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DANIEL JAVIER DE LA GARZA MONTEMAYOR, DANIEL BARREDO IBÁÑEZ, AND ABRAHAM A. HERNÁNDEZ PAZ



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Institutional Crisis and New Ways to Interact on Social Media: A Comparative Study of Political Participation by México and Ecuador's Youth

Daniel Javier de la Garza Montemayor,¹ Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León, México
Daniel Barredo Ibáñez, Universidad del Rosario, Colombia
Abraham A. Hernández Paz, Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León, México

Abstract: The Latin American communication media crisis, visible from a dramatic drop in advertising financing and a progressive move by audiences toward new media, is linked to the public institution crisis. This communication media crisis denotes the emergence of social practices focused on user activation, thereby causing a decline in vertical mediation and a detriment to new routines which, according to collective intelligence, tend to develop collaborative symbolic environments and a general greater empathy. These phenomena do not extend beyond Latin America in a horizontal or global way. México and Ecuador are two countries that are representative of Latin America's trends. México, on one hand, is a context with high media concentration and powerful communicational groups whose links result from the heavy bipartisanship that has ruled this country over the last three decades. Ecuador, on the other hand, is a context where former President Rafael Correa's administration (2007–2017) created a new legal framework that favors—at least from a normative point of view—better democratization of communication media through the implementation of institutions that are tasked with ensuring diversity in media and encouraging citizen involvement in co-government tasks. This research compares the results from surveys administered to more than two thousand college students from México and Ecuador, in which these two strategic groups were asked about their views on phenomena such as online and offline political participation and information consumption in order to find out if there any differences between México and Ecuador's concept of political participation among young college students.

Keywords: Media, Social Networks, Political Participation, México, Ecuador

Introduction: Internet and Political Participation

In the late 1990s, Locke (1999) recognized that the digital sphere allows for the creation of new platforms that make political participation easier. In that context, Locke recognized the possibility of achieving greater interaction between political leaders and citizens, as well as the possibility of improving conditions for transparency in public administration. This notion would become, in the following years, a substantial research field. Other studies, like Gutiérrez-Coba (2012), show that information and communications technology (ICT) are part of the social imaginary of the group, where gradually more and more people use them on a regular basis. Therefore, technology helps to increase inclusion to the point where it contains within itself a public space that can be used by any digital native, leaving conventional platforms prone to exclusion.

Wang (2007) argues that, unlike traditional media, the Internet allows users to choose the amount of information they receive on politics. According to his research, the use of online resources in relation to politics can be divided into two main categories: consumption of information regarding politics and the expression of political opinions. He claims that the consumption of information about politics has positive effects on the political attitude of citizens and their political participation. Consequently, Wang's study detected among the people surveyed that as the externalization of opinions on politics increases, so too does interest, trust, participation, and efficiency in politics.

¹ Corresponding Author: Daniel Javier de la Garza Montemayor, Faculty of Political Science and Public Administration, Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León, Monterrey, 64980, México. email: danieldegarza@gmail.com

Similarly, Borge, Cardenal, and Malpica (2012) emphasize that the Internet, in regards to offline political participation, helps communication, while in regards to online political participation, gives citizens the possibility to interact with each other and be part of political groups with greater ease than ever before. Furthermore, these authors claim that citizens' use of the Internet naturally influences political participation, regardless of one's political preferences. In Ecuador and México, all of the previously mentioned factors are strongly influenced by one key factor—the technology gap, which is the difference between those citizens who have access to technology and those who do not. The following article will compare the political participation of both countries' youth in relation to their technology use.

Theoretical Framework

Consensus and Divergence of Opinions on Political Participation in Traditional and Online Media

Research focused on contrasting the effects of new media against traditional mass media has observed a generational change, particularly in the use of media to consume information on politics; an example of this is Holt et al.'s (2013) research on Sweden. According to these researchers, the use of social media encourages the involvement of young adult citizens, while the use of traditional media does the same for adult citizens. Moeller et al. (2014) go one step further by asserting that mass media has an effect on how political efficiency is perceived by young adult citizens, and that it is indispensable to motivate young individuals to participate in collective actions. These authors also confirmed that newspapers are the most useful information source to influence the political efficiency of those who use them, which is mostly adult citizens. On the other hand, audiences that belong to the new generation keep themselves informed mostly through digital media, though this depends on the degree of their political involvement and the context. Fenton and Barassi (2011) assert that social media, as a consciousness producer, threatens the formation of public opinions because an individual's opinions and messages tend to have the same weight as those that come from thorough deliberation. In turn, the authors explain that the self-orientated essence of social media results in a weakening of the community's opportunities for political involvement.

Additionally, there are divergent perspectives on what constitutes online political participation. Hoffman (2012) argues that most studies tend to mix up the concepts of online political participation and political communication. From Hoffman's point of view, online political participation implies that users try to influence governmental and electoral issues or change public policies. The aforementioned concept differs from that of political communication, which is not necessarily meant to influence the outcome of a political event. In reality, accessing and sharing information on politics can be done in different ways according to the convictions and interests of each individual.

With the intention of describing the different elements that make up each concept, Hoffman (2012) explains in detail the activities that make them different. In the case of online political participation, the author includes examples like donating money to a candidate or, if a user chooses to support joining alternative politics on the Internet, customizing a social media site to keep others updated on certain political campaigns, as well as creating or subscribing to groups related to politics. In contrast, Hoffman (2012) notes that in this information age, political communication can have a more horizontal nature. Unlike the traditional messages issued by people in power to citizens, it is possible now for messages to go in both directions, and it is even possible to establish direct communication between leaders and citizens.

It can be argued that, even when there is a divergence of opinion regarding the elements that Hoffman (2012) presents as the differentiators between online political participation and political communication, it is indispensable that they be taken into consideration for scientific verification. However, other research has shown that, in certain contexts, political participation

created by digital media is minimal. In a study done by Padilla de la Torre (2014) to analyze the political activity of young people on the Internet in Aguascalientes, México in the context of the 2010 state elections, the author asked certain subjects of her study to write a journal recording their political activities in cyberspace. The author reported that nearly 5 percent of the subjects participated in activities of political interaction. The purpose of this study was to analyze the many ways in which young citizens take part in political participation, not just limited to electoral aspects. The results of this work found only traces of political participation, although the author concludes results might vary in another study.

Likewise, regarding political participation offline, Treré and Cargnelutti (2014) concluded that it cannot fully transpire without real contact between people. Their study found that there are a plethora of options for political participation on the Internet, though citizen's ways of participating is not always heterogeneous. In relation to this, Vázquez and Cuervo (2014) noted that young adults participate in the most thorough use of social media, along with those citizens who are unemployed. Additionally, the authors explain that to participate more efficiently on social media, one must have ICT skills. Nevertheless, Vázquez and Cuervo (2014) did not find any significant evidence that participation in social media impacts other platforms for political participation.

It can be argued that Vázquez and Cuervo's (2014) study is far from being conclusive. Different forms of citizen participation through social media are still developing, and the authors deem their continued development important for democratic purposes. They also suggest conducting further research in this field in order to find a model that can explain and provide more information on the relationship between citizens and political participation on social media. In another study, Ikeda, Richey, and Teresi (2013) contemplate if the incidence rate in a user's political participation varies depending on how they access the Internet. It is important to mention that in the contemporary context, Internet access through mobile devices is within the reach of millions of people around the world. The study used data from Japan, a country that, according to the authors, has the highest mobile phone usage in the world. Despite this, the authors claim that the rate of mobile netsurfing is not high; therefore, its influence on political participation is minimal (Ikeda, Richey, and Teresi 2013). Nevertheless, the authors conclude that the gap between the traditional way to access the Internet and mobile phone navigation must be considered in future research on the effects of the Internet on citizens' political behavior.

Institutions and Mass Media Trust Crisis

All around the world, people are experiencing a general loss of trust in both journalistic organizations and state institutions (Barredo 2013; Barredo 2013b). In previous decades, close ties were maintained between the two, to the point where famous corruption cases demonstrated a strong relationship between journalism and politics. Considering that, to attain a quality democracy for citizens, it is a necessary condition to have access to autonomous information sources, free of connections to political institutions, this leads, to a certain extent, to doubting the veracity of the information shown on mass media. This problem is exacerbated by Bauman's (2007) claim that the policies seen in public institutions and those seen on mass media are usually contradictory.

The aforementioned controversy is not limited to traditional media. On the contrary, some studies also doubt the positive relationship between social media discourse and politics. For instance, in a study involving two journalists on social media by López, Campos, and Valera (2013), they inferred that social media was not being used to its full potential. Likewise, Redondo (2012) questioned what new media contributes to democratic progress by simply voicing the opinions of citizens. Merely collecting information is not useful to democracy; it must be interpreted as well.

In the global transition to a horizontal communication mode, it is important to understand the concept of network society, coined and defined by Castells (2012a, 50) as "a society where

the key social structures and activities are organized around electronically processed information networks through the use of micro-electronic based technologies.” Based on this definition, the media is not a means of promoting a particular agenda onto itself, but rather a way to structure networks that already exist in the world. In Castells’s (2011) theory on the power of networks, he argues that users can be the “anti-power”—a force that is equal to the one created by traditional media—by using the diverse applications of the Web 2.0 against the large amount of information spread by mass media. Castells (2012b) also describes social media as places reigned by free speech, not controlled by traditional forces in power, and therefore operated under a management different from those of traditional mass media. He also notes that everything on the Internet is capable of reaching the entire world, but that even if social media is preferred by new generations, they consume the same information on mass media that is being broadcasted via traditional media.

The previous statements are relevant because studies centered on the possibility of the Internet as a medium displacing or competing against mass media have concluded that digital media, at best, limits itself to repeating the news presented by mass media. Wring and Ward (2010) illustrated this phenomenon for the 2010 English elections. Additionally, Barredo et al. (2015) concluded that social media can contribute to an increase in political participation, but there is no evidence that shows that it has a decisive influence on voters. Rather social media’s influence on political participation rests in its ability to motivate voters to look for new information.

México and Ecuador: Media Concentration and the Technology Gap

México and Ecuador are two representative countries of Latin American tendencies in terms of the relationship between politics and technology. México maintains high media concentration (Huerta and Gómez 2013), with Televisa and Tv Azteca together possessing 96.5 percent of the national television broadcasting share in 2010 and, problematically, arrogating the monopoly of citizens’ entertainment (Delarbre 2011). However, their impact is progressively fading—in 1995, Televisa had 91 percent of the broadcasting share, while in 2010, said share was reduced to 68.3 percent (Huerta and Gómez 2013). This decrease was caused, first, by the increasing number of competitors Televisa confronts; and second, but not less important, due to numerous information scandals tying this broadcaster to government party Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI). Additionally, the emergence of a generation that is more critical of information than the previous one has weakened the reputation and credibility of this popular channel.

In contrast, one of the Ecuadorian government’s main concerns has been fighting media concentration. Therefore, under the government of former President Rafael Correa, the *Organic Communication Law* was passed in 2013. This law was passed with the intention of redirecting radio frequency so that 33 percent of media would be owned by the state, 33 percent by the private sector, and 34 percent by the community (Art.106). Nevertheless, nine out of ten channels are still owned by the private sector and, with economic crisis consuming the country, this situation hardly seems reversible (Chavero and Oller 2014).

Another factor that must be considered is the large technology gap in México. According to official Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (INEGI) (2016) statistics, around 46.3 million Mexicans do not have access to the Internet. These Mexicans coexist with highly sophisticated users that use the full potential of social media to make themselves heard in public spaces. It is important to remember that in the 2012 federal elections, the #YoSoy132 student movement emerged (Castillo 2014), bringing a turn in cyber activism towards politics, which has increased gradually as the technology gap lessens. Similarly, in 2014, after the mass murder of students in Iguala, the #TodosSomosAyotzinapa movement began. This unifying movement sought to stir up public opinion in order to bring light to and uncover the cause of this disastrous crime (Fernández-Poncela 2015).

In Ecuador, 11.5 percent of its population ranging from fifteen to forty-nine years of age can be classified as digitally illiterate (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos [INEC] 2017); this number can be considered much higher if those older than seventy are added to the statistics. Even with all of this, the use of social media in Ecuador among the elite population is so important that, according to Rivera (2014), its effective management helped Rafael Correa achieve victory during the 2006 elections. The *Organic Communication Law* barely regulates the exchange and participation that takes place on the Internet; however, there are institutions that were specifically created with the mandate of observing the presence of diversity in media—like the *Superintendence of Information and Communication* or the *Regulation and Development of Information and Communication Council*—as well as for encouraging the involvement of citizens in co-government activities. There are scholars who claim that these institutions, along with the alluded to legal framework, have stimulated the consolidation of a communication monopoly owned by the state (Basabe-Serrano and Martínez 2014), as well as contributed to the technology gap. It is also worth mentioning the political gap in Ecuador between those who support and those who despise the system created from the development of the so-called “Citizens’ Revolution,” the political movement led by former President Rafael Correa.

Research Questions

The general research question this study is predicated upon is the following:

RQ1: Are there any differences between México and Ecuador’s concept of political participation among young college students?

The following specific research questions were also considered:

RQ2: What are the online and offline participation mechanisms preferred by young college students in these two countries?

RQ3: To what extent are the online and offline political participation of college students in México and Ecuador related?

Methodology

While some useful methodological bases for this comparative research on the Mexican and Ecuadorian contexts were adopted from studies of other countries (outlined below), it must be kept in mind that their results come from specific environments and timeframes. Political and historical circumstances, local characteristics, and Internet access were all key determinative variables of these studies.

This research was given an exploratory design. Based on quantitative techniques, it seeks to further knowledge on the intersection between politics and social media from a comparative perspective. To that end, we designed a survey that aimed to quantify the perceptions of college students of political participation. The outline was built around two aspects: media consumption and online and offline political participation. In the case of media consumption, the items taken into consideration originated in a study by Gómez, Tejera, and Aguilar (2013) on political culture surrounding the 2012 Mexican presidential elections. In the case of online political participation, this research adopted certain elements from a study by Gil de Zúñiga et al. (2010), such as the case of young adults collectively signing petitions online about issues they agree upon. Additionally, based on a study by Vesnic-Alujevic (2012), this research considered activities like looking up information on politics, reading political-based humor, watching videos on politics, sharing information on politics with others, participation in or reading discussions on politics, posting information on politics on social media, and “liking” or commenting on another user’s post or message. To measure political participation offline, the survey adopted aspects from

Oser, Hooghe, and Marien (2013), such as contacting a politician regarding issues of public interest and contributing to an organization whose aim is to influence public policies. Lastly, it must be noted that some of the questions included in this tool were obtained through dialogues with students from private and public universities in Nuevo Leon (México) in a series of focus groups conducted before the quantitative study.

In México, the survey was administered in two ways: 58 percent of surveyed people were asked to answer the survey online using the *Google Forms* platform; 42 percent were asked to answer a printed version of the survey. In all cases, the students were made to answer the survey in classrooms, and it was administered by professors, administrative staff, and authorities of the participating universities. The administration of surveys started on May 5, 2015 (in the case of state elections in Nuevo Leon and Sonora), and on April 5, 2015 (when legislative elections officially started all over México.) This research’s convenience and non-probability sample gathered a total of 1694 college students of various majors from public and private universities in Nuevo Leon, Durango, and Sonora.

In Ecuador, the survey was administered between July and September 2015 in two higher education institutions: De las Americas University (UDLA), a private university in the country’s capital (Quito); and Eloy Alfaro de University of Manabí (ULEAM), a public university in the Manabí region. A total of 447 surveys were administered, 182 of them to private university students (UDLA), and the other 265 to public university students (ULEAM.) The sampling in this case is the same as that done in México; it is a convenient, non-probability sample with surveyed students from different majors, with the surveys administered in a similar manner to the ones in México (i.e. 20% administered using *Google Forms*, and 80% answered on paper).

Results

Political Participation and Media Consumption in Surveyed Students from México and Ecuador

In general, for students in both México and Ecuador, media consumption of mass media tends to be low, especially in México.

Table 1: Media Consumption in Surveyed Students from Public and Private Universities in México

	<i>Most Voted Response</i>	<i>University</i>	<i>Total Percentage</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<i>Television Consumption</i>	Little	Public	34.2%	579	1.58	.99
		Private	39.7%	112	1.59	1.08
<i>Print News Media Consumption</i>	Little	Public	37.8%	641	1.19	.88
		Private	38.2%	108	1.32	.93
<i>Digital News Media Consumption</i>	Some	Public	32%	447	1.88	1.12
		Private	34%	96	1.59	1.075
<i>Radio Consumption</i>	Little	Public	36.5%	508	1.26	1.02
		Private	32.9%	93	1.53	1.07
<i>Printed Magazine Consumption</i>	Little	Public	38.2%	533	1.15	1.01
		Private	34.9%	98	1.18	1.06
<i>Social Media Consumption</i>	Plenty	Public	36.7%	513	2.97	1.01
		Private	43.3%	122	3.11	1.00
<i>Blog Consumption</i>	Little	Public	29.8%	416	1.64	1.18
		Private	29.1%	82	1.28	1.66

Note: N = (Public = 1407, Private = 283). Where the minimal value is 0, and the maximum is 4.

There are five values: none, little, some, enough, and plenty.

Data Compiled by the Authors

Table 2: Media Consumption in Surveyed Students from Public and Private Universities in Ecuador

	<i>Most Voted Response</i>	<i>University</i>	<i>Total Percentage</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<i>Television Consumption</i>	Rarely	Public	30.8%	56	2.56	1.56
	Often	Private	30.9%	82	2.65	1.59
<i>Print News Media Consumption</i>	Rarely	Public	47.2%	85	1.91	1.48
	Often	Private	35.1%	92	2.26	1.50
<i>Digital News Media Consumption</i>	Always	Public	28.9%	52	3.19	1.58
	Rarely	Private	27.7%	73	2.58	1.69
<i>Radio Consumption</i>	Rarely	Public	45%	81	1.75	1.48
	Rarely	Private	47.7%	124	1.72	1.52
<i>Printed Magazine Consumption</i>	Rarely	Public	38.9%	70	1.30	1.35
	Rarely	Private	45.2%	117	1.54	1.45
<i>Social Media Consumption</i>	Almost Always	Public	36.5%	66	3.35	1.57
	Almost Always	Private	61.4%	162	4.11	1.39
<i>Blog Consumption</i>	Rarely	Public	39.9%	71	1.53	1.49
	Rarely	Private	30.3%	79	2.11	1.65

Note: N = (Public = 265, Private = 182). Where the minimal value is 0, and the maximum is 5. There are six values: Never (0), Rarely (1), Often (2), Not sure (3), Almost always (4), and Always (5). Data Compiled by the Authors

Nevertheless, it is clear that in Ecuador’s case, there is a greater predisposition for television consumption in both students from private and public universities: (Private: $M = 2.56$, $SD = 1.56$ and Public: $M = 2.65$, $SD = 1.59$), which is also the most-used form of traditional media (see Table 2). In contrast, México’s television consumption median was significantly smaller in both groups (Private: $M = 2.56$, $SD = 1.56$ and Public: $M = 2.65$, $SD = 1.59$) (see Table 1). In this case, we can see that in both the private and public universities where the surveys were administered, the use of conventional media was not more than the median. We can say then that traditional media (television, print media, radio, and print magazine) is often consulted by the surveyed students, with television being the most consumed media by both (Private: $M = 1.59$, $SD = 1.08$ and Public: $M = 1.58$, $SD = .99$) and the most consumed among conventional media (see Tables 1 and 2).

Table 3: Offline Political Participation among the Surveyed Students from Private and Public Universities in México

	<i>Most Voted Response</i>	<i>University</i>	<i>Total Percentage</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<i>Voting</i>	No	Public	50.9%	862	0.38	0.486
	Yes	Private	57.2%	159	0.57	0.496
<i>Going to Rallies</i>	No	Public	68.4%	1159	0.17	0.376
		Private	77.1%	215	0.23	0.421
<i>Supporting a Campaign</i>	No	Public	75.3%	1052	0.25	0.431
		Private	68.8%	192	0.31	0.464
<i>Signing Public Consultations</i>	No	Public	80%	1115	0.20	0.400
		Private	74.2%	207	0.26	0.438
<i>Participating in Student Organizations</i>	No	Public	54.5%	763	0.45	0.498
	Yes	Private	54.5%	152	0.54	0.499
<i>Going to Conferences</i>	Yes	Public	55.7%	778	0.56	0.497
		Private	63.2%	176	0.63	0.482
<i>Contacting Politician / Representative</i>	No	Public	78.7%	1100	0.21	0.409
		Private	74.9%	209	0.25	0.434
<i>Contributing to the Influencing of Public Policies</i>	No	Public	82%	1147	0.18	0.383
		Private	78.1%	218	0.22	0.414
<i>NGO</i>	No	Public	81.5%	1139	0.18	0.388
		Private	68.3%	190	0.32	0.466

Note: N = (Public = 1407, Private = 283). Where the minimal value is 0, and the maximum is 4.

There are five values: none, little, some, enough, and plenty.

Data Compiled by the Authors

One of the main aspects analyzed in this research is offline political participation. In general terms, the main difference between the two groups was that the amount of Mexican students who did not exercise their right to vote was slightly higher in the first group. This might be influenced by the fact that a greater amount of Mexican participants exercised their right to vote in the 2015 elections. In Ecuador’s case, when students were asked how frequently they had exercised their right to vote, in the case of students from the private university in Quito, Ecuador ($M = .99$, $SD = 1.48$,) 55.8 percent said they had “never” done it, while in the case of students from the public university in the Manabí Province ($M = 3.57$, $SD = 1.86$,) 53.7 percent said that they had. However, it is also important to take into account that Quito and Manabí held local elections in 2014. Another thing that must be considered is that according to Article 6.1 of the 2008 Ecuadorian Constitution, voting is mandatory for all people older than eighteen. “Supporting a political campaign” was one of the most rejected options in both Ecuadorian groups, with just a slight difference in intensity. In the UDLA’s case ($M = 1.80$, $SD = 1.79$), 29.3 percent of respondents said they had never supported a political campaign; in the ULEAM’s case ($M = .92$, $DE = 1.40$), 54.6 percent of students had the same answer (see Table 3).

Table 4: Offline Political Participation among the Surveyed Students from Private and Public Universities in Ecuador

	<i>Most Voted Response</i>	<i>University</i>	<i>Total Percentage</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<i>Voting</i>	Never	Public	55.8%	101	.99	1.48
	Always	Private	53.7%	139	3.57	1.86
<i>Going to Rallies</i>	Never	Public	59.7%	108	0.81	1.33
	Never	Private	50.2%	131	1.05	1.45
<i>Supporting a Campaign</i>	Never	Public	29.3%	53	1.80	1.79
	Never	Private	54.6%	143	0.92	1.40
<i>Signing Public Consultations</i>	Never	Public	43.1%	78	1.14	1.43
	Never	Private	45.2%	119	1.14	1.55
<i>Participating in Student Organizations</i>	Never	Public	40.3%	73	1.34	1.57
	Rarely	Private	41.3%	109	1.26	1.41
<i>Going to Conferences</i>	Never	Public	71.3%	129	0.59	1.19
	Rarely	Private	43.4%	115	1.13	1.33
<i>Contacting Politician / Representative</i>	Never	Public	62.4%	113	0.75	1.29
	Never	Private	63.5%	167	.67	1.20
<i>Contributing to the Influencing of Public Policies</i>	Never	Public	57.5%	104	1.05	1.60
	Never	Private	67%	179	0.62	1.18
<i>NGO</i>	Not Sure	Public	33%	60	3.59	1.20
	Never	Private	60%	159	0.98	1.60

Note: $N = (\text{Public} = 265, \text{Private} = 182)$. Where the minimal value is 0, and the maximum is 5. There are six values: Never (0), Rarely (1), Often (2), Not sure (3), Almost always (4), and Always (5).
Data Compiled by the Authors

Among students from surveyed Mexican universities, the option with the highest rejection rate was “contributing to the influence of public policies.” In public universities, the rejection rate was 82 percent ($M = .18, SD = .383$), while in private universities, it was 78.1 percent ($M = .22, SD = .414$.) In contrast, students said that they had gone to politics-related conferences; in the first case, there was a favorable response of 55.7 percent ($M = .56, SD = .497$), while in the second case, there was a 63.2 percent ($M = .63, SD = .482$) response. There is no response that allows for the identification of higher political participation (see Table 4).

Political Participation on Social Media

In México’s case, the surveyed students recognized their lack of active political participation on social media. The response with the highest median, from both public and private university students, was “I like a comment I agree with” ($M = 1.79, SD = 1.32$ and $M = 1.71, SD = 1.42$), followed by “I look up information on politics” ($M = 1.54, SD = 1.08$ and $M = 1.69, SD = 1.69$). However, the former can only be considered to be carried out by “some.” The vast majority of the surveyed students reported that they did not often undertake political activities on social media, and in general, used it only casually (see Table 5).

Table 5: Online Political Participation among the Surveyed Students from Private and Public Universities in México

	<i>Most Voted Response</i>	<i>University</i>	<i>Total Percentage</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<i>I look up information on politics</i>	Some	Public	35%	489	1.54	1.08
		Private	35.4%	99	1.69	1.17
<i>I read humorous content on politics</i>	Some	Public	32.8%	458	1.58	1.10
		Private	32.6%	91	1.51	1.07
<i>I share humorous content on politics</i>	None	Public	37.5%	525	1.17	1.16
		Private	40.5%	113	1.23	1.25
<i>I read discussions</i>	Some	Public	80%	442	1.61	1.23
		Private	74.2%	90	1.69	1.18
<i>I participate in discussions</i>	Some	Public	38.4%	535	1.14	1.14
		Private	38.5%	107	1.22	1.21
<i>I watch videos with political content</i>	Some	Public	31.3%	436	1.70	1.17
		Private	34.2%	95	1.80	1.21
<i>I share videos with political content</i>	None	Public	41.8%	582	1.12	1.18
		Private	43.2%	121	1.23	1.20
<i>I post personal opinions on politics</i>	None	Public	45.2%	629	1.00	1.14
		Private	52.1%	146	0.96	1.19
<i>I like a comment on politics</i>	Some	Public	26.3%	1139	1.79	1.32
	None	Private	28.9%	190	1.71	1.42
<i>I post information on politics</i>	None	Public	54%	756	0.78	1.01
		Private	59.2%	164	0.75	1.06
<i>I follow politicians on social media</i>	None	Public	38.4%	535	1.26	1.27
		Private	43.3%	119	1.19	1.29
<i>I follow journalists or leaders on social media</i>	None	Public	31.2%	436	1.46	1.30
		Private	32.1%	89	1.48	1.34
<i>I reply to politicians' comments</i>	None	Public	64.8%	904	0.60	0.96
		Private	64.3%	178	0.63	1.02
<i>I sign petitions</i>	None	Public	54.1%	757	0.83	1.16
		Private	58.4%	162	0.80	1.30

Note: N = (Public = 1407, Private = 283). Where the minimal value is 0, and the maximum is 4. There are five values: none, little, some, enough, and plenty. Data Compiled by the Authors

In Ecuador’s case, it is important to note that in both private and public universities, there was generally less political participation on social media. However, different substantives were identified among both groups, whereas in México’s case the differences were not as numerous. Regarding the “I look up information on politics” option, the most voted response from UDLA ($M = 2.28, DS = 1.59$) students was “rarely,” whereas 45 percent of students in ULEAM ($M = 1.52, DE = 1.49$) stated that they looked up information on politics using social media (see Table 6).

Table 6: Media Consumption of Surveyed Students from Private and Public Universities of Ecuador

	<i>Most Voted Response</i>	<i>University</i>	<i>Total Percentage</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<i>I look up information on politics</i>	Rarely	Public	33%	60	2.28	1.59
	Rarely	Private	45%	123	1.52	1.49
<i>I read humorous content on politics</i>	Rarely	Public	35.7%	65	1.73	1.66
	Rarely	Private	33.3%	88	1.78	1.52
<i>I share humorous content on politics</i>	Often	Public	34.6%	63	2.43	1.55
	Never	Private	32.5%	86	1.40	1.46
<i>I read discussions</i>	Never	Public	34.1%	62	1.55	1.67
	Rarely	Private	32.8%	87	1.57	1.57
<i>I participate in discussions</i>	Often	Public	30.9%	56	2.15	1.61
	Never	Private	42.9%	114	1.07	1.37
<i>I watch videos with political content</i>	Never	Public	41.4%	75	1.36	1.61
	Rarely	Private	43.2%	114	1.47	1.43
<i>I share videos with political content</i>	Never	Public	38.7%	70	1.33	1.57
	Never	Private	49.2%	131	0.94	1.37
<i>I post personal opinions on politics</i>	Never	Public	24.2%	44	2.12	1.86
	Never	Private	46.0%	121	1.00	1.37
<i>I like a comment on politics</i>	Never	Public	37.9%	69	1.34	1.55
	Rarely	Private	27.6%	74	1.96	1.81
<i>I post information on politics</i>	Never	Public	33%	60	1.82	1.84
	Never	Private	51.5%	137	0.84	1.25
<i>I follow politicians on social media</i>	Never	Public	27.5%	50	1.91	1.79
	Never	Private	38.6%	102	1.33	1.58
<i>I follow journalists or leaders on social media</i>	Never	Public	59.7%	108	0.76	1.24
	Rarely	Private	35%	93	1.40	1.54
<i>I reply to politicians' comments</i>	Never	Public	35.2%	64	1.68	1.80
	Never	Private	66.3%	175	0.61	1.12
<i>I sign petitions</i>	Always	Public	71.8%	130	4.07	1.62
	Never	Private	48.9%	130	1.20	1.65

Note: $N = (\text{Public} = 1407, \text{Private} = 283)$. Where the minimal value is 0, and the maximum is 4. There are five values: none, little, some, enough, and plenty.

Data Compiled by the Authors

Relationship between Variables

After carrying out factor analysis, three levels of use were found to correspond to different behaviors by social media users. The first level, referred to as a “passive user,” was defined as performing actions through which the Internet-user received information only (e.g. getting bulletins on politics and reading discussions.) The second level was called a “responsive user.” In México’s case, the subjects not only received information, but actively sought out news and public figures that reflected their interests, as well as a more solid interaction when it came to signing petitions on issues they deemed relevant. The third and last level, referred to as a “content-sharer,” includes actions where the Internet-user socialized about the information they deemed relevant (e.g. sharing videos, post information on politics, and so on).

Table 7: Relationship between the Online and Offline Political Participation of Students from Private and Public Universities in México

	<i>Passive User</i>	<i>Responsive User</i>	<i>Content-Sharer</i>
<i>Voting</i>	0.04	0.08**	0.09**
<i>Going to Rallies</i>	0.23**	0.24**	0.34**
<i>Supporting a Campaign</i>	0.24**	0.23**	0.34**
<i>Signing Public Consultations</i>	0.24**	0.22**	0.38**
<i>Participating in Student Organizations</i>	0.24**	0.24**	0.31**
<i>Going to Conferences</i>	0.28**	0.29**	0.37**
<i>Contacting Politician / Representative</i>	0.37**	0.28**	0.38**
<i>Contributing to the Influencing of Public Policies</i>	0.31**	0.29**	0.39**
<i>Collaborating with a NGO</i>	0.18**	0.16**	0.24**

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. The Pearson coefficients in bold mark the closest associations.
Data Compiled by the Authors

An interesting result from the passive user profile was that it was positively related to actions such as contacting a representative/politician ($r = .37$ $p < .01$), contributing to the influence of public policies ($r = .31$ $p < .01$), and participating in student organizations ($r = .24$ $p < .01$). In other words, passive social media users can participate actively in offline contexts. In the case of responsive users, correlations were found among cases such as voting ($r = .08$ $p < .01$), going to rallies ($r = .24$ $p < .01$), going to conferences ($r = .29$ $p < .01$), contacting a representative/politician ($r = .28$ $p < .01$), and contributing to the influence of public policies ($r = .29$ $p < .01$). Ultimately, there was an undeniable relationship between offline political participation and online political participation. Even when participation was generally low among the surveyed students, it was clearly linked to their activities on the Internet (see Table 7).

Table 8: Relationship between the Online and Offline Political Participation of Students from Private and Public Universities in Ecuador

	<i>Passive User</i>	<i>Responsive User</i>	<i>Content-Sharer</i>
<i>Voting</i>	-0.004	-0.048	-0.033
<i>Going to Rallies</i>	-0.52	-0.052	-0.033
<i>Supporting a Campaign</i>	0.018	0.062	0.040
<i>Signing Public Consultations</i>	0.001	-0.054	-0.006
<i>Participating in Student Organizations</i>	0.015	0.114*	-0.004
<i>Going to Conferences</i>	-0.046	-0.030	-0.014
<i>Contacting Politician / Representative</i>	-0.035	0.041	0.040
<i>Contributing to the Influencing of Public Policies</i>	.000	0.448**	0.024
<i>Collaborating with a NGO</i>	-0.038	0.444**	0.376**

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. The Pearson coefficients in bold mark the closest associations.
Data Compiled by the Authors

In Ecuador’s case, not many positive correlations were found, save for a few specific cases. This included participating in student organizations, which was positively related to responsive users ($r = .114$ $p < .05$). Another positive correlation found between responsive users and political participation on social media was how they said they contributed to influencing public policies

($r = .45$ $p < .01$) and collaborated with non-governmental organizations ($r = .44$ $p < .01$). In the case of social media content-sharers, their behavior was correlated to collaborating with NGOs ($r = .38$ $p < .01$). In this sense, it is clear that the relationship between these students' active participation on social media and their offline political participation is minimal. These results could have been influenced by low participation on social media among Ecuadorian students, but we must consider that the results were similar for Mexican students (see Table 8).

Conclusion

This research found that a high level of conventional political participation influences online participation, a reflection of the technology gap that marks these two countries. In other words, traditional media highly influences the contemporary political environment of young college students, particularly in Ecuador. This means that political participation in México and Ecuador are still heavily influenced by offline behaviors, though young users from these two countries constantly monitor social media. It is important to note that low consumption of mass media information was recognized, no doubt a reflection of the trust crisis news media is suffering globally (Barredo 2013a) It is possible that this tendency, in which social media is used by citizens to keep themselves informed, will grow with time as the use of technology gradually becomes more universal and as conventional media gradually notices the challenge posed by Web 2.0. We observe that, especially in México's case, the consumption of information through mass media is gradually decreasing.

Furthermore, the research results suggest that the trust crisis extends to governmental institutions, more so in México than in Ecuador, which was previously noticed in another study (Barredo 2013b). This crisis is particularly caused by the lack of a real connection between the people in power and the citizens, the dismantling of society with the creation of public policies, and the problems created in both contexts by the lack of democratization of public spaces, among other causes (Barredo 2013b). All of this results in a lack of political participation on social media, which is created to be the provider of personal experience through statuses, comments, pictures, videos, among others features, and not to be the platform that hosts social interaction. In other words, some of the problems inherited from traditional media—such as the lack of trust in public activities and events or the poor stimulation of community action—affect new media to such an extent that users from both countries tend to take on passive roles when it comes to online political participation. From this point of view, and based on the above findings, we believe that it is highly improbable that new social movements would begin in the near future in either of these countries—unlike in the cases of Spain, the United States, Egypt, and Tunisia, among others—or evolve into organized participation like political parties, collaborative media, or elections monitored mainly through social media. However, even though it is highly improbable that a movement will occur, the impact and importance of social media should not be disregarded. Citizens are slowly adopting new media, which use their vision and message to encourage greater social participation and inclusion of citizens, which is having a negative effect on both news media and state institutions.

This research on social media and its influence on political participation is relevant because it brings us closer to comprehending both the practices and the ways in which young people relate to politics in Latin America. This is important because it will eventually be the new generations of these two countries—México and Ecuador—that will inevitably influence the decision-making of their respective countries. Understanding the media through which they receive information about their reality, as well as the ways in which they express themselves in adverse moments, contributes to generating a background for also understanding the dynamics of student movements, political expressions, and social conflicts that could arise in the near future. These ideas not only serve as our conclusions, but also as guidance for further research on the process and introduction of new dynamics into contemporary governmental communication.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Dr. Daniel Javier de la Garza Montemayor: Associate Professor, Faculty of Political Science and International Relations, Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León, Monterrey, México

Dr. Daniel Barredo Ibáñez: Lecturer, School of Human Sciences, Universidad del Rosario, Bogotá, Colombia

Dr. Abraham A. Hernández Paz: Associate Professor, Faculty of Political Science and International Relations, Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León, Monterrey, México

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