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Social media and the personalization of politics

“Democracy depends on deliberation, slow-footed interaction, and time-consuming...forms of multilateral conversation.... Computers are as fast as light, literally. Democracy is slow as prudent judgement” - Barbero (1997)

From the personalization of politics to the interactive policy on social media

The personalization of politics demonstrates the change of communication paradigm that the world has suffered in recent years due to technological development. Beyond the tools, understanding the new dynamics within which is "vibrating" the hyper-connected society that bases its online interactions based on the use of Social Media is essential.

However, as part of my central arguments, the study of political communication makes a mistake in addressing issues such as the personalization of politics focusing on the study of the tool above the dynamics generated through this.

In turn, I think that the characteristics of social media and the high degree of interaction and exchange of ideas can be better exploited for the common good rather than for the development of strategies for brand positioning (political figures), that is, take advantage of them from the perspective of social communication and not from marketing.

In this way this paper is divided into three parts: the approach to the concept of communication from the theory and its evolution into Social Media, the analysis of changes in the communicative dynamics behind the rise of Social Media in relation with politics based on the literature used in the sessions and finally, a conceptual proposal to approach the issue from another perspective analyzing.

To discuss the personalization of politics by using new technologies, we must first break down the concept into subgroups to analyze their academic background and its development in the field and of the consequences of this practice in contemporary political dynamics. Firstly, I want to address the conceptualization of communication from their initial theories for further analysis by relating it to the political action.

In a first approach, on board communication concept based on the "Linear Models of Communication" proposed by the American thinker Harold Laswell, which identifies the elements of the communication process. Namely, the process is made up of who says what, by which channel to whom and with what effect (Ayerdi, 2005, p. 5). In a metaphor well known by people that operate in communication studies, this model it is also known as the "Hypodermic Needle Theory".

Based on the evidence produced by Laswell, the authors Shannon and Weber developed the mathematical theory of communication, which focused its efforts on the study of the operation of the machines (technology) in the communication process. This model was meant to be universal to be widely applied to any message, regardless of their significance, and from theory, seeking to "study the amount of information of a message based on the ability of the medium." (Galeano, 1997a, p. 5)

Namely, the model of Shannon and Weaver is represented using a diagram is composed of five elements; a source that is the initial sender of the communication process, a transmitter representing the technical issuer responsible for transmitting the message to a set of signals and codes, a channel that is the technical means through which the coded signals are sent, a technical receiver whose role in the process is decoding the message to turn it into an understandable message, the recipient to whom the message is intended and noise represents interferences generated during the process and that comes from external environments (Galeano, 1997b, p. 6).

I wanted to address the definition of communication from these two theories which, despite being the first to be developed and which have been widely revalued by new models and theoretical proposals, are the basis of mass communication and evolution to social media .

Mass communication, finds its greatest strength in the ability to send messages to a widespread public near or distant through the use and development of technology. It is "a source of power and a potential instrument that aims to influence and control of innovation in society" (...) "an important source of definitions and images of social reality" (McQuail, 1985, p. 28).

In this respect, the era of mass media (radio, television, newspaper) was noted for his ability to disseminate information to a large extent; of course, with high costs because of the few owners of many media companies. Within this logic, a message was articulated to be sent through any of these technological means and expected to have a reaction (or response influence) in the receivers.

I understand these dynamics models of dissemination of information, and different from a communication model in the sense that the first is simply a one-way act, while the communicative act aims to create interaction between transmitters, receivers and vice versa (without much emphasis on the technological tools used to achieve them).

It is precisely this conceptual difference that allowed the rise of social media. We passed talking about receivers to talk about audiences, recognizing them as people with capacity for reflection and ability to interact with both messages received, as with the emitter. In previous times, a viewer, a non-listener reader, could not interact with issuers of messages or even interact with the meanings of the messages beyond a local scale (if we look at today, what I write in the hemisphere this can be instantly read in west and vice versa).

Now, with the development of applications based on Web 3.0 platforms (which allow the creation, interaction and distribution of content online) and the development of technological devices (such as smart phones, tablets, etc.), the social media transforms the way we communicate and interact; both among ordinary citizens and political processes.

With the emergence of social media, both senders and receivers "meet for the first time in a single informational space, with equal access availability of tools (information technology) to generate contents and make use of them" (Torres, 2014a, p. 23). Consequence of this phenomenon, communication ceased to be a one-way process, becoming a two-way communication, allowing audiences to move from their passive role to an active one where not only receive messages, but become "prosumers-simultaneous between consumers and producers of information / content-which constitute the new hyper-connected society" by social media. (Torres, 2014b, p. 23.)

As a result of these new dynamics, there have been deep changes in the way society is organized, reorganized and interact in their domestic level, as externally (with other societies), and how they relate with politics (in their representative, participatory and policy forms) through the use of media (online tools of social media).

As Strömbäck (2008) states, previously “mass media has played a particular role in the intensification of decoupling of the lifeworld and the political system as the increasing interdependence of political practice on media operations has rendered political communication highly mediatized”. However, with the advent of social media, the audiences are now having a major influence on the media and thus on the politics and its actors.

Based on this argument, meaning of "politic" in light of the interactions of society and its influence on issues of common purpose, as the authors Jensen and Ercan suggest (2014a, p. 3) “a conventionally and historically bounded configuration of human activity”. With dynamic generated in the Social Media we can see how through the use of new media (where the citizen is the main star), the relationship and human activity between the actors change significantly. Is no longer, from my point of view, a relationship and influence of politics in the public sphere, but the influence of individuals in public spaces on the policy through online interactions.

Moreover, due to the characteristics of social media platforms and the new dynamics of interaction using virtual communication, can be seen as more and more individuals active politically (in the generation and exchange of contents) but less coordinated or gathered around "groups" that seeks the common good.

This reflects a tendency to be part of the public but from the hyper-segmentation of the individual from their own perceptions and judgments. As perceived by Bennett and Segerberg “due to structural transformations in social organization changes in political values, democratic engagement is increasingly...an expression of personal hopes, lifestyle values, and the promise of individual opportunity that further eroded group memberships and loyalties to parties and political institutions” (Jensen & Ercan, 2014b, p. 2); a dichotomy between participating but not being part of the public or social movements.

In this context, where society is configured and acquires elements of other societies (social media is a tool that allows communication and interaction without geographical barriers, omnipresent and omnipotent way) changes the scenario of citizen expression and perception realities. Boyd & Ellison describes these interactions generated online as a kind of relationship “social network sites allow creation of personal profile pages with varying degrees of publicness that are connected to pages of others into clearly articulated networks of online social relationships” (Dylko, & McCluskey, 2012a p. 253).

At this point we found the major factor in the use of social media in relation to political management; participation or the opportunity to participate in public discussions of online way through actions occur:

a) Information products (e.g., news and opinion) that are (b) published online and openly available, (c) thematically focused on politics, (d) to a significant degree shaped by an active participation of the users, and (e) where this participation occurred voluntarily outside of the user's professional routines and practices (Dylko, & McCluskey, 2012b p. 250).

This participation does not occur simply by being able to express and disseminate scale their views and opinions, but to be in the same "communicative stage" and with the same opportunities (tools) that have historically had political leaders. Thus citizenship "online" has the capacity to participate actively (albeit individually from their avatars) in articulating political discourse (in favor or against, fulfilling a role as a third party validators or critics), generation policy (protests around specific topics, sharing of realities that need to be tapped or demands of shares required) or evaluation of managements (the discussion and dissemination of information concerning the effectiveness of the results or veracity).

Since now what is public remains public, however the stage where it is discussed, public debate for "resolving problematic Situations that cannot be settled without interpersonal coordination and cooperation" (2000, 27) and this is the advantage offered by the political thinking (or personalization of politics) environment for participation and not as a mechanism for representation of a mark.

In this manner, the "citizens can participate is by expressing their views, helping broaden the marketplace of ideas" while the possibility that social media gives citizens to participate in "political matters" contribute to the effective functioning of democracy (Dylko, & McCluskey, 2012b p. 250).

Thanks to social media, this type of individual participation in the public sphere are possible can contribute to building democratic and stronger political participation which share the same level of importance to the interaction between citizens and political leaders processes.

In this new scenario with these specific conditions would be hard to imagine without such communication capacities like “the widespread production and diffusion of personalized movement frames and the coordination of movement activities in the absence of formal movement organizations” (Jensen & Ercan, 2014c, p. 3).

Understanding how through communication networks (social media) have changed the interaction scenarios as communicative unites all actors on the same level (with the same advantages of participation), the personalization of politics is the response from the political marketing to adapt to new scenarios.

Although public relations evolution and change scenarios to be generated (time and space on virtual or physical spaces), politics continues to based “on a relationship between the authorities and the members of the system” (Jensen & Ercan, 2014d, p. 4) and betting on the personification of politics to maintain and take better advantage of social media focuses, not taking advantage of these tools to build collaborative mechanisms for formulating, monitoring and evaluating policies, but the change in the tone of the speech, articulation of discourses that seek to impact the public sphere from the private sphere and the equation of a politician in a matter of "status" with their audience online, thereby seeking to de-politicize both "image" as "speech" to get in tune (and why not, empathy) with the new audience.

In closing, I would like to propose an approach to the phenomenon of social media policy to stop analyzing, elementary way, tools or means by which shares of "politic engagement" are developed to analyze the interactions that occur in communication processes and organization of society on the development of the online politics.

As such, I believe that the contributions made by Herbert Blumer, George Herbert Mead, Charles Horton Cooley y Erving Goffman in the theory of Symbolic Interaction (Rizo, 2012, p. 3) are highly valuable for the analysis of this situation. Overall, from the symbolic interaction constructions (political or social) created from communication processes are governed on three premises:

1. Human action based on the meaning attributed to objects and situations that surround them

2. The significance of these things arise from the social interaction that an individual has with the other actors.
3. These meanings are used as a process of interpretation made by the person in his relationship with things that are, and are modified through this process.

Based on this model, I propose migrate the concept from the personalization of politics to the interactive policy social media on, giving greater prominence to the background of the use of social networks as a mechanism of political participation in democratic spaces (online), and that reward more analysis of interactions based on the thinking of other interactions from deliberate actions (such as making speeches with "scripts" the importance of the image, on the message, and the interactions of the message).

In this way, we focus on communication as a cornerstone of building policy by the interaction of the components of a company (the tools and technology evolve over time, but the communicative principle is always the same) in both conventional spaces and virtual, that can enrich the research and analysis when studying issues related to political, social sciences or the influence of one upon another.

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