

THE HASHTAG AS A TOOL TO SET UP A GOVERNMENTAL AGENDA

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DOI: 10.24989/ocg.v335.30

Abstract

ICTs are accelerators and amplifiers of change. They are redefining how we interact with each other and the world around us, a specific application is social media, which facilitate real-time communications, data exchange and immediate feedback by institutions to stakeholders and vice-versa. In order to apply the principle of inclusiveness, the current Ecuadorian administration, with 18 months in the power, has adopted the slogan "the government of all" to spread their activities through the public administration institutions. One of its main communication channels is social media through the microblogging platform of Twitter. Where public institutions and political leaders are sharing their daily activities through posts, videos, images and so on.

The main purpose of this paper is to identify in Twitter during the period of 30 days (October 2018) how often is used the hashtag #ElGobiernoDeTodos (translation, The government of All) for which Ecuadorian institutions, in what contexts, and in what type of themes. As well as recognize if there are persistent themes into the analyzed posts to assume whether there is an agenda through that or it is just an individual effort from every institution to fulfill their communications need for sharing information.

Keywords: hashtag, social media, Twitter

1. Introduction

The accelerated increase of the Internet's users has generated more and diverse analysis about whether and how digital platforms as Social Media networks, have any impact in the political sphere. The role of the Internet and communication technologies (ICT) in modern society cannot be understated. Individuals and institutions around the world are trying to increase public engagement by utilizing Web 2.0, Bertot et al., 2010; Lorenzi et al., 2014 (cited Yaqub et al., 2017). This provides a quick and cost-effective platform to political actors and state institutions to communicate quickly and directly with the public, Heverin & Zach, 2010 (cited Yaqub et al., 2017).

Ecuador is part of the Ibero-American Charter² on Electronic Government (2007), in which "Electronic Government" and "Electronic Administration" are understood as synonyms to define the use of ICT in the Public Administration system to improve the information and services offered to citizens, guide the effectiveness and efficiency of public management and increase transparency of

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² The charter embraces the commitments made in the Johannesburg declaration and plan of action, the Monterrey Consensus and the Geneva Declaration of Principles, the Ibero-American Code of Good Governance and the relevant resolutions of other Summits, especially with regard to the Millennium Development Goals.

the public sector and citizen participation, the last point is relevant in the sense, the electronic services shall be focused on the citizens' rights.

The improvements of the technological infrastructure, accessibility, the development of the Electronic Government Plan³ and the execution of public policy in this regard, the communication through online platforms have become an integral part of public discourse and communication in the contemporary Ecuadorian society. In this context, it is imperative to highlight the fast use and development of social media, which has caused major changes pertaining the way people find groups of individuals with similar interests, the nature of information, the available news sources, or the possibility to require and share ideas (Stieglitz, Dang-Xuan, 2012). With the increasing relevance of communication through social media comes a change in the way the public administration exercise their public communication. Public institution, politicians, representatives from the civil society, citizens and other actors communicate and make visible their activities, opinions, and claims into social media, which has become a tool for all those groups in their political communication strategies. Specifically, for this case study, the inputs are through Twitter.

The total population of Ecuador is 16,714,929 inhabitants, from them the 50.75% have activated cellphone: from which the 26.83% have a smartphone and the 25.28% use social media networks. According to the data of the Institute of Statistics and Census of Ecuador more than one million people have a twitter account which represent the 8.5% of the population and the 20.4% of the incidence into the twitter users group.

All institutions into the Ecuadorian Public Administration have a social media accounts, most of them are Twitter accounts which can be used as an active or as a sporadic communication tool, depending on each communication strategy. The Executive Function has 22 institutions (ministries, secretaries, etc.) plus the presidency and vice presidency. The Legislative Function has the National Assembly. The Judiciary Function is made of four institutions. The Electoral Function have two institutions. The Transparency Function is composing by eight institutions and 20 Public Enterprises.

Although digital communication is institutionalized in the Latin American public sector, it has not reached all its potential for interaction in social media networks. Politicians and entities do not use at all social networks to interact with citizens, but more as unidirectional diffusion channel. They do not necessarily touch the issues that citizens demand, and only one in ten mayors' responds to the citizen through Twitter. (Riorda & Valenti, 2015).

The 85.4 percent of Latin American public entities⁴ have a Twitter account. In the case of Ecuador, the public institutions have started to open their Twitter's account since 2009. As the case of The Secretary of Communication and the National Assembly. In 2010-2011 were opened the Presidency account and the main ministries accounts from the Executive function, and so on in the case of the other public institutions. The representatives of each ministry, some deputies from the National Assembly and other political actors have their own twitter's account as well.

³ Currently the Ministry of Telecommunications is following the precepts of the E-Government National Plan 2018-2021

⁴ This research led by the Inter-American Development Bank about the profile of the Latin American Governor User includes an analysis of 407 social network accounts that include governors and subnational public entities of 61 Latin American cities.

Another issue to understand and take into consideration is the transfer of what is considered or seen as public, understood as a place for sharing and exchanging debates, which is not anymore just the public squares or the traditional media communications *"the sum of these structural and cultural changes is often referred to as a shift from a mass-mediated public sphere to a networked public sphere"* (Kersey, 2011).

Politicians around the world are sharing and announcing their public policies, political decisions, intended activities and so on in Twitter, their information is taken by their followers but also for the mass media communication to spread it to the other segments of the population, who do not have access or participation into social media channels. It does not mean, the social media channels replace the traditional media as such it is just a newly opened space for informing and getting in touch with people, in an immediate and direct manner. Jenkins exposes in his book 'Convergence Culture' that we 'are facing a cultural change that he calls the culture of convergence *"where old and new media collide (...) where popular media intersect with corporate media, where the power of the media producer and consumer interact each other in unpredictable ways"* [Jenkins 2006, p.14]. Likewise, the author suggests that convergence occurs individually in each participant and in social interaction with others at the same time. In this convergence culture arises new forms of community defined by voluntary, temporary and tactical affiliations, reaffirmed by virtue of intellectual enterprises and common emotional investments. Members can change groups when their interests and needs vary and can belong to more than one community at the time. These communities, however, remain united through mutual production and reciprocal exchange of knowledge. [Jenkins 2006, p. 37]

This environment of shared knowledge or collective intelligence, as the author calls it, on the part of the communities in social networks is related to discussions, debates, and points of view around an event, topic, service, political conjuncture and even errors by organizations. This generation of knowledge is generating an alternative source of power to these people that, when it is used in an organized way, could have an impact on the daily life of people and organizations, not only digitally but also in the physical reality. The difference between both media types can be identified in terms of time and closeness, in this context, a tweet can be sent and received in real time without intermediary, this last role was performed mostly by the mass media communication enterprises just two decades ago, currently they still play this role but not as the main character anymore.

The current Ecuadorian government has started its activities in May 2017. In September was created the slogan #ElGobiernoDeTodos (The Government of all) with the purpose to highlight a dialogue policy where all the civil society groups could fit and express their ideas for continuing the decision making process. Why is relevant this hashtag? It is because, the previous Ecuadorian administration used to create emotional and patriotic slogans with a certain populist approach, some examples of that: *La patria ya es de todos* (The homeland is already of all), *Avanzamos patria* (We advance homeland), *La patria vuelve* (The homeland returns). Those slogans were diffused in all the governmental political campaigns through of traditional and mass media communication platforms, the institution into the public administration was aligned to use and reproduce those slogans in their communicational products and channels to get in touch with the citizens.

After a month of the launched slogan, the aim of this study is to what extend there is an active participation of the Ecuadorian Public Institutions in Twitter, during the period of 30 days (October

2018), through the hashtag⁵ #ElGobiernoDeTodos (translated means the government of all) which is the slogan of the current Ecuadorian government, and it is used in all the communicational campaigns. As well as identify the positive or negative sentiment into the messages.

2. Methodology

The study units are all the tweets posted into the hashtag #ElGobiernoDeTodos (government of all) during the time period from October 1-October 31, 2018. For tracking the tweets was used the Keyhole tool which gives some structured categories as date, user, number of comments, number of retweets, number favorites and the text message. The other part of the categorization process was made manually to classify the data into themes and tweet's sentiment analysis.

For the specific activity of sentiment analysis was used the tool: SentiStrength, an algorithm, which provides two values per each text analyzed: one measures the intensity of the positive feeling and the other the intensity of the negative feeling, based in a given sentiment corpora data set in Spanish. Also called polarity. Both indexes vary from 1 to 5. Positive sentiment strength ranges from 1 (not positive) to 5 (extremely positive) and negative sentiment strength from -1 (not negative) to -5 (extremely negative). This double measure corresponds to the presence of different emotions combined in the same expression, which is suggested by empirical studies in the field of psychology. Berrios, Totterdell, and Kellett (2015 cited by Baviera, 2016)

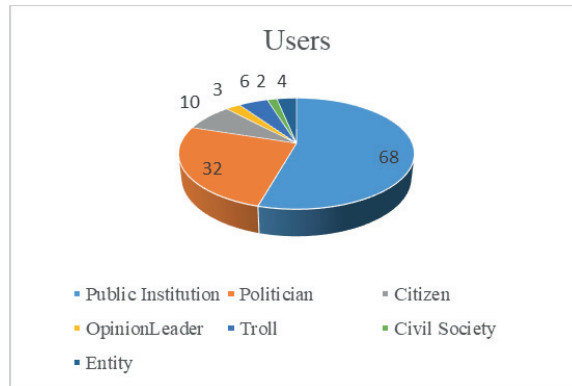
3. Findings

Into the hashtag #ElGobiernoDeTodos (The Government of All) during the time period from October 1-October 31, 2018 was posted a total of 125 tweets from 68 different users (Table 1) the 54% of the users correspond to Public Institutions followed by the politicians with the 25.6%. In average, there are 9.8 comments per tweet, but the tweets with more than 300 comments are from the messages written by the President of Ecuador, i.e. there some tweet without any comment. (Graphic 1).

General Results	
# of Posts	125
#Users	68
Comments	1.237
Retweets	10.104
Favorites	8.949

Table 1.
Source: Own Elaboration

⁵ According to Twitter a hashtag, written with a # symbol, is used to index keywords or topics on Twitter. This function was created on Twitter and allows people to easily follow topics they are interested in. Hashtags can be included anywhere in a Tweet. Hashtagged words that become very popular are often Trending Topics.



Graphic 1.
Source: Own Elaboration

The data was analyzed by tweet groups according to certain categories to simplify the understanding of their content since every tweet has a different topic and focus. The main identified themes were regards to general messages (27), activities done by the institutions or through their representatives or team members (26), informal, protocol and work meetings (17) and general comments about public affairs (14). (Table 2)

Themes	
Activity	26
Agreement	3
Comment	14
National Dialogue	3
Event	9
Infrastructure	6
Meeting	17
Message	27
News	9
Quotation	8
Story	1
Summary Report	2
Total	125

Table 2.
Source: Own Elaboration

As a result of the Sentimental Analysis of the 125 tweets; 61 tweets are not positive/not negative which means they are neutral. 17 tweets are positive/not negative which means they are purely positive messages. 9 tweets are extremely positive/not negative. (Table 3)

governmental agenda or strategy in the use of this hashtag, not just for the number of tweets and interactions but for the number of public institutions, no more than 30 including regional and local government level, who are participating in this period of time. All institutions produce content month by month but they do not use this hashtag for positioning the political slogan often.

According to the results of the sentiment analysis, the hashtag #ElGobiernoDeTodos has a neutral environment, more than the 50% of the publications in there not have any positive or negative connotation, which means the created hashtag keeps an informative line mostly about the daily activities or projects done by the institutions and the politicians, i.e. the confirmation about the public institutions use Twitter as unidirectional communication channel, which can be supported by the number of comments per tweet, which are not more than 9.8 in the best case with the exception of the President activities.

The short time period analysis could not reflect a deep understanding of the hashtag use because the slim segment of impact but it identifies the low level of engagement by the public institutions after a year of the launched hashtag. The slogan itself is a speech strategy to call the action of inclusion and collaboration from the society to the current government administration, nevertheless as a tool for social media channels does not have enough use and impulse by the time in the long term.

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