Spanish MP's upgraded? The technological adoption of Spanish members of parliament among years

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Abstract

During recent years, the wide spread of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and how our politicians are using it and managing their presence on the mass media, have led us to define new concepts as permanent campaign or vigilant citizen. This new citizen model can control political elites throughout the available tools, or at least, is able to contact those elite constantly.

However, does such a vigilant citizen really exist? In other words, which elite behavior could allow citizens to control them according to this expectation? This work is aimed to present the evolution of Spanish Members of Parliament's (MPs) online profile focusing on the two last finished legislatures, though. Consequently, it implies a methodological contribution as well as a reflexive one, as it spread some light on the representative model the permanent or vigilant citizen lives with, and its real possibilities for controlling the elites.

*Kewywords:*ICT, MPs, Facebook, Twitter, permanent citizen

Resumen

En los últimos años, la extensión de las TIC y el uso que nuestros políticos están haciendo de ellas y su presencia en los medios de comunicación nos han llevado a definir conceptos como campaña permanente o ciudadano vigilante. Éste será un nuevo modelo de ciudadano, que, a través de los nuevos instrumentos de que dispone, "controla" de manera constante a las élites políticas, o, al menos, se relaciona con ellas de forma permanente.

Cabe, sin embargo, preguntarse, si existe realmente este ciudadano permanente o vigilante. Dicho de otro modo, ¿qué aspectos del comportamiento de las élites permitirán éstas que satisfagan las expectativas de los ciudadanos y se sometan a su control? Este trabajo recoge la evolución del perfil online de los parlamentarios españoles centrado en las dos últimas legislaturas. Constituye, así, una aportación metodológica, pero también reflexiva al debate campañas-ciudadanos permanentes, en tanto que arroja luz sobre el modelo de representante que convive con este ciudadano permanente, así como sobre el alcance total del control de este último en virtud del anterior.

*Palabras clave:*TIC, MPs, Facebook , Twitter, ciudadano permanente

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[1] Working paper involved in an ongoing research project. Every suggestion and comments will be welcome.

1. Introduction

As, recently, those who were born after the appearance and etend of the Internet are acquiring legal age for voting, how to contact and convince them have become a main worry for political parties: From those using the Internet, (91% of Spanish population, according to Center for Sociological Research, CIS, study no. 2889), the great majority have an account on Facebook (55% of Spaniards main net in 2011), Twitter (used by 17% of Spanish citizens in 2011). In 2013 almost 75 per cent of Spanish homes had complete access to the Internet[2]. In 2014 a 96% had a Facebook account, and 56% had a Twitter profile. Opposite to these numbers, only 30 per cent of Spanish MPs have a Facebook or a Twitter active profile[3]. Yet, near 54% of Spanish MPs had neither Facebook nor Twitter.

Even when there are strong variations among European countries about accessing to the Internet, it is still more variation about the Internet penetration on elites. For instance, countries like Denmark, Netherlands or Sweden, with the highest level of Information Society development have low levels of candidate's using of social media (Larsson and Moe 2011, Vergeer and Hermans 2013, Hansen and Kosiara- Pedersen 2014).

Nowadays, political scientists are exploring to what extent the decision of technology adoption by candidates depend on the features of the adopter (Lorenzo and Garmendia, 2015), or the environment they are involved in. Although that discussion is more common when talking about American politics, it is gathering *momentum* in Europe.

This work is based on the seminal comparative work of Lilleker et al. (2011) and Anstead and Chadwick (2008:57), analyzing how personal and institutional constraints can determinate technology adoption and use by Spanish MPs. For doing that, we are developing an original dataset that summarizes social, demographic, and institutional

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2 According to INE http://www.ine.es/prensa/np864.pdf

3Nowadays, there are few more MP's using social networks. However, those who had an inactive profile or who had started their presence at the social media because of the last local and regional elections (March and May, 2015) or in the previous general ones, in 2011were excluded. The first group due to, in fact, they are not in social media. The second, because they started to use It once they have finished their MP's condition at state level.

features of Spanish representatives at *Congreso de los Diputados* since 1979 to date[4]. We have also included their presence at social media, and, at first sight, only 46% of them are using those technologies, what is going to have an important impact over the notion of vigilant citizen, as it is going to be difficult to contact or control those MPs who are not "online".

We first describe the variables and what the common profile of MP user of social media is. We focus here on Facebook and Twitter because of two main reasons. On the one hand, are the most used social media in Spain; on the other, they are the most useful and friendly to contact and share messages, contents, and information, also political ones. We find that Spanish MPs are not as present as social media as Spanish citizens. Among MPs, those minor and regionalist parties are the keenest to the use of social media as Facebook and Twitter, although the presence of Spanish MPs as a whole in such sphere is still low, as major parties, which were 92% of the Chamber in 2008, and 89% in 2004, are less predispose to social sites. We also find there is not a clear average social media user.

2. **Social media adoption by candidates and its meaning. An overview of the Internet's importance in political communication strategies and real opportunities from ICT to the permanent citizen model**

As Lorenzo and Garmendia pointed out (2015:4), "Election campaigns are communication campaigns (Bimber 2014:130), and despite the consensus on their minimal electoral effects (Brady, Johnston and Sides 2006), their relevant role as a source of public information affecting (reinforcement, (Lazarsfeld, Bernard and Berelson, 1948)) voters' private beliefs has led to their constant evolution. Competition for votes drives parties and candidates to make their information as accessible as possible, which usually requires broadcasting messages over the most popular media available (Ansolabehere 2006). As a consequence, it is therefore possible to trace linkages from technological innovation to changes in the larger political communication strategies, and on to the choices, and adaptation of political actors". Based on that, it would be possible to speculate about the many benefits of the Internet on fluent

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4As it is only an exploratory work, we focus here on the two more recent, finished legislatures, for showing the impact of Internet over politicians when communicate with citizens. We have selected them not only because are the most recent and we all remember it, but because are the most close to the appearance and growing use of social media in Spain.

communication citizen-politicians, and how the extension of social networks and ICT have created the model of vigilant citizen, the main focus of this panel. Well, it may be premature to assume that, since the campaigns are permanent, there is also a permanent citizen, who constantly observes and controls representative's performance. Not only because, perhaps, we are assuming the part of citizens and civic interest that may not hold.

Going further, before talking about vigilant or permanent citizens, it is important to highlight, as we are doing here, about its real scope and the role social media plays on it, we need to pay attention to the other side of the coin, that is, on political parties and candidates. Undoubtedly, parties are using social media as a new tool for their goals (essentially for gaining votes). Nevertheless, how is parties' presence on the Internet? What is their online performance? Not only the different levels of Internet permeation on European (and Spanish) society are important, but also institutional features (Spanish proportional electoral system, i.e.), emphasizing the difference between major and minor parties. Therefore, it is possible for two effects to appear major parties using social media more than smaller ones, for increasing their advantages, or minor formations becoming social media users for a greater visibility.

Norris (2003) captured and analyzed the content of 134 parties' website, and she concluded that fringe and minor parties were taking advantage of, precisely, that possibility, by developing more original and bottom-up communications. Here in Spain, it is easy to think about those small or minor parties as traditionally IU (Izquierda Unida,), and recently UPyD (Unión, Progreso y Democracia), trying to acquire the relevance of PP (Partido Popular) and PSOE (Partido Socialista Obrero Español). Both, PP and PSOE have the greatest space on traditional media, especially on TV, even more during campaigns (distributed according to Congress' weigh of each party). Consequently, it is depending of party exposure to public that will be possible or not to talk about vigilant citizen and its degree of permanency. That is why, apart from the easiness the social media provide as tool for citizen control and monitoring of party activity, it is need a willing from candidates and parties to show what they do.

The importance of analyzing candidates' features and creating a database as ours is not only because candidates willing's relevance in defining permanent citizen. It is because the appearance of Social Network Sites (most relevantly, Facebook and Twitter) profoundly dynamized the online presence of political actors in most of European

countries (Lorenzo and Garmendia, 2015), and stressed the figure of individual politicians in formerly party-centered political systems (Larsson and Moe 2011, Karlsen and Skogerbo 2013) as Spanish. Although the presence of Spanish MPs on social media is far from being absolute (more than a half of them did not have Facebook nor Twitter profiles in 2011), or near to the average citizen level, it has significantly increased in a few time.

Several explanations are available when discussing candidates' social media adoption. The first group approaches this explanation from a cost-benefit perspective. Political scientist of this group analyzes what candidates gain from the attributes of the innovation (Yi et al. 2006): visibility (the short-term competitive advantage of being online (Selnow 1998)), reaching voters directly, and an increasing personalization of politics enhancing their relative weight in their own parties (Stromer-Galley, 2000; Peterson, 2012; Marcinkowski and Metag,2014). The second core alludes to candidates' socio-demographic aspects delving into the consequences of the age "digital divide", belonging to upper cohorts relevantly decreases in the likelihood of developing a presence on spaces like Facebook or Twitter (Larsson and Kalsnes, 2014; Strandberg 2013). We posit here the socio-demographic features influence candidates' social media presence as well as political ones. We also describe the main characteristics of MP users.

Since general elections are the "first order ones" (Delgado-Sotillos and López Nieto, 2012) (Delgado Sotillos, I. and López-Nieto, L. (2012): , we analyze the social media's profile of MP's at the national stage, as they are the representative *per excellence*. More so, since Spanish mobilization and protest cycle started in 2011 with the arrival of 15M Movement, one of the strongest claims against politicians was they were not responsive, they do not listen nor talk to people. That is why we found important to inquire into candidates' use of social media. Doing that, we would answer to the question *are our MPs using social media, who and how?* More so, what is the profile of MP user of social media? Analyzing Spanish Parliament and MPs' behavior in that field is a key issue that remains unexplored, offering us a unique opportunity for a better understanding of the current Spanish political cycle.

3. Data and Method

We started the current research collecting data from Congreso de losDiputados' website (http://www.congreso.es/portal/page/portal/Congreso/Congreso), and completing them using socio-demographic information of Spanish MPs' available mainly in press and parties databases. Some of the information, as MPs' presence at social media, was directly taking by diving on these media.

We use the web for finding MPs' profiles on Facebook and Twitter. We codified those who have each one as 1, if it was a private profile (friend petition was requested for seeing shared information), and 2 for those public. We took into account just those with a real (not a fan page derived from Congreso), active (not just "birth data"), profile, created before September 27th, 2011, when Chambers were dissolved for next elections. We decided to pay attention to the public-private division because of the heterogeneous use of Facebook on Twitter accounts among MPs'. Such a distinction implies consequences as the kind of communication dynamics attached in both media. While private profiles, specially on Twitter, takes the candidate out of viral trends and issues, public one facilitate so much been contacted or, at least, "followed", by citizens. Additionally, the preferred network has also implications on the deepness of the posted messages.

As an exploratory study as this working paper is, our analyses are mainly descriptive, trying to depict an introductory state of art in the distribution of the main used variables. In forthcoming works, we will try to find other behavior trends as how often MPs' upload their profiles, which contents the use to share, etc. We focus on Spain due to it has been yet unexplored, as we said above. Spanish Congreso de los Diputados was choosen because its paramount importance in our political system, as well as due to the validity and reliability of data for the database.

In next section we will describe the measured features and our main expectations as well.

4. Variables and hypotheses

This research is exploratory, as we said before. We are aim to discover not only if Spanish MPs are social media users or if not, but also we would like to describe their communication trends and behavior patrons.

However, here we have selected some preliminary, descriptive, socio-demographic variables, as well as some descriptive political ones.

Socio-demographic variables:

Gender: We selected gender as a primarily social and demographic feature. In addition, as there is a gender gap on our societies, and MPs also reproduce such a gap (it was not until 2007 we had parity electoral lists), we found interesting to consider it. Moreover, it is an essential characteristic for describing the average MP using social media.

Education Level: we wanted to test here if education level have some effects over using social media. We also wanted to know what level was the most common among those social networks' users. We follow CIS levels of education.

Political Variables:

*Political Party:*our aim here is to test Norris (2003) previous results for Spanish parties. That measure also provides use MP's ideology information.

*Incumbency:*having being an MP before can give some experience for politicians about how to act. Incumbency could have taught them also what the main ways for communication with different interlocutors (considering here citizens actively involved in that conversation) are.

Dependent variables:

*Using Facebook:*we only consider, as said above, active profiles constituted during the analyzed legislative period.

Using Twitter: the same for twitter. We included public and private profiles in both media.

Main expectations:

Our main expectations based on the described variables are

-Gender expectation: we expect social media to reproduce the same gender gap as the Chamber has. So, *men are expected to have a greater presence at the social media field.*

-Age expectations: the youngest MPs are thought to be the great majority of those using social media, due to the generational gap associated to new technologies. That is why our

hypothesis here is *the earliest the age, the most probable the use of social media profiles*.

-Educational level expectations linked high education levels with greatest knowledge about technology and communication skills. Owing to such supposition, we expectthe*higheducational level(s) to be held by a great majority of social media users.*

-Party expectations: accordingly, Norris (2003), we assume that *minor and small parties are the most probable to have social media active profiles.*

-Incumbency expectation: *those MPs who have been at Parliament before and have more experience in that field are expected to be present at social media than those who are not incumbents.*

5. Discussion and Results

Across the following pages, we will discuss our results, advancing the main findings of the research. Firstly we will present a brief description of all variables taken into account (demographic, political and social networks ones), by two different periods, one of them for each complete legislature analyzed in the paper. We have just described the variables and proceed with cross tabs, trying to find the distribution of our main independent factors over the dependent variable, having an account (or not)or a profile on social sites.

2004-2008

During the period 2004-08, the last time PSOE was in office, almost 52 % of MP's had never had an organic charge at the party, and, among those who do had, the great

majority have been at state level. As we see coming soon, on 2008-11 legislature, it was less than 40% who had never been party elite before becoming MP's. Nevertheless, 52% of them have been MP's before (they were incumbent). It is important, because it tell us about the regeneration level of Spanish Congreso. In 2008, as 59% of MP's were incumbent, such a renovation was not achieved.

And what about socio-demographic features? Regarding to sex, 36% of the Chamber were women, while in 2008 they were 38, what means that women representation is growing, getting near to the real composition of Spanish society. Those with high education levels, (university studies) were in 2004 near to 85% of MP's, much more than the average Spaniard. In next period, the profile of our MP's is closer to the "real" Spaniard, and due to that, a bit more representative. However, it opens the question of the quality of representatives.

Now, we want to know the profile of our social media active MP. We expect those using such nets as Facebook and Twitter to be less in 2004-08 than in 2008-11, mainly because those nets were not as famous as they are nowadays.

In 2004-08, only 7 per cent of our deputies had a Facebook account in 2004-8; yet the 5% of them had a Twitter profile. These data increases significantly in 2008-11 confirming our firs assumptions. It also implies a trend to be more communicative and close to citizens (as permanent campaign theories posit). That greater presence in from 2008 to nowadays, create a bigger space of opportunity for vigilant citizens.

Among those who had a Facebook profile, 21% were women, and 79 per cent, men. Twitter analysis reveals that 85% of MP's using that net were also men. So, the social networks field was dominated by men. The great majority of Twitter (85) and Facebook (86%) users were highly educated (graduated and post graduated). Incumbency here has no statistic meaning. These results confirm our main assumptions regarding to socio-demographic variables. Contrary to said above, incumbency is not relevant for being active in the social media landscape.

Finally, party is the most relevant political variable here, with statistical influence in having or not a social network profile. PSOE (42%) and PP (39%) are the most active on Twitter in 2004-08, as well as on Facebook (PSOE, 59%, PP 24%). It is an interesting finding due to its mainstream condition. However, these numbers could hide another reality. If we put our attention to the percentaje of party members that have

Facebook or Twitter using Party in the Y axis, in 2004-08 the great majority of parties has low representantives using the social media. NaBai (100% on Facebook), CIU (10% private Facebook account) and PNV (24% Facebook public profile) are predominant. CIU, ERC and NaBai are the most active parties on Twitter (20, 10m and 100% respectively). Even when it is easy for majority parties to be also the majority of users, here we can appreciate a weak evidence supporting minor parties hypothesis. However, there is no enough information for concluding anything about ideology.

Taking this in mind, we will look at 2008-11 results. After, we will present our conclusions.

2008-2011

Before analyzing the distribution of our variables, we would like to describe the general social media presence picture in 2008-11.While out of the many people who have access to the Internet, almost all[5] (96%) have a Facebook account, only 30% of MP's have also an account. Moreover, 7% of them are private, or need a "friend request". Regarding Twitter, the profiles are more similar, as it is used by 56% of Spanish population and 30% of MP's. Near 54% have neither a Facebook or a Twitter profile. The average Spanish MP in social media profiles is having none or only Twitter. This is quite unexpected. Even when Twitter appeared after Facebook, due to its immediacy or style of the message.

If we take a look to Spanish Members of Parliament previous works, more than a half (54%), were public workers and civil servants before became deputies at Congreso de losDiputados. Among Spaniards, the most common employment sector (more than 20%[6]) is the third one (services, protection and sales), while, amongst deputies, the most shared is scientist techniques and intellectuals (66%). It could have two readings. The first can suggest that Spanish MP's are more prepared than the average citizen, so they

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5 http://www.iabspain.net/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2015/01/Estudio_Anual_Redes_Sociales_2015.pdf

have a greater capability for the governmental task. However, it could also mean that Spanish Congreso is not a small picture of Spanish reality, in other words, Spanish MP's are not a descriptive representation (Pitkin, 1967) of Spaniards. Nevertheless, it confirms our thoughts about previous work and its influence on having an account on social media.

Firstly, we will look to the socio-demographic variables, as sex or education level. Then, we will focus on other characteristics, as the political party, or if they were deputies before or not.

Out of the many MP's who had a Facebook profile, a majority are women (62% of them have an account). This shows a different result compared to 2004-8 and demonstrates that gender inequality gap is changing in the social network landscape.However, both men and women (7% and 8%) are not so prone to have a public account, which makes difficult to use it for keeping in touch with citizens. Also women are more active on Twitter (32% of women MP's are on Twitter).

Between major parties, the largest presence on social media is for PSOE, (32% on Facebook, 27% on Twitter, and 11% on both social networks), far from PP, with 10% of deputies with both networks, but only 23% on Twitter, and 25% on Facebook. Among those who had presence on Facebook, PSOE has the half of their profiles up to a public access. PP only 34%. Other parties, like UPyD and IU has both a complete social network presence, with 100% of their representatives on Facebook and Twitter, and no private accounts. Regional parties, as BNGA, NaBai, CIU, ERC and ICV are plenty represented on Facebook and Twitter, as well as IU and UPyD. PNV is mostly on Twitter (83%). That confirms the Norris hypothesis; it also means that regional parties are the most social media active, looking at them as a whole. We could not assume any strong conclusion for ideology in that case, because conservatives and progresists are both present in the regional side. However, those on the left seem to be a majority (NaBai, ICV, ERC, BNG). It suggest that, rather than ideology, and according to Norris (2003) findings, it is the kind of party what influences most their activity or presence at the social networks landscape. At the while mainstream parties are partially active on

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6TheFebruaryBarometer of Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas, CIS, survey nº 3052. INE data are available at http://www.ine.es/ss/Satellite?
L=es_ES&c=INESeccion_C&cid=1259925481659&p=1254735110672&pagename=ProductosYServicio
s%2FPYSLayout&param3=1259924822888

Facebook and Twitter, regional and "small parties", those minor or niche ones,are more used to interact with citizens throughout these tools.

Nevertheless, the variable that influences the most the use of social networks is education level (party variable is the second one, very close to educative levels). Surprisingly, it shows different results for each network. If the highest presence on Facebook is for non-graduate deputies (67%), graduate and postgraduate control Twitter (31% and 29%, respectively). Variations in how parliamentary parties are present at the social site level are in next figures.

Figure 1. Twitter's inner users by party, in %
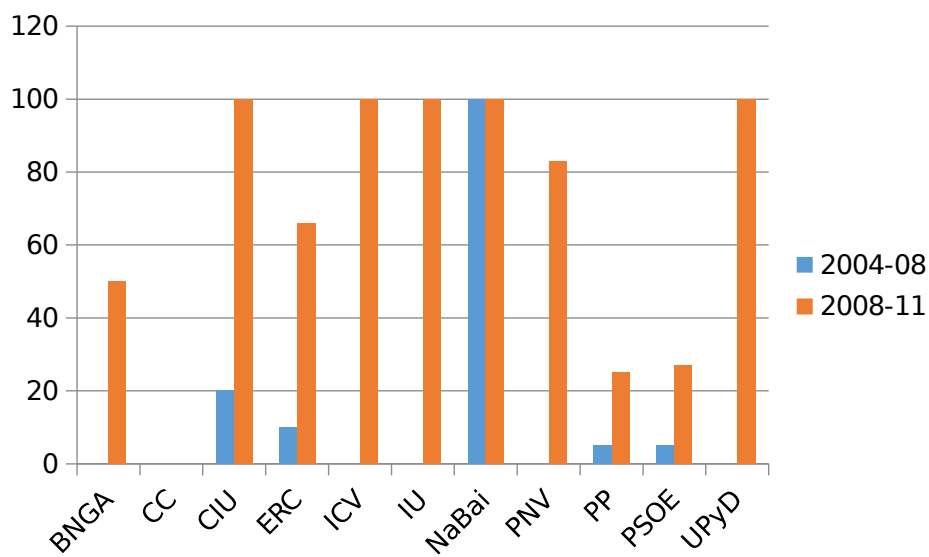
Source: self-development

**Figure 2.** Facebook's inner users by party, in %
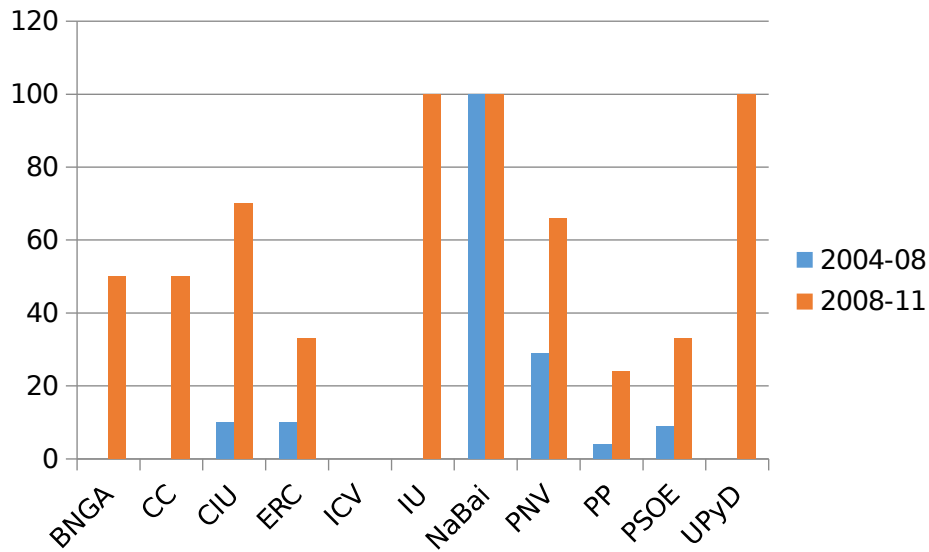
Source: self-development

Finally, those who have never been MP's are more present on Facebook (63%), but not on Twitter (31% of incumbents are on Twitter, opposite to 28% of new chamber's members).
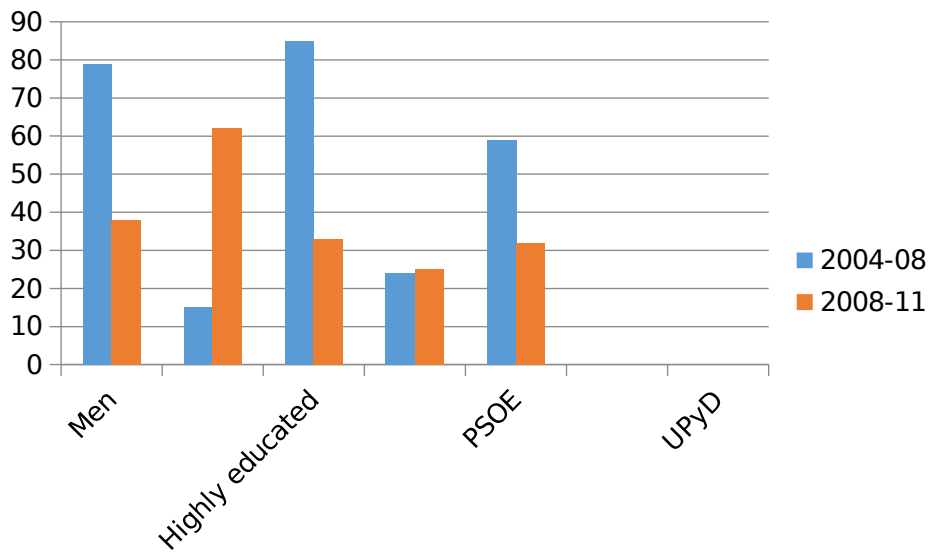
Following figures summarize the main differences between 2004-08 and 2008-11 indicators about Spanish MP's and their social sites presence.

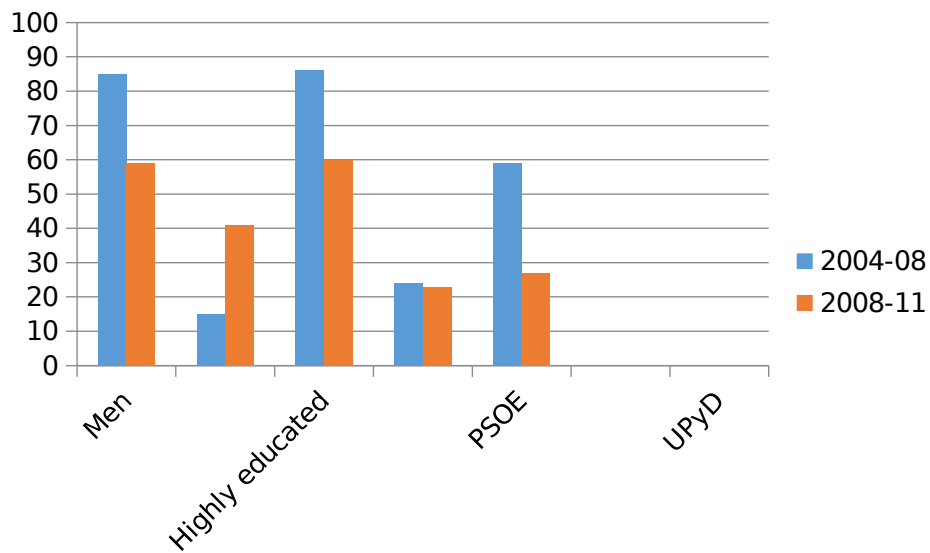Figure 3.**.** Main features distribution variation between 2004-11, in %
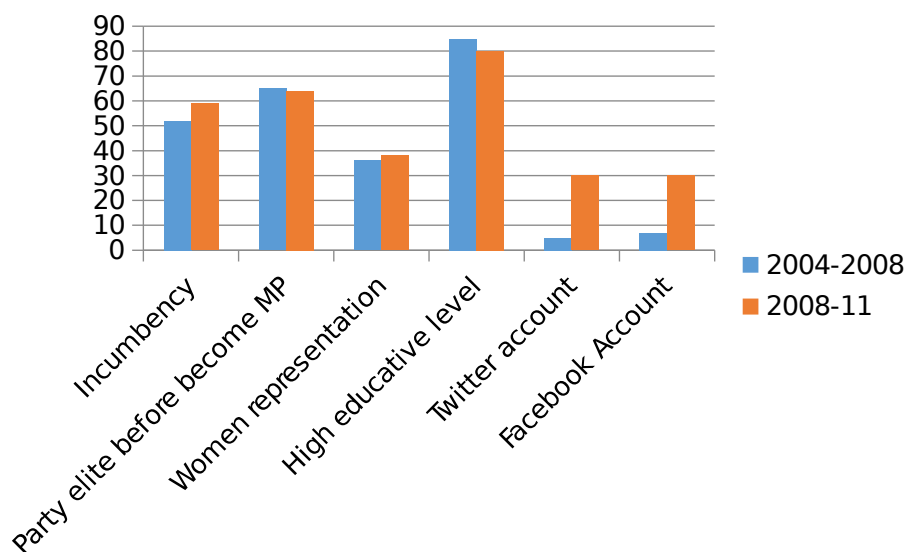
Source: self-development

Figure 4. MPs who are Facebook users

Source: self-development

Figure 5. MPs who are Facebook users

Source: self-development.

6. **Conclusion**

One of the main conclusions we can outline is that there are significant differences between both periods, exactly as we expected, given the rapid increasing in the use of NICT and social sites demands a reaction by our MP's. In spite of that, some of the differences are surprising, like the incumbency irrelevance or the increasing of lower educational levels using social media. However, it could be just a consequence of the extent of these sites. We need to wait for more date to create a more complex trend.

Going further,it is difficult to talk about about an average or a profile of MP user due to such variations. While in 2004-08, a high educated man were the user of social media, in 2008-11 it is a non-so educated woman, member of a minor party. Perhaps next period (2011-15) could spread some light over what patron will consolidate.

Even when MPs' presence on the Internet social media is increasing, it is still far from been at the same level citizens are present on Facebook, Twitter and other social sites, as more than a half of Spanish population is using them almost daily. Collecting the data for the current research, we observed that in fact, the greatest part of our incumbents now have social sites profile, but which were created recently, mainly this year, perhaps because of the successive elections we have to face. Anyway, MP's do not use Facebook or Twitter as much as the average citizen dos; however, citizens are not claiming for MP's to do that. Most of Spanish citizens use Facebook and Twitter for being communicated with their families and friends. Almost no one uses it for searching for political information (21% ensured they used it for searching information, but there is no details about what kind of information), while 92% revealed they never used their social profiles for contact with politicians or parties. This is an interesting discover to reflect about, as it has important implications in the discussion we keep around the idea of permanent7vigilant citizen. As it is not possible to talk about vigilant citizens if MPs are not expose to the formers critic eyes, it is also difficult to talk about permanent citizens if they do not use their social site for that aim.

While almost no one use social networks for talking to politicians, near to a third of population normally use it for political protest. Perhaps it is not so important for politicians to have active social networks profiles, or rather, these are not so important for citizens for contact with them. Before, we were surprised the barely part of our MP's present on the social network atmosphere, but, as we can see now, citizens are not keen on be politically active at their social networks. That is why MP's presence or absence on social networks perhaps is meaningless for the average citizen. More so, this average

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citizen does not try to contact them this way. Consequently, the gap between citizens and their representatives could be certainly smaller at this point than was suggested by our previous results. In spite of that, we find few reasons for talking about a vigilant citizen. Summarizing our main arguments, no vigilance is possible without the willing of the vigilant and the presence of those we want to monitor.

We would like to stress the methodological contribution this paper opens throughout the building of the database that makes possible deeper analyses and the establishment of social media behavior patrons. Going further on our knowledge about one main actor in the definition of what the permanent citizen is, we will progress in our whole perspective.

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