# COMMUNICATION & SOCIETY
# COMUNICACIÓN Y SOCIEDAD

*Campaigning on Twitter: Towards the "Personal Style" Campaign to Activate the Political Engagement During the 2011 Spanish General Elections*

**La campaña en Twitter. El "estilo personal" como estrategia para activar la participación política durante las elecciones generales españolas de 2011**

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**ABSTRACT: Politicians have been quick to adopt and leverage social media to engage voters. Micro-blogging on Twitter is a campaign tool that helps a political candidate directly interact with citizens through a shared conversation. It also**

**allows the candidate to use a personal campaigning style based on a more everyday (versus an institutionalized) style of speech. The aim of this article is to analyse the extent to which the candidates for the presidency of the two leading parties in Spain deployed this personal strategy on Twitter during 2011 General-Election campaign. In order to achieve our goal, we have designed and used a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the 2.274 tweets put out by both candidates' accounts: @conRubalcaba and @marianorajoy.**

*RESUMEN: Los políticos han adoptado y potenciado rápidamente los social media para conectar con los votantes. En concreto, Twitter ayuda a los candidatos a escuchar activamente a los ciudadanos a través de una conversación directa con ellos, y permite un estilo personal de campaña, con un discurso humanizado y alejado de lo institucional. Este artículo pretende conocer hasta qué punto se utilizó esta estrategia personal en la campaña de Twitter de los candidatos de los dos principales partidos a las elecciones generales de 2011 en España. Para ello se ha diseñado un análisis cuantitativo y cualitativo sobre 2.274 tweets publicados por las cuentas de ambos: @conRubalcaba y @marianorajoy.*

**Keywords:** Social Media, elections, personal style, campaigns, twitter, political engagement.

**Palabras clave:** social media, elecciones, estilo personal, campañas, Twitter, compromiso político.

## 1. Introduction

The traditional political communication model has been based on so-called media logic since television's emergence as a tool for communication in the middle of the twentieth century. For the decades since, political communication and campaigning have been dominated by a top-down, asymmetrical-relations pattern and a strong mediatisation of political strategy in an attempt to meet the requirements of the media as public-opinion shapers[1]. This system in which citizens had little to say and the possibility for them to directly access politicians was virtually non-existent has often become a breeding ground for the current social disaffection with politics among members of society.

It has been widely recognized that a new era has emerged since the mid-1990s when the Internet became an important additional means of political campaigning. The new communications landscape points to the dispersion of old political patterns that may have outlived their utility towards the extension and growth of a new public sphere in a

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[1] Cfr. SCHWEITZER, Eva J., "The Mediatization of E-Campaining: Evidence From German Party Websites in State, National, and European Parliamentary Elections 2002-2009", *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 17, 2012, pp. 283-302; PAGE, Benjamin I., "The mass media as political actors", *Political Science & Politics*, 29 (1), 1996, pp. 20-24; SCHUDSON, Michael, "The news media as political institutions", *Annual Review of Political Science*, 5, 2002, pp. 249-269; ALTHEIDE, David L., "Media logic and political communication", *Political Communication*, 21 (3), 2004, pp. 293-296; ALTHEIDE, David L. and SNOW, Robert P., "Toward a theory of mediation", *Communication Yearbook*, 11, 1988, pp. 194-223, among others.

number of ways[2]. The opportunities and challenges for citizens to access and participate in political discourse by means of the Internet are major topics of discussion in the academic debate on the nature of contemporary democracy[3].

In this context, studying the role of the Internet in political communication and election campaigning is a recent research topic[4] that includes a broad collection of theoretical and empirical studies with varying predictions and findings[5]. Most of these studies show how Internet users currently have better opportunities to interact with individuals and organisations in a way that reduces societal hierarchies and allows them to narrow the gap separating them from their elected representatives.

When we focus on Twitter as a system that allows for immediate, fast, and widespread dissemination of information[6], the open, transparent, and low-threshold exchange of information and ideas this microblogging allows shows great promise for reconfiguring the structure of political discourse towards a broadening of public debate by facilitating social connectivity[7]. This research tries to empirically measure whether during the first Spanish national election campaign to use Twitter, the candidates adapted by couching their political discourse in a more personal, emotional style[8], or did they continue to rely on traditional political speech.

## 2. *Campaigning on Twitter: Real Social Media or Propaganda Tool?*

The increasing importance of social media for political communication and election campaigning is seen from a small but growing body of theoretical and empirical research[9]. Some studies focused on how political leaders used Twitter for

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[2] Cfr. DAHLGREEN, Peter, "The Internet, Public Spheres, and Political Communication: Dispersion and Deliberation", *Political Communication,* 22, 2005, pp. 147-162.

[3] For a review of this debate see FARRELL, Henry, "The consequences of the Internet for politics", *Annual Review of Political Science*, 15 (1), 2012, pp. 35-52.

[4] Cfr. CHADWICK, Andrew and HOWARD, Philip N., "Introduction: new directions in internet politics research", in CHADWICK, Andrew and HOWARD, Philip N. (eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Internet Politics*, Routlegde, London, 2009, pp. 1-9; VERGEER, Maurice, "Politics, elections and online campaigning: Past, present… and a peek into the future", *New Media and Society*, 15 (1), 2012, pp. 9-17.

[5] Cfr. FARRELL, David M., KOLODNY, Robin and MEDVIC, Stephen, "Parties and campaign professionals in a digital age", *Press/Politics*, 6, 4 (Autumn), 2001, pp. 11-30; STEIN, Stuart D., *Politics on the web*, Prentice Hall, Harlow, 2003; KLOTZ, Robert J., *The politics of Internet communication*, Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham, 2004; HENDRICKS, John A. and KAID, Lynda L. (eds.), *Techno politics in presidential campaigning*, Routledge, New York, 2010; HOFFMAN, Lindsay H., "Participation or Communication? An Explanation of Political Activity in the Internet Age", *Journal of Information Technology and Politics*, 9 (3), 2012, p. 217-233; LILLEKER, Darren G. and KOC-MICHALSKA, Karolina, "Online political communication strategies: MEPs, E-Representation, and Self-Representation, *Journal of Information Technology and Politics*, 10 (2), 2013, pp. 190-207.

[6] Cfr. KWAK, Haweoon, LEE, Changhyung, PARK, Hosung, and MOON, Sue, "What is Twitter, a social network or a news media?", paper presented at the 19th International Conference on World Wide Web, Raleigh, 2010.

[7] Cfr. WELLER, Katrin, BRUNS, Axel, BURGESS, Jean, MAHRT, Merja and PUSCHMANN, Cornelius (eds.), *Twitter and Society*, New York, Peter Lang, 2013.

[8] Cfr. PAPACHARISSI, Zizi and OLIVEIRA, María F., "Affective news and networked publics: The rhythms of news storytelling on #Egypt", *Journal of Communication*, 62 (2), 2012, pp. 266-282.

[9] See for example, SELNOW, Gary W., *Electronic whistle-stops: the impact of the Internet on American politics*, Praeger, Westport, 1998; FARRELL, David M., KOLODNY, Robin and MEDVIC, Stephen, *op. cit.*; WEBSTER, Frank, *Culture and politics in the information age: a new politics?*, Routledge, New York, 2001; STEIN, Stuart D., *op. cit.*; KLOTZ, Robert J., *op. cit.*; HENDRICKS, John A. and KAID, Lynda L. (eds.), *op. cit.*; ANDUIZA, Eva; CANTIJOCH, Marta; COLOMBO, Clelia; GALLEGO, Aina

campaigning[10]. Most of these researchers showed how social media have the potential to collapse societal hierarchies and allow for symmetrical relationships that contribute to the destabilization of traditional political communication systems[11]. In this sense, we share the idea that social networks have managed to "democratize" political participation, because any citizen can now interact with his or her political representative as well as monitor or criticize their work or make suggestions–activities which undoubtedly enhance transparency[12]. Gutierrez-Rubí calls this new paradigm for political communication "Watched Politics"[13].

But in practice, most empirical studies have found that politicians rarely use Twitter for social conversation or for the listing of multiple viewpoints in political debates[14]. Instead, the researcher finds in the candidates' microblogging one-way broadcasting as in the case of conventional communication tools. Consequently, one must question the use of Twitter as a real "social" media for egalitarian social purposes[15]. In fact, the political actors involved simply use Twitter to spread information on political events and to state their opinions[16]. They seem to have overlooked the conversational aspects of the microblog which could have served them to instigate online deliberation among equals. In this research it has been found that while the bulk of the studied Tweet activity follows this trend, there are traces of a more participatory public sphere[17].

and SALCEDO, Jorge, "Los usos políticos de Internet en España", *Revista Española de Investigaciones Sociológicas*, 129, 2010, pp. 133-146; GIBSON, Rachel and CANTIJOCH, Marta, "Conceptualizing and Measuring Participation in the Age of the Internet: Is Online Political Engagement Really Different to Offline?, *The Journal of Politics*, 75 (3), 2013, pp. 701-716; KRUIKEMEIER, Sanne; VAN NOORT, Guda; VLIEGENTHART, Rens and DE VREESE, Claes H., "Getting closer: The effects of personalized and interactive online political communication", *European Journal of Communication*, 28 (1), 2013, pp. 53-56.

[10] Cfr. SOLOP, Frederic I., "RT @BarackObama We Just Made History. Twitter and the 2008 Presidential Election", in HENDRICKS, John A. and DENTON, Robert E. (eds.), *Communicator-in-Chief. A Look at How Barack Obama used New Media Technology to Win the White House*, Lexington Books, Lanham, 2009, pp. 37-50; SMALL, Tamara A., "Canadian Politics in 140 Characters. Party Politics in the Twitterverse", *Canadian Parliamentary Review*, Fall, 2010, pp. 49-45; ANCU, Monica, "From Soundbite to Textbite. Election 2008 Comments on Twitter", in HENDRICKS, John A. and KAID, Lynda L. (eds.), *Techno Politics in Presidential Campaigning. New Voices, New Technologies, and New Voters*, New York, Routledge, 2011, pp. 11-21; PARMELEE, John H. and BICHARD, Shannon L., *Politics and the Twitter revolution. How tweets influence the relationship between political leaders and the public*, Lexington Books, Lanham, 2012.

[11] Cfr. RODRÍGUEZ, Roberto and UREÑA, Daniel, "Diez razones para el uso de Twitter como herramienta en la comunicación política y electoral", *Comunicación y Pluralismo*, 5, 2012, pp. 89-115; ENLI, Gunn S. and SKOGERBO, Eli, "Personalized-campaigns in party-centred politics: Twitter y Facebook as arenas for political communication", *Information, Communication and Society*, 16 (5), 2013, pp. 757-774; HAWTHORNE, Josua, HOUSTON, J. Brian and MCKINNEY, Mitchell S., "Live-Tweeting a Presidential Primary Debate: Exploring New Political Conversations", *Social Science Computer Review*, 31 (5), 2013, pp. 552-562; BEKAFIGO, Marija A. and MCBRIDE, Allan, "Who Tweets About Politics? Political Participation of Twitter Users During the 2011 Gubernatorial Elections", *Social Sciences Computer Review*, 31 (5), 2013, pp. 625-643, among others.

[12] Cfr. MCNAIR, Bryan, *An introduction to political communication*, Routledge, New York, 2011.

[13] GUTIÉRREZ-RUBÍ, Antonio, "Twitter, mucho más que la CNN", in *El Periódico de Catalunya, 4-07-2011*, p. 8.

[14] Cfr. YARDI, Sarita and BOYD, Dana, "Dynamic debates: An analysis of group polarization over time on Twitter", *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society,* 30 (5), 2010, pp. 316-327.

[15] Cfr. SMALL, Tamara A., *op. cit.*; WELLER, Katrin, BRUNS, Axel, BURGESS, Jean, MAHRT, Merja and PUSCHMANN, Cornelius (eds.), *op cit.*

[16] Cfr. SMALL, Tamara A., "What the hashtag? A content analysis of Canadian politics on Twitter", *Information, Communication & Society*, 14 (6), 2011, pp. 872-895.

[17] LARSSON, Anders O. and MOE, Hallvard, "Representation or Participation? Twitter use during the 2011 Danish Election Campaign", *Javnost-The Public*, 20 (1), 2013, pp. 71-88.

It is true, as recent studies suggest, that social networks may complement some of the offline campaign strategies, given that the real influence on public opinion still remains dependent on the old media system, on which offline campaigns are based[18]. The social networks can then be used as a part of a classic but "virtualized" political strategy.

Although the impact of Twitter on voting decisions has not yet been shown[19], there is a broad consensus that campaigning via Twitter is a new approach with its own scenarios, features, and potentials[20]. Social networks may be fostering "a new social-media-based type of expressive political behavior"[21], and giving rise to a new type of participation that lacks an obvious offline counterpart[22]. Although offline and online campaigning are interrelated, Twitter as a communication tool is impacting significantly on the relationship between political leaders and citizens in the sense that Twitter provides candidates with a personal platform to interact with voters more closely[23].

The rise of e-campaigning is often associated with the ability candidates now have to circumvent journalistic news selection and representation[24]. Why? Because social media offer non-hierarchical participatory forms that bypass traditional communication media[25]. The technical characteristics of Twitter allow political actors "to free themselves from the discretionary power of the mass media and to reach voters in an unfiltered way"[26]. The channel to break the dominant media logic of the old campaign style thus opens the way for politicians to overcome the deeply rooted disaffection voters now have toward them.

With this potential, it seems that politicians should not reject this new social phenomenon as a campaign tool. Although President Obama is perhaps the most famous pioneer[27], other candidates have also used Twitter as a campaigning communication tool

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[18] Cfr. ARROYO, Luis, "10 razones por las que Twitter no sirve para (casi) nada en política", in ARROYO's blog http://www.luisarroyo.com/2012/05/06/10-razones-por-las-que-twitter-no-sirve-para-casi-nada-en-politica/, 2010 (visited 20/07/2012).

[19] Cfr. ANDUIZA, Eva, CANTIJOCH, Marta and CRISTANCHO, Camilo, "Los ciudadanos y el uso de Internet en la campaña electoral", in MONTERO, José Ramón y LAGO, Ignacio (eds.), *Las elecciones generales de 2008*, CIS, Madrid, 2010, pp. 123-142; CONGOSTO, Mª Luz, FERNÁNDEZ, Montse and MORO EGIDO, Esteban, "Twitter y Política: Información, Opinión y ¿Predicción?", *Cuadernos de Comunicación Evoca*, 4 (February, 'Comunicación política 2.0'), 2011, pp: 10-15; GAYO-AVELLO, Daniel, METAXAS, Panagiotis T. and MUSTAFARAJ, Eni, "Limits of electoral predictions using Twitter", in Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference on Weblogs and Social Media, AAAI Press, Washington D.C., 2011, pp. 490-493.

[20] ANDUIZA, Eva, CANTIJOCH, Marta; COLOMBO, Clelia; GALLEGO, Aina and SALCEDO, Jorge, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

[21] GIBSON, Rachel, and CANTIJOCH, Marta, "Conceptualizing and Measuring Participation in the Age of the Internet: Is Online Political Engagement Really Different to Offline?, *The Journal of Politics*, 75 (3), 2013, p. 701.

[22] Cfr. HIRZALLA, Fady and VAN ZOONEN, Liesbet, "Beyond the Online/Offline Divide. Convergences of Online and Offline Civic Activities among Youth", *Social Science Compute Review*, 29 (4), 2011, pp. 581-498.

[23] Cfr. PARMELEE, John H. and BICHARD, Shannon L., *op. cit.*; KRUIKEMEIER, Sanne; VAN NOORT, Guda; VLIEGENTHART, Rens and DE VREESE, Claes H., *op. cit.*; ENLI, Gunn S. and SKOGERBO, Eli, *op. cit.*

[24] BIMBER, Bruce and DAVIS, Richard, *Campaigning online. The Internet in U.S. elections*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2003; VACCARI, Cristina, "From the air to the ground. The internet in the 2004 US presidential campaign", *New Media & Society*, 10 (4), 2008, pp. 647-665.

[25] SCHLOZMAN, Kay; VERBA, Sidney and BRADY, Henry E., "Weapon of the Strong. Participatory Inequality and the Internet", *Perspectives on Politics*, 8, 2010, pp. 487-509.

[26] SCHWEITZER, Eva J., *op. cit.*, p. 283.

[27] Cfr. HARFOUSH, Rahaf, *Yes we did. Cómo construimos la marca Obama a través de las redes sociales*, Planeta, Barcelona, 2010; HENDRICKS, John A. and DENTON, Robert E. (eds.), *Communicator-in-chief. How Barack Obama used new media technology to win the Withe House*,

in different electoral contexts[28]. By using Twitter as a platform for public communication, candidates have the opportunity to share their opinions with voters and listen to their followers' comments. However, it´s true that these communication processes are normally restricted to those who share one's own ideas (i.e., one's "colleagues" or fans), so one must question the potential of Twitter to reach unconvinced voters[29].

In this regard, the few analytical studies conducted in Spain about candidates' public conversations on Twitter have shown that they take place with the very journalists and politicians who occupy the centre stage of most political conversations already[30]. This endogamous character of political Tweets thus evidences the lack of a real dialogical conversation by means of this medium with the general public[31].

In order for anything to be a real social medium, it should be related to collaboration, co-production, and conversation, to shift from the classical one-way broadcast mechanism to a many-to-many, or interactive, model[32]. In practice, candidates currently seem to understand social networks as a vehicle for short-term propaganda rather than long-term public interaction. The main indicator is that Spanish politicians use Twitter, as do their colleagues in most other countries, primarily during election times. Most candidates have simply jumped on the bandwagon of social media in order to see the potential of these communication tools for message dissemination or the mobilization of followers[33].

This instrumental use explains why candidates persist in using Twitter as an electoral propaganda tool or a platform for spam rather than providing a real chance to interact with their followers or a way to present their own ideas and opinions that add content value to their timelines. Therefore, candidates should take into account the content-

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Lexington Books, Lanham, 2010; BEAS, Diego, *La reinvención de la política: Obama, Internet y la nueva esfera pública*, Península, Madrid, 2011.

[28] Cfr. AMMANN, Sky L., "A political campaign message in 140 characters or less: the use of Twitter by U.S. Senate Candidates in 2010", in Social Science Research Network, 2010, http://ssrn.com/abstract=1725477 (visited 2/09/2011); WILLIAMSON, Andy, "The Internet Election that Wasn't", *Political Insight,* 1, 2010, pp. 58–60; JUNGHERR, Andreas, "Twitter in politics. Lessons learned during the German superwahljahr 2009", paper presented at the Workshop on Microblogging at the CHI 2010, Atlanta (USA), 10-15/04/2010: http://andreasjungherr.net/2010/04/10/twitter-in-politics-lessons-learned-duringthe-german-superwahljahr-2009/, 2010 (visited 16/09/2010); MAAREK, Philippe J., *Campaign Communication and Political Marketing*, John Wiley and Sons, Oxford, 2011; HOLOTESCU, Carmen, GUTU, Dorina, GROSSECK, Gabriela and BRAN, Ramona, "Microblogging meets politics. The influence of communication in 140 characters on Romanian presidential elections in 2009", *Romanian Journal of Communication and Public Relations* 13 (1), 2011, pp. 37-47.

[29] Cfr. ARROYO, Luis, *op. cit.*

[30] Cfr. GUARDIÁN, Carlos, "Topología de la comunidad política española en Twitter", in K-government blog http://www.k-government.com/2011/11/18/topologia-de-la-comunidad-politica-espanola-en-twitter/, 2011 (visited 6/06/2012).

[31] Cfr. MEDVIC, Stephen K., "Campaign management and organization. The use and impact of information and communication technology", in MEDVIC, Stephen K. (eds.), *New directions in Campaigns and Elections*, Routledge, New York, 2011, pp. 59-78.

[32] Cfr. EVANS, Dave, *Social media marketing. An hour a day*. Wiley, Indianapolis, 2008.

[33] Cfr. DELLI CARPINI, Michael X., "GenCom: Youth, civic engagement, and the new information environment", *Political Communication*, 17, 2000, pp. 341-349; BENNETT, W. Lance; BREUNIG, Christian and GIVENS, Terry, "Communication and political mobilization. Digital media and the organization of anti-Iraq war demonstrations in the U.S.", *Political Communication*, 25, 2008, pp. 269-289; and HOOGHE, Marc, VISSERS, Sara; STOLLE, Dietling and MAHÉO, Valérie-Anne, "The Potential of Internet Mobilization. An Experimental Study on the Effect of Internet and Face-to-Face Mobilization Efforts", *Political Communication* 27 (4), 2010, pp. 406-431.

value parameters that empirically explain which Tweets have been considered worthy on Twitter and why[34].

Besides, candidates need to be more flexible with the topics they talk about in order to listen to the real public agenda and connect it with their own political agenda. As some scholars have argued, the Twitter agenda is likely to differ from that of the traditional media because "events and themes are filtered through the community's own established interests and news frames, resulting in a distribution of attention that is different from that of the mainstream media or of general public debate"[35]. However, this "street voice" will be reflected in Twitter hashtags and Trending Topics (TT) that can orient political parties around public opinions.

At least, any candidate who wants to campaign on Twitter should keep in mind that the rules have changed from those of the past, and now the key concept is to interact with voters through social conversation[36]. Twitter is not just about talking but includes listening, responding, and debating as well, since the internal communicative structure of this microblogging network is not a monologue but a spontaneous, honest, and free dialogue with citizens, specifically, those who are recognised as "cybercitizens"[37]. The key issue is then how much a candidate is willing to participate in the dialogues that Twitter facilitates and the extent to which it is technically or humanly viable for politicians to establish a real conversation with the thousands of followers that most candidates have on their Twitter accounts[38].

Perhaps one should not expect that the use of social networks applied to campaigning would quickly give rise to a completely new strategy, different from traditional offline campaigning. In fact, as mentioned earlier, what findings there are suggest that these new practices have not changed politicians' approach to campaigning all that drastically[39]. Nevertheless, it must be expected that politicians and their campaign teams will be wise enough to understand that Twitter and other social networks provide them with the potential for waging new kinds of campaigns and to use them to their benefit by deploying a dialogical strategy which will bring them closer to the citizenry. As Parmelee and Bichard maintain, "Politically interested individuals and groups can no longer ignore the opportunities presented by Twitter to engage in political discourse and to influence the outcome of campaigns and legislation"[40].

### 3. *Opportunities for Personal Style on Twitter*

Communication research has long emphasized how the reception of political and societal events depends on conversations about news in people's immediate social context. It helps them make sense of what happens in the world by connecting the news with their personal experiences and embedding them in socially relevant structures.

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[34] Cfr. ANDRÉ, Paul, BERNSTEIN, Michael and LUTHER, Kurt, "Who Gives A Tweet? Evaluating Microblog Content Value", paper presented to CSCW 2012: ACM Conference on Computer-Supported Cooperative Work, New York, ACM, 2012, pp. 471-474.

[35] BRUNS, Axel and BURGESS, Jean E., "#Ausvotes: How Twitter covered the 2010 Australian federal election", *Communication, Politics and Culture*, 2011, 44 (2), p. 13.

[36] Cfr. VERGEER, Maurice and HERMANS, Liesbeth, "Campaigning on Twitter: micro-blogging and online social networking as campaign tools in the 2010 general elections in the Netherlands", *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 18 (4), 2013, pp. 399-419.

[37] GUTIÉRREZ-RUBÍ, Antonio, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

[38] Cfr. ARROYO, Luis, *op. cit.*

[39] Cfr. VERGEER, Maurice and HERMANS, Liesbeth, *op cit.*

[40] PARMELEE, John H. and BICHARD, Shannon L., *op. cit.*, p. 224.

Twitter users often connect current events with personal experiences, opinions, and worldviews as they explain, classify, interpret, and reinterpret what they have received[41]. In this way, candidates using Twitter also need to adapt themselves to this new personal, informal communication landscape.

When we talk about *personal style* on Twitter, we are referring to a new political campaigning model that is emerging alongside the three models of campaigns already identified by Norris: pre-modern, modern and postmodern[42]. As Vergeer et al. suggest, after the Web 2.0 era, particularly with regard to social media, "the newer, personally kept web platforms, such as social network sites, have made this an essential feature, allowing for more personalization in politics… whether this is candidate-centred campaigning or personality-centred campaigning"[43].

In the old style of campaigning that shaped what we call an *institutional perspective*, candidates focused primarily on party ideological alignments through an official, impersonal type of discourse focused on political messages, where the possibility of interacting with voters was more difficult. By contrast, through the *personal-style campaign* using social networks, candidates can strategically share any comment including those unrelated to politics. In a social context of increasing disaffection with politics and politicians, a turn to the more human dimensions of a candidate and to the communication of personal messages with empathy will seem more credible to voters[44]. Through these personal messages, citizens can have some insight into the private life and interests of a politician[45], something scholars have called "pop politics"[46].

By using a cross-national comparative perspective on personalisation in political campaigning, Veerger and Liesbeth show that the way candidates present themselves online is related to cross-national differences[47]. Some examples of a personal-style use of Twitter by political leaders are cited: For example, the decision of the President of Argentina, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, when she announced via Twitter that she was going to be a grandmother in July 2011 (a story which became a world Trending Topic in a few hours) or the course of his cancer treatment that President Hugo Chavez of Venezuela made public via his Twitter account.

O'Reilly and Milstein use the term "environmental familiarity" for how Twitter can provide access to daily details of the famous and the powerful in a way unthinkable until now[48]. They consider that Twitter facilitates a level of empathy that could be similar to that of real life but with the advantage of being able to reach a huge number of people. The problem is that, although candidates sign the Tweets they write (mostly by using special code, as Barack Obama did with his initials at the end of each Tweet in the 2012 Election), their profiles are not personal. They do not tell us anything about themselves as persons, about their family, their concerns, and so on.

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[41] Cfr. MAIREDER, Axel and AUSSERHOFER, Julian, "Political Discourse on Twitter: Networking Topics, Objects and People", in WELLER, Katrin, BRUNS, Axel, BURGESS, Jean, MAHRT, Merja and PUSCHMANN, Cornelius (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 291-341.

[42] Cfr. NORRIS, Pippa, *A Virtuous Circle. Political Communications in Postindustrial Societies*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000.

[43] VERGEER, Maurice, HERMANS, Liesbeth and SAMS, Steven, "Online social networks and micro-blogging in political campaigning. The exploration of a new campaign tool and a new campaign style", *Party Politics*, 2011, p. 5.

[44] Ibíd.

[45] Cfr. PEARSON, Steve, and O'CONNELL, Ford, "Tweeting for Campaign Success", *Campaigns & Elections*, nº 7, June, 2010.

[46] Cfr. MAZZOLENI, Gianpietro and SFARDINI, Anna, *Politica Pop. Da 'Porta a Porta' a 'L'isola dei famosi'*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2009.

[47] Cfr. VERGEER, Maurice and HERMANS, Liesbeth, *op cit.*

[48] Cfr. O'REILLY, Tim, and MILSTEIN, Sarah, *The Twitter Book,* O'Reilly Media, Sebastopol, 2009.

To sum up, a personal-style campaign is based on the candidate's revealing him- or herself as a person rather than as the spokesperson for a party platform and the values it represents. As some online political-marketing professionals recommend, people who use Twitter want to talk with people, not corporate logos[49]. In fact, a recent study by Krumekeier et al. proves that "highly interactive and personalized online communication does increase citizens' political involvement." Moreover, according to them, "political personalisation positively moderates the effect of interactivity on political involvement, meaning that the effects of interactivity are even stronger in a personalized setting"[50].

What is really important for citizens to know is the candidate's personal opinions about daily life. He or she should express these opinions by being simple ("keep it short"), smart (especially in response to criticism), and relaxed in tone, avoiding any direct confrontation with rivals. His/her participation should add value to the Twitter community by launching interesting questions and by generating discussion on certain issues or adding links, images, and information of interest. The importance of active listening is essential in this regard in order to generate a real social conversation.

4. *Objectives and Methodology*

In online campaigning, politicians have tried "to be there" and not miss the train of technological progress. In the Spanish political-communication context, there is evidence of a gradual and sometimes unwise use made by political parties of electronic-campaigning innovation: first, by creating their own websites in 1996; second, by using personal blogs later on; and more recently by using their own Facebook profiles and YouTube videos[51]. In fact, in the context of the present research, Spain with 27 million Internet users is fifth in the world in the use of social networks as well as one of the top nations in Europe to access social media through mobile phones.

Microblogging via Twitter was the final tactic in online campaigning during the Spanish regional and local elections of 2011. The national elections of November 2011 became the first electoral campaign for national political leaders to include these innovations as tools for online campaigning. For that reason, we decided to conduct descriptive and exploratory research –a first approach to the issue– which could provide a baseline for understanding Twitter practices and uses derived from the candidates of the two leading political parties running for the Prime-Ministerial position in the national elections: the Popular Party (PP), and the Socialist Party (PSOE).

On the one hand, Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba, who was handpicked by José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero as his successor, became the PSOE candidate. He waged a campaign featuring a personal style, literally following the guidelines proposed by his electoral team about deploying an "American-type" campaign. This meant an individual

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[49] Cfr. FUGUET, Albert, "Manual de instrucciones de Twitter para políticos españoles", in FUGUET's blog http://www.albertfuguet.com/2011/10/twitter-para-la-comunicacion-politica.html, 2011 (visited 26/12/2011).

[50] KRUIKEMEIER, Sanne; VAN NOORT, Guda; VLIEGENTHART, Rens and DE VREESE, Claes H., *op. cit.*, p. 53.

[51] Cfr. PEYTIBI, F. Xavier; RODRÍGUEZ, José A. and GUTIÉRREZ-RUBÍ, Antoni, "La experiencia de las elecciones generales del 2008", *Revista de Internet, Derecho y Política*, nº 7, 2008, pp. 26-37; DADER, José L., "Ciberpolítica en los websites de partidos políticos: la experiencia de las elecciones de 2008 en España ante las tendencias transnacionales", *Revista de Sociología y Política,* 17, 34, 2009, pp. 45-62; and ISLAS, Octavio, "El tránsito de la blogosfera a la twittosfera", in IVOSKUS, Daniel (ed.) *Cumbre mundial de comunicación política*, Libros del Zorzal, Buenos Aires, 2010, p. 255-264.

and very personalized campaign (as in American presidential politics). It was not a team or a corporate campaign: it was him, Rubalcaba, the central axis on which the strategy hinged. This personal style was projected through the campaign slogan: "Rubalcaba, sí" ("Rubalcaba, yes"). By associating the campaign with the candidate more than the Socialist Party, he projected a positive message linked to his seriousness, austerity, and closeness to the people as a fellow human being.

He represented a more constructive style with a clear pedagogical tone. He embodied a kind of a "teacher candidate" who seemed to be an "enchanting person" whose slogan was "to listen, to do, [and] to explain." This personal style highlighted another feature in Rubalcaba's campaign: A conscious and voluntary distancing with respect to Zapatero and the Socialist Party as political brands. The brand "PSOE" had long been damaged by the economic crisis and the failure of their social policies during the last Socialist term in government, especially since May 2010. In fact, far from the traditional PSOE brand, he switched the colour scheme for his electoral stage from the classical red to blue. In addition, he carefully avoided public appearances with Zapatero.

Rubalcaba's main interest was young voters, so he became a very active candidate in social networks, through which he often gave positive nods to the proposals of the "15M" social movement and the outraged public. In fact, Rubalcaba´s official Twitter account –"conRubalcaba"– debuted quite early, on July 8th, just a day before he accepted the position of candidate from the Federal Committee of the PSOE.

By contrast, the candidate of Popular Party (PP), Mariano Rajoy, who was handpicked by former Conservative president José María Aznar right before 2004 general elections, was making his third try to become the country's Prime Minister. Rajoy's speeches focused on pointing out Rubalcaba's Socialist connections, that is, with the party of crisis, cuts, unemployment, failed social policies, etc. Above all, the strategy was to link Rubalcaba with his predecessor, Zapatero, and the latter's many mistakes.

In the 2011 Spanish General Election, the Popular Party deployed a low-profile campaign in a corporate style with a moderate speech. Far from any personalization, Rajoy simply embodied the political positions of his party. Their slogan, "¡Súmate al cambio!" ("Join the change!"), reinforced the idea of a team campaign. Following a "catch all" strategy, Rajoy made an effort to reach young voters so that @marianorajoy was launched on Twitter on the 15th of September, much later than Rubalcaba, but like him, it was his team who were in charge of updating his Twitter account.

Given the embryonic use of Twitter made by Spanish politicians, we decided empirically to test whether Rubalcaba's and Rajoy's Twitter profiles fit a real communicative use of the new medium or remained close to traditional campaigning patterns.

Our aim was to test the degree of interaction and social conversation that both candidates used from their Twitter accounts. As has been explained, the aim of this research is to describe the style (personal or corporate) they presented in their microblogging messages to identify the relative dialogic character of their Twitter usage and the level of interactive conversation they reached; that is to say, to investigate the extent to which both political leaders took advantage of the possibilities of this social network and integrated them as a tool for their campaign strategies.

In this regard, here are the research questions we asked regarding the use of Twitter to engage the public in their respective campaigns:

RQ1.-To what extent did both candidates include in their Twitter conversation the main public-agenda issues or, instead of "listening" and answering citizens' concerns, they simply projected their own agendas to reinforce their offline campaigns?

RQ2.-To what extent did both candidates use their Twitter account to directly interact with citizens to "explain" their electoral program through a real conversation with citizens, or did they choose to limit their use of the social-interaction resources (retweets, mentions, links, etc.) available and their possible relations with some of their online interlocutors?

RQ3.-To what extent did both candidates keep away from an institutional-perspective campaign to focus on a candidate-centred campaign, and how was this choice projected in their use of Twitter as a campaign tool? Note: We will consider institutional campaigning on Twitter as the presence of ideological alignments and an official, impersonal discourse, mostly focused on political messages. By contrast, we will consider a personal- or candidate-centred campaign one characterized by a focus on the human dimensions of the candidate, with personal messages from his private life and with a higher level of voter interaction.

For these purposes, we designed an empirical analysis based on a content analysis of the Tweets from @conRubalcaba and @marianorajoy. We then created a quantitative and qualitative study of all the Tweets gathered during the sixteen days of the campaign. Finally, we examined a total amount of 2.274 tweets (1.390 for @conRubalcaba and 884 for @marianorajoy) published on Twitter's public message board between November 5th and 21st (the day after the 2011 Election ended).

Using a manual coding sheet, we measured different quantitative indicators to test the social interaction conducted during the two-week analysis: the number of followers and actual Tweets; the main topic that defined the content of each Tweet; the use of retweets and who was retweeted; the use of mentions and who was mentioned; and the use of informational links. We also did a qualitative reading of the candidates' use of hashtags as a frame for Tweet content.

The use of an integrated methodology (including both quantitative and qualitative approaches) helped us make a characterisation of each Twitter account and discern what the strategy behind its use was: If it fit the new paradigm of campaign personalization or not. Finally, comparing @conRubalcaba and @marianorajoy allowed highlighting similarities and differences which may lead to interesting conclusions about the influence of Twitter for achieving the PP versus the PSOE campaign objectives.

## 5. *Findings*

From an initial review of the number of Tweets posted, one finds a significant advantage for the Partido Popular candidate, Mariano Rajoy, versus the Socialist Party candidate, Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba, in the number of followers[52]. This is an important result given that Rubalcaba´s Twitter account was launched two and a half months before Rajoy´s.

Ironically, the Socialist candidate was more active on Twitter[53]. He posted more Tweets per day in his timeline (74.5 Tweets average per day for Rubalcaba compared with 50

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[52] Cfr. TORIBIO, Beatriz, "Elecciones 20N. Rubalcaba y Rajoy 'traicionan' Facebook y se cambian a Twitter", in *lainformación.com*, 13-11-2011, http://noticias.lainformacion.com/elecciones-generales/elecciones-20n-rubalcaba-y-rajoy-traicionan-facebook-y-se-cambian-a-twitter_ISoxJis6CTeemOM7IO5cx2/ (visited 20/07/2013).

[53] Cfr. SECO, Raquel, "Rubalcaba fue más influyente que Rajoy en Twitter durante la campaña", in *elpais.com*, 22-11-2011, http://politica.elpais.com/politica/2011/11/22/actualidad/1321988832_920902.html (visited 20/07/2013).

Tweets average for Rajoy)[54]. Moreover, Rubalcaba included more mentions and did more retweets than his political adversary. His aim was to be the candidate that would ". . . listen . . . do, [and] . . . explain," as his campaign slogan stated.  What could explain Rajoy's greater success?

From its opening day until it was finally closed immediately after the Socialist electoral defeat, the @conRubalcaba Twitter profile acquired more than 66.000 followers and was following 7.351 followers. During the period of this analysis, coinciding with the two weeks of the official campaign, we identified 1.390 separate Tweets. It should be noted that, as explained above, the @conRubalcaba account was mostly managed by the candidate's campaign team so that the candidate restricted his participation to those Tweets that were signed with the initials Rbcb. In fact, the latter comprised just 9.7% of the total Tweets.

In the case of Rajoy, his Twitter account @marianorajoy, launched in mid-September 2011, reached 95.578 followers, 2.688 following, and 2.975 Tweets from the account's creation until the day after the election. Almost 30% of the tweets (a total amount of 884) were posted during the campaign. Similar to Rubalcaba's Twitter profile, @marianorajoy was also managed by the Popular Party campaign team and also followed the habit of identifying the messages written by him with his initials, MR. However, Rajoy's direct participation in his Twitter account was almost non-existent: during the sixteen days analysed in this research, we found that only 6 Tweets bore the MR signature. This fact means that Rajoy wrote fewer than 1% of the Tweets published on @marianorajoy, a highly symbolic presence.

We shall now present some data derived from the descriptive analysis the Tweets' contents relating the campaign issues, the main hashtags, and the nature of the use of the social-interaction resources available.

### 5.1. *Campaign Issues in the Candidates' Tweets*

With regard to Rubalcaba´s Tweets, it is worth noting the emphasis on what we have called the "meta-campaign," meaning first-hand information about the campaign development, electoral-activities promotion, the agenda of rallies, etc.

As Table 1 shows, the meta-campaign ranked first of the main issues (41%), even above other more specific issues that, as polls indicated, were of higher priority in public opinion, for instance, the economic crisis, social policies, or political corruption.

**Table 1. Main Issues Raised by Rubalcaba´s Tweet**

|  | Frequencies | Percentage % |
|---|---|---|
| **Social Policy** | 116 | 8.4 |
| **Economic Crisis** | 187 | 13.5 |
| **Other economic problems** | 75 | 5.4 |
| **ETA/Terrorism** | 4 | 0.3 |
| **Corruption/Politicians** | 38 | 2.7 |
| **Meta-campaign** | **571** | **41.1** |
| **Others** | 398 | 28.7 |

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[54] Cfr. EUROPA PRESS, "Rajoy tiene más seguidores en Twitter, pero Rubalcaba es más activo y casi dobla a su rival en mensajes personales", in *informativostelecinco.com*, 16-11-2011, http://www.telecinco.es/informativos/nacional/Rajoy-seguidores-Twitter-Rubalcaba-personales_0_1317750532.html (visited 20/07/2013).

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| **Corruption/Politicians** | 38 | 2.7 |
| **Meta-campaign** | **571** | **41.1** |
| **Others** | 398 | 28.7 |
| **Total** | 1390 | 100 |

Source: The authors of the article.

The meta-campaign topic eclipsed the public discussion on other ballot proposals related to the economic crisis and unemployment, which ranked second place, or even other topics clearly linked to the PSOE political brand like the social policy issue, which ranked third place.

Particularly striking was the low number of Tweets dedicated to the political-corruption issue. Instead of self-criticism to gain public trust, Spanish politicians usually disregard this topic invisible when campaigning. This tactic contrasts with the concerns of real citizens, since the latter continue to recognize "politicians and the political class" as the third main problem on their agenda, as the CIS (Spanish Centre for Sociological Research) indicated at the time of the election campaign.[55]

Something very similar is found regarding Rajoy's Tweets. The highest percentage figure here is the 36.5% of Tweets talking about the PP campaign. This is by far the main topic, which means that his strategy also focused on promoting the candidate's electoral agenda and simply reminded his followers of upcoming campaign activities. In other words, the emphasis of his Twitter usage, as in the case of his opponent, was what we have called the meta-campaign, not the issues of most concern to the public.

There is a group of themes related to social policy, the crisis, and other economic problems which ranked second (over 10% and below 17%), as can be seen in Table 2. According to the polls, the crisis was the key issue that would decide which party's candidate would win. In other words, the crisis was the real citizenship concern. However, @marianorajoy paid that fact scant heed: Rajoy's speech was particularly evasive when referring to economic policies and his crisis solution program.

**Table 2. Main Issues Raised by Rajoy's Tweets**

|  | Frequencies | Percentage % |
|---|---|---|
| **Social Policy** | 125 | 14.1 |
| **Economic Crisis** | 115 | 11.9 |
| **Other Economic Problems** | 149 | 16.9 |
| **Immigration** | 13 | 1.5 |
| **Corruption/Politicians** | 5 | 0.6 |
| **Meta-campaign** | **323** | **36.5** |
| **Others** | 124 | 15.1 |
| **Total** | 884 | 100 |

[55] Cfr. Spanish Center for Sociological Research (CIS), *2011 November barometer. Study n° 2917*, CIS, Madrid, 2011.

Source: The authors of the article.

Nevertheless, the silence about corruption and political scandals reached a much more significant rate: less than 1% of the references. Despite social dissatisfaction with politicians, Rajoy's Twitter, like Rubalcaba's, did not become a vehicle for discussing the topic, and so a great opportunity to prove these candidates' closeness to citizenship was lost.

In relation to RQ1, where we asked the extent to which both candidates included the main public-agenda issues or just projected their own ballot agenda to reinforce the offline campaign in their Twitter conversations, our findings have demonstrated that both candidates used their Twitter accounts mainly to reinforce their own offline campaigns rather than as a real space for discussion. In fact, most of the issues that concerned citizens (unemployment and economic problems) had hardly any presence in the candidates' social conversations.

This instrumental or strategic approach reproduces the same paradigm used in traditional campaigns regarding the slim role of thematic priorities and the lack of concrete policy proposals versus emphasis on the candidates' self-image and the promotion of the campaign gameplan.

### 5.2. *Main Hashtags Unused in the Respective Twitter Campaigns*

One of the objectives of this study was to identify the main hashtags used by Rubalcaba and Rajoy in their campaign Tweets. By identifying the most used ones, an idea of the strategic framing proposed by both the PP and PSOE candidates emerges as derived from the highlighted issues and how they are defined.

Results showed that 30% of Tweets published by Rubalcaba's official account used hashtags as a Twitter resource. This figure, much lower than expected, shows the ignorance of the possibilities offered by labelling Tweets to direct public attention to them.

Regarding the kind of hashtags used by the Socialist candidate, there was an underlined hashtag: "rajoynorespondealfredonoseesconde" (which means that Rajoy didn't answer but Alfredo (Rubalcaba) didn´t hide). This hashtag became popular following the PSOE candidate's participation in the only electoral debate on television which took place on November 7th. The aim of this label was to keep before the public the attitude of the PP candidate in facing the Socialist Party candidate's questions posed during the debate.

But there were other hashtags frequently used by Rubalcaba. Examples include the campaign slogan "peleaporloquequieres" (translated into "fightforwhatyouwant") and a direct voting appeal for the party: "votapsoe" (meaning "votepsoe"). In both cases, the hashtags represented labelling for purely electoral outcomes.

Coinciding with the publication of a mid-campaign poll indicating that the Socialist Party was considerably behind because of supporter inattention[56], Rubalcaba intensified his ballot performances with what he called "rallies en route." This initiative consisted of providing short rallies, just twenty minutes, in small towns and villages, along the way to major events planned for larger communities. They were also advertised on Twitter under the hashtag "mitinesenruta."

In the case of the Conservative candidate, Mariano Rajoy, 40.6% of his campaign Tweets were labelled with hashtags. This means that @marianorajoy made a strategic

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[56] Cfr. GAREA, Fernando, "El desplome del PSOE da una mayoría aplastante al PP", *El País*, 13/11/2013, p. 1.

use of hashtags throughout the campaign, a fact that proves Rajoy was conscious of the benefits of hashtag labelling from the very beginning. However, this figure was not high enough to indicate an optimum use of this tool for framing purposes. Despite the higher percentage, there was not a wide variety of hashtags in @marianorajoy. There were a selected group of them which were systematically repeated through the messages posted during the sixteen days analysed.

One of the most repeated labels was the slogan of the PP campaign, "sumatealcambio" (meaning "jointhechange"), which appeared primarily during the first days. As the campaign went on, another hashtag became recurrent: "votaPP" (translated into "votePP"). The meaning of both shows that Rajoy and his team understood Twitter labelling possibilities as a virtual advertising device for spreading key messages of their offline strategy and asking the public to vote for Rajoy and the PP: Another way of posting the meta-campaign discourse already present in the content of his Tweets.

Without doubt, the most reproduced hashtag was "programaPP" ("PPprogramme"). The references to their political proposals were pervasive, and this tag brought together all the references to the entire range of campaign issues. In spite of labelling each topic by name, all of them could be found within this framework and were accompanied by an indication of the specific document pages where they could be found.

During the televised electoral debate in which Rajoy faced Rubalcaba, there was a hashtag which perfectly conveyed the rival character of the event. As a response to the already mentioned "rajoynorespondealfredonoseesconde" tag published by Rubalcaba's account, @marianorajoy released "alfredonotecreo" (translated into "Idonotbelieveyoualfredo") to raise doubts about the opponent's credibility.

These results show that neither candidate for the Prime Minister's office made an optimum use of hashtags to frame their messages. Instead of creating a long-term strategy through hashtag framing, both used this device with a more short-term perspective and applied its use to the immediate purposes of the campaign.

### 5.3. *Social-Interaction Measurement*

In order to measure the dialogical character of their accounts, we analysed the use of Twitter resources to promote interaction and social conversation. We focused on three tools: the retweet (RT), a resource to share some information with others by spreading it beyond its original audience; the number of mentions (referred) to others, a resource to measure the candidate's listening capacity; and the use of extra linked information, a resource to add content value and avoid restricting one's message to the standard Tweet length of 140 characters.

One of the challenges of Rubalcaba's campaign was to listen and to explain, actions that theoretically fit the nature of this social network. The results show that almost 80% of cases did not correspond to any retweet, a fact that demonstrates a limited ability of candidates to listen online.

Regarding the number of mentions, 67% of the @Rubalcaba Tweets included references to others, which underlines the consideration of his active and open role on Twitter. It is also important to notice that from that 67% of the Tweets that included mentions, 36% of the cases mentioned anonymous citizens, while 33% referred to politicians and 10% specifically those of the PSOE, as shown in Figure 1, below.
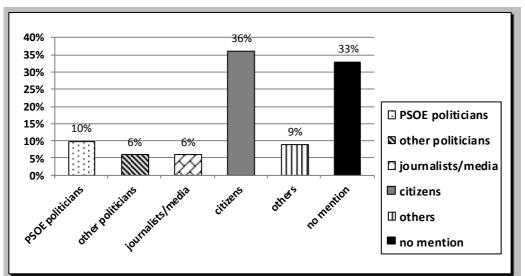
**Figure 1. Distribution of Mentions Used on the @conRubalcaba Twitter Account**



Source: The authors of the article.

In the case of the @conRubalcaba Twitter feeds, Candidate Rubalcaba made little use of this resource, since only 27% of the Tweets included any link to additional information. When they did, most of the time the links in question were to videos (9.7%) and text (8.5%).

Rajoy's Twitter account interactivity was similar in some aspects. For the conservative candidate, 93.1% of the Tweets did not include any retweets. Moreover, he shared little information generated by others, and when he did it, more than 50% came from other PP members' accounts.

When talking about mentions, 77% of the cases included references to what others had said, reinforcing the idea of a bidirectional (but limited) dialogical communication model. The higher figure of mentions is also for citizens, as showed in Figure 2, with a 61% of the total, a percentage proving Rajoy's interest in connecting with connect people.
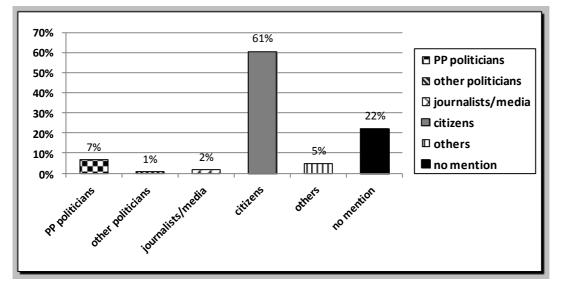
**Figure 2. Distribution of Mentions Used on the @marianorajoy Twitter Account**



Source: The authors of the article.

The link to extra information through @marianorajoy became a common strategy, a fact that proves an attempt on the part of this candidate to use the potentialities of Twitter. Some 40% of the Tweets are fed by different kinds of resources, among which 32% included links to web pages (mainly the PP web page). This approach was clearly used to reinforce party allegiance.

To sum up, with regard to RQ2, where we asked the extent to which both candidates use their Twitter account and especially social-interaction resources to directly interact with citizens to "explain" their electoral program through a real conversation with citizens, we consider that the number of retweets and mentions registered was really low for both candidates. This fact proves the underuse both the PSOE and the PP made of the potential this social network offered to establish an interactive and multi-directional dialogue with the Spanish citizenry. The candidates' lack of experience with these social practices could explain their difficulties in utilising tools that would have facilitated social conversation and that had the potential to change the election outcome.

### 5.4. *Personal Style in Social Conversation*

Twitter offers candidates one of the best chances to develop a personal style of campaign that presents a more human dimension of the candidate. Candidates can strategically share any comment, even from a personal or private perspective, so that citizens can gain insights into his or her private life.

Following Rubalcaba´s Tweet feed, it was apparent that he had a hard time projecting a personal style on his social conversation. Because of his team's Twitter account management, the percentage of Tweets (which included Rubalcaba´s signature, RbCb) was quite low. By contrast, instead of showing the candidate's human face, @conRubalcaba was used to spread his main campaigning agenda and proposals or to mobilize followers.

We found just a few examples where this personal style was projected which enabled followers to see a more human and emotional dimension of the candidate. In order to illustrate this exception, we reproduce some of them here[1]:

-"In Granada, I must talk after Felipe (González).  It´s difficult to sing after Camarón. Today, they played the Beatles. Felipe and Alfonso [laugh]. RbCb."

-"I´ll try to eat something. I´ve ordered a tuna and tomato salad, a chicken steak with chips, and a kiwi. I´ll drink also a cup of tea. RbCb."

-"I´m really sorry about the soldier from Córdoba, Joaquin Moya, in Afghanistan; and I want to send his family and friends my respects. RbCb."

-"In Badajoz, preparing for this afternoon rally and looking at the good Spanish football match out of one eye. Great morning in Cordoba with Rosa @PepeGrinan RbCb."

Rajoy's Twitter account, as noted before, featured a corporate style. As a consequence, his personal voice could hardly be found: Only six of 883 tweets are signed with the MR initials. His corporate style (using a first-person-plural party voice) gave @marianorajoy quite an impersonal and formal dimension, with no room for spontaneity. Further, most Tweets talked about the party's agenda and programs. In fact, Tweets referring to the content of their electoral program, including page numbers where the information could be found, were highly common.

When signing Tweets with MR, Rajoy usually wrote in the first-person singular but with corporate and strategic content, focusing on party positions and referring

negatively to his opponent, as shown by the examples below.[2] The only time Rajoy used Twitter to convey a private message and show himself as a man and not a politician, was the Day of Reflection, when he published a photo of his wife and him going for a walk:

- "Opening the campaign in Toledo with @mdcospedal. Unemployment worries me more than any opinion polls. MR."
- "My condolences to the family, friends and colleagues of sergeant Moya [who] died in Afghanistan today. MR."
- "I want to thank all of you who have taken part in the campaign through social networks for your interest. We'll keep in touch. MR."
- (Day of Reflection) "Going for a walk with Viri [his wife] #jornadadereflexion pic.twitter.com/5xLb8tOa."

As can be seen, the direct participation of Rubalcaba and Rajoy in personally updating their accounts was much lower than expected. This situation is especially striking in the Conservative candidate's case, whose absence is almost complete. Their strategy was not to offer insights into their private lives and interests, so Twitter could not convey their personal portraits. Their focus seems to have been on generating political messages, not on making personal connections with citizens. Both showed inexpressiveness in their timelines, far away from the smart gestures, smiles, and winks that could have better connected them with Twitter users.

Taking into account these considerations which respond to RQ3 (related to the extent to which both candidates kept away from institutional campaign in deference to a candidate-centred one), we emphasise in conclusion that, against expectations, neither of the candidates really practiced a personal campaign style, evidenced by the lack of a human dimension portrayed on personal messages and the low level of involvement with their followers in real social conversation.

## 6. *Discussion*

In this article we have presented an exploratory descriptive reflection on the use of Twitter as a tool for political participation in the most recent General Election in Spain. Our aim has been empirically to test how the Internet and especially a social network like Twitter represent a real bottom-up structure that destabilizes the schemes used so far in election campaigns and points to a new model of campaigning, one characterised by a more personal style on the part of candidates. Because of the exploratory character of this study, its results should be understood as a first approach to considering the use and impact of Twitter in the Spanish political arena. Thus they cannot be extrapolated to other countries or raised to the level of a general theory.

We empirically tested the extent to which this personal style of campaigning, or candidate-centred campaigns, emerged in the areas of more informal speech, an emphasis on listening, and open-participation patterns by the candidates through their use of Twitter. The candidates studied were Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba of the Socialist Party (PSOE) and Mariano Rajoy of the Popular Party (PP). Both were running for the Prime Ministership during 2011 Spanish General Election.

Each politician designed a different strategy for his campaign to use this social network. On one hand, Rubalcaba outlined and announced a personal campaign style in which he was going to avoid associations with his predecessor, the ex-president José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero. On the other, Rajoy drafted and implemented a conscious

institutional campaign in which he stuck to official party positions. Both candidates diverged from their stated approaches and instead used similar scenarios regarding their Twitter campaigning style. Both in fact made an offline use of this online tool.

Results from our study show that in light of RQ1, Rubalcaba was not congruent with his own intentions. Not only did he make minimal personal use of Twitter, but when he used it at all, he simply applied the old campaigning paradigm by advertising his offline electoral activities and not generating social conversations with followers. His participation did not add too much value as it did not launch interesting questions on the main issues of public concern. In terms of social interaction, he did not use Twitter resources well or often enough to encourage social conversation.

In the case of Rajoy, his use of Twitter was, as expected, a clear reflection of the Conservative Party's institutional campaign. Despite the candidate's intention to confer a dialogical character to @marianorajoy, he took part in writing a mere six posts. His team, who managed the account, spread the same kind of messages as in the traditional media. Rajoy's Twitter did not become a tool for humanizing the campaign but merely another device for presenting the same political program as offline. He therefore did not take advantage of the potential of Twitter to interact and dialogue with the public, but used it instead to give himself an additional impersonal presence.

No matter the initial approach they announced (including their willingness to dialogue and interact with citizens), the final result was quite similar for both: an institutional campaign. Neither of them interacted or added enough value by means of Twitter; they hardly dialogued with followers. In light of the three research questions stated at the beginning of this article, the analysis proves that for the 2011 Spanish General Election, the two main political parties (PSOE and PP) mainly used microblogging by Twitter as a reinforcement and reminder of their electoral agenda rather than a means for including the public interests as the *Leitmotif* for their message strategy. The meta-campaign became by far their priority issue in both cases. As a consequence, they used Twitter as a kind of a "microblogged" version of their offline strategies, with official impersonal discourse and the restatement of official party positions as key features.

In response to our second question (RQ2), we found that the candidates decided to campaign on this social network without having a clear or accurate strategy adapted to its special capacity. The underuse both candidates made of the resources of this social network including retweets, mentions, and links to extra information (hashtags) shows that despite their initial attempt to embrace the Twitter idea of connecting with people, they did not actually pursue it. They adopted a bi-directional (but limited) dialogical communication model based on their electoral agendas and built upon an institutional discourse. The old campaign paradigm still remained dominant even when the new technology urged changes.

Finally in terms of RQ3, this article showed that, against expectations, both parties deployed an institutionalised use of their candidate's Twitter accounts, understanding it as a short-term propaganda device. This result occurred not only because their electoral teams managed their accounts, but also because of their refusal to be personally present in the great majority of their Tweets. They were not able to portray themselves as individual citizens versus politicians. Furthermore, they did not understand the potential of Twitter to reach other communicative objectives with voters beyond electoral ones. In the end, neither of the candidates really practiced a personal style campaign.

Our empirical study contributes to the idea that, in general, Spanish politicians have not yet understood that Twitter is a tool focused on the candidate as a person rather than as part of a political institution. However, it seems likely that for the immediate future

Twitter will remain part of the current communication strategy, where the real influence on public opinion will continue to be developed through the old media system.[57]

In this sense, we cannot say that their online strategy was wrong, especially in light of their lack of experience with these new social practices. Still, the opportunity Twitter presented for greater specificity, proximity, empathy, and humanization was overlooked, and these goals remained forgotten aspects in the traditional mediated campaigns. The candidates both followed the conventional wisdom of media use instead of circumventing it. Their first step in social media was too timid to fill the gap between citizens and politicians that disaffection and discredit have fed over recent decades, partly thanks to both candidates' reliance on those traditional modes of campaigning which hindered social participation in the democratic process and a real dialogue focused on the people's concerns.

Although more empirical studies are needed on the effectiveness of Twitter use on elections results and its relationship with the traditional offline campaign strategy, a greater use of participatory communication and open dialogue made available by Twitter can certainly encourage the achievement of a modern campaign style that can bring people together at the same time as offering a new tool for message positioning.

The results of this research can thus become a baseline for understanding social-media use by Spanish candidates in future. As a first exploratory and descriptive approach to the issue, this study does not prove the efficacy of new Twitter-based approaches to political campaigning, but it may provide a case-study-based general understanding that will help build and strengthen them by raising relevant questions.

## Funding

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[57] Cfr. ARROYO, Luis, *op. cit.*

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