

## The political participation on Twitter. No one studies the detached

### *La participación política en Twitter. Nadie estudia a los deshilvanados*

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#### **Abstract**

*This article is a state of art about political participation on Twitter that trace a map around the interaction forms relevant for the social studies that elucidate the panorama projected by them to explain and comprehend what is happening with these phenomena between the users who form the biggest sector in Twitter: the ordinary users. The subject is important because despite Twitter is the political social network chosen by scientific authors as well as users, there are not studies about the conversation between ordinary citizens with no political agendas. The article is formed with four sections, inductively built from an exploration with grounded theory of the recent literature; 1) Twitter in the public sphere, 2) social effects of Twitter in the political participation, 3) Twitter in activism, protests and mobilizations, and 4) relationship between Twitter and mass media. The conclusions show that the social studies offer an incomplete idea about the communicative practices on political issues on Twitter and that the users who integrate the biggest collective on Twitter are not shown in the scientific literature. The concept 'detached' is proposed to refer to these ordinary users.*

#### **Keywords**

*Political participation, Twitter, ordinary user, digital interaction, detached.*

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## **Resumen**

Este trabajo esboza un estado de la cuestión sobre la participación política en Twitter realizado con el objetivo de mapear las formas de interacción que se están estudiando, para dilucidar hasta dónde el panorama que proyectan esos estudios es suficiente para explicar y comprender los entresijos de lo que ocurre con este fenómeno entre los usuarios que conforman el sector más amplio en la red: la población común y corriente. El tema es relevante porque si bien Twitter es la red social política de preferencia tanto para los investigadores como para los usuarios, no se encuentran estudios de las conversaciones que realizan ciudadanos de a pie sin vínculos entre ellos ni lazos que los integren con una causa, movimiento, hashtag o partido político. El texto está integrado por cuatro apartados, formados inductivamente con lo que reveló una exploración de la literatura reciente realizada con la teoría fundamentada: 1) Twitter en la esfera pública, 2) efectos sociales de Twitter en la participación política, 3) Twitter en activismo, protestas y movilizaciones, y 4) relación entre Twitter y periodistas o medios de comunicación. Las conclusiones apuntan a que los estudios sociales ofrecen una idea incompleta de las prácticas comunicativas de asuntos políticos en Twitter y que los usuarios que conforman el colectivo más grande en Twitter no aparecen en la literatura. Se propone el concepto ‘deshilvanado’ para designar a esos usuarios de a pie.

## **Palabras clave**

Participación política, Twitter, usuario común, interacción digital, deshilvanado.

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## **Introduction. Political participation on Twitter**

Twitter is the preferred political social network for both researchers and users. Social studies consider it a medium that consolidates political communication, making it a little more innovative, because it facilitates the rapid transmission of short messages and promotes the dissemination of informal and spontaneous speeches, while allowing direct listening and conversation. On Twitter, public institutions, political parties, social movements, and business organizations spread their opinions and establish peer-to-peer communication with partners, sympathizers, militants, or clients (Campos-Domínguez, 2017; Moya-Sánchez & Herrera-Damas, 2015; Murcia-Verdú, 2018; Ortiz-Espinoza & Espejel-Trujillo, 2021; Veenstra *et al.*, 2014; Zamora-Medina & Zurutuza-Muñoz, 2014).

Political participation on Twitter is on a global scale. In Brazil and South Korea, the use of Twitter has increased among citizens and politicians, to the extent that this network plays a role in deliberation and participation because of its easiness to share user-generated content (Kim & Park, 2012; Martins de Souza *et al.*, 2017). In Spain, it was suggested to reflect on the desirability of shifting interest in television to the image management of politicians on Twitter, because it extends contact between leaders and citizens (Quevedo-Redondo *et al.*, 2016). In Nigeria and Turkey, politicians who wanted to make their views available to broad audiences and ordinary citizens used Twitter, which has led to a change in election campaigns and voter courtroom (Opeibi, 2019). In New Zealand, the use of Twitter was specifically recommended for women politicians who wish to practice public relations and gain visibility (Fontaine, 2017).

## **Other social media**

Some studies on political participation in social media do not indicate a specific platform. For example, Effing *et al.* (2013) discussed that politicians with more participation in social media—which are not specified—obtained more votes in the Netherlands during national elections. Barisione *et al.* (2017) concluded that social networks have been widely demonstrated to improve political participation and collective action. Brown *et al.* (2017) suggested that social media activism be studied—without distinguishing which—to understand how collectivities maintain their identity in a social movement.

On the other hand, authors who indicate the social networks used to conduct their studies—commonly Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube—conclude that cover them all. For example, Youmans and York (2012) conducted their study on Facebook and Twitter, but in their discussion, they refer to the networking capacity—in general—for mobilizations. Van Stekelengurg and Klandermans (2017) noted differences between recruitment or call for mobilization by traditional channels against that made on social networks Facebook and Twitter, referring to networks in general.

Other authors analyze the effects of incidental exposure to political news that identify as an emerging trend in digital consumption, with conclusions more or less favorable to political participation in network, in terms of how

users engage with mobilizations or political positions that they hear on their digital platforms because they get into activities outside political participation (Kümpel, 2020; Lee *et al.*, 2022; Serrano-Puche *et al.*, 2018).

## **The social media ecosystem**

There are also studies that do not refer to social media as applications or platforms, but to the interaction that occurs on the Internet in generic terms, understanding it as a media sphere or as stated by Van Dijck (2013), as an “ecosystem.” This author warned that the like button belongs to Zuckerberg. Each time a user clicks like on any of the more than 350 thousand websites that have it installed; their personal data is routed to Facebook even if they do not have an account on that network. “The like button allows Facebook to track how many users and whose friends have clicked the button [that] indicates a profound modification of a social standard” (2013, pp. 49-50).

Authors who do not indicate which social networks they used to make their observations refer to the Internet or Web 2.0 in general as if it constituted an ecosystem. Hekim (2021), says that the Internet has been praised as a tool that increases political participation and improves dialog between politicians and citizens, and that the widespread use of social media has made them a valuable communication channel for both individuals and organizations. Consistent with the recommendation that Brown *et al.* (2017) had expressed years ago about their interest to study social media activism—without specifying any—to better understand it; Kadiri *et al.* (2020) say that political participation and user engagement on the Internet require academics to investigate and understand the inherent potential in these actions on various social networks.

## **Political participation and Twitter**

It seems that there can be no politics without electronic interaction in this digital age. A significant part of the literature has been devoted to understanding the political actions that are conducive to Twitter or in some network. We are at a point where it is necessary to conceive and employ theorizations that are in concordance with the digital age to talk about the online phenomenon of political participation. Some approaches to political

participation that consider the electronic world are using tools that analyze interaction in traditional media, resulting that the phenomenon is underestimated and not scaled (Trejo-Delarbre, 2015). Nowadays, even the social groups that do not interact with the digital age are affected by the dynamics of social networks.

This does not mean [...] that people around the world participate in the networks. In fact, most do not. But everyone is affected by the processes that take place in the global networks of this social structure (Castells, 2012, p. 51).<sup>1</sup>

The degree of Twitter-political codependency is so high that some academics conduct research with questions that would not even be considered in some geographies, for example, Straus *et al.* (2016): question “Why do some senators use Twitter more often than others?” (own translation). All research questions are credited to the knowledge. The spectrum establishes conditions where it is possible to follow the dialog on these two phenomena: *political participation* and *Twitter*, necessary and relevant to better understand the reality of our time. But the question remains about the daily political interaction that happens 24/7 on Twitter between ordinary users, who are unknown to the public opinion.

### **Political participation in ordinary users in a daily basis**

Twitter created a constant and always-open political discussion space that did not exist. In the past, ordinary people could talk about politics only under certain conditions, such as when they were at the hair salon and said something about the news, or at the meeting with friends, or at work with the colleague. Frequent users have a voice on Twitter to discuss about politics, and they instantly incorporate the dynamic dialog of the Twitter timeline. No matter what time and place, they can write, dictate, or repeat whatever they are thinking about the political event that triggered their opinion of the moment. They use their digital prosthetics—as stated by Mercedes Bunz (2017) to cell phones—to enter Twitter to answer the question “What is

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<sup>1</sup> Castells used a 2007 data from Hammond et al., but the Statista page consulted on November 24, 2021, estimated 82% of Internet users of social networks in the world for this year. <https://bit.ly/3ImEM93>

going on?”. Are those who are not accustomed to political opinion taking on the interest there? Is this how political positions are being delineated? Does this talking about politics on Twitter translate into any action? Are political actors watching those interactions?

The above questions remain unanswered, because unless there is research carried out 1) in contexts of campaigns, debates or political elections; 2) on perverse ways of using the Network; 3) on a hashtag, meme, topic, social cause, mobilization, or activism; 4) on a relevant political situation; 5) on a structural approach, or 6) in comparison with another social phenomenon such as the media; no studies have been found that observe the daily interaction on day-to-day political issues made by ordinary users.

Because of the latter, the literature review was done to map the interests of researchers, to emphasize the need and propose a perspective that allows to improve our understanding of the phenomenon. Once understanding this form of participation, it will be possible to analyze whether it has any social influence, whether it is able to achieve any public influence or whether it exercises any power.

### **Brief note on grounded theory**

The results on the following pages are part of an exploratory study of the literature conducted for doctoral research of grounded theory on political participation on Twitter. The concept of grounded theory tends to be confusing because it refers to a set of procedures used to conduct a scientific study, the result of which is a theory as well as the name of this strategy which is not a theory. Informed theory is a methodology for generating the theory that will explain how study participants conceive that interaction on which the researcher asks a question. It refers to something that lies at the root (the foundation) of the dynamics of the studied group. It is the concept that a group of people have of their interactions, an exchange that surprises the researcher and wants to understand; for this reason, the researcher turns to the people and asks them questions about their relationships, so that they can explain the way they understand them. The grounded theory is a way to explain this understanding of the phenomenon by the researcher so that he/she does not alter it or modify it by adapting it to his/her own paradigms. If the researcher uses his/her deductive reasoning, if he/she establishes previous

categories, or if he/she uses an established theory to explain how community members relate and communicate, the outcome of the research will not be a grounded theory. For these reasons, there is no research theory and no previous categories or references derived from verified theoretical bodies when working with grounded theory (Charmaz, 2013; Glaser & Strauss, 2017).

## **Materials and method**

The aim of the literature review was to know the objectives of research conducted on political participation on Twitter. The search words used were political participation and Twitter.<sup>2</sup> More than a thousand titles were obtained, indicating that the topic is being addressed with interest by the academic community. Once the results were selected with criteria of date and discipline, half of them remained, with a total of 271 articles. To describe this overview, reference is made to a representative selection of these studies.

Many valuable works were not included because they do not focus on analyzing the relationship between political participation and Twitter. Studies that integrated their corpus of analysis with political hashtags or algorithms with political variables to investigate phenomena outside political participation, and work on political phenomena with disciplines and approaches other than sociology and communication were also omitted.

Although the search words used were political participation and Twitter, UNAM Digital Library, Redalyc and ResearchGate, as well as literature on Twitter, provided research on other digital platforms and social networks in general that were included because of their relevance in sizing the topic.

There were three criteria used to classify this set of publications: 1) decreasing order in terms of the number of jobs; 2) alphabetical order by last name; and 3) chronological order according to the date of publication moving toward the most recent. The chronological criterion is important because it makes it easier to observe how quickly these topics have evolved, as well as the emergence of new routes of exploration by social researchers. The first works, for example, called on the academic community to take an interest in these topics by describing the characteristics of political participation in social networks and their potential, while the most recent analyze

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2 The search of words was done in spanish and english: *political participation AND Twitter*.

more specifically aspects of these dynamics or to enter the study from perspectives. It is understood that the relevance of studying these phenomena has been established in social studies.

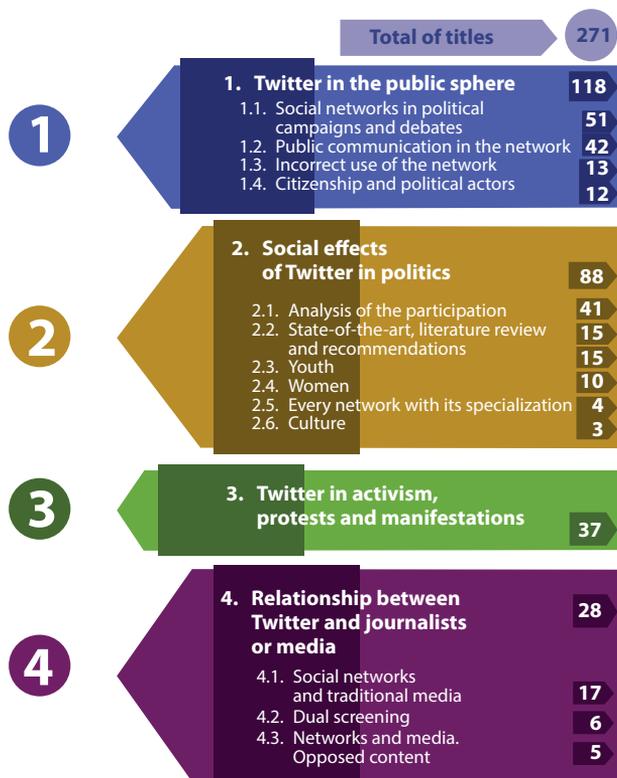
The presentation was ordered according to the number of titles in each topic to provoke a sense of gap by the little studied phenomena and boredom for those that will be investigated. For the same reason, the introductory paragraph to each block indicates the number of titles it has. There are 118 reports on Twitter in the public sphere and only 28 on the relationship between this social network and the media, so there are opportunities for research in the latter topic. At the same time, four thematic sets were established, and the decreasing order were also incorporated. The topic for each group was determined inductively from reading the abstracts of those materials.

It is interesting to comment that the first search was made in the UNAM Digital Library, and once classified the topics already determined, it was proceeded to search at Redalib and ResearchGate, finding it unnecessary to add new titles to the sets: it was appropriate to save the new texts in the thematic boxes already labeled. However, the increase in the number of articles did force the index to be rearranged, the most relevant being that the group that was at the end with the least titles was ranked penultimate, in other words, fewer jobs addressed the relationship between the media and social networks (theme four) and more work focused on activism and mobilization (theme three). The names or central themes of journals were not considered, the factor of inclusion was the content of the articles.

There are 51 works in our corpus that are framed in contexts of political campaigns and party debates — this being the largest set of texts — and only three that analyze the political use of social networks, relating it to the cultural features of the population studied. The following diagram shows the list of topics and jobs listed.

The following is an overview of the results obtained in this literature review. Because of the space, only a representative selection of these articles is referred to with the aim of drawing an overview of the subjects being investigated to attend to empirical evidence and whether they reveal the characteristics of the users. The total number of works that are available to give ideas of where to advance in the research is indicated. In the bibliography only the studies mentioned here are presented.

### Classification of topics in the literature reviewed



## Twitter in the public sphere

This section contains 118 papers that study the relationship between actors or agencies in the public sphere and citizens on social networks.

### *Networks in campaigns and political debates*

This set consists of 51 studies that analyze how social networks affect campaigns and political debates during elections. For example, Blas Risk *et al.* (2019) made a quantitative analysis focused on Twitter during the counting of votes of elections in Spain 2015 and found that the media are at the

center of the activity, but citizens gain high visibility by using humor in conversation. Ramos-Sandoval and Blázquez-Soriano (2021) analyzed feelings in the tweets of the presidential debate in Peru in 2021 and suggest that there are opportunities to understand reactions and opinions in Peru in relevant political situations in the analysis of social media data. Nicasio-Varea and Pérez-Gabaldón (2021) conclude that despite the increasingly widespread use of Twitter by politicians, they must learn to exploit this instrument that offers possibilities to reach people and gain support at the ballot box. These authors carried out a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the tweets published by the profiles of two candidates for the mayor of Valencia0 in 2019.

### *Social media public communication*

This name groups 42 titles that study how politicians or government bodies relate to social media users outside election seasons. Using survey and Twitter data, Amador and Piña-García (2017) noted that electoral participation, inter-regional participation, interest in politics, and sources of political information are reducing, while participation in Twitter is increasing; they conclude that Twitter is significant in terms of political participation in Mexico. Using data from eighteen qualitative interviews, Farkas and Schwartz (2018) analyzed the perception that social media managers of Danish political parties have of user-generated content and found that they use Facebook only for one-way communication and public opinion monitoring, concluding that voters are not represented on Facebook users. Guarino *et al.* (2020) verified whether it is correct that exposure to propaganda, influencers and disinformation on social networks are responsible for the polarization of users on the networks and the success of the campaigns, and found highly partisan community structures aligned with politicians, very active users, users with roles, and useful information in the retweet related to exposure, interactions, and user participation with respect to advertising. Del Valle *et al.* (2021) deny the existence of algorithm-enabled echo chambers on Twitter and support the hypothesis that social networks can open discussion spaces between political parties, which they say, it is particularly important in fragmented consensus democracies where it is imperative that the parties form coalitions, as is the case with the Dutch parliament. Ortiz-Espinoza and Espejel-Trujillo (2021) found that the volume and presence in social networks does not guarantee the impact of the candidates' tweets or their connection

with the public. They mention the example of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador who was the least active candidate and the one who obtained the most interaction.

### *Perverse use of the network*

This section groups 13 studies that review the introduction or non-introduction of fake news, bots or algorithmic biases in social media to manipulate public opinion. For example, Stukal *et al.* (2017) developed a methodology for detecting bots on Twitter to study the activity of bots in the political discussions of the Russian tweet activity. Sinpeng *et al.* (2020) reached the same conclusions as Ortiz-Espinoza and Espejel-Trujillo (2021): the winning candidate Duterte in the Philippines was little active on social media, so his prominence was not made by paid trolls and fake accounts, but by his supporters who made aggressive support in both the digital and offline movement. Tank-Mercuri and Esteves de Lima-Lopes (2020) conclude that the repetition and standardization of stigmatized speeches, as well as their spraying on social networks, are used as an instrument to gain popular support. With grounded theory, Santini *et al.* (2021) performed observational netnography and discourse analysis in more than 19 thousand tweets, sorting the sample into user-generated bots, media spambots, and political bots, and concluding that bots set the stage for Jair Bolsonaro's victory in Brazil's presidential election in 2018.

### *Citizenship and political actors*

This section contains 12 works that carried out theorizations or models for the study of the interaction between citizens and political actors on social networks. Papacharissi and De Fatima Oliveira (2012) present a theory of affective news to explain the distinctive character of the content produced by the public on the Web in times of political crisis. Barisione *et al.* (2017) propose the concept 'digital movement of opinion' as a heuristically useful tool for investigating new forms of digital citizen participation. Hanteer *et al.* (2018) propose a model for obtaining data on Twitter and say it is useful for finding different communities in the context of political communication on Twitter.

## **Social Effects of Twitter on Political Participation**

This second group contains 88 papers that study the effects of the political use of social media in the different areas of analysis proposed by researchers.

### *Analysis of participation*

In this topic, 41 titles are grouped that refer to the motivations for participating or not politically in the network, or the context in which such participation occurs, in studies that are not related to citizen mobilizations or political campaigns. For example, Bernhard and Dohle (2018) conducted a survey among German citizens to determine whether it is true that the perception of what friends or acquaintances do on social media affects their own communication activities and found that the scope and influence of Facebook and Twitter affects the intensity of online communication only when it comes to friends and acquaintances. Matingwina (2018) surveyed 124 students and said that, as a result of the Arab Spring, there are national security concerns in Zimbabwe about the potential shown by the networks to coordinate and mobilize users. Muhammad Saud *et al.* (2020) surveyed Lebanese using Facebook, Twitter and Instagram for political purposes and conclude that social media are suitable for using an online political platform and provide an opportunity for users to participate in the political sector of their country.

### *State-of-the-art*

This topic groups 15 pieces reflecting on academic production that addresses the relationship between political participation and social media. Campos-Domínguez (2017) analyzes the literature on Twitter since its appearance in 2006, focusing on the use that broadcasters and recipients make of political debate and the electoral campaign. Whitesell (2019) says research is needed to explain how stakeholders use networks to influence policies and engage with stakeholders. Trein (2021) states that ruptures usually occur through incisions and discursive ellipses with the linearity of the original discourses, but in the case of politics, the propagandistic character of the stickers remains even when a new meaning is constructed.

### *Young people*

This topic contains 15 titles where young people represent the studied population and articles whose central focus is the political participation of young people in social networks. Yang and DeHart (2016) surveyed 4556 US university students after the 2012 election to investigate what psychological and behavioral factors related with social media predicted young people's online political participation, and they found that online social capital, political self-efficacy, and participation in Facebook groups were positive predictors, while social trust did not have a direct influence. Acevedo *et al.* (2021) incorporate perspectives from the public and private spheres and the philosophy of technology, to analyze the relationship of young people with politics on Twitter and conclude that young people have a way that allows them to generate resistance processes to the models imposed by the right and the left in political campaigns. On the other hand, Vázquez-Barrio *et al.* (2020) claim that participating in political affairs is not important for young people, but they prefer using the networks to entertain.

### *Women*

This section includes ten titles that reflect on the role of women in political participation in social networks. Guha (2015) analyzed the usefulness of hashtags to focus and publicize feminist issues on Twitter and concluded on the need to relate the main themes of the Network and activism to engage the public. Sánchez-Duarte and Fernández-Romero (2017) interviewed twelve activists with a broad background in the feminist movement and in the intensive use of social networks and show that digital collective action repertoires are configured as endogamic spaces and not completely conquered by feminist collectives. Parsloe and Campbell (2021), with a thematic analysis of 481 tweets, studied how Twitter has facilitated indigenous women's activism in North America.

### *Each Network on its role*

This topic has four research that analyzes differences of political participation in different networks. Woo Yoo and Gil de Zúñiga (2014) examined the impact of using Twitter, Facebook, and blogs on gaps in political knowledge and participation among people with different educational levels and concluded that there are differences that contribute to widening inequa-

lity in political commitment. Sockmann *et al.* (2020) compared the use of Chinese social networks Weibo and WeChat with Twitter, WhatsApp and Facebook and reflect that, because of the authoritarianism of the state, the significant differences between American networks are not seen in Chinese networks where users know that political discussion is sensitive to the state and use any network to demonstrate, while in the United States, Twitter is more conducive to political expression.

### *Culture*

This section lists three articles that discuss the differences in the political use of social media related to users' country, language, or ethnicity. Vaccari *et al.* (2015) found that institutional environments and technological possibilities play a role in the political discourse of social networks. Institutional and non-institutional political participation is significantly stronger in established democracies than in third-wave democracies. Ahmed *et al.* (2018) noted that the contents of publications of English-speaking communities, compared with those in Malay, differ both in the way they use Twitter and in the users with whom they interact. Workneh (2021) argues that social media platforms are likely to increase intra-group political participation, but also chronically decrease the engagement of the external group. His study is part of a political context in Ethiopia in 2018 that embodies highly heterogeneous and competing collective identities, ethnic and other.

### **Twitter in activism, protests, and mobilizations**

This third block has 37 works related to activism, mobilizations and citizen participation linked to a cause or its triggering factors, and its links with social networks. For example, Smith *et al.* (2015) analyzed 770 tweets related to Taksim Square in Turkey in 2013 and noted that efforts to change are based not on calls for action but on the dissemination of information. Dutceac and Bossetta (2016) found that the citizens and not the political parties are the ones who make political appeals prior to an electoral process. Mercea and Bastos (2016) propose the concept of engagement compass to point out the relationship between activists' patterns of life and their investment of personal time in protest, characterizing activists as 'serial' by virtue of the relationship they establish between their public and personal activities.

Chan and Park (2021) analyzed participation in protests in South Korea in 2016-2017 and concluded that what motivates political participation is not network services, but the use of network users and their participation in rival protests.

## **Relationship between Twitter and journalists or media**

This fourth and last block refers to 28 titles that relate traditional media to social media.

### *Social Media and Traditional Media*

The 17 studies that make up this section discuss relationships and distinctions between traditional media and social media with respect to the role they play in the political participation of citizens. Justel-Vázquez *et al.* (2018) quantified the times that statements published on Twitter are used by journalists and conclude that the network is a source of The New York Times not only in electoral contexts. Anastasopoulos and Williams (2019) say that much of our knowledge about participation in political protests comes from data collected about violent protests, because the media focus on the violence of social mobilizations and ensure that the digital revolution diverted attention from the traditional news sources to social networks. Casero-Ripollés (2020), with big data techniques of more than 120 million tweets and a methodology machine learning and social network analysis, claims that the influence on Twitter in the media system is being reconfigured and that the media obtain intermediate and low values in authority, questioning their power to effectively condition the political conversation on Twitter. Christine Hine (2020) conducts a content analysis of the performances of three British newspapers from Twitter between 2007 and 2014 to explore the potential contribution of different journalistic practices in maintaining inequalities in social media platforms. It concludes that there is a complex ecology of connections that goes between traditional and new media, and between different media constructions as cultural devices, which must be explored to understand how people assimilate the variety of representations of what Twitter is and who uses it. He claims that this exploration is important because it relates to the ability to consider oneself with a voice, which is a decisive aspect of digital equality and, consequently, of social equality.

### *Dual Screening*

There are 6 titles where the studied population uses social networks to express themselves in real time on the political content presented by television. Shah *et al.* (2016) found that facial expressions, physical gestures, and candidate flickering are consistent, solid, and significant predictors of public expression during debates, above the candidates' memes, rhetoric, and tone. Jennings *et al.* (2017) found that political debates are related to increases in the political knowledge of viewers and that accuracy reduced problem-based tweets and consequently reduced knowledge acquisition, while it increased the production of problem-based tweets along with the acquisition of knowledge.

### *Networks and media. Opposite content*

There are 5 articles where it is observed that the framing of traditional media with respect to political power is contrary to the content circulating on social networks. Nunomura (2013) verified whether Twitter reflects the traditional media agenda in the second round of the presidential election in Brazil in 2010 and found that news published in the national press is different from what is popular on the Web. Robles *et al.* (2015) analyzed how activists of the 15-M movement used Internet when it broke into Spanish public life and observed that they tried to control information presented by the press. García-Perdomo (2017) conducted two types of studies with software that analyzes and categorizes large databases in Colombia's presidential elections in 2014 and in both cases found opposing positions between network users and journalists.

## **Conclusions and discussion**

Some authors refer to the physical world as "reality." Even though a lot has been said about the real and virtual in the digital age. And even if the discussion is not settled, there is no doubt that everything that happens in the online world is real.

In the digital age, the answer to the question of whether the media is the message is: it depends. With these studies it is not appropriate to analyze the phenomenon of interaction on social networks with the tools that were stu-

died by media scholars. It is required to specify the media and the message, as well as the context that, as some authors point out, positions as the factor that tilts the scale to one side or the other, in the possible electronic interactions. There is the need to “link or relate the elements that had not been associated in communicative study objects, to see how they are integrated and what new aspects they can prove” (Orozco & González, 2011, p. 12).

Differences in user participation related to the different platforms they choose for their messages are disrespected in some studies, while others do not specify which applications they used to perform their work. Generically referring to social media circumvents the fact that not all applications are equal. Moreover, this distinction is connected to the economic and political context in which phenomena are inscribed, and it is therefore important to delineate it. It appears that the differences between the different applications in authoritarian regimes are blurred because the contents of the messages are prioritized over the media used to broadcast them. Is this always the case? Is this true for all repressive systems? Studies are needed in this regard. Not all social media users can choose the platform they are going to use to get their ideas going. What Western researchers conclude with regard to political communication in the digital age does not concern everyone. All countries are different.

Researchers report media describing realities that are not verified on social networks, what reality did the press refer to before the digital age? Despite differences in the findings, there is consensus that the media are losing authority and their ability to influence public opinion. This constitutes an analysis perspective relevant to the communication that requires research.

All the studies on mobilizations, protests and activities obtained were carried out with data collected with a hashtag. There is a technical practicality in the use of this resource for the integration of the corpus and also methodological relevance. Moreover, the fact that academic studies refer to the multiple and diverse hashtags that circulate on social networks to identify social movements also makes those causes more visible to the academic world, which is fair and imperative for democracy. However, to what extent is this practice of circumscribing studies around a hashtag or electoral topic or event legitimizing a data integration criterion that is hegemonic in social studies by putting aside a portion of reality that is also visible on those networks?

Users manifest themselves politically daily, not only from specific events and not only from them. Social media give a place to users. No ordinary citizen was able to express his/her dissatisfaction with the media's picture of the news, but now the social sciences are asking to go to the polls and to express that rejection on election day to consider it valid. Otherwise, if it is going to be expressed only on networks, users must use a hashtag or keywords to be seen. It is our sciences that must move by devising strategies to identify those users and those publications and ask them why and the reason they do it. If that does not happen, research is dealing with a small portion of what happens and is visible in political interaction on social networks.

It is said that Twitter currently influences the media and not the other way around; and that Twitter's authority and influence on public opinion is superior to that of the press. In this regard, it is alarming that the media maintain agendas on the national context clearly decoupled from the issues that are trending on social networks. Candidates and politicians, for their part, do not use or know or do not want to take advantage of the possibilities that the networks have for interacting with their audiences. This attitude is not coherent with studies that show how online interaction between popular personalities and users translates into forms of social commitment and manifestation. The latter is another consensus of the diverse collection of academic titles.

In general terms, there is a tendency to interpret the findings of the research by questioning the political commitment of online activists to Spanish-speaking authors, as well as an optimism and a celebratory attitude in Anglo-Saxon scholars. In some studies, there is a tendency to interpret the data in contempt of the interaction itself and it stands out how academics get to conflicting interpretations. The conclusions of authors expressing their views based on their findings are also highlighted. It is observed that researchers are clear in their positions, in contrast to authors who strive so hard to suspend their judgments that their academic pieces do not make relevant contributions to the understanding of the phenomena they study. Emphasis is placed on the importance of developing tools and strategies that help to better understand political participation in the digital age.

There is a lack of research on the relationship between few followers and the impact of messages. Citizen voices that manifest themselves in networks can go unnoticed by algorithmic leverage. Huge amounts of data obtained with algorithms are relevant, but the findings must be more in tune with data that is broad, vague, or indiscriminate. There are not studies with data selec-

ted manually. It is not possible to accept or reject the potential of social networks in political participation, but it is possible to integrate the political map of the digital world by gathering studies that specify their coordinates.

No studies were found on the ways in which ordinary users use these digital tools to participate politically. As regards political participation, social movements are studied as well as organized actions; manifestations articulated with identity evidencing their chronology, legitimacy, and legality; and the social actions that happen around political events in the form of party debates or electoral processes. We need to observe the political interaction on Twitter that is detached, i.e., the one which does not belong to political parties or hashtags, or that do not rise with systematic operations, because it does not meet criteria of relationship or visibility. Their participants are not influencers, their tweets are not trendy, their interactions do not get a certain number. It is stated that, despite these characteristics, such silent political participation that is deployed among “detached” tweets or separated from a hashtag, activism, or visible public or private event, and alien to the referents used by the social sciences, is part of the connected forms of political participation. This is a participation that happens at this time. To make the collection of studies more complete, those considered detached users who became audible with social networks are required. Once this form of political participation has been identified and studied, it will be possible to analyze what this social group can do, hence it is urgent that researchers see it.

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