

Chapter 70

Imperfect Bipartisanship and Spanish Pluralism: The Keys to Success of Podemos on Twitter

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this research is to find if the success of Podemos in the 2014 European Parliament Elections and its activity on Twitter agrees with the theoretical perspectives that Dahlgren (2011) and De Ugarte (2007) developed or if there is a new civic participation paradigm that determines the success of the current political communication strategies. In order to verify this proposal, this study not only has applied Dahlgren and De Ugarte's theories, but it has also developed a tweets sampling methodology that permits collection and analysis of information from Podemos' tweets from the 25th March 2014 to the 24th May 2014. The main conclusion of this research is that there is not a 'new civic participation model', but there are some emerging social and collective trends that De Ugarte and Dahlgren did not consider in their approaches, but that offer a context for the development of a new concept of "politics".

INTRODUCTION

Cultural convergence has changed the public landscape from a technological, economic, social and global perspective (Jenkins, 2006). Information and communications technology has emerged as a result of this cultural convergence and it has transformed the structure of social relationships and the political communication process. Lasswell's (1948) communication theory is obsolete within this postmodern society where emerging technologies have motivated the birth of a "participative communication" model (Servaes, 1996; Servaes & Malikhao, 2005).

Barack Obama's campaign in 2008 demonstrated the strength of social networks, like *Twitter* or *Facebook*, as powerful tools to create communities of volunteers who worked together toward a greater good. Voters felt part of the campaign; they could collaborate and participate in the political process as

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never before. Obama knew how to take the sense of belonging to new and stronger levels; for that reason, Obama's campaign was a turning point that defined a new way to understand the relationship between politics and new technology, between representatives and citizens.

John Daniel, the vice-chancellor of the Open University (UK), said in a conference about the new information society: "Ladies and gentlemen, the new technologies are the answer. What was the question?" This is a good consideration about "the great expectations generated in many different areas of our lives by the prospect of the application of information and communication technology, but at the same time the prevailing disconcertion over their possible uses and impacts" (Subirats, 2002, p. 228). This expression is also an anecdote that reminds the story about Marconi, the father of the Wireless. He was working a long time on the telegraph connections and, one day, when one of his collaborators realized what they have just got, he said: "Marconi, we can talk to Florida!" Marconi turned to him and he responded: "But do we have anything to say to the people in Florida?"

In the same way, we are all hopeful and excited about how digital revolution could improve the democratic system, "but we should first think about the problems facing us today and in the potential and real uses of the information and communication technologies" (Subirats, 2002, p. 228).

The success of *Podemos* during the European Parliament Elections in 2014 is the result of a set of political and communication strategies. However, *Podemos* stood up because of the online communication methods used during the campaign. According to Howard's (2006) thesis, *Podemos* organized a "hypermedia campaign" where citizens kept the power. In this sense, the hypothesis of this chapter suggests understanding if the success of *Podemos* in the 2014 European Parliament Elections and its activity on Twitter are influenced by the hypothesis developed by Dahlgren (2013) and De Ugarte (2007) or if there is a new civic participation paradigm that determines the successful of the current political communication strategies. So, this research should be understood as a theoretical approach that aims to compare the activity of *Podemos* on Twitter with Dahlgren's (2013) and De Ugarte's (2007) paradigms about political participation and civic engagement. This framework is expected to be useful to give some final recommendations about the main ingredients an online campaign should have.

CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

May 15, 2011 was a coordinated day of protests in many Spanish cities. It was the day of the *#spanishrevolution* when citizens took to the street expressing their opposition to the political elite. It was a networked movement popularly known as the *15M*. The *15M movement* was born digital. The call to occupy the streets came from many bloggers and online activists that spread their outrage against the Spanish government and their controversial laws¹ on *Twitter*, *Facebook* and other online platforms. The movement was not a single entity, but a blend of different intentions. They were the *Spanish indignados*² and they stood in for a great part of society that was growing apart from political institutions (Walzer, 1984).

One of the most powerful and repetitive mottos of the *15M movement* held that Spanish politicians "do not represent us". This was not a populist movement that tried to destabilize the democracy system and to shake the foundation of the Welfare State, but a protest that was warning that our politicians were neither devoting time nor efforts to get what they pledged to citizens. Politicians who represent citizens are supposed to share our values, our needs and our interests (Subirats, 2012); "to represent" is "to be alike", so this means that our representatives should look like us, citizens, because it is the only way they can understand our problems, our worries and our lifestyle.

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