Political Communication in times of a New Political Culture

Comunicación Política en tiempos de Nueva Cultura Política
Comunicação política em tempos de nova cultura política

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Abstract

The process of globalisation and its clear communicative, cultural and political effects are greatly affecting two relatively new concepts in academic research, specifically Political Communication and Political Culture. The relationship between these concepts is increasingly interdependent as the tools and languages of Political Communication strongly influence the formation of the New Political Culture, and in turn, citizen activity through digital communication tools is conditioning the generation of content and the creation of discourse which take shape in the form of Political Communication.

We believe that to understand the reasons for this relationship it is necessary to establish, firstly, the characteristics of the New Political Culture, and secondly, the way in which the possibilities offered by technology transform the generation and transmission of Political Communication. Possibly the newest aspect of this relationship is that it has a two-way nature, altering the classical roles of the communication process that clearly distinguishes transmitters and receivers. This new aspect constitutes global evidence and is felt in a very similar way in all western representative democracies.

This work endeavours to describe and analyse this emerging scenario which has taken shape as another of the transformations which are occurring in advanced societies, and to identify some trends which, in all cases, are subject to the accelerated change of our time.

Key Words

Resumen

El proceso de globalización y sus manifiestos efectos comunicativos, culturales y políticos están afectando crucialmente a dos conceptos relativamente jóvenes en la investigación académica, en concreto, la Comunicación Política y la Cultura Política. La relación entre estos conceptos es cada vez más interdependiente pues las herramientas y los lenguajes de la Comunicación Política influyen decisivamente en la conformación de la Nueva Cultura Política y, a su vez, la actividad de la ciudadanía a través de las herramientas comunicativas digitales está condicionando la generación de contenidos y la creación de los discursos que toman cuerpo en forma de Comunicación Política.

Creemos que para entender las razones de esta relación es necesario establecer, por un lado, las características de la Nueva Cultura Política y, por la otra, la manera en que las posibilidades que ofrece la tecnología transforman la generación y la transmisión de la Comunicación Política. Posiblemente lo más novedoso de esta relación es que tiene carácter bidireccional, alterando los roles clásicos del proceso comunicativo que distinguía nítidamente entre emisores y receptores. Novedad que constituye una evidencia global y se deja sentir de manera muy similar en el conjunto de las democracias representativas occidentales.

Este trabajo se esfuerza en describir y analizar este escenario emergente que ha tomado cuerpo como otra de las transformaciones que están aconteciendo en las sociedades avanzadas, y en identificar algunas tendencias que, en todo caso, están sometidas al cambio vertiginoso propio de nuestro tiempo.

Palabras clave

Cultura Política; Desafección; Participación; Comunicación Política; Tecnologías Digitales; Lenguajes Comunicativos

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Resumo

O processo de globalização e os seus manifestos efeitos comunicativos, culturais e políticos estão a afetar crucialmente dois conceitos relativamente jovens na investigação académica, em concreto, a Comunicação Política e a Cultura Política. A relação entre estes conceitos é cada vez mais interdependente, pois as ferramentas e as linguagens da Comunicação Política influenciam decisivamente na formação da Nova Cultura Política e, por sua vez, a atividade da cidadania através das ferramentas comunicativas digitais está a condicionar a geração de conteúdos e a criação dos discursos que ganham forma como Comunicação Política.

Acreditamos que, para entender as razões desta relação, é necessário estabelecer, por um lado, as características da Nova Cultura Política e, por outro, a maneira como as possibilidades que oferece a tecnologia transformam a geração e a transmissão da Comunicação Política. Possivelmente a novidade desta relação é ter caráter bidirecional, alterando os papéis clássicos do processo comunicativo que distinguia nitidamente entre emissores e recetores. Novidade que consiste numa evidência global e que se deixa sentir de maneira muito semelhante no conjunto das democracias representativas ocidentais.

Este trabalho esforça-se por descrever e analisar este cenário emergente que ganhou corpo como outra das transformações que estão a acontecer nas sociedades avançadas, e em identificar algumas tendências que, em todo o caso, estão sujeitas à mudança vertiginosa própria do nosso tempo.

Palavras chave

1. Introduction

It has almost been forty years since the notion of political culture started to be used with certain regularity in studies focused on understanding how citizens establish their relationship with politics.

One of the precursors of the term, Lechner (1990; 1996), has analysed in several papers the path that studies on political culture have followed during these years and the different focal points of interest they have gradually tackled.

According to Lechner (1990), during a first phase, studies on political culture focused on citizens' attitudes, values and beliefs (Almond y Verba, 1989), to then, in a second phase, analyse the impact attributed to the globalisation of culture and communication in the configuration of the political culture (Castells, 2009).

The current phase, the third, is particularly complex as the convergence of two phenomena can be observed. First of all, the profound crisis of representative democratic systems (Castells, 2017), some of the causes of which we will analyse later. Secondly, the generalised penetration of communicative messages by means of available digital technological instruments, most particularly through the Internet (Chaves-Montero, 2017). Of course we are referring to communicative messages related to politics more or less explicitly.

Such that, today more than ever, political communication has gone on to play a strategic role in citizens' relationship with politics; i.e., in the formation of political culture, in how citizens perceive, value and judge politics. This is a phenomenon that affects all representative democracies in advanced societies and which decisively contributes to the crisis of traditional political culture or the old political culture (Jurado, 2015).

As was correctly pointed out by Gil Calvo (2018),

the crisis of today's democracy is a political problem for which we need to find out who the political culprits are; and we only have two types of agents who are

suspects: the political class and the media class. (...) On the one hand, hypothesis A, proposed by the authors who interpret the problem as a "mediatisation" of politics, where it is the "media" who occupy the independent variable as the "culprits" of causing the crisis of democracy. And on the other, hypothesis B, by those who attribute its cause to the "politicisation" of the media, in which case the independent variable is the "political class", which is ultimately responsible for the electioneering degradation of democracy (p. 218-219).

In the following lines we do not seek to position ourselves on one side or the other of the hypotheses proposed by Gil Calvo (2018). But we do want to contextualise and explain the way in which the "new political culture" and "political communication" are related, to try to understand the scope and consequences of this relationship

To this end, in the First Part of this article we will deal with the meaning of the "new political culture", its causes, and some of its expressions and consequences; while in the Second Part we will analyse how the new instruments and contents of "political communication" affect the questioning of the classical scenario in which the old political culture has existed.

First Part: The new political culture

2. Questioning traditional politics

The new political culture is the expression of the absence of social, cultural and ideological categories of political problems traditionally formulated in terms of left and right. This confirms the suspicions of different authors about the institutional reality of post-industrial societies (Touraine, 1971; Bell, 1994).

The new political culture also has differentiated elements with respect to the old structures of political action and representation of classical democratic systems. According to Clark and Inglehart (1998) among such differentiating elements we have the following:

- A high percentage of voters who do not currently identify with any political party.

- The emergence of political leaders who break away from the classical programmes established by their own parties.

- The distancing of citizens with respect to the official matters of public life.

- The negative feelings of part of the population towards politics, translated into signs of more or less exacerbated discontent (Ganuza and Font, 2018).

But what are the reasons for this evolution?

A first relevant reason has to do with the way in which citizens consume (Bauman, 2007) the political fact (audiovisual and digital production scenarios), which most often just reproduces the debate between political actors, a debate centred on grabbing headlines.

A second, equally relevant reason is related to citizens' disenchantment with politics, due to a large extent to the failure to fulfil the axioms on which trust in representative democratic systems rests.

According to Simone (2016), the "axioms of democracy" are those that the rights and freedoms of citizens in representative democracies are based on (jobs, healthcare, education, equality, freedom of speech), the protection of which is the responsibility of the political class.

The fact that the political discourses and practices that led to what is known as the "old political culture" stabilised around such axioms is why it has enjoyed a certain level of stability and acceptance for several decades. In fact, the degree of legitimacy of this old political culture had seen few variations during recent decades.

However, during a relatively short period of time, different causes have accelerated the questioning of traditional ways of understanding and practising politics, on the one hand, and of legitimising it, on the other. In order to understand this change of direction, we will mention two large issues which, as we see it, largely explain the crises of representative democracies caused by their questioning by increasingly broad and extensive sectors of the population:

- The economic and therefore social impact of globalisation and its consequences.

- The feeling that identity structures which are fairly consolidated in our society have of being under threat.

The economic and social impact of globalisation

Globalisation has ushered in a new stage that takes over from the hegemony of the industrial production system and which is characterised by an economy based on services, innovation and knowledge. An economy guided by finance capitalism and marked by "post-organisation" (Bell, 1994; Lash and Urry, 1998).

We are referring to an economy that is constantly influenced and affected by the advances and technological supremacy which, among other effects, has led to the "*loss of the centrality and stability of work as a central element of social structuring*" (Subirats, 2010).

An economy that has created rising inequality and has significantly increased the number of disadvantaged, marginalised and excluded people. An economy that is strongly rejected by a wide range of population sectors.

How can we admire or respect a way of doing things that has invented an economy-fiction based on financial engineering, which has created sophisticated bubbles of <economic ether> that have ruined so many millions of people while a few amassed millions of dollars of personal profit? (Gutiérrez Conde, 2018, p. 341-342).

Globalisation creates problems that states have been incapable of solving, among other reasons because the nature of such problems goes beyond territorial borders. Thus, many citizens have internalised a growing sensation of uncertainty and insecurity.

In turn, politicians in representative democracies have been shown to be incapable of assuaging these uncertainties. In fact, in many cases they aggravate them with apocalyptic language. In one or another scenario, from the perspective of citizens, the feeling of defencelessness is quite widespread.

Threatened identities

On the one hand, identities give meaning to life and, on the other, operate as refuges in the face of potential threats, whether they be imagined or real (Tajel, 1982). However, there is evidence that in complex societies the weakening of identities, or their fragmentation, is a regular phenomenon.

Today it is a fact that there is a very significant number of people and groups around us who feel that their identity is under threat. To a large extent this is due to different factors that could potentially erode these identities, be they political, ethnic, linguistic, professional or of another nature.

Related to the above, attitudes and behaviours of withdrawal and rejection in the face of imagined or real threats are on the rise. Good examples of this are the radicalisation of nationalist sentiment, religious fundamentalism or the rise in xenophobia.

Undoubtedly, the phenomenon of emigration is having a big impact on the spread of these types of attitudes and behaviours. It is evident that emigration, a threat for some, an opportunity for others, produces feelings of hostility and rejection among numerically and socially significant groups of people.

In this respect, Mounk (2018) states that

from the moment when this massive arrival of immigrants started in societies that defined themselves by a shared culture and ethnic origin, the tension between theory and practice became increasingly explosive. Thus, we probably should not be surprised that, in recent decades, support for a series of political forces radically opposed to immigration has risen so fast (p. 171).

Evidently, these feelings and behaviours are more visible among the population that coexists socially and spatially with the immigrant population, but they tend to spread to wider sectors of society due to the effect of discourses and accounts that they have found in the large variety of communication structures available in ground that is fertile for their large-scale dissemination.

3. How to identify a new political culture?

The new political culture has differentiated elements with respect to the old structures of political action and representation of classical democratic modernisation processes (Clark and Inglehart, 1998).

We are assisting a widespread process of pluralisation and de-emphasis (in the strong sense of the term) of the ways of experiencing our relationship with politics and political events. The pluralisation we refer to is based, in many cases, on interests that are more cultural than political, created by communities structured through networks and which, on many occasions, have little social visibility.

It could be said that this abandonment of the intense experience of the political fact has become widespread and also has a sentimental component. As pointed out by Innerarity (2018), "*There are disillusioned people everywhere and for very different, often contradictory reasons, on the right and left, those who are let down by the people or those who feel betrayed by the elites*" (p. 53).

Below we will provide a few indicators of this reality

The potential of social movements

Social movements (ecologists, pacifists, feminists, etc.) are gaining increasing protagonism. By means of mechanisms of collective action, they seek to strengthen democracy, decentralisation, respect for diversity and individual freedom.

In recent years, feminism is becoming particularly noteworthy. Feminism is the voice of one of the new dimensions of social life that wishes to be heard in order to have an acknowledged space in society. It installs itself in opposition to the order established for women by the dominant cultural system, defending the right to have a space of equality with respect to men, in which women have greater autonomy, greater social power and prestige (Bullén, 2017, p. 58)

Nor should we forget the mobilisations carried out by many young people that have crossed national borders and which have had a large impact in countries such as Spain. They indicate a movement that may not just be circumstantial and which may crystallise into a feeling/identity of a social group whose interests (access to public resources, for example) collide with those of other social groups (for example the demands of older, retired people).

Along these lines we should point out that a fairly widespread idea among many young people is that time and again they have to overcome barriers that severely impact their expectations and lives.

Young people face a wall that prevents them from building a future. The bricks that make up this wall are precariousness, a lack of opportunities or the absence of possibilities to become independent and build a home. Added to this are the ignorance, lack of interest (in the best of cases) or corruption (in the worst) of our public servants when seeking solutions (Politikon, 2017, p.12).

Disillusionment among citizens with politics

Everyone is aware of the high percentage of voters who currently do not identify with any political party and of the increasingly evident behaviour of candidates

and political leaders who break with the classical programs established by their own parties in an attempt to attract the interest of people who have withdrawn from politics.

In the opinion of Simón (2018), "*citizens turn their backs on political parties because the world has changed and they are no longer as relevant, or because the parties themselves, having been hollowed out of ideology, interest them less*" (p. 71). A trend that Simón (2018) himself has called "the bankruptcy of the party system" (p. 57).

The truth is that politics is perceived by many citizens as an activity beyond their concern, which leads to a withdrawal from conventional political activity (Mair, 2013). As pointed out by Innerarity (2018), "*the current political landscape is filled with a widespread disappointment that no longer refers to something specific but to a general situation*" (p. 9).

One of the reasons behind this withdrawal is that the lives of political actors are generally far removed from a large majority of citizens, with whom they have sporadic contact. It is a powerful process of privatisation of politics.

Those who believe they live at the forefront of politics, who are usually those who think they are writing history, are hardly ever generous and do not usually make the effort to explain the hidden driving force behind things (Del Olmo, 2018, p. 9).

Thus, professional politicians have been socialised in a closed ecosystem; they understand their function in a way that is excessively vertical and they internalise the notion that media projection is one of the keys to success. Thus, they are more concerned about their media impact (with or without content), something that has to do with simple propaganda and not with solving citizens' problems. The political agenda is the best expression of the gap between politics (politicians) and society (citizens).

The politics of emotions: populism

The relationship between politicians and citizens that we have just described has created a significant vacuum that populism is taking advantage of to offer a series of recipes that contain simple and rapid solutions for the problems of our time. But as is pointed out by Mounk (2018),

> the readiness of populist leaders to offer such simple solutions that have no chance of working is very dangerous. When they achieve power, their policies rather tend to exacerbate the very problems that caused the popular outrage that put them in government in the first place (p. 44).

It is the politics of emotions that is being practised with notable success by people and political parties.

Innerarity (2017) rightly refers to this emotional component with the term "*exasperated societies*" (p. 53). Citizens who feel vulnerable, gripped by a conveniently crafted fear of different types of threats, impatient about the lack of solutions to the problems they perceive.

Emotions and feelings override rational thought.

We have a collective landscape with the contagion and feedback of the chaotic effects of an anxious precariat, compulsive consumers, societies in maximum alert, hysterical markets, widespread threats and distrustful citizens (Innerarity, 2017, p. 60).

Logical thought is pitched against emotional situations. As is rightly pointed out by Del Olmo (2018), "*the limits of reason are far from being a new discovery, and the importance of emotions has expanded post-modern politics from the boundaries of governments to those of the opposition*" (p. 108).

But in fact, rationality and bureaucratisation draw old politics away from the solutions that are demanded from it. Conventional politics is incapable of ade-

quately moving through that geography of emotions (Del Olmo, 2018), entirely the opposite to the populist proposals.

The emotional component is a core reason behind the rise of populism. As pointed out by Lassalle (2017),

> in order to understand the populist process we have to explore the emotional structure of Western societies and the collapse of the Enlightenment. (...) It is about demolishing –through the use of successive wrecking balls- the liberal architecture and democracy that arose from the 18th century (p.17-18).

The growth and expansion of the populist phenomenon is understood better if we consider the technological factor, as social networks have become a regular, and sometimes crucial, playing field for political action. Thus, as we are going to argue in the Second Part of this article, as regards the expansion of this geography of emotions, technology at the service of political communication plays a decisive role, even transforming the concept itself of *Political Communication*.

Second Part: Political Communication

4. The sophistication of Political Communication

Political communication is a task focused on the creation of beliefs and opinions on political matters. In this sense, the main recipients of political communication are citizens and the main issuers of information are the politicians themselves.

However, what characterises the current stage of political communication is that citizens are transformed into an active and critical agent that uses technology as an element to make political decisions, as opposed to models where direct participation was only so in appearance (Blumler and Kavanagh, 2000).

Continuing with Blumler and Kavanagh (2000), the first stage of political communication -started after the end of World War II- had been characterised by the subordination of a large part of the communication to stable and strong values and

political institutions, while during the second stage, an increasingly professional-ised political communication had adapted its content to the television format in order to seduce an electorate whose opinion could be variable.

On the other hand, during the third stage -characterised by an overabundance of information- Blumler and Kavanagh (2000) identify five trends that have been gradually consolidated:

- A greater need for professionalisation.

- Increased skills.

- The emergence of anti-elite populism.

- Centrifugal diversification.

- Changes in the ways people perceive politics.

This third stage we are referring to has essentially been influenced by the appearance of the so-called Web 2.0, which has brought the creation of a new public sphere of citizen participation. For example, this has led to instant mobilisations around specific political events that make demands or protest and which Rheingold (2004) defines with the term "smart mobs".

Likewise, during this stage, the use of new technologies has contributed towards the development of the ideal of the Open Government model, understood as a horizontal model of communication (Calderón, 2011) or, if one prefers, a conversation between institutions and citizens on political matters, which is a sign of good health of democratic culture (Warner, Turner and Hawthorne, 2013).

However, several shadows are cast over the use of new technologies in political communication. We will list some of them:

- The fear of criticism and the desire to control political communication by the issuers (Macnamara, Safinofsky and Beattie, 2012).

- Low participation in many of the new channels created, particularly on social networks, which means that the problems of mobilising the disenchanted electorate do not seem to have been solved (Warner, Turner and Hawthorne, 2013).

- The suspicion that a growing exposure to these types of communication mechanisms does not guarantee a higher participation of citizens in politics (Tuviera-Puigbó, 2009).

- The difficulty of much of the political class to harness the language of digital communication mechanisms, and the persistence of the language used in audiovisual media such as television (Del Rey, 2012).

- The rejection of many politicians of the new communication channels, either because of a generation gap or because of scepticism about the benefits of using these technological devices (Ureña, 2011).

In short, although social networks make it easier to have direct contact, give participants visibility, encourage debate or even alert about possible conflicts, the political class makes a rather token use of them and only in some cases are active and permanent political communication strategies designed using these mechanisms (Túnez and Sixto, 2011).

Within the framework of this ambivalent contribution of the new digital systems to political communication, Ainsworth, Hardy and Harley (2005) highlight the three positions that can be observed in relation to the benefits and limits of the use of these technologies in political communication:

- Those who value the democratic potential of using the Internet, mainly because it facilitates the participation of a wide variety of sectors, including sectors traditionally excluded from political dialogue.

- Those who highlight the discrimination brought about by its use, derived from situations of gender, class or race.

- Those who make the potential and benefits of the Internet depend on the behaviour of users, in particular in terms of community and social responsibility.

5. The risks of Political Communication today

We have already established that the use of digital technology is transforming the way in which information is produced, distributed and received (Boczkowski and Anderson, 2017). This transformation is also influencing the political behaviour of citizens, but what is not yet clear is whether it contributes towards higher participation (Prior, 2007). That is, the higher number of news articles and communications in circulation and the possibilities of mainstream entertainment do not necessarily lead to increased critical participation.

The above has a lot to do with the fact that, paradoxically, this multiplication of channels and information content can increase the risk of disinformation among citizens. This is mainly due to two reasons:

- A larger volume of information does not necessarily lead to a more well-informed population (Kampen and Snijkers, 2003).

- The higher number of users and actors present in digital channels has been accompanied by a series of interested practices that are not governed by informative criteria such as veracity.

There are many examples of what has become known as "fake news", particularly the evidence of what happened during the campaign after which Donald Trump was elected president (Alcot and Gentzkow, 2017; Guess, Nihan and Reifler, 2018) or the Brexit referendum (Bastos and Mercea, 2017).

According to the Digital News Report (2018), the manipulation of journalistic information to serve certain political or economic interests is the main source of concern for users (77%). These same users consider that the news media and journalists are the ones who should safeguard the veracity of news articles (84%), also attributing a large portion of the responsibility to technology companies (79%) and governments (72%) (Amoedo, Vara and Negredo, 2018).

Along with the risk of disinformation or inaccurate information, the third stage of political communication must also face the risk of the lack of pluralism, either due to the "control" over social networks exerted by certain groups of users who share ideas and visions of reality (Sunstein, 2017) or because of the difficulty for some groups to access these digital platforms adequately (Bakshy, Messing and Adamic, 2015).

Hermes (2006) concludes that the use of new technologies focused on political communication is not achieving large-scale communication between large groups of people but that it tends to create closed, small communities.

6. Digital technologies and horizontal dialogue

A different and complementary perspective to that presented in the above section highlights the contribution of digital technologies to the fostering of horizontal dialogue. Del Olmo (2018) rightly points out this paradox:

On the one hand, the Internet multiplies the possibilities of confusion and requires much more skills for citizens to distinguish between real and fake content. (…) On the other, the reorganisation of public conversation, the alteration of the communication format, destroys the order of power. Power requires that communication only flow in one direction, from the top down. And today, with the appearance of social networks and the crisis of representation, we are no longer mere passive recipients and consumers of information. (p. 175-181).

As a result, during a period in which increasing distrust among citizens with respect to politics is a fact, the possibilities offered by technology to expand political communication and increase citizen participation is one of the aspects that analysts and researchers are most interested in (Kampen and Snijkers, 2003; Rheingold, 2004).

What is relevant about this potential capacity is that a political culture that can be built by means of digital media cannot be understood exclusively in technological terms; i.e., it is not just about access to information through new channels; it is about something much more profound.

What we are suggesting is that the potential capacity of digital media applied to political communication is a cultural phenomenon to the extent that audiences and users play a more dynamic role. That is, audiences and users feel capable of, and motivated to, create and publish content (Lewis, 2012).

What we wish to highlight is this ability of digital media to open up two-way dialogues, based on the dynamic activity of citizens, which can increase participation and even play an accelerating role in the transformation of representative democracies (Papacharissi, 2010). It is true that all this must take place in a scenario where political communication is currently, more than ever, a clear exponent of immediacy that is almost always coloured by emotion. Immediacy and emotion are also key words in the logic of contemporary communication.

However, although the media have traditionally been the mediators between the leaders and the public and have been the epicentre of public debate (Monzón, 1996), they have currently lost the exclusivity and capacity to monopolise this debate.

This has allowed new actors, such as political parties themselves and institutions, to open up new spaces where they demand a presence of their own, though the success of what Tuñez and Sixto (2011) call a "commitment 2.0" does not only depend on their attitudes, but also on the uses that citizens make of these opportunities.

Existing studies show a greater correspondence between the use of digital technologies and participation in public matters, particularly among young people (Arriagada and Schuster, 2011), which offers the possibility of promoting new civic practices that defy the traditional concept of participative democracy (Scherman, Arriagada and Valenzuela, 2012, p. 184).

In other words, although it seems that the use of social networks has a smaller impact than that of traditional media on the predisposition to vote -for which it rather acts as a reinforcement-, it can be stated that its more positive effects come from the multidirectional interactions that promote political participation beyond the simple exercise of voting (Navia and Ulriksen, 2017, p. 83).

Conclusions

This article does not seek to go beyond the limits established. Thus, we have provided a series of reflections, evidence and trends that offer ample proof that the current processes of change and social and technological transformation are transforming the mechanisms that shape political culture and the formats and contents of political communication.

A different matter is whether we are in a position to add to the above an empirical addendum where we can contrast some of the intuitions that this paper suggests. What we can say is that we are immersed in a solid process of contrasting and verification through a virtual community that we have been monitoring for several months. But we cannot yet put forward reliable results.

What we can say is that any empirical study that attempts to understand the consequences of the new forms of political communication within the scenario opened by the new political culture must propose a segmentation of the population that is different to and more complex than those that have been used traditionally.

We understand that the appropriate approach to understand the effects of contemporary forms of political communication in the type of relationship that citizens establish with politics must rely on a specific application of classical theories on attitudes, with a particular focus on the relationship between beliefs, emotions and behaviours

We believe that only in light of a segmentation that takes into consideration these three factors can we achieve a more accurate understanding of the influence that the new forms of political communication are having on the positions of citizens regarding political events.

Meanwhile, what we are in a position to reaffirm is the intense relationship and interaction between political communication and political culture, two increasingly linked concepts. On the basis of this certainty we would like to finally highlight, as a summary, the three most visible signs of this link, and with it the keys that help to pinpoint and understand it.

►The complex relationship between communication and politics

The evolution and expansion of digital technologies and therefore of the media at the service of political communication, are creating a complex and influential scenario for the shaping of political culture. Conventional media from before the expansion of digital technologies that spread information in a unidirectional and vertical way, coexist with and are complementary to new informative alternatives and communication languages. That is, these channels and languages are significantly influencing the <cognitive dimension> of political culture, at a time when, in addition, virtual content can have even more credibility than reality itself.

►Communication and politics need each other

The necessary relationship between communication and politics is comprehended by understanding the behaviours and attitudes of three different agents:

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- Political actors use and abuse the analogue and digital media universe to spread their messages and channel their political and electoral marketing strategies, "*in this continual campaign we currently live i*n" (Gil Calvo, 2018, p. 199).

- The communication media have the ability to give the messages sent out by politics visibility, or not; to support them or criticise them. Therefore, the media have an active role in the forming of public opinion and in the development of the political process (Eilders, 2000), i.e., in the shaping of political culture.

- Citizens as a whole, be it in their more passive (spectators) or active (actors) roles, find in this media universe their main informative sustenance on political matters. Citizens require the media to follow public matters, collect information on topics and opinions, inform themselves, form opinions and participate in the political process (Eilders, 2000).

►Communication and politics: new roles for citizens

Taking advantage of the possibilities that technological innovation offers for horizontal dialogue, we are witnessing a certain degree of social mobilisation represented in "digital activism" (Morozov, 2017).

This digital activism has opened up new scenarios of participation in the public sphere, where the immediacy of information (truthful or fictitious), the facilities for interaction and the collective speed to publish opinions, have revealed the fragility of the traditional political panorama, giving way to a new political culture that is now structured on the foundations of low trust in institutions and political apathy.

Within this context, the new communication channels and languages are being considered as one of the main culprits of the negative attitudes of citizens towards the political system (Jorge and Miró, 2011).

As a result, by redefining and expanding the channels of political communication, the roles of issuer and recipient have been reconfigured. There are an increasing number of active recipients who become issuers of information and political opinion.

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