Original Article

Electors are from Facebook, political geeks are from Twitter: Political information consumption in Argentina, Spain and Venezuela[1]

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Abstract: This article compares the patterns of political information between general voters and the most interested audiences (journalists, academics, consultants and political leaders), focusing on the case studies of three critical elections held in 2015: the last general elections from Argentina, Spain, and Venezuela. The method used compared primary data for specialized audiences (also called "political geeks") with secondary data for normal voters, taken from three different external sources. The research found that the habits and sources of political information of specialized audiences during the electoral campaign differ from those of the general voting public. Specialized publics rely more on social networks as source of political information than general voters, however the gap is bigger on Twitter and narrower for Facebook. Voters in general use Facebook and WhatsApp more than specialized audiences do. In addition, there is a shift of the center of gravity of the campaigns towards the digital world, both in the specialized publics and in the normal electoral population, but digital migration seems to be more accelerated among specialized audiences than among ordinary voters. It was also observed that political information tends to lead to media convergence and a consolidated or "hybrid" communication system. This research also suggests that despite the rapid acceptance of the digital in the information world, it is possible that little journalism, research, or campaigning is being done where the massive audiences really are .

Keywords: Infopolitics, Cyberpolitics, Social media, Political communication, Elections, Campaigns, Media use

Introduction

This paper aims to show the ways in which the most interested agents are informed about politics, contrasting this involvement with how the general electorate informs themselves politically. It analyzes the pattern of consumption of both digital and traditional media. This paper is inserted in a larger comparative study on the use of the Internet in politics in three critical elections held in 2015: those of Argentina, Spain and Venezuela. It is based on a previous investigation of "cyberpolitics" in Latin America, carried out in 2006.

There two main network-uses were distinguished: 1) as a tool for political communication, generally referred to as "infopolitics", and 2) as a tool for organization and political mobilization, known as "cyberactivism" (Fernández, 2008: 23). In an earlier article regarding infopolitics, it was exposed how the most interested agents are informed about politics (Rodríguez-Virgili and Fernández, 2017). The study identified the digital environment as the primary arena for the most active and interested audience to inform themselves politically (Fernández and Rodríguez-Virgili, 2017).

Christopher Arterton pioneered the topic of cyberpolitics in an early 1987 study entitled *Teledemocracy* (Arterton, 1987). Arterton questioned, through empirical research, whether emerging technologies would be able to offer a new form of democratic engagement, one closer to the original Greek ideal. Although his experimental results were not very conclusive, since then, several studies have been done on how the transition from traditional political communication to digital political communication is taking place (Poster, 1997, Mazzoleni, 2001, Bohman, 2004, Holtz-Bacha, 2013, Maarek, 2014).

In 2015 the use of Internet in the Ibero-American[2] region was widespread, reaching a majority of 52% of the total population, a stark contrast to the use of internet in the same region in 2006, when the first study was conducted (average rates of internet use were of 17%). However, there are still significant variations in the various countries that make up the region. It is clear that this significant increase in Internet penetration also suggests an equivalent increase in the use of new media to inform and politically mobilize.

This article offers an empirical analysis of the main findings of the "infopolitical" dimension at the electoral campaign, contrasting the so-called "political geeks" (the publics who are most involved and interested in politics) with normal voters. This article further seeks to identify and define the usual channels of political information for political geeks—such as political officers, journalists, professors and political consultants—during the most intense phase of political information consumption, namely, elections. As such, we investigated the following hypotheses:

- H1: Specialized audiences consume political information in different way than general voters, and there are differences in the patterns of media consumption according to the social media platform used (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube or WhatsApp).
- H2: The consumption of political information varies by different countries, both among specialized audiences and general voters.

To address this analysis, we will first explain what is meant by Infopolitics, then recall the concept of critical elections and justify the relevance of the selected cases. Then we will briefly detail the methodology and analyze and discuss the results. Finally, we conclude pointing out key ideas.

Theoretical Frame

The term media consumption refers to the use and habits associated with different media. Given the process of media convergence, media consumption is currently largely subsumed by the Internet, with media content such as newspapers, magazines, radio or television serving as additions to digital elements (Serrano-Puche, 2017). Consequently, infopolitics is understood as the media consumption of political information.

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[2] We use the term Iber-America for the region conformed by Iberian peninsula and Latin American countries that were once colonized by Spain and Portugal.

The consolidation of the media as a primary space for public debate has strengthened a mediatized policy model, whereby the media are established as agents of intermediation par excellence between political elites and citizens (Mazzoleni, 2010, Rodríguez-Virgili et al., 2011, Ardèvol-Abreu & Gil De Zúñiga, 2017). This media power becomes especially central in the context of electoral campaigns. However, the characteristics of public space have rapidly evolved in recent years with the emergence of the digital media, which has led to an accelerated reconfiguration of the communicative ecosystem.

The impact of the Internet on political communication has sparked an intense academic debate (Arterton, 1987, Jenkins; Thorburn, 2003, Dahlgren, 2005, Hendricks; Kaid, 2010). Digital media reduces the limitations of time and space, making political information becomes a continuous flow, disrupting even an essential component of the information professions, which have gone from the periodicity as the basis of their task to have to face the realization of "journalism without periods" (Martín Algarra et al., 2013). In addition, the media have lost their quasi-monopoly on political information; it is no longer only offered by traditional media but by different actors such as politicians, citizens, activists, think tanks or civic associations across multiple platforms (Bowman; Willis, 2003, Kelly, 2008). At present, all users are subjected to a greater or lesser extent to different information flows (Newman et al., 2018).

As a result, the power of the media undergoes a continuous process of flexibilization, still maintaining a strong centrality in political communication while the information displayed by the media continues to set the tone and agenda of public discussion (Castells, 2009). However, the proliferation and rapid technological development of contemporary media does not necessarily mean that there is an increase in political information. The set of political information acquired by the user does not just depend on their availability, but is also conditioned by factors such as habit, interest and competition, and is correlated with sociodemographic characteristics such as age, education, nationality, level of Income or professional occupation (Meilán, 2010).

The digital environment has fostered the rise of mass self-communication (Castells 2009), a new social form of communication that, although massive, is produced, received and perceived individually; being Twitter one of its main exponents. This digital use of political information becomes a personalized consumption adapted to the habits of an audience that has also been transformed with the Internet revolution (Medina, 2015). In short, as Deuze (2012) points out, one no longer lives "with" the media, but rather "in" the media.

Digital platforms are changing political information, but they are not replacing journalism and conventional media. Thus, public space is constituted by an incipient hybrid media system (Chadwick 2013, 2017), in which the "old" as well as the "new" media participate and are constantly interrelated. Variables related to personal preferences, needs and expectations are relevant to explain the consumption of information.

With the available political information and the diversity of media provided (press, radio, television, webs, social networks, digital media etc.), individuals select both media and content. How do people choose the political information they have at their disposal? Iyengar and McGrady (2007) suggest three possibilities. The first is that people select through "biased polarization", that is people prefer to find information that reaffirm their beliefs. Another option is that people do not use information regarding other facts when seeking information about "public affairs" that interest them. The third possibility is that those people who are interested in politics might tune in searching for all the available information.

In this context, when studying the online mobilization of Germany, Italy and the UK Vaccari found that the effects of online mobilization are differential, rather than uniform, across different kind of voters (Vaccari, 2007).

In summary, the broad analysis of the academic literature carried out on this subject is intended to provide a background to our study, which helps to understand how the acquisition

of political information varies according to our selected audiences.

The case

Argentina, Spain, and Venezuela held elections in 2015. The three countries are among the most e-connected countries in Ibero-America, having Internet penetration levels that are above the regional average, ranging from 60% of the population in the case of Venezuela to 75% of the population in the cases of Argentina and Spain according to World Internet Stats data (2014).

The analysis of these three critical elections involves an implicit suggestion that is not measured by this paper: cyberpolitics might be increasing the frequency of critical elections worldwide.

Argentina held a presidential election, whereas those of Spain and Venezuela were legislative, the first occurring in a parliamentary system and the second in a presidential system. However, the three contests can be identified as "critical elections" in the sense attributed to it by V.O. Key: "A category of elections in which voters are unusually concerned, in which the measure of commitments and linkage to the campaign is relatively high, and in which election results reveal an acute alteration of the pre-existing segments within the electorate" (Key, 1955: 4).

The critical election also implies "an election in which the depth and intensity of electoral commitment is high, there are more or less profound readjustments in power relations within the community, and new and lasting form Electoral clusters" (Key, 1955: 5). This concept is generalizable and extensible as a definition of a much broader phenomenon of political behavior.

The triumph of Mauricio Macri in the Argentinian presidential elections of November 2015 marked the end of the Kirchner era. The high intensity of the electoral commitment in these elections is verified by the participation in the second round of 81% of the census population. The deep readjustment in power relations and the new electoral groupings took place with the end of the "Kirchnerismo," a political current that had come to power in 2003 with Néstor Kirchner and that was led by his wife, the democratically elected Cristina Fernandez, after his death. Another relevant aspect is that the political panorama was affected by the emergence of a new party, the PRO, which had gained power in 2005. Since the military dictatorship that ended in 1983, only two political parties and their conjectural alliances had reached national power: the Union Civil Radical and the Justicialista Party. The relevance of PRO in the political landscape thus meant that it was the first time in a century that someone who was neither Peronist nor radical reached the presidency of Argentina.

The general elections held in Spain on December 20th of 2015 had a participation of 69.67% of the electorate. They reveal an alteration of the pre-existing segments within the electorate, as for the first time in the history of Spanish democracy four parties surpassed 10% of the votes, questioning the imperfect bipartisanship dominated by the two great political forces, the Popular Party (PP) and the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE). Indeed, the realignment of political-partisan preferences of the Spanish electorate was evident: for first time, bipartisan PP-PSOE obtained only 50% of the total votes and the sum of the two emergent parties (Ciudadanos and Podemos) obtained over 30%. The results of the subsequent elections of 2016, as the 2015 elections required a second round because of the parties' inability to form Government, ratifies this alteration of the political-partisan preferences of the Spaniards.

Finally, the parliamentary elections in Venezuela, held in December 6th of 2015, can also qualify as critical elections because of the change in voters' political preferences. With a participation of 74.17% of the electorate, an increase of 7.7% over the 2010 legislative elections, the elections to the National Assembly gave the Venezuelan opposition an important

victory. The Mesa de Unidad Democrática (MUD), the main opposition movement to President Nicolás Maduro, reached 112 deputies of the 167 that compose the National Assembly. With 56.2% of the national vote, the opposition seized 72% of the parliamentary representation and closed the long cycle of Chavismo electoral victories, which had lasted 17 years and had won more than a dozen elections.

Methodology

This study explores the data extracted from two different kinds of surveys: the first employed primary data and was conducted among specialized publics of politically active citizens. The second employed secondary data from general voters. Our research included survey-based studies from third parties—that is, the research questions are examined under conditions that are not totally controlled by the researchers.

Four types of specialized audiences were identified among our interviews. These audiences were focused around interest and/or involvement in politics (i.e., "political geeks"): political leaders and elected charges (19.6% of respondents), political consultants (29.5%), political journalists (20.2%), and academics related to public policy and/or political science (30.5%).

To reach these *political geeks*, this study used an online questionnaire. For convenience, a non-probabilistic sampling was conducted through a self-administered questionnaire using Google Forms resources. The survey was promoted through social networks, banners placed on websites of different study partners, personal e-mail invitations and distribution lists of various professional associations, such as the Political Communication Association (ACOP) and the promotion of dissemination through Members of the OCPLA (Organization of Latin American Political Consultants), as well as mailing lists from the Konrad Adenauer Foundation. In sum, 528 effective surveys were received. The entire dataset is available for researchers and colleagues.[3]

The dates for data compilation were limited to the days between March 14th and May 14th of 2016. After the deadline for survey responses, it was verified that the Argentinian sample was under-represented regarding the comparative samples (Spain and Venezuela), so a new e-mail was sent only to Argentinian target audiences and the period for these responses was extended until Monday, May 30th of 2016.

Two specific questions were mainly the analyzed for this paper. The first was: *During the electoral campaign held in 2015 in your country, which were the THREE MAIN CHANNELS with which news and political events were reported? (Mark only three).* The response options were: Newspapers, Radio, Open TV, Cable TV, Internet Journalism, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Wedges or Campaigns, Political Militancy, Campaign Acts, Personal Conversations or Other (specify). The second question pointed out the cyber-activism, offering a multiple choice answer with no limit of options chosen: *During the last electoral campaign held in 2015, which of the following activities did you PERSONALLY do?*

The selected method for measuring specialized audiences could have conditioned the results of the study. Using an online questionnaire might imply that the people who answered the survey are a more Internet-active public than the average population. However, it is well known that Internet surveys offer myriad advantages in data collection, including reduced costs, faster survey administration, and those reasons are advantages for the research. In addition, Internet surveys might offer more accurate self-reports (Chang; Krosnick, 2010; Greenlaw; Brown-Welty, 2009; Wright, 2005) as compared with other survey methods.

For measuring the general public consumption of information, we used public opinion

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[3] Please contact us at cfperez[at]alumni.unav.es if you are interested in accessing the dataset.

polls with three different sources. For the Venezuelan and Argentinean cases, we worked with polls provided by two pollsters who collaborated with our research and agreed to include in their public opinion studies two questions, using the same wording to those of our online questionnaire.[4] In the Venezuelan poll, the party ID was also analyzed as a variable. For the Spanish case, we used the secondary data provided by the CIS (Sociological Research Center) survey of February 2016, which included a questionnaire regarding the user habits of new technologies.

The questions used to contrast the general population with our selected audiences were not identical in their wording. The empirical method for collecting the data was also different. Both elements imply another methodological limitation in the measurement. For these reasons they are not compared in a unique dataset.

Analysis and discussion

How do political geeks use media?

When asked about the main channels used for political information, there are important differences among the three countries. In general, 61% of the so-called *political geeks* reported having been informed through Twitter (up to 72% for Venezuela and just 39% for Argentina), and 56% through newspaper publications on the Internet (the highest was Spain with 63%, and the lowest was Venezuela with 51%). [see Table 1]

Table 1: Infopolitics: Main channels used for political information

Channels	Argentina	Spain	Venezuela
Political news sites @ www	58%	63%	51%
Twitter	39%	68%	72%
Facebook	34%	13%	25%
Cable TV	34%	3%	28%
Open TV	33%	48%	11%
Printed press	29%	37%	15%
Radio	29%	30%	19%
Personal conversations, face to face	14%	15%	19%
Political lines from party	7%	8%	9%
Campaign political ads	7%	3%	4%
WhatsApp	5%	3%	31%
Youtube	5%	3%	8%
Campaign acts	4%	6%	8%

SOURCE: *Elaboration with own data, Ciberpolítica study March-May 2016 in relation to the methods used by the interviewees in the 2015 elections of Argentina (125), Spain (155) and Venezuela (n = 211)*[4]

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[4] The pollsters were Carlos Fara, who conducted a study in the Greater Buenos Aires area (October 2015), and Jesus Seguias, working with his polling firm Datincorp, whose survey was conducted among Venezuelan population on a national scale (April 2016).

[5] Original question from the questionnaire (in Spanish): Durante la última campaña electoral celebrada en 2015 ¿cómo buscó Ud enterarse de las novedades y eventos? (escoja los tres más importantes)

Subscription TV is very low among Spaniards, and high in Venezuela and Argentina. However, if we add the percentages of television consumption, both in subscription and open signal, it reaches third place with 49.2%. In other words, Twitter (61.4%), periodicals on the web (56.3%), and TV (49.2%) were the three main means by which audiences who were particularly involved and interested in politics inquired during the 2015 elections in Argentina, Spain, and Venezuela.

In a second line of preferences, there is a three-way tie between preferred media when considering the average: 25.9% printed newspapers, 25.8% radio, and Facebook 25.6%.
It is remarkable how the so-called "new media" have surpassed traditional media among our interviewees. Television, which had been the dominant means of communication in electoral campaigns since its widespread growth in the 1960s, only reached third place. The front is now dominated by the so-called "new media," which runs on digital platforms, as the main channels that the audiences chose for informing themselves politically. The emergence of the Internet has led to new forms of access and consumption of political information (Anduiza et al., 2012). In the aforementioned 2006 study on cyberpolitics (Fernández, 2008), printed newspapers were the main source of political information, preferred by 80% of the specialized audience. Nine years later, paper newspapers are down 50 points and are no longer the fundamental source of political information during the campaign, largely surpassed by the different Internet platforms. In that previous study, TV was a very important means of political information even for specialized audiences. When compared with the 2006 survey, the patent evolution mitigates the aforementioned possible methodological bias. Among the same public, and with the same method, traditional media were clearly dominant (Fernández, 2008).

This new pattern of consumption is happening both among women and men. There have been numerous inquiries into the fundamental psychological differences between the sexes, ranging from academic research (Knobloch-Westerwick & Alter, 2007; Nainan Wen et al., 2013) to popular bestsellers like *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus* (Gray, 1992). However, when analyzing the patterns of consumption for political information within specialized audiences, our research showed that both men and women seem to come from the same planet: one in which Twitter and digital news sites are very important. [Figure 1]

Figure 1: Main channels used to be informed politically by gender
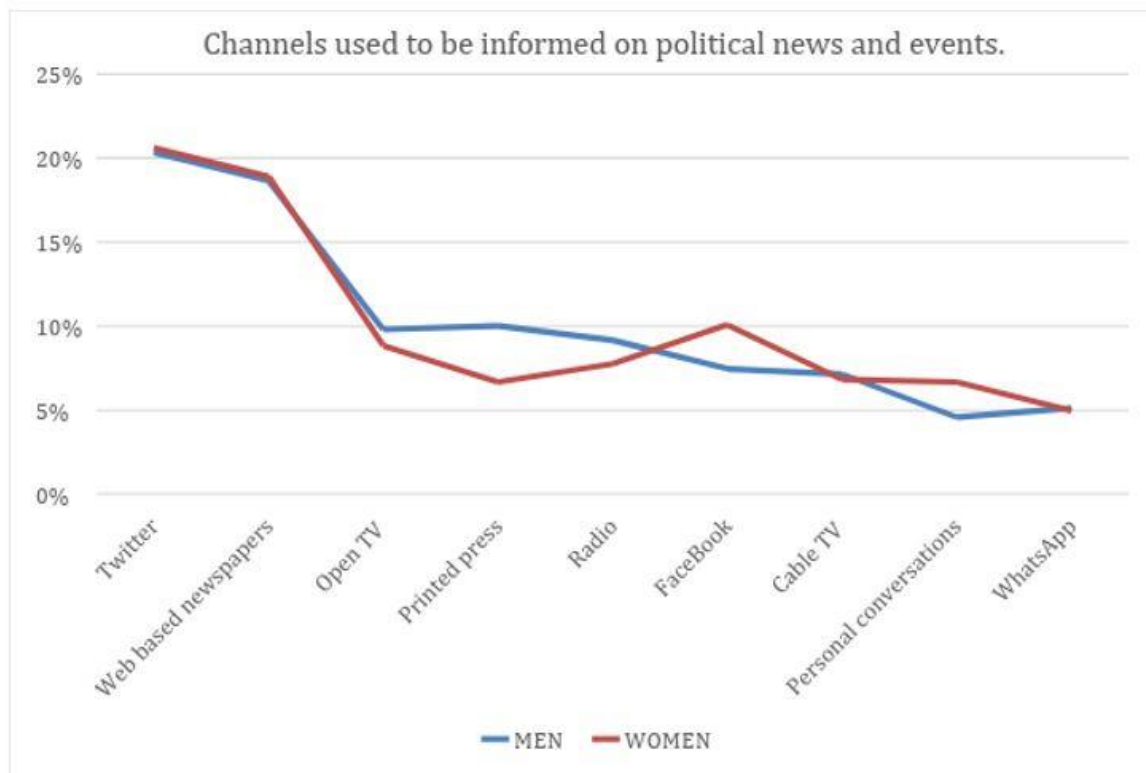
SOURCE: *Ciberpolítica study March-May 2016, n = 528*

This collected data verifies that the active and interested people in politics also participate in the "new social operating system" that Rainie and Wellman (2012) pointed out, because they have found on the Internet a platform for contact and exchange of information and can access it in a constant and ubiquitous manner thanks to mobile communication. These new ways of accessing content are therefore based on mobility, immediacy, interactivity, and multitasking.

Channels for activism among the most politically interested audiences

Regarding their personal experience and cyber-activism, the surveyed respondents were asked to answer questions regarding the activities in which they had personally participated in order to be politically active during the campaign. In other words, the use of new means that imply a higher degree of commitment beyond the reception of information. The main responses of the category were, "I tweeted or retweeted political information," and "I searched for information on the Internet about a candidate through Google" (over 60% each). Half of the respondents surveyed included, "I watched political videos online (YouTube or others)," and "I received and/or sent Whatsapps with political content."

Less frequent were, "Visit a candidate's website" (44%), "Read a blog about candidacies and/or political information" (40.5%), "I shared on my Facebook wall some political content of my favorite party or candidate" (37.7%), or "Received and/or sent e-mails to friends or relatives with political content" (37%). In a third range, we could locate those campaigning activities that were pursued by a third or a fourth of our interested audience, such as "I received emails through a mailing list of a political party or candidate to which I had subscribed" (29%), or "I received and/or sent Whatsapps with political content" (24%). Another 24% of the

participants claimed to have taken part in a demonstration or campaign rally that had been coordinated by e-mail.

Less prevalent were other types of activities, such as monetary donations and direct contact; while theoretically important for political action and cyberpolitics, in practice they were rare even among the most politically interested audiences. It has been said that with tools like Twitter, citizens with political concerns can access the realm of traditional communication and attempt to influence politicians and media (Chadwick, 2013), but from our data this possibility seems to be given minimal priority even among the most interested audiences. [Table 2]

TABLE 2: Cyberactivism. Main channels used to activate politically:
During the last electoral campaign held in 2015, which of the following activities did you PERSONALLY do? (Choose the three most important)

| Channel	%	n
I tweeted or retweeted political information	63.4%	335
I searched for information on the Internet about a candidate through Google	61.9%	327
I watched political videos online	52.5%	277
I received and/or sent WhatsApps with political content	52.3%	276
I visited a candidate's political web site	44.7%	236
I read a political blog on candidacies	40.5%	214
I shared on my Facebook wall some political content of my favorite party or candidate	37.7%	199
I received and/or sent e-mails of friends or relatives with political content	37%	196
I received emails through a mailing list of a political party or candidate, to which I had subscribed	29.5%	156
I got an email asking for participation in a political campaign act, and I took part	24.1%	127
I registered on line in a political candidate's site	17.6%	93
I established direct contact with parties, sending an email or a direct message with my concerns to a candidate	5.1%	27
I made an online monetary contribution to a party or candidate	4.7%	25

SOURCE: Elaboration with own data, Ciberpolítica study March-May 2016 in relation to the methods used by the interviewees in the 2015 elections of Argentina, Spain and Venezuela, n = 528

Argentina: asking Greater Buenos Aires electors

Argentina has the highest level of Internet penetration in the region, almost 80% for June 2016 according to World Internet Stats. Within Argentina, it can be assumed that the use of digital media for cyberpolitics is even greater in the Greater Buenos Aires (GBA) than in the rest of the country. However, when we compare the use of digital media to inform and politically engage the voters of GBA in the presidential election of 2015, we found a very different

behavior amongst the most politically interested audience.

**Figure 2: Use of social networks for political information among citizens of Buenos Aires**[5]
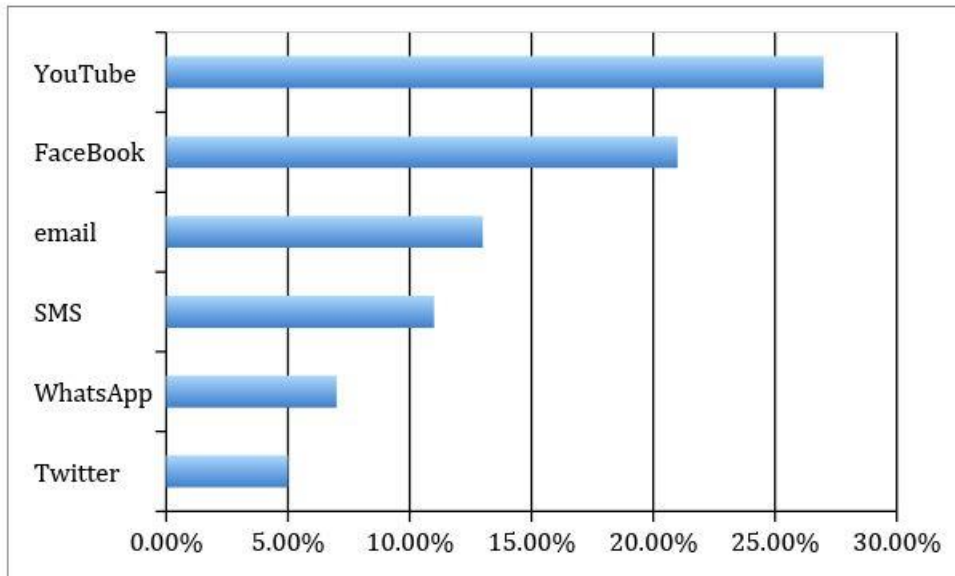
SOURCE: *Fara y Asociados, survey in Gran Buenos Aires, with verbatim by Carmen Beatriz Fernández. Question verbatim: "Did you get any political information during the campaign thru…?"*

YouTube is the preferred digital medium for being informed about policy among Argentine voters from the GBA (27%), but this figure is low when compared with the statistics reported by the politically interested audience that was surveyed. 52% of the participants claimed to have "watched online political videos (YouTube or others)." Among the most politically interested audience, 37.7% shared campaign information on their Facebook page, in contrast with 21% of GBA Argentines who shared political information from the campaign through the popular social network. [Figure 2]

Perhaps most notorious is the contrast between the voters of Greater Buenos Aires and the most politically interested audience regarding Twitter as a means of political information during the campaign. While only 5% of GBA Argentines said that used Twitter to inform themselves about politics, this figure increased to a staggering 51% among those most interested in politics during the 2015 campaigns. [Figure 3]

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[6] Technical info from CARLOS FARA Y ASOCIADOS poll: Universe: Argentinians voters, over 16 years from Gran Buenos Aires. N: 316 Dates: 17 to 19 October 2015. Polling method: Semi-probabilístic at homes GBA. Sex and age quotes Error: +/- 5.5 %. Confidence: 95 %

Figure 3: Comparison between voters from GBA and the most interested publics in 2015
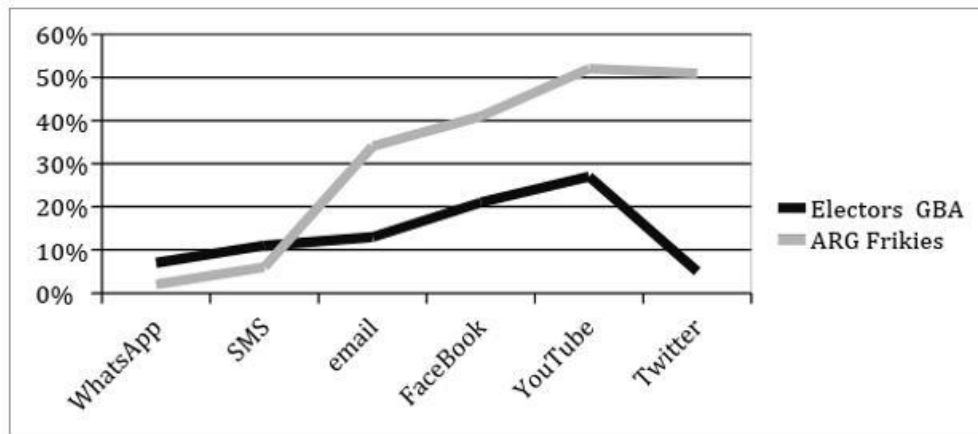
SOURCE: Authors' compilation comparing data from the 2015 Ciberpolítica Survey with Carlos Fara, GBA survey, April 2016

These findings support our initial hypothesis. The Argentinian case suggests that there are differences in the patterns of media consumption for political information among general public and the most interested audiences (H1). These differences are mainly found in Twitter, Facebook and YouTube environments. While specialized publics rely more on social networks as source of political information in general, the gap is bigger for Twitter, and shorter for Facebook and YouTube.

The role of Twitter as a tool for political communication has continued to grow both in Latin America (Fernández, 2012) and Spain (Rodríguez; Ureña, 2011; Campos-Domínguez, 2017), taking into account that Twitter is not exactly a media, but a platform where users share and comment information for different purposes. Journalists have standardized the use of Twitter to promote their work and keep track of information (Lasorsa et al., 2012). Twitter is a way of accessing the traditional media in a digital version, not only to follow their corporate profiles, but also because the common practice by journalists of linking their content to external media, directing traffic to internet websites, even occasionally recommending content produced by their competition (Noguera, 2013). In addition, many politicians use Twitter because it allows them to address mass audiences and interact with the electorate without the mediation of journalists (Casero-Ripollés, 2008; López-Meri et al., 2017). Twitter serves them as a way to generate news and gain media presence in an attempt to impose their own agenda over the media agenda (Strömbäck, 2008) and even to control public discourse (Broersma; Graham, 2013).

However, our study suggests that the use of Twitter as an instrument of infopolitics and cyberpolitics among regular citizens is less relevant than among the more interested audiences. For the Argentinian case, although literature suggest that voters comment on political issues on Twitter (Gainous; Wagner, 2014; Parmelee; Bichard, 2012), including filtering and hierarchizing information (Bruns; Highfield, 2015), our survey shows that these uses are not quantitatively comparable to those of a more politically interested type of audience.

Spain split between two planets: Twitter and Facebook

We used secondary data from the Center for Sociological Research (CIS)[7] in order to contrast the audience´s behavior for Spain. In the survey conducted in February 2016, after the electoral process of 2015, a questionnaire regarding the use of digital media and social networks was included.

When comparing Spanish politically interested audiences with the population in general, a different pattern of information consumption is indicated, not just regarding rates of Internet penetration but also regarding their use and intensity. [Table 3]

Table 3: Frequency of connection. Among Spaniard connected to social networks, how often do they connect?

All the time	17%
Few times a day	33%
Once a day	25%
3 to 5 times a week	11%
1 to 2 times a week	7%
From time to time	3%
Barely never	4%
Non answer	1%
N	1.148,00

SOURCE: CIS February 2016, n= 1.148

As for the use of media, regular Spaniards kept television as the preferred means of communication for political information while the politically interested audience relegated it to third place. There are differences in use of social networks. According to the CIS survey of March 2016, 46.3% of Spaniards used social networks intensively (a few times a day). [Table 4]

Table 4: Frequency of connection. Among Spaniards Especially Interested in Politics, how often did they check Twitter?
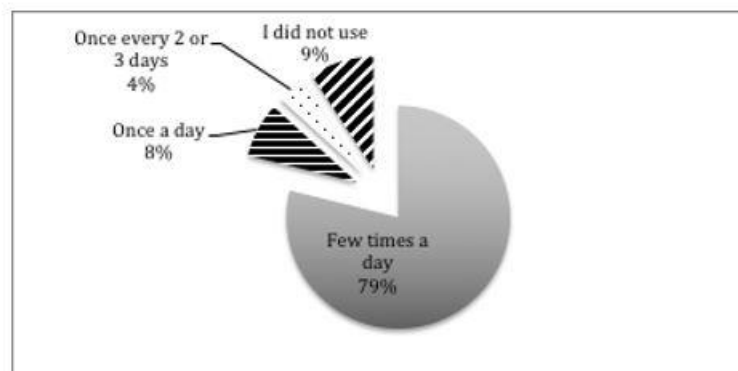

SOURCE: Own data of the study Ciberpolítica 2015, n = 155 Spanish answers of the total of 538

[7] The Center for Sociological Research (CIS) studies the variations of Spanish public opinion since 1963. It carries out periodic surveys, usually with a bimonthly frequency barometer, having the data available for the public on its website. Although not identical, the questionnaires have a standard design, constructed from the same skeleton while adding different themes and questions.

When the Spanish CIS inquiries about social networks related to the communication technologies, it asks in a generic way, grouping Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and others within the same category of response. Almost half of Spanish respondents used social networks. The CIS poll also asks about favorite social networks. Among Spanish citizens, Facebook monopolizes the preference of social networks, with 91.5% of respondents selecting it as their favorite. The CIS does not specifically inquire whether Facebook is used or not as a source of political information, but this preference is very striking when contrasted with that of more specialized audiences. In our survey of this particularly interested public, Facebook was only minorly important in the Spanish elections with barely 4%.

There are remarkable differences in the habits of instant messaging among different types of users: while 79% of our political geeks from Spain check their Twitter account few times a day, just 50% of social media users from Spain do the same [see Figure 4]. We expected that our specialized publics might behave differently from the general population, but they are also different from social networking users, and they express a much more intensive use of digital media in general, and of social networks in particular, as useful vehicles for informing themselves politically. These findings support our RQ3 on different intensity of social media use between both types of audiences.

Figure 4: (Spain 2015) Contrasting frequency of connection between general social networking users and the most interested publics
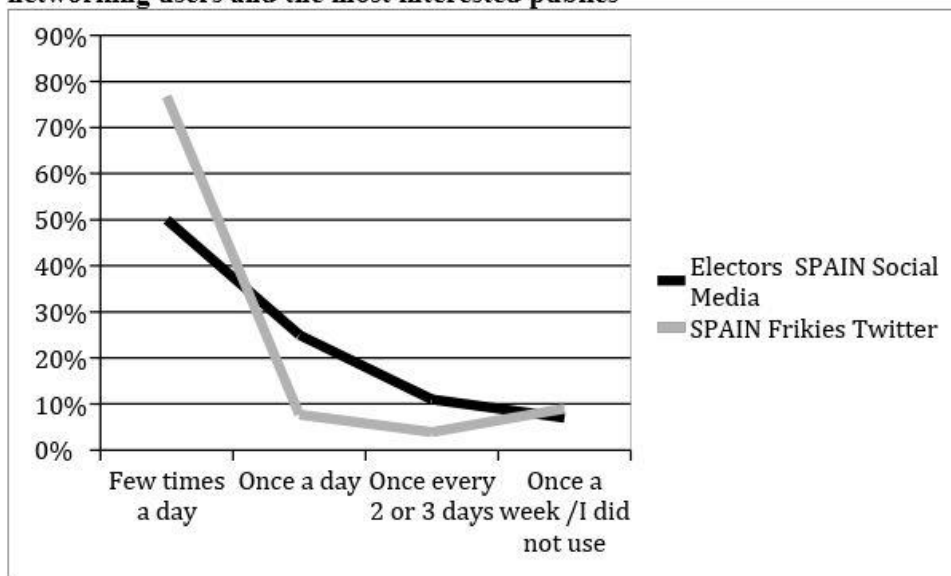
SOURCE: Authors' compilation comparing data from the 2015 Ciberpolítica Survey (n = 155 Spanish answers of the total of 538) with CIS February 2016, n= 1.148

However, when using instant messaging to communicate (mainly through WhatsApp) the Spaniards behave similarly. There is an intensive and massive use of instant messaging among *geeks*, those especially interested in politics, very similar to the behavior of the general population. Among our interviewed political specialists, 88.5% of Spanish political geeks check WhatsApp several times a day, while the CIS survey found that among Spaniards in general, 90% check their WhatsApp either continuously or a few times a day (Figure 5).

Figure 5: (Spain 2015) Contrasting frequency of instant messaging checking (WhatsApp and others) between general social networking users and the most interested publics
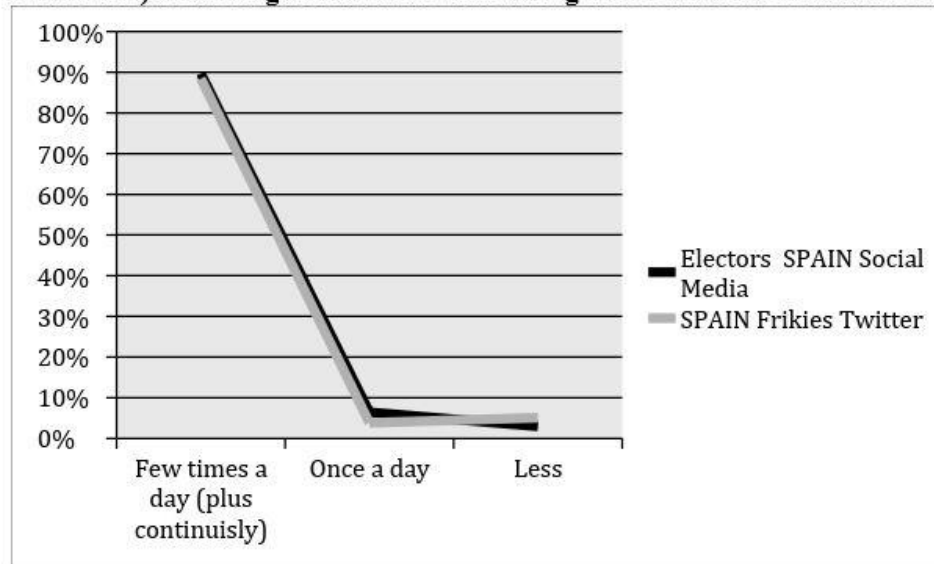

SOURCE: Authors' compilation comparing data from the 2015 Ciberpolítica Survey (n = 155 Spanish answers of the total of 538) with CIS February 2016, n= 1.148

In short, in Spain most interested publics use instant communication platforms similarly and as intense as any other WhatsApp user. Unlike what happens with social networks (Facebook, Twitter and others) in which the behavior of the average voter is different and less intense than that of those particularly interested in politics, affirming our H2. .

Venezuela migrates from TV, but political preference makes a difference

After the Venezuelan legislative election, voters were asked in a nationwide survey about their most-used means to inform themselves on electoral events (Datincorp, May 2016). In Venezuela, TV is still the main medium chosen by normal voters for political information, with 26% of voters reporting the use of open signal TV, where contents are controlled, to a greater or lesser extent, by the national government. However, a similar number (23%) do so through cable channels or subscription TV, including foreign production channels such as CNN, TVE and Antena 3. Social networks plus news sites on the Internet together make up 26% of respondents. (Figure 6)

Figure 6: (Venezuela 2016) During the last parliamentary elections, which channel was the most used to find out about the electoral process?
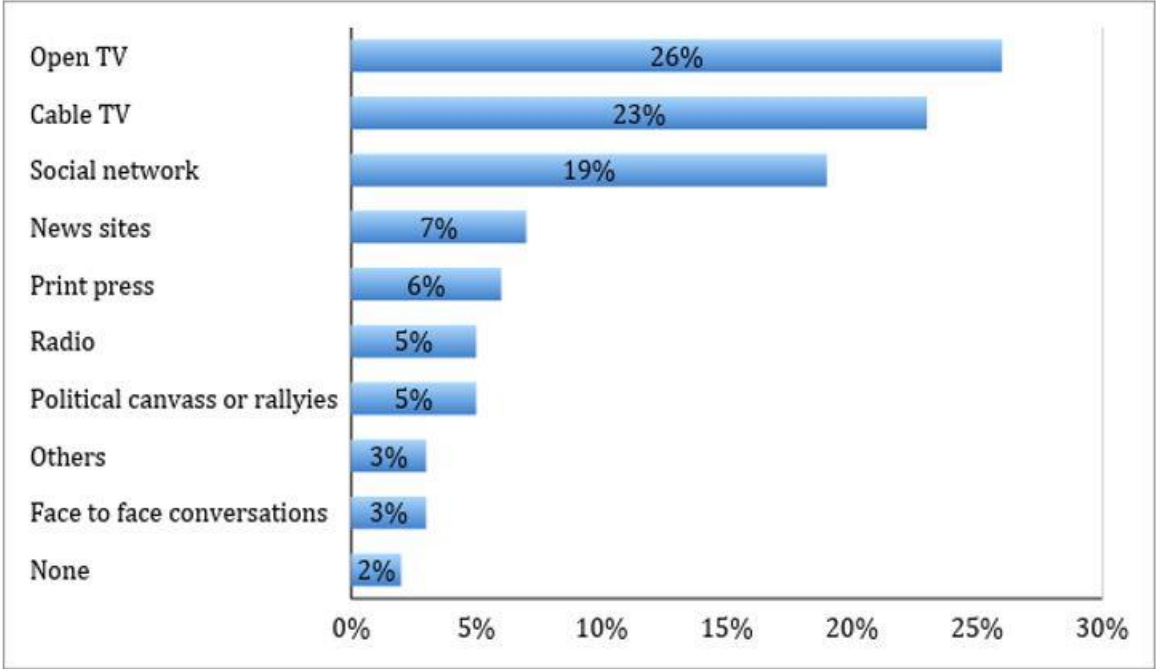
SOURCE: Datincorp Venezuela, using verbatim suggested by Carmen B. Fernández, April 2016

This clear predominance of TV, which almost half of the country's voters prefer for information about political issues, is a variable that differs from our survey. For the public particularly interested in politics, TV is not an important source of political information. Among general electors, the frequency is three times higher than among the specialized publics (Figure 7).

FIGURE 7: (Venezuela 2015) Contrasting sources of political information between voters and the most interested publics
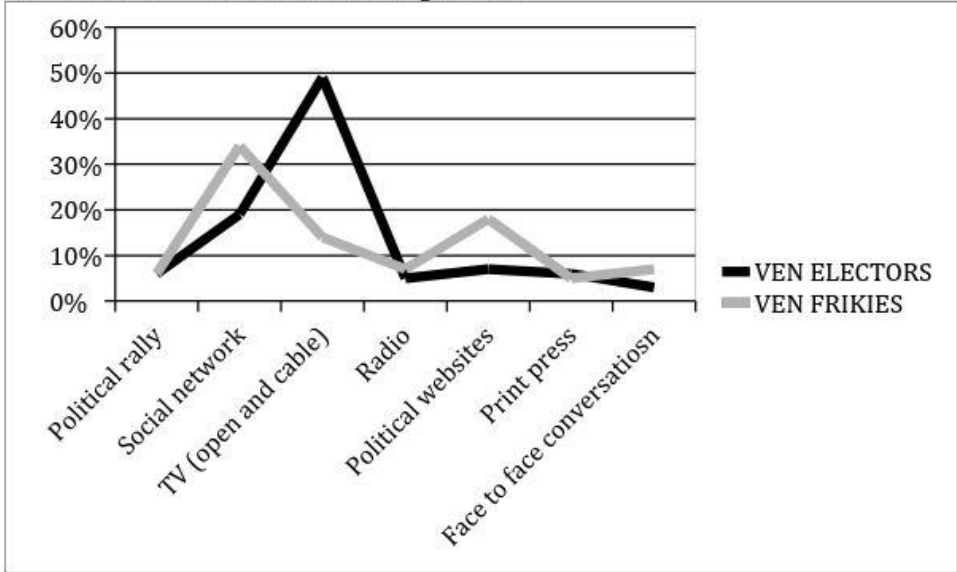
SOURCE: Authors' compilation comparing data from the 2015 Ciberpolítica Survey with Datincorp Venezuela, national survey, April 2016

The contrasts between citizen voters and specialized public are remarkable in the Venezuelan

case. However, it is even more interesting to analyze the data of citizen infopolitics according to the voter's political preferences, as we pointed out in a previous article (Rodríguez-Virgili; Fernández, 2017).

We found that TV channels, whose editorial management is mostly dominated by the government, are used as source of political information mainly by those who are supporters of the government. While 36% of government supporters (dotted bar in Figure 8) use open signal TV as the main political information channel, only 17% of opposition supporters (checkered bar) do the same, and 33% of those who perceive themselves as "neutral" or "non-aligned" (in gray). Regarding social networks, exactly the opposite occurs: 26% of opponents report themselves politically through RRSS, while only 8% of the ruling party does the same.

These results confirm the theory of selective exposure. This theory states that the consumption of media is determined by the predispositions of the audience, which seeks to confirm or reinforce their opinions in the media content (Lazarsfeld, Berelson; Gaudet, 1948). That is, citizens seek information as closely as possible with their previous ideas about reality (Stroud, 2010). There has been recently a return to this theoretic approach of selective exposure. In the Anglo-Saxon context, it is based on two premises: the multiplication of channels to obtain information, and the emergence of a new model of journalism far removed from objectivity that promotes partisan exposure (Goldman; Mutz, 2011, Stroud, 2011). This phenomena has also been detected in Spain (Berganza; Martín, 2001; Humanes, 2014). Both premises are also fulfilled in the Venezuelan case in the 2015 elections analyzed in this study.

FIGURE 8: (Venezuela 2016) Source of information by political preferences. During the last parliamentary elections, which channel was the most used to find out about the electoral process?
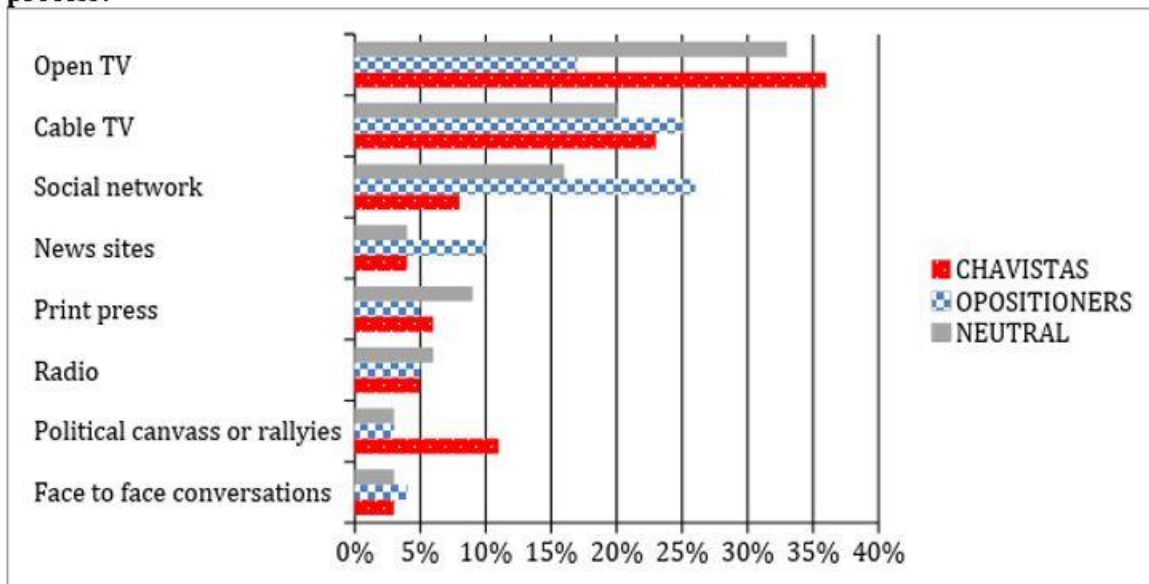
FUENTE: Datincorp Venezuela, national poll, verbatim from Carmen Beatriz Fernández, April 2016, n= 1.207

Conclusions

This research aimed to analyze the way in which the actors who are particularly interested in politics are informed during the electoral periods, compared to the way in which the ordinary voters are informed. To do this, primary data were obtained for three critical elections in 2015: those of Argentina, Spain and Venezuela. Our primary data was then compared with secondary data on the use of media by general voters from three different external sources.

After analyzing the data of the three cases, it can be affirmed as a first conclusion that habits and sources of political information of the specialized public differ significantly from those of voters in general during the electoral campaign, confirming our main hypothesis. In none of the three countries does the general population behave similarly to the public especially interested in politics. When analyzing the use of social media as source of political information, there are differences among the two publics: while general voters use mainly Facebook, political geeks rely heavily on Twitter. The use of Twitter as an instrument for infopolitics and cyberpolitics among regular citizens is less relevant than among the particularly interested audiences.

As a second conclusion, there is a shift of the center of gravity of the campaigns towards the digital world, which in turn is reflected in the changing habits of the global consumer towards the digital media. The comparison between our tracking studies on cyberpolitics quickly identified this displacement (Fernández, 2010). This was even more noticeable in 2015, both in the specialized publics and in the normal electoral population. Therefore, it was observed that political information advances towards media convergence and a consolidated or "hybrid" communication system (Chadwick, 2013), which intermingles the "old" as well as the "new" sources of information and in which the variables related to personal preferences, needs, and expectations are relevant to explain the consumption of information. This displacement, which reinforces the digital as a dominant political information environment, accelerates the schedule of politics and has serious implications for the budget distribution of campaigning.

There are similarities in the use of WhatsApp among both studied groups. It was remarkable that even though we found a different pattern of information consumption between citizens and specialized audiences (H1)—and in social media use, with regard to the immediacy of information—the use of instant messaging usage habits is similar. This is particularly true in Spain, where the massive use of instant messaging to communicate among ordinary voters coincides with a similar habit of instant messaging amongst specialist audiences. As a result, it is still an open question to what extent both elements—the speed of information transmission and the incidence of new formats in campaign budgets—affect the volatility of the policy and the vertiginous nature which generates the political changes in the three countries under study: Argentina, Spain and Venezuela.

The increase of relative importance of the new media is coincident in the three countries analyzed. However, there are important differences, particularly because the phenomenon seems to be more intensely accelerated in Venezuela. In that case, the audiences have switched from the analog to the digital world faster than the overall general trend. There might be a deliberate response of the audiences to resist the control of information by the national government. The intensive use of politics 2.0 in Venezuela is related to the government's consolidation of control over the media, along with the theory of selective exposure. As such, it is very striking that the normal voter continues using the TV as their main source of news media, distinguishing between public and private outlets.

As a third conclusion, digital migration seems to be more accelerated among specialized audiences than among ordinary electorates, partially reinforcing H1. The data of the descriptive analysis indicates that Twitter, periodical web publications, and open signal TV are the three main channels used by political geeks to be informed during the elections under study. But even in this adaptation to media convergence, there are impressive divergences among countries, affirming our second hypothesis (H2). Voters in general more frequently use Facebook and WhatsApp than specialized audiences do. The most remarkable case in these differences is Spain, where the public especially interested in politics uses Twitter with great intensity, while general Spanish voters prefer Facebook. In Argentina, 61% of those interested in politics use Twitter, while only 5% of the general Argentine voters surveyed acknowledged using this social network. YouTube is the preferred digital medium for being informed about policy both

among Argentine voters and political geeks, which is not the case in Spain or Venezuela.

However, as was pointed out, this is just a preliminary analysis: the use of data from diverse sources deprives standardization and is a weakness of our study, preventing definitive conclusions. With these first conclusions, it seems appropriate to continue investigating the differences between the two analyzed populations and to interpret what these inequalities mean in terms of the respective frames of reference. What are the implications of having a professional political class with such different information habits than the electorate? Is it relevant that those who exercise political journalism prioritize their sources of information differently from that of the citizenry? Is it simply an observation related to a greater intensity of use linked to the professional biases of the studied publics that have no greater qualitative importance? Or, on the contrary, can the very different pattern of information sources lead to the generation of very different frameworks of interpretation of reality, between "normal" voters and voters especially involved with the world of politics?

This research suggests that despite the rapid acceptance of the digital in the information world, it is possible that little journalism or campaigning is happening where the large public audiences actually are—i.e., on Facebook and WhatsApp. Even in the academic field, the social platforms preferred by the average voter are not sufficiently investigated. Undoubtedly, the study of infopolitics will have to be further investigated and future research needs to be done to assess if these tendencies are reaffirmed or refuted.

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