# Politics 2.0 with the Nintendo generation

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**Abstract**

*The emergence of Web 2.0 has transformed the uses and strategies of political communication. The campaign developed by Obama's team is a good example of the electoral efficiency of these new tools whose results we are now analysing and evaluating.*

*While our present leaders could be classified as the "fax generation", the North American experience opens the doors to a new way of relating with the electoral masses. With these new instruments of interactive communication, voters have the space to be able to make their voices heard and to be able to affect the electoral programme, something which undoubtedly benefits an election campaign's degree of democratic quality.*

**Resum**

*La irrupció del Web 2.0 ha transformat els usos i les estratègies de la comunicació política. La campanya desenvolupada per l'equip d'Obama és un bon exemple de l'eficàcia electoral d'aquestes noves eines, el resultat de les quals tot just estem analitzant i avaluant.*

*Si els nostres dirigents actuals els podríem emmarcar com la "generació del fax", l'experiència nord-americana obre les portes a una nova manera de relacionar-se amb la massa electoral. Amb aquests nous instruments de comunicació interactiva, els votants disposen de l'espai per poder fer arribar la seva veu i per poder incidir en el programa electoral; un fet que sens dubte redunda en benefici dels nivells de qualitat democràtica d'una campanya electoral.*

**Key words**

*Nintendo generation, Web 2.0, social networks, feedback, politics 2.0, Internet, cyberpolitics, e-campaign.*

**Paraules clau**

*Generació Nintendo, Web 2.0, xarxes socials, feedback, Política 2.0, Internet, ciberpolítica, e-campanya.*

## Introducció

To date, political communication had channelled a fundamentally unidirectional message as the communication procedures and instruments did not allow for immediate interaction, the reason why the message often remained untouchable until election day. The candidate talked and potential electors listened.

In this respect, various studies of electoral behaviour highlight that this passivity or, in other words, the impossibility of the electorate to make its voice heard in order to affect the political programme, is one of the most powerful reasons for the high level of abstention.

The empirical studies carried out by Norris (1999),[1] Bimber (2001), Owen and Davis (1998) and Hill and Hughes (1998) allow us to generalise the accuracy of the following statement: access to ICTs does not impact the political participation of citizens. In other terms, the individual political behaviour of people with access to the Internet is not significantly different from that of people offline.

Given this view of political communication, the Internet and particularly the new features associated with the concept of

Web 2.0 have become a great instrument for promoting the feedback that is so necessary in designing campaign strategy. As we already know, when users decide to put the mouse's icon on top of a banner or over a pop-up, they are already showing an interest in finding something out about the window they are about to open.

## Internet 2.0

The added value of this new stage in the Internet, the so-called Web 2.0, is precisely the possibility to comment, express an opinion, take part in a real-time chat or in social networks, as well as to send an email or answer a survey. In short, to take part directly in designing the campaign. For this reason, those in charge of the campaign have highly valuable information, as they can know, on a daily basis, the degree of acceptance and interest aroused among the electorate by different points in the electoral programme. In such a situation, the campaign strategy can be modelled based on the degree of interactivity of the electorate. We must not forget that citizens are increasingly better informed and want fast, individualised responses.

Consequently, instead of governments that observe their citizens, Web 2.0 enables citizens to observe the political class at close quarters.

**The Nintendo generation**

According to the North American consultant, Dick Morris,[2] the Nintendo generation[3] no longer waits to turn on the TV and see what's happening. What they want is to interact with the news, to choose and control it.

Unlike current leaders, whom we can mostly place within the "fax generation", the Nintendo generation is characterised by knowing how to communicate digitally, as it integrates digital tools within its areas of relations. The book *The Kids are Alright. How the Gamer Generation is Changing the Workplace*,[4] talks about how the generation that has been born with the phenomenon of videogames has learned to share, not to fear failure, how to work in a team and wanting to be the best but not the richest. The document states that they are the future managers, a more than sufficient reason for firms to modify both their business model and their structures.

This generation is smarter than that of its parents and more sociable, less competitive and more sincere; from the cradle it has mastered new technologies and happiness is the ultimate goal. It was born and grew up in democracy. It is made up of men and women aged between 20 and 30 and totals almost seven and a half million in Spain, according to data from the Spanish Statistics Institute (INE).

One peculiarity of the Nintendo generation, according to Montserrat Ventosa,[5] CEO of the Great Place to Work Institute, dedicated to creating excellent and efficient places to work in, is that representatives of the Nintendo generation can be described as committed: "They don't see hard work as a sacrifice but as a requirement and a chance to excel, so their commitment and engagement are different to those of previous generations. This doesn't mean they're not committed but that, for them, the contract does not entail a sacrifice. However, they do have a low tolerance for frustration."

Jeroen Boschma, creative and strategic consultant, as well as a specialist in the world of young people, who has gathered together his knowledge in the book *Generació Einstein*, states that, if there's something that defines this generation, it's their optimism. "It's the first generation to see the world from a positive point of view. They're serious; they have traditional ideals and a positive image of the future. Their perception is closely related to sincerity and authenticity is, for them, a very important concept."

Susceptible to changing political party, argues Boschma, they are "more concerned about specific issues than ideologies" and expect politicians "to get things going, to be authentic and do the things they promise".

Values such as honesty, sincerity, family and friendship motivate these young people, who enjoy social intelligence, points out Montserrat Ventosa. She also adds that they are socially committed, responsible towards the environment and concerned about climate change.

Jeroen Boschma says that "they are concerned and get angry about injustice, unnecessary red tape, unjustified authority, the lack of authenticity and contradictions in the world. They're happy with their friends, family and with helping someone".

Many North American experts on politics, among them Dick Morris,[6] state that the Nintendo generation, which is now aged between 20 and 35 and is therefore made up of those people who will have political influence over the next 25 years, will return to the sphere of political involvement thanks to the Internet. Not only because it is a generation the majority of which already accesses the Internet for a lot of their everyday tasks, such as getting information or shopping, but because it's a generation that looks for specific answers. Today's political options seem all alike and make them sceptical.

With the Internet they can find individualised feedback to the issues that concern them most. Political scientist Robert Putman[7] also agrees when he says that "the Internet is bringing civic participation and collective commitment to a segment of the population - young people - that traditionally ignores politics".

**Web 2.0 and Politics 2.0**

Web 2.0 is defined on Wikipedia as term that is commonly associated with web applications collective intelligence to provide interactive services online, with the main characteristic that users control their data. The name was adopted by Dale Dougherty, from O'Reilly Media, and has been developed by Tim O'Reilly himself in an article on his blog in October 2005.[8]

Web 2.0 allows for the creation of collective intelligence based on the exchange of experiences and knowledge, making use of user-friendly Internet-based communication tools that facilitate the creation and publication of texts, multimedia images and networks of contacts. The tools that allow this to happen may be programs or platforms on the web itself, such as blogs and wikis, areas for images such as Flickr and Picasa; video such as YouTube and Vimeo; instant short messages such as Twitter; socialisation platforms such as Facebook and MySpace and platforms where presentations can be posted in PowerPoint or PDF. For their part, other users can see or download all these files, even to the latest generation mobile phones, without having to use a personal computer. Certainly, blogs lead the way in this new stage of the Internet, as they create a clear opportunity to share and improve knowledge. But we must remember that the people who create the network on Web 2.0 are hoping to benefit by sharing other people's knowledge and learning from them.

Within this context, Politics 2.0 must be analysed from two perspectives: that of the political class and that of citizens. In

the first case, Politics 2.0 is the use of 2.0 tools to open up the process further to the electorate and to promote the political programme of the person put forward as a candidate. Moreover, computer platforms offer the chance to talk with citizens, to listen to them and share their opinions.

In the second case, it is the capacity of citizens to organise themselves into networks through 2.0 tools to create interest groups and, in this way, influence both politicians and political parties.

In short, we can say that all voters are reached more directly and more accurately with Politics 2.0.

Before looking further at the concept of Politics 2.0, if we go back in time we can see that politics has been a communicative activity that, albeit slowly, has taken over the new tools on offer at any particular time. K. A. Hill and J. E. Hughes state in *Cyberpolitics*[9] that, with the evolution of the media, we have increasingly more access to more political information and politicians but the capacity to interact or influence politics has not grown in parallel. And they point out that this capacity will increase as citizens make use of Internet as a tool in their everyday lives, in how they relate socially and progressively also to take part in the political arena.

In politics, the benefit of the change depends on emergence and strength of incentives coming from the electoral market that affect, on the one hand, the inputs of the political system (election campaigns) and, on the other hand, the production of public policies and the role played by public administrations. A large part of the differences observed between the United States and Europe can be found in the field of the political use of ICTs. In any case, the change in the social and political environment is increasingly more significant and inexcusable. That's why, taking Barack Obama's recent election campaign as a benchmark, we may predict that those who are capable of adapting to these new digital environments will get better results than those who continue to be anchored in the same old procedures.

Peytibi, Rodríguez and Gutiérrez-Rubí,[10] in their analysis of the election campaigns of political parties in the Spanish general elections of 2008, point out that, while new communication technologies have already been fully incorporated into campaign strategy in more than one electoral cycle in the United States, in Spain the situation is very different. In general, the electorate continues to be more dependent on the conventional media, such as newspapers, radio and television. Although the national parties are making an effort to design communicative strategies to be disseminated via new technologies, the opinion of voters is mostly constructed with information transmitted by the classic media.

Notwithstanding this, it is now unimaginable to have a campaign without a strategy implemented on the Internet. In this respect, it can be said that the last election campaign in 2008 was characterised by the innovate use of digital technology that, in summary, took the following form:

1. Increased interactivity (especially in the use of blogs).
2. Co-production of resources via the Internet (volunteer platforms, etc.).
3. Use of format exchange (TV channels).
4. Development of social networks (Facebook).
5. Use of personal e-campaigns (e.g. campaigns to support the candidature of (Spanish president) Rodríguez Zapatero, PAZ).

## Specific features of Web 2.0

As we have already mentioned, on Web 2.0 political messages reach all party supporters through various environments online. And a new figure appears, the "cyber-progressive volunteer", who is encouraged to *"pass it on"*, inundating the Internet with not necessarily solicited mail, i.e. spam or junk mail, and sending mass text messages paid for by the cyber-volunteer. Supporters are also encouraged to send the party a complete census of forms and chats with public opinions. In other words, they should infiltrate blogs and websites of the candidates for other parties to be able to take part with comments and questions. This is called *trolling* in the language of the Internet.[11]

In the study mentioned, Peytibi, Rodríguez and Gutiérrez-Rubí[12] observe that the elections of 9 March 2008 were the first general elections in Spain where the Internet played an important role, with the use of the following virtual environments:

**Blogs.** 27% of the heads of the electoral lists in previous elections had blogs during the electoral campaign.

**Nanoblogs.** Nanoblogs started to be used, such as Twitter. The candidates could talk directly to their supporters via this medium.

**Crowdsourcing.** This consists of outsourcing a specific service to volunteers to carry out tasks that used to be expensive when done by a company (e.g. telephone calls, creating websites, writing letters to the director of a medium, etc.). Volunteers are segmented by their postcode and can therefore be asked to work on issues related to their community, i.e. at a local scale.

**Format swap.** Dissemination is the most important thing when giving out a message. With new technologies and the new tools provided by this technology to share information, videos, images, sound, etc. can be shared and messages from the party or candidates can be posted on any personal blog, website or forum. This is the so-called embedding; information can be examined anywhere.

**Social networks.** Facebook was the star of the Spanish electoral campaign in 2008. In the US, other interesting social networks are currently being explored, such as themed or personal social networks (older people, young people, Afro-Americans, Hispanics, etc.). This can help segment the campaign towards a specific issue or personal situation.

**Personal e-campaigns.** As a leading example we have the Zapatero Support Platform (PAZ in Spanish), created from five

thousand signatures by intellectuals, actors, sports people, scientists, etc. who go to make up the largest support group of famous people of all the elections held to date in Spain.

## The North American experience

A good example of behaviour and its impact on the design of political strategies for election campaigns can be found in the last North American elections and, more specifically, in the campaign that led to the victory of the Democrat candidate and current president Barack Obama, whose triumph can to a large extent be attributed to the use of Web 2.0. Of note in his team is Chris Hughes (co-founder of Facebook), expert in social networks and creator of **BarackObama.com**, a website with maximum interactivity that became the platform from which most of the innovative strategies were launched that went to make up the US president's election campaign.

A key piece of data: his team of experts has been made up of a number ranging from ten to a little more than twenty people, aged between 25 and 40 with a profile of advanced users of new Internet applications, with professional experience in the new digital social media, as well as enthusiasts and pioneers in digital communication. Consequently, this is a team that has a structure and organisational model equivalent to a Web 2.0 start-up itself. The specialist in political communication, Antoni Gutiérrez-Rubí[13] identifies five digital scenarios where Obama implemented political strategies that explain why he won the election, in spite of there being many factors against him:[14]

- Grassroots policy: the politics of activists.
- Active volunteer policy: text message and telephone helplines.
- Digital policy: online advertising.
- Local policy, pocket policy: Twitter.
- The policy of network trust: *My.BarackObama.com*.

A study by the consultancy firm McCann attributes to the Nintendo generation a significant impact on the American election campaign, given that Internet presence now has notable repercussions on everyday life. The study claims that the Nintendo generation helped Obama to win the nomination, generating a wealth of content on blogs and microblogs like Twitter. Frenetic activity on these spaces led to donations and, consequently, multiplied the expressions of support that turned around the initial position of public opinion. At the same time, the conventional media saw realised that their influence on public opinion was losing force.

Manuel Castells talks in *La galàxia Internet*[15] of a new system of social relations centred on the individual, constructed in an environment that might be called "tertiary relations" or "personalised communities", maintained while users continue to have shared interests with the community in question.

The degree of political interaction on the part of citizens will be proportional to the use they make of the Internet in their everyday lives. As pointed out by Manuel Castells, "cyberspace is becoming land under dispute, because it is a privileged tool for acting, informing, recruiting, organising, dominating and *resisting domination*". This is therefore a note of warning for politicians and representatives of the people: "if you don't take care of the Internet, the Internet will take care of you".

## The key role of new ICTs in the elections in the Basque Country and for the Galician government

At the time of writing, this study[16] coincides with the electoral campaign for the Basque and Galician elections. Monitoring the technological resources used by the candidates from the different parties has shown that these elections are a turning point with regard to the inclusion of Politics 2.0 instruments.

The candidate for the Basque presidency for the (nationalist) PNV party, Juan José Ibarretxe, has a videoblog, although his inclusion on the social networks has been controversial due to the presumed forgery of his figure on Facebook. According to *cybereuskadi.com*, the same thing has happened with Ibarretxe's Twitter. In spite of his presence on the Internet, he has possibly been the least present of all the groups.

The socialist candidate, Patxi López, has also joined the social networks and is one of the few candidates, together with the Galician PP (conservative) and the (Galician nationalist) BNG candidates, who has realised the importance of Twitter, one of the most successful Web 2.0 tools that, as we have seen, has been fundamental in Obama's campaign strategy. Moreover, he also has his channel on Facebook with 3,571 followers, has his own channel on YouTube, Flickr and, curiously, his choice of music can be consulted on last.fm.

The PP candidate for the Basque Country, Antonio Basagoiti, provides information via his blog *Basagoiti 2.0*, and is also present on Facebook, Tuenti, YouTube and Flickr.

With regard to the Galician elections, Anxo Quintana, leader of the Nationalist Galician Block (BNG), has also created a videoblog, from which he invites people to send in questions and comments via mobile or webcam.[17] He also has a network on Facebook,[18] Twitter and on the BNG's Flickr.

The former Galician president, Emilio Pérez Touriño, who launched his election campaign on Facebook, also has a blog (<http://presidentetourino.com>) and offers detailed information on the website *psdeg-psoe.com*. His photos can also be seen on Flickr and his videos on Touriño TV and on his YouTube channel.

For his part, Feijóo is the protagonist of the website *recargan dogalicia.com*, as well as having his own blog, where he presents his party's electoral proposals. The pages are linked to the PP website for Galicia and have the respective electoral calendar, a page on Facebook, Flickr, Tuenti and a channel on YouTube. The PP has also created the first open forum for PP party members.

## Government 2.0

Among other reasons, the current US president, Barack Hussein Obama, will go down in history for having encouraged citizen participation in governance via a website (*http://www.change.gov*) from which people can follow and participate directly in the decisions taken by the present resident of the Whitehouse.

Although this website is having problems due to the avalanche of visits it's receiving, we should not some elements that are highly significant from the point of view of citizen feedback:

- A section called *Open Government* encourages citizens to send in their ideas, following the classification of government areas, such as the economy, human rights, housing, health, education, etc.
- The section called **An American Moment**, which asks citizens to send in their experiences concerning the campaign and election day.
- The news and the blog are open to participation via comments.
- One section invites citizens to find ways of serving their community voluntarily.

There can be no doubt that president Obama not only believed in the power of the Internet when designing his campaign but also in the management of government, for which he has opened up citizen participation and has turned the Internet into an instrument to realise his electoral promise of change: *Yes we can*.

## Conclusions

In short, political communication must integrate the Internet or, more specifically, the network of networks in the strategic planning of any communication aimed at its target, both internal and external.

The data that appear in this work show the fundamental role of some digital environments, such as the various blog formats and social networks, in the two most recent elections in Spain: the 2008 general elections and the Galician and Basque regional elections in 2009. But it's the North American election that has highlighted the electoral returns provided by the strategic use of the new virtual platforms with the victory of Barack Obama.

These new digital environments, capable of providing a veritable dialogue between the candidate and citizens, have shown that, from now on, election campaigns will have to be approached in these terms: opening up dialogue, involving the demands of the electorate, providing feedback and prioritising the role of the man in the street.

## Notes

1  Norris, P. "Building Knowledge Societies: The Renewal of Democratic Practices in Knowledge Societies", 2004. (Report for UNESCO)

2  Morris, D. *Vote.com.* Renaissance Books, September 2000.

3  Beck, J. C.; Wide, M. *The Kids are Alright. How the Gaming Generation is Changing the Workplace.* Harvard Business School Press, 2006. This work defines the Nintendo generation as teenagers and young people who have been brought up hooked on video consoles, which has shown them to be winners but also collaborators, without fear of failure, with the need to co-participate and feel they play a key role in the social and cultural projects they are involved in.

4  Beck, J. C.; Wide, M. *The Kids are Alright. How the Gaming Generation is Changing the Workplace.* Harvard Business School Press, 2006.

5  Article from *Expansión & Empleo*, published 22.02.2008.
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   <http://www.uoc.edu/idp/7/dt/esp/peytibi_rodriguez_gutierrez.pdf> [Consulted 26 February 2009].

11 <http://www.libertaddigital.com:6681/php/imprimir_pagina.php?cpn=1276318428>

12 Peytibi, F. X.; Rodríguez, J. A.; Gutiérrez-Rubí, A. "La experiencia de las elecciones generales del 2008". In: "IV Congreso Internet, Derecho y Política (IDP)". *Revista de Internet, Derecho y Politica*. no. 7. UOC, 2008.

13 <http://www.gutierrez-rubi.es/?page_id=53>

14 He's black, he's called Hussein, he's not rich and is a young lawyer. A series of attributes that would have meant the presidency were unattainable in North American society until now.

15 Castells, M. *La galàxia Internet*. Barcelona: Areté, 2001.

16 27 February 2009.

17 <http://quin.tv/falame/>

18 <http://www.facebook.com/people/Anxo-Quintana/1361979852>

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