
Special issue
Political communication

Rocío Zamora Medina
rzamoramedina@um.es
Associate Professor. Faculty of
Communication and
Documentation. University of
Murcia, Spain.

Paloma del H. Sánchez Cobarro
palomahenar.sanchez@um.es
Professor. Faculty of
Communication and
Documentation. University of
Murcia, Spain.

Helena Martínez Martínez
hmmartinez@ucam.edu
Teaching assistant. Faculty of
Social Sciences and
Communication. Catholic
University of Murcia, Spain..

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The importance of the "strategic game" to frame the political discourse in Twitter during 2015 Spanish Regional Elections

Abstract

There is broad consensus on the idea that Twitter, an online communication tool for campaigning, is significantly impacting the interaction between political candidates and citizens (Parmelee & Bichard, 2011; Enli & Skogerbo, 2013; Kruikemeier *et. al.*, 2013). Despite the importance of the strategic use of framing tweets on followers' opinions, framing approach research applied to microblogging requires further investigation on national and local contexts. This research explores the extent to which candidates (at a local context) use Twitter as a tool for campaigning, in order to identify main frames that describe the strategic use of Twitter for online campaigning. Following framing scholars suggestions (Dimitrova & Strömbäck, 2012; Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Patterson, 1993) and other recent contributions related to the use of framing in Twitter (Parmelee & Bichard, 2012; Zamora & Zurutuza, 2014; Naaman *et. al.*, 2010; Vergeer *et. al.* 2013), this paper develops a quantitative approach using tweets content analysis to empirically test the strategic use of generic frames made by each...? Findings points to a different priority of each frame by considering that candidates mostly used two generic frames: *'Me Now'/selfpromotion* and *political information source*, to seek political engagement. Other generic frames, like *media validation* and *personal* frame, where less important. Conclusions show that the use of Twitter for campaigning is still replicating old patterns of broadcast media, instead of social media, based on a one-way communication model.

Keywords

Twitter, elections, Framing, campaigning online, Spain, political mobilization

1. Introduction

Numerous studies have focused on analyzing the opportunities offered by digital environments for political communication in general (Gibson & Cantijoch, 2013; Kruikemeier *et al.*, 2013; Williams & Delli Carpini, 2011) and for the development of the on-line campaigns compared to off

line in particular (Hendricks & Kaid, 2011; Lilleker & Koc-michalska, 2013; Vergeer, 2012; Hoffman, 2012). The majority of these studies show how, at present, Internet users have greater opportunities to interact with people and organizations in order to reduce social hierarchies as well as gaps between represented and representatives.

The called *noopolitik* (that includes the cyberspace), as opposed to the *realpolitik* (Castells, 2001), helps grant major power to citizens and facilitate their participation in the processes of political decisions. Thus, the new parameters in which the new political communication is based offer the possibility of extending the possibilities of citizenship and political engagement in the political debate.

The Web 2.0 can only be recognized as a new social factory (Ritzer et al., 2012) where prosumers turn into loudspeakers that produce conversations with and for multiple and fragmented audiences. Receivers not only consume these contents, but also answer and reproduce messages that simultaneously create contents for others. At present, social media governed by these prosumers provide parameters around the way collaboration is produced and consumed. In such a way that citizens who consume political information through traditional media can also use new media for mixing the "old information" with "new" information. Some authors call this process "transmediation" (Cheong & Lundry, 2012). In addition, the online political communication can reach a segment of the electorate, like young people and other minority groups, who typically do not consume political information in traditional media due to a certain feeling of disaffection on democratic politics, yet understand the new media ecosystem as a collaboration and participation sphere.

This emerging digital political communication environment is featured by Coleman and Freelon (2015) with the following characteristics:

a) it is based on a range of political sources that now make it almost impossible for any political voice to claim overarching authority.

b) include horizontal networks that allow citizens to evade institutional structures and processes.

c) increase the number of people who find themselves engaged simultaneously as mass-media consumers and as message producers.

d) the tone of political communication has become less constrained by the generic features of official politics.

e) not only largely lawless, but seemingly invulnerable to strong legal regulation.

Political communication in general, and more concretely, strategic communication in the context of electoral times, must include a more open, horizontal and social vision of the development of political messages that also influence the framing process. Considering that social networks offer the perfect platform not only to strengthen personalization and individualization of messages, "but also in order that social networks prosumers can contribute to the production of meaning for the community that go around the content and the product, sharing a meaning, a participative action or social relation that never existed before" (Berrocal et al., 2014:2).

Politicians have taken Twitter to provide information directly to their constituents (Hemphill, Otterbacher, & Shapiro, 2013). Without the news media as mediator, politicians have an opportunity to directly influence public perceptions and behavior through framing. We are interested in the way candidates frame issues when speaking directly to their audiences without relying on news media.

To do so, we examined whether and how politicians use Twitter to frame their political messages, with special attention to the textual aspect. Concretely, we conducted tweets content analysis (N=1.995) to empirically test the strategic use of generic frames made by candidates running for 2015 regional elections in the Region of Murcia (Spain). We found that candidates followed a one-way communication pattern based on two generic frames - *'Me Now'/selfpromotion* and *political information source*- to seek the political engagement.

This suggests that candidates online campaigns framing efforts are focused in such a way that they are still replicating old patterns of broadcast media, instead of social media ones.

We contribute to the literatures on framing and media effects by (1) examining how framing theory and practice can be applied from traditional media to social networks, and (2) empirically test generic frames in the use of Twitter at a local context in order to see differences among framing efforts.

2. Background

2.1. From offline to the online campaigns

Internet and new media technologies have "transformed" and "even "revolutionized" the way of doing the political campaigns (Panagopoulos, 2009: 1). Studies that focus on the evolution of campaigning from a technological perspective (Medvic, 2011; Vergeer, 2012) underline changes that have made it more and more difficult for candidates and political organizations to unify their strategic communication and to control their political messages in the new media ecosystem campaigns.

From the first campaigns that started to incorporate Internet use in the nineties, candidates have been capitalizing all the technological innovations that were offering a major interactivity with their voters across the digital contexts to reach what Howard (2006: 2) defines as a "hypermedia campaign" that provides candidates the possibility of "hooking" their potential voters of multiple forms, and even to collaborate in the own development of the campaign, rather than acting simply like consumers.

As Foot and Schneider (2006: 22) sum up, the online campaign, unlike the offline campaign, basically includes four non-exclusive activities: to report, to involve, to connect and to mobilize.

The first one of these activities - to report - is probably the most obvious for Internet use and it was the only function used during the first online campaigns. The candidates offer information in the nearest moments to the electoral date, including news, biographical information, electoral program, and their position on concrete topics that they are more interested in emphasizing.

But besides serving as vehicles information dissemination, online campaigns are also destined to involve citizens. In other words, to facilitate as never before the interaction between potential voters and the own candidate. In fact, increasingly, candidates websites request visitors personal information and contact data to segment political messages. This data mining practices offered in the digital environments are, undoubtedly, a big advantage of the online campaigns.

Probably one of the most important opportunities for online campaign is to mobilize public support for the candidate. This is a form of political involvement, since it usually requires registration as a member or volunteer of the campaign to persuade others in order to spread the actions of their candidate, as well as to look for their vote. Nevertheless, digital contexts are also mobilization platforms when they use mailing list or social networks (FaceBook, Twitter, Youtube, etc.) to spread their messages. Gradually, and in many cases experimentally, candidates strategic communication teams have been doing a strategic use of the social networks simultaneously trying to discover their potential to interact and communicate with voters in their own benefit (Ampofo et al., 2011; Dang-Xuan et al., 2013; Hong & Nadler, 2012; Giansante, 2015).

In spite of the initial fear of losing message control, candidates have realized that "they cannot ignore any more the opportunities that social networks, and specifically Twitter, to involve in the political speech and to influence the result of the campaign and his legislation" (Parmelee & Bichard, 2012: 224). The launch of any online campaign across social networks can also allow candidates to jump journalistic traditional filters of selection and

presentation of his electoral messages to reach his voters (Schlozman et al., 2010; Schweitzer, 2012; Vaccari, 2008).

The increasing importance of Twitter in online campaigns has justified the reconsideration of the traditional models that Norris (2000) offered to classify electoral campaigns, depending on the technological use and the communicative practices. Together, with the three models that Norris underlined, premodern, modern and postmodern campaign after the Web age 2.0, Vergeer, M., Hermans, L., and Sams, S., (2013) have suggested a fourth model: personal style campaign. As these scholars explain, the new web platforms based on the personal dimension, as the social networks, represent an essential characteristic, focusing on the customization in politics, and mainly on the candidate personality (Vergeer, M., Hermans, L., & Sams, S., 2013: 5). In the personal style campaigns, candidates can share strategically any type of comment, including personal information, without being limited only to the political message. This allows citizens to obtain a different, less formal and institutionalized perspective, which leaves the most intimate part of the candidate, including his interests and worries unknown (Pearson & O'Connell, 2010). This innovation turns out to be noteworthy because any attempt of offering a more human face of a candidate across the communication of personal messages can generate major credibility between voters (Vergeer et al., 2013). As O'Reilly and Milstein (2009) pointed out, this is one of the big options that Twitter offers which is to facilitate a level of empathy that can be similar to the real life due to its environmental familiarity.

2.2. The "Twittersphera" for campaigning online

Since Barack Obama's famous campaign in social networks in 2008 (Harfoush, 2010; Hendricks & Denton, 2010) to present, this network of microblogging has become a campaign tool that allows a political candidate to interact directly with potential voters. This fact has justified the proliferation of studies realized in different political international contexts linked to the use of the microblogging in electoral campaign (Aharony, 2012; Bruns & Burgess, 2011; Caldarelli et al., 2014; d'heer & Verdegem, 2014; Enli & Skogerbo, 2013; Grant et al., 2010; Hendricks & Frye, 2011; Holotescu et al., 2011; Hong & Nadler, 2012; Jungherr, 2010; Kruikemeier, S., 2014; Larsson & Moe, 2013; Parmelee & Bichard, 2012; Small, 2012; Solop, 2009, Coleman & Freelon, 2015; Conover et al., 2011) as also in the Spanish political context (Criado, Martínez-Fuentes & Silván, 2012; Bernal & Congosto, 2014; Congosto, 2014; Deltell, Claes & Osteso, 2013; Izquierdo, 2012; Rodríguez & Ureña, 2012; López García, 2016; López García, Lara & Sánchez Duarte, 2011; Quevedo, Portalés-Oliva, Berrocal, 2016; Valera, 2013; Zamora & Zurutuza, 2014).

Most of these studies have focused on what extends Twitter beyond being a good resource for the diffusion of immediate, widespread information, and a representation of a great challenge for the reconfiguration of the political speech structure towards a broad social connectivity on the public debate (Weller et al., 2013). From this point of view, any candidate who wants to campaign on Twitter must remember that rules have changed with respect to the type of persuasive communication that was established in the past, with more dialogic conversational patterns and new ways of interaction, based on direct social conversation practices (Vergeer & Hermans, 2013).

The strategic use of Twitter for campaigning online has also been a relevant research topic (Zamora & Zurutuza, 2014; López García, 2016). As some researchers argued, Twitter trending topics are likely to differ from that of traditional media, because "events and topics are filtered and established by the community and its news frames, which results differences from reference media (*mainstream media*)" (Bruns & Burgess, 2011: 13). However, some campaigns, still detected a hybrid model with respect to media coverage in Twitter compared to traditional media (Jungherr, 2014).

In practice, it seems clear that politicians rarely use Twitter to engage in a true social conversation (Medvic, 2011) or for the inclusion of multiple views in political debates (Yardi & Boyd, 2010). It is much more frequent to find candidates using microblogging network exclusively in electoral moments as a way for wide and conventional information diffusion (*broadcast media*). In this sense, the real social character of social media has been also questioned (Small, 2012) as has been the political-electoral use of this tool to encourage political participation (Larsson & Moe, 2013).

Despite the growing interest of candidates to develop an instrumental use of Twitter during their campaigns, their efficiency to reach public support seems rather limited. While there is a broad consensus among scholars on the idea that Twitter, as a communication tool, is significantly impacting the interaction between political leaders and citizens (Enli & Skogerbo, 2013; Kruikemeier et al., 2013; Parmelee & Bichard, 2011), there is limited evidence about the real influence of an increasing activity on Twitter to improve candidate visibility and salience pointing to a better public image (Hong & Nadler, 2012).

Considering previously mentioned studies related the use of Twitter for campaigning online as our background, the aim of this paper is to further research on the importance of the strategic use of this tool for framing the political message during the campaign. We part from the idea that framing approach applied to microblogging requires further studies on national and local contexts. This research represents a clear example of how candidates (at a local context) use Twitter as a tool for campaigning online.

2.3. Generic Frames on Twitter for campaigning online

Frame analysis during electoral times is of great interest for understanding "the central idea or story line that follows and gives meaning to the unfolding of events happen" (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989: 143). These interpretive packages turn out to be extremely effective for the subsequent reception of messages from the audience (de Vreese, 2004).

Framing theory has reached a growing role in communication research (Borah, 2011; de Vreese, 2012; de Vreese & Lecheler, 2012; Matthes, 2009, 2012; Scheufele & Iyengar, 2013; Vliegthart, 2012; Vliegthart & Zoonen, 2011). In spite of the many integrators efforts (d'Angelo, 2002; de Vreese, 2005; Entman, 1993, 2004; López-Rabadán, 2010; Matthes, 2012; Reese, 2007), there is a lack of full conceptual and methodological convergence to integrate diverge definitions, theoretical models and ways of frame measurement, as well as differences in the types of frames (Scheufele, 1999). The multiplicity of understandings surrounding the concept of frame joins the controversy over the types of frames that exist (Marín & Zamora, 2014). For that reason, recognizing framing theory as a fractured paradigm that, far from being unified (Entman, 1993), must be regarded as a multiparadigmatic research program (D'Angelo, 2002) becomes justified.

At its origin, framing theory was born with a double sociological and psychological side. It has cultural, representative and symbolic meanings that must be developed for greater conceptual clarity. In order to advance into an integral understanding of framing studies, Sádaba et al (2012) propose a systematization of the lines of research in which framing can contribute to the study of political communication: constructivist, cultural, narrative, methodological, journalistic roles, strategic and symbolic. With these seven research lines of framing, these scholars do not intend to feed the division of the discipline, but to open directions for future studies to exhaustively analyze each one of them, in order to shed more light on its global understanding.

In this study we understand frames as communication devices that diagnose, evaluate, and prescribe issues (Entman, 1993), relying on them to make sense of what we read (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Goffman, 1974). From a constructionist perspective, as Van Gorp explains (2005, 2007, 2010) a frame must be understood as "a media package" that

consists "of all indicators or framing devices by which the frame can be identified: metaphors, catchphrases, visual images, lexical choices, selection of sources, graphics, stereotypes, dramatic characters, etc." (Van Gorp, 2005: 490). Beside these framing devices, there are reasoning devices that are connected to the four functions of framing: defining a problem, assigning responsibility, passing a moral judgement and reaching possible solutions (Entman, 1993). Moreover, "the frame itself is a specification of the idea that connects the different framing and reasoning devices in a news article" (Van Gorp, 2005).

Therefore, from a strategic point of view, we can focus on "generic frames" (Callaghan & Schnell, 2005: 5) or consistent structural features and narrative devices linked to "culturally embedded frames" (Van Gorp, 2010: 85) to influence public judgements about the candidate. In that sense, candidates' tweets can be examined for keywords or phrases, stereotypical images, source of information and other symbolic actions which include judgments or valuations. Lastly, the essence of these frames is to reflect or promote certain ways of thinking about an issue or subject specifically through certain narratives, and to establish resonances with realities not explicit in the information contents.

One resource increasingly used to promote frames is the use of hashtags on Twitter to group all relevant tweets related to the same story under the same parameters, so that they facilitate the location of the published information as well as the social conversation around that topic. They are entered by the user along with the content of their message to indicate a keyword or topic associated with a tweet. They thus provide useful metadata for searching and browsing tweets. Some scholars have pointed out how politicians actively use social media to frame issues by choosing both topics to discuss and specific hashtags within topics (Hemphill et al., 2014). Other recent studies focus on the thematic agenda and communication preferences of candidates (López García, 2016).

The importance of using hashtags in the context of election campaigns is obvious. When a candidate includes a hashtags in their tweet, they are strategically promoting a specific definition of each subject through specific labeling terms. The use of hashtags can also increase the amount of political views of a topic, so that those users who look for political information across the hashtags, instead of seeking for concrete profiles, will obtain an ideological diversity of political information about the candidates and avoid the negative effects of the selective exposure (Parmelee & Bichard, 2012).

Recently, Scheufele and Iyengar (2013) have pointed out that framing research can obtain more conclusive results by examining psychological effects derived from imperceptible changes of how a problem, a situation or an electoral candidate is represented. In this specific context of the electoral campaigns, there is some tradition regarding the framing approach, specifically based on generic frames to examine mainstream media coverage during an electoral campaign. In this sense, two generic frames are distinguished: the strategic frame -which include candidate horse race approach- and the thematic or issue frame -focusing on public affairs content or election proposals. Other framing scholars point towards a similar typology (Dimitrova & Strömbäck, 2012; Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Patterson, 1993) with three main frames: *strategic game* frame, *thematic* frame and *personal/emotional* frame. Although this typology includes broad evidence on the traditional media framing approach, there is less exploration on the microblogging and more on the interactivity context.

Specific applications of the framing theory for the context of microblogging are still scant, despite the importance of the strategic use of how a tweet can frame followers' opinions (Zamora, 2015). Recent scholars have focused on the study online campaigning in Twitter from this perspective in order to concretely understand the strategic use of some generic frames used by candidates. Parmelee and Bichard underscore the idea that "the analysis of frames derived from the tweets disseminated during the campaign may provide clues about how those who have written them (either the candidate or his campaign team)

perceived key issues and the political process" (2012: 70). In their study, they showed how strategic frame is still the most frequent subject used by candidates during online campaigns, a fact that coincides with other similar works realized in different contexts (Zamora & Zurutuza, 2014). Other recent studies have also applied the *visual framing* and *verbal framing* for studying the use of the image made by the candidates on Twitter (Quevedo, Portalés-Oliva, Berrocal, 2016).

The broad activity of a candidate in Twitter is mostly focused on how to spread their daily campaign activities among their followers in order to keep them informed, and, simultaneously, to look for their implication on the campaign. Additionally, most candidates choose to use a positive and informal tone regarding the diffusion of the activities on their timeline. Nevertheless, when they need to give information about their electoral opponents, candidates used a more negative tone and reach Twitter advantages for discussing negative qualities of competitors (Parmelee & Bichard, 2012).

Furthermore, the typology between strategic and thematic frame (Parmelee & Bichard, 2012), offered another classification of possible frames candidates use for campaigning online in Twitter. Specifically, they explain how tweets can be used with a media validation proposal or as information source frame.

In the first case, (*media validation*), part of the candidate tweets include basic quotes and links to mainstream media news in which the candidate is positively portrayed and chooses to spread among their followers. At the same time, the candidate shares those relevant publications that attack their opponents or even defend them from political attacks. This approach is significant because it demonstrates the importance that traditional media still play as a credible and legitimate information source in electoral times.

In the second case (*information source frame*), tweets become a valuable resource as a source of political information, as well as a resource that facilitates involvement in the campaign. Candidates dedicate a huge effort to supply relevant information through the inclusion of links that can be distributed among supporters and volunteers. Under this approach, the one-way communication model is defined as usually taking place when any candidate campaigns in Twitter (Zamora & Zurutuza, 2014). In spite of the followers' intention to interact with their candidates, it is rare to see candidates open to public participation, to receive advice from his followers for taking decisions or even to respond to followers questions. As a result, despite the use of replies, retweets and mentions that potentially encourage candidates and followers dialogue, most of the tweets look for the candidates selfpromotion, because "they are focused on telling the people what they must do, more than in asking them about their advice or opinion " (Parmelee and Bichard, 2012:195).

A third approach exists that has been identified in previously mentioned studies (Vergeer, M., Hermans, L., & Sams, S. (2013); Zamora & Zurutuza, 2014). This is the framework of personality (*personality frame*), referred to those tweets that, far from what is properly political or traditional information, mention non-political issues, private life information and personal information about the candidate. Many of these tweets are expressed in the first person singular (I) and the plural (us) to give the impression that words come directly from the candidate. The relevance of this approach is specifically from the microblogging context, as some early studies have pointed out (Parmelee, 2006; Trammell et al, 2006; Vergeer et al 2013; Zamora & Zurutuza, 2014), and can better improve the human side of the candidate, including his or her empathy among voters. Given the fact that Twitter serves many people as a primary information source about the campaign, "followers appreciate a limited amount of personal information in the candidate timeline, because this information makes them feel that political leaders are human and close persons" (Parmelee & Bichard, 2012: 218). This approach tends to be more frequent in the

final moments of the campaign, when candidates look for maximum interaction with their followers.

Out of the electoral context, but also related to the role of tweets to frame political messages, Naaman et. al (2010) developed a content-based categorization of the type of messages posted by Twitter users. The resulting categories were similar to categories derived by Honeycutt and Herring (2009) which included the following typology: information sharing (user shares with followers any relevant information to them), selfpromotion (user publishes a link to their website, blog or any other link which has a direct relationship), opinions/complaints (user share his opinion or complaint about any matter of interest or actuality), statements and random thoughts (user express his point of view of some insignificant matter), question to followers (user makes a direct question on any issue to his followers to know their opinion), presence maintenance (information on the location and movements of the users, events, calendar, agenda, etc.), anecdote-me (details about some event staged in the past by the user), anecdote-others (stories and/or anecdotes protagonists are others who are not the user). Their results showed two common types of user behavior in terms of the content of the posted messages: a majority of users focus on the "self", while a smaller set of users are driven more by sharing information. Our task will be to test this framework pattern also in the case of candidates campaigning online.

3. Method

Our main goal of this research is, firstly, to explore to what extent candidates running for the Region of Murcia regional elections (at a local context) use Twitter as a tool for campaigning, by measuring their Twitter activity and then trying to identify generic frames that characterize their strategical use of the microblogging for campaigning online.

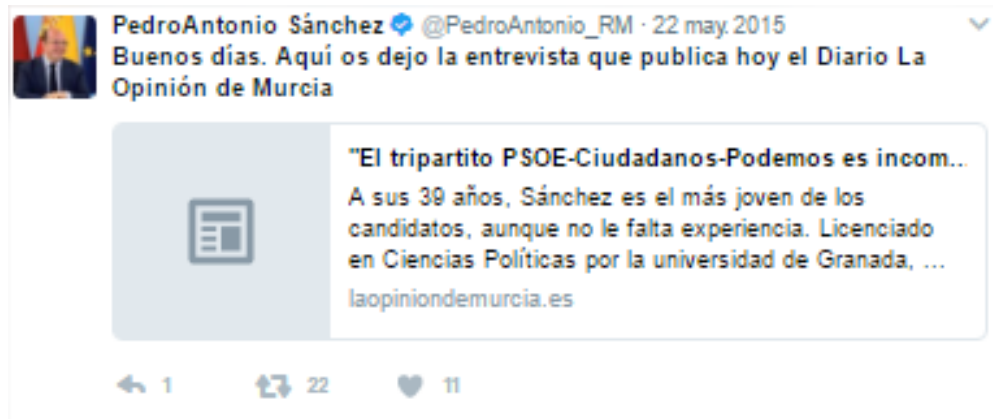
Secondly, we outline possible differences in Twitter use from traditional to new parties, in order to answer to what extent candidates from new parties are expected to use Twitter over more traditional parties to explore microblogging potential for strategic framing uses.

In order to achieve this goal, we conducted an empirical research design, based on tweets content analysis derived from the Twitter activity of main candidates running for 2015 regional elections in Murcia Region (Spain). Specifically, we followed 6 candidates Twitter timeline that represent traditional parties like Partido Popular (Pedro A. Sánchez), Partido Socialista (Rafael González Tovar) and Izquierda Unida (Jose A. Pujante), but also candidates that represent what has been called "new politics" like Podemos (Oscar Urralburu), UPyD (César Nebot) and Ciudadanos (Miguel Sánchez).

We collected tweets using Twitter's Streaming API. We identified verifiable accounts associated with each candidate, and collected all tweets posted by those accounts during the two weeks before the elections day (from May, 8th to May, 25th) corresponding to the official campaign time. We identified a sample of N=1.995 tweets gathered during the two weeks official campaign among the six candidates.

We used a code sheet based on a quantitative approach to describe each candidate Twitter activity. At the same time, we measure, from a qualitative perspective, the consistent structural features and narrative devices linked to each tweet that were examined for keywords or phrases, stereotypical images, source of information and other symbolic actions which include judgments or valuations to identify the presence of frames, based on our own typology of generic frames in Twitter, based on other mentioned typologies (Parmelee & Bichard, 2012; Naaman et. al, 2010).

- *Media validation frame*: candidates' interventions containing basically journalistic links of positive articles and relevant publications that attack his opponents or that defend them of his attacks. Some examples of this frame:



- *Political Information Source frame*: tweets that become a valuable resource, as political information source (sharing information and opinion about issue and topics) as well as any resource that facilitates campaign participation (Parmelee & Bichard, 2012) Examples of this frame:



- *Personality frame*: tweets that refer to non-political issues that have to do with intimacy or tastes personal, sports hobbies, etc., of the candidate. (Veerger, 2011; Zamora & Zurutuza, 2014). Some examples of this frame:



- *Media Now / Selfpromotion frame*: tweets that refer to what is the candidate doing at every moment (meetings, rallies) along the campaign (meta campaign). Some examples of this frame:





4. Findings

a) Twitter activity differences among traditional and new parties

In terms of Twitter activity, our findings showed a similar pattern among traditional and new parties during the two weeks of the official campaign. In fact, we found candidates from traditional parties that post similar tweets amount than those from the new parties. Only UPyD (new party) had a considerable amount of tweets during the analysis period (nearly 700 tweets in 18 days; 40 average per day). This result pointed out to the idea that to be a candidate from a new political party does not mean to be more active in Twitter comparing to old parties. However, we underlined the importance of the retweet activity (70%) in almost all candidates, versus own tweets (30%). This practice is even more significant among new parties candidates who, contrary to what we expected, didn't reach the potential of Twitter as a tool to spread their own message among their followers (see Table 1.)

Table 1. Twitter activity differences among candidates running for 2015 regional elections in R.Murcia

Comparative of number of retweets among candidates		Tweets		Total
		without retweet	With retweet	
Candidate	Pedro Antonio Sanchez (PP)	90	152	242
		37,2%	62,8%	100,0%
	Rafael González Tovar (PSOE)	98	98	196
		50,0%	50,0%	100,0%
	Oscar Uralburu (Podemos)	54	82	136
		39,7%	60,3%	100,0%
	Jose Antonio Pujante (IU)	30	359	389
		7,7%	92,3%	100,0%
	Cesar Nebot (UPyD)	202	500	702
		28,8%	71,2%	100,0%
	Miguel Sánchez (C's)	86	244	330
		26,1%	73,9%	100,0%
Total		560	1435	1995
		28,1%	71,9%	100,0%

Source: Own elaboration

If we focus on the evolution of Twitter activity along the campaign, we see how activity normally increases along time, by understanding that the closer to the election day, the more intensive the candidate activity. However, comparing to traditional parties, new parties followed an irregular trend with increase and even sometimes decrease their Twitter activity with the days (see graphic 1.)

Graphic 1. Evolution of Twitter activity among candidates in 2015 regional elections in R.Murcia



Source: Own elaboration

b) Use of hashtags to frame the political discourse

As we explained below, the importance of using hashtags in the context of election campaigns is crucial, because when a candidate include a hashtags, he is strategically promoting a specific definition of each subject through specific labeling terms. However, in our case study, we found a general trend to use hashtags (as an strategic tool for framing) only sometimes (30%). This was a common trend among candidates, however a higher use of hashtags was detected among those candidates from new parties supposed to be more familiar with microblogging than traditional ones.

Table 2. Twitter activity differences among candidates running for 2015 regional elections in Region of Murcia

	Pedro A. Sánchez PP	Rafael Glez.Tovar PSOE	Oscar Uralburu PODEMOS	Jose A. Pujante IURM	Cesar Nebot UPyD	Miguel Sánchez C's
Total number of tweets/ average per day	N=242/ 13,4	N=196/ 10,8	N=136/ 7,5	N=389/ 21,6	N=702/ 39	N=330/ 18,3
Without hashtag (%)	70%	64%	47%	57%	56%	59%
With hashtag (%)	30%	36%	53%	43%	44%	41%

Source: Own elaboration

We decided to explore, in qualitative terms, those hashtags used by candidates along the campaign and conducted a descriptive tag cloud analysis. From that analysis we can pointed out that, in general, traditional parties mainly used ideological and less creative hashtags, like those hashtags that just ask for the vote (i.e. Vote for PP) or even use the same campaign slogans (i.e. It's time for the left wing) By contrast, candidates from new parties used more creative hashtags, sometimes related a storytelling strategy (i.e. Iamalsoaflintstone) or even closer to the political context of that elections (i.e. Let's make history). Graphic 2. includes most representative hashtags used by each candidate.

Graphic 2. Hashtags tag cloud of different candidates running for 2015 regional elections in Murcia



Source: Own elaboration

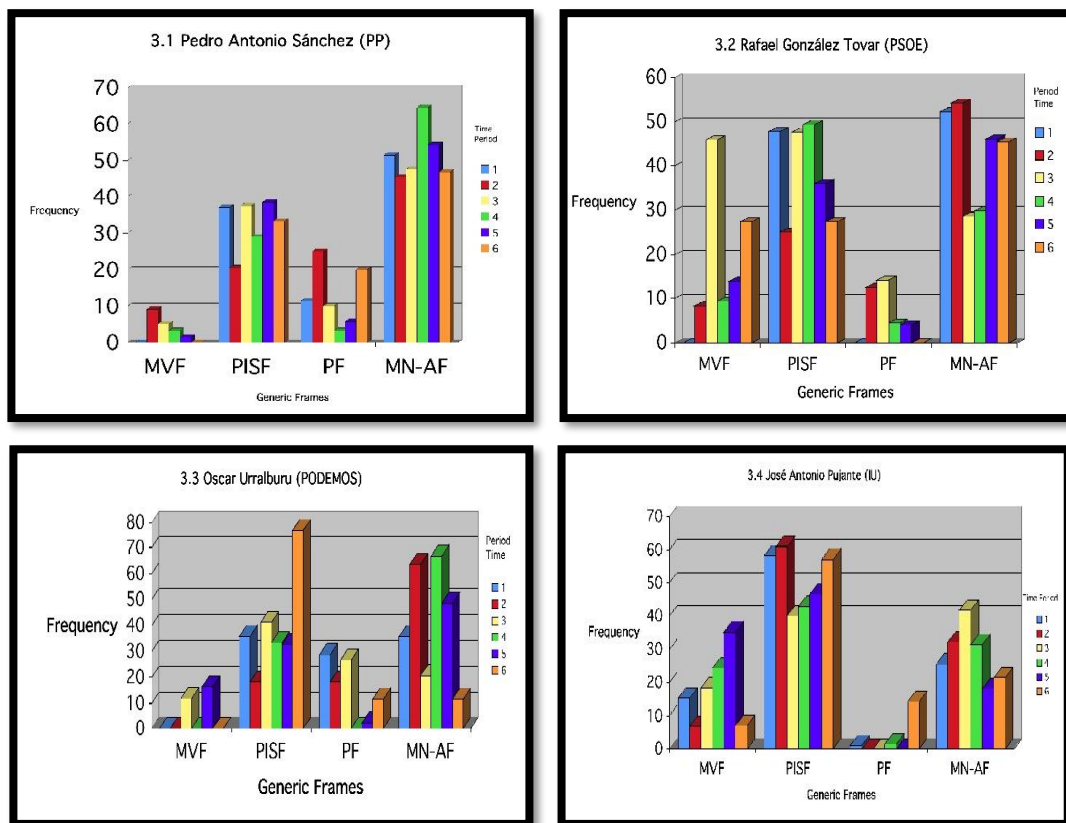
c) Presence of generic frames

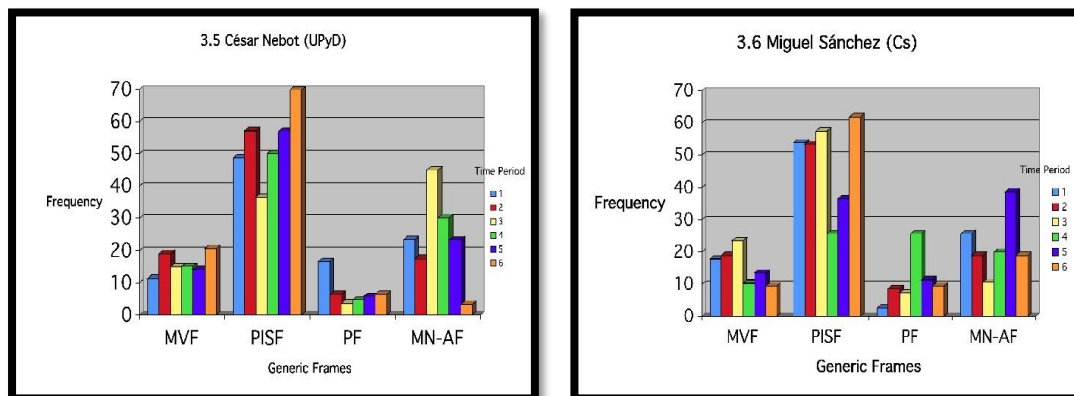
When we applied our quantitative approach to test our own typology of generic frames in Twitter based on other mentioned typologies (Parmelee & Bichard, 2012; Naaman et. al, 2010;) we found some interesting findings. Among the four generic frames that we included in our typology –Media validation frame, Political Information Source frame, Personality frame and Media Now/Selfpromotion frame– only two of them were clearly identified among all the candidates: political information source frame and ‘Me Now’/selfpromotion frame. By contrast, the rest of the generic frame (media validation frame and personality frame) were less important than expected.

This result pointed out to the idea that, for most of the candidates, to become a valuable political information source (sharing informations and opinions about different issue and topics) or to spread their own updated information about their own campaign activities, were more important than other conversational patterns, like to keep conversations with followers, in a more informal way, or to underline relevant mainstream media news in a resonance way.

This pattern is supported independently of candidates from traditional or new parties although, and also along the campaign time, as Graphic 3. shows, some minor differences were found, in the sense that personal frame was more relevant in the case of the candidates from new parties comparing to candidates from traditional ones. This may be due to their need for more visibility to explain to voters who they really were. In fact, the less known candidates used part of their tweets to strategically share non-political issues that have to do with intimacy or personal tastes, sports hobbies, etc.

Graphics 3. Evolution of generic Frames used by candidates running for 2015 regional elections in Murcia. (Source: Own elaboration)





5. Discussion

This research attempts to reflect and empirically measure the potential offered by social media, specifically Twitter, as a strategic tool in the context of online campaigns. It recognizes the considerable advantages of microblogging, not only to skip the traditional journalistic filters in regards to the selection and presentation of their electoral messages, but also to enhance personalization and individualization of information spreading and opinion shaping processes. Based on more dialogical communication formulas and less obvious persuasion processes, candidates campaigns on social media represent a break from the own dominant logic of traditional media campaigns.

Among all the opportunities that Twitter offers as a tool to develop a campaign, this work highlights the power of microblogging to strategically frame the political discourse. In particular, we have applied the latest formulations of the framing theory to identify, 1) the role of hashtags to frame the political messages in qualitative terms, and 2) the establishment of generic frames to define the campaign on Twitter. In this sense, the review of the recent literature of framing on Twitter during election campaigns has let us identify four different generic frames -media validation frame, political information source frame, selfpromotion frame and personality frame.

At the core of this research, we sought to empirically measure the strategic use of the microblogging for framing their message.

This communication pattern is supported not only among candidates from traditional parties (like Partido Popular, Partido Socialista, or Izquierda Unida) but also candidates from new parties (like Ciudadanos, Podemos, UPyD). Contrary to what we originally expected, new parties, with a few minor exceptions, mostly replicated the same communication model than traditional parties, by considering Twitter a sa medium for spreading or even broadcasting information instead of a real social media for interact with followers in a more familiar or personal way.

Nevertheless, we recognize that the use of Twitter, as a campaign tool, remains an unexplored territory and requires future empirical research not only at the national level, but also at the local or regional level, like our own research. Despite the importance of the strategic use of framing tweets among followers opinions, there is a lack of empirical studies that try to apply traditional public mass media effects theories like Framing and Agenda Setting on this new ecosystem media that social media represents. Further research is needed to provide scientific and rigorous explanations around the consequences this has for shaping public opinion.

6. Conclusions

The use of Twitter at the local level in 2015 during the regional elections in Murcia, compared to 2011, had considerably increased its importance as a information source.

The candidates didn't reach the microblogging potential to frame their own political messages (more retweets than own tweets) with the use of strategic hashtags. Rather, our findings illustrated how candidates followed a one-way communication pattern, based mainly on the use of two generic frames (political information source frame and 'Me Now'/selfpromotion frame) with few interactions and implications with followers. Media validation frame and Personal frame were less important.

Another difference we found was that all parties used political information source frame more than 'Me Now'/selfpromotion frame, but there was two exceptions, because PP y UPyD used in the last period more 'Me now'than political information source frame. On the other hand, it is very common in the case of 'Me Now'/selfpromotion frame to be accompanied by a photograph of the candidates at the place.

The traditional parties used 'Me now'and selfpromotion frame more often than the new parties, but the use of personal frame was more often in the last one. Similarly, the traditional parties, were the parties with smaller number of retweets in comparing with the number of tweets. It was significative in the case of Pedro Sánchez (PP: traditional party) and Oscar Urralburu (Podemos: new party) who had a major number of retweets, but the difference is less than others new parties, whose retweets triple the number of tweets emitted in the majority of cases. We underline the importance of the retweet activity (70%) versus own tweets (30%). This practice is even more significant among new party candidates. The two candidates for the most representative parties (traditional parties: PP y PSOE) usually had more equality between the tweets and retweets than the new parties. The two parties with more level of retweets were IU and UPyD.

Traditional and new parties had the same level Twitter activity during the campaign, only UPyD (new party) had a considerable amount of tweets during the analysis period (nearly 700 tweets in 18 days; 40 average per day). In general, the Twitter activity among candidates normally increases along the campaign, but the new parties followed a more irregular trend during the period. Also, there was a general trend in the use of hashtag, but the new parties included more often than traditional ones, and more creative ideas or politics concepts.

In summary, for most of the candidates, to become a valuable political information source (sharing informations and opinions about different issue and topics) or to spread their own updated information about their own campaign activities, was more important than keeping conversations with followers, or to underline relevant mainstream media news in a resonance way.

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