

Are politicians politically engaged? Analysis of the political engagement 2.0 developed through Facebook¹

¿Están los políticos políticamente comprometidos? Análisis del compromiso político 2.0 desarrollado por los candidatos a través de Facebook

Estão os políticos politicamente comprometidos? Análise de compromisso político 2.0 desenvolvido pelos candidatos através do Facebook

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ABSTRACT

Social networks enable a fast and close relationship between candidates and citizens, which is enhanced if the former encourage dialogue and participation of the latter, i.e., they have a political engagement 2.0. In order to measure this engagement in Facebook, we developed a scale validated through a content analysis of the posts published by the main candidates of two elections for governor in different Mexican states. The results show that Facebook is used by electoral candidates more to spread their proposals and reflections than as a scenario to promote citizen participation through the exchange of ideas.

Keywords: candidates, electoral campaigns, social network, Facebook, political engagement 2.0.

RESUMEN

Las redes sociales posibilitan una relación rápida y próxima entre candidatos y ciudadanos, que se potencia si los primeros fomentan el diálogo y la participación de los segundos, es decir, mantienen un compromiso político 2.0. Se elaboró una escala para medir este compromiso en Facebook, validada mediante un análisis de contenido de los posteos publicados por los principales candidatos en dos elecciones a gobernador en estados mexicanos. Los resultados reflejan que Facebook es utilizado por los candidatos más para lanzar propuestas y reflexiones que como un escenario para promover la participación ciudadana mediante intercambio de ideas.

Palabras clave: candidatos, campañas electorales, redes sociales, Facebook, compromiso político 2.0.

RESUMO

As redes sociais permitem uma relação rápida e estreita entre os candidatos e os cidadãos, algo que é reforçado se os candidatos fomentarem o diálogo e a participação dos cidadãos, ou seja, se mantêm um *compromisso político 2.0*. Foi criada uma escala para medir esse compromisso no Facebook, validada por uma análise de conteúdo dos posts publicados pelos principais candidatos em duas eleições para governador em estados mexicanos. Os resultados mostram que o Facebook é usado por candidatos mais para apresentar propostas e reflexões que como um palco para promover a participação dos cidadãos através da troca de ideias.

Palavras-chave: candidatos, campanhas eleitorais, redes sociais, Facebook, compromisso político 2.0.

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INTRODUCTION

Electoral campaigns are an exceptional moment in the democratic development of countries, because during their development the political and public debate about different programmatic proposals, public policies and ideological positions tends to increase. They represent, in addition, a scenario in which candidates implement different strategies to obtain electoral benefits, translated in the electoral legitimation that is the vote. In this scenario, traditional media play a crucial role in connecting candidates and citizens, allowing the former to transmit information, and citizens to obtain sufficient elements of judgment to make their final electoral decision.

However, the arrival of the Internet has opened new avenues for political activity during the electoral campaign (Larsson, 2014; Vesnic-Alujevic & Van Bauwel, 2014), generating mechanisms that allow a more direct, faster and economic connection between candidates and citizens. In addition, these new media make it possible to transmit information much more up-to-date than usual in traditional media among the different actors of the political system (Sweetser & Lariscy, 2008). These political possibilities offered by social media and, in particular, Social Network Sites (SNS), such as Facebook or Twitter as part of electoral campaigns, have not gone unnoticed by many of the parties and political candidates: it is rare to find political candidates that in the current electoral campaigns do not develop a strategy of political communication through the different possibilities that the Internet offers, especially through SNS.

It is not surprising, therefore, that web content on politics, such as the pages of candidates, blogs and especially the SNS, are considered a new terrain in which the electoral battle takes place, due to the proximity between the candidates and the citizens that these supports facilitate (Williams & Gulati, 2013; Woolley, Limperos & Oliver, 2010). Although the SNS has often been perceived by candidates and parties as mere mechanisms for propaganda at election time (Klinger, 2013), research shows how they also constitute new forms that citizens can use to get involved in political processes, and that they help to generate a greater political engagement (Blom, Carpenter, Bower

& Lange, 2014; Fernandes, Giurcanu, Bowers & Neely, 2010; Zhang, Seltzer & Bichard, 2013). However, for this to happen, it is necessary that the candidates, parties and/or rulers become involved in promoting this engagement through their activity in the different social networks.

The main objective of this study is to create a scale to measure the extent to which candidates use their SNS—in the specific case of this article, Facebook—to promote the political participation of citizens through a quality dialog process. A process defined, for the purposes of this work, as a political engagement 2.0, developed not primarily by citizens, but by the candidates themselves through their SNS.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

INTERNET AS A NEW SPACE FOR POLITICS

Internet has evolved from the Web 1.0, which enabled a linear and unidirectional communication (Tuñez & Sixto, 2011), towards the Web 2.0, which opens the possibility of a two-way communication, where users can not only receive information, but also create it (Vesnic-Alujevic & Van Bauwel, 2014). Within this web development, social media has gone a step further, allowing the integration of technologies and social interaction between the different users of the network (Lin, 2016; Sweetser & Lariscy, 2008; Xenos, Vromen & Loader, 2014). In this sense, social media has been defined as the growing number of websites or Web 2.0 services that offer the possibility of uniting people, encouraging the establishment of social networks and dialogic communication through the exchange of content between users (Sweetser & Lariscy, 2008). In this vein, sites such as blogs, social networks, microblogs or other digital media formats can act as catalysts for deliberation (Halpern & Gibbs, 2013).

The sites created within this Web 2.0 allow the fulfillment of four communicative functions: the *information* to the users on any subject or matter; the *interaction* between users in a two-way communication; the *engagement* of the users in an active participation in the online platform; and, finally, the *mobilization* of these users in a more advanced participation, such as online purchase or affiliation in organizations

(Vesnic-Alujevic & Van Bauwel, 2014). The use, to a greater or lesser extent, of these functions derives in the generation of tools that allow the union between people in a virtual dialogical communication, through media such as blogs, wikis or SNS (Halpern & Gibbs, 2013; Sweetser & Lariscy, 2008).

This transition to Web 2.0 has also opened up new possibilities in the field of political communication, especially in the context of electoral campaigns, where the tools that social media make available to candidates amplify their potential connection with citizens and potential voters (Fernandes et al., 2010; Sweetser & Lariscy, 2008; Vesnic-Alujevic, 2012). All this because the Internet has been proven as an excellent means to achieve an effective dissemination of political information in the context of the campaigns, something that has led many candidates to understand their networks as one more tool of the range of marketing at their disposal. However, it should be remembered that these SNS can also be used to achieve mobilization, social interaction and even entertainment among its members (Fernandes et al., 2010; Larsson, 2014).

While in the first online campaigns there was an important use of tools such as blogs, which allowed for greater interactivity between candidates and citizens, in recent years a significant step has been taken towards the use of SNS like Facebook, Twitter or YouTube (Dou, 2014; Larsson, 2014; Lin, 2016; Trammell, Williams, Postelnicu & Landreville, 2006). Social networks can be defined as online communities that enable users to create profiles, connect with the profiles of other users and navigate through these networks (Gil de Zúñiga, Jung & Valenzuela, 2012; Larsson, 2014; Zhang et al., 2013). The popularity of the SNS has rapidly moved to the political realm, where parties, rulers and/or politicians who do not have any of these tools to connect with citizens are rare (Lin, 2016; Woolley et al., 2010).

Therefore, there is no doubt that the SNS represent a new field in which the politics is developed, due to its ability to transmit information and news about politics towards citizenship (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012; Trammell et al., 2006) and the exceptional electoral campaign tool they represent for parties and candidates (Dou, 2014; Klinger, 2013). This is because the interactivity that characterizes the SNS can improve

the dialogical communication between candidates and their followers, which must necessarily involve the development of an ethical and quality dialogue between both actors (Sweetser & Lariscy, 2008); that is to say, a use of the SNS as tools for dialogue and not only to disseminate information, a strategy that has nevertheless been detected among political candidates (Dou, 2014; Fernandes et al., 2010; Sweetser & Lariscy, 2008; Woolley et al., 2010).

Although the influence of the Internet on electoral processes has occurred since the 1990s, the 2008 presidential elections in the United States are usually mentioned as the first in which the SNS played a crucial role (Dou, 2014; Williams & Gulati, 2013; Woolley et al., 2010). Authors such as Hanson, Haridakis, Cunningham, Sharma and Ponder (2010) mention how this campaign, largely thanks to the communicative strategy developed by then-presidential candidate Barack Obama, was the first in which the SNS became accessible to the voters, turning them into popular forums to participate politically (Woolley et al., 2010). That presidential campaign showed how the use of the SNS jumped from the simple dialogue or exchange of messages, towards an instrumental management aimed at the development of offline participation activities –like groups activities, meetings, viewing of debates or the simple active participation in the campaign–, which were planned within the SNS itself (Fernandes et al., 2010). However, beyond the general use of the SNS, this electoral campaign revealed, in particular, the important potential of Facebook as a tool for political communication (Hanson et al., 2010; Larsson & Kalsnes, 2014; Williams & Gulati, 2013). In fact, it has been considered that the use made of Facebook during that electoral campaign highlighted the potential that this social network has for the development of the candidates' strategies (Woolley et al., 2010).

Within existing SNS, Facebook is undoubtedly the most popular social network used by Internet users in the world, with around 1.5 billion active users (Brandtzaeg, 2015; Woolley et al., 2010). This popularity is also seen in the Mexican case, where, according to data from the World Internet Project Mexico (WIP, 2014), more and more users use the Internet to access social networks. The latest data from the Mexican

Internet Association (AMIPCI, 2016) show how, in 2015, Internet penetration was 59% of the population, with about 65 million Internet users. Among them, the results of the study reflect that 31% went online to access SNS, a percentage similar to those who do it to search for information. In addition, according to the study, Facebook remains the preferred social network in Mexico, with a penetration of 92% among Internet users. That is, about 60 million Mexicans usually use this network.

Considering this data, both internationally and in the Mexican context, it is not surprising that Facebook quickly made the leap to the political arena, being widely used by politicians, rulers and candidates as a tool for connecting with citizens and potential voters. Beyond the case already mentioned in the 2008 presidential elections in the United States (Woolley et al., 2010), their use has also been verified in other countries. Such is the case of Mexico, where Leetoy and Figueroa (2016) recently highlighted the use of Facebook made by the independent candidate to the Jalisco State Congress Pedro Kumamoto in the 2015 elections, because, in the words of those responsible for the candidate's campaign, this network was where the largest cyber-citizen participation took place. Also Berumen Villarruel and Medellín Mendoza (2016) have targeted Facebook as the network most used by candidates for the 2015 elections in the state of Nuevo León. To a large extent, this use of Facebook is determined by the fact that, through the generation of virtual communities, it offers a range of tools that can be used to mobilize groups, facilitate political discussion, convey information and campaign proposals, manage the image of the candidates and engage with potential followers and voters (Dou, 2014; Halpern & Gibbs, 2013; Larsson, 2014; Macafee, 2013; Woolley et al., 2010).

Although authors such as Vesnic-Alujevic and Van Bauwel (2014) point out the relative impact these networks have on elections, their contribution has been found to improve when their use is conducted by politically committed citizens, which tend to use more SNS and web content on politics to inform themselves about electoral campaigns and make subsequent decisions (Macafee, 2013). Thus, spaces such as Facebook acquire the potential to become forums for political dialogue, with the consequent

repercussions on the development of citizens' political engagement (Blom et al., 2014; Gil de Zúñiga et al. 2012; Larsson, 2014; Larsson & Kalsnes, 2014; Valenzuela, Park & Kee, 2009).

POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT AND THE ROLE OF THE SNS IN ITS DEVELOPMENT

In order to make citizens' engaged to democracy manifest, it is necessary to possess an acceptable level of political knowledge and involvement in public affairs through the development of diverse expressions of political participation (Delli Carpini, 2004; Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996). A committed citizen should have stable, consistent and informed opinions on the main public issues (knowledge of topics, candidates, rulers, policies, etc.) and engage in behaviors designed to influence, directly or indirectly, the public quality of life for himself or for others (Delli Carpini, 2004, p. 396). This proposal has been used by some authors to measure the political engagement among citizens (e.g. Conroy, Feezell & Guerrero, 2012; Yung & Leung, 2014).

However, the arrival of the new social media and the contribution made by the SNS to politics have meant an evolution in the definition and forms of political engagement. This is the idea of Pettingill (2008), who points out the existence of an engagement 2.0 that is manifested by the existence of new forms of political participation. In this case, a participation through virtual communities where products can be created and shared in a similar way as would be done using traditional mechanisms. And, along with the positive impact that traditional media have on the quantity and quality of citizen engagement (Delli Carpini, 2004), the most recent empirical research in the field of political communication have evidenced the role played by the SNS as catalysts of this transformation among citizens. It has been shown how their use can lead to an increase in the civic engagement of their users (Conroy et al., 2012; Fernandes et al., 2010; Larsson & Kalsnes, 2014; Papacharissi, 2004).

Although there is some controversy about the true scope of the use of the Internet in the development of political engagement, most studies present optimistic results about their effect (e.g. Conroy et al., 2012; Shah, Kwak & Holbert, 2001; Valenzuela et al., 2009; Xenos

et al., 2014). In this regard, Dou (2014) points out that the use of online media during the electoral period can improve the political participation of voters, largely thanks to the ease of connecting with other users to obtain information, express thoughts and discuss political issues. In the specific case of Facebook, it has been documented how its use can increase citizens' civic and political engagement, their involvement in public affairs and the development of activities through the web (Fernandes et al., 2010; Macafee, 2013; Yung & Leung, 2014).

However, the behavior of the candidates, parties and/or rulers is crucial for this development of political engagement and promotion of citizen participation to take place (Larsson, 2014; Larsson & Kalsnes, 2014; Macnamara, Sakinofsky & Beattie, 2012). In this sense, the SNS open a wide range of important possibilities that candidates can use to connect with their potential voters and discuss their views in a more effective, simple and close manner. This may lead them to gain confidence and generate greater electoral support from committed voters (Dou, 2014; Larsson & Kalsnes, 2014; Sweetser & Lariscy, 2008; Williams & Gulati, 2013).

Regarding the political use of Facebook by candidates in elections, Larsson (2014) details that there are different topics that they often posted in their pages and profiles. Aspects such as acknowledgments, campaign reports, information on political issues, criticism of opponents and news about the candidate's personal sphere often dominate the candidates' pages on this network. But, according to the same author, they can also use Facebook with the aim of mobilizing citizens, i.e. "to generate feedback from voters, or to encourage people to participate in campaign meetings" (p. 462). It is a political participation facilitated by the Internet, which provides voters with greater capacity to learn about candidates and their proposals (Hanson et al., 2010).

In spite of the potential that the SNS can have in the political and electoral environment, most of the studies show that this interaction between candidates and citizens rarely occurs, and that few candidates engage in a true dialogical communication with their Facebook followers through the exchange of messages (Lin, 2016; Macafee, 2013; Woolley et al., 2010). In fact, SNS are often used as information dissemination mechanisms,

converting them in repositories of proposals, personal and campaign information, advertisements and even activity calendars rather than in tools to motivate citizens to participate in political processes in a really committed way.

In this regard, Túñez and Sixto (2011) point out that politicians need to accept the engagement to move from a participatory attitude to a real participative action in their SNS. An engagement 2.0 that leads them to become users and interact with other members of their social network. However, as already indicated, the research reflects that this is rarely achieved, something that has also been found in Mexico, where candidates tend to participate little in their social networks (Espino-Sánchez, 2014), simply offering campaign information.

Starting from this literature, and taking Delli Carpini's (2004) proposal on citizen political engagement, this study proposes the concept of the candidates' political engagement 2.0 as the one that measures the degree to which they commit with their followers through social networks, interacting beyond mere gratitude and the dissemination of personal and campaign information. That is, engaging in a deep conversation that will improve the political knowledge of their followers through the transmission of information in sufficient quantity and quality.

With the objective of creating a scale that allows measuring the level of political engagement 2.0 that the candidates develop in their SNS, in particular Facebook, in this study we look for the answers of the following research questions:

- RQ1: How much do the candidates contribute to political knowledge in their posts and get involved with their followers by establishing a quality interaction?
- RQ2: Is it feasible to add the variables of participation and contribution to the knowledge of the candidates in their posts to generate a scale of political engagement 2.0?
- RQ3: Is the scale of political engagement 2.0 replicable to different electoral processes developed in other geographical and temporal areas?

FIRST STUDY: CREATION AND VALIDATION OF THE SCALE OF POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT 2.0

METHODOLOGY

Considering the objective set out in the study, we conducted a content analysis of the posts published during an electoral campaign by the candidates on their Facebook walls. To do so, we selected the gubernatorial elections of the state of Baja California, which took place in July 2013, as a case study. We analyzed all the posts published in the Facebook pages of the two candidates with the best chances of winning the aforementioned elections, according to the surveys conducted during the electoral campaign (*Excelsior*, 2003, July 7): Fernando Castro (Partido Revolucionario Institucional, PRI) and Francisco Vega (Partido Acción Nacional, PAN), finally winner of the elections. The sample contained all the posts published by the candidates on their pages during the election campaign. For the capture we used NVivo's NCapture application for Google Chrome. The selection was made between April 24 and July 4, 2013, when official campaign activities ended. The process ended with 556 analysis units.

In order to generate the scale of political engagement 2.0, we followed the proposal of Tuñez and Sixto (2011) to include in the measurement the degree of participation and the interaction of the politicians with other members of the SNS. However, although this proposal allows for structural analysis of Facebook pages, it does not allow a detailed and deep analysis of the activity within the posts. Therefore, we made an operationalization of the scale starting conceptually from the proposal of Delli Carpini (2004) on the political engagement, considering that it is conformed of the political knowledge and political participation.

- **Participation of candidates:** we used two reactive to determine the level of involvement of the candidates with Internet users, both quantitatively and qualitatively. Thus, we coded the "number of comments made by the candidate" in his posts and we calculated the average number of comments made by each candidate to recode the variable in the following categories: "0" in case the candidate did not comment on any post; "1" in case the candidate had a number of comments equal to or less than the average; and "2" in case the number of

comments was higher than the average. As for the quality of the "candidate's participation", we coded as "0" when the candidate only posted but did not establish a dialogue with subsequent comments; "1" if the candidate fostered a superficial dialogue, generating feedback through a response, without interacting with them again; and "2" if it fostered a deep dialogue through additional comments that opened a dialogical conversation.

- **Contribution to knowledge:** we measured the contribution made by the candidate at the cognitive level from a quantitative and qualitative perspective. The "level of contribution to knowledge" was coded as "0" when the candidate did not comment; "1" when he added comments, without providing new information to the original post; and "2" when he provided extra knowledge, through new arguments or additional documentation. As for the "quality of contribution to knowledge", we coded with a "0" when the candidate did not comment; with "1" when he presented information, but without an argument, explanation or reasoning; and finally "2" if the candidate's comment clearly provided an opinion about the information, arguing the point of view or position with clear quotes or descriptions related to the subject or content.

After the coding process, we performed a new analysis on 10% of randomly selected units of analysis ($n = 56$), in order to calculate the intercoder reliability. We used the Krippendorff Alpha formula (Hayes & Krippendorff, 2007) for both ordinal and ratio variables (number of candidate comments). The average agreement value was .96. It should be mentioned that the lowest reliability detected was .83, corresponding to the variable "quality of participation" made by the candidate.

ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

The descriptive analysis of the four reactive contemplated in the study shows, in general, low scores for all of them (table 1). Thus, in only nine posts the candidates made comments in a number greater than the average, which is the best level of participation. In addition, in no post this participation

Engagement variables	Frequency	Percentage
Number of comments of the candidate		
0 = No comments	523	94.1
1 = Comments \leq average	24	4.3
2 = Comments > average	9	1.6
Interactivity of the communication		
0 = No response comments	533	95.9
1 = Encouraged a superficial dialogue	23	4.1
Level of contribution to knowledge		
0 = No comments	523	94.1
1 = Does not provide new information	33	5.9
Quality of contribution to knowledge		
0 = No comments	523	94.1
1 = Information without arguments	26	4.7
2 = Information with arguments	7	1.3

Table 1: Descriptors of the constitutive variables of political engagement 2.0

Note: N=556

Source: Own elaboration..

became of such quality that it scored the highest level of interactivity of communication. That is, in no case did the candidates foster a deep dialogue through a conversation with at least one of the Internet users. Regarding the contribution to knowledge made by the candidates, no post was detected where the highest level of this action could be coded. Therefore, it can be pointed out that in no case did the comments of the candidates contribute any knowledge superior to that indicated in the original post. Nevertheless, seven posts were detected in which the candidates made comments where they argued their views or proposals, although they were not different from the original publication that motivated said commentary.

As a preliminary step to the creation of the proposed scale of political engagement 2.0, we evaluated the validity of the construct to determine if the construct behaved according to the theoretically established, which is that the four items must conform a same component or dimension (Igartua, 2006). A factorial analysis, with orthogonal varimax rotation, performed with the four variables, yielded

a single component that managed to explain 91% of the variance ($KMO = .856, p < .001$), confirming the validity of the construct. In addition to this test, we calculated the internal consistency of the scale to determine the level of reliability of the instrument, i.e., if all the items contribute something to the analyzed construct (Igartua, 2006). The Cronbach's alpha test showed a high value ($\alpha = .95$), which confirmed its reliability.

From the validity and reliability provided by both tests, we created the indicator measuring the political engagement 2.0 of the candidates by adding the four reactive described above. The created scale oscillated in a theoretical range of variation between minimum (0) and maximum (8). However, the results obtained after the creation of the indicator reflect a very low level of political engagement 2.0 among the analyzed candidates ($M = 0.25, SD = 1.01$). This can be detected more clearly by reviewing how none of the published posts scored with the theoretical maximum value of 8 predicted as the highest point of the scale. The best score obtained on the scale was 6 points.

SECOND STUDY: EXTERNAL AND CRITERION VALIDITY OF THE SCALE OF POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT 2.0

METHODOLOGY

Although the first content analysis made it possible to determine the construct validity and reliability of the created scale, we considered opportune to determine to what extent the instrument had the capacity to be used in different contexts, that is, if it had external validity. But also if it was able to predict the behavior of other instruments, that is, criterion validity, in this case, predictive (Igartua, 2006). This would make the scale even more robust and it could be proposed for being used in other studies. In order to prove this, we developed a new content analysis, in this case about the electoral campaign developed in the Mexican state of Nuevo Leon in 2015.

Once again, we analyzed all the posts published in the Facebook pages of the two candidates with the best chances of winning the elections according to the polls published during the electoral campaign (Ordóñez, 2015, March 24): Felipe de Jesús Cantú (PAN), Ivonne Álvarez (Alianza por tu Seguridad), Jaime Rodríguez “el Bronco” (independent) and Fernando Elizondo (Movimiento Ciudadano). We decided to include this last candidate because, although his numbers were low, his decision in the final run of the campaign to support the winning candidate represented an important turn in the strategy of Jaime Rodríguez “el Bronco”, the winner of the elections (Rodríguez Labastida, 2015, June 9). We selected all the posts published by the aforementioned candidates between March 6 and June 4, 2015, with a total of 2142 units.

For the coding of the units of analysis we used the scale of political engagement 2.0 developed in the previous study, using the same variables and procedures of codification and analysis. After the coding process of the set of selected posts, we conducted a new analysis on 8% of units of analysis ($n = 180$) to calculate the reliability of the process or intercoder reliability. The average agreement value was .90 (Krippendorff's Alpha), with the lowest detected reliability of .87, relative to the variable on the “quality of participation” made by the candidate.

ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

The variables constituting the political engagement 2.0 had a greater presence in the case of the governor elections of the state of Nuevo Leon of 2015 than in those of the previous study (table 2). Thus, 35.8% of

the candidates participated in the discussion generated from their posts, publishing their own comments. In addition, this interactivity led to a more superficial (29.7%) than deep dialogue (5.9%), but in any case higher than revealed in the choice of the first study. On the other hand, the contribution to the knowledge by the candidates was also important, both in quantity and in quality. In 27.9% of the cases, the candidates commented on what had already been indicated in their posts, but in 7.8% of the occasions they came to provide extra information. In addition, up to 6.2% of comments were detected in which the candidates argued their points of view, although the comments without deep argumentation continued dominating (29.4%).

Although these descriptive results were relevant, we worked on the construction of the indicator that would allow us to determine in an adequate way the level of political engagement 2.0 developed by the candidates, in this case of the Nuevo Leon elections. As a first step, we tested the construct validity of the scale again, in this case with the new data, in order to verify the applicability of the instrument created in a different context to this new one (Igartua, 2006). The factorial analysis, with orthogonal varimax rotation, performed with the four variables, yielded a single component that managed to explain 94% of the variance ($KMO = .870$, $p < .001$), which confirmed the validity of the construct. In addition, the internal consistency of the scale was high ($\alpha = .97$), which confirms its reliability. The results, very similar to those obtained in the first study, show how the scale maintained its internal consistency in a different context and, therefore, its items continued to contribute to the same construct. Once the external validity was verified, since its use in a population, background and time different from those of the first content analysis was equally reliable, the scale was constructed in the terms described in the first study.

The univariate data detailed earlier showed that the level of participation and contribution to knowledge made by the candidates of Nuevo Leon rose regarding their colleagues of the elections of Baja California of 2013. This reality was evidenced when determining the level average of political engagement 2.0 made by the candidates in the election of Nuevo Leon ($M = 1.83$, $DE = 2.57$), which was higher than in the first study. In spite of this, it should be mentioned that this engagement was not high enough to allow believing that the candidates had achieved a quality interaction

Engagement variables	Frequency	Percentage
Number of comments of the candidate		
0 = No comments	1375	64.2
1 = Comments \leq average	325	15.2
2 = Comments > average	442	20.6
Interactivity of the communication		
0 = No response comments	1379	64.4
1 = Encouraged a superficial dialogue	636	29.7
2 = Fostered a deep dialogue	127	5.9
Level of contribution to knowledge		
0 = No comments	1377	64.3
1 = Does not provide new information	598	27.9
2 = Provided extra knowledge	167	7.8
Quality of contribution to knowledge		
0 = No comments	1379	64.4
1 = Information without arguments	630	29.4
2 = Information with arguments	133	6.2

Table 2: Descriptors of the constitutive variables of political engagement 2.0

Note: N=2.142

Source: Own elaboration.

with their followers, and that they were able to transfer information and encourage participation at appropriate levels. This can be proven by reviewing how only in 3.9% of the posts there was a level of engagement that scored the value 8 contemplated as the theoretical maximum of the created scale.

Along with the verification of the external validity of the scale, since it could be used in a different study with a substantially different and broader population, we sought to provide robustness to the construct created. In order to do so, we analyzed the extent to which the scale created had criterion validity, that is, if it could be related to another relevant external instrument, so as to be able to predict the behavior of this second instrument (Igartua, 2006). Resuming the postulates of the theoretical framework, it is expected that an

increase in political engagement 2.0 of the candidates will be related to the political engagement of the citizens following the Facebook pages of politicians (e.g., Fernandes et al., 2010 Macafee, 2013, Pettingill, 2008). However, the use of the construct of citizen political engagement to test the criterion validity of the scale created in this study presented a methodological problem. The instruments created to measure the political engagement of the citizens have been used in the context of studies through questionnaires or surveys, but not in the context of a content analysis, as is the case of this study.

Therefore, we decided to look for an indicator that, as a proxy, would allow to measure the level of political engagement developed by citizens within Facebook, in this case in the pages of the different candidates

of the elections of Nuevo Leon. Within the reviewed literature, several studies have raised the possibility that *likes* to Facebook pages or their content constitute an expression of the civic engagement of their users (Brandtzaeg, 2015; Brandtzaeg & Haugstveit, 2014; Brandtzaeg, Haugstveit, Lüdgers & Følstad, 2016; Guy, Ronen, Zwerdling, Zuyev-Grabovitch & Jacovi, 2016; Kim, Hsu & Gil de Zúñiga, 2013). Among the interaction tools that Facebook gives to its users, such as sharing posts or writing comments, giving like to the contents published in the webpages constitutes an engagement that has been called low cost (Brandtzaeg & Haugstveit, 2014), i.e., reflects a non-strong type of engagement from the user (Guy et al., 2016). Despite this, likes are a basic feedback tool for Facebook users. This was detected by Brandtzaeg et al. (2016), who in their study with young Internet users could observe how receiving likes in their comments constituted for commentators a motivating initiator to engage in civic causes.

In this sense, Brandtzaeg (2015) defines civic engagement in Facebook as a response to social needs, expressed in different mechanisms of action, among which are the practices of support; pressing the like button of their pages or contents is one of the easiest support practices to perform on Facebook. This has

also been pointed out by Kim et al. (2013), for whom social networks, such as Facebook, can allow users to integrate into more heterogeneous discussions and engage in civic activities in a simpler way, for example, through the realization of a low effort interaction as it is to give like to a content. On the basis that likes are basic expressions of digital human behavior, from which different attributes of the people who made them can be estimated (Kosinski, Stillwell & Graepel, 2013), the authors assume that these support practices are manifestations of political engagement, as they reflect the citizenship political expressions (Brandtzaeg, 2015).

Considering this background, we worked with the idea that the number of likes received by the candidate's post represented an expression of the political engagement of the citizens manifested in the Facebook pages of the different political candidates. In this sense, we assumed that an increase in political engagement on the part of the candidates in their Facebook pages would lead to an increase in the political engagement of the citizens. To analyze this association, we used the variable on likes received by the candidate's post ($M = 2196.32, SD = 3178.35$). The analysis revealed a moderate but significant correlation between the two variables, $r(2140) = .228, p < .001$. This showed that, as candidates tended to increase their political engagement

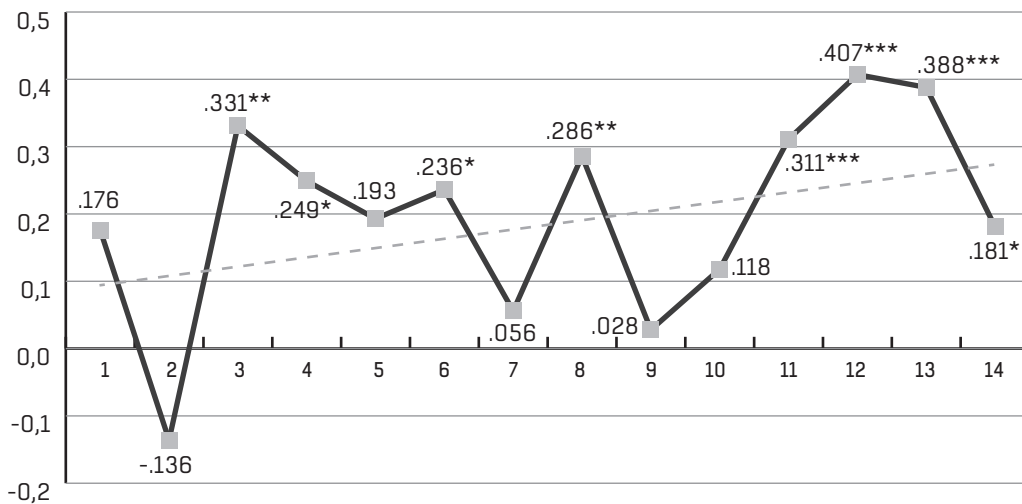


Figure 1. Correlations between political engagement 2.0 of candidates and citizen political engagement on Facebook during the different weeks of the electoral campaign.

Note: $N = 2142$, * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Source: Own elaboration.

2.0 on Facebook, there was also an increase in the level at which citizens politically engaged and interacted, through their level of likes granted to the posts of the candidates. This result reveals the validity of the predictive criterion of the created scale.

Based on this global result, we decided to conduct a detailed analysis of this correlation, assuming that a long-term electoral campaign like the one studied could have different phases and that these could affect the association found. As can be seen in figure 1, dividing the campaign into weeks showed that the highest level of association between the two types of political engagement occurred in the final run of the campaign. Thus, we detected two moments in which both types of political engagement were associated in a significant way: the moment before the middle of the campaign and, especially, in the final term of the campaign. Within these periods, the levels of association found in weeks twelfth, $r(288)=.407, p < .001$, and thirteenth, $r(388)=.388, p < .001$, although this relation decreased in the last week, $r(175)=.181, p = .016$, perhaps due to the beginning of the ban imposed to candidates the days prior to the election. In any case, there is a general trend towards an increase in the association between the two variables throughout the campaign, which is intensified in the final part of the campaign, and which shows how an increase in the political engagement 2.0 of the candidates also comes accompanied by an increase in the political engagement of Facebook users.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The impact that social media in general, and SNS in particular, can have on democratic development has been widely documented (Dou, 2014; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012; Valenzuela et al., 2009). However, for this beneficial impact to occur, it is necessary for politicians, parties and/or rulers to move forward in the use of these networks until they are seen and used as a valid instrument for establishing dialogue, training citizens and promoting their political and civic participation. That is to say, that they acquire the “commitment to move from the participatory attitude to the action of participation” pointed out by Túñez and Sixto (2011, p. 213). In spite of this good intention, it has usually been documented that the SNS are rather used as

tools to disseminate information and propaganda (Fernandes et al., 2010; Klinger, 2013; Sweetser & Lariscy, 2008), rather than as mechanisms to promote citizen participation in the political and/or civic sphere.

This is a reality subsumed by the results obtained in the study. In response to the first research question, which posed how much the candidates contribute to the political knowledge in their posts and get involved with their followers by establishing a quality interaction, we have detected that the level of development of these activities by some of the candidates in their Facebook pages during the electoral campaigns analyzed was low. It should be noted, however, that this contribution has increased in the Nuevo Leon campaign of 2015, compared to that of Baja California in 2013. However, it is again documented how candidates, their collaborators, consultants or even the parties or coalitions that support them in the electoral contest, still do not perceive the opportunities that social networks offer to improve the civic and political engagement of citizens, and thus contribute to the democratic development of the society (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012).

The main objective of the study was to create an instrument that would measure the level of political engagement 2.0 developed or maintained by the candidates in their social networks, in this specific case on Facebook, during an election campaign. In this sense, the second question of research questioned whether it is feasible to add the variables of participation and contribution to the knowledge of the candidates in their posts to generate a scale of political engagement 2.0. As can be seen from the results of the study, the reactive used for the construction of the scale maintained high reliability and were combined together to create a single indicator. Thus, the study provides a new instrument that allows measuring, on the one hand, the political engagement 2.0 of the candidates on Facebook by adding measures regarding the level and quality of their participation in the dialogues generated in their pages; and on the other, the level and quality of the contribution to the knowledge and political engagement of Internet users, made by these same candidates in their comments.

Finally, the third research question of the study asked if the scale of political engagement 2.0 is replicable to different electoral processes developed

in other geographic and temporal areas. As we have seen, the same scale designed for the Baja California electoral campaign in 2013 presented a very high level of validity and reliability in its application to the Nuevo Leon electoral campaign of 2015. This shows how the instrument created is applicable to different processes, which gives it external validity. Also, the indicator showed a predictive capacity at the time of associating it with the political engagement of the users of the Facebook pages of the candidates of the campaign of Nuevo Leon. The result of the analysis shows a positive association between both variables, although it should be noted that this was not as strong as might be expected.

Therefore, the validity of the instrument seems to be confirmed: a greater political engagement shown by the candidates in the SNS, in this case Facebook, tends to motivate citizens' participation to a greater extent within their networks. While this seems to come out of the relationship found, it is also true that the proxy used to detect the level of citizen political engagement on Facebook is not entirely consistent. In this sense, it is necessary that in future investigations the measurement of this construct within the SNS is improved. Thus, together with the traditional instruments that allow measuring the level of political engagement maintained by citizens through questionnaires, it would be interesting to develop indicators that will be able to determine the same construct within the networks; for example, through the codification –through content analysis– of the different expressions of political action developed by Internet users in their comments on the posts published by political candidates on their Facebook pages.

It is obvious that this work has been confined to a small part of the many that currently covers the relationship between politicians and citizens. But it is also true that Facebook is one of the most used networks, if not the most, among the candidates in the elections. However, the exercise of elaborating the scale of political engagement 2.0 does not seek to circumscribe the behavior of political candidates in their Facebook pages. Rather, it is also expected to be applicable to analyze what might be happening in other social networks widely used politically in electoral campaigns (Dou, 2014), such as Twitter, which presents characteristics comparable to those examined in the developed scale. In this sense, it is possible to measure

the level of interaction of the candidates with their followers, as well as the new knowledge transmitted by them in their comments derived from their original tweets, as has been done regarding Facebook. It would be interesting, therefore, in future research, to extend the scale created to the study of this network, especially when the literature shows how candidates usually use Twitter to establish textual communication with their followers, through short messages (Golbeck, Grimes & Rogers, 2010).

In addition, the instrument created enables the analysis of political engagement 2.0 to be broadened beyond electoral periods, which will allow studies on the day-to-day political activity carried out by rulers, parties and/or politicians during their legislature. The engagement of politicians with the cognitive development and the civic engagement of the citizens must also arrive other moments than the electoral ones. This is especially true when it has been found that social networks are often used by citizens to engage with decision makers (Giglietto & Selva, 2014), thanks to the interactive dialogue provided by the Internet and characterized by a horizontality based on the greater equality between actors who, a priori, usually belong to different power spheres.

In spite of these promising avenues of application of the instrument, it should be pointed out that the study presents some limitations that must be overcome in later studies. In this sense, both content analyzes were conducted in the context of subnational electoral campaigns. It would be advisable to carry out the same study in a national electoral campaign, as could be a presidential election to the Republic or general elections in a parliamentary country, which would expect a greater volume in the traffic of messages between candidates and followers of their networks, due to the complexity in strategy that supposes a campaign of this type. Likewise, it is necessary to improve the criteria validity of the scale by studying its relationship with other constructs, beyond the number of likes of Facebook followers. For this reason, it is necessary to review the predictive capacity of the political engagement 2.0 of the candidates with aspects such as, for example, the political participation of the citizens who use or follow their social networks.

The results of the study open promising lines of work on the use of the SNS for political purposes, both by citizens and, above all, by candidates, politicians

and/or rulers. While the studies conducted to date often use techniques such as the survey to measure political manifestations of citizens in the use of social media and SNS (e.g., Conroy et al., 2012; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012; Macafee, 2013; Shah et al., 2001, 2007; Valenzuela et al., 2009; Yung & Leung, 2014; Zhang et al., 20), there are less studies that have approached this aspect from the analysis of the contents present in the social networks. And those who have done so have focused more on the role played by citizens within them as users (e.g., Fernandes et al., 2010), than on politicians as generators of content. It is necessary

to address this aspect of the political reality of social media, insofar as its use by candidates, politicians and/or rulers can be one of the most important current sources of public opinion, especially in contexts of high political activity, such as electoral campaigns. It is interesting to analyze the reasons for the low political engagement 2.0 detected among the candidates, i.e., what leads these actors to perceive social networks as excellent tools for the dissemination of information and extension of traditional campaign strategies, but not as tools for effective communication with sophisticated citizens and a public opinion formed and involved.

FOOTNOTES

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