedel, 2007; Aichholzer & Kuzeluh, 2008; UN, 2014). Hagen (2000) explicates the category of informing as a basic level of

participation, limited to the search and retrieval of information by citizens. At a higher level, the category of deliberation is shaped by a more advanced process that encourages discussion among citizens, as well as with rulers (Öberg, 2016). The category of deciding, as a product of the second category, is described as the space of crystallization or the final impact of expression and citizen participation (UN, 2014). Vedel (2003, 2007) agrees with Hagen in the preponderance of the deliberating category. He understands deliberation as the establishment of a public space that is transparent and accessible to the processes of exchange of opinions between citizens. However, the impact on decision-making is not guaranteed by the opening of channels of deliberation per se (Bächtiger et al, 2014), hence arises the importance of the other components (informing and deciding) to be understood as instrumental and the importance to encourage greater participation in the scenario marked by deliberation.

The situation on the Internet is divided between an initial enthusiasm for embodying the Habermas public sphere based on rational discourse (Cammaerts & Van Audenhove, 2005), and subsequent studies that have recognized—in the new media—a fragmentation of both the public sphere (Zizek, 2010), and of the discursive rationality guided by banalization (Giraldo-Luque, 2015: 19).

Deliberation, a structural concept of government theories (Öberg, 2016: 189), has been assumed as the involvement of different actors in the realization of a common goal through collective action (Hendriks, 2009), or as a factor which promotes the highly-qualified participation of citizens (Chambers, 2004).

Habermas (2008: 11) states that within the deliberative paradigm we must propose spaces that provide formation, understanding and creation of public opinion, guaranteeing transparency and publicity in the delivery of information. This in turn, allows cultivating a habit of informed discussion among citizens. This proposal is endorsed by Thompson (2008: 502), for whom a legitimized political order requires publicly articulated, explained and justified decisions. The assumption described implies the ability to promote skills of understanding and critical comparison of diverse information and opinions among the public with the aim of achieving rationally motivated decision-making processes (Dryzek, 2009).

Öberg (2016: 180), complements the preponderance of deliberation above the other levels of analysis by stating that the deliberative axis cannot be understood only as a decision-making mechanism. The process contains elements of collective learning (Hajer & Wagenaar, 2003), consensus building (Cohen, 1989; Niemeyer, 2014), empowering citizens (Dahl, 1992) or refining citizen opinion building, (Fishkin, 2009).

Deliberation, according to Tufte (2015: 234), can be understood as the main motivation of the reasoned action that leads to citizen participation materialized in the election (voting) (Chambers, 2004), a conception linked to the proposal of Habermas (2008) when he extols rational discourse as an inseparable element of communicative action. Thus, the deliberative process can be fostered by adequate technical development that offers new spaces for debate and agency (Öberg, 2016: 181). The parliamentary scenario finds support in these participatory mechanisms—supported by the ICTs—that can endorse the representation and that allows the citizen approach. Consultation mechanisms can ensure greater, better and more transparent representation (Schudson, 2003; Parkinson & Mansbridge, 2012).

The figure of parliament is thus placed at the centre of the political system as a framework for dialogue between political institutions and citizens (Bernardes & Bandeira, 2016), and parliamentary websites can be seen as a potential tool for making the process of public decision-making more visible and transparent (Coleman, 2004; Setälä & Grönlund, 2006; Leston-Bandeira, 2012). Setälä (2011) assumes the figure of parliament as the

incarnation of representative democracy in which the vote needs to be complemented by public discussions between autonomous, equal and rational citizens.

The study presented here addresses the deliberative axis of Internet participation (Macintosh, 2004; Hagen, 2000; Vedel, 2003 and 2007) and the way in which representative institutions define a digital strategy to build a public sphere on-line. The main objective of the study is to identify the importance given by parliaments to the definition of spaces of deliberation from some of the tools that exist on the Internet for this purpose. The study, which includes two periods of analysis (2010 and 2015), describes the institutionalization of some digital communication processes and identifies trends in the use of tools within parliamentary websites.

The analysis on the deliberative axis allows to reflect on the theoretical hypothesis in which some authors propose the revitalization of the participation (Lévy, 2002), the construction of a new public sphere (Roberts, 2014; Castells, 2009) or the political reconnection of citizens (Briggs, 2017), linked in this case to the offer of participation in parliaments.

2. Conceptual framework: two models of deliberation

As an alternative to discourses describing the Internet as a tool that can enhance direct democracy and thus eliminate the parliamentary deliberative process (Katz, 1997; Lévy, 2002), projects of liberal democracy and deliberative democracy can be revitalized through the use of ICT. The models consider the main criticisms of direct participation in public decision-making (Macpherson, 1997; Zizek, 2010) and allow new relations between citizens and their representatives.

2.1. A liberal model of representation

The construction of the liberal theoretical model proposes that ICTs can strengthen representative institutions as the centre of the participatory scenario. The impulse of the new citizens (Schudson, 2003) criticizes the exemplary citizen model or "informed" (Katz, 1997) based on the reception of information by the traditional instances of the political world. Schudson (2003: 53-59) defines information as necessary for participation, but warns that information alone has never been the ultimate goal of democracy.

The liberal model in which plurality is promoted from Internet tools is subscribed by Jenkins and Thorburn (2003: 2) in pointing out the diversification of channels introduced by the Web in political practices. The consolidation of local action, as a principle of the liberal model, involves structuring communities of interest (thematic or territorial) (Setälä, 2017). The role of ICTs is to secure the spaces of exchange between communities and existing instances of representation (Coleman, 2004; Öberg, 2016) under the protection of laws and other specific regulations such as constitutions, agreements or treaties.

The transition of understanding the Internet as an enabler of direct and individual participation to the conception of ICTs as support elements for communication with representative institutions points out the emergence of the social subject. The community (physical, virtual or hybrid) finds on the Internet a basic element of its daily behaviour and action (Touraine, 2005). The communities, organized under a created identity, establish the prototype of participation from a deliberative process, both autonomous and with institutions (Giraldo-Luque, 2015).

The individual gains importance with collective and identitarian action, which develops within established representational frameworks, but can be broadly empowered by Internet social media (Castells, 2009; Tufte, 2015).

2.2. The step towards the deliberative model

The development of Habermas allows civil society to enter the political-administrative system through a politicized and belligerent public sphere (Mejía, 1997: 12). The constitutional guarantee ensures the flow of social communicational power, generated communicatively and legitimized by the mutual or intersubjective justification of a political decision (Cohen, 1989).

The public sphere is the place of deliberations in matters relevant to civil needs and where public consensus takes shape (Öberg, 2016: 181). The promise of the new public sphere thus depends on the destruction of barriers to participation, on overcoming technical problems and developing a plan of action that surpasses the technical, economic and cultural delays of the digital gap (Jenkins & Thorburn, 2003). This is an idea reinforced by previous studies by Steiner et al. (2004: 135), in which institutional design has been shown to influence the promotion and quality of deliberation within a parliamentary space. It was also emphasized by Kreide (2016), who recognizes new technologies as important opportunities to overcome space barriers and as providing clear potential for the construction of a communicative power.

Deliberative action is developed through communication mediated by the public sphere. The success of a deliberative policy lies in both active citizens and the "institutionalization of procedures and conditions of public communication, as well as in the interrelationship of institutionalized deliberation with the informal processes in which the opinion is created and consolidated" (Habermas, 1996: 300). For Richards and Gastil (2015: 12-13), Habermas's proposal can be condensed into the "symbolic-cognitive procedure" model that gives a positive balance of legitimacy to dialogue.

The deliberative paradigm is the empirical reference of the democratic process insofar as it generates legitimacy through activities of formation of the will, public opinion and respect for the moral agency of the participants (Thompson, 2008: 498). The deliberative process under parliamentary dynamics is framed under a legitimacy that emerges from a normative and codified situation (Gastil & Black, 2008: 16), and which uses the procedure as a guarantee of participation (Mejía & Tobar, 2003: 52).

However, Western societies reveal an increase in the volume of political communication through a public sphere dominated by mediated and unidirectional communication contrary to deliberation (Habermas, 2008: 12). This is an argument also pointed out by Žižek in his constant criticism of cyberspace as a centre of social dispersion (2010). Although studies such as Lundin and Öberg (2014) and Naurin (2009) have shown evidence on the establishment of deliberative processes at local and international level, respectively, criticism about their real impact is also shared by Niemeyer (2014) when he announces weak results on the power of Internet-based communication to promote deliberation and to impact the formal decision-making process.

Given the scenario of dispersion in the scholars viewpoints, Madianou (2013) proposes a "tripartite model of civic engagement" in which ICTs can guarantee a deliberative process and avoid the fragmentation of the audience. The power of the deliberative public sphere lies in two fundamental points: 1) autonomy that reflects other values and allows the inclusion and the agency of communities in front of their representatives (Chadwick, 2006: 89), 2) understanding the discourse as a significant form of participation (Madianou, 2013) and of promotion of dialogic action based on collective reflection on the action itself (Tufte, 2015).

The technological impact forces the renegotiation of the rules in social institutions. The idea of renegotiation of the construction of the public sphere is assumed by Volkmer (2014) who proposes a comprehensive analysis of the discursive deliberation that values individual subjectivity rather than rationality; the use of agnostic forms of deliberation; social self-

construction; the articulation and transcendence of difference, and the replacement of dialogue by consensus. Other proposals for renegotiation can be found in Norman (2017: 300) who, together with Volkmer, describes a scenario supported by transnational support networks that can ensure the political effectiveness of the public sphere, and the concept of "mini-public" introduced by Setälä (2017), which introduces the deliberative functionality of small autonomous communities within the parliamentary decision-making system.

3. Methodology of analysis

The evaluation of the deliberative use of the websites of the parliaments to promote higher levels of political participation is designed as a content analysis, a methodological technique that allows inferences to be formulated and a quantitative analysis based on the systematic and objective identification of the characteristics of a text (Holsti, 1969). We also use the model provided by Bardin (1986) who understands the method as a set of analysis techniques aimed at obtaining indicators that describe the content of the messages and the conditions of production or reception of them.

The construction of indicators is the most necessary step of an exploratory model for a proposal of descriptive results that allow direct comparison, development analysis or supply exploration, both in time and in front of different units of analysis (Cazau, 2006: 26). The research thus retakes the reflections of Vidal (2001 in OCTS-OEI, 2016: 9) regarding the importance of understanding the construction of indicators as alternative and complementary units to statistical data. The models have been validated and their utility demonstrated as mechanisms for the analysis of coded information or any other type of numerical data, including aggregate statistical values. According to Sizer et al., (1992) this type of observations allows defining the synthesis of the institutional information and it further makes it possible to judge its quality.

Content analysis to explore parliaments' websites has been used in previous studies in different political systems and in general with small samples of 2 to 10 objects of analysis that allow deeper observations for each (Oni et al, 2016). The studies of Bernardes and Bandeira (2016) design the coding based on the elements present or absent in the analysed websites.

The unit of analysis defined in parliaments has been used in comparative studies on the use of the Internet in representative chambers (Norris, 2001), or on the quality index of parliamentary discourse (Steiner et al, 2004). Setälä and Grönlund (2006) also present their results based on the definition of specific categories of analysis such as information, legislative activity and interaction. Similarly, the work of Welp (2011) and Perna and Braga (2011) describe the adoption of ICTs for the promotion of parliamentary democracy in Latin America, besides the work of Sobaci (2011), which includes European case studies as well as cases from other developing countries.

In Africa, Oni et al (2016) analyse tools of interaction between parliament and citizens in different countries of the continent. Coleman (2004) analyses the effectiveness of online consultations conducted by the British Parliament through its website with the aim of improving the connection between representatives and the represented. In addition, the World e-Parliament Report (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2016) includes a section on online parliament, dedicated mainly to information, and another on communication between the institution and citizens in which deliberative tools are analysed: such as forums, surveys or social networks.

The sample of analysis consists of 10 countries (5 European and 5 American) and their respective chambers of parliamentary representation. The analysis has been applied specifically to the official websites of each of the institutions of the sample (see table 1) taken as a whole —the analysis does not study pages inside or outside of political parties or

associations. In case of a bicameral parliament, the study was applied to each of the chambers that form the legislative branch analysed. The data collection took place during the years from 2010 and 2015, which allows to study the evolution of Internet use over a period of five years.

Table 1. Research sample. Analyzed websites by country in 2010 and 2015

Country	Parliament chamber	Websites
Argentina	Senado de la Nación	www.senado.gov.ar
	Cámara de Diputados de la Nación	www.diputados.gov.ar
Chile	Senado de Chile	www.senado.cl
	Honorable Cámara de los Diputados	www.camara.cl
Colombia	Senado de la República de Colombia	www.senado.gov.co
	Cámara de Representantes	www.camara.gov.co
Ecuador	Asamblea Nacional de Ecuador	www.asambleanacional.gob.ec
France	Sénat	www.senat.fr
	Assemblée Nationale	www.assemblee-nationale.fr
Sweden	Riksdag	www.riksdagen.se
Spain	Senado	www.senado.es
	Congreso	www.congreso.es
Italy	Senato della Repubblica	www.senato.it
	Camera dei Deputati	www.camera.it
United Kingdom	House of Lords	www.parliament.uk/business/lords
	House of Commons	www.parliament.uk/business/commons
United States	U.S. Senate	www.senate.gov
	House of representative	www.house.gov
<i>Own elaboration</i>		

The research sample is justified based on the previous work of Welp (2011) and Perna & Braga (2011) focusing on the case of Latin America, and the comparative intention resumes the work of Steiner et al (2004) with the European parliamentary models. The size of the sample follows the trend of studies with similar characteristics (Oni et al, 2016; Coleman, 2004; Setälä & Grönlund, 2006), in which we intend to delve deeper into the cases analysed. Although the study by Steiner et al. (2004) raises limitations in the comparisons made in different political systems, the studies by Setälä and Grönlund (2006), Welp (2011), Oni et al (2016) and Bernardes and Bandeira (2016) demonstrate very similar dynamics among the analysed websites.

3.1. A framework of categories

Based on Hagen's (2000) proposal, Vedel (2003) rethinks the three categories scheme in the use of the Internet to promote participation. The UN (2014) in its biannual survey on e-government continues along the same lines and develops a proposal based on the same three categories: inform, deliberate and decide. The analytical set is summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Categories of Internet use with the aim of promoting citizen participation

Author	Categories		
	Inform	Deliberate	Decide
Hagen	The most basic level of participation.	Informed citizen discussion in everyday spaces.	The greatest level of participation. Constant activity in political organizations.
Vedel	Transit and infinite access to information, used by various agents to improve their communications.	Setting up an online public space. It allows the expression and exchange of opinions.	Impact of active participation in decision-making.
ONU	Offer of public information through websites as a basis for citizen participation.	Interactive methods used to request public opinion, meet demands and contributions and ensure a feedback process.	Scope of the government's commitment to electronic participation, which is taken into account in decision-making processes.
<i>Own elaboration from: Hagen (2000), Vedel (2003 y 2007) and ONU (2014)</i>			

3.2. Subcategories of analysis

Under the deliberate category defined within the three axes of participation, the study develops two subcategories of analysis. On the one hand, the subcategory of discussion, shaped by the axes of political action or the areas in which citizen actions occur when they intervene in public affairs and are executed by the political agents themselves (Vedel, 2003). On the other hand, the engage subcategory, based on the levels of quality of the participation or the degrees of political involvement citizens reach within the process of formal institutional participation (Giraldo-Luque, 2012). The levels inquire the qualitative degree to which citizen participation can reach (Macintosh, 2004: 2), within the three criteria: to allow, to engage and to empower (Aichholzer & Kuzeluh, 2008).

The study defines a model of analysis on the deliberate category in which two subcategories are concretized, one corresponding to the axes of political action (discuss), and another one related to participation levels (engage) (table 3).

Table 3. Proposed categories and subcategories of analysis

Category	Subcategory	Conceptualization
Deliberate	Discuss	Configuration of an online public space in which, under conditions of accessibility and transparency, the expression and exchange of citizen opinions is allowed.
	Engage	Construction of a civic obligation towards the forms of public action and decision, via Internet. The institution guarantees tools of citizen involvement in organized consultation processes.
<i>Own elaboration from: Vedel (2003), Macintosh (2004), Aichholzery y Kozeluh (2008) y Giraldo (2012)</i>		

3.3. Analysis Model

3.3.1. Category system

Content analysis is based on Giraldo-Luque's (2012) proposal of categories, context units and units of analysis. It is a basic system of categories formed by subcategories and units of context (see table 4). In each of the context units a series of specific units of analysis are studied which are the basic forms of object evaluation (parliament website).

Table 4. Category System

Category	Subcategories		Context units (Analysis indicators)
Deliberate	Basic Axes of Political Action	Discuss	Discussion forums and chat rooms
			Blog Services
			Opportunity to send messages to the institution
			Conducting opinion surveys
	Levels of Participation	Engage	Sending requests via email
			Collective Construction Services
			Presence in open social networks (deliberation)
			Measurement of interactivity
			Formal process of electronic consultation
<i>Own elaboration from: Hagen (2000), Vedel (2003 y 2007) y ONU (2014).</i>			

3.3.2. Data measurement system

The quantitative framework of the data collected in the study is structured by combining each of the units of analysis with the use of the Internet by the parliaments studied. The analysis follows the weighted presence classification (Bardin, 1986: 77) through which the presence or absence of the elements of the context units is measured. For each unit of analysis, the score oscillates according to the importance of the unit of analysis within the context unit (see methodological annex). Each context unit has a maximum value resulting from the sum of the maximum values corresponding to each unit of analysis. The weights obtained derive from the bibliographic review carried out. The proposed measurement system responds to quantized observation units. The weight distribution, in any case, does not affect the final values, it only orders them, while the differences of score are given by the existence (observance or not) of certain elements and is based on an equal number of observations for each country (it responds to an aggregation function). As indicators of institutional evaluation, the weighting is based on a criterion of comparability. In this study, a scale of 100 points is used, which allows better visualization and the ordering of observations (OCTS-OEI, 2016: 14-15).

In the homologation and comparison of the results between the constructed context units (over the 100 points mentioned), the value obtained in the unit of analysis and the

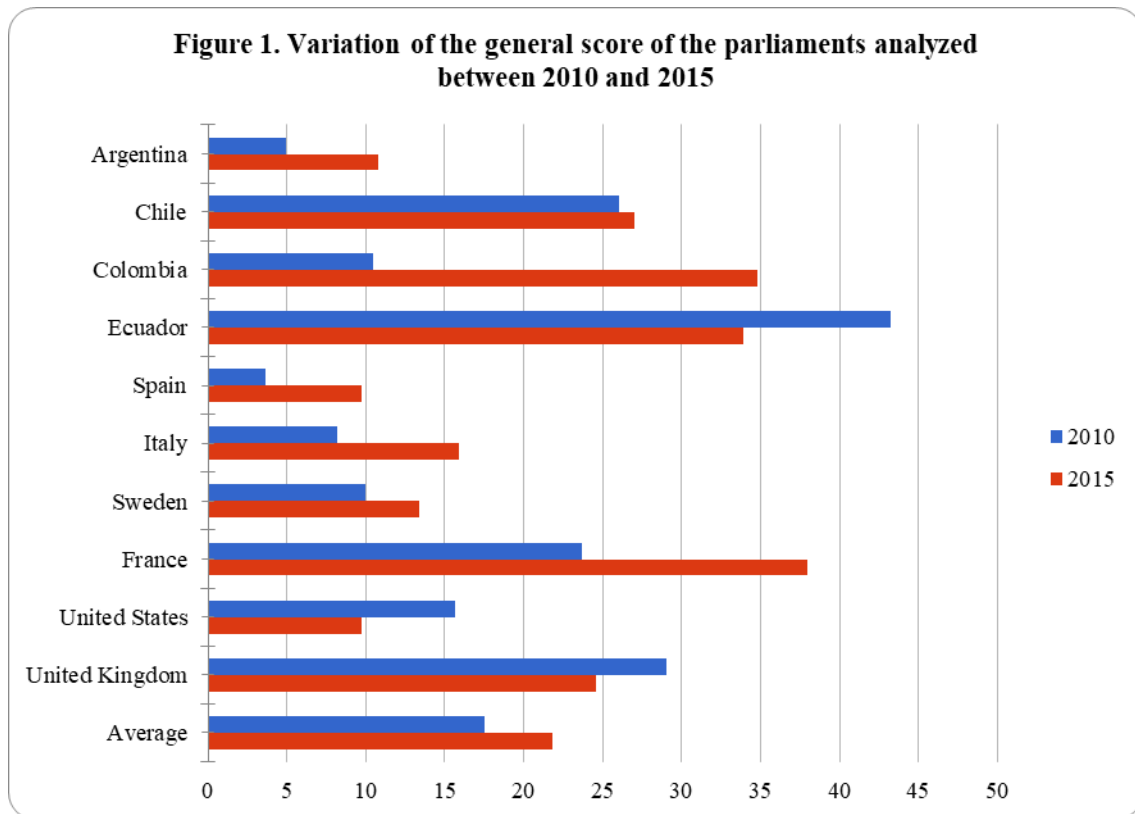
maximum possible value in the corresponding indicator is compared. The context units make up the subcategories (Table 4). Thus, the values of the subcategories are calculated from the simple average resulting from the homologated values obtained by each of the context units of the same subcategory.

The analysis of the parliaments' website was carried out during October and December, in 2010 and 2015. The proposal of the five-year study in the collection of information demonstrates an intention of a longitudinal analysis with the aim of identifying trend changes and use of tools for each object and year of the research sample (Arnau, 1995). Between 2010 and 2015, the massive increase in the use of social media (Pew Research Center, 2014) and the increasing demand for open channels of transparency (Porlezza, 2016), open government and participation (UN, 2014), point out a period of test in the public institutions thanks to the evolution of the dialogical tools of Internet. It is, therefore, a period of movement and consolidation in the use of technology as a platform of connection between citizens and public institutions (Costa & Giraldo, 2013).

In each website, the use by the parliament to respond to the units of content raised in each subcategory was studied. The study focused on the presence of specific services, as well as on the institutional response to the demands made. The observations were systematized in coding sheets by chamber and country (Hernández Sampieri et al., 2008: 367) prepared in synchronized and pre-designed spreadsheets based on the weighting established in the units of analysis.

4. Results

Overall, the results show significant variations between the assessments conducted in 2010 and 2015. The first point to note is that seven of the ten countries improved their overall levels in the category. The exceptions of Ecuador, the United States and the United Kingdom do not prevent the overall average for the deliberate category from rising by 4.3 percentage points, from 17.5 to 21.8 points (see figure 1). France and Colombia lead the positive movements, while the United States and, above all, Ecuador—which loses its leadership—are the main declines. It is important to note that, despite the general increase, none of the countries reaches even 40% of the maximum points in the category. This is a situation that keeps deliberation neglected in the communicative and interactive strategies of parliaments, as displayed in 2010. In fact, the average of the sample (21.8 points) barely exceeds one-fifth of the maximum possible score in the category.



Source: Own elaboration

As shown in Figure 1, Spain, Italy, Argentina and Colombia managed to multiply their results for 2010 by two or more. Table 5 shows the growth trend of the countries indicated, as well as the main losses, based on the multiplier analysis for the countries of the sample.

Table 5. Values and progression in the deliberate category (2010 - 2015)

Country	DELIBERATE			
	2010	2015	Variation in percentage points	2015/2010 (multiplier)
Argentina	4,9	10,8	5,9	2,20
Chile	26,1	27,0	0,9	1,04
Colombia	10,5	34,8	24,4	3,33
Ecuador	43,3	33,9	-9,3	0,78
Spain	3,7	9,8	6,1	2,66
Italy	8,2	15,9	7,7	1,94
Sweden	10,0	13,4	3,4	1,34
France	23,7	38,0	14,3	1,61
United States	15,7	9,8	-5,9	0,62
United Kingdom	29,1	24,6	-4,5	0,85
Average	17,5	20,7	3,2	1,59

Source: own elaboration.

Regarding the subcategories (discuss and engage), the results compared denote a significant distance. While the first, discuss, reduces its overall average by 0.5 percentage points, the second, engage, increases its average by 10 points (see table 6). The general values also calls attention to trends in the behaviour of countries. While in the subcategory

discuss most countries decrease their results —the United Kingdom being the most critical case based on its own score in 2010 and Ecuador the most representative case according to its fall in percentage points — in the subcategory engage the behaviour is absolutely the opposite: eight of the ten countries of the sample —with the result of Colombia in the leading position— increase their results and achieve an average growth of 1.75 times their initial score in 2010.

Table 6. Values and progression in discuss and engage subcategories (2010 - 2015)

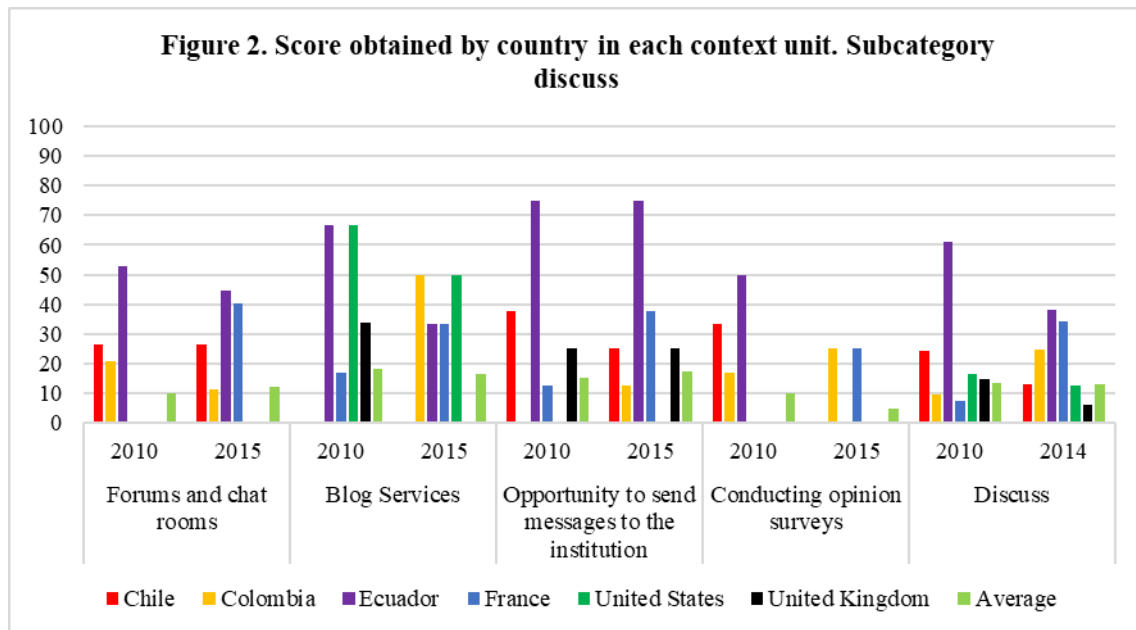
	Subcategory Discuss				Subcategory Engage			
	Score		Variation in percentage points	2015/2010: multiplier	Score		Variation in percentage points	2015/2010: multiplier
	2010	2015			2010	2015		
Argentina	0	0	0	-	9,8	21,6	11,8	2,20
Chile	24,3	12,9	-11,5	0,53	27,8	41,2	13,4	1,48
Colombia	9,4	24,7	15,3	2,63	11,5	45,0	33,5	3,90
Ecuador	61,1	38,2	-23,0	0,62	25,4	29,7	4,3	1,17
Spain	0,0	0,0	0,0	-	7,3	19,5	12,2	2,66
Italy	0,0	0,0	0,0	-	16,4	31,8	15,4	1,94
Sweden	0,0	0,0	0,0	-	19,9	26,8	6,8	1,34
France	7,3	34,0	26,7	4,66	30,7	42,0	11,3	1,37
United States	16,7	12,5	-4,2	0,75	14,7	7,0	-7,7	0,48
United Kingdom	14,7	6,3	-8,4	0,43	43,4	42,9	-0,6	0,99
Average	13,3	12,8	-0,5	0,96	20,7	30,7	10,0	1,75

In both subcategories, however, there are two cases opposite to the trend. For the subcategory discuss, Colombia and France represent the exceptions to the trend of decrease or to maintenance in values equal to zero in all indicators of the subcategory. The Colombian and French cases are striking because their growth is very high and significant. Colombia rose 2.63 times its value in 2010, a progression of 15.3 percentage points, and France increases to 4.66 times its 2010 results, a rise of 26.7 points.

Similarly, in the subcategory engage the results of the United States and the United Kingdom contradict with the growth trend of the rest of the eight countries in the sample. While the average improvement in these eight countries doubles its 2010 score, the United Kingdom loses 0.6 percentage points and the United States reduces its percentage to half of what it achieved in 2010. Although the United Kingdom's reduction is almost imperceptible from the point of view of the multiplier (0.99), it breaks the growth trend of the sample. The case of the United States, on the other hand, represents a considerable reduction in the tendency to reinforce the tools to consolidate relations between the representative institution and the citizens.

In the context units of each subcategory, the differentiated behaviour in each indicator must be highlighted, as shown in Figure 2¹. Within the context units of the subcategory discuss, it is observed that while the context units "Forums and chat rooms" and "Opportunity to send messages to the institution" slightly increase their score (2.35 points, in average), the other two indicators —"Blog services" and "Conducting opinion surveys"— reduce their results (3.4 points, on average) between 2010 and 2015.

¹ Figure 2 excludes the graphical representation of the results of Argentina, Spain, Italy and Sweden as they do not obtain any score in the four context units that form the subcategory discuss.



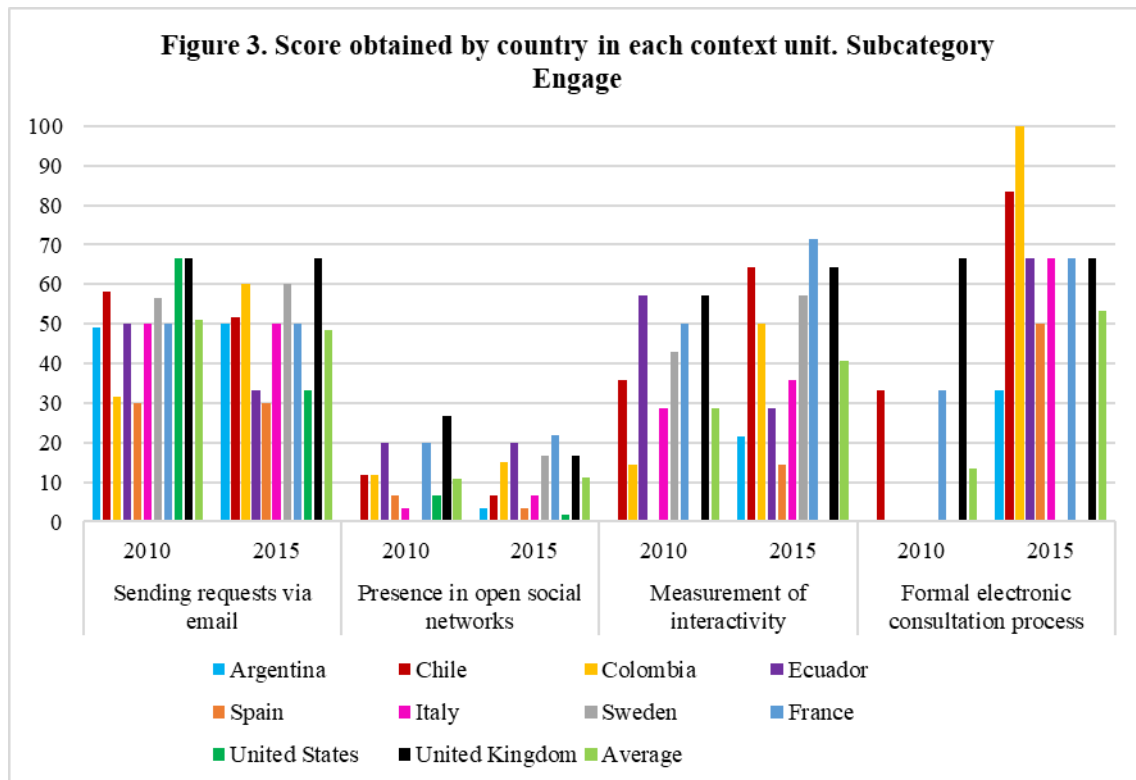
Source: own elaboration

In the increase of the context units the behaviour of France stands out, which is undoubtedly the country that creates the most positive difference between the units of context that improve their score between 2010 and 2015 by increasing the options of discussion within the offer of tools on their parliamentary websites. With the results of Colombia in the third indicator of the subcategory —"Opportunity to send messages to the institution" —, the results of France in the whole subcategory are those that avoid a bigger fall of the general average. By contrast, Figure 2 indicates that most countries reduce their results in the four context units of the subcategory discuss.

Among the indicators that show a regression in its measurement the fall in the indicator "Blog Services" (1.7 points) stands out, but this also especially applies on the indicator "Conducting opinion surveys" (5 points), which means the complete closure of blogs in the United Kingdom and partial in the United States and Ecuador. The results also show the cancellation of opinion polls in Chile and Ecuador. The two contextual units begin to show themselves as backward or outdated elements compared to other tools that, like the formal processes of electronic consultation, begin to institutionalize the different actions, is almost always informative, that citizens can do through the Internet. They are actions, however, that are closer to the figure of administration or e-government —under the figure of the service-client— than to democracy or electronic participation —under the conception of law-citizen—.

In the case of the context units of the engage subcategory, represented in figure 3², the behaviour follows the general trend of the subcategory. Most of the indicators increase their score, except for two context units: "Sending requests via email", which is reduced by 2.4 points, and "Collective construction services" that maintains its null 2010 score. The decline is concentrated in the fall of the Ecuador and the United States, which reduces the average of the study despite the increase in the score of countries like Colombia and, to a lesser extent, Sweden.

² Figure 3 excludes the graphical representation of the results of the ten countries in the context unit "Collective construction services" since no country reaches positive values for the indicator in any of the years of the study.



Source: Own elaboration

The indicator "Presence in open social networks" is the one that has a more dynamic behaviour. While some countries (Sweden and Argentina) start from zero points in 2010 and they score in 2015, other countries significantly reduce their points. United States loses almost all its valuation; Spain falls to half of its 2010 percentage points, and Chile and the United Kingdom also lose about half of the estimation made in the first year of evaluation. There are also significant increases, such as the case of Italy that doubles its score and becomes the fastest growing country and, finally, countries that maintain their initial score (Ecuador) or those with little variations in their scores between 2010 and 2015 (Colombia and France). Despite the general decrease in the average (-0.5 points), there are no general trends in the behaviour of the sample, and the reduction in the score is almost imperceptible despite the wide movement of the countries.

Apart from the United States (which does not score in 2010 or 2015) and Ecuador (which reduces its results by almost a half), the context unit "Measurement of interactivity" presents a generalized increase in all countries that translates into an increase in the average by 12.1 percentage points. The average increase is 1.5 times the value of 2010, a development in the results led by Colombia that triples its initial results, by Chile that is close to double them and by the inclusion of Argentina and Spain in the table of positive scores. The other countries, Italy, Sweden, France and the United Kingdom, also increased their score compared to 2010, although in their case, given their significant values in 2010, their progress is not so noticeable.

Undoubtedly, the most striking indicator of the subcategory engage is "Formal electronic consultation process," a context unit in which the institution offers a regulated and structured mechanism, under which citizens can comment on policies, laws, projects and other products issued by the parliament. The total sample of the study goes from 13.3 points in 2010 to 53.3 in 2015, a fourfold increase from the initial value. Most countries, with the exception of the United States and Sweden that remain without points in the context unit, get results at or above 50 percentage points.

Most significantly, of the seven countries that were zero rated in 2010, five obtained positive estimations in 2015: Argentina, Colombia, Ecuador, Spain and Italy. Likewise, France and Chile doubled their results. The only country that does not grow, but maintains a high score, is the United Kingdom that, for 2015, holds the third position with France, Italy and Ecuador, surpassed only by Colombia and Chile.

The formal process of electronic consultation is the leading indicator that carries the subcategory to gain a wide advantage over the other subcategory discuss. The quadrupling of its results in 2010 and the inclusion —by half of the sample— of the tool within its procedures, shows a formalized intention to link the opinion of the citizens to the decision-making process. Within the framework of the implication, both the institution and the citizen establish a framework of dialogue that exceeds the information levels in the relationship and propose an approach so that public opinion is formally included in the public decision-making process.

5. Discussion

The results reveal two main ideas to consider. On the one hand, there is a formalization of the processes of digital communication by the representative institutions with the citizens that, at a first glance, can be understood as a symptom that these institutions have taken into account the importance of the net. On the other hand, however, there is a setback in the actions and practices related to the generation of discussion and collective exchange by the institutions: closure of blogs, surveys, forums, and other collective construction services. The results invite us to think about the voices that suggest that the Internet and the digital media would revitalize the processes of deliberation and citizen participation in public affairs as well as the relationship between representative institutions and citizens (Jenkins & Thorburn, 2003; Chadwick, 2006).

If we look at the liberal model of representation (Jenkins & Thorburn, 2003), the data shows that digital media is not being used to transfer territorial communities to virtual spaces by representative institutions (Volkomer, 2014). The advantages of the new virtual communities identified by authors such as Schudson (2003) or Castells (2009) are not being used by the parliamentary bodies to generate new lines of political action based on practices that improve the processes of collective deliberation and active participation. On the contrary, the results show a regression in actions linked to the creation of blogs, forums or surveys, which are digital resources that can encourage discussion, exchange of opinions and collective deliberation. The study shows that there is a lack in the creation of new digital mechanisms that renew the relationship between the representative institutions and their citizens. Further, we have not found formulas that allow discourses and debates of different social strata and interested groups (Setälä, 2017) that are carried out with relative independence and autonomy of official institutions (Giraldo-Luque, 2015).

In part, this regression is also related to the dizzying change in digital resources and spaces. Web services like forums or chats have diminished their use and incidence by the users to generate conversations, to relate or to inform themselves. This fact can explain the abandonment or the renounce of these actions by the representative institutions. Social media has become the star service in debate and social conversation (Boyd & Ellison, 2008) and, based on previous studies (Anduiza et al, 2014), it can be said that representative institutions are not being able to respond to the intensity and the penetration of these tools in the citizens use. The representative institutions analysed are not able to absorb this transition and to actively implement the new digital tools.

What has been detected is a formalization and validation of the processes of digital interaction between institutions and citizens that are giving rise to an extension of the already protocolary practices of institutional communication. This is evidenced by the

increase in the score of the implication subcategory, and especially in the indicator "Formal process of electronic consultation". These practices fuel the trend towards e-government (Katz, 2015), which accelerate the services and institutional processes provided to citizens by public institutions, even though they are not deepening in the concept of democracy or electronic participation.

As Habermas (2008) has identified, it can be said that mediated and unidirectional political communication continues to exist despite the opening of new channels and digital tools in the representative institutions. The discussion and public debate within the spaces of the web are being commanded by political leaders, political parties and the executive branch. The representative institutions, which hold the legislative power, are not being active players in the regeneration and reconversion of the exchange between citizens and their representatives as can be deduced from the results. This analysis dilutes the possibility of building a public sphere on the Internet that successfully solves the deliberative model of political action (Habermas, 1996).

In this scenario, Internet promises for the success of deliberative politics are blurred by observing that technological innovations and new connectivities are not being used to promote processes of deliberation that benefit the construction of a public and participatory sphere on the net (Aichnolzer & Kuzeluh, 2008). The deliberate category highlighted by Vedel (2003, 2007) and Hagen (2000) is not being addressed by the representative institutions – paradoxically, the heart of the political deliberation in a democracy—, and the backward movement in the subcategory of discussion and the indicators related to training, understanding and creation of public opinion do not invite to consider that they are going to bet on this trend, at least with this type of tools analysed.

The challenge posed by the arrival of the Internet for the construction of the public sphere is not being assumed by representative political institutions to encourage and catalyse the deliberation and inclusion of public opinion. Virtual media are not disruptive in creating spaces for debate and collective deliberation and, in tune with Habermas (2008), they continue to be channels that debauch the possibility of generating deliberation and are unable to break with the reproduction of content and topics. The digital democracy model of Jenkins & Thorburn (2003) based on the institutional and theoretical design of Habermas is, therefore, far from its materialization if one considers the practices of the institutions that emerge from the results obtained.

6. Conclusion

The final balance of the discussion of the results observed shows a first conclusion about the reluctance of the representative system to use ICTs as tools for reconnecting with citizens and, more specifically, as spaces for discussion and debate as part of the process of deliberation. Faced with the explosion of the use of digital spaces for conversation and public discussion of social and political issues, representative institutions seem to be overwhelmed by the incessant transformation of tools and the use given by citizens. In this scenario, the political leaders, individually or through their political parties, assume and take advantage of new forms of communication and exchange of ideas and opinions with citizens, and they are collecting the formulas offered by the digital tools for deliberation.

The fact that representative institutions are not taking on the new challenges of citizen mobilization in digital spaces has negative consequences for promoting participation in political affairs; and, consequently, in building an active public sphere on the Internet. Assuming the described online participation paradigm, in which deliberation is considered crucial to the effective culmination of participation, it is understood that the representative institutions of the citizens –especially in countries with parliamentary political systems— should not be separated from their important role in each of the phases of the process of

building a democratic debate. Political institutions are responsible for leading and encouraging deliberation through spaces that are used by a large social majority, and they have to be able to harmonize the set of opinions, value them and incorporate them into the public decision-making process.

If, in the place of those institutions, those who assume these functions are the political leaders and political parties, who take advantage of and manage them, we can face the consequences of a bigger distance and disenchantment between citizens and parliamentary institutions, as well as greater political and social polarization between the political system and the citizens' aspirations. In recent years, frequent cases of corruption and the economic crisis, among other factors, have led to a disenchantment and distance of citizens with conventional politics and representative political institutions, which has resulted in an important loss of legitimacy, in support of political leaders in a personalized way, and in the permanent challenge to traditional political groups or parties. In order to recover from the illusion and maintain credibility and citizens' trust, it is necessary to achieve more real and transparent participation in the decision-making process of public and political issues. The Internet offers tools and resources that can be used to promote transparency and citizen reconnection with institutions that safeguard the representative character of democracy. Collecting citizen proposals and concerns and including them in the decision-making processes of representative institutions in a more visible and effective way is not a technically difficult task.

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Methodological Annex

Coding map. Content analysis (coding system: weighted presence) - Category: Deliberate			
Subcategory - Context Unit (CU)	Unit of analysis	Weighing	Maximum value of CU
Discuss - Forums and chat rooms	Presence of open chats (generalists)	1(x5)	36
	Presence of open chats (thematic)	1(x5)	
	Presence of open chats (generalists)	1(x5)	
	Presence of open chats (thematic)	1(x5)	
	The citizen needs to subscribe as a user of the page to participate in the forums / chats offered	1(x5)	
	The historical contents of the forums and chats are published on the website	1(x3)	
	Agents moderating the discussions in the forums and in the chats offered are officials of the technical team of the web page of the parliament	1(x2)	
	The agents who moderate the discussions in the forums and in the chats offered are officials of the communication team of the parliament	1(x3)	
	The agents who moderate the discussions in the forums and in the chats offered are the representatives or their advisors	1(x5)	
The topics proposed in the chats and forums are related to the parliamentary agenda	1(3)		
Discuss - Blog Services	The website has blog services for representatives	1(x1)	3
	The website has blog services for identified and interested citizens	1(x1)	
	The citizen can post comments in the blogs contained in the web of the institution	1(x1)	
Discuss - Opportunity to send messages to the institution	The citizen can send brief messages to be published on the website of the institution	1(x2)	4
	The citizen can make comments on the website of the institution	1(x1)	
	The citizen can make comments on the policies discussed and adopted in the parliament in different spaces to forums and chats	1(x1)	
Discuss - Conducting	The institution uses online surveys to know the opinion of citizens on issues related to the legislative agenda	1(x10)	

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Comparative study of ten countries (America and Europe)

opinion surveys	The results and the number of participants in the survey are visible to all citizens	1(x5)	30
	The citizen needs to register as a user of the page to participate in the survey	1(x5)	
	Citizens' surveys are updated according to changes in the legislative agenda	1(x5)	
	Citizens can comment on survey results	1(x5)	
Engage- Sending requests via email	Citizens can send petitions related to legislative activities via email or using some other mechanism present on the institution's website	1(x10)	30
	The citizen receives a formal response from the institution to the request made	1(x5)	
	Response time of the institution to the citizen once it has formulated its request	1(x5)	
	The questions of the citizens and the answers of the institution are published in the webpage of the parliament	1(x5)	
	Citizens are identified in the publication of petitions	1(x5)	
Engage - Collective Construction Services	The parliament website offers wiki services and / or other collective building tools	1(x1)	1
Engage - Presence in open social networks	The institution has profiles created in social media	1(x5)	30
	The institution makes a deliberative use of the profile created in the social media	1(x10)	
	The institution makes a participative use - decision making - of the profile created in the social media	1(x15)	
Engage - Measurement of reach / interactivity	The website uses tools to measure the reach and interactivity generated with citizens	1(x7)	7
Engage - Formal electronic consultation process	The institution has, within its website, a formal procedure so that the citizen can comment / suggest about the policies, laws, projects and other parliamentary products proposed and / or approved by their representatives	1(x2)	3
	The formal procedure includes the obligation of response by the institution towards the citizen	1(x1)	
<i>Source: Own elaboration.</i>			