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# TWITTER'S MESSAGES DURING A GOVERNOR ELECTION: ABUNDANCE OF ONE-WAY, TOP-DOWN AND AUTO-REFERENTIAL COMMUNICATIONS AND SCARCITY OF PUBLIC DIALOGUE

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## Abstract

*This paper examined how a public dialogue between citizens and politicians was developed on Twitter within an electoral campaign. This study focused on analyzing the messages that circulated on the Twitter accounts of five candidates that ran for governor in the state of Jalisco, Mexico, in 2012. Twitter is one of the most popular social media platforms in the western democracies and recently has been an important communication channel in the political field, especially in electoral periods. The questions this study investigated includes: What is happening within Twitter in electoral competitions? How are the users communicating with the politicians? What kind of public dialogue can be found in these communication processes? These questions were tackled through qualitative textual analysis of messages that circulated through the Twitter accounts of five Mexican politicians that competed in an electoral campaign. The major finding indicates that there was a scarcity of public dialogue on Twitter during Jalisco's local campaigns. Nevertheless there was evidence of an incipient public dialogue between candidates and citizens within Twitter interactions.*

**Keywords:** Public Dialogue, Political Communication, Social Media, Twitter.

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The advent of the Internet and the Web 2.0 offered new forms of communication that changed contemporary societies. Hence, an important field of research is related to how the Internet and Web 2.0 are changing the political communication systems and practices. This paper examines how public dialogue between citizens and politicians were developed on Twitter within an electoral campaign. The study focused on analyzing the messages that circulated in the Twitter accounts of five candidates that ran for governor in the State of Jalisco, Mexico, in 2012.

As I discuss in the body of this article, most of the research on Web 2.0, public dialogue, and political communication is anchored to quantitative investigations of voter turnout. Also, the majority of this research has been conducted in Europe or the United States. Therefore, the main objective of this research was to advance the political communication field, through the qualitative study of public dialogue within social media communication platforms in a Latin American electoral campaign.

Twitter, along with other social networks like Facebook or Youtube, has become a popular social media platform in the western democracies and recently has been an important communication tool in the political field, especially in electoral periods. What is happening within Twitter in electoral competitions? How are the users communicating with the politicians? What kind of public dialogue can be found in these communication processes? These questions were the guide to observe, through a qualitative textual analysis, the Twitter feed of five candidates that competed for the government of Jalisco, Mexico. The major findings indicate that there was a scarcity of

public dialogue on Twitter, during Jalisco's local campaigns.

### **Public Communication and Public Dialogue as the Base for Democracy**

Public communication is a basic process that allows a community: (1) to organize collective tasks; (2) to promote social actions; and (3) to spread their common goals. This basic process allows the social reproduction of any kind of human community (Martín Serrano, 1994). Drawing from this definition, it is clear that several processes of public communication constitute the organization of democratic elections because an electoral process is a collective social task that promotes diverse social actions—the most relevant and frequent is to vote—in order to create an agreement about the common goals of a certain community.

In democratic societies, an important question that speaks to public communication processes is how public dialogue occurs in order to organize the collective tasks, promote social actions, and diffuse the common goals. Departing from this question, Demers and Lavigne (2007) developed a model to analyze public communication, defined as a structure that allows public dialogue in contemporary democracies (2007, p. 73). According to these authors, four different dimensions compose the public communication terrain: journalism, public relations, social advertisement, and network communication, all of which overlap and operate at the same time. In such a manner, this model proposed the study of public communication as a process that constitutes an essential political mechanism of democratic societies because, in theory, democratic societies should have an open political communication system

where citizens and politicians can analyze, discuss, and criticize public issues.

Thus, what is a public dialogue and why is public dialogue important in democratic systems? A dialogue is an interaction between two or more persons. This interaction permits the exchange of information, opinions, reflections, and reactions between the participants within the dialogue (Acosta García, 2012). The concept of public is related to all those common topics and issues within a certain community, and also is defined as opposed to the private sphere. A public dialogue is an interactive communication between people discussing topics or issues of concern to a community. The ideal democratic system is one that has mechanisms that allow their citizens to participate in the public life of their community through a political communication system. Therefore, the public dialogue works as evidence that these mechanisms are effective towards the consolidation of a democratic system (Acosta García, Larrosa-Fuentes & Palau Cardona, 2014, p. 137).

In Demers and Lavigne's model (2007), network communication is an important dimension of public communication that operates through digital technologies. In recent years, this novel dimension has acquired an important place in political communication, mainly because network communication has been thought of as a tool for the improvement of deliberative democracy and for integrating citizens into the discussion and management of collective issues. In the frame of network communication, a dialogue is an interaction between two or more persons, discussing public issues, that are not communicating face to face and, therefore, they need technical mediations in order to interact (López de Anda, 2012, p. 251). These network communications become part of a

broader public communication system. These communication systems, as already said, are vital and fundamental within the processes of social reproduction of any democratic society.

### **Mass Self-Communication, Web 2.0, and Twitter**

According to Manuel Castells (2000), the emergence of digital communication made possible the constitution of what he called the network society. The base of this new society is the convergence from analog to digital technology, which enabled "critical transformations" in the way that humans communicate; the outcome of these transformations can be observed in political, economic, cultural and technological dimensions (Castells, 2009, p. 57). A particular change that is important to mention here concerns the forms of communication. Castells claims that an outcome of the technological shift in the network society is what he calls mass self-communication that emerged with the Internet and the Web 2.0.<sup>2</sup> The mass self-communication—which is different from interpersonal and mass communication, but coexists with them—allows creating horizontal networks of interactive communication wherein people—audiences—have the opportunity to create their own communication systems. In this

<sup>2</sup> The concept of Web 2.0 was defined Tim O'Reilly as the a "set of principles and practices" that guide the work of a web-based company: "Services, not packaged software, with cost-effective scalability; control over unique, hard-to-recreate data sources that get richer as more people use them; trusting users as co-developers; harnessing collective intelligence; leveraging the long tail through customer self-service; software above the level of a single device; and lightweight user interfaces, development models, and business models" (O'Reilly, 2005).

new form of communication, any person with access to Internet has the possibility to select messages, produce their messages, and send messages to a potentially massive and global audience (Castells, 2009, pp. 63–71).

The network society opened the possibility for a new horizon of political participation, civic engagement, and public deliberation (Cogburn & Espinoza-Vasquez, 2011, pp. 193–194; Sweetser & Lariscy, 2008, p. 177; Vesnic-Alujevic, 2012, p. 466). Some authors have claimed that digital technologies, especially Web 2.0, are the base to improve democratic systems because this technology allows citizens to directly communicate and interact with the politicians (Cogburn & Espinoza-Vasquez, 2011; Vesnic-Alujevic, 2012, p. 465). Another benefit is that through Web 2.0 they can create their own messages and become what some scholars have named prosumers—producers and consumers (Barassi & Treré, 2012, p. 1271; Castells, 2009, pp. 63–71; Trejo Delarbre, 2011, p. 63). Other authors are skeptical about the democratic improvements fostered by new technologies because they claim that Web 2.0 has improved the State and corporate surveillance and control of the users (Barassi & Treré, 2012, p. 1271), and because many electoral and political experiences have shown a lack of public dialogue and interactions within the cyberspace (Dahlgren, 2005; Duarte & Larrosa-Fuentes, 2013; Macnamara, 2011; Trejo Delarbre, 2011, p. 73).

In the frame of this debate, Twitter has become a popular tool in political communication processes and campaigns since it was launched in 2006 (Álvarez García, 2010; Cogburn & Espinoza-Vasquez, 2011; Duarte & Larrosa-Fuentes, 2013). Twitter is a networked-platform within which people can post their own

messages, read messages from other people, and interact among the participants of the network. This platform is also defined as a micro blog, which is a technological combination of a personal blog—a space within which people can publish content of their own creation (Graham & Smart, 2010, p. 204)—and social media. Briefly, Twitter is a stream of messages that allows the users to have conversations with other individuals, groups, or the entire network through messages of 140 characters that are named “tweets” (Barash & Golder, 2011, pp. 143–144; Boyd, Golder, & Lotan, 2010, p. 1; Marwick & Boyd, 2011, pp. 3–5; Purohit et al., 2013, p. 2439).

The Web 2.0 architecture of Twitter seems suitable for public dialogue because it is a network where everyone that has a computer and Internet access can join—although it has to be recognized that the digital gap is still an issue in many regions of the world. While this network allows the possibility of sending private messages among the users, Twitter is mainly a flow of public messages where every user that joins the network is permitted to participate in every conversation. Consequently, this microblogging platform has a more public profile than other forms of communication on Internet, like emails, which are, most of the time, private interactions. Additionally, Honeycutt and Herring (2009) have explained that one of the most salient features of Twitter is its “addressitivity” function, which means that people have the possibility to create conversations with one or more Twitter users. In theory, this microblogging tool, as other online resources, is a technology that allows public dialogue about political issues. However, Twitter is not a technology that can, per se, create dialogue or conversation. Twitter needs humans that operate these forms of communication. Therefore, the aim of this

research is to observe how political dialogue and conversations are taking place within Twitter, as part of a general public communication process.

### **Twitter and Public Dialogue**

Within the specialized literature, Twitter has been tested as a useful device for dialogical communication. Drawing from the field of public relations, LaMarre and Suzuki-Lambretch (2013) proved that Twitter is a valuable communication tool during electoral campaigns. They discovered a relation between the use of Twitter and the probabilities of winning an election; Smith (2010) examined Twitter during natural disasters, and found that Twitter is a useful dialogic platform during a communication crisis; and Rybalko and Seltzer(2010) learned that many companies used Twitter as a medium of conversation with its stakeholders. From the political communication field, researchers have found incipient dialogue practices during electoral campaign periods (Grant, Moon, & Busby Grant, 2010).

However, there is counterevidence about the dialogic powers and uses of Twitter. Researchers have found that the same people that are engaged in political activism offline used Twitter as a communicative and dialogic tool (Bekafigo & McBride, 2013), which means that Twitter is not necessarily a trigger or a facilitator for public dialogue. Moreover, there is evidence that within elections there is a scarcity of dialogue between citizens and politicians, because the former use the microblogging platform only to disseminate information (Adams & McCorkindale, 2013; Barrios, 2012; Duarte & Larrosa-Fuentes, 2013).

The investigation around the dialogic uses of social media in the political field has been designed, mainly, from a quantitative perspective. This research has focused on

the political uses of Twitter for voter persuasion, public relations during electoral campaigns, and for quantifying deliberation (Adams & McCorkindale, 2013; Aparaschivei, 2011; Bekafigo & McBride, 2013; Mansilla Corona & Mansilla Sánchez, 2012). The operationalization of the conversations and public dialogue within Twitter in this kind of research has been related to the frequency of replies or retweets within a political conversation (Adams & McCorkindale, 2013; Grant et al., 2010). Although this research is valuable to understand the general patterns of political conversations, it has failed to explain the characteristics of these dialogical processes and the details of how people are using Twitter in the contemporary political communication systems.

### **Structural Conditions of the Cyberspace in Jalisco's Local Election**

According to a commercial research report, Latin America has “the fastest growing Internet population” of the world because it has been rising at a pace of 12% in the last two years. In the same report Twitter appeared as the third most important social media in the region (ComScore, 2013). Despite the important development of social media in Latin America, there is little research around Twitter and political campaigns in this region (Andrade, 2013; Cremonese, 2012; Mansilla Corona & Mansilla Sánchez, 2012). Also, this research is not directed to study the concept of public dialogue in local contexts. Therefore, this research tackles the lack of political communication research of social media within local political campaigns in Latin America.

Jalisco is one of the most important states of Mexico because is the fourth economy of the country—behind the Mexico City, State of Mexico and Nuevo León. In the census of

2012 Jalisco had 7 350 682 inhabitants, which represented 6.5% of the whole Mexican population (INEGI, 2010). In 2012 30% of Jalisco's households had a computer, and 76% of these computers were connected to Internet. This infrastructure allowed three million of Internet users in Jalisco, which represented 40.8% of the whole population (AMIPCI, 2012). In 2012, the year of Jalisco's election, 54% of the whole Internet Mexican users had a Twitter account; however, there is no available data to determine the exact number of Jalisco's Twitter accounts. According to the results of a survey, the majority of Jalisco's social media users preferred Twitter that Facebook for getting journalistic information and having political exchange opinions (Ramos, 2010). On the other hand, in the electoral dimension, Jalisco had 5 260 351 citizens that were in the electoral list, thus able to vote in the 2012 governor election (IEPCJ, 2013, p. 99).

As said, in 2012 was celebrated a democratic election in Jalisco in order to designate a new governor. Five different candidates participated in the local electoral campaigns, which were developed from February to July of 2012.<sup>3</sup> As a general description, the following data portray the online communication activity within the Twitter accounts of the five candidates: (1) In total, 35,072 persons followed the Twitter accounts of the candidates—it is not possible to know if these followers were Jalisco's citizens or from other parts of Mexico or the world; (2) The candidates followed to 9,275 persons; (3) 5,097 tweets were published in the candidates timelines—either by candidates or by Twitter users; (4) These tweets carried 654 Internet links, 540

photographs, and 254 videos (Duarte & Larrosa-Fuentes p. 167).

### Method

What kind of tweets circulated through Jalisco's political communication system? Did Jalisco's candidates and citizens use Twitter as a tool for public dialogue and to what extent? Which were the characteristics of the episodes of public dialogue between candidates and citizens on Twitter during the 2012 governor campaigns? The former are the questions that guided this research. In order to answer those questions I conducted an inductive textual analysis to describe the interaction between candidates and Twitter users in order to find the patterns of the public dialogue. As a result, I considered public dialogue all the Twitter interactions between the candidates and users that enabled an exchange of information, opinions, reflections, and reactions of the electoral campaigns, through the addressivity function of Twitter—direct and public messages and answers. The operationalization of public dialogue did not include private or personal exchanges of messages on Twitter, neither retweets nor the action of favoriting a tweet.

During the electoral campaigns of 2012, a research group of ITESO University collected a sample of all the tweets that were published in the time-line of the five candidates. The candidates, the candidate's followers, or any Twitter user that wanted to send a public message to the candidate wrote these tweets. The candidates, parties, and their Twitter accounts are presented in Table 1. The sample was collected through all the electoral campaign, which took place between March 30 and July 1 of the year 2012. The sample was designed as a constructed week and was constituted by 14 weeks. The samples were taken on April 1, 8, 15, 22 and 29, May 6, 13, 20 and 27, June 3,

<sup>3</sup> For a complete report of this electoral process, see IEPCJ, 2013; for a complete report of this electoral process from a political communication perspective see Duarte & Larrosa-Fuentes, 2013.

10, 17, 24, and July 1 of 2012. In each week the research group collected all the tweets that were published on the Twitter feed of the five candidates. In total, the sample was constituted by 732 tweets that represented 14.6% of the whole universe of tweets published throughout the electoral campaigns.

## Findings

### General features of the messages that circulated on the candidates' Twitter feed.

The first approach I made for the analysis was to read several times the whole sample of tweets that circulated on the five candidates' feed. From the 732 tweets of the sample, 646 (88%) were originated through the candidates' Twitter accounts. This general features speaks of a communication system that was dominated by the messages of the candidates that ran for governor in Jalisco's elections.

All the candidates used Twitter to build certain kind of rapport or closeness with their voters and Twitter users. These kinds of tweets followed three different patterns.

(1) The candidates used to begin the day with a friendly message, generally, saying "good morning" to their followers: "Good morning! Today we are going to be touring through different municipalities. This is my schedule: <http://www.aristoteles.mx/agenda>".<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Original tweet in Spanish: "¡Buenos días! Hoy seguimos con una intensa gira en distintos

(2) These tweets served to convey the political motto or slogan of the candidate through hashtags like #AlfaroToday (#AlfaroHoy), #WeAllMakeTheChange (#TodosHacemosElCambio), #HappyVote (#VotaFeliz), and #IAMIn (#Yosíleentro).

(3) Some of the candidates used literary or philosophical quotes to inspire their followers. These tweets did not trigger any kind of significant public dialogue, as it is explained in the further pages.

In addition, the candidates used Twitter, most of the times, to announce their geographical location, their political schedule, and with whom they were meeting. For example, a candidate announced a radio interview: "I am at an interview with Pablo Lemus 91.5 FM";<sup>5</sup> other described what he was doing in real time: "On my way to San Francisco. I will keep listening to those who have taken risks for our people and our state <http://t.co/x7La1YpN>".<sup>6</sup> Twitter was useful for these purposes because candidates had the chance to send information in real time to their followers. Nevertheless, these communication practices did not encourage public dialogue.

The majority of the messages that circulated through the candidates' Twitter feeds were related to political information about their campaigns. The topic that dominated the candidates' activity was their own political activities. They published invitations to political rallies, demonstrations, seminars, and debates; also, mixed with their political mottos, they

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municipios. Te comparto la lista de actividades: <http://www.aristoteles.mx/agenda>"

<sup>5</sup> Original tweet: "En entrevista con Pablo Lemus 91.5 FM"

<sup>6</sup> Original tweet: "Camino a San Francisco, seguimos escuchando a quienes han arriesgado mucho por nuestra gente y edo <http://t.co/x7La1YpN>"

informed about their general political ideas. One candidate published: "At 12:01 we will start our political campaign with the needy, the abandoned, the ones who live in the streets without shelter",<sup>7</sup> and other one published a propagandistic message: "Jalisco needs the young people to build the state we all deserve, a state with more and better opportunities for all".<sup>8</sup> These features of the political communication within Twitter are very important because show an auto-referential communication practice, which means that in these cases politicians were more interested in communicating their own messages, rather than using Twitter to encourage public dialogue. Twitter was used as megaphone to disseminate political information through the Internet.

Another interesting pattern was that candidates used historical anniversaries, celebrations, or commemorations to build their tweets. They wrote tweets about the "Internet Day" or the "Labor Day"; especially, they remembered a tragedy where many people died. This tragedy occurred in 1992 in Guadalajara, capital of Jalisco, when the drainage of many blocks of the city exploded due to an oil spill. These tweets were very emotive and solemn: "Today we remember April 22; our work should be carried with responsibility and facing the society",<sup>9</sup> "After 20 years of the tragedy, we should not let something like this happens

again. We are part of the generation of the change. I offer my respect and condolences to those who were affected by this tragedy".<sup>10</sup>

Furthermore, another important feature of these tweets is how the politicians refer to the "other", in this case, to their audience as potential voters. In general, the candidates addressed to other candidates by their name and in few cases to journalists too. Conversely, they addressed to the citizens as masses or groups of people: students, women, youngsters, migrants, or as "people of Jalisco": "The youngsters are not a minority; they are the engine for a better world. Recognition for #132 movement <http://ow.ly/b9NDy>",<sup>11</sup> "These are our migrant bothers. We will keep working for you, because you are part of Jalisco's soul".<sup>12</sup> The candidates extrapolated the political communication messages that normally are crafted for rallies or mass media, and used these messages in a communication system with different characteristics.

Finally, drawing from a textual analysis was impossible to identify who wrote the messages that appeared in the candidates' time-lines. None of the candidates disclosed how they were using their Twitter account and who was writing the messages. Thus, there was a lack of transparency of the candidates on their use of this social media.

<sup>7</sup> Original tweet in Spanish: "A las 12:01 iniciaremos campaña junto a los más necesitados, los abandonados, los que viven en la calle sin ningún cobijo..."

<sup>8</sup> Original tweet in Spanish: "Jalisco necesita de sus jóvenes para construir el estado que merecemos, donde existan más y mejores oportunidades para todos".

<sup>9</sup> Original tweet in Spanish: "Recordamos el día de hoy 22 de abril, que el ejercicio público debejercerse con responsabilidad y comprometido con la sociedad".

<sup>10</sup> Original tweet in Spanish: "A 20 años de la tragedia, no permitamos que algo similar suceda, somos la generación del cambio. Mi respeto y condolencias a los afectados".

<sup>11</sup> Original tweet in Spanish: "Los jóvenes no son una minoría, son la posibilidad y motor para un mundo mejor. Reconocimiento para el movimiento #132 <http://ow.ly/b9NDy>".

<sup>12</sup> Original tweet in Spanish: "Esos son nuestros hermanos migrantes. Vamos a seguir trabajando con ustedes, son parte del alma de Jalisco".

### **Twitter as Tool that Fosters Public Dialogue**

From the 732 tweets that constitute the sample for this research, 220 (30.05%) were part of a dialogue, previously defined as an interaction between two or more Twitter users that allows the exchange of information, opinions, reflections and/or reactions among them; the other 512 tweets (69%) that were wrote either by the candidates or Twitter users, were one-way messages that not constituted a dialogue. In the tweets that were part of a dialogue I found 209 different Twitter accounts. These accounts either produced the message, or were mentioned in the message.

Which were the characteristics of these episodes of public dialogue between candidates and citizens on Twitter during the 2012 governor campaigns for Jalisco? After analyzing all of these interactions I found four types of political dialogue on Twitter: small (political) talk and campaign logistics, negative confrontations, political discussions, and collaborations. This typology is explained in the following sections.

#### **Small (Political) Talk and Campaign Logistics**

The majority of the conversation on Twitter during the campaigns could be characterized as small talks, defined as friendly casual, informal or trivial interactions (Merriam-Webster, 2012). Twitter users tended to send friendly and trivial messages to the candidates. Throughout these messages users expressed sympathy and support for their politicians (i.e. greetings, cheers, or endorsements). The candidates tended to respond to these tweets in friendly ways. For example, the user @bettzalfaro wrote this message: "Excellent meeting of @AristotelesSD with

businessmen! Every day we are more! ☺." <sup>13</sup> The candidate, @AristotelesSD responded: "@bettzalfaro Greetings to all the red team; thanks for your constant support." <sup>14</sup> These interactions are very similar to those that occur within tours or rallies of a traditional political campaign, where people salute or hail the candidate, and the candidate correspond this interaction with a polite gesture or a shake of hands. Thus, these interactions, which constituted 40% of the dialogical interactions within Twitter, do not offered a new or radical change in the political communication processes.

Similarly, another recurrent conversation pattern was that users tended to ask information about the campaigns. The questions were centered on asking about the schedules and locations of massive congregations, campaign activities such as distribution of flyers or stickers, or the plans for television debates and media interviews. The candidates responded to these questions giving short and precise answers. For example, a user asked: "@EnriqueAlfaroR at what time is the event???" <sup>15</sup> And the candidate answered: "@n0r1r3 at 7:30 pm." <sup>16</sup> In this case, Twitter was a useful tool to disseminate information, but also for clarifying the candidates' agendas and campaign logistics. 112 tweets constituted either a small talk or campaign logistics interactions.

<sup>13</sup> Original tweet in Spanish: "Excelente reunión de @AristotelesSD con empresarios! Cada vez somos mas! ☺".

<sup>14</sup> Original tweet in Spanish: "@bettzalfaro Saludos a todo el equipo rojo, gracias por su apoyo constant".

<sup>15</sup> Original tweet in Spanish: "@n0r1r3 A las 7:30 pm"

<sup>16</sup> Original tweet in Spanish: "@EnriqueAlfaroR a que hora el evento???"

### Negative Confrontation

A recurrent strategy of the political communication operators was the negative campaigning (Strozzi Méndez, 2013, p. 48), which in Mexico is called “guerra sucia” (dirty war). The negative campaigns were held, mainly, through Internet via emails or web pages. There were twenty tweets within users asked the candidates about the truthfulness of these negative communications. @MarianaSkink asked: “What is going on with the phone calls that say that Alfaro and Emilio are united and that the real change is you? Who is paying this?”<sup>17</sup> The candidate answered: “@MarianaSkink is not me and neither my party, for the sake of the campaigns I hope that the truth arises in order to know who is paying this dirty war.”<sup>18</sup> The negative confrontations were active process of dialogue within which citizens used Twitter as a channel for attacking some candidate, for asking explanations to a candidate about the dirty war, or for supporting a candidate against certain attacks. The majority of conversations occurred when users asked the candidates about the dirty war or the negative campaigns in a gentle or polite tone. When the messages were aggressive or rude, the candidates did not respond the messages and ignored these kinds of tweets.

### Political Discussion

Besides the political confrontation, there were also 67 tweets dedicated to political discussions. Some users asked specific

<sup>17</sup> Original tweet in Spanish: “@MarianaSkink No soy Yo y tampoco el partido, espero se aclare quien esta pagando esa guerra sucia x el bien de las campañas”.

<sup>18</sup> Original tweet in Spanish: “@FernandoGarzaM ¿Q onda con las llamadas en las q dicen q Alfaro y Emilio están unidos y q el verdadero cambio eres tu? ¿Quien paga eso? ...”.

questions to the candidates, like: “I am a single mom with an autistic child, would I have any kind of help with your new administration?”<sup>19</sup> The candidate answered in a general and rhetorical way: “@VeritoArizaga we will develop child care programs in kindergartens and full-time schools, through a comprehensive policy”.<sup>20</sup> Other users established communication with the candidates through the discussion of journalistic stories. A user wrote: “<http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2001/12/18/030n1soc.html> Echeverría [Mexican ex-President] take out the civic education in our country, Mr. @EnriqueAlfaroR, here is a link that says that.”<sup>21</sup> And the candidate’s answer was: “@babypriincess in high school and in basic education, these courses continued. In ’99 during Zedillo’s [Mexican ex-President] administration, started the substitution, and Fox [Mexican ex-President] killed these courses.”<sup>22</sup> In another example, a user addressed two candidates and asked them about security policies; just one candidate answered to the user and expressed that Twitter was not a good platform for complicated or elaborated discussions and he recommended using other communication channels in order to

<sup>19</sup> Original tweet in Spanish: “@AristotelesSD Por ejem yo que soy Mama sola con un niño autista, recibiria algun tipo de apoyo con su nvo. gobierno?”.

<sup>20</sup> Original tweet in Spanish: “@VeritoArizaga Implementaremos programas de cuidado a sus hijos en guarderías y escuelas de tiempo completo, mediante una política integral”.

<sup>21</sup> Original tweet in Spanish: “<http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2001/12/18/030n1soc.html> Echeverría quito en los 70 las clases de civismo en el país señor @EnriqueAlfaroR aquí un link k de vdd lo acredita.”

<sup>22</sup> Original tweet in Spanish: “@babypriincess En secundaria, educación básica, continuaron. Con Zedillo en el '99 comenzó su sustición y Fox le dio el tiro de gracia.”

make a longer conversation. The user asked: “@FernandoGarzaM @FernandoGuzman\_ How are you going to solve the ‘insecurity and justice’ problems #IWillNotVoteforFernandoGuzman”<sup>23</sup> The answer was the following: “@MirellCobo Through this channel is not possible [to answer that question], if you want to, give me your email and I will send you the proposal.”<sup>24</sup>

### Collaboration

Twitter was a space wherein users expressed, through 21 tweets, their intentions to help or collaborate directly in the political campaign of the candidates. In the following example, a user offered help to a candidate: “@EnriqueAlfaroR I will join to your movement. I am Juan Carlos Macias, businessman, email [juancarlos@prolub.com.mx](mailto:juancarlos@prolub.com.mx), mobile phone: 3334967213, what should I do?”<sup>25</sup> The candidate responded: “@MACIASJUANK Thank you Juan Carlos. I will ask my team to look for you in order to analyze how we could work together. Cheers.”<sup>26</sup> These public interactions were useful to generate a communication structure for political participation. Nevertheless, Twitter was a limited tool to go beyond in the function of

connecting people that wanted to collaborate among each other. In all the cases the candidates asked users to communicate with a third person via email or telephone in order to get in touch and start collaborating.

### Discussion

Although Twitter is a technology that was built upon the architecture of participation and thus support dialogical processes, the results of this research show that Twitter was not used as a dialogical communication tool during the 2012 Jalisco's elections. One in four tweets that were published in the candidates' feeds was part of an interactive conversation and this is evidence that Twitter offers more interaction than mass mediated communication. Nevertheless, the magnitude of the communication processes within Twitter was rather minimal because in an electoral competition of two months and with 5 260 351 potential voters, the sample for the textual analysis presented 732 messages—tweets—and only 220 of these messages were part of a public dialogue. Broadly speaking, neither candidates nor Twitter users showed much interest in generating dialogical processes.

During Jalisco's political campaigns, Twitter provide a structure where users could read the information that the candidates were spreading through Internet, and sometimes users had the chance to participate in dialogical communications with the candidates. However, conversations between users and candidates were not a common practice during the campaigns and in the majority of cases the communication practices showed low dialogical characteristics and few traces of public dialogue. On the contrary, the candidates operated Twitter mainly as a one-way, top-down and auto-referential communication platform. Twitter was very useful to

<sup>23</sup> Original tweet in Spanish: “@FernandoGarzaM @FernandoGuzman\_ ¿Cómo ofrecen resolver los problemas de "Inseguridad y justicia" #NoVotoXFdoGuzmán.”

<sup>24</sup> Original tweet in Spanish: “@MirellCobo Por este medio no es posible, Si gustas mandame un email y te doy la propuesta.”

<sup>25</sup> Original tweet in Spanish: “@EnriqueAlfaroR me sumo a tu cambio Juan Carlos Macias empresario correo juancarlos@prolub.com.mx Cel 3334967213 que hacemos?”.

<sup>26</sup> Original tweet in Spanish: “@MACIASJUANK gracias Juan Carlos. Pido que te busquen para ver cómo trabajamos juntos. Saludos”.

disseminate messages in real time about the candidate's campaign logistics, political statements, and mottos, but candidates failed on using the addressivity function of this social media. Rather than addressing Twitter users in personal or collective conversations, politicians tended to refer them as collective "others" (e.g. women, migrants, youngsters). This communicative strategy speaks to a massive public and tends to homogenize the audience in big social chunks. As a result, public dialogue was not fostered within these types of communications.

The architecture of participation of the Web 2.0 is certainly embedded on Twitter and I found public dialogue episodes through the collected sample. Twitter was a useful platform for public dialogue when users wanted to express sympathy for the candidates and, by the contrary, when users expressed antipathy for those politicians the interactions were canceled because candidates ignored these messages. Twitter was also a valuable trigger for short conversations between candidates and users (e.g. establish or recognize political stands, political attacks, or possibilities of collaboration). Yet, after these short conversations Twitter was not useful to maintain the interaction. In different examples, the public dialogue moved to other channels of communication such as personal messages on Twitter, emails, or phone conversations. For instance, in a significant conversation, a candidate recognized that Twitter was not a good platform for complicated or elaborated discussion and he recommended to use other communication channels in order to hold a longer conversation. Hence, because of its own nature, Twitter works as a platform for brief interactions and as a hook to start deeper and longer interactions in other communication platforms.

An important question is why the public dialogue within Twitter was rather minimal during the Jalisco's campaigns. The structural characteristics of the communication system that Twitter presents in Jalisco are important, because as showed above, not all the population of Jalisco was able to participate in this communication system. The digital gap is still an important issue in the Mexican and Latin American context. On the other hand, this research showed that the communication processes within the Twitter candidates' time-lines were monopolized and controlled by them. The candidates produced 88% of the messages. Furthermore, there was an imbalance between the people following the candidates' accounts (35,072) and the people who the candidates followed (9,275). A dialogue can only be held between, at least, two people. In other words: candidates did not show real intentions to use Twitter as a tool to foster a public dialogue.

The findings of this research are important for the following reasons. (1) It presents evidence that in Jalisco's elections the Web 2.0 did not lead to a radical democratic change that improved or fostered public dialogue in the political communication system. (2) From a methodological discussion, the results of this research support the idea that is not enough to count the number of followers, tweets, or re-tweets to measure the dialogical processes within Twitter. It is important to read and analyze what is happening within these messages. Otherwise, numbers could lead to celebratory interpretations about the democratic powers of the Web 2.0. For example, a significant amount of dialogical processes during Jalisco's elections were small talks. These interactions are far from improving public dialogue in a democratic context. (3) This research helps to understand the forms and mechanisms of

public dialogue within Twitter, during an electoral campaign. Jalisco has similar characteristics—demographics, communication structure and political system—of other Latin American regions and this research could be useful to understand what is happening in other countries. However, more research is needed in order to make generalizations.

### **Conclusions**

A metaphor to understand how public dialogue is happening on social media is to compare the electoral campaigns on Twitter with a marathon where the candidates are the runners and the Twitter users are the public. The runners are the protagonists of the race, such as the politicians in the electoral context. The candidates, while running, are hearing the messages of support or rejection of the public and they smile and salute the public while running. Sometimes they lower their running velocity and shake some hands of the public and exchange some friendly words. Also, they can hear some opinions and questions of the public. In some cases, candidates try to answer them in a short and frenzy mode. Nevertheless, in this marathon, candidates never stopped to hold a long talk with the members of the public because they want to win the race. Thus, the reasons that explain the low interactivity between users and candidates are not related to the technology per se, but to the implicit or explicit rules of the communication system and to the interest of political elites to held conversations with their constituents.

According to Martín-Serrano (1994), public communication is a basic process that enables the reproduction of social and political systems. In theory, a democracy should foster a public communication system that allows public dialogue. The architecture of participation of the Web 2.0, based on interactivity, promised democratic, horizontal, and decentralized communication processes within citizens and power elites could interact (Jackson & Lilleker, 2009, p. 235). Hence, an important outcome of this research is to stress that technology, per se, does not change the reality; and technology, per se, will not improve the political communication of contemporary societies. Twitter needs humans to be operated and if humans are not interested to build public dialogue, these communication processes will not flourish.

### **Limitations**

This research is a case study and more qualitative research is needed to understand the public communication mechanisms of the social media and Web 2.0. The textual analysis offers valuable insights to study the messages and communication dynamics within social media. Nevertheless, this methodological tools has limitations and other approaches would offer interesting results, such as ethnographies on how political elites and citizens are using the Web 2.0 or critical studies about the historical and sociocultural context where this communication is produced.

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## Tables

Table 1

*Name of the candidates, political party, and Twitter accounts*

<b>Candidate</b>	<b>Political Party</b>	<b>Twitter account</b>
Aristóteles Sandoval Díaz	Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party)	@AristotelesSD
Fernando Guzmán Pérez Peláez	Partido Acción Nacional (National Action Party)	@FernandoGuzman_
Enrique Alfaro Ramírez	Movimiento Ciudadano (Citizen Movement)	@EnriqueAlfaroR
Fernando Garza Martínez	Partido de la Revolución Democrática (Democratic Revolution Party)	@FernandoGarzaM
María de los Ángeles Martínez Valdivia	Partido Nueva Alianza (New Alliance Party)	@mariangelval

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