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(R)evolutionizing Political Communication through Social Media

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CHAPTER 6

IMPERFECT BIPARTISANSHIP AND SPANISH PLURALISM: THE KEYS TO SUCCESS OF PODEMOS ON TWITTER

ABSTRACT

The objective of this research is to find if the success of *Podemos* in the 2014 European Parliament Elections and its activity on Twitter agrees with the theoretical perspectives that Dahlgren (2011) and De Ugarte (2007) developed or if there is a new civic participation paradigm that determinates the successful of the current political communication strategies. In order to verify this purpose, this study not only has applied Dahlgren (2011) and De Ugarte (2007) proposals, but also it has developed a sampling tweets methodology that permits to collect and analyze information from *Podemos*' tweets from the 25th, March 2015 to the 24th, May 2014. The main conclusion of this research is that there is not a real 'new civic participation model', but there are emerging some social and collective trends that De Ugarte and Dahlgren did not consider in their approaches, but that offer a new context for the development of a new concept of "politics".

KEYWORDS

Cyber-activism, Political Participation, Civic Engagement, Bipartisanship, Podemos, Pablo Iglesias, De Ugarte, Dahlgren, European Parliament Elections, Protests, Network Society, Spanish pluralism

INTRODUCTION

Cultural convergence has changed the public landscape from a technological, economic, social and global perspective (Jenkins, 2006). Information and communications technology has emerged as a result of this cultural convergence and it has transformed the structure of social relationships and the political communication process. Lasswell's (1948) communication theory is obsolete within this postmodern society where emerging technologies have motivated the birth of a "participative communication" model (Servaes, 1996; Servaes & Malikhao, 2005).

Barack Obama's campaign in 2008 demonstrated the strength of social networks, like *Twitter* or *Facebook*, as powerful tools to create communities of volunteers who worked together toward a greater good. Voters felt part of the campaign; they could collaborate and participate in the political process as never before. Obama knew how to take the sense of belonging to new and stronger levels; for that reason, Obama's campaign was a turning point that defined a new way to understand the relationship between politics and new technology, between representatives and citizens.

John Daniel, the vice-chancellor of the Open University (UK) said in a conference about the new information society: "Ladies and gentlemen, the new technologies are the answer. What was the question?" This is a good consideration about "the great expectations generated in many different areas of our lives by the prospect of the application of information and communication technology, but at the same time the prevailing disconcertion over their possible uses and impacts" (Subirats, 2002, p. 228). This expression is also an anecdote that reminds the story about Marconi, the father of the wireless. He was working a long time on the telegraph connections and, one day, when one of his collaborators realized of what they have just got, he said: "Marconi, we can talk to Florida!" Marconi turned to him and he responded: "But do we have anything to say to the people in Florida?"

In the same way, we are all hopeful and excited about how digital revolution could improve the democratic system, "but we should first think about the problems facing us today and in the potential and real uses of the information and communication technologies" (Subirats, 2002, p. 228).

The success of *Podemos* during the European Parliament Elections in 2014 is the result of a set of political and communication strategies. However, *Podemos* stood up because of the online communication methods used during the campaign. According to Howard's (2006) thesis, *Podemos* organized a "hypermedia campaign" where citizenship kept the power. In this sense, the hypothesis of this chapter suggests to understand find if the success of 'Podemos' in the 2014 European Parliament Elections and its activity on Twitter are influenced by the hypothesis that Dahlgren (2011) and De Ugarte (2007) developed or if there is a new civic participation paradigm that determinates the successful of the current political communication strategies. So, this research should be understood as a theoretical approach that aims to compare the activity of *Podemos* on Twitter with Dahlgren's (2012) and De Ugarte's (2007) paradigms about political participation and civic engagement. This framework is expected to be useful to give some final recommendations about the main ingredients an online campaign should have.

CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

The May 15, 2011 was a coordinated day of protests in many Spanish cities. It was the day of the *#spanishrevolution* in which citizens threw into the street expressing their opposition to the political elite. It was a networked movement popularly known as the *15M*. The *15M movement* was born digital. The call to occupy the streets came from many bloggers and online activists that spread their outrage against the Spanish government and their controversial laws¹ on *Twitter*, *Facebook* and other online platforms. The movement was not a single entity, but a blend of different intentions. They were the *Spanish indignados*² and they stood in for a great part of the society that was growing apart from political institutions (Walzer, 1984).

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One of the most powerful and repetitive mottos of the *15M movement* held that Spanish politicians “do not represent us”. This was not a populist movement that tried to destabilize the democracy system and to shake the foundation of the Welfare State, but a protest that was warning that our politicians were neither devoting time nor efforts to get what they pledged to citizenship. Politicians who represent citizens are supposed to share our values, our needs and our interests (Subirats, 2012); «to represent» is «to be alike», so this means that our representatives should look like us –citizens-, because it is the only way they can understand our problems, our worries and our lifestyle.

Then, the *15M movement* was just claiming a democratic renovation and a political change: politicians were more interested in how to get more power and how to get promoted inside the political institutions than in how to satisfy the requirements of citizens. For those reasons, the *15M movement* demanded more transparency, more direct civic participation and to drive out the mediation of lobbies and chambers. The future of democracy was at stake here. How to get this renovation in the Spanish democratic society? Do they –politicians- really represent us –citizens-?

The model of welfare mix (Evers & Wintersberger, 1990) could be defined as an alternative path where the political clear-out could start from. In the Spanish case, citizens must understand first how their representatives have been elected and second, how they are exerting their authority and their influences (Presno Linera, 2012). On the one hand, the Spanish representation voting system is not a proportional method. The *D'Hondt law* discriminates under-represented political parties in favor of over-represented ones; this electoral method does not guarantee a real representative and proportional system³. That is why the current political sphere is not a pluralist arena, but a monochromatic stage. The political scene should be like a puzzle made by different pieces and where each piece represents different preferences and social opinions. Voting should be understood like the tool that makes proportional representation possible. In this regard, Hirschman (1991) claimed that “a democratic regime achieves legitimacy to the extent that its decisions result from full and open deliberation among its principal groups, bodies, and representatives” (p.169). Following the same idea, Narud & Esausson (2013) considered that:

“Democracy works best if citizens are not only voters, but also act as quality-controllers between elections. [...] The better the communication between citizens and representatives, the better the quality of the representation will be. Negotiation and deliberation between elections can be considered as critical for good representation. Political participation serves as an important tool for citizen input in the democratic process and it enables citizens to pressure politicians to take this information into account when making political decisions (Mansbridge, 2003; Verba, Scholzman & Brady, 1995)”. (p.36)

Then so, if the intention is to figure out the democratic crisis and to create a trustful relationship between society and government, why can citizens not set up a ‘deselect system’ that permits individuals oust an elected official before his official term has ended? (Subirats, 2012). Other countries like Canada, Switzerland or some places in United State have already celebrated *recall elections* or *recall referendums*. According to the *Oxford dictionary*, the *recall* is a method of election in which voters can use when they want to remove and replace an elected official before his official term has ended. This procedure begins when sufficient voters sign a petition and it means to change “ordinary people” (Hibbing & Theis Morse, 2002) into “monitorial citizen” (Schudson, 1998) to ensure politicians functions properly (Narud & Esausson, 2013). It is a democratic duty of citizens. *Monitoring* means the demolition of the *panoptic model* developed by Bentham in 1791 and the end of the role of political actors as a big brother –regarding the novel *1984* by George Orwell-. According to Feenstra & Casero-Ripollés, (2014), “monitoring, defined as the exercise of public scrutiny toward power centers and relations, is considered a rising trend due to the potential enabled by the new digital communication structure” (p.2450). On the other hand, regarding representative’s functions and responsibilities, it is important first to point out the role of the representatives as a vehicle for expressing the wishes and choices of citizenship and for promoting the civic participation. Democracy should not be understood like a scenario occupied only by

professional politicians, but like an *infocracy* (Zuurmond, 1998). The coming of *infocracy* will imply a less hierarchical, more flexible and opener democratic system:

“In a more ‘constructive’ sense, *informatization* is associated with a resurgence and renewal of democracy. More specifically, *informatization* is expected to facilitate all kinds of (direct as well as participatory) digital democracy. [...] ICTs are, furthermore, said to contribute to the transparency of power, to favour interactive decision-making and the empowerment of citizens”. (Van de Donk, 2000, p. 139)

Occidental societies are living so a digital revolution that is making up the current *Information age*. Castells (2004) named this model of social organization the «*network society*», in which citizens live in a global, interconnected and informed community based on a free, open and liberalizing culture. The traditional hierarchical structure is obsolete nowadays and a new decentralised democratic model is emerging. The main characteristic of this new social organization system is to provide lateral and multidirectional communication flows. The *network society* is composed of proactive or *prosumers* (McLuhan & Barrington, 1972; Toffler, 1980) that want to participate in the public sphere creating their own content, sharing information and interacting with other users of the web 2.0.

In this volatile context, activists from the *15M movement* protested against those politicians that “do not represent us”. Government responsibility in public welfare is a deeply rooted idea in Spain, but activists from the *15M movement* believed that the main tenets of the Spanish democracy were living a tricky period because of the lack of civic involvement. According to their manifesto, Spanish democracy needed to conform to the new rules of the *network society*. For those reasons, the *15M movement* understood that the opportunity to set up their own political party had already arrived. *Podemos* was born with the aim to monitoring dishonest politicians and to give more power to the people.

In conclusion, in the same way the presidential campaign of Barack Obama in 2008 shined for the use of the Internet and social networks, the phenomenon *Podemos* excelled as a different political party that knew how to defend their political strategies skillfully on social networks, especially on Twitter. In their public manifesto, they demanded a deep political renovation and more opportunities for civic participation. Twitter was a useful tool for giving and receiving feedback from voters and although other Spanish candidates –like Jose Luis Rodríguez Zapatero (PSOE), Mariano Rajoy (PP), or Rosa Díez (UPyD)- had previously used social networks as a means of political expression, the effects of these last ones were less popular. The main advantage of *Podemos* lies in the level of argumentation, the discursive strategies, the coherence and the empathy of their online messages. They were not just disseminating a political ideology among voters –self-promotion-, but the idea that the civic empowerment was the main step for reaching social and democratic changes.

CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

Postmodern societies have developed a new collective identity influenced by the technological, economic, social and global convergence (Jenkins, 2006). *Network society* has changed the rules of the political and public debate. Candidates and political parties who aspire to take advantage of the strength of networks must be aware of the logic of the new democratic society. In this sense, De Ugarte (2007) has configured the ‘empowering people model’ as a political strategy that parties should include in their electoral campaigns in order to connect with the new electorate. According to De Ugarte (2007), the ‘empowering people model’ depends on the strength of the following factors: swarming, speeches, tools and visibility.

1. Swarming. Arquilla & Ronfeldt (2000) argued that swarming “is already emerging as an appropriate doctrine for networked forces to wage information-age conflict” (p. 5). It could seem an amorphous multitude, but it is a deliberately structured, coordinated, strategic way to strike from all directions (Arquilla & Ronfeldt, 2000). Swarming is so the new power structure of the network society. It is a concept that explains the new organizational system of democratic citizenships in which people transfer their values and culture from virtual environment to reality. Thus, swarming

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depends upon communication and information flows that shape the structure of the network society. However, there is a conflict within the network society; it is called the “social netwar” (Ronfeldt, Arquilla, Graham Fuller & Melissa Fuller, 1998) and it is led by small units or nodes that interact with each others to coordinate their actions and to ensure the effectiveness of the movement. Online communities and virtual conversations follow the logic of swarming, but it is difficult to start a movement on the Web and then to shift it to the reality, like a protest or a demonstration that occupies the streets. For that reason, new political parties should know how to be part of the swarming and how to bring that voices round to their point of view.

2. Speeches. The new speeches on social networks must be focused on the empowering people strategy. Online speeches do not aim to set a strict hierarchy of values, a doctrine or a creed; but they suggest ranges or perspectives from which we can understand the social reality. Political speeches should narrate individual stories or relate stories about small group of people that change the public space using the ingenious and the imagination –political storytelling-. These new speeches keep the main postmodern ingredients that ensures the success of the narrations on the web: a strong identity component, decentralized flows of communication -information is not mediated by any single agent- and the common idea that defines “activism” as a “social hacking” form.
3. Tools. The main idea is to provide useful tools for users in order to encourage them to participate in any kind of movement that parties or political actors could organize. In this context, it is important that new political parties show their attitude to reach consensus among the online community and their ability to divulgate and spread their ideas on the global net. It is a strategy that will help politicians to find virtual allies.
4. Visibility. It is the last step of the empowering people strategy. Citizens must gain visibility on virtual spaces and offline environments. Network visibility is the key to achieve the “tipping points” (Gladwell, 2006). Ideas, products, messages, trends and behaviors spread on the Internet like viruses do, but there is a moment when the epidemic reaches the top point, the moment when the popularity of that information reaches a climax. That is the *tipping point phenomenon* and political strategies should be focused on researching that point.

On the other hand, Dahlgren (2013) understands that “democracies today do not automatically guarantee extensive participation of citizens, either in electoral or extra-parliamentarian contexts. Democratic systems in fact offer varying patterns of what are called structures of opportunity for participation” (p.11); but participation also depends on the initiatives that citizens take by themselves. Then the concept of «participation» is defined as a social conduct inherent to democratic systems. Civic participation is one of the most representative behaviours attached to the tenets of citizenship and democracies (Dahlgren, 2012).

Online civic participation is nowadays one of the main values to understand the evolution of democracy and the development of political participation and civic engagement. In this context, Dahlgren (2012; 2013) has reflected on the key elements of the online participation and the importance of each parameter within the democratic ecosystem. These factors also determinate the success of the empowering people model and the popularity of movements or political speeches on the Internet. According to Dahlgren (2012; 2013), these parameters that define the democracy and the online and offline civic participation are:

1. Terrains of engagement: the borderlands. Public sphere is a terrain that is limited by three borders basically: *consumption*, *popular culture* and *civil society*.
The *consumption* is a vast term that is connected with the logic of markets. This concept means that we participate because we are trying to find satisfaction and pleasure. “Consumption is a powerful gravitational force, and it is not surprising that our identities as consumers are generally much more easily mobilized that of citizens” (Dahlgren 2013, p.38).

Popular culture is often entangled with consumption –since it is a massive and heterogeneous terrain that has a compelling allure-, but it is also a borderland that invites participation: invites citizens to engage in many questions having to do with how we should live and what kind of society people want. Popular culture “allows us to process, to work through positions having to do with contested values, norms and identities in a turbulent late modern socio-cultural milieu” (Dahlgren 2013, p.33)

The idea of *civil society* refers to “a terrain that in some or other involves free association for common purpose outside both the market and the private sphere of the home” (Dahlgren 2013, p.33). Democracies must guarantee that the people share their interest with friends, communities or social networks without any commercial or political purpose. “Democracy should be a celebration of an involved public” (Dalton, 2002, p.32). The freedoms associated with civil society are absolutely essential for democratic public spheres. However, civil society is always a potentially vulnerable terrain and, in this context, political participation must be understood as a tool to defend civil society against antidemocratic trends.

“We often equate political participation with the act of voting, but if you view politics from the citizen’s perspective, participation is not limited to voting, nor is voting necessarily the most effective means of influencing the political process. Instead of waiting several years until the next election, you might try to contact political elites directly, or you might work with others who share your interests, or you might find other ways to advocate your cause” (Dalton, 2002, p.33).

2. **Visibility and Intervisibility.** The notion of *visibility* is not simply a question of being visible or invisible. Visibility is an important aspect of participation. Brighenti (2010) developed two models that conceptualize this term within the public sphere. On the one hand, the first model refers to the public sphere as a mode of visibility where one can be in public, “that is where the ‘synchronicity of attention’ can be said to (in its better moments) give rise to a certain regime of democracy visibility” (Dahlgren, 2013, p.40). On the other hand, the second model is “the public realm of social visibility, of interaction, where the gaze and recognition of general or significant others becomes central to the constitution of self, of identity” (p.40). Dahlgren (2013) called this last kind of model “*intervisibility*” and it is related to the idea of “how our sense of self emerges through interaction or the ‘presentation of self’” (p.40). Then, from the perspective of democratic participation, public sphere *visibility* and social *intervisibility* remain both conditions for participation.
3. **Voice.** Couldry (2010) described the concept of *voice* as a process in which particular perspectives and opinions are acknowledged; but voice is also a value that favours forms of social organization in political contexts. Nevertheless, in this contemporary context, voice and other social values and visions “become marginalized by political design and economic rationality, voices becomes something to be protected, to be promoted, to give witness to the human reality behind” (Dahlgren, 2013, p.39). From the perspective of democratic participation, public sphere *visibility* and social *intervisibility* remain both conditions for participation.
4. **Sociality.** Political participation is a social action based on human communication and contingent upon sociality. Doing politics in an effective way requires a degree of social skills and competences; it is common to undervalue the importance of the sociality, but we should understand this concept as a tool to motivate political participation and to improve networked interaction. Social interaction is the first requirement for supporting participation. However, the dreadful use of the web is obviously not a form of democratic political participation, yet it victimizes many people on the web. “There are many unfortunate examples of how not just baleful individuals but even entire symbolic ‘lynch mobs’ can emerge in social media. [...] In any case, sociality cannot be legislated, but there remains the regulatory challenge of dealing with

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anonymous harassment that can stifle public discussion –but in a ways that will still safeguard freedom of legitimate speech-.” (Dahlgren, 2013, p.35).

Regarding this characteristics (Dahlgren, 2011; De Ugarte, 2007), we understand that political participation on the Web is a mechanism of knowledge sharing and mutual learning. Traditional and conservatives political principles are becoming obsolete and less effective. The potential of political micro-blogging should not be underestimated; in fact, Twitter and other micro-blogging platforms are considered extraordinary tools to connect voters with candidates, but not everybody is capable enough to develop a political micro-blogging strategy.

The majority of online actions by political actors are more likely to seem an “electronic brochure” (Jackson & Lilleker, 2009) than an attempt to connect with the interests and needs of citizenship. Politicians tend to use blogs as “campaign gimmicks” (Lilleker & Malagón, 2010) or tweets as a “vehicles for self-promotion” (Goblbeck, Grimes & Rogers, 2010), “while micro-blogging in general has evolved towards becoming more conversational and collaborative” (Larsson & Moe, 2011). The model of political participation proposed by Dahlgren (2011) and De Ugarte (2007) suggests to increase the power of individual through political micro-blogging use and the empowering people phenomenon. It is an opener paradigm that enhances civic ability to share information and knowledge with other online users via social media.

METHOD

Social media data is difficult to obtain. Nevertheless, this research has developed a sampling tweets methodology that permits to collect and analyze information from *Podemos*' tweets. This method will provide an overview of the political participation strategy of *Podemos*' on Twitter. In order to verify this purpose, we will not only expound the strategies we have identified, but also we are going to compare those characteristics with De Ugarte's and Dahlgren's theoretical hypothesis.

This analyze will track tweets sent from @*ahorapodemos* and @*pablo_iglesias*_ Twitter accounts two months before the European Parliament Elections 2014. For carrying out this tweets collection, this work is going to use *Topsy* application, since we believe it is a suitable online tool for obtaining tweets and information according our specific needs. The tweet search range we have employed starts the 25th, March 2015 and ends the 24th, May 2014 -two months before the day of the European Parliament Elections-. Yet, we also point out that we have needed to translate the tweets from Spanish to English in order to make the speech understandable.

But why Twitter? Twitter is a micro-blogging system that has become one of the most relevant communication platforms for the new politics. Originally, this service was created as a web page in which users exchange personal messages (Barberá & Rivero, 2012), but nowadays, Twitter has become a massive phenomenon with more than 271 million online users⁴. Twitter is the social network that better foreshadow the interrelationships that are shaped on the Internet between citizens, representatives and prominent opinion movers. Twitter's potential relies on the fact that messages are spread in a quick and massive way –viral phenomenon or “massive phenomenon” (Barberá & Rivero, 2012) - and thus, they can get to a bigger and varying amount of public than direct followers. It is a platform made up of a structure difficult to find in other social networks that are more connected and introspective.

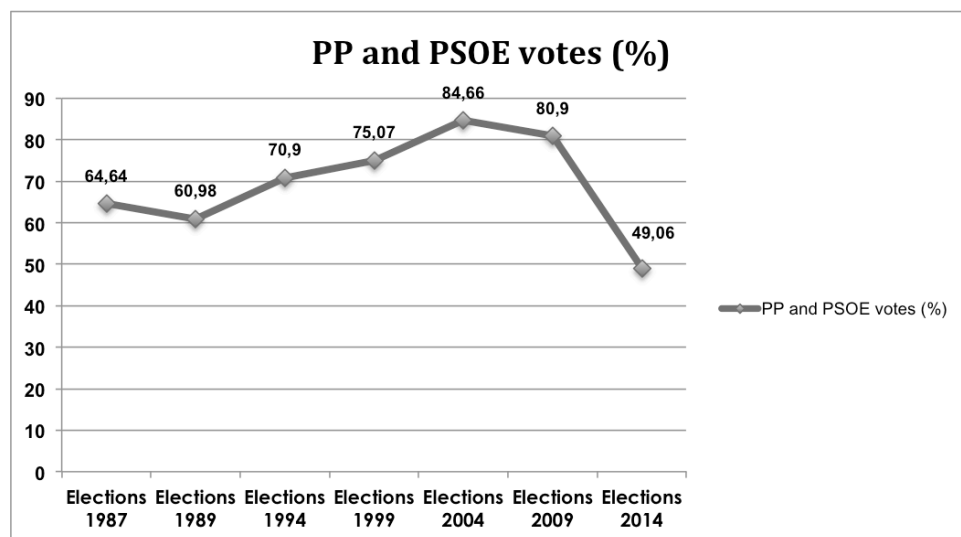
Moreover, the open nature of conversations in Twitter leaves us the chance to study the politic strategy carried out in elections and other political campaigns. In short, “Twitter is a relevant source of political information; it has been a battlefield during electoral campaigns, a deliberation forum and a path of political expression” (Barberá & Rivero, 2012).

RESULTS

The elections to the European Parliament, which took place on 25th May 2014, were a remarkable occasion to know the Spanish people's opinion. For the first time in almost three years, political parties were subjected to elector's evaluation. It happened within a context of economic crisis which would predictably lead to several consequences that would affect the currently ruling party -*PP party*- and the previous party on the Government -*PSOE party*-.

European Elections made up the perfect scenario to test whether the citizens were still faithful to the two biggest political parties in Spain (imperfect two-party system) even in critical situations. Although civic participation was low in these elections -according to the Spanish Home Office, the participation rate was 45,86%-, the event became the perfect alibi to apply the *protest vote*. The supporting rate of the two biggest parties -*PP party* and *PSOE party*- decreased significantly in comparison to the previous electoral meetings reaching records never seen before in European elections.

Figure 1: The evolution of two-party system in Spain. PP party and PSOE party rates across the European Parliament elections (1987 – 2014)



Source: Boix Palop & López García (2014)

In this breeding ground, new parties emerged gaining importance in the politic scene, such as *Vox*, *Ciudadanos*, *Movimiento Red*, *Primavera europea*, *Partido X* or *Podemos*. One of the better rated parties was *Podemos*. They got almost the 8% of the votes. This electoral success made them one of the starring political groups in Spanish political outlook. These changes drove into deeper transformations as well, such as the resignation of the chief of staff from *PSOE*, Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba. Following the tendencies the electorate showed in European Elections, the *PSOE* agreed that the new presidency had to be replaced by someone young, who seemed to be worried about the real needs of the people and disappointed with the current political situation. This description matched with Pedro Sánchez, who started an overhauling process in the party, clearly aiming to recover citizen's trust and improve the deteriorated reputation of socialist party.

Podemos could be also defined as a «hactivist party» since we understand this political group was born from an activist movement –the *15M movement*–, but they are not a protest demonstration anymore. They are a political party that is using the rules of cyber-activism and the hacker culture to create and set up another political participation model –more democratic, transparent and collaborative–.

In this context, the concept of «hacker party» is connected with the idea of «hactivism». The term *hactivism* comes from the marriage of «hacking» and «activism»:

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“*Hactivism* is the emergence of popular political action, of the self-activity of group of people, in cyberspace. It is a combination of grassroots political protest with computer hacking. *Hactivism* operate within the fabric of cyberspace, struggling over what is technologically possible in virtual lives, and reaches out of cyberspace utilizing virtual powers to mould offline life. Social movements and popular protest are integral parts of twenty-first-century societies. *Hactivism* is activism gone electronic”. (Jordan & Taylor, 2004, p. 1)

However, *hactivism* does not mean any politic institution associated with cyberspace, “in which case all politics would be *hactivist* [...]. *Hactivism* is a specific social and cultural phenomenon, in which the popular politics of direct action has been translated into virtual realms” (Jordan & Taylor, 2004, p.1). The hacker culture is subject to seven values or characteristics that have a significant role in the formation of our new society and that represent the hacker ethics and the spirit of *informationalism* (Himanen, 2001).

According to Himanen (2001), those seven values are:

1. Passions. Hackers enjoy what they do. They believe they are doing something interesting and there is not a higher stage of motivation than that belief.
2. Freedom. Hackers do not organize their lives in terms of a continuously optimized workday, but in terms of a dynamic flow between creative work and life's other passions.
3. Social worth. Hackers want to be part of an online community and to work together with other users in order to not only share information and interests, but also to create something valuable to the society.
4. Openness.
5. The value of activity. The technological development of the Information Age provides open communication flows where freedom of expression does not find any limit, but where hackers must respect a code of ethical conduct as well.
6. Caring. The new challenge of hackers is to get that everybody participates in the network society and to make citizens feel responsible for the consequences and benefits of being part of the network society. Hackers who live according to the hacker ethic become a true hero and gain the community's highest respect.
7. Creativity.

On the other hand, following the conceptual approach that *Podemos* is a ‘*hactivist party*’, we indeed define them as a cyber-activist political party too. *Cyber-activism* is a new civic behavior model in which citizens develop a strong collective conscious that encourage them to interact and discuss public affairs with other users on the Web. Cyber-activism is also considered the most evident manifestation of social movements; it is a phenomenon that requires political reforms in order to adapt the current democratic system to the new demands of the contemporary society. Tascón & Quintana (2012) described cyber-activism as a collective action made up by “individual activists who use online platforms and social networks to publish their protest, look for allies and face antagonists” (p. 9). Thus, a cyber-activist is “someone who uses the Internet, and the blogosphere above all, to spread a speech and to make available to citizenship the tools that give the power and the visibility that is now monopolized by the institutions back to the people” (De Ugarte, 2007, p. 66).

Pablo Iglesias used Twitter frequently since he sang up on Twitter in November 2010. That was one of the main factors that helped him to gain more followers a year before the European Parliament Elections in 2014. Digital citizens understood that Pablo Iglesias did not create his Twitter account just for political goals, but maybe for activist purposes as well. However, one of his weaknesses was that he did not replay to his followers when they mentioned him for asking questions about his political proposals or about the manifesto of *Podemos*.

Pablo Iglesias was quite active on Twitter and he used this platform for making direct political communication flows, but also for promoting changes in the public sphere. However, it is suggested to

improve the feedback since it is important citizenship feels that representatives listen to their claims and petitions.

Then, in order to show some examples of the hacktivist behavior of *Podemos* and Pablo Iglesias –like transparency, protest actions, encouraging civic participation, informing against political corruption, etc.- we have collected some tweets we include below:

Figure 2: Tweet published by @ahorapodemos the 27th March, 2014

Translation: “The problem is not the scoundrels, but the corruption as a form of government”, Pablo Iglesias



Figure 3: Tweet published by @ahorapodemos the 5th May, 2014

Translation: “It is time to put civil laws before the interest of lobbies and privates campaigns”, Pablo Iglesias



Podemos sought to get visibility and “intervisibility” (Dahlgren, 2013). Following the hypothesis of De Ugarte (2007), *Podemos* wrote their tweets and spread their ideas, behaviors or trends like virus do. They tried to divulgate their messages like if they were an epidemic and infect citizens with their political ideas. Then, visibility helps to gain intervisibility, that is “how our sense of self emerges through interaction or the ‘presentation of self’” (Dahlgren, 2013, p.40).

Visibility could be significant improved using a suitable speech and voice. The following example may illustrate these ideas about how *Podemos* use Twitter to gain visibility and intervisibility among online

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users –they added the link to the TV program where Pablo Iglesias participated and they also included a headline that attracted attention- and offline citizens –he first participated on the TV program and then he used Twitter to publish and communicate his messages to whom did not watch the program; there is feedback relation between information broadcasted on TV and the one given on the Internet- .

Figure 4: Tweet published by @ahorapodemos the 6st May, 2014

Translation: “We cannot overcome this crisis impoverishing the population”, intervention of Pablo Iglesias in Cuatro: bit.ly/1nhxSWK

PODEMOS ✓
@ahorapodemos

"De la crisis no se sale empobreciendo más a la gente", intervención de Pablo Iglesias en Cuatro: bit.ly/1nhxSWK

↩ Responder ↻ Retwittear ★ Favorito ⋮ Más

Cuatro

Pablo Iglesias: "Aquí, parece que para que te vaya bien te tienes ..."

Tras escuchar el testimonio de Miguel, un hombre en paro desde hace cinco años y tras la acusación de Compromís al PP asegurando que emplea en el Instituto Valenciano de la Juventud a miembros de...

Ver en la web

| RETWEETS | FAVORITOS |
|----------|-----------|
| 60 | 30 |

13:08 - 6 de may. de 2014

Hence, Pablo Iglesias also used his own Twitter account as a way to improve the visibility and intervisibility of *Podemos*. Since this political party was born, they started strengthening the figure of Pablo Iglesias as a recognizable face on micro-blogging platforms and TV programs. His presence on Twitter has been active and constant; he showed to be a competent user and a skilled cyber-activist. Doubtlessly this fact helped *Podemos* to gain followers, visibility and intervisibility faster during the European Parliament campaign.

Figure 5: Figures about the development of Pablo Iglesias on Twitter
 Source: Elaborated by the authors and based on López García (2014)

| Pablo Iglesias (@Pablo_Iglesias_) | |
|---|---------------------------------|
| First tweet date | 11 th November, 2010 |
| Months on Twitter before the European Parliament campaign started | 41.94 |
| Published tweets until the 9 th May, 2014 | 7,271 |
| Tweets per day (before the European Parliament campaign started) | 5.70 |
| Published tweets until the 26 th May, 2014 | 7,600 |
| Published tweets during the campaign | 329 |
| Tweets per day during the campaign | 18.28 |
| Frequency variation (%) | 220.51% |
| Retweets during the campaign | 96 |
| Retweets during the campaign (%) | 29,18% |
| Replays during the campaign | 4 |
| Replays during the campaign (%) | 1.22% |
| References to other users during the campaign | 69 |
| Hashtags during the campaign | 98 |
| Retweeted times | 73,225 |
| Followers (until the 9 th May, 2014) | 149,147 |
| Followers (until the 26 th May, 2014) | 264,892 |
| Followers variation | 115,745 |
| Followers variation (%) | 77,60% |

The speech of *Podemos* on Twitter was clearly focused on favoring the empowering people phenomenon. The speech of postmodern societies, as De Ugarte (2007) and Dahlgren (2012) explained should keep a strong identity component and contribute to create new forms of social organization in the political debate. The information given by *Podemos* was not mediated by any media; they provided decentralized flows of communication on Twitter and other micro-blogging platforms. The voice of *Podemos* acknowledged particular perspectives and opinions:

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Figure 6: Tweet published by @ahorapodemos the 3rd May, 2014

Translation: More than 300 circles created by honest and anonymous people that make politics daily. This is the right way: We can!



Más de 300 círculos creados por gente honesta y anónima que hacen política día a día. Este es el camino : ¡Podemos!

← Responder ↻ Retwittear ★ Favorito ... Más



| RETWEETS | FAVORITOS |
|----------|-----------|
| 72 | 26 |

4:45 - 3 de may. de 2014

Figure 7: Tweet published by @ahorapodemos the 4th April, 2014
Translation: “What we are defending is the democracy system” Pablo Iglesias



The speech of *Podemos* on Twitter was a political strategy that deals about the idea of vanquishing the bipartisanship and the political “caste”⁵ that were damaging the society. In this context, *Podemos* emerged to bring change and hope. Pablo Iglesias sent tweets to the leaders of the other political parties as well –like the PP party and the PSOE party- to remark the outrage of the Spanish citizenship. *Podemos* believed that most of the people who used to vote to the PP or the PSOE were disenchant and they felt cheated by the “caste”, so the Spanish society needed a deep political and social transformation: Spanish people were finding another kind of politicians who really “represent them” –following the slogan of the *15M movement-* (López García, 2014).


On the other hand, *Podemos* put on public scenario different kind of online tools to encourage civic participation. Twitter was, in this sense, the most useful vehicle for communicating people how they could participate in the public debate and which were the online tools that were available to them: links and *#hashtags* were used for redirecting users to other platforms or websites. These tools not only enhanced the empowering people phenomenon, but they were also a means for organizing social demonstrations, finding allies on the virtual arena and spreading ideas and knowledge. A successful message follows the logic of *transmediality*.

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On the other hand, it is worth mentioning here that sociality (Dahlgren, 2013) has also showed to be an effective tool for *Podemos* strategy on Twitter. Sociality is a form of democratic political participation that motivates political participation and improves networked interaction.

Figure 8: Tweet published by @pablo_iglesias_ the 12th April, 2014

Translation: Today is an important day for @ahorapodemos. Join our meeting and participate.

Pablo Iglesias 
@Pablo_Iglesias_

Hoy es un día importante para @ahorapodemos. Ven a nuestro encuentro y participa.

↳ Responder  Retweetear  Favorito  Más

PODEMOS
comienza la tercera fase
CAMPAÑA ELECTORAL
POPULAR Y CIUDADANA

encuentros, talleres, conversaciones, música...
biblioteca y actividades para los más pequeños

SÁB 12 ABRIL | IES Lope de Vega | 12.00h a 21.00h
C/San Bernardo 70

noche
SÁB 12 ABRIL | Sala Clamores | 23.00h a 06.00h
C/Alburquerque 14
Metro Bilbao L1

@ahorapodemos www.podemos.info

| RETWEETS | FAVORITOS |
|----------|-----------|
| 40 | 25 |

1:09 - 12 de abr. de 2014

Figure 9: Tweet published by @pablo_iglesias_ the 11th April, 2014

Translation: Tomorrow there will be an awesome meeting of @ahorapodemos. I will give a Political Communication workshop (12:30 – assembly room) Join us! RT



On the official website of *Podemos*, activists could also find other online tools for participating and collaborating in political decisions, public debates, forums, etc. They opened a section called «Asamblea ciudadana» –*Citizens' Assembly*- where people could vote decisions and propose ideas; moreover, they have also deployed other cyber-activist tools and platforms like *Reddit*, *Loomio*, *Appgree*, *Agora voting system* or *TitanPad*. Another significant space of civic participation was the «Banco de talentos» –‘Talent bank’-, where citizens explained their abilities and described how they thought they could collaborate in the organization and management of *Podemos*. In short, the official website of *Podemos* could be defined as a *crowdsourcing* and a *co-working* platform.

Eventually, we sum up that the presence of *Podemos* on Twitter has been notable during the two months before the European Parliament Elections in 2014. “Just 48 hours after they got five seats in the European Parliament, they became the Spanish political party with more followers on Twitter” (Gómez & Viejo, 2014). The Twitter account @ahorapodemos exceeded the followers of other political forcers like the *PP* party, *PSOE*, *UPyD* or *Izquierda Unida*.

Gustavo Entrala, brand strategist of ‘Agencia 101’ and creator of the Twitter account of the Pope (@Pontifex) agreed that the successful of *Podemos* was an unexpected phenomenon in the communication field. Pablo Iglesias caused the same fascination than his party on the online scenario. One of the most remarkable characteristics is that they developed a strategy based on networks of interactionsto encourage the dialogue with the citizenship. As Rita Maestre argued: “The net must be an element of interaction. It is not just to launch a tweet”, our representatives should understand the value to give feedback and replay to the users (Gómez & Viejo, 2014).

Solutions and Recommendations

The popularity of *Podemos* was a sudden phenomenon. The party started being an unknown political group in the social sphere, but soon they realized their reputation was disseminating among citizens and they became the third most influential political force in Spain –behind *PP* party and *PSOE* party-. *Podemos* is a “hacktivist party” which showed to have important advantages over traditional political parties; nevertheless, since they are an emerging political model, their civic participation strategy also presents some flaws that could harm their proposals and messages in the public online debate. For those

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reasons, this research aims to describe the most common defects of the political participation communication model of *Podemos* and suggests some solutions and recommendations that could relieve future negative effects:

- Heterogeneity. The organizational model of *Podemos* is based on the heterogeneity. This means that there are different political opinions and a great number of ideological perspectives in the internal political debate – *Podemos* did not have political delegations; they were organized in local “circles” that followed a determinate ideology -. Pluralism is a good element in democratic societies since it is the key to understand and reconstruct liberal democratic politics. Groups are viewed as the means to acquiring political power and the role of those groups, communities and associations plays in self-development is central to political pluralism (Eisenberg, 1995). Equally, there is a connection between this idea and the term developed by Francis Galton in 1906: “wisdom of crowds” or “crowdsourcing”. Galton affirmed that decisions taken by groups or communities are often better than the information given by any single member of a group (Surowiecki, 2005). The *crowd* is intelligent because the decision making process is a collective action where bad decisions are rejected by the majority. Nevertheless, on the other hand, this opportunity is also a disadvantage, because no everybody is qualified to participate in the decision making process. Putnam (2001) argued that there are two characteristics that determinate the motivation of citizens to participate in the political sphere: political knowledge and civic engagement. Citizens are not supposed to be political experts (Stoker, 2006), but they must show a basic political knowledge level that guarantee that their decisions are based on rational arguments. Civic engagement is important to motivate civic participation; citizens must be aware of the dreadful consequences of the electoral abstinance. Then, as Putnam (2001) claimed: “If you do not know the rules of the game and the players and do not care about outcome, you are unlikely to try playing yourself” (p.35). From all this, it follows that heterogeneity is a positive value since we understand the multitude as a “wisdom crowd”, but it might be also dangerous because no everybody is motivated to participate in the political affairs or they do not just know how to do it –lack of political knowledge-. So then, if we want to pursuit a real political pluralism, *Podemos* should start educating and training people before giving them political responsibilities that exceed their cognitive abilities.
- The concept of «democracy» as an ambiguous term. «Democracy» is a polysemic concept. There is not a universal definition since we could establish standard tenets and characteristic of a perfect democratic system; each society demands different needs and so, each democracy should encompass different principles that satisfy those social petitions. One of the most used proposals of *Podemos* -which comes from the *15M movement*- is to set up a “real democracy” in Spain. But, what do they understand when they say “real democracy”? They do not make the main tenets of a “real democracy” clear; there is not a common manifesto that includes a definition about how a democratic system –Spanish democracy specially- should be. *Podemos* uses this empty term without following any guideline or criterion and let people believe in the kind of democracy they would like to live in; but that is an individual perception that could not fit with the democratic ideals of other citizens. In fact, there are different local circles in *Podemos* that claim different models of democracy; for example, ‘Deepening democracy’, ‘We could participate more’, ‘Direct democracy’ or ‘Anticapitalist Left’. Some of those social circles tend to go towards radicalisms, although they do not divulgate radical or extreme ideas. Yet, some of those movements also proclaim a direct democratic system when, indeed, direct democracy is a utopian model of social organization that was just feasible in the Ancient Greek civilization (Hamilton, Madison & Jay, 2012; Merino, 2001). Then, we suggest *Podemos* does encourage “direct participation” –and not direct democracy- as a vehicle for giving power to citizens. Direct participation means that citizens turn into active actors that play an important role in the political process –it is a feasible model of popular sovereignty-. It is not just about voting

during the elections; it is about collaborating in democratic decisions through social media, for example. Twitter provides interesting opportunities for online deliberation, as we have demonstrated; so as a “hacktivist party”, *Podemos* should set up common values and definitions that users could share on the Internet, because the ideological chaos that is being generated by the different local circles makes people feel confused.

- Superficial speech. The speech of *Podemos* on Twitter is sometimes offensive and radicalized. They use the term “caste” to label politicians who are not making politics. It is a pejorative concept that they use randomly when they want to discredit someone who are not using political power to help citizens. The concept of “caste” is a good resource to point out bad political praxis, without euphemisms. However, it would be better if *Podemos* also emphasis their political proposals instead of going on stressing the bad behavior of others political actors. On the other hand, the speech of *Podemos* is like a plebiscite process and sometimes, their messages lack of preciseness and rigorous information. It seems their messages are written like tweets. For that reason, we suggest *Podemos* adjusts their speeches depending on the context and the target. Young people may appreciate tweets instead of rigorous speeches, but ‘Podemos’ should not forget the importance of communicating quality messages and educating people in political issues.

From all this, it follows that even though *Podemos* has showed to innovate the traditional political participation model in Spain, there are still some behaviors we suggest they should improve, like the chaotic political pluralism, the lack of conciseness in their messages about democracy and civic participation, and the superficial speeches that looks like tweets.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

This research sets out to investigate the political participation model developed by *Podemos* during the European Parliament campaign 2014. However, we are aware that this study does not consider some others points from which we could also analyze this political strategy. Thus, we will discuss directions for future researches and emerging trends in this epigraph.

1. **An analysis of the narrative strategy from the perspective of storytelling.** The potential of stories demonstrates that the storytelling is one of the most powerful means of communication available in contemporary societies. “Stories are more efficient and effective vehicle for communicating factual, conceptual, emotional and tacit information” (Haven, 2007, p.122) than other political strategies. However, storytelling can be used to enlighten the reality or to conceal information. Salmon (2010) criticized that “in hypermedia society” the ability to build a political identity by telling stories, instead of using rational arguments, is the key to achieve power. Yet, storytelling is a management tool that is bewitching the human mind (Salmon, 2010). Politicians use a manipulative technique to influence opinion and behaviors. That is the power of stories. Stories have effects upon us. Instead of using stories to communicate, the political actors use a speech in which the force of language and the emotional plot seek to persuade citizenship. “This is not written experience, and it is not experience based on rational thinking. Instead, storytelling is based on experience passed on from mouth to mouth” (Benjamin, 1999, p. 86). However this political narrative has not succeeded in Spain. During the presidential campaign in 2008, the electoral candidate Mariano Rajoy used this communicative strategy against Jose Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, who was the President of the government in that period, in a face to face TV Spanish program. Rajoy ended his speech telling a story about a girl who needed to grow up in a better society. That story reminded the ‘Ashley’s story’ told by George Bush after the *11M* attack, but there was an important different: Rajoy was not able to transmit emotions, it seemed that he did not believe in the story he was telling. So, although it was a brave attempt to get something different, the strategy failed because Rajoy was not able to be a good storyteller.

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In this regards, we consider that one important future research direction must investigate the storytelling strategy of *Podemos*. Pablo Iglesias, the leader of this political party, is a good speaker, but he has trouble building emotional connections with the audience. So then, it could be interesting to guess if the storytelling is an important point in his political strategy or if it is a strategy that could damage the image of the political party.

2. **Tracking the Spanish presidential campaign in 2015.** After the unexpected success of *Podemos* in the European Parliament elections in 2014, it is considered important to analyze the next political campaign in Spain. Twitter clearly constitutes a new arena for the public debate nowadays. Micro-blogging has showed to be an important tool for increasing political participation among previously unengaged citizens (Castells, 2007); however, it is still uncertain the next online communication strategy of *Podemos* for the presidential campaign in 2015.

CONCLUSION

The main conclusion of this research is that there is not a real ‘new civic participation model’ in the sense that the model it is complete new, but there are emerging some social and collective trends that Dahlgren (2011) and De Ugarte (2007) did not consider in their approaches that means the reconsideration of some characteristics. Digital culture and new civic participation forms have led to several transformations in contemporary societies. Common knowledge and new collaboration forms offer a new context for the development of a new concept of “politics”. In this participative ecosystem, Dahlgren (2011) and De Ugarte (2007) suggested that civic participation must be funded in the “empowering people” phenomenon and in understanding democracy system like an opportunity for improving offline and online political participation. According to De Ugarte (2007), the ‘empowering people model’ depends on the strength of the following factors: swarming, speeches, tools and visibility. On the other hand, Dahlgren (2013) understands online civic participation is nowadays one of the main values to understand the evolution of democracy and the development of political participation and civic engagement and argues that the ‘empowering people model’ depends on the strength of some factors inherent to the democracy and the online and offline civic participation: consumption, popular culture, civil society, visibility, intervisibility, voice and sociality.

Nevertheless, Dahlgren (2011) and De Ugarte (2007) theoretical perspectives do not includes some innovative characteristics and inherent to *network society* (Castells, 2004). The electoral campaign in 2014 helped to change the traditional way of understand and make politics. The success of *Podemos* has made a turning point, its actual politic model and its campaign strategy has established a precedent for every new party that wants to make its own way through the actual politic scene. The analysis of the activity of *Podemos* on Twitter during the previous two months of 2014 European Elections has showed that there are new trends that new politicians should also implement in their online strategies in order to improve their relation with voters and with the aim to connect with the real interest of the new electorate. These new elements could be summarized in the following proposal:

- Be a *hacktivist party*, not just a political party. Twitter is not only a tool for political purposes; it is also a vehicle for helping citizens. A *hacktivist* candidate should communicate with other users and provide feedback to their followers. The strength of any ‘hacktivist party’ relays on their promise of setting up the empowering people model in the postmodern society.
- Spread your ideas, products, messages or behaviors on micro-blogging platforms like virus do.
- Create your online self through the interaction with users and community on the Internet.
- Provide first hand information. It is important to not let media gives information before you do. Twitter and other online platforms are decentralized flows of communication that favour forms of social organization in political contexts and acknowledge multitude of perspectives and opinions.
- Provide online tools for people who want to participate in the political debate. Twitter is a good vehicle for promoting these tools.

- Create democratic spaces for encouraging political participation and civic engagement. As a Twitter user, it is important to use sociality in the public and political debate.
- Set up a party that works like a net of interaction –where all the users and actors give feedback-, with a non-hierarchical structure.
- Be honest, transparent and open-minded. Be like common people are, because it is the only way to know what are the real needs and interests of citizenship.
- Motivate the sense of belonging. Create an affect effect, emotions in politics; but never forget the importance of being at the service of what citizenship needs.

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KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Civic engagement: The virtue of participating in social and political issues. It expresses the motivation and the aptitude of citizens to take part in the political decision making process in order to improve the tenets of the society and the democratic community.

Cyber-activism: Also known as «digital activism», is a form of activism in which activists use online platforms and social media for organizing protests and political mobilizations. Cyber-activists use online technologies to share messages and ideas and to reach common goals.

Cyber-democracy: The virtual arena where online users can share their knowledge and their interests. This kind of democracy keeps a non-hierarchical structure and people could participate in any political proposal or social aims; there is not a central authority that controls the power; power is distributed equally among citizens on the Internet.

Empowerment: An action that gives power to the people. The ability of social communities or individuals to take decisions and to start those decisions up.

Micro-blogging: An online platform that allows share brief information, images and video links quickly.

Political campaign: A political strategy that seeks to influence on voting behavior. Candidates explain their political proposals and promises in order to win votes.

Political participation: An activity led by citizens in which society shows interest in participating in the political sphere in order to get political purposes and change social conditions.

Social movement: A collective behavior that supports a social goal. Every protester has an individual explanation for their actions, but they join the multitude because they all share the same feeling of outrage and frustration and they are searching for opportunities of change.

ENDNOTES

¹ One of the most powerful movements was *#donotvotethem* (*#nolosvotes*) that encouraged people to protest against the *Sinde Law* or *Sustainable Economy Law*. According to this regulation, web contents and web sites must be limited in order to protect the intellectual propriety. However, as *Wikileaks* disclosed later, this law was a political strategy orchestrated by intellectual propriety lobbies, the music industry and the government of North America.

² The tag *Spanish indignados* is a catch-all term, an ambiguous expression, because it does not define the ideological identity of activists of the *15M demonstration*. The movement brought different kind of

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people together and the term *indignados* –indignant or anger- does not give us so much information about why they decided to join the protest, their opinions about the political and social situation. However, we must understand this catch-all term as an expression of outrage against the political system. The book of Stéphane Hessel, *Time for Outrage!* was the inspiration for the *Spanish Indignados* and other international movements like the American *Occupy Wall Street* protest.

³ The Council of Spanish State published an official report where they recognize that the Spanish representation voting system is not a proportional method and that the best solution is to encourage the civic participation in political affairs (Consejo de Estado, 2009).

⁴ Information updated in October 2014. This date is available on the Twitter official website:

<https://about.twitter.com/company>

⁵ *Podemos* usually uses the term «casta» -an approximate translation could be «caste» or «political class»- to name politicians who are too much time in the power and forgot their responsibilities as political representatives. This term keeps negative connotations because it also refers to politicians who believe that they belong to such a select elite that they do not care to become into a corrupt person.