

Study analyzes the 'virality' of Twitter in electoral processes

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A UC3M study analyzes the "virality" of Twitter in electoral processes. Credit: UC3M

Since the Catalan elections of 2010, when Twitter reached a critical mass of Spanish users, this social network has played an important role in emitting messages during all of the electoral campaigns held in Spain. In this case, the research carried out at UC3M by Professor M^a Luz Congosto, of the Telematic Engineering Department analyzes three

aspects of the political conversation that develops on this social network: the structure of the tweets, their content and their spread.

"We have detected two conversations: one that is found in political marketing, which contains tweets about the campaign or mentions the candidates by their usernames; the other is a citizens' conversation, which is freer, and mentions users by their names with a more natural and fresher language," explains Professor M^a Luz Congosto.

This research has studied the conversation that is exogenous to the organization of the parties and candidates to the European Parliament, as well as the endogenous conversations of the competing political forces. In both cases the study analyzed the patterns of publication, the themes discussed, the emission of these messages and the profiles of the users who participated.

According to the results of the study, published in the journal REDES, political marketing used structures of messages with hash tags and included mentions of the candidates' Twitter accounts. In contrast, the citizens participated by commenting on news in which the candidate's names appeared or by giving their opinions during televised debates.

In addition to the differences in structure, there was also a variance in themes: political marketing focused more frequently on the campaign, the electoral system and corruption, unlike the citizens' conversations, which used more dismissive insults and were more influenced by the controversies that arose during the campaign. This was the case, for example, of the comment made by Miguel Arias Cañete, the Partido Popular candidate, in his debate with Elena Valenciano, the PSOE candidate ("The debate between a man and a woman is very complicated because of you overuse your intellectual superiority it seems like you are a male chauvinist who is cornering a defenseless woman.")

These exogenous and endogenous conversations are described in the article as being like "oil and water". "The first thing that the parties and candidates should do is to listen to what people are saying, because I think it is very enlightening to see what they are saying on the internet," states the study's author. However, she clarifies that Twitter users do not accurately represent society, because they are generally young users with a slight preponderance of males. "It isn't a true reflection of the population, but it DOES give you a measure of a future sector, as is the case of young voters who, in many cases, participated in an election for the first time," points out Professor Congosto.

More information: Elecciones Europeas 2014: Viralidad de los mensajes en Twitter. M. L. Congosto. 2015 REDES-Revista hispana para el Análisis de redes sociales. ISSN (digital) 1579-0185 ISSN (paper) 2385-4626. [dx.doi.org/10.5565/rev/redes.529](https://doi.org/10.5565/rev/redes.529)

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