Deliberation and Conversation between Political Elites and Social Media Users during Guadalajara's Elections: a Political Communication Systems Approach

Deliberacions i converses entre elits polítiques i usuaris de xarxes socials virtuals durant les eleccions de Guadalajara: un estudi des dels sistemes de comunicació política

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Social media has been considered a set of technologies that have the potential for transforming politics. In particular, these communication technologies could be a powerful civic tool to build bridges between political elites and citizens in contemporary democracies. However, to date, there has been no clear evidence that the use of social media has helped in creating these bridges. Thus, this paper concentrates on studying political communication between political elites and Internet users through Facebook and Twitter, in the context of a Mexican electoral campaign in Guadalajara City. This study proposes a political communication systems model as a theoretical framework for studying political communication and social media. This model suggests definitions for the concepts of political communication, political deliberation, and political conversation. Throughout

Els mitjans de comunicació digitals han estat considerats com a tecnologies amb el potencial per transformar el món polític —especialment per construir ponts de comunicació entre elits i ciutadans en les democràcies contemporànies—. No obstant això, fins al moment actual no hi ha hagut cap evidència contundent que provi que aquestes tecnologies s'hagin emprat extensivament per construir aquests ponts, de tal manera que aquest article està enfocat en l'estudi de les relacions comunicatives entre elits polítiques i usuaris de Facebook y Twitter, en el context de les eleccions municipals de Guadalajara (Mèxic) i ofereix un model de sistemes de comunicació política, com a marc teòric per estudiar la comunicació i els mitjans digitals. Aquest model suggereix definicions per als conceptes de comunicació política, deliberació política i conversa política. Pel que fa a la metodologia, l'estudi

three months of political campaigns, online observation and textual analysis were employed in studying political communication between political elites and Internet users within the framework of a local midterm electoral campaign. The results show three essential elements: (1) political deliberations and conversations were not general practices; (2) the power to control political communication was concentrated in the candidates' political campaigns; (3) nevertheless, there were several examples of political interactions between political elites and social media users during the political campaigns.

Key words: *political communication, political communication systems, political conversation, political deliberation, Latin American electoral campaigns.*

es basa en l'observació del desenvolupament de les campanyes a internet, així com en una anàlisi textual de les publicacions que candidats i usuaris van realitzar a Facebook i Twitter. La investigació ha mostrat tres resultats fonamentals: (1) la deliberació i conversa política no van ser una pràctica comunicativa generalitzada; (2) el poder per controlar la comunicació política va estar concentrat en els candidats; (3) no obstant als punts anteriors, va ser possible trobar i estudiar diversos episodis d'interacció política entre candidats i usuaris de xarxes socials.

Paraules clau: *comunicació política, sistemes de comunicació política, conversa política, deliberació política, campanyes electorals a América Latina.*

Two decades after the appearance of the Web 2.0 in the realm of politics, the democratic outcomes of Internet activity are unclear and ambiguous, particularly regarding the political interaction between political elites and citizens. On the one hand, research has shown the existence of online conversations between political elites and citizens (Halpern and Gibbs, 2013; Sørensen, 2016; Sweetser and Lariscy, 2008) and between citizens (Fernandes, Giurcanu, Bowers, and Neely, 2010). On the other hand, scholars have found that the Internet and social media are not fostering democratic communicative processes and that, on the contrary, there is a lack of political interaction (Larrosa-Fuentes, 2014; Dahlgren, 2005; Macnamara, 2011; Ross, Fountaine, and Comrie, 2015; Segado-Boj, Díaz-Campo, and Sobrado, 2016).

Taking into account the aforementioned mixed results from research, the understanding of the communicative relations between political elites and citizens on the Internet still admits theoretical and empirical work for three main reasons. First, the focus of the scholarship has been concentrated on political communicative processes that occur in the United States and some European countries, and thus there is a lack of information about what is happening in other regions of the world, such as Latin America. A literature review discovered only four research papers devoted to the analysis of online communication between

political elites and citizens in Latin America: Colussi Ribeiro (2010) investigated the interaction between candidates and citizens during an online political debate in Brazil; in Argentina's elections Slimovich (2012) examined Facebook posts and D'Adamo, García, and Kievsky (2015) studied interaction between political elites and citizens; and Larrosa-Fuentes (2014) analyzed Twitter conversations between candidates and citizens during a Mexican election.

Second, within the existent literature on political communication, there is not a clear definition of what constitutes political communication between political elites and citizens. On the contrary, researchers have tended to use a variety of names for political interaction, such as *political talk*, *political conversation*, *public dialogue*, *political dialogue*, *political discussion*, *political debate*, and *political deliberation*. For example, Vliegenthart and Zoonen (2011) have used the concept of "discussion" when referring to interpersonal communications among citizens regarding the news. In the same fashion, Ikeda and Boase (2011) have referred to "political discussions" to explain the ordinary political conversations between individuals. In many papers in the social sciences, the term "political talk" has been used as a label for referring to interpersonal political communication (Kim and Kim, 2008; Kim, Wyatt, and Katz, 1999; Rojas, Shah, and Friedland, 2011; Wyatt, Katz, and Kim, 2000). In contrast, other researchers have used, without distinction, the terms *deliberation*, *conversation*, *interpersonal communication*, *interpersonal exchanges* and/or *political talk* (Shah *et al.*, 2007). This situation is problematic for understanding and defining what is and what is not political communication in social media between political elites and citizens.

Third, network and content analyses of large sets of digital data have been leading political communication research on Internet issues, but qualitative methods have been underdeveloped (Postill and Pink, 2012: 134) —as also occurs within the whole field of political communication research (Karpf, Kreiss, Nielsen, and Powers, 2015)—. Network and content analyses are useful for portraying and understanding the big picture regarding political information flows, the interactions among millions of users, and the recurrent topics of political interactions. However, network and content analyses tend to overlook questions about the specific kinds of actors participating in these interactions and the qualitative characteristics of their political conversations.

Drawing from previous investigations (Duarte and Larrosa-Fuentes, 2013; Larrosa-Fuentes, 2014), the present research concentrates on studying political communication between political elites and Internet users through Facebook and Twitter, in the context of a local electoral campaign. In alignment with the previous description of knowledge gaps in the political communication research field, this paper presents three main contributions. First, the investigation furnishes information about a political communication process that occurred in Latin America, a typically overlooked region. Second, the investigation proposes a political communication systems model as a framework for studying political communication in social media. This model suggests bounded definitions for the concepts of political deliberation and political conversation. Third, online observation and textual analysis are employed for studying political communi-

cation between political elites and Internet users within the framework of a local midterm electoral campaign.

A POLITICAL COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS MODEL

Political communication systems perform three core functions. First, these systems have an epistemic function. Through communicative actions, individuals generate knowledge about the rules of operation, common goals, and values of a political system. Thus, political communication operates as a mechanism for producing political knowledge (Habermas, 1985; Martín Serrano, 1994). Second, political communication systems have the function of disseminating political knowledge among all the individuals who integrate a political system. In other words, political communication systems diffuse the political knowledge that individuals need for living according to the norms, laws, common goals, and values of a political community. Third, political communication systems function as a mechanism for organizing the collective decisions and actions that pursue the goals and values of a political community (Martín Serrano, 1994). These three functions can take place in both private and public spaces and within any political regime or political organization. The final objective of political communication is to be a device for producing, reproducing, growing, and perpetuating a political community.

Individuals who interact with each other through various communicative actions are the units that constitute political communication systems. All the individuals who are part of a political community are, at the same time, part of a political communication system and participate in its development. Within the political communication systems some units have more power than others (e.g., Casero-Ripollés, Feenstra, and Tormey, 2016; Micó and Casero-Ripollés, 2014). In this paper, power is defined as the capacity of an individual, a group of persons, or an institution to influence the operation of the political communication system.

The units of the system perform three different types of political communication: interpersonal communication, mass communication, and mass self-communication. For the purpose of this paper, only the latter is defined. Political mass self-communication refers to communications mediated by digital technologies, especially those that are connected to the Internet. This type is mass communication because it has the potential for reaching a global audience; it is self-communication because it is "self-generated in content, self-directed in emission, and self-selected in reception by many who communicate with many" (Castells, 2009: 70).

Political mass self-communication allows interaction between individuals. As stated in the introduction to this paper, political interaction has been named and studied in a number of ways (e.g., as political conversation, political talk, and political deliberation). Political talk, political conversation, and political dialogue are broadly defined as political communications

between two or more actors that can occur anywhere (in public or private spaces), through face-to-face and mediated interactions, and that have no formal rules for operation (Kim and Kim, 2008: 55). Henceforth, the term "political conversation" will be used for referring to all the forms that non-ruled political mass self-communication can take.

Political deliberation is a reflective communicative process bounded by explicit rules. It is an instrumental process of communication that has specific goals (e.g., production of political knowledge) and specific rules (i.e., every individual has the same amount of time for participating, every individual should be open to discussing the arguments of the others, and every individual should embrace the best rational argument [Habermas, 2006]). The most visible examples of political deliberation occur in parliaments, congresses, and courts, where political elites deliberate as part of their ordinary duties. However, deliberation can also occur between political elites and citizens, and between citizens. Henceforth, the term "political deliberation" will be used to refer to ruled political mass self-communication. It is important to note that the distinction between the ruled (political deliberation) and the nonruled (political conversation) operates on a continuum, and the definitions are not monolithic.

To sum up, *political communication* is defined as any communicative action that creates political knowledge, diffuses political knowledge, and/or organizes the collective decisions and actions of a political community. Thus, *political mass self-communication* is composed of all the online mediated communicative actions that produce political knowledge, diffuse this knowledge, and/or operate as a mechanism for organizing the collective decisions and actions of a political community. Political mass self-communication can adopt two forms: *political deliberation* (ruled communication) and *political conversation* (nonruled communication). Further, *political communication systems* are an organized set of political communication actions, which have a specific goal, such as organizing a democratic election.

METHOD

From April to June of 2015, midterm electoral campaigns took place in Mexico. The purpose of this political process was the election of federal and state deputies and five governors, as well as the president in many municipalities. Of the 2,417 Mexican municipalities, there are some in which the elections are exceptionally salient, such as Guadalajara, which is the capital of the state of Jalisco and has the fourth-largest economy in the country.

Thus, the main objective of this paper is to investigate the political deliberations and conversations between political elites and social media users, in order to understand the regularities, ruptures, and power inequalities in the performance of the political communication system's functions through Facebook and Twitter during a electoral campaign in Guadalajara. The following are the research questions that guided the investigation:

- RQ1. What are the similarities and differences in the interactions between political elites and social media users on Facebook and Twitter during the municipal midterm campaign in Guadalajara?
- RQ2. What are the regularities, ruptures, and power inequalities in the political conversations and political deliberations between political elites and social media users on Facebook and Twitter during the municipal midterm campaign in Guadalajara?

Data Collection

An enormous amount of information is produced within social media. This digital information can be recovered and analyzed through various automatized techniques. These techniques are valuable because in many cases it is impossible for researchers to collect and analyze such a vast amount of information manually. However, these techniques tend to overlook two important elements of political communication within social media. First, they tend to assume that all the messages that are produced within a candidate's social media account can be cataloged as political communication. Second, in the particular cases of Facebook and Twitter, researchers tend to assume that likes, shares, favorites, and retweets are, per se, political interactions and/or conversations. In fact, retweets and shares accomplish the diffusion of a message; favorites and likes are endorsements of a message. These social media functions do not, in all cases, directly enable political conversations. Furthermore, a reply —either on Facebook or on Twitter— does not always constitute a political deliberation or a political conversation (e.g., D'heer and Verdegem, 2014; Larsson and Moe, 2013). Therefore, this investigation proposes a qualitative research design that does not require automatized data collection and automatized content analysis for the performance of a rigorous analysis of the political conversations and deliberations on social media.

Ten candidates competed to be the president of Guadalajara's municipality. According to different polls, only three candidates had the chance of winning the election: Alfonso Petersen, Ricardo Villanueva y Enrique Alfaro. Hence, this research observed the messages that these candidates produced on Twitter and Facebook and the interactions of these candidates with social media users. These observations were executed at 9:00 a.m. each day from the beginning to the end of the political campaigns —that is, from April 5 to June 3 of 2015—. In each observation, the researcher read all the posts and tweets that were published in the last 24 hours on the walls and timelines of the candidates (see Table 1).

During the observations, the researcher took ethnographic notes. Moreover, through a purposeful sampling about unusual cases (i.e., political deliberations and conversations), the researcher collected all conversations and deliberations between candidates and social media users (i.e., texts, images, and videos) within Facebook and Twitter. The researcher archived this material in digital files.

Table 1. Name of the candidates, number of Twitter followers, and number of Facebook fans

Candidate	Twitter followers	Facebook fans
Alfonso Petersen	7 K	31 K
Ricardo Villanueva	15 K	79 K
Enrique Alfaro	95 K	530 K
Total	117 K	640 K

ANALYSIS

The political deliberations and conversations among political elites and social media users were examined using textual analysis, which is a useful tool for making a careful and detailed observation of how candidates and social media users relate to each other. The textual analysis was structured and guided through the political communication systems model. This model was useful for observing the characteristics of the units of the system, the functions that created the messages that circulated in social media, and the power relations that were constructed within these communicative processes.

RESULTS

General Features of the Political Communication Campaigns on Facebook and Twitter

The three major candidates presented intensive political communication campaigns on social media platforms. The main purpose of their social media strategies was to diffuse the political knowledge and values of the candidates —and, in rare cases, to organize collective actions—; the candidates did not use Facebook or Twitter to create political knowledge. Throughout the campaigns, the candidates tended to communicate through social media their real-time locations (e.g., in media interviews, tours around the neighborhoods, and meetings with political and civic leaders); political advertisements (e.g., TV spots, political mottoes, digital posters, and memes); political proposals for the municipality (e.g., education plans, financial budgets, and security measures); journalistic information (e.g., reportage about a rally, stories about a candidate's personal life, and press releases); live broadcasts of debates or rallies; and information about their public policy plans. Moreover, social media platforms were used for diffusing political information about candidates, parties, and the rules of operation of the Mexican electoral system.

The first remarkable regularity in Guadalajara's political campaigns is that the candidates did not privilege the interaction with social media users over other online activities. Political deliberations and/or conversations between candidates

and social media users were not the most frequent activities on Facebook and Twitter. The regular pattern was that candidates produced their own political information and diffused it on their Facebook pages and Twitter feeds, at which point social media users tended to interact with the candidates' Facebook posts and Twitter tweets. In general, the candidates lacked an explicit strategy for interacting with their social media followers.

Nevertheless, despite the aforementioned characteristics of the political use of social media, there were instances in which users were able to communicate with candidates. That is, although such cases did not occur very frequently, there were indeed political deliberations and conversations among political elites and social media users. Therefore, the following pages will present the results of a close and detailed textual analysis of these political communications.

Political Deliberation between Political Elites and Social Media Users

Throughout the political campaigns, the regular pattern was that there were no instances of political deliberation. However, there was an exception. One of the candidates, Alfonso Petersen, developed a strategy for communicating with his social media followers. This strategy had clear objectives and rules of operation. The name of this strategy was #PregúntaleAPetersen (#PoseAQuestionToPetersen). The objective of #PoseAQuestionToPetersen was the creation of a direct channel for communication between the candidate and social media users. Users had the opportunity to ask questions, and the candidate had the chance to answer those issues. There were four simple rules. First, this exercise was made available only on Thursdays. Second, the social media users had to ask a single question, in the form of text or video, which included the hashtag #PoseAQuestionToPetersen. Third, users had to send the question to the candidate through Twitter, Facebook, or Flicker. Fourth, the candidate promised to respond to the questions (*#PregúntaleAPetersen*, 2015).

Alfonso Petersen published 26 videos on YouTube in which he answered questions posed by his social media followers. The mechanism was useful for generating political deliberations between social media users and the candidate. Users created their own questions, and Petersen, in turn, crafted personalized and public answers. For example, @rebecamerca2 sent a tweet to Petersen asking the following question: "My neighborhood is very insecure. What are your plans about this issue, Mr. @AlfonsoPetersen?"[1] The candidate produced a video with a response, which was uploaded to his YouTube channel. Petersen narrated the video, in which he explained that during his tours around Guadalajara's neighborhoods, he found that people were worried about public insecurity. Then he proposed four measures for eradicating insecurity: (1) hiring more police personnel, (2) training the police, (3) creating a metropolitan police force, and (4) implementing a citizen police model (*Respuesta sobre seguridad*, 2015). This example is similar to the other 25 videos.

Throughout this exercise, Petersen answered questions about education, public health, public transportation, and many other topics. #PoseAQuestionToPe-

tersen falls into the terrain of political deliberation because the candidate and social media users were engaged in a communication process that had clear goals and rules. This communication process functioned to diffuse political knowledge through different social media platforms. This political knowledge was related to the programs that Petersen proposed for Guadalajara's political future.

#PoseAQuestionToPetersen had several downsides. One is that these exercises were minimal in comparison with the extent of the whole social media network of the candidate (6,737 Twitter followers and 30,992 Facebook fans). During the campaign, he published 26 videos on YouTube and established a political interaction with 26 social media users. Another downside is that the candidate did not respond to all the questions that users formulated. He ignored questions in which users insulted him, laughed at him, and/or criticized him and his political career.

Political Conversation between Political Elites and Social Media Users on Twitter

In the course of the electoral campaigns, candidates participated in nine different debates. During these debates, there was an increased volume of messages on Twitter. Political elites and social media users produced and diffused political messages on Twitter before, during, and after the debates. Ricardo Villanueva, the candidate of Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party), used Twitter after the debates to engage in short conversations with his followers. For example, Rocío Sánchez tweeted, "I applaud you for such a great debate @rvillanueval #VillanuevaWinsDabate #WorkingTogether he will lead #GDL to a successful route." The candidate answered, "Thank you very much, that is how things shall be!"[2] In another example, Rebeca Martínez tweeted, "Professor @rvillanueval, I admire you because you are a young candidate that knows the students' necessities." The candidate answered, "Thanks, Rebeca, #WorkingTogether we will make it possible."[3] These friendly conversations had the objective of supporting the candidate after the debates. Aside from these political conversations, Ricardo Villanueva did not engage in interactions with his followers.

Enrique Alfaro, from the Movimiento Ciudadano (Movement of Citizens) party, was the third candidate observed during the election in Guadalajara. Alfaro was the candidate who had more interaction than the others with his Twitter followers. As did Villanueva, Alfaro responded to many friendly tweets that contained messages of support for his campaign. Also, as in the case of #PoseAQuestionToPetersen, Alfaro used other platforms to answer his followers, such as YouTube and a blog. For example, @YONOFUI asked, "Hey, @EnriqueAlfaroR, are you going to prosecute the former mayors of Guadalajara because of their corruption?" The candidate replied both with a text and with a YouTube video: "Hi @YONOFUI, as I said at @ITESO, I will do my job to put those who plunder Guadalajara in the place they have to be… youtu.be/2mAjya77oa8."[4] In the same fashion, this candidate had a special blog where he posted different kinds of texts. The name of this blog was "Alfaro Responde" (Alfaro Answers), <www.

alfaroresponde.com>. When his social media followers asked him questions, Alfaro posted the answers in his blog; then, he disseminated the answers through Twitter. For instance, a Twitter user asked him about his position on the abortion issue. Alfaro replied not only with a tweet but also with a link to a blog post and a video: "@maximiliano2012 @SalvadorCaro @guadalupemorfin I am against abortion. Here is my position: alfaroresponde.mx/blog/postura-s..."[5] With his reply, Alfaro expressed his position against abortion. Since the abortion issue is a complex and controversial topic, Alfaro did not limit his answer to a single tweet, and he produced larger responses through texts and videos in order to support his position with arguments and evidence.

Political Conversation between Political Elites and Social Media Users on Facebook

Many of the messages (i.e., texts, images, videos) that the candidates published on Facebook were identical to the messages that circulated on Twitter. Other posts were very similar to their Twitter messages but included some variations, which were made possible by the fact that Facebook does not have a restriction on the length of the texts and has functions for uploading multiple images in the same post. Thus, some publications on Facebook had the same text as on Twitter, but with more images. Other publications had text that was essentially the same as on Twitter but was expressed in longer phrases. This pattern changed only during the debates when the candidates and their staff used Twitter to send arguments, ideas, and attacks in real time (Larrosa-Fuentes, 2016). These messages were not published on Facebook.

Despite similarities in messages on the two platforms, there were more political conversations on Facebook than on Twitter. In general, candidates' Facebook posts received more likes, shares, and comments than Twitter received retweets, favorites, and replies to the same messages. For example, on May 24 Enrique Alfaro posted to his Facebook page a video of a local rock star playing his campaign theme song. The post had 13,389 likes, 17,408 shares, and 1,456 comments.[6] On Twitter, a similar post generated only 511 retweets, 611 favorites, and 118 replies.[7]

However, all the conversations on Facebook between candidates and social media users developed from the candidates' posts rather than from those of the users. The candidates appeared uninterested in responding directly to users' posts. The researcher's online observations found no political conversation on Facebook that was initiated by a post made by a user. On Twitter, however, political conversations arose from users' tweets. Thus, political conversations between candidates and users on Facebook were completely centralized and anchored to candidates' posts, whereas on Twitter they were decentralized and not anchored to candidates' posts, despite the lower overall volume of response.

Regarding political conversation, Ricardo Villanueva had the same strategy on Facebook as on Twitter. He tended to answer comments from his fans in a very simple way. For example, in a Facebook post on June 2, he wrote, "Vote next June 7. Guadalajara needs you. You are our strength". After this text, there is a photograph of the candidate, who is smiling and raising his arm. Sha Moreno

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made the first reply: "Although I cannot vote in Guadalajara, I support you". Villanueva answered, "Thanks for the goodwill. I send you a hug".[8] Throughout the campaign, Villanueva continued conducting only this kind of political conversations with his Facebook fans. This limited type of political conversation was also present on the Facebook pages of Alfonso Petersen and Enrique Alfaro.

However, Alfonso Petersen and Enrique Alfaro went farther than Ricardo Villanueva and used Facebook for generating more complex political conversations with their fans. These conversations emanated from the candidates' posts. Fans commented on these posts, and then the candidates responded to those comments. It is interesting to note that these posts were not intended to generate political conversations; rather, they were messages for communicating various kinds of information about the political campaign. The posts were not directed to some specific user, nor were they formulated as questions or as instructions for creating a conversation.

Consider the following example: On May 16, Alfonso Petersen posted a message after one of the debates. The post consisted of a video and a text in which Petersen made the criticism that two of the candidates had been absent from the debate. Further, he claimed that he was proud of participating in a debate organized by undergraduate students.[9] As can be observed, this post was the expression of Alfonso Petersen's opinion, but it was not constructed as the beginning of a conversation or a message that would encourage Facebook fans to contribute their points of view. However, during the following two days (May 17 and 18), the post generated 73 comments and five answers from Petersen. For example, Juan Puentes wrote a long text (1,646 characters) describing the situation of a polluted neighborhood in Guadalajara. After the description, Puentes asked Petersen for his help. Althoug Puente's comment was not related to the original post, Petersen replied, "Hi Juan, a few days ago I was in your neighborhood. I share with you this story: http://alfonsopetersenfarah.com/.../reunion-con-colonos.../." The link contains a text and photographs, in a journalistic style, narrating Petersen's tour through the polluted neighborhood.

Alfaro used Facebook to broadcast diverse political messages that were not explicitly crafted for interacting with his fans. However, in all the posts there were comments from his fans. Some of these comments generated political conversations with Alfaro. For example, on May 19, the candidate wrote the following post: "To recover Guadalajara we need character. I invite you to learn about my proposals of #GoodGovernment for our city." This post attracted 2,229 likes, 183 shares, and more than 200 comments from Facebook fans. The first comment was from a user who asked Alfaro for a telephone number to get in touch with him. Alfaro answered, "Hi. How can I help you? Send me your telephone number through a private message, and we will call you. Cheers". After this message, many Facebook fans wrote texts encouraging Alfaro to continue replying to the social media users' posts. During the campaign, there were many instances like the aforementioned political conversation, in which Alfaro responded to one of the multiple comments on his Facebook account.

Facebook was useful for broadcasting political information, but Alfaro was the only candidate who also used this social media platform to react to or

explain political information. Negative campaigning, personal attacks, and defamation were common practices during the electoral season. Throughout his campaign, Enrique Alfaro was accused by his adversaries of being in collusion with Emilio González, a former governor of the state of Jalisco. Alfaro used Facebook to combat this accusation and to explain to his followers that he had no relationship with the former governor. Consider, for example, a May 12 post. In this message Alfaro wrote,[10] "We are going to implement a good government. It is that simple #GDLDabate http://enriquealfaro.mx/debategdl". The first comment on this post was from a social media user who asserted that he was not going to vote for Alfaro because of his relations with the former governor. In response, Alfaro explained that he was under attack from negative campaigns that included defamation and disinformation, and he insisted that he was not in collusion with González. Subsequently, 72 messages were posted to endorse Alfaro's explanations.

Finally, in Alfaro's campaign, there was a third pattern regarding political conversations. Alfaro was the only candidate who used social media for organizing the people who supported his political ideas (i.e., for performing the third function of political communication). For example, he developed a campaign on Facebook to convince his fans to contribute a tweet. On Alfaro's web page, users could download an application that made it easy to sign up for a Twitter account and to create tweets for his campaign.[11] This exercise was successful because many Facebook users opened a new Twitter account to support Alfaro in his political career, and those who already had a Twitter account were motivated to help replicate and diffuse Alfaro's tweets. This strategy was useful for encouraging Facebook fans to also utilize Twitter as a political communication channel.

Furthermore, Alfaro and his staff developed an application called "Guardián Electoral" (Electoral Guardian). This app is a web page for gathering evidence of, and documenting, illegal practices during the elections, such as the production of disinformation, bribery of election officials, giving gifts (e.g., money, appliances) in exchange for a vote, and many other actions. Alfaro used Facebook, in various political conversations, to encourage his followers to participate in his digital campaign through the "Electoral Guardian" application. An example of this kind of conversation occurred on a May 12 post. In this message, Alfaro posted a photograph of a journalistic article published in the newspaper *Mural*. The story referred to a magistrate who used public resources to benefit Ricardo Villanueva's political campaign. This post generated 182 comments, 1,595 likes, and 848 shares. Facebook users engaged in a discussion about the newspaper article and the problem of corruption in Mexico. Suddenly, the topics of disinformation and defamation became prominent, and users started to post messages citing examples of false information against Alfaro.[12] The example shows how Alfaro used Facebook as a platform for publicizing his crowdsourcing application, which had the objective of organizing citizens to be vigilant during the election. It also demonstrates how he used digital media other than Facebook and Twitter for creating new political knowledge about corruption during the election (i.e., for performing the epistemic function of political communication).

Discussion and Final Remarks

The first research question for this paper is related to the similarities and differences in the interactions between political elites and social media users on Facebook and Twitter. The online observations revealed two consistent patterns in the uses of these platforms. First, most of the time the candidates published nearly identical content on Facebook and Twitter. That is, despite the differences between the two platforms, they chose to use the same communicative strategies. Second, the candidates tended not to answer any rude or critical questions from their fans and followers.

In contrast, the most significant difference was that there were more political discussions on Facebook than on Twitter. Why was Facebook a better platform for political discussion? There are two possible explanations. First, there was a bigger network of users on Facebook than on Twitter. By the end of the political campaigns, the three candidates had, in total, 632,255 Facebook fans and only 106,700 followers on Twitter (see Table 1). That is, Facebook had a network that was, roughly, six times bigger than Twitter. Furthermore, a higher percentage of voters in Guadalajara had a Facebook account (45.5%) than had a Twitter account (16.9%) (Silva Medina and Paláu Cardona, 2016). The second explanation is related to Facebook's architecture, which allows an almost unlimited space for posting texts, pictures, and videos, whereas Twitter confines its messages to 140 characters. However, the research design of this investigation did not accommodate a complete answer to the research question. Further research is needed to test the differences between the two social media platforms.

The second research question is about the regularities and ruptures in the political communication processes through Guadalajara's elections. The political communication systems model suggests that there are three functions of political communication. During the online observations, there were no instances of deliberations or conversations that performed the first —i.e., epistemic— function of political communication. Facebook and Twitter were not used as tools for generating political knowledge; all such knowledge was previously produced. The second function of political communication is the diffusion of political knowledge. As has been explained, the three candidates used their social media accounts to broadcast political messages, and some of these messages generated spontaneous political conversations between candidates and social media users. The third function is to organize collective decisions and actions that pursue the goals and values of a political community. Among the candidates only Enrique Alfaro used social media to perform this function; he did so through the development of online applications, such as "Electoral Guardian" and the mechanism for contributing a tweet.

On the one hand, these findings from the perspective of a republican model of democracy, are of concern for two main reasons. First, according to Habermas (2006), the republican model is based on the "epistemic function of discourse and negotiation," in which citizens (including political elites) communicate in order to find solutions to political problems (2006: 413). As the online observations showed, the messages that circulated on the candidates' Facebook and

Twitter accounts diffused political knowledge that was crafted beforehand. That is, during the elections candidates did not use social media platforms for the production of political knowledge. For example, candidates could have used social media to identify the most significant political, social, and economic problems of Guadalajara's neighborhoods; they could have learned about citizens' proposals for developing the municipality; or they could have organized social media users to create knowledge about the political campaign through the elaboration of texts, photographs, or videos. Rather, candidates and their staff used social media for communicating information about their political campaigns, and they monopolized the creation of political knowledge.

The second concern is that the findings suggest strong communicative power imbalances between candidates and social media users. Power was previously defined, within the context of this paper, as the capacity of a unit (individual or collective) for influencing the operation of the political communication system. By this definition, a power imbalance is evident from the fact that the three core functions of the system were controlled and dominated by political elites. In general terms, political communication began and ended with the candidates; furthermore, candidates and their staff strongly influenced the operation of both the spontaneous political conversations and the ruled political deliberations. From a theoretical and technological point of view, the social media offer the possibility of establishing horizontal relations between political elites and citizens. However, this is not happening in reality, and the reason is located in the political realm: The rules of operation of the political system and the political communication system have not changed. That is, the lack of political deliberation and conversation within social media is not a technological problem but rather a political one.

On the other hand, these findings show that it is possible for political elites and citizens to engage in online political deliberations and conversations. #PoseAQuestionToPetersen and Electoral Guardian are examples of deliberations and conversations that were successful. These cases revealed that political deliberations and conversations have a greater opportunity to succeed when communication processes are planned in advance when they have clear rules of operation, and when they have the goal of, indeed, creating political conversations and deliberations. Social media, as a *technological tool*, proved to be useful for creating communicative bridges between political elites and citizens.

Technological tools allow political dialogue between political elites and citizens. However, technology does not have agency. The existence and inexistence of dialogues are related to the human *will* for creating political communication and to the ways in which people *use* these technologies. In short: Web 2.0 will not change, per se, the distribution of communicative power; people, using the Web 2.0, do have the possibility of making this change. Thus, we have a political problem, not a technological one.

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Notes

1 Original tweet in Spanish: <https://goo.gl/hgJCTM>.

2 Original tweets in Spanish: <https://goo.gl/QDIiAX>.

3 Original tweets in Spanish: <https://goo.gl/Im9tD3>.

4 Original tweets in Spanish: <https://goo.gl/mbnFZs>.

5 Original tweets in Spanish: <https://goo.gl/Wnr3RX>.

6 Original post in Spanish: <https://goo.gl/Y1t4YL>.

7 Original tweet in Spanish: <http://goo.gl>.

8 Original post in Spanish: <https://goo.gl/8di2J7>.

9 Original post in Spanish: <https://goo.gl/VSMjqE>.

10 Original post in Spanish: <https://goo.gl/Ba0Jme>.

11 Original post in Spanish: <https://goo.gl/VM8O1k>.

12 Original post in Spanish: <https://goo.gl/iDdKUu>.

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