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Compared and longitudinal study about the use of social networks in parliaments of America and Europe (2010-2017)

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Abstract

Introduction: The article analyses how parliaments use social media through the study of the representative chambers of Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, United States, Spain, France, Italy, United Kingdom and Sweden. **Methodology:** Using a content analysis method developed in 2010, 2015 and 2017, the text presents the evolution and the paths of the social media use of the selected parliaments. **Results and conclusions:** Results show a progression in the informative parliamentary use of social media, but they highlight few advances in the creation of deliberative or participative arenas in social platforms. The paper identifies parliamentary actions oriented to integrate the changing media ecosystem, linked to social media, but the institutional intention is limited to the presence and the impact inside the media framework, more than in the promotion of the social media mediated participation.

Keywords

Social media; Parliaments; Information; Deliberation; Participation; Democracy.

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1. Introduction

It is not chance that social networks hoard the attention of parliaments as a way to encourage new informative spaces, of democratic participation and as a tool to approach politics to the citizen. Initially, a possible solution to the distance of the individual towards political processes is suggested (Anduiza *et al*, 2014; Bennett, 2008; Casero-Ripollés and Feestra, 2012; Putnam, 2002). At the same time, the parliament can re-think its communicative positioning strategy from the concept of “Two-way street mediatization” (Feenstra *et al*, 2016) through the use of social networks as point of information and direct interaction with citizens.

At the same time, the current flows of communication guided by immediacy (Bauman and Bordoni, 2016) and the network society (Castells, 2005), the increase in the demand of information (Forte, 2015) and the constant capacity of interaction that information technologies and communication entail (Tufté and Hemer, 2016) demand to the institutions of the State to open processes so that levels of transparency and accountability required by democratic political systems can be reached (Levy, 2002; Costa-Badía and Giraldo-Luque, 2013).

The definition of the use of Internet from public institutions with the purpose of promoting participation of citizens in decision making has been reflected in the structure of participation axes (Aichholzer and Kuzeluh, 2008; Macintosh, 2004; ONU, 2016; Vedel, 2007) which try to translate the possibilities platforms and architecture of information in Internet offer to improve or guarantee the flow of information of public interest, construction of dialogue spaces and the configuration of decision scenarios.

The paper performs a compared analysis, with three years of observation (2010, 2015 and 2017), of the use of social networks by parliaments of ten countries of America and Europe. The text, from the political action axes suggested by Vedel (2003 and 2007) —inform, deliberate and decide— updates the measurements of the previous years (2010 and 2015) with results of 2017 and makes a balance about the reach, as well as the type of use of social media by public institutions.

2. Theoretical framework: social networks. So close and so far away of participation

Social networks – online platforms that exponentially integrated inside the daily routines of millions of users – have been defined as services based in web applications that allow the user to create a public or semipublic profile within a delimited system of interaction (Boyd and Ellison, 2008). Different

studies have highlighted the use of networks by users and have identified (Bulut and Doğan, 2017) seven main motivations. Baek et al (2011) indicate that the most noticeable use of social networks is about processes related to the flow of information, while entertainment is positioned in second place (Alhabash *et al*, 2012; Ruano et al, 2016). In third place, its communicative function has been identified (Pempek *et al*, 2009; Bulut and Doğan, 2017) and, linked thereto, the fourth intention, related to the contents creation process (Chung *et al*, 2016). The socialization and looking for a social status have been identified by Martínez and Ferraz (2016) as a fifth motivation, and Sharma and Verba (2015) suggest the construction of relationships associated to specific motivations (such as social acceptance, expression, creation of identity) as the sixth reason for the use of networks. Lastly, Bulut and Doğan (2017) indicate the use of social networks linked to the business or labor world.

Even though the intention of politically participating is not catalogued as one of the main motivations of social networks use, different authors (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012; Castells, 2012; Della-Porta, 2015; Salzman, 2016) have indicated its importance within the current political game, mostly from the protest movements produced in the second decade of the XXI century.

The use of social networks as promotion tool of participation establishes two positioning lines among those who trust in its individualized or collective capacity of expression as a vehicle for social change (Anduiza *et al*, 2014; Castells, 2012; Tufte & Hemer, 2016;), and those who analyze social networks as communication tools focused on egocentrism and popularity of a specific user (Marwick, 2013; Zizek, 2010), without talking about substantive issues in its platforms and perform consensual agreements about themes of public interest (Caro, 2015). Calvo and Campos-Domínguez (2016) also introduce different contradictions between the commercial interests of networks and the transparent character a political conversation in the network must have, an idea exposed, besides, by Fuchs (2014) and Giraldo-Luque (2015).

Moreover, social networks add to the infinite universe of information offered by Internet, a scenario that feeds the space of the ephemeral, or liquid (Bauman and Bordoni, 2016), because the constant and fast production of messages from different senders causes an informative oversaturation (Forte, 2015; Sunstein, 2017). Another of the arguments of the critical sector refers to algorithmic systems that limit the possibility of knowledge, diversity and browsing in the net. Pariser (2011) argues that the trend to offer a personalized service establishes a closed system of announcements and information that may limit users' participation and interaction. Experiments in social networks performed by Bond et al (2012), Coviello *et al* (2014) and Jones et al (2017) tend to confirm the possibilities that platforms manipulate information and act as any other media, within the framework of communicative action of the XXI century (Alonso-Muñoz and Casero-Ripollés, 2016).

Social networks, from a more optimistic perspective, have been identified as a space from which a part of deliberation is conducted and as a good part of the activism of contemporary political movements (Anduiza, 2014; Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Castells, 2012; Fuchs, 2014; Lindgren and Lundström, 2011).

However, Fuchs (2014) suggest two relevant obstacles. On one hand, the stratification or the digital gap, one of the main problems the concept of mediatic alphabetization tries to solve (Celot and Pérez

Tornero, 2009). On the other hand, Fuchs introduces the concept of “asymmetry of the power of visibility” (2014: 190), determined by the capacity of incidence a user may have on social media.

The same as Fuchs, Van Dijk (2011) remarks that the impact of social networks feed an imagery that identifies them as spaces with mechanisms and functions that would allow building a new public sphere sustained on democracy, collectivity and participation. However, the optimistic notion is criticized when analyzing the mix between public values (participation, communication, democracy, popularity), legal concepts (privacy, intellectual property, trust) and economic instruments (business models, creation of value) present in the configuration of social networks. For Van Dijk (2011) social networks are spaces where multiple interests —private, public and corporate— compete for controlling the rules of social interaction. Social networks stop being free spaces for debate and negotiation of opinions and ideas moving away the vision of constituting as places free from commercial and political interests.

Van Dijk (2011) defines social networks as communication tools that formalize and subscribe a discourse pre-existing in the public sphere, while the distance between the increase of technological complexity of platforms and the knowledge of users grows. Social networks are a product of cultures mediated by commercial strategies that define the respective guidelines of socialization and connectivity (Van Dijk, 2011).

Page (2012) has demonstrated that publications carried out in social networks regarding specific issues or agendas tend to centralize the theme itself instead of generating a debate about them. Although authors such as Rosales (2016) acknowledge that networks facilitate participation and integration of different publics to the scheduled themes.

Other studies have also indicated that messages about social or political contents in social networks, from a specific case or a determined and controlled exercise of expression, tend to be almost nonexistent considering that users prefer to comment other kind of issues related to entertainment (Fuchs, 2014; Torrego and Gutiérrez, 2016), although it was analyzed how citizens used social networks to communicate public and massively events such as 15M in Spain (Hernández et al, 2013), the egyptian revolution (Eltantawy and Wiest, 2011) or Tunisia protests (Hermida *et al*, 2014).

Other critical versions about the use of social media in these mobilizations (Lynch *et al*, 2017) have demonstrated, however, how social networks increase social tension when the polarization in the mediatic discourse increases, or how they need a traditional mediatization of protest to achieve a real impact in the public opinion (Casero-Ripollés et al, 2016).

3. Methodology

The article presents a longitudinal research including contents analysis to study the use of social networks in five American (Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador and United States) and in five European countries (Spain, France, Italy, Sweden and United Kingdom) in three specific years: 2010, 2015 and 2017. In each one of the countries the chambers comprising the parliament were analyzed as well as the social networks linked to their official websites from three categories of analysis: inform, deliberate and decide (Macintosh, 2004; Vedel, 2007; Aichholzer and Kuzeluh, 2009; ONU, 2016).

The comparison between the three years of study allows to analyze the evolution in each one of the categories proposed.

The research sample can be justified from the previous researches of Welp (2011) and Perna and Braga (2011) for the Latin America's case, and the comparative intention with the European parliamentary models resumes Steiner et al's work (2004). The sample size continues the trend of studies of similar characteristics (Oni *et al*, 2016; Coleman, 2004; Setälä and Grönlund, 2006), in which there is the attempt to delve into every case analyzed. Although Steiner et al's (2004) study suggest limitations in the comparisons made in differentiated political systems, studies of Setälä and Grönlund (2006), Welp (2011), Oni et al (2016) and Bernardes and Bandeira (2016) demonstrate similar behaviors among the websites analyzed despite of the political system or the democratic tradition of studied countries.

The content analysis to explore parliament's websites has been used in previous studies in different political systems and, in general, with small samples between 2 and 10 objects that allow to delve in observations selected (Oni *et al*, 2016).

Table 1. Table of categories and analysis units			
Category	Inform	Deliberate	Decide
Context unit	Presence/Informative use	Deliberative use	Decision making use
Analysis unit	A. Presence in the social network	A. Open, clear and regulated offer of dialogue	A. Commitment of the parliamentary institution and its legal framework, towards the offer of participation mechanisms
	B. Informative use of the social network (unidirectional). Publication of information (agendas, parliamentary activity, news)	B. Will of citizen to participate expressed in the sending of communications	B. Inclusion of products of digital participation in the process of legislative discussion and decide
		C. Mandatory nature of duly and accurate response by the institution	
Author's own creation			

The object of study defined in parliaments has been used in comparative studies about the use of Internet in parliaments (Norris, 2001), or about the quality index of discourse in the parliament (Steiner et al, 2004) as maximum instance of citizen representation in the democratic system. Trechsel *et al*

(2003), as well as Setälä and Grönlund (2006) present their results from the definition of specific categories of analysis such as information, legislative activity and interaction. The researches of Welp (2011) and Perna and Braga (2011) describe the adoption of ICTs for the promotion of parliamentary democracy in Latin America, as well as Sobaci's researches (2011) comprise a significant collection of studies about European cases and other developing countries. On his part, Coleman (2004) has analyzed the effectivity of online queries made by the British parliament through its website in order to improve the connection between representatives and represented parties. Likewise, the World e-Parliament Report (2016) includes a section about online parliament, mainly dedicated to information, and another one about the communication between the institution and citizens where some tools such as forums, surveys or the use of social networks are analyzed.

The contents analysis uses the category methodology, contexts units and analysis units suggested by Giraldo-Luque (2012) and updates the previous study performed between 2010 and 2015 by Giraldo and Villegas (2017) to evaluate the use of Internet and social networks by institutions in the participation process. Every context unit responds to its respective category (inform, deliberate and decide) and it is comprised by analysis units that identify specific aspects to be evaluated. The first category, identified with the action axis of 'inform' (Vedel, 2003), analyses the presence and the informative use of social networks performed by the institution to approach its activity towards citizens. The second category is positioned within the 'deliberate' axis and it analyses the offer of discussion platforms, the possibility of open participation of citizen and the commitment of the institution in the dialogic relationship established through the social network. The third category positions in the 'decide' axis and examines the institutions' commitment of incorporating the results of participations in the decision making processes (ONU, 2016). Table 1 shows the identification of categories, contexts and analysis units used in the study.

Category — Context unit (CU)	Analysis unit	Total	Max. Value of CU
Inform — Informative presence and use	Presence in the social network	1(x5)	10
	Informative use of social network. Publication of information	1(x5)	
Deliberate — Deliberative use	Open, clear and regulated offer of dialogue	1(x5)	15
	Will of citizen to participate expressed in the sending of communications	1(x5)	
	Mandatory nature of duly and accurate response by the institution	1(x5)	
Decide — Decision making use	Commitment of the parliamentary institution and its legal framework, towards the offer of participation mechanisms	1(x5)	10
	Inclusion of products of digital participation in the process of legislative discussion and decision making	1(x5)	
Author's own creation			

Each one of the networks used by parliaments was analyzed to respond to analysis units suggested in every category (table 1). The study focused in the publications performed by each one of the chambers in every social network. In each case, between 40 and 45 publications were evaluated, as well as the characteristics of opening, interaction, participation and response that institutions defined for every network. Observations carried out were systematized in code sheets per chamber and country prepared in synchronized calculus sheets (Microsoft Excel) and pre-designed from the weight established for analysis units (table 2).

The coding carried out, from quantitative methodological framework, is structured from the relationship between units of analysis and social networks of every parliament —up to five social networks per every chamber—. The analysis uses the weighted presence (Bardin, 1986: 77) whereas presence or absence of specific elements of context units are measured. Previous studies (Oni et al, 2016; Bernardes and Bandeira, 2016), also use the coding supported in the presence or absence in analyzed websites. For every unit of analysis, the score received was of 0 or 1 point: one point for presence and no point for absence, in each one of the networks analyzed by representation chamber. Thus, the maximum score of analysis units was 5 (when analyzing a maximum of five social networks in every case). The final score of every context unit varies depending on the number of analysis units included therein (Figure 2).

4. Results

4.1. Category: Inform

The total average of the first context unit, inform, keeps a continuous progression from the start of the measurement and obtains, for 2017, a score higher than 50% of the unit's maximum value (10 points). In the years of study (2010, 2005 and 2017), the information unit has increased 2.4 times its initial score (2.7), but it is evident that the main increase of the evaluation is located in the period 2015-2017, where the average increases 2.6 points, a progression close to the average of the sample in 2010.

	2010	2015	2017
Average	2.7	3.8	6.4
Argentina	0	2	8
Chile	2.5	1.5	7
Colombia	2.5	4.5	7
Ecuador	4	4	8
France	4	9	9
Sweden	0	2	2
Spain	2	4	6
Italy	1	4	7
United Kingdom	8	6	10
United States	3	1	0
Author's own creation			

United Kingdom recovers the leadership in 2017 and obtains the highest score possible in the analysis unit. The Anglo-Saxon country surpasses France, which obtains 9 points, the same value that in 2015. United Kingdom multiplies by 1.7 times their results of 2015 and, even though it is not the country with the greatest growth within the sample, it meets all indicators of the unit in an outstanding manner.

Latin-American countries, as a whole, obtain the highest growth average of the sample for the 2015-2017 period. The four countries analyzed reach an improving average of 4.5 points in the last period of the study. The cases of Argentina and Chile stand out since they are the countries that grow the most in the last years of analysis (2015 and 2017), increasing 4 and 4.7 times, respectively. The case of Argentina is eye-catching, which starts the evaluation period with null score and for 2017 obtains 8 points. Undoubtedly, it is the most noticeable progression of the table of analyzed countries and, in terms of social networks use, the austral country moved from not offering any information through social networks whatsoever in 2010 to using four social networks by chamber with informative purposes in 2017.

Colombia and Ecuador add to the Latin-American Dynamic with important and sustained growths. Even though they do not reach the progress dimensions of Argentina and Chile for the period 2015-2017, its results also increase in a clear manner. Ecuador doubles its results and Colombia multiplies by 1.6 its values of 2015.

The countries of the south of Europe, Spain and Italy, also reach the most relevant positions of evolution for the whole period analyzed (2010-2017). Italy is the country that, after Argentina, obtains the highest progression when moving from 1 in 2010 to 7 in 2017. The Spanish case is also relevant when it triplicates its 2 points of 2010 for 2017.

Table 4. Context unit 1. Inform. Evolution of results. Detail by analysis unit (2010—2017)

	Presence on social networks			Informative use of the profile		
	2010	2015	2017	2010	2015	2017
Average	1.55	1.95	3.2	1.15	1.85	3.2
Argentina	0	1	4	0	1	4
Chile	1.5	1	3.5	1	0.5	3.5
Colombia	1.5	2.5	3.5	1	2	3.5
Ecuador	2	2	4	2	2	4
France	2.5	4.5	4.5	1.5	4.5	4.5
Sweden	0	1	1	0	1	1
Spain	1	2	3	1	2	3
Italy	1	2	3.5	0	2	3.5
United Kingdom	4	3	5	4	3	5
United States	2	0.5	0	1	0.5	0
Author's own creation						

At the bottom of the table there are the two only countries that do not progress in the analysis period. USA reduces progressively since 2010 until reaching null values in 2017. If in 2010 North-American chambers used two social networks each, in 2015 the number reduces to the use of Twitter in the Senate. However, the use of microblogging disappears in 2017. Sweden, which in 2015 decides to use Twitter as a way of giving information about Riksdag activities, keeps that only social network in 2017 and its results do not vary between 2015 and 2017.

The presence on social networks, first analysis unit of the information category, increases generally for the study sample. The general average has doubled between 2010 and 2017, but the main development of the indicator positions in the 2015-2017 period. In the last period of analysis there is an average increase of 1.25 points for the countries of the sample. For the year 2017, the sample reaches 3.2 points (64% of the maximum score) and most countries surpass, for the first time since the onset of the study, the 2.5 points in the contents unit.

Even though the leaders of the presence on social networks are United Kingdom, with the maximum score (5 points), and France (4.5 points), the cases that outstand the most in the evolution of their scores are the Latin-American countries (Argentina, Chile, Colombia and Ecuador) and the south of Europe (Spain and Italy). The country with the greatest progression is Argentina, which moves from 0 points in 2010 to 4 in 2017. A similar progression is obtained by Spain and Italy which triplicate their score and the rest of countries of South America which multiply by 2.2 times in average their results of 2010.

The trend of constant increase in the three measurements is broken by Chile and United Kingdom who reduce their scores in 2015. However, in 2017, after a re-thinking of the use of social networks specially relevant in the United Kingdom, the two countries overcome their baseline values. United States is the only country that reduces its score for the measurement of 2017.

In the second analysis unit within the informative arena, informative use of the profile, the trend is similar, although considering the specific conditions of the indicator, the progression is even higher. While the difference in scores between 2010 and 2017 in the first unit was 1.65 points, in the second indicator is 2.1 points for the same period. The average value of 2010 (1.15 points) multiplied 2.8 times and therefore, reached 3.2 points in 2017. There mainly outstands the boost given for potentiating the informative profile of social networks between the 2015-2017 period, where the score increases 1.7 times when shifting from 1.85 to 3.2 points.

Besides Argentina, there also highlights Italy's case, which started with null values in 2010 and obtains a score of 3.5 in 2017. Likewise, in the Latin-American, French and Spanish cases, there outstands a constant progression in the analyzed period. For the last measurement (2017) the case of the Parliament of Chile outstands, which multiplies its result of 2015 by 7. The Senate and the Chilean chamber only used Twitter in 2015, while in 2017 they widen their scope of information tools to YouTube, Instagram, Facebook and Flickr.

For this unit, the United States keep the trend of eliminating the use of social networks in their parliamentary chambers, while Sweden stays with the same scores reached in 2015.

4.2. Context unit: deliberate

Given the slight fall the total average of the context unit ‘deliberate’ experienced in the 2010-2015 period, in 2017 the average of the unit increases 1.85 points and doubles its evaluation of 2015. It is worth mentioning that in 2017 all countries achieve scores, except USA which keeps a null score in the three years analyzed. In any case, the general average does not even reach the fourth part of the maximum value of the unit and positions with 3.55 points in the 23.7% of the maximum score (15 points).

The context unit presents diverse trajectories and few countries show a continuous progression during the years of study. Only Argentina, Spain and Italy evolve every year of measurements, while Chile, Ecuador and United Kingdom recover in 2017 whereas in 2015 their initial results decreased. Colombia and Sweden, on the other part, only evolve in the last measurement, while France loses points progressively in the three years studied. The Gallic country, after the first boost of open networks positioning, has closed participation spaces within social networks used where the user can debate or comment freely.

The leader of the sample is the United Kingdom, which gets 7 points. The social networks offer of the British parliament, having the two chambers concentrated in the domain address *UK Parliament*, allows the user to intervene in 4 out of the 5 platforms linked to their web. Facebook, Twitter, Flickr and Instagram are open spaces where citizens can give opinion and from which the institution, like the case of Instagram, responds to citizens.

	2010	2015	2017
Average	1.9	1.7	3.55
Argentina	0.0	2.0	5.5
Chile	2.0	0.0	3.5
Colombia	2.0	2.0	5.0
Ecuador	4.0	2.0	3.0
France	5.0	4.0	3.5
Sweden	0.0	0.0	1.0
Spain	1.0	2.0	4.0
Italy	0.0	2.0	3.0
United Kingdom	5.0	3.0	7.0
United States	0	0	0
Author's own creation			

As a whole, the studied parliaments increase 1.87 times their baseline results between 2010 and 2017. The general average shifts from 1.9 points to 3.55 in the total of the period, although between 2010

and 2015 the average dropped 0.2 points, positioning in 1.7. The most noticeable progresses for the context unit are focused in Spain and Colombia, countries where the offer of social networks where citizens find space for debate and discussion about parliamentary activities has increased. In Spain — which moves from 1 to 4 points— the offer of social networks concentrated in Twitter in 2010 and 2015, is extended to YouTube, Instagram and Facebook, and in Colombia —which in 2017 multiplies by 2.5 its results of 2015— social networks turn from 3 to 5 in at least one of their chambers.

The comparison of the analysis unit about deliberation allow pointing out that the two first units —the clear, open and regulated offer, and the possibility to participate for citizen— get a higher score in 2017, despite reducing in 2015. The third analysis unit, mandatory nature of institutional response, traces the inverse pathway: after increasing in 2015 compared to 2010, it gets its lowest score in 2017.

The analysis unit, clear, open and regulated offer recovers in 2017 its global score compared to the slight loss of 2015, although it is a poor result which mean (1.1 points) does not surpass the 25% of the total maximum (5 points). Out of the four countries that reduced their score in 2015, Chile, Ecuador, France and United Kingdom, only Chile and United Kingdom recover again in 2017, the score they had in 2010, while Ecuador and France keep the same score of only 1 point of 2015, a behavior Italy and Spain repeat.

Argentina is the only country that has progressively increased its scores, reaching, which 2 points, the group of leaders in 2017. Colombia also achieves improvement in its scores in 2017, also positioning among the leading countries. USA and Sweden continue without betting on open spaces for dialogue in their social networks profiles.

Table 6. Analysis unit 2. Deliberate. Evolution of results. Detailed by analysis unit (2010—2017)¹

	Clear, open and regulated offer			Possibility to participate for citizen		
	2010	2015	2017	2010	2015	2017
Average	0.85	0.7	1.1	0.85	0.7	2.3
Argentina	0	1	2	0	1	3.5
Chile	1	0	1	1	0	2.5
Colombia	1	1	2	1	1	3
Ecuador	2	1	1	2	1	2
France	2	1	1	2	1	2.5
Sweden	0	0	0	0	0	1
Spain	0.5	1	1	0.5	1	2.5
Italy	0	1	1	0	1	2
United Kingdom	2	1	2	2	1	4
United States	0	0	0	0	0	0
Author's own creation						

The second contents unit, possibility to participate for citizen, is the one improving the most within the ‘deliberate’ category. Besides, its score of 2017 —2.3 points that entail a multiplication of its results by 3.3 compared to the initial value of 2010— is closer to half of the category’s maximum (5 points).

All countries get in 2017 their best score in this indicator. In fact, 6 countries of the sample reach or surpass 50% of the total score of the analysis unit. The country leading the progress in this unit is Argentina, reaching 3.5 points in 2017, while in 2010 it didn’t have any score. United Kingdom is the one reaching the highest score in 2017 (4 points) and Colombia’s score in 2017, 3 points, triplicates its results of 2015.

Except Argentina, Spain and Italy are the countries increasing in the indicator the most. In the former, the Spanish courts multiply by 5 its results of 2010 and Italy, which started from 0 points at the beginning of the measurement, reaches 2 points in 2017. Ecuador and USA are the only countries that do not grow compared to 2010, although the Latin-American country increases its score compared to 2015. USA keeps its null score of the three years of the sample.

The last contents unit, which considers the mandatory nature of the institutional response, is the indicator that suffers a greater score reduction despite its already poor scores in the previous years. The fall of 0.2 points between 2015 and 2017 is led by France which, after improving its score in 2015, reduces drastically in 2017, and gets zero points. The only country that improves its score —and which gets a score above zero as difference compared to the previous years— is Spain with 0.5 points. Spain, together with United Kingdom, which keeps its score in 1 point in the three years analyzed, are the only countries scoring in this indicator in 2017.

4.3. Category: decide

The last context unit, decide, is characterized by reducing to zero the scarce score obtained in the previous years (0.2 points in average). The only countries that achieved a score in this unit were France and United Kingdom.

	2010	2015	2017
Average	0.2	0.2	0
France	1	1	0
United Kingdom	1	1	0
Author’s own creation			

Both countries kept their scores in 2010 and 2015 (1 point), but in 2017 have weakened their commitments —linked to a social network such as Facebook, where citizens made comments that could be implemented as consumables on parliamentary discussions and agendas— of inclusion of participation results mediated by social networks in the system or the decision making agenda.

4.4. Evolution of the use of social networks

The use of social networks by studied parliaments during the three years denotes an increase in 2017 both in the numbers of networks used as well as the numbers of users in every network. The pathway can be understood considering three stages. The first one linked to the shy and scarcely controlled presence of networks (2010) and characterized by two conditions. On one hand, the need to be in social networks marked by the open presence of many contents and comments, although with little impact in users. On the other hand, a denial of the opening of participation spaces through networks, associated to the scarce effective control over its platforms. A second stage, related to the specific re-thinking of the networks use considering its difficult control and the loss of its utopic framework conceived as public spheres (2015). And a third stage, of consolidation (2017), where an informative strategy is traced with some interaction tools, and that achieves to increase the impact of networks in the number of users. Table 8 shows the evolution of the use of networks for studied parliaments.

Table 8. Social networks analyzed by every country of the sample and number of users (2010, 2015 and 2017)*

Country	Representative Chambers	Social networks 2010	Social networks 2015	Social networks 2017
Argentina	Senate of the Nation	No social networks found	Facebook (6407) Twitter (74400)	Facebook (17672) Twitter (189313) YouTube (4435) Instagram (3192)
	Chamber of Deputies of the Nation	No social networks found	No social networks found	Facebook (3970) Twitter (6461) YouTube (12364) Instagram (739)
Chile	Senate	Twitter	Twitter (31254)	Twitter (52717) YouTube (116) Instagram (538)
	Honorable Chamber of Deputies	Facebook Twitter	Twitter (ND)	Facebook (2825) Twitter (108326) YouTube (675) Flickr (36)
Colombia	Senate of the Republic of Colombia	Facebook Twitter LinkedIn	Facebook (19120) Twitter (205893) LinkedIn (336)	Facebook (38435) Twitter (266047) YouTube (3498) Instagram (4229) Soundcloud (21)
	Representatives Chamber	No social networks found	Facebook (8667) Twitter (69097)	Facebook (12300) Twitter (100577)
Ecuador	National Assembly of Ecuador	Facebook Twitter	Facebook (176409) Twitter (183380)	Facebook (253646) Twitter (243370)

France	Sénat	Facebook Twitter LinkedIn Flickr	Facebook (19509) Twitter (106585) Dailymotion (144) Google + (10219) Instagram (842)	Facebook (64230) Twitter (363162) Dailymotion (218) Google+ (17838) Instagram (11741)
	Assemblée Nationale	LinkedIn	Facebook (24481) Twitter (58969) Dailymotion (39) Google + (33174)	Facebook (95835) Twitter (186837) Dailymotion (253) Google+ (85928)
Sweden	Riksdag	No social networks found	Twitter (6399)	Twitter (17965)
Spain	Senate	No social networks found	Twitter (10295)	Twitter (85041) Youtube (334) Instagram (645)
	Congress	Twitter	Twitter (25230)	Facebook (10997) Twitter (142459) Youtube (8130)
Italy	Senato della Republica	LinkedIn	Twitter (10303) YouTube (4676)	Twitter (122025) Youtube (8541) Instagram (230)
	Camera dei Deputati	LinkedIn	Facebook (27682) YouTube (8557)	Facebook (23241) Twitter (153365) Youtube (13915) Flickr (65)
United Kingdom	House of Lords	Facebook Twitter Friendfeed Flickr	Facebook (882) Twitter (33433) YouTube (803) Flickr (ND) Google + (31535)	Facebook (14700) Twitter (219130) YouTube (3727) Flickr (44) LinkedIn (2087)
	House of Commons	Facebook Twitter Friendfeed Flickr	Twitter (31487)	Facebook (21021) Twitter (194713)
	Parliament UK	NA	NA	Facebook (352450) Twitter (1249092) YouTube (69816) Flickr (768) Instagram (18032)
United States	U.S. Senate	Facebook LinkedIn	Twitter (8355)	No social networks found
	House of representatives	Facebook LinkedIn	No social networks found	No social networks found
Author's own creation				

Thus, despite that in 2015 there is a re-thinking –and a slight decrease in some cases— of the use of social networks in parliaments, in 2017 is when a work consolidation dynamic in social media starts to be observed. In the last measurement performed, most of chambers increase their presence and consolidate the use of networks of 2015, with a relevant increase of users in its main platforms. We also appreciate an attempt to approach citizens through the inclusion social networks of more recent impact, like Instagram’s case, even though it does not have the impact of the two most relevant networks yet: Twitter and Facebook.

For the year 2017, the network used the most is Twitter, which is present in all chambers of the 9 countries (except United States). For its part, Facebook is present in 14 chambers that represent 8 countries (United States and Sweden are the only ones that do not use this social network). Lastly, Instagram boost is worth mentioning, which in 2015 was only used by the French Senate. For 2017, the social network reached 9 chambers (half of sample) and 7 countries.

5. Results discussion

One of the main evidences deduced from results obtained is that a greater change produced in two years, from 2015 to 2017, compared to the five previous years of analysis, between 2010 and 2015. The change is appreciated specially in the first context unit that considers the presence and informative use by parliaments in their social networks profiles, which confirms the motivational positioning suggested by Baek *et al* (2011) and highlighted by Castells (2012). Parliamentary institutions are more and more aware of the need to use social networks tools and about consolidating the informative work made therein within the changing mediatic dynamic (Feenstra *et al*, 2016). Moreover, the progression moves forward in a parallel manner with the increase of the incursion of social networks in the daily life of citizens (Bulut and Doğan, 2017) and with the acknowledgement of its relevance within the current games of politics (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012; Salzman, 2016). Also, the increase of the number of followers in all networks used by parliaments between 2015 and 2017 is noticeable, as well as a general trend to increase the presence of parliamentary activity in social networks.

Part of the progresses of institutions in their presence of social networks is due to the increase of the presence of parliaments in social networks as strategic scenario of communication and mediatic positioning (Casero-Ripollés and Feenstra, 2012). The representative institutions of analyzed countries benefit from their profiles on social networks in the informative aspect, and overcome the disparity detected in the period of analysis ranging from 2010 to 2015, between the presence and the use of social networks. The change can be motivated both by a greater awareness of institutions about the need to be in social networks (Castells, 2012), as well as by the type or profile of social network where they keep or build their profile.

It is interesting to discover there are specific profiles used among the same networks. While Twitter is a platform with scarce interaction or promotion of dialogue and consensus among citizens and institutions (Caro, 2015), since parliaments limit to publish information in an unidirectional manner, an scenario shared by Fuchs’ ideas (2014), Facebook on the other hand, allows some extra type of participation, such as making comments and sending messages, despite the use of this network by parliaments is always associated to the format of institutional site that avoids further possibilities of

dialogue (Page, 2012; Van Dijk, 2011). However, it is eye-catching that Instagram is the social network that more interactions generates, despite there are fewer users following parliaments in this social network compared to the others. The cases of Chile, France, Spain and United Kingdom demonstrate a greater interaction between the institution and represented parties in this social network—even though main lines of political conversations are not evidenced within the platform—. The fact that Instagram is the social network growing fastest in 2017 (Fernández, 2017) and it is also the one that more growth had in the study performed, recovers the critical discussion introduced by Marwick when indicating egocentrism in the network. The results of the study denote a high interest for promoting that information reaches more users, but a null enthusiasm when it comes to talking about more complex and interactive communication processes (Fuchs, 2014; Lynch et al, 2017; Sunstein, 2017). Parliaments have thrown themselves into a positioning of their themes in social networks despite the private interests they manifest (Calvo and Domínguez, 2016; Van Dijk, 2011) and promote the privatization of the public sphere (Giraldo-Luque, 2015) mediated by the commercial framework of the platform.

Likewise, a good part of parliamentary institutions of the sample have rethought, at least regarding access, about their strategies linked with deliberation (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012; Castells, 2012). As results show, the general trend in the category is a small recovery in increase compared to the drop of 2015. The limited growth is focused, most of all, in the second contents unit: opportunity to participate through social networks by the citizen. On the contrary, contents units that entail a greater commitment by the institution—clear, open and regulated offer, and mandatory nature of the institutional response—have not increased or even have reduced in the already poor score obtained in 2010 and 2015. The absence of dialogue, and the one-street theme centralization, have been elements previously criticized by Page (2012) and Van Dijk (2011). The evaluation about the ‘deliberate’ category connects with results obtained in the last category, ‘decide’, where any of the countries of the sample scored (Fuchs, 2014).

When observing scores by analysis units, we can indicate that institutions have reinforced their presence in social networks, although they have done it from an unidirectional and scarcely interactive or dialogic role (Caro, 2015). Even though citizens can access to new profiles on social networks to follow information and parliamentary agenda, even nurturing the critics about the informative oversaturation provided by Forte (2015) and Sunstein (2017), the range of interaction is still scarce. Although parliaments have reinforced their presence on social networks, results of analysis units that require an institutional commitment towards proposals and actions of citizens in their networks reduce. This specific fact, the control over wider dynamics of participation and dialogue, added to the factor of having relatively low incidence in the discussion framework of social networks (Fuchs, 2014), avoids the increase of social tension mentioned by Lynch et al (2017). Before generating dialogue processes, the intention of the use of social networks by parliaments seems to be precisely the contrary. To avoid it both thematically as well as instrumentally.

6. Conclusion

The concentration of the dialogic activity in a social network like Instagram denotes the concrete intention in the use of social networks by parliaments studied. On one hand, the need to be in the most recent and dynamic space of communicative movements and linked to young publics. It is not an

irrelevant issue if we consider the need to reconnect the political process, that has the parliament as a central figure within the democratic structure and balance, with the interests of youth and citizens detached politically.

On the other hand, it entails the distancing from the political debate in the network. The possibility to build a dialogue, an arguing process that surpasses the informative, educational fact, is reduced in a social network such as Instagram, the same as in Twitter or Facebook if the dialogue conditions are closed. Thus, social networks, despite having a very important discursive and interactive potential, are limited to a function of presence and informative dissemination of the parliamentary activity. They are one more link of the information strategy of an institution using social networks to give an impression of closeness and transparency, but its intention cannot be considered as deliberative and much less participative.

In the democratic framework, the parliament is the place of the ideological disputes that, argumentatively, can be solved to generate political processes of consensus. Social networks can be used in a critical manner to increase the deliberative and participative potential of citizens, surpassing the objective of current informative presence. The challenge positions in the need to generate a typical argumentative dispute of a public democratic sphere. Not typical from what happens on an everyday basis in social networks. Social networks can become the space to do so if only there is a political intention that does not limit citizen dialogue and that assumes a commitment with participation results.

Nevertheless, up until now, the functionalities of social networks to generate processes of political transformation have been assumed from outside institutions and the attempts to do so from institutionality have been shy and scarcely published. The conversations in Instagram, linked to what happens in a picture, don't generate high expectations either. From the social networks and parliamentary institutionality it is possible to recover the discursive intention and the —non polarized— political debate that go hand by hand with the approach of public issues towards citizens. Instagram, as any other social network, is a tool that can be targeted and used according to this objective.

7. Notes

¹ Table 6 does not include score of the analysis unit 'mandatory nature of institutional response' since values obtained by eight out of the ten countries are null.

² Table 7 only includes the results of France and United Kingdom because the rest of the sample gets null values in all years and all analysis units that comprise the 'decide' subcategory.

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