Chapter 6
Political Participation in Mexico Offline and Through Twitter

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ABSTRACT

We used survey data and collected data from the online social network Twitter between October 5, 2015 to November 9, 2015 to provide an overview related to political participation in Mexico. With the former we provided a qualitative assessment of participation by examining electoral participation, participation between regions, interest in politics and sources of political information. With Twitter data, we described the intensity of participation, we identified locations of high activity and identified movements including agencies behind them. We compare and contrast participation in Mexico to its counterpart in Twitter. We show that participation seems to be decreasing. However, participation through Twitter seems to be increasing. Our research points towards the emergence of Twitter as a significant platform in terms of political participation in Mexico. Our study analyses the impact of how different agencies related to social movements can enhance participation through Twitter. We show that emergent topics are important because they could help to explore how politics becomes of public interest.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-2495-3.ch006
INTRODUCTION

Academics generally agree that political participation is quintessential for democracy. Not only does political participation serve as the main conduit with which the public expresses their opinion, but it also establishes an important link between the public, the state and its institutions. In spite of its importance, there is a view amongst researchers suggesting that political participation has decreased in recent decades. The lack of participation is visible through the decrease in turnout during election periods, the growth of negative sentiments towards politicians and their parties, and the decline in engagement in civic associations (Norris 2002).

Even if political participation seems to be decreasing, the emergence of new agencies, such as online social networking sites, pose the possibility that political participation is shifting away from traditional practices and moving towards online ones. In fact, as the use of online social networks has become mainstream, their role as agents for social change has increased (Gonzales–Bailon, Borge-Holthoefer J., Rivero, A. & Moreno Y., 2011). The use of online social networks in events ranging from the spread of political news to election campaigns and protests has demonstrated their importance in the context of fomenting social change.

The growing importance of online social networks as a catalyst of social change has sparked an increasing interest in studying them. Studies increasingly use online crawling of social networks for data collection. Mining social signals from online social networks provides quick knowledge of real-world events (Roy & Zeng, 2014). In fact, areas of social network analysis are now expanding to different disciplines, not only in data mining studies, but also in computational social science; i.e., user behavior. Thus, the availability of unprecedented amounts of data about human interactions from different social networks opens the possibility of using this information to leverage knowledge about the diversity of social behavior and the activity of individuals (Weng, Flammini, Vespignani, & Menczer, 2012; Lu & Brelsford, 2014; Thapen & Ghanem, 2013; Piña-García, Gershenson, & Siqueiros-García, 2016; Piña-García & Gu, 2013). In particular, the focus of social data analysis is essentially the content that is being produced by users. The data produced in social networks is rich, diverse and abundant, which makes them a relevant source for data science (Ferrara, De Meo, Fiumara, & Baumgartner, 2014; Weikum et al., 2011).

Twitter is one of the most studied online social networks. This social media platform provides an efficient and effective communication medium for one-on-one interactions and broadcast calls (e.g., for assistance or dissemination and access to useful information). In Twitter users post messages that are limited to 140 characters known as tweets. In addition to this, users can follow other accounts they find
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