INFORMING WOMEN: OVERCOMING ONLINE CHALLENGES IN POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS

Jonattan Rodríguez, Graciela Padilla-Castillo

Universidad Complutense de Madrid (Spain)

jonrodri@ucm.es; gracielp@ucm.es

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Women's political participation faces numerous challenges in the virtual environment, where information traceability, political campaigns and misinformation play a key role. In an increasingly digitized world, access to information and women's political empowerment become vitally important. Digital platforms offer new opportunities for women to actively engage in the political sphere, express their opinions and participate in decision-making processes. However, they also pose significant challenges that should be approached with caution.

In the current landscape, digital contexts have proven to be both a source of empowerment and a fertile ground for the emergence of anti-feminist challenges and violence. Contemporary feminism has found in social networks a vital platform for mobilization and dissemination of its messages, becoming a far-reaching activist agora. However, at the same time, these digital platforms have also given rise to renewed forms of violence and opposition to the feminist movement. Delgado and Sánchez (2023) highlight in their research how the intersection between digital tools and feminism has generated both advances and challenges in the struggle for gender equality.

Added to these challenges, the growing phenomenon of disinformation and manipulation of information during electoral processes pose a threat to women's political participation. The concept of disinformation encompasses both fraudulent information content (fake news) and misleading content (misinformation), hate speech (misinformation), deliberately false speech (false speech) and unintentional misinformation by the media or journalists (missinformation). In short, disinformation involves the distortion of information through the dissemination of false news that misleads the final recipient (Rodriguez Perez, 2019, pp. 68). This spread of disinformation can undermine trust in electoral processes, influence voters' perceptions and decisions, and hinder women's active participation in politics. It is critical to address this challenge to ensure an informed and transparent environment during election periods, thereby fostering equal opportunities for women to fully participate in political processes and exercise their right to vote in an informed and informed manner.

The growing rise of fake news has revealed an increase in academic attention to the term. Faced with the landscape of so-called fake news, Rodríguez Pérez (2019) defends the use of the term disinformation, as this can encompass the multiple facets in which hoaxes, misleading or malicious content, which encompass hate speech, are propagated.

Online political campaigns are often inundated with fake news, hate speech and discriminatory narratives that can undermine public confidence in the democratic process and hinder women's active participation. It is therefore critical to develop effective strategies to combat

misinformation and promote media and digital literacy among women, giving them the tools they need to discern the veracity of information and engage in informed debates.

Likewise, online gender-based violence represents a serious obstacle to women's political participation. Online attacks, such as harassment, intimidation and defamation, can have a devastating impact on women's confidence and security, deterring them from actively participating in politics. As a result, social networks are the ideal breeding ground for those who want to attack the collective or women in a disintermediated manner. The democratization of communications that they have generated since their emergence and momentum more than 20 years ago, have allowed that there are no limits or boundaries when commenting, participating or interacting even with people we do not know.

Interconnected women are exposed to information, comments, analysis and opinions that appeal to emotionality and personal beliefs, beyond the news, giving way to the term post-truth. Those behind these publications seek to magnify, manipulate or recreate them from unreal sources. The purpose is mass dissemination and amplification through retweets, likes, or chains that go endlessly from one device to another. It is essential to adopt legislative and policy measures that address and sanction online violence, while promoting safe and inclusive environments that encourage the equal participation of all voices.

This study aims to explore the challenges and opportunities related to women's online political participation, focusing on the issues of information traceability, political campaigning, and misinformation. The research seeks to understand the impact of these factors on the creation of a strong community where women with shared technological interests can exchange ideas, identify role models, find mentors and mentees, engage in global discussions, and celebrate the power of face-to-face interactions.

To this end, the methodology employed in this study consists of a comprehensive review of case studies and analysis of relevant reports in the field. Different cases of women's online political participation will be analyzed and shared, identifying barriers, challenges and successful strategies used to overcome them. In addition, a qualitative analysis of online discourses and debates will be conducted to understand the influence of misinformation on the political process and how it affects women's participation.

The expected results of this article will provide a deeper insight into the barriers women face in their online political participation, as well as the effective strategies used to overcome these challenges. The study is expected to shed light on the importance of creating an inclusive and supportive community that promotes women's active political participation in the context of smart cities.

Discussions are expected to emerge on the effectiveness of strategies used to overcome barriers to online political participation, as well as on the responsibility of digital platforms and political actors in spreading misinformation and encouraging women's active participation. In addition, the discussion can focus on the importance of digital literacy and equitable access to technology as key enablers of women's political participation in online environments. These discussions can open up new perspectives and areas of research in the search for solutions that promote gender equality in the political sphere and address the specific challenges faced by women in the digital realm.

KEYWORDS: Women's political participation, Disinformation, Information manipulation; Electoral periods, Equal opportunities.

REFERENCES

Delgado Ontivero, L., & Sánchez-Sicilia, A. (2023). Subversión antifeminista: análisis audiovisual de la Manosfera en redes sociales. *Revista Prisma Social*, (40), 181–212. Recuperado a partir de https://revistaprismasocial.es/article/view/4958

Rodríguez Hernández, J., & Ortega Fernández, E. (2023). Contranarrativas frente a la cultura de la manósfera. @nolesdescasito y otros movimientos para frenar el odio en redes. Tyrant Lo Blanch, 197- 215.

Rodríguez Pérez, C. (2019) No diga fake news, di desinformación: una revisión sobre el fenómeno de las noticias falsas y sus implicaciones. *Comunicación*, 40, 65-74. http://doi.org/10.18566/comunica.n40.a05