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ABSTRACT

Twitter has reached Mexican politics in the presidential election. Despite the fact candidates have a twitter account to send messages; we propose the question how they use it to communicate with citizens? This exploratory research provides evidence that Mexican presidential candidates are only sending messages for politicians and not for citizens. We collected and analyzed 618 tweets from the three most important political parties: PRI, PAN and PRD, from November 2011 to February 2012. Using a five category framework, we found that most candidates sent thank and regret messages, but very few messages to their militancy and citizens. We found that the lack of information about this technological tool has disabled Mexican politicians to take advantage of this tool. Finally we hope this research contributes to analyze the impact of social media in Mexican Politics in a more systematic way.

Keywords

Twitter, political campaign, social media strategy, online marketing, communication.

1. INTRODUCTION

The cases of Tunisia, Egypt and Libya are clear examples of this so called revolution 2.0 (Attia et al. 2011). This worldwide recent trend seems to become real among the ideas of different authors, such as the creation of the fifth state or the one created by internet interaction with citizens (Dutton 2009). Or the political power as a result of the interaction and communication connections that share meaning and communication channels. This kind of interaction can only happen through internet (Castells 2009). The changes on traditional political structures to the digital world are changing the perspective on politicians, political parties and democracy (Mosca 2010). Digital social media have permeated different areas of the political realm. The expansion of e-democracy through social media can be one way to understand these phenomena. However our research leads to a second complementary path. There are several examples of the use of Twitter to change political behavior in Mexico. In 2009, the Senate had to consider a large group of citizens who gathered in the Twitter's social network, demanding to stop an Internet tax which had been approved by the House and the senators stopped just on time (Riva-Palacio 2009) after having gathered more than a hundred thousand messages using twitter. The Mexican Twitters put on so much pressure that senators had to attend the claimers and stop the tax on Internet later on (Sandoval-Almazan et al. 2011).

Next year, two students from the Instituto Tecnológico de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey, a private university in Mexico, were killed by military inside campus. One student hidden close to the entrance sent Twitter messages using his cell phone, explaining about the intrusion of the military. These messages, regained by the media, contradicted the military version, that both students were assassins. It also made people aware about the death of the two students. After these messages were made public, both young men were recognized as students of the institution. The military was accused and the names of the students were honored (Hechos 2010).

In the southern state of Veracruz a message from the official hash tag #verfollow posted the following message: "in the primary school named Jorge Arroyo an armed group kidnapped five kids" (Monroy-Hernández 2011). This message was re-tweeted by 12 more people, among them the account @gilius_22 named Gilberto Martinez Vera and María de Jesús Bravo Pagola (@maruchibravo). Two days later, both of them were arrested on charges of terrorism. They claimed to have been tortured by the police and forced to sign confessions. After one month under arrest, the international pressure was so strong, that both were released (Juarez 2011).

According to the Mexican Internet Association (AMIPCI), access to social networks became the 4th line of Internet activity in Mexico with 61% of the total population and it is the main entertainment business. Six out of ten Mexicans use Internet social networks, plus 60% use it daily. The most widely used network in the country is Facebook with 39% while Twitter ranks third with 20% after YouTube (Martinez 2011).

Data from the Competitive Intelligence Unit (CIU) consultancy highlights the fact that young people between 16 and 25 use the Internet and 87% of those over 50 years are connected to the network. 68% of them have used social networks. The growth of social network users in Mexico, especially Twitter, is exponential. This is the reason why political parties, politicians and organizations in general are using these forms of communication every day.

Another consultant, Comscore, states: "the growth of the Mexican audience in Twitter has been multiplied by six during the last year achieving a third place in penetration in Latin America and the eighth largest in the world". This company indicates that the growth of Twitter in Mexico has been of 935% and 145% for Facebook in 2010 (Comscore & Marchant, 2010). On January 2010 the total number of accounts grew four times its size, whereas active accounts grew a total of eight times (NIC 2011). Currently there are an estimated of 4 million 103 thousand people registered on Twitter, but only half of them use their accounts (IAS, 2011).

These isolated examples and the data of the use of this trend in the Mexican politics raises a new perspective over the use of social media to make political campaigns, however very few researches have been made to understand such phenomena. The purpose of this paper is to explore the impact of Twitter in the political campaign field. We believe that the main use of it is communication and politicians are not completely aware of how to use social media as a tool to communicate more efficiently with their constituents.

2. SOCIAL NETWORKS AND DIGITAL SOCIAL MEDIA LITERATURE REVIEW

Social network research can be traced since the 1800s. According to Freeman (2004), the first author in developing this field was Durkheim, with his notion of individualism and collective action. Also, Tonnies mentioned the direct social ties that link people who shares values and beliefs. Simmel was the first scholar who used the term "social network", and the ramifications of this concept into more complex networks, instead of groups (Freeman 2004).

From this starting point, three main traditions of study about social networking arose. First, in the 1930s, Moreno recorded the interaction of small groups – classrooms –, as well as Mayo and Warner researched the interpersonal relations at work. Secondly, in the 1960-1970s, White and other researchers from Harvard studied networks on political communities and social movements. Finally, a group of the university of California, around Freeman developed different works about social networks and group based analysis (Freeman 2004).

In order to understand the relationship between Twitter and the politicians, we need to go back and find the link on the web 2.0 tools and the government websites as the main link of this evolving relationship. The purpose of this literature review is to achieve such goal, and enables us to understand the next section of data analysis of Twitter. The term Web 2.0 was coined by O'Reilly (Afonso et al.), who defines it as: "the web as a platform that extends to all connected devices". Even though, these devices are not just limited to being interconnected, instead much of their functionality rests on the fact that they use technologies that allow users to build the content and format of sites. This is an example of software application (apps).

The term web 2.0 is still on debate. Wilson and colleagues (2011) mention that a lot of concepts have caused confusion and ambiguity on the term. He proposes that web 2.0 must be understood as "… the second generation of the Web, wherein interoperable, user-centered web applications and services promote social connectedness, media and information sharing, user-created content, and collaboration among individuals and organizations" (Wilson et al. 2011) (p. 2).

From this starting point, web 2.0 is using Blogs, Wikis, Forums, RSS, Apis (such as Google Maps), Podcasts, Video casts, social bookmarking (like Del.icio.us, Technorati, or Digg) and social networks (Twitter, Facebook, Hi5, LinkedIn) (Gallupe 2007).

This new area of research has been developed during the last years. A few studies have been published discussing the impact of Twitter. One of the first contributions was the work of Java Et. al (2007), who compared micro-blogging to regular blogging and found out more engagement and reciprocity among Twitter users when compared to conventional bloggers. Also, Honey and Herring's research was focused on conversations carried out using this social media platform. This study found out that using the @ symbol to target messages to specific users makes this service more usable as a collaboration tool (Honey et.al.2009).

Another research area connected to Twitter is based on its recommendation function. While the platform is limited to exchanging short text messages, recommending websites, videos or photo sharing is frequent, enforcing viral practices. (Phelan et al. 2009) studied this particularity of Twitter for promoting news and stories growing its viability. The first research focusing on a deep understanding of this relatively new phenomena was made by Zhao and Rosson (2009). They discovered that this tool, not only eases information sharing, but also helps Twitter to build up a common ground and sense of connectivity among colleagues and friends.

Twitter has also deserved other type of reflections and research. Kwak et.al (2010) has stated that an important research question is whether or not Twitter is a social network or a news media. Here, the authors analyze the topological characteristics of Twitter and its impacts as a new medium for information sharing. On the technical side of Twitter, the work of Lee (2010), his partners and Sarma et.al (2010) provided different methods to analyze the Twitter hierarchy of messages and to discover how previous posts influence new ones.

Other studies have focused on the political and democratic angles of the use of digital social media. On the side of social movements and e-democracy relationship with Twitter, previous research (Mosca) has established the concept of the political use of the Internet as " to gather political information, to discuss political issues and to perform acts of dissent online". Calderaro (2010) expands Mosca's concept by saying that "the Internet also includes tools other than the WWW, such as E-Mailing Lists, collaborative on-line software, Peer-to-Peer Networks, Instant Messaging tools, and so forth". Even though this research is focused on email, it shows the potential of these tools in politics.

Other studies (Mccaughey et al. 2003), (van-de-Donk et al. 2004) and (Pickerill 2010) support this concept regarding digital social media. Wall (2009), has studied the Irish e-democracy, or Wigand (2010), has measured the conversation of different stakeholders to build up relationships with the government. These studies use the information sharing in Twitter to provide evidence of the existence of new political uses in the Internet linked to digital social media. Furthermore, (Baumgartner et al.) study of social network websites among young users, finds that participation on politics of this cohort are not more liable to participate than users of other media. Studies as those of Gibson & McAllister (2011), Gueorguieva (2008), Gulati & Williams (2010), among others, also have examined the importance of the social networks and tools of the Web 2.0 (YouTube, MySpace, Facebook, etc.) in the most recent electoral campaigns held in developed democracies. In sum, more and more areas of the political realm are now under the scrutiny of the academics interested on the digital social media networks.

Very recent research has been made on Twitter and Facebook on politics. Andersen and Medaglia (Andersen et al. 2009) researched Facebook on the 2007 Danish Parliament election. Tumasjan and Sprenger (Tumasjan et al. 2010) researched on the German national election on 2009, found that it is possible to predict election outcomes by examining the frequency of mentions of political parties in Twitter messages. However, Jungherr & Jorgens (2011) prove that this findings are not accurate and needs more elements or revision to become true. Similar research like Olof & Larsson (Olof et al. 2010) on the Swedish election, Ifukor (2010) on Nigeria, and Cozma & Chen (2010) on the US shows influence of the social media, but not direct causality. Social media tools impact on elections is a research in progress (Feezell et al. 2009) (Metaxas et al. 2011) (Conover et al. 2011; Effing et al. 2011; Hanna et al. 2011).

3. METHODOLOGY

Online research has become the best way to collect, compare and analyze data nowadays for researching web 2.0 tools such as Twitter. However, very few methodologies and research models have been developed to this end. This situation creates confusion and difficulty about validity and trust in research findings that collect data online (Linders 2011). The e-research does not only make tasks easier or automates them, it raises a whole range of methodological and epistemic issues (Estalella

et al. 2011). Using innovative data collection strategies, however, does not compromise the validity of the findings. Gallupe (2007) mentions that current information systems (IS) research seems more concerned with "how" the research is conducted than "what" research is conducted and "why". Hewson (2008) develops the concept of Internet-mediated research (IMR): "Internet-mediated research involves the gathering of novel, original data to be subjected to analysis in order to provide new evidence in relation to a particular research question" (p. 58) This kind of research, though, like any other study, requires careful planning, designing, and piloting. Its most obvious advantage is cost and time efficiency.

For the purpose of this paper we collected 618 tweets using the mkTwitter tool sent by presidential Mexican candidates Enrique Pena Nieto (PRI[1]), Josefina Vazquez Mota (PAN[2]) and Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (PRD[3]), and analyzed them using five categories, that are explained on table 1 using keywords. Once we have the data collection of tweets, we classified them manually, reading each tweet and grouped them into the following categories until we got the numbers. Some items were dismissed because they were ambiguous or confusing.

Category	Description	Keywords
Interactions	A candidate promotes action, suggests or challenges followers or users to talk to them.	Collaborate, inclusion, claim, ask people, enable, empowerment, citizen, democracy, democratic, vote, expectations.
Thanks	Candidates thank another politician, media, or actors.	Thanks, appreciate it, congratulate, excellent, great, best effort.
Condolence	Candidates share sorrow for important people.	Pity, sorrow, pain, lost, emptiness, vacuum, lack.
Congratulations	Candidates send greetings to new governors, deputies or ministries.	Send, message, greetings, congratulations, best wishes.
Militancy	Candidates send messages to their followers in the political party they belong to.	Courage, pride, political parties, expectations, win, victory.
* Note: the words were chosen on Spanish, translation was made for the purpose of this paper.		

Table 1. Categories and Keywords for the Social Media Analysis

4. MAIN FINDINGS

Once data were analyzed by a team of students and researchers and these clusters were organized, we analyzed them one by one in order to validate the data. General results of the number of tweets are shown on Figure 1. Josefina Vazquez Moat (PAN) had a great number of messages sent using this platform during January, the end of the pre-campaign in which she was elected in her political party primaries. On the other hand, the leftwing candidate Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (PRD) had a consistent participation on the social network. A different case was the PRI candidate, Enrique Pena Nieto, whose scandal in the social network on December, raised the critics over him, and that made the use of twitter less aggressive and more passive.

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[1] PRI Partido Revolucionario Institucional

[2] PAN Partido Acción Nacional
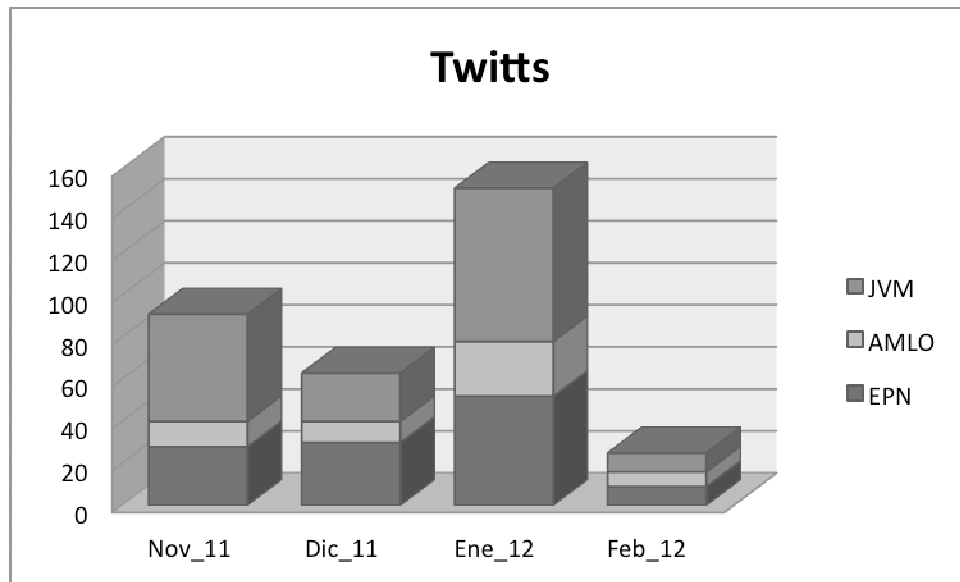
[3] PRD Partido de la Revolución Democrática

Figure 1. Mexican Presidential Candidates' Tweets - Nov 2011-Feb 2012

The category interactions is understood as the main goal candidates tried to achieve, however results on figure 2 show a different perspective. Enrique Peña Nieto's interactions were the double messages (20) on February instead 11 messages sent on November. This was part of the strategy to reduce the impact of a political scandal held on November that impacted the twitter network making a trending topic in a few hours against this candidate. The PRI candidate had zero post messages on december to reduce his presence and regain on January. However, this came back to normal on February when the three candidates had the same number of tweets.
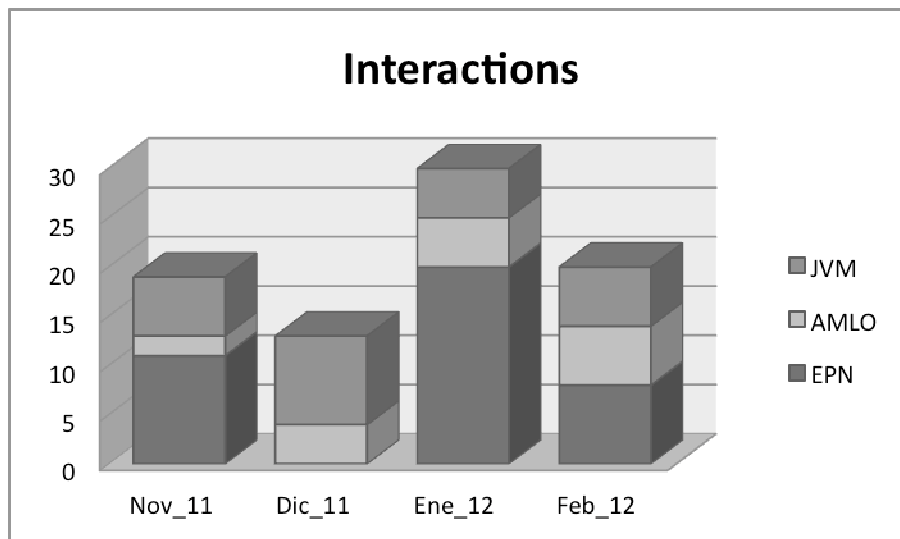

Figure 2. Interaction Category among Mexican Presidencial Candidates

The second category is the thank messages of the candidates. This message is remarkable among the PRI and the PAN candidates. The behavior of Enrique Pena Nieto (PRI) on December and January is consistent with his low profile strategy after the twitter scandal on December. It is important to mention that leftwing Andres Manuel López Obrador did not send this type of messages. This kind of message has the meaning to make a public appreciation to another politician or mass media communicator, but is not a direct message to citizens and also shows the use of twitter communication tool with the purpose of sending internal messages among friends of the candidate and not focused on citizens expectatives.
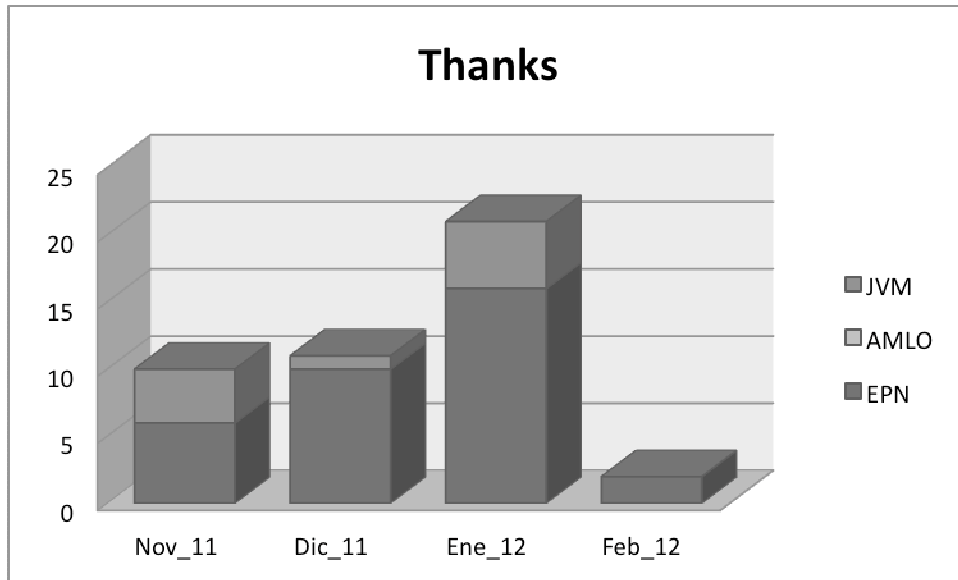
Figure 3. Thanks Category among Mexican Presidencial Candidates

The congratulations category complements previous analysis. On this category presidencial candidate of the PRI political party sent 10 messages on November and December. However their opponents sent only one – Josefina Vazquez Mota – in the same period of time. This means that the candidate's use of twitter is related to talk to her own political class and not with an electoral purpos.
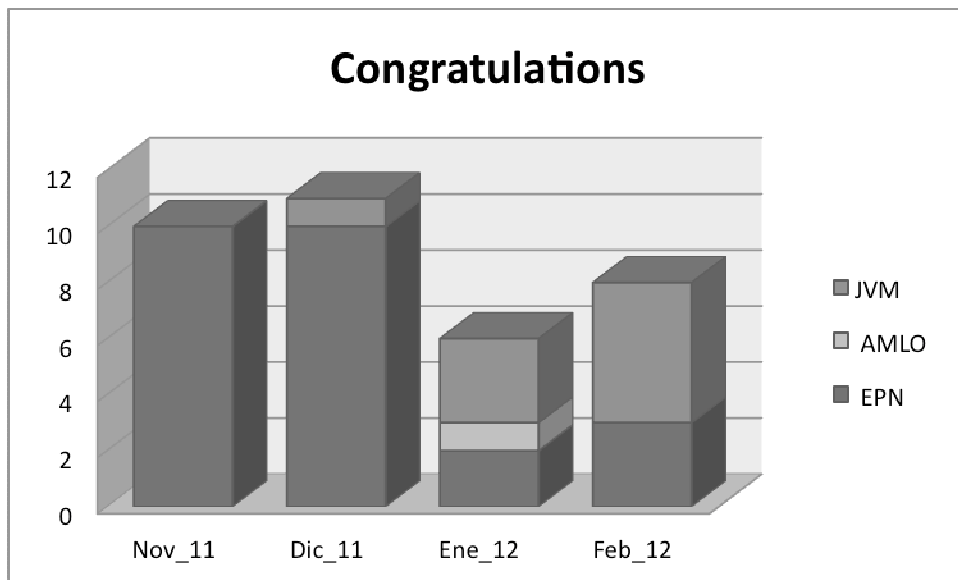

Figure 4. Congratulations Category on Mexican Presidencial Candidates

However this political behavior changed after January 2012, when all candidates used this kind of messages through the social network. But again, during February, the PRD candidate did not use this kind of messages to send over his twitter account making a difference among the other candidates.

The militancy category means messages sent to their supporters inside their own political parties. This inside communication is important because it was made externaly, this means that other citizens can see the message sent by the candidate. All candidates have made a maintance communication among their supporters on 2011. However the radical difference on January by Josefina Vazquez Mota is explained by her own internal campaing. She must win the primary election on the

PAN political party which was held on February 5th. This was the reason for the many messages to her supporters. On the other hand, messages sent on February by this same candidate reflected the same principle. Something remarkable is the PRD candidate strategy on this kind of messages. This candidate has sent a consistent two or three messsages maximun to his supporters. This could be explained because the main structure of this political party do not have internet access and is focused over that segment. Another explanation is that this candidate's social media strategy is focused not over his supported and more on the other parties.
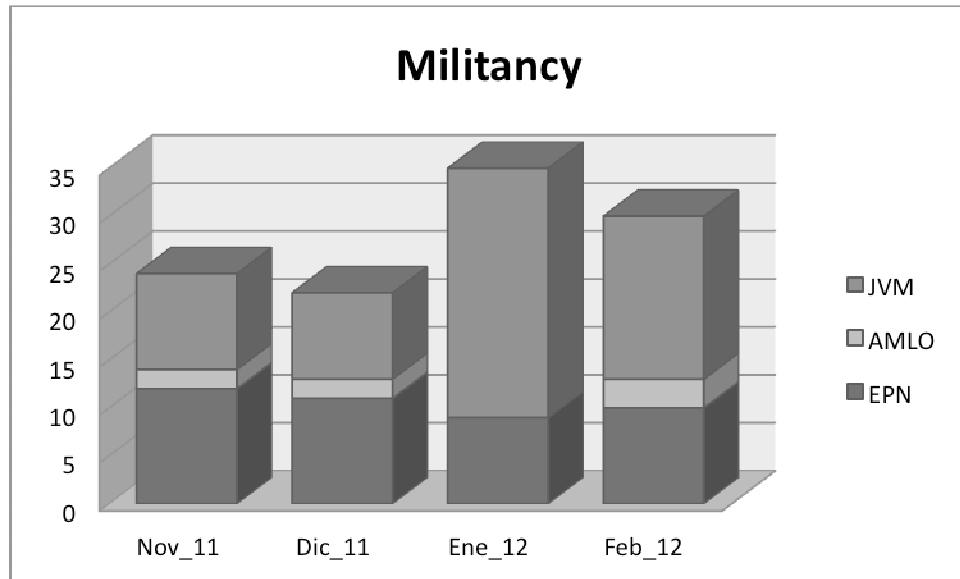

Figure 5. Militancy Category on Mexican Political Candidates

This last category of condolence is not relevant for this research, however messages appear recurrently for the three candidates during the time of the study – November 2011-February 2012. We could find some interesting behaviors. For example, the PRI candidate showed more condolence messages (8 messages) rather than the other two candidates, and most of his messages were sent on November, and none of them on Februrary. (See Figure 6)

On the side, from the PAN candidate, only five condolence messages were sent during this period of time and none of them during February. The PRD candidate only sent three messages, one each month, except January. This category is not consistent with the strategy of the candidates and remarks the idea of following a pattern of communication for the people inside their campaing and not for the general public.

These categories presents a common conclusion: all of them relate their messages to the inside campaing: militancy, friends, supporters on mass media and other politicians, but there is no evidence of messages directed to citizen's discussion or to promote political participation among citizens.
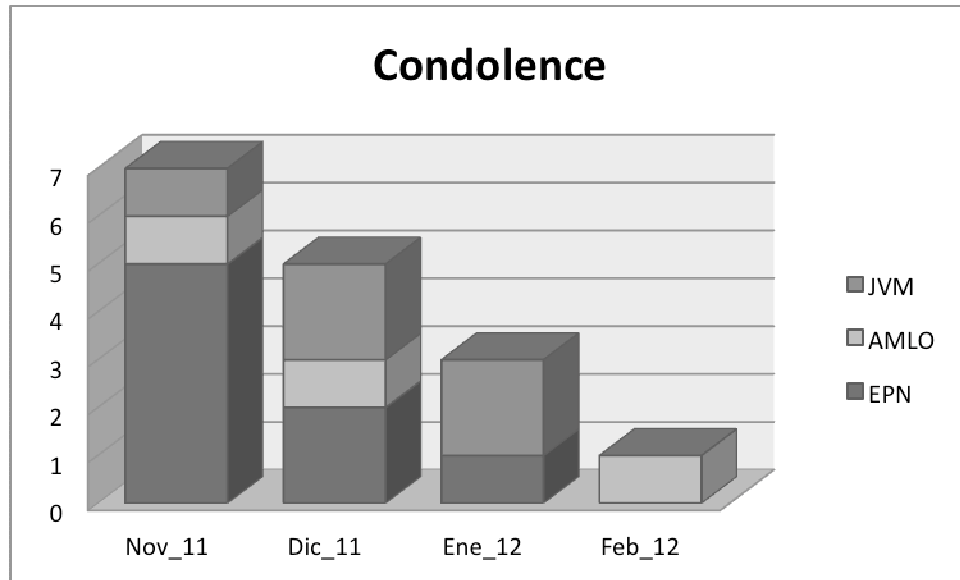
Figure 6. Condolence Category on Mexican Political Candidates

The different categories of messages reveal a lack of political strategy to convince voters, promote political activism or relate to discussion over political issues. Most of them reveal the political behavior and relations of the candidates that expose their greetings and sorrows to the public. Figure 7, shows a general overview of all the categories and the presidential candidates' behavior using Twitter. As we can see, the militancy messages, congratulation and condolence are the most important ones. The interaction messages, looking for communication with citizens, do not exist on this graph. This can mean, that at least in the Mexican case, candidates are not aware of the correct use of the social media tools to improve democracy using technology.
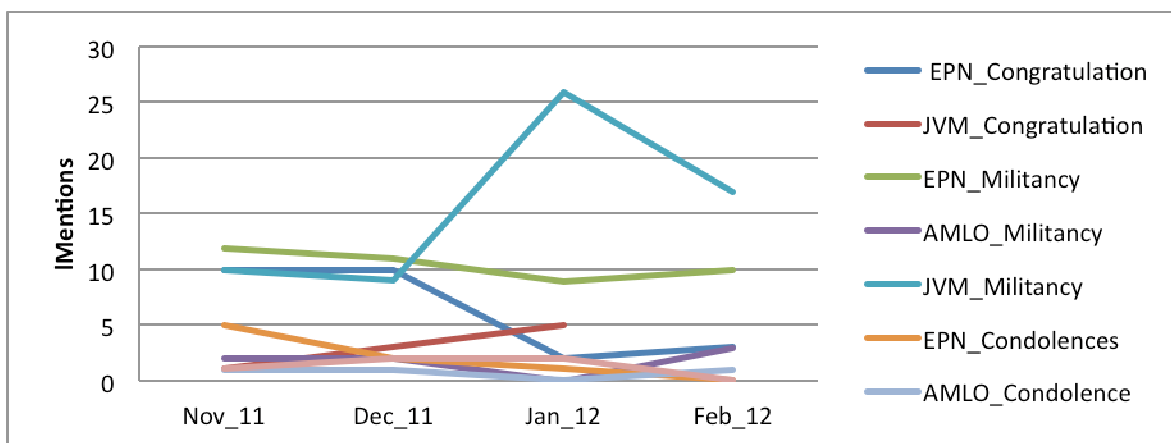

Figure 7. General Twitter Analysis on Mexican Political Candidates

5. CONCLUSION

We have four main conclusions according to our research. The first conclusion is that Mexican political candidates to the presidency are using Twitter as a tool to promote their image and discourse; the use of Twitter in the pre-campaign is evident for the three candidates. This conclusion confirms previous research - Andersen and Medaglia (2009).

The second conclusion is that messages discourse are more focused on the inside campaign and very few to interact or communicate with citizens. Our analysis presents that Mexican presidential candidates send messages of thanks, congratulations to other politicians and condolence. Only one candidate presents direct messages to their supporters - Josefina Vazquez Mota.

The third conclusion is that Mexican politicians are using Twitter to send isolated messages without any marketing strategy or clear purpose. We did not find evidence of concrete discourse, statements to promote democratic behavior on their followers.

Our fourth conclusion is directly linked to the previous one, because the Twitter use in Mexican elections is a novel platform, and politicians are using it more for fashion and to become well know rather than having a political strategy to engage citizens on to their campaigns. The use of Twitter on this stage of the Mexican presidential election is only a secondary communication channel.

Finally, with this data we cannot predict the result of the election, because we did not find the messages engaging citizens to promote online political participation. Also these results are only an instant photo on the previous stage of the general election that will be held on July 2012. We hope our model of analysis and our conclusion will be useful for future research on the social media impact on politics and e-democracy research efforts.

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