

Media Consumption and Its Influence on Electoral Political Engagement: An Analysis From the Communication Mediation Model in the Context of the 2021 Mexican Federal Election

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Election campaigns provide a crucial moment in the relationship between political actors and the citizenry, with the media playing a key role in the transmission of relevant political information to the public—an activity that has a bearing on shifts in political attitudes and behaviors. The communication mediation model explains this media influence process as an indirect effect of media consumption on participation through the development of postconsumption orientations and reasoning on the message. Following the model, this article seeks to analyze whether the same process took place during the 2021 Mexican federal election campaign by conducting a two-wave panel survey, with a representative sample of 1,750 participants in the first wave and 596 in the second wave. The findings made it possible to determine how the model manages to explain the effect of political interest on electoral engagement through attention to campaign news and political conversation, both jointly and separately.

Keywords: electoral political engagement, media consumption, election campaign, communication mediation model, Mexico

There is no doubt that election campaigns represent a crucial moment in the relationship between political actors and the citizenry. During these times, political debate among the different actors that make up the public sphere increases, with a strong presence of the mass media, which provide a scenario for the exchange of messages. During the campaigns, the media continue to play their vital role of transmitting relevant political information to the public; the work they do can have an impact on any shift in the political attitudes and behaviors of citizens. In the literature on political communication, the communication mediation model has been presented to explain the influence of the media on citizen behavior (Lee, 2017).

Specifically, the theoretical model developed by McLeod, Kosicki, and McLeod (1994) and expanded by Shah, Cho, Eveland, and Kwak (2005) and Shah and colleagues (2007) considers that there is an indirect effect of political interest on participation through the mediation of actions such as exposure to media

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content, the development of reasoning about the message, and orientations subsequent to its consumption (Lee, 2017). The model's logical result is an explanation of the political participation or involvement developed by citizens. However, this involvement needs the addition of other elements to make it a real engagement with democracy by the citizenry. Thus, there can be said to be a democratically engaged citizenry at both the civic and political levels (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996) when, in addition to participation, citizens also show an interest in obtaining information on political issues and, ultimately, in developing and maintaining appropriate political knowledge (Delli Carpini, 2004).

Although it may be expected that different actions aimed at citizen participation will be developed in the political context within the framework of an election campaign, electoral participation or voting determines to a large extent the citizen's political engagement in an electoral context. The degree of engagement will also be associated with the level of electoral knowledge, campaign awareness, or electoral political sophistication (Muñiz, Echeverría, Rodríguez-Estrada, & Díaz, 2018; Muñiz, Téllez, & Saldierna, 2017; Schuck, Boomgaarden, & de Vreese, 2013; Van Heerde, Johnson, & Bowler, 2006) developed by citizens, which together with participation, makes up the construct of political engagement just described. Taking this into account, the present article aims to analyze to what extent the 2021 Mexican federal election campaign contributed to the generation of electoral political engagement among the citizens by explaining the process from the perspective of the communication mediation model.

To this end, a two-wave panel survey among Mexico's adult population was used to analyze whether the citizen's prior orientation, represented by the maintaining of political interest at the beginning of the election campaign, contributed to the development of electoral engagement through the mediation of news consumption and interpersonal conversation variables. In doing so, (1) the importance of political engagement for the quality of the democracy is discussed, highlighting the engagement in the electoral context and the impact of media consumption on its development, (2) the contribution of communication mediation model is explained, reviewing the limitations in its application, especially the need to expand the application of the model to cultural contexts different from the one in which it was developed, and (3) the media context during the recent Mexican elections is provided.

Political Engagement and Democratic Development

The role played by citizens in achieving a strengthening of the democratic system is crucial. Through their involvement in the development of actions connected to the political and social system, their work is essential for the country's democratic development. So, it is assumed that the existence of an active, participative civil society will manage, through its involvement in various existing citizen participation mechanisms, not only to set up the institutional framework, but also to strengthen the system and promote control of the political representatives' activities (Buendía & Somuano, 2003). But to attain this citizen involvement, it is essential for citizens to have enough information to develop knowledge of the political system and what is being debated and decided on within it, and thus make decisions (Brussino & Rabbia, 2007; Dalton, 2006; Prior, 2005). This presupposes setting up a scene where, by forming more politically sophisticated citizens, a more stable society is created (Dimitrova & Strömbäck, 2012).

Now, a truly participative citizenry—namely, one that is involved in the different actions provided by the system itself—requires that people become involved in conventional actions such as the associationism or the membership in political parties, or carrying out unconventional actions such as taking part in demonstrations or protests from a critical and reflexive stand. In other words, this kind of involvement necessarily entails the existence of a democratically engaged citizenry, at both the civic and political levels (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996). The citizens' engagement therefore entails not only their participation, but also that they maintain sufficient interest in and knowledge of political issues to be able ultimately to develop strong, engaged political and civic participation on these bases (Delli Carpini, 2004).

Although there are different understandings of political engagement (Díaz & Muñiz, 2017), in general terms, it can be assumed that an engaged citizen has at least an acceptable level of political knowledge and an acceptable degree of political participation (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996). Participation is understood as the extent to which the citizen is involved, by means of different actions or behaviors, in improving the quality of public life for himself or herself and others. In an attempt to synthesize the different proposals, Yung and Leung (2014) consider that political engagement can be developed on three levels: cognitive awareness, which entails being informed about politics; expression, which involves conveying points of view on public issues in more or less closed circles; and action, which requires participation, by means such as voting, militancy in political parties, or involvement in strikes or demonstrations.

Although, in the course of its development, the democratic system requires citizens to become involved in its day-to-day workings, it is very likely to be in the context of elections that this largely democratic engagement is expressed more clearly. Participation in electoral contexts, with the acquisition of information and undertaking of actions such as voting, contributes not only to establishing an electoral democracy (Buendía & Somuano, 2003), but also to supporting the institutional framework, strengthening the system, and promoting control of the political representatives' activities through citizens' legitimation granted by the vote. This vote necessarily remits to electoral participation or voting behavior, which, for authors like Dalton (2000), is one of the cornerstones of a country's democratic development—though it does not, in and of itself, guarantee advances in setting up the system.

Following the same line of thought, and going back to the notion of democratic engagement described earlier, it is recommended that this participation be associated with desirable levels of cognitive engagement or political knowledge on the part of the citizens, which will enable them to exercise their participation fully. In this regard, some authors understand that the campaign awareness maintained by the citizens of the issues debated during electoral contexts is an expression of the existence of electoral political sophistication (Muñiz et al., 2018; Schuck et al., 2013; Van Heerde et al., 2006). Thus, along with an affective engagement—that is, the citizens' campaign interest in everything that happens during the electoral context (Hollander, 2005)—a cognitive awareness or engagement is developed that is linked to their level of knowledge of the specific issues and program proposals debated during the election campaign (Claassen, 2011; Hansen & Pedersen, 2014; Hollander, 2005; Rhee, 1997; Thorson, 2014; Van Heerde et al., 2006). All of this may favor a reflexive, critical participation in the elections by an informed citizenry.

Media Effects on Political Engagement

It has been observed that the good working order and democratic consolidation of political systems result, to a large extent, from having citizens who are well-informed on the subject of politics and political issues (Dimitrova & Strömbäck, 2012)—citizens who are involved in the system through the development of different actions that tend to promote political participation (Delli Carpini, 2004; Yung & Leung, 2014). For this to happen, the role played by the media in their different modalities is transcendental, given that they are key elements for countries' democratic development (Avery, 2009). For good reason, the media are largely considered responsible for building bridges between the political sector and a large part of society, which, without their work, would not be able to learn about or even understand the principal events in the political sphere. In other words, the media favor political learning, which improves citizen engagement.

However, although many factors can determine an increase in this citizen engagement with politics, the information media and the political content they broadcast do have a significant impact on the generation and/or reinforcement of citizens' political attitudes and behaviors (Avery, 2009; de Vreese, 2005, 2012). Although this influence can be manifested in any context, it is to be expected that during election campaigns, it tends to increase (Schuck et al., 2013) because the media cover the issues broadly and constantly, and there is an increased need for orientation among citizens who hope to acquire the resources to make electoral decisions through the vote (Díaz & Muñiz, 2017; Matthes, 2012).

It is precisely in the context of information of this kind that it has been possible to investigate and verify the effect of media consumption on the shaping of citizens' cognitions, attitudes, and behaviors in the electoral field, all of which are essential constituent elements of citizen political engagement. Within the field of political communication, numerous studies aim to explain how this media impact on civic and political engagement is produced. The communication mediation model has been used in an attempt to synthesize the direct and indirect effects generated in this process. The theoretical model was originally proposed in the 1990s by McLeod and colleagues (1994) and has since been widely used by other researchers during the last 30 years (Borah, Barnidge, & Rojas, 2021).

Communication Mediation Model

The communication mediation model (O-S-O-R) hypothesizes how the impact of individual orientations on the audiences' responses in terms of civic and political engagement is due to the mediation role played by both the mass and interpersonal communication variables and how the subsequent orientations occur after the exposure to or consumption of communication stimuli (Gil de Zúñiga, Diehl, Huber, & Liu, 2019; Lee, 2017). After its first formulation, several authors have studied this process, resulting in modifications of the theoretical model. Among them are Shah and colleagues (2005), who incorporate reflection and discussion as subsequent, and not simultaneous, elements to the consumption of media content. Later, the model was updated through Shah and colleagues' (2007) reinterpretation; they proposed the campaign communication mediation model (O-S-R-O-R) by incorporating reasoning as a mediating variable between media consumption and subsequent orientations.

From this theoretical approach, it is assumed which initial orientations of the audience (O_1) determine what media or content is consumed (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2019). These initial orientations are established by a set of cultural, cognitive, motivational, and structural traits that lead people to consume media content (Lee, 2017). Among them, one of the most important features is that of political interest; it motivates the audience to be exposed to the media and to become politically involved. In this sense, Strömbäck and Sehata (2010) note that, although it is not a sufficient condition, political interest is in fact a necessary condition for generating political involvement among citizens. This is also applicable to the electoral field; people more interested in politics are more likely to be knowledgeable, and have a greater likelihood of voting, given that political interest is “the most powerful predictor of political behaviors that make democracy work” (Prior, 2010, p. 747).

The media messages that are consumed by the audience are the stimulus (S), or the information obtained within the election campaign. This information, obtained by exposure to different media contents, will be subjected to a process of Reasoning (R_1), which entails undertaking actions that amount to commenting on the content received from the media by means of establishing expression and discussion with other people (Shah et al., 2005). This reasoning has been seen as a central element in the model because of its role in “the distillation of ideas encountered in the news for all individuals” (Shah et al., 2007, p. 678). As a result, a series of subsequent orientations (O_2) will be generated in the audience, which may entail, among other results, an increase in political knowledge or sophistication in the electoral context. Finally, it is assumed that these variables as a whole, by means of a causal chain process, will determine the way in which and the level at which the citizens will become engaged by participating electorally (R_2).

Limitations to and Challenges for the Model

Since its incorporation into the field of political communication, the model has captured the attention of many researchers and has become a widely used theoretical model (Borah et al., 2021; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2019). Despite this, the empirical application of the model has a few limitations. The main one is perhaps the high prevalence of the model’s application in a limited geographical context; to a large extent, “the testing of communication mediation [model] has previously been limited to the US context” (Lee, 2017, p. 134). In this regard, it is worth mentioning that although more studies are conducted at the U.S. level (e.g., Cho et al., 2009; Choi, Warner, & Jennings, 2018; Jung, Kim, & Gil de Zúñiga, 2011), increasing evidence is being found that goes beyond these borders. Evidence of the model’s application can already be found in Asian countries, including Pakistan (Tariq, Zolkepli, & Ahmad, 2022), South Korea (Park, 2019), or Singapore (Teo, 2022), and Latin American countries, such as Chile (Valenzuela, 2013) or Mexico (Muñiz & Corduneanu, 2014; Muñiz et al., 2017).

A second limitation is determined by the lack of consideration of contextual-level factors, somewhat because the model was originally theorized as a process that only considered individual-level factors (Borah et al., 2021; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2019). However, recent studies have begun to determine the possible “effects of psychological and social structural factors toward various outcome variables” (Lee, 2017, p. 128). Some cross-cultural studies have already begun to analyze the moderating effect of cultural and system-level factors on the model, such as freedom of expression and of the press (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2019), or political freedom and digital infrastructure (Borah et al., 2021). These studies have been able to confirm, first, the high external

validity of the model, due to its applicability in countries with different political and media systems. The findings obtained in 19 countries in the study by Gil de Zúñiga and colleagues (2019), and 17 in the case of Borah and colleagues (2021), make it possible to conclude that there is robust cross-cultural support for the model.

On the other hand, these cross-cultural studies confirm the differentiated impact that contextual-level factors have on the model. In the case of the Gil de Zúñiga and colleagues (2019) study, findings showed a positive and reinforcing effect of freedom of expression on the association between discussion and participation. However, and contrary to what was hypothesized, the impact from the freedom of the press was small; “in less open societies . . ., talking with others about politics makes people more likely to participate in politics, while this is not the case in countries with more open press systems” (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2019, p. 159). In other words, when journalistic activity is suppressed or limited, political conversation may become an essential activity in determining political behavior of citizens. These results are partly confirmed by Borah and colleagues (2021), who found that freedom of expression (including freedom of the press) did not have a moderating effect on voting, but did have a moderating effect on protest—making the impact of political talk more likely to increase this activity.

In addition to these limitations, the conception of the outcome variable of the model constitutes an additional one because in its application, usually “the model does not distinguish between various forms of political participation” (Borah et al., 2021, p. 4). Previous studies have evidenced that news consumption stimulates participation (Cho et al., 2009; Choi et al., 2018; Jung et al., 2011; Park, 2019; Shah et al., 2005) through the mediation of orientations such as political conversation (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2019), for both traditional and online media content (Shah et al., 2007; Teo, 2022). However, the participation is frequently described in terms of political and civic activities, and not as electoral participation. In this sense, there is less evidence to explain the electoral engagement, manifested through the development of electoral political sophistication and, especially, voting. An exception is the recent cross-cultural study, carried out by Borah and colleagues (2021), that found an indirect impact of news consumption on voting for most of the countries analyzed, including Mexico.

The Media and Election Campaigns in Mexico

The different electoral campaigns in Mexico during the present century have had a significant impact on journalistic practice and on the way politics is covered. In this sense, the 2000 electoral campaign marked the beginning of a process of *Americanization* of media coverage of politics, with the development of political marketing by the political actors, and information that tended toward spectacularization and personalization in the media (Lozano, 2001). The 2006 presidential campaign in turn established the beginning of the use of the digital media as a space for the development of political communication (Meneses & Bañuelos, 2009); however, the role of the traditional media continued to prevail, to a large extent marking the outcome of that campaign by means of its treatment of the different candidacies.

It is assumed that the 2012 presidential campaign marked the apogee of the political use of the digital media, especially that of the social networks, which became a new context in the electoral race for the main candidates and political parties. Without abandoning the presence of the traditional media and the development of *ground campaign* strategies, digital campaigns blazed their trail using social networks as

spaces to attack their opponents and to undertake negative or dirty campaigns, in a clear continuity with past uses (Cárdenas, Ballesteros, & Jara, 2017). This scenario continued to apply in the 2018 presidential campaign, which to a large extent was characterized not only by disinformation in the digital environment (Pérez & Barojan, 2019), but also by the intensity of the debate and the exchange of messages on social networks from a likely more participatory society (Guerrero, 2020).

Since the 2018 presidential elections, Mexico has had a new political scenario marked by several aspects. First, López Obrador's assuming power meant a breakaway from traditional political parties as he became the first president of the country to be openly framed in a leftist ideology (Muñiz, 2021). In addition, this transition toward a new political reality has been tainted by a strong level of polarization, promoted to a large extent through the political communication strategy followed by López Obrador. This strategy tends to present reality as a confrontation between two sides: the bad side, represented by previous administrations and the opposition, and the good side, represented by the current administration (Marini, 2019; Muñiz, 2021). Finally, this political alternation of 2018 has not diminished the risk that already existed for media independence in the country (Guerrero, 2020). This reality does not provide grounds for optimism about a substantial change in the current levels of freedom of the press compared with those reported by Freedom House (2017), which classified Mexico as a country without a free press for the year 2017.

Mexico's 2021 federal elections took place in June within this context, after an electoral campaign marked by strong polarization promoted by the different candidacies and political parties as well as by a proliferation of fake news related to the actors and other issues of electoral interest (Agence France-Presse [AFP], 2021). A highlight in this context was the strong confrontation pursued by the president's party, MORENA (Movimiento de Regeneración Nacional), with the country's regulating electoral institution, the National Electoral Institute (Instituto Nacional Electoral, [INE]), particularly its president, Lorenzo Córdova. It is no wonder that it is assumed that within the disinformation processes detected during the elections, "disinformation about the Instituto Nacional Electoral (INE) has stood out," which sought mainly to discredit the elections and present the idea of possible undercover electoral fraud (Mulato, Martínez, & Cabrera, 2021, para. 2).

Theoretical Model and Research Questions Proposed

From the evidence provided in the empirical backgrounds reviewed, a theoretical model is put forward that will be subjected to contrast regarding the indirect effect of political interest on the citizens' electoral political engagement (see Figure 1). This model works from the communication mediation model, but with the variables electoral political sophistication (O_2) and electoral participation or vote (R_2) as constitutive of electoral political engagement and, therefore, dependent variables within the model; attention to news on politics and interpersonal political conversation are taken as mediator variables, establishing this order of presence within the causal chain analyzed. Hence, the study will attempt to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: Is there an indirect effect of political interest on electoral political sophistication through paying attention to the news during the campaign and developing interpersonal political conversation?

RQ2: *Is there an indirect effect of political interest on electoral participation (voting) through paying attention to the news during the campaign and developing interpersonal political conversation?*

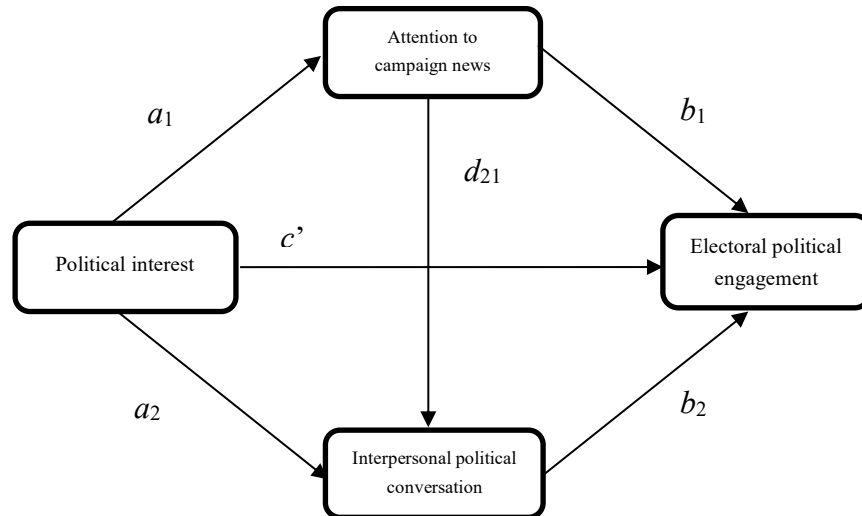


Figure 1. Theoretical model of the media process to be studied.

Method

Design and Sample

To carry out the study, a panel survey with a two-wave design was applied during the election campaign. The survey was fielded using QuestionPro, an online polling firm, among its Mexican pool of respondents, to obtain a representative sample of the national population. The first wave of the survey was conducted on April 10–16, 2021, and consisted of a descriptive survey with a probabilistic sample of the population at the Mexican national level. The interviews were conducted online using a questionnaire designed on the QuestionPro platform, which allows the same responder to answer the survey questions only once to prevent ballot-box stuffing during the data collection process.

The aim in this first wave was to obtain a representative sample of the Mexican population in terms of sex, age, and area of residence. To this end, a multistage probabilistic sampling was conducted using Mexico's Nielsen areas as the sample framework; this allowed for stratification of the country into six geographical areas to obtain a proportional allocation sample. In addition, at the national level, the responders were stratified on the basis of sex, age, and socioeconomic level, using the Socioeconomic Status Index created by the Mexican Association of Market Intelligence and Opinion Agencies (Asociación Mexicana de Agencias de Inteligencia de Mercado y Opinión [AMAI], 2017). A total of 1,750 adult respondents participated in the survey, with a participation rate of 79%. The sample had a margin of error of +/-2.34% and a confidence level of 95%.

The second wave of the panel survey was conducted after the June 6, 2021, elections; the field work began June 8 and was completed June 24. A total of 596 responders in the first wave answered the questionnaire in the second wave, which represented a desertion rate of 66%. All the responders were adults (≥ 18 years), and they were registered as voters in one of the federal entities of the Republic. In effect, the final sample was made up of 266 men (45%) and 330 women (55%), with ages ranging from 18 to 77 years ($M = 44$, $DE = 13$). The responders' socioeconomic status can be broken down as follows: 253 (42%) lower, or D/D+; 212 (36%) middle, or C/C-; and 131 (22%) upper, or ABC+. A total of 86% of the sample had a high school ($n = 178$, 30%) or university level ($n = 334$, 56%) education, and these responders logically placed themselves ideologically in the center ($n = 227$, 38%), with a center-left tendency ($M = 4.02$, $DE = 2.72$).

Measures

Political Interest

The responders were asked about their interest in local or municipal politics; in politics at the state and federal or national levels; and, finally, in international politics. To this end, a 5-point Likert scale was used in the first wave of the study; values ranged from 1 (*not interested at all*) to 5 (*very interested*) for each response, to generate an indicator of general political interest ($M = 3.70$, $ED = 0.91$, $\alpha = .88$).

Attention to Campaign News

The survey evaluated the degree of attention to news stories from different media to obtain information on the elections, using a 5-point Likert scale with values ranging from 1 (*none at all*) to 5 (*very much*). This scale was used to measure the level of news consumption during the election campaign in the second wave of the study, and sources were printed newspapers, radio, TV, and digital newspapers. The internal consistency of the scale was evaluated, and good results were obtained ($M = 3.23$, $ED = 0.95$, $\alpha = .76$), making it possible to generate a single indicator.

Interpersonal Political Conversation

Interpersonal political conversation was evaluated in the second wave of the study with a 5-point Likert scale with values ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*every day*) regarding frequency of conversations with family members, coworkers, classmates, fellow club members, neighbors with whom they had a close relationship, friends, and/or acquaintances and even strangers. To complete this scale, two items from the study by Shah and colleagues (2007) were taken to measure the extent to which the responders spoke with people whose political ideas are similar to or different from theirs ($M = 3.14$, $ED = 0.82$, $\alpha = .88$).

Electoral Political Sophistication

Regarding the level of political sophistication in the election campaign, several proposals made previously by various authors were taken as a reference and adapted to the electoral field, where the recommendation was to put together the measurements of the responders' electoral political interest and

knowledge to generate an indicator of electoral political sophistication (Guo & Moy, 1998; Muñiz et al., 2017; Schuck et al., 2013). First, the responders' election campaign interest in the second wave of the study was measured using a 5-point Likert scale with values ranging from 1 (*not interested at all*) to 5 (*very interested*).

In addition, the level of electoral political knowledge was measured in the second wave of the study by a set of four questions about events that occurred during the campaign, determining whether the responders were right (1) or not (0) in their answers to questions such as, *Which institution made the final decision on withdrawing Félix Salgado Macedonio's candidacy registration during the election campaign?* The scale generated by adding these responses revealed acceptable reliability (KR-20 = .51). With these two variables, the indicator of electoral political sophistication was created, taking the formula that grants double weight to the cognitive component versus the affective one ($M = 1.15$, $ED = 0.31$).

Electoral Participation

This indicator, electoral participation, in turn measured the responders' electoral behavior in the second wave of the study, taking Dalton's (2000) proposal on voting behavior as reference. In this case, the responders were asked in the panel survey, *Can you tell us whether you voted in the last federal representative elections on June 6, 2021?* The score was 1 (yes) or 2 (no). The variable electoral participation (voting) was transformed into a dummy variable, where 0 represented *did not vote* and 1 represented *did vote* ($M = .94$, $ED = .23$).

Control Variables

Finally, a series of sociodemographic variables were controlled because they have been identified as part of the initial orientations in the model (Lee, 2017). Specifically, the responders were asked about their gender (1 = male; 2 = female) and their age in years. Their socioeconomic status was measured also according to the index created by the AMAI (2017). The scale is made up of statuses that range from upper (A/B/ C+) to lower (D+/D), with the socioeconomic statuses linked with the middle class being between statuses (C/C-). The responders' educational level was also evaluated with a scale that ranged from 1 (*without studies*) to 7 (*postgraduate studies*). Finally, political ideology, ranging from 0 (left) to 10 (right), and partisanship (0 = nonparty identification, 1 = party identification) were measured because of the impact of partisan media use on political participation found by Choi and colleagues (2018).

Results

The first step of the analysis consisted of reviewing the existence of relationships between the different variables examined in the study (see Table 1). The analysis made it possible to determine whether or not there were correlations among the variables and to rule out any possible problems of collinearity between some of them, which are expected in cases in which correlations are high ($r > .90$). To this end, partial correlations were studied, which made it possible to control the influence of control variables on the zero-order correlations of the rest of the indicators used in the study. As can be observed in the data obtained, the highest partial correlation was the one existing between attention to campaign news and

interpersonal political conversation, $r_{\text{partial}}(588) = .55, p < .001$, so that problems of collinearity in the data used can be ruled out.

Subsequently, to test the proposed theoretical model with the diverse variables of the study, different mediation analyses were performed using as an independent variable the political interest expressed by the participants during the first wave, corresponding with the beginning of the election campaign at the federal level. The different dimensions of electoral political engagement measured in the second wave were taken as the dependent variable, examining both the use of measuring electoral political sophistication and electoral participation (voting). In addition, attention to the news during the campaign to obtain information on the federal elections as well as interpersonal political conversation were used as mediator variables, and these two were measured during the second wave of the study. Moreover, the different sociodemographic variables, ideology, and partisanship were controlled.

Table 1. Partial Correlations of the Variables Used in the Study.

	Wave	M	ED	α	1	2	3	4	5
Political interest	1	3.70	0.91	.88	–				
Attention to campaign news	2	3.23	0.95	.76	.37***	–			
Interpersonal political conversation	2	3.14	0.82	.88	.38***	.55***	–		
Electoral political sophistication	2	1.15	0.31	–	.52***	.40***	.42***	–	
Electoral participation (voting)	2	.94	.23	–	.11**	.12**	.16***	.24***	–

Note. $N = 596$. The variable electoral participation (voting) was transformed into a dummy variable, where 0 represented *did not vote* and 1 represented *did vote*.

** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

To carry out this mediation analysis, PROCESS macro for SPSS created by Hayes (2013) was used because it allows for calculating the direct effects (from the predictor to the criterion variable, controlling the mediators), the indirect effects (from the predictor to the criterion variable through the mediators), and total effects (the total amount of the previous effects) in the model proposed. Specifically, model 6 was used with a bootstrapping of 10,000 samples because it makes it possible to determine whether the causal chain models proposed show any indirect effect on the dependent variable. In this sense, first, the theoretical model was calculated with electoral political sophistication as the criterion variable (see Figure 2).

The results revealed an indirect effect of interest on sophistication through political conversation, $B = .04, SE = .01, 95\% \text{ CI } [.0175, .0635]$, as well as through attention to campaign news, $B = .06, SE = .02, 95\% \text{ CI } [.0273, .0951]$. On the other hand, it was possible to observe an indirect effect through the causal path examined; thus, political interest had an impact on an increase in sophistication through attention to campaign news and interpersonal conversation, $B = .03, SE = .01, 95\% \text{ CI } [.0160, .0511]$.

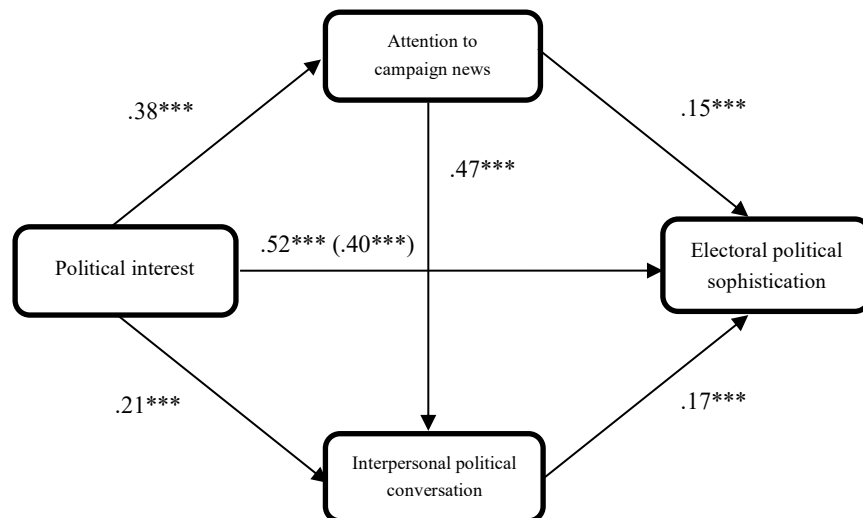


Figure 2. Explanatory model of electoral political sophistication.

Note. $N = 596$. *** $p < .001$.

Contrasting the effects detected made it possible to determine that there were no statistical differences between them; therefore, it can be determined that they became different ways to explain the behavior of the dependent variable. In this sense, it can be concluded that the effect of political interest can be explained through interpersonal political conversation ($\beta = .21, p < .001$), which in turn caused electoral political sophistication to increase ($\beta = .17, p < .001$). It can also be observed that interest caused attention to news to increase ($\beta = .38, p < .001$), and electoral sophistication increased indirectly as well ($\beta = .15, p < .001$). Finally, it was detected that there was an impact through the causal path proposed, where interest caused attention to increase ($\beta = .38, p < .001$), and attention in turn had a positive impact on an increase in conversation ($\beta = .47, p < .001$); all this resulted in an increase of electoral sophistication ($\beta = .17, p < .001$).

Finally, the theoretical model proposed was also analyzed with electoral participation (voting) as a criterion variable (see Figure 3). In this case, the results reveal an indirect effect on voting through political conversation, $B = .12, SE = .07, 95\% \text{ CI } [.0108, .2945]$, but not an indirect effect through attention to campaign news, $B = .08, SE = .08, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.0820, .2506]$. On the other hand, an indirect effect was observed through the causal chain examined, and this way political interest had an impact on an increase of electoral participation through attention to campaign news and interpersonal conversation, $B = .11, SE = .07, 95\% \text{ CI } [.0108, .2945]$.

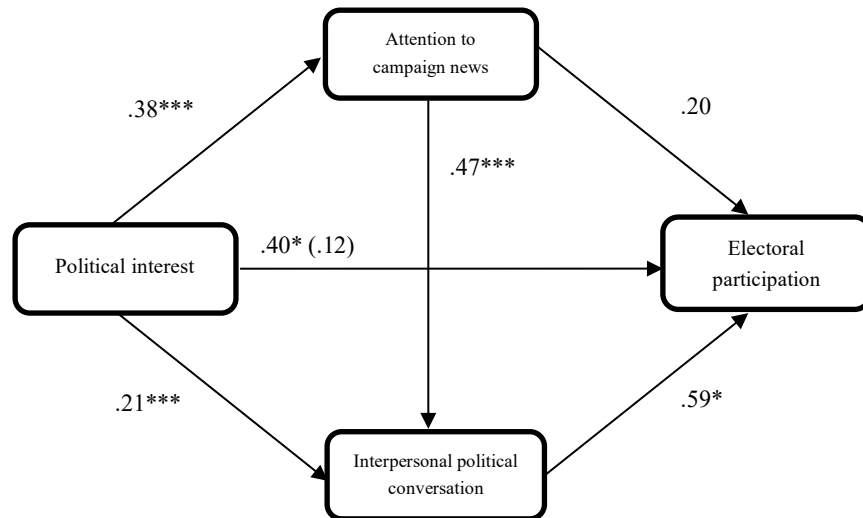


Figure 3. Explanatory model of electoral participation.

Note. $N = 596$. * $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

Contrasting the effects detected allowed determining that there were no statistically significant differences between them; therefore, it can be determined that they became different ways to explain the behavior of the dependent variable. In this sense, it can be concluded that the effect of political interest can be explained through interpersonal political conversation ($\beta = .21$, $p < .001$), which in turn caused electoral participation to increase ($\beta = .59$, $p = .017$). Furthermore, the causal path proposed within the communication mediation model also turned out to be statistically significant, so it can be concluded that political interest generated greater attention to election campaign news among the responders ($\beta = .38$, $p < .001$), which in turn caused their level of interpersonal political conversation to increase ($\beta = .47$, $p < .001$)—all of this resulting in an increase of voting ($\beta = .59$, $p = .017$) (see Figure 3).

Discussion and Conclusions

The present article set out the objective of analyzing whether the consumption of news from the media in the context of the 2021 Mexican federal election campaign impacted the levels of electoral political engagement of citizens, understanding this engagement as a multidimensional construct that encompasses both electoral political sophistication, represented by citizens' electoral knowledge and interest, and the electoral political participation achieved by these citizens, described by whether or not they exercised their right to vote. For that purpose, the theoretical process explained by the campaign communication mediation model (O-S-R-O-R) was applied, evaluating the impact of interest in what happened in the campaign on the electoral political engagement, from the mediating action of communication variables such as news consumption and interpersonal political conversation.

The data collected in this nationwide two-wave panel survey of Mexico's adult population made it possible to answer the two research questions posed by the study. Regarding the first question, which asked whether there is an indirect effect of political interest on electoral political sophistication through attention

to the news during the campaign and interpersonal political conversation, the findings of the study allow for the determination that there is indeed an indirect effect, in different ways. Along with the explanation proposed by the model in the form of a causal chain, it was also possible to detect an indirect effect through news consumption or interpersonal political conversation variables independently. This reveals how the generation of electoral political sophistication does not always occur, thanks to the effect of the same determining factors, and, at any rate, it is extremely important for both communication variables to work jointly to result in greater levels of cognitive and affective engagement with the electoral process on the part of the citizens.

In turn, the second research question asked whether there is an indirect effect of political interest on electoral participation (voting) through attention to the news during the campaign and interpersonal political conversation. Again, the findings of this study allowed one to determine that there is an indirect effect, in different ways. Thus, while an explanation proposed from the campaign communication mediation model in the form of a causal chain is plausible, it is also possible for this impact to be explained by means of an indirect effect through the interpersonal political conversation independently. This reveals that, in contrast to political sophistication, the diversity of ways that lead to exercising the citizens' right to vote necessarily involves the process of reflection entailed by interpersonal political conversation. In view of these findings, it should be underscored that the theoretical model contributes significantly to the explanation of the generation of citizen electoral political engagement, and this way, it was possible to validate its applicability to the 2021 Mexican electoral context.

These findings highlight how the processes that derive in an active and quality involvement of citizens during the electoral process are heterogeneous, at least for the Mexican case, taking the data analyzed into consideration. Although the behavior of both dependent variables could be explained from the proposal of the communication mediation model, the analysis should not ignore that both news consumption and political conversation can generate responses that promote citizen engagement in a direct way. In this sense, interpersonal political conversation is seen as a crucial variable for explaining the outcome variables, a centrality within the model that has already been raised at different times by previous authors (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2019; Shah et al., 2007). On the one hand, conversation contributes, in conjunction with obtaining information through news consumption, to improving citizens' electoral political sophistication. But, above all, it becomes a key variable to explain their level of participation in similar parameters from other previous studies at the international level (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2019), and in the Mexican context (Borah et al., 2021; Muñiz & Corduneanu, 2014).

These findings open the discussion on two levels. First, it is possible to observe once again how the model is applicable outside the context where it was originally designed, in line with cross-cultural studies recently carried out (Borah et al., 2021; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2019). However, it would be advisable to conduct cross-cultural studies in contexts close to the Mexican one, such as in the Latin America. Second, these findings join those already obtained in previous works (Muñiz & Corduneanu, 2014; Muñiz et al., 2017) that make it possible to demonstrate empirically the applicability of the model for the Mexican context. Furthermore, the findings highlight the important role that political debate plays in shaping the participatory behavior of the Mexican citizenry. This supports the idea of the preponderant role of political talk in contexts of limited freedom of the press, which is still the case in Mexico (Guerrero, 2020). In any case, it is necessary

to continue testing the model in subsequent studies, expanding the range of variables used to gain a broader picture of the configuration of political attitudes and behaviors of the citizenry.

Furthermore, this result also poses the question of the extent to which this conversation is fueled not just by the information provided by the traditional media, but also by the new digital channels. This is something especially important, because, in social media and networks, real information competes more and more with fake news. In this sense, it would be convenient that future studies address the role of information received from the new media on the configuration of people's electoral political knowledge, as well as the determination of their voting. New media also create the possibility of generating online message exchange processes, a type of conversation different from the one studied in this paper. In this sense, future studies should address the role of the new media in the configuration of this electoral political engagement of citizens, seeking to determine which of the ways of obtaining information, and reasoning about the information received, has a greater capacity to determine the political sophistication and electoral participation of citizens.

This study is not without limitations. On the one hand, the analysis was carried out with data from a panel survey that had a nationally representative sample in the first wave but not in the second. Although in this type of study, the priority is to guarantee the measurement of the different variables of the model at different times, there is no doubt that counting with a representative sample that allows extrapolating the results to the population would be desirable. Moreover, although it has been possible to answer the research questions through mediational techniques that allow for the guarantee of an explanatory scope for the study, it is true that not using more sophisticated analysis techniques, such as structural equation modeling, does not allow for a full assessment of the strength of each antecedent variable on the outcome variables, considering all the other variables together (Lee, 2017). Finally, the study has focused the analysis exclusively on offline conversation, excluding online conversation from the analysis, which was necessary given that the model applies in both scenarios simultaneously (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2019).

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