

Ordinary Citizens Talk About Politics on Twitter Because They Need It. Grounded Theory of Social Justice for the Detached



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ABSTRACT: This article refers to the methodological process of a research carried out with Constructivist Grounded Theory and the QDA software Atlas.ti used in citation coding and semantic network mapping, and its resulting theoretical categories. The study analyzes the conversations of ordinary people who publish and defend their political positions on Twitter on ordinary days of the week, freely and independently of electoral contexts, activism and other forms of organized or financed political participation. Empirical data were taken from qualitative interviews. The results show that the political conversations of media-unknown people who interact on ordinary days of the week without hashtags and outside of campaigns and political parties, do not appear in social studies.

KEYWORDS: constructivist grounded theory, QDA, Atlas.ti, political participation, Twitter, detached

I. INTRODUCTION

On Twitter (now X) there are people who like to talk about politics. For them, expressing their opinion on political issues is a personal need, so they do it daily, outside of electoral contexts, party affiliations, financing, activism or social mobilizations. These people are common users, people who are unknown to the media, but with 4-digit numbers of followers, who publish their political positions, defend their ideologies and argue with users with opposing positions in favor of their preferences.

Due all the social studies found on political participation on Twitter are carried out in contexts limited to some political arena, which is confirmed in reviews by various authors (Campos-Domínguez, 2017); (García Silva, 2018); (González-List, 2022); (Matassi y Boczkowski, 2020); (Nascimento Rossetto et al., 2013), unknown users who tweet daily about politics just because that is their favorite topic, do not appear in the studies. Therefore they are “detached”: people who, without being tied to any of the threads used in the collection of data by social studies, participate politically on Twitter and who, for the same reason, are invisible in the investigations. This article addresses the methodological application of Constructivist Grounded Theory that was used to study the detached. This is an investigation carried out in order to propose a theory about the conception that these people have of their political participation on Twitter.

The article is organized as follows: first it offers a literature review of what has been studied and reflected on political participation on Twitter; it subsequently addresses the historical context of Constructivist Grounded Theory located in the symbolic interactionism that characterized the beginnings of the Chicago School; continues with a description of the practical application of the methodology; mentions the theoretical categories that emerged in the research, and closes with a brief discussion of the findings.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW: WHAT ABOUT POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN SOCIAL NETWORKS?

A review of the literature on political participation in social networks shows that published research is carried out with data collected in one of the following contexts: (1) elections, campaigns and political debates; (2) mobilizations, protests, activism and acts of organized civil resistance, and (3) around hashtags, viral topics, influencers, journalists or media. There are no studies on the political participation of ordinary people on ordinary days of the week on social networks.

Although most of these studies agree that the political involvement of users varies depending on the social network they use, some authors—fortunately the least—do not specify the applications they used to carry out their research or arrive at generic conclusions despite having collected data on different platforms. However, various evidence shows that the forms and contents of political conversations differ significantly between different social networks.

In Turkey, for example, Twitter played a significant role in the expansion of protests and the gathering of different participants, figures and activists (Dogu, 2019); while in Zimbabwe, Facebook expanded the space for democratic political participation

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(Matingwina, 2018). In Colombia, Twitter allowed the construction of a collective digital ethos (Bonilla-Neira, 2021), and in Venezuela it emerged as a flexible and decentralized channel of political participation (Said-Hung y Segado-Boj, 2018). In Spain, Facebook works better to study the phenomenon of incidental exposure to news (Serrano-Puche et al., 2018), and in Denmark it is observed that it is only useful for one-way political communication (Farkas & Schwartz, 2018).

Robles and others (2015) observed that technological skills influence the use of social networks and function as a chain of transmission of inequalities. Even the electronic device used constitutes a variable of political participation in social networks: Figeac and others (2020), analyzing the use of mobile phones, concluded that the exchange of unreliable information is prominent in communities such as the extreme right, because they organize their debates around unreliable sources.

The economic and political contexts in which this phenomenon occurs also affect the choice of platforms. For example, Omotayo and Folorunso (2020) compared the political participation of university students depending on the platforms in Nigeria, and found significant differences in preferences, with Facebook being the most used and Messenger, the least; while in Sweden, young people do not consider the political news they receive to be real, regardless of whether it is on Twitter or Facebook (Sveningsson, 2015); and in Madrid, young people use their platforms only for leisure (Vázquez-Barrio et al., 2020).

Even the format in which political content is distributed varies between the different social networks: Baquerizo-Neira and others (2021) observed that Ecuadorians generally publish iconographic images and are more active than Spaniards during political campaign periods, and other authors conclude that iconographic images constitute the main communication vehicle on Twitter in electoral campaigns (López-Rabadán et al., 2016); (Quevedo Redondo et al., 2016); (Ruiz del Olmo & Bustos Díaz, 2016) and (Ruíz del Olmo & Bustos Díaz, 2020).

What Western researchers conclude regarding political communication in the digital age does not apply to the entire globe. Not even in the West is the same observed in all countries. Sockmann et al. (2020) discuss how Twitter and Weibo, designed to be a source of information among the public and information-centered communication, better conduct political expression; while platforms designed to enhance social connections with private contact and user-centered, such as WhatsApp, Facebook and WeChat, tend to inhibit political expression. Dashti et al. (2015), conclude that although social networks allow the exchange of opinions regardless of whether they are a minority or a majority, this is not true in Arab societies.

Studies that analyze the interaction between public administrators and citizens agree that officials do not dialogue with social media users or take advantage of their potential for horizontal communication to make decisions. Politicians use social networks to promote campaigns or try to persuade with slogans (Alonso-Muñoz & Casero-Ripollés, 2018); (Arbaiza et al., 2022); (Campos-Domínguez, 2017); (Farkas & Schwartz, 2018); (García Silva, 2018); (Guerrero, 2016); (Kim & Park, 2012); (Kurt & Karaduman, 2012); (Leston-Bandeira & Bender, 2013); (Marino & Lo Presti, 2018); (Martínez-Rolán & Piñeiro-Otero, 2014); (Poulakidakos & Veneti, 2018) and (Rebelo et al., 2020). Nevertheless, forms of reciprocal engagement between politicians and citizens on Twitter have been observed in Cyprus (Komodromos, 2015); Denmark (Sørensen, 2016), and the United States, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom (Tromble, 2018).

Authors who analyze the authority and influence of Twitter on public opinion, compared to that of traditional media, agree in stating that there is a reduction in the influence of the media on public opinion, with its respective increase in social networks (Bode & Dalrymple, 2016); (Bouza-García & Tuñón-Navarro, 2018); (Casero-Ripollés, 2020); (López-Jiménez, 2016) and (Syahputra & Ritonga, 2019). Studies that analyze the frames between political news presented in traditional media and social networks agree that they are contradictory: there are discrepancies between the media discourse and the approach taken to political issues on Twitter (Anastasopoulos & Williams, 2019); (Ausserhofer & Maireder, 2013); (García-Perdomo, 2017); (Matos et al., 2017); (Nunomura, 2013); (Ofori-Parku & Moscato, 2018) and (Santos, 2020). Other authors have found that journalists use Twitter as a source of information (Gehrke & Benetti, 2020); (Justel-Vázquez et al., 2018) and (Parra Gómez, 2016); or that they offer more information on this network than in their media (Jaraba Molina et al., 2020), which allows us to affirm that on Twitter there may be information that is not found elsewhere.

All studies that analyze the presence of bots, malicious algorithms or trolls on social networks affirm that they constitute inequalities in access to information, manipulation of public opinion and damage to democracy (Chibey Rivas, 2021); (Chirwa & Manyana, 2021); (Loh et al., 2020); (Richards, 2021); (Santini et al., 2021); (Stukal et al., 2017) and (Wells et al., 2016), but these conclusions could be measured: just as people develop strategies to distinguish and avoid impostors and criminals on the streets, so on social networks. Some users will do better and others worse, just as with any other skill in human interaction.

Studies that use electronic tools to extract enormous amounts of data from social networks that occasionally turn out to be generic and indeterminate despite the scraping, would indicate that their reflections can be as imprecise as their samples. In the COVID-19 confinement, for example, ordinary people used their social networks with frequencies and in ways totally foreign to their habits, and big data was wrong by classifying certain conversations as “non-organic” that nonetheless were anomalous for their algorithms.

Regarding the easy tools and reach of any user to produce messages, it is stated that with sophisticated technologies, fakes are made that look real, that are difficult to detect, and that can cause exploitation, sabotage and threats to democracy (Figueiredo da

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Guarda et al., 2018); but with the same data, reflections could point to the opposite: aforesaid, only the oligarchy with access to expensive and complex computer programs could produce messages, while now anyone can generate messages on their cell phones. Following the idea that social networks allow ordinary people to produce and distribute political ideas of various shapes and qualities, it can be concluded that today the political opinion of citizens is disseminated in the most democratic way ever known.

All the studies reported here, along with those that make up the complete literature review of the research, integrated with 247 titles, were carried out in some political context established as an arena in data collection: campaigns, elections, social mobilizations, activism; or around actions or performances of political figures or relevant officials in public life. There do not seem to be studies that analyze the political participation on Twitter of ordinary citizens, on ordinary days of the week. This research sought to analyze this phenomenon.

III. THE CHICAGO SCHOOL AND THE CONSTRUCTIVIST GROUNDED THEORY

In the little disseminated antecedents of Chicago Sociology, can be found the most compelling similarities between American sociology and social justice studies that make up the paradigm that forms part of the Constructivist Grounded Theory of Kathy Charmaz (2013). The visible and recognized precursors of the Chicago School ignored women sociologists and ignored the relevance of the works of Jane Addams and Florence Kelley, thereby erasing from American Sociology the detonating quality of social well-being that lies in the studies of these researchers. In 1895, they conducted a research called "Maps and Papers," which contains statistical data and census cartographies of Hull House beneficiaries "never equaled by the men of the Chicago School" (Picó y Serra, 2010, p. 46). More than a thousand people participated in that investigation. It contains (a) demographic characteristics of residents; (b) information about their low salaries, their positions and the unhealthy conditions of their jobs; (c) the conditions of their housing; (d) their lifestyles; (e) traditions of the Jews, Italians and Bohemians, and (f) analysis of unions. Despite that "Maps and Papers" "set the prolegomena for much of Chicago Sociology and had a general impact on all subsequent studies" (2010, p. 45), the most visible founding men of the Chicago School ignored it and did not even cite it.

The work of Addams and Kelley constitutes a particularly relevant contribution to the origins of the Chicago School because it tested investigative techniques and focused on themes that became the hallmark of the house. The women led by Addams, generally segregated from positions reserved for men in universities, were professors in women's institutes or devoted themselves to social work, forming a network of sociological scholars who were separated not only from the academic spaces of nascent sociology, but also from the most read bibliographies of the Chicago School to date.

"Maps and Papers" is a precursor of several traditions with which the Chicago School is identified: it established the study of the city and its inhabitants; the central themes on immigration, poverty and structure of occupation constitute its central chapters; and is pioneer in the method of demographic mapping by geographic distribution of urban populations, identified as one of the main contributions of American Sociology to sociological research.

In her handbook on using Grounded Theory for social justice studies (2013), Kathy Charmaz rejects the presumptions of objectivity that some researchers placed on Grounded Theory by emphasizing positivism. She wanted the origins of the method in the Chicago School to be recovered, because it is a constructivist investigative procedure anchored in Symbolic Interactionism, which emphasizes the phenomenon studied over the methods to analyze it.

The constructivist perspective of Grounded Theory prioritizes the phenomenon under investigation and views the data and analysis as created by shared experiences and relationships with participants. In this perspective, any method is a means before an end. Constructivist Grounded Theory accepts that researchers' positions, starting points, and conclusions influence their analyzes and that the meanings of their data are neither inherent to the data nor do they arise exclusively from them. "Constructivists frame much of their material in "viewpoints" rather than "facts" and emphasize placing their data in context" (Charmaz, 2002, p. 678).

Grounded Theory is founded on the Chicago School. His constructivist approach emphasizes the symbolic interactionist stamp of George Herbert Mead (1982) and Herbert Blumer (1982) that has from birth. Along these lines, assumes that 1) multiple realities exist, that 2) the data reflect the constructions of both the participants and the researcher, and that 3) the researcher enters and is affected by the world of the participants.

There are at least two aspects of Grounded Theory. The classic, attached to its founding fathers Glaser and Strauss (2017) can be used with qualitative, quantitative and mixed data; and constructivist for social justice studies, demands that empirical data be collected with qualitative interviews. Another quick difference is that the classic, like any other qualitative method, uses the saturation of the categories to suspend data collection (Monge Acuña, 2015), while the constructivist, in the version of Kathy Charmaz (2013), proposes a final evaluation with questions about the characteristics of the theory that has emerged from the research, to suspend data collection. The quid is to arrive to abstract theoretical categories with clearly demonstrated relationships and where the conditions under which these theoretical categories and their relationships arise, change or are maintained, are specified. This is achieved by carrying out successive analyzes of the qualitative data from which mid-range theories are

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developed. “The strategy of collecting data and analyzing it simultaneously is the hallmark of Grounded Theory that has permeated all qualitative research. Collecting first and analyzing later fails the analysis because it eliminates the iterative comparative process that essentially defines Grounded Theory. (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012, p. 348).

In the iterative cycle that Grounded Theory follows, the writing of memos—emphatically indicated in the methodological procedure—is the ideal way to give relevance to the emerging theory. Charmaz and Belgrave state that “writing memos leads us to elevate our codes to tentative conceptual categories and can include the difficulties that the researcher experienced in making sense of the data” (2012, p. 357). Memos are notes that describe what the researcher thought when labeling and assigning units of meaning to incidents, actions, and events derived from the data. The QDA software Atlas.ti, designed specifically to work with this method, allows them to be linked directly to the codes, which is essential: the memos can be recorded wherever the researcher decides, but they must be linked to the categories. A notebook or field diary is of no use if the noted reflection cannot be related to the specific code or category on which that reflection was made. For Virginia Monge, making memos “is not an optional strategy; on the contrary, it is a fundamental procedure in the application of [Grounded Theory] methodology to any research” (2015, p. 78).

Regardless of the variations of Grounded Theory, all versions include: 1) conducting analysis and data collection simultaneously, 2) engaging in early analysis of emerging ideas, 3) using comparative methods, 4) analyzing basic social processes in data, 5) construct tentative inductive abstract categories that explain and synthesize these processes, 6) exemplify to expand, refine, and test these tentative categories, and 7) integrate robust categories into a theoretical framework that specifies the relationship between the categories and explains the conditions under which categories develop their properties and consequences, as well as the process or processes of which those categories are part.

IV. CONSTRUCTIVIST GROUNDED THEORY TO VISUALIZE THE DETACHED

Due to the characteristics of the social group studied, Constructivist Grounded Theory is the most appropriate method for the research presented here. They are ordinary people who participate politically on Twitter without being linked to a common thread that is useful for researchers when collecting data but that imposes an analysis perspective. This absence of a link between unknown tweeters with any element of cohesion that facilitates or allows their identification makes it very complex to distinguish them for the social sciences. With Grounded Theory it was possible to visualize and analyze the day-to-day Twitter participation of ordinary people not involved in the political arenas used by science to collect data. The theory produced with this methodology is based on the practice carried out by members of the community studied, is sensitive to its environment and represents the complexities found in the experiences of the research participants.

Kathy Charmaz and Linda Belgrave (2012) suggest that the codes assigned to the data be action verbs, because they help not lose sight of attention in the interactions. To identify the codes, quotes from the interviews are first selected. The quotes are the phrasings of the participants that refer to the interactions they carry out with other members in their community, or that have to do with those exchanges, and that seem to give clues about the phenomenon studied. They are the words of the collaborators as they were said, separated from the text. The task is rather mechanical: each fragment of what the interviewee said, which is considered key phrasing to understand the conception he or she has of the interactions carries out in his community, is separated from the text. Quotations, split when they contain multiple meanings and grammatically treated for coherence, are known as open, live, or noun codes. Open codes are those that have a real and independent existence, but also indissoluble with empirical data. Codes separation can be done with any processor, but as its volume becomes very extensive, it becomes imperative to use some Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) such as Atlas.ti. The image below is a screenshot of the software's Document Manager, which counts the number of citations identified in each interview.

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Iden...	Nombre	Tipo	Ubicación	Grupos	Citas
D 1	ALEJO GARZA TAMEZ entrevista completa	Texto	Biblioteca		40
D 2	CARLOS AGUIAR entrevista completa	Texto	Biblioteca		62
D 5	GUADALUPE entrevista completa	Texto	Biblioteca		38
D 6	NUBIA entrevista completa	Texto	Biblioteca		55
D 7	PANDITA entrevista completa	Texto	Biblioteca		46
D 8	RODOLFO entrevista completa	Texto	Biblioteca		46
D 9	SSAMTAO entrevista completa	Texto	Biblioteca		60
D 10	TITO entrevista completa	Texto	Biblioteca		98
D 11	VÍCTOR HUGO entrevista completa	Texto	Biblioteca		91
D 12	VIANEY entrevista completa	Texto	Biblioteca		73
D 13	ALEJANDRA BARROSO entrevista completa	Texto	Biblioteca		57
D 14	FERNANDO LÓPEZ entrevista completa	Texto	Biblioteca		102
D 15	GERMÁN CASTRO entrevista completa	Texto	Biblioteca		57

List of files in Atlas.ti showing the number of quotes obtained in each interview

In the software, open codes are written in a window that is displayed with the right mouse button when selecting quotes in the interview transcripts. The difference between live codes and open codes is that the same quote, that is, a live code, can suggest several open codes. Furthermore, for reasons of meaning or syntax, it is not possible to take a quote as a code. The sum of citations in the previous figure gives a total of 825, but with those citations 1.473 codes were formed. The image below shows a detail of the interview that allowed us to take advantage of the greatest number of quotes. The quote is highlighted in blue in the left column; and in fuchsia, in the right column, it is possible to see the beginning of the code “I opened my account without knowing what to expect”, anchored to that quote and phrased so that it is relevant to the case of this and other quotes in other interview documents stored in Atlas.ti.

FER: Mira yo estoy desde el 2009 pero debo admitir que un par de años no lo usé, ahí lo tenía, muy de vez en cuando entraba, después de todo lo que se generó después del fraude del 2006, creo que los que estábamos apoyando a Andrés Manuel, nos quedamos con esa sensación de que se necesitaban herramientas precisamente para difundir ideas para decir “oigan, está esta opción o se quedan con lo que les están diciendo no les crean”, todo un poquito en ese en ese sentido. Consideré que en un momento dado twitter podría ser una buena herramienta, al principio lo dejé un poco abandonado un tanto por cuestiones de trabajo otro tanto porque no comprendía muy bien cómo era él el manejo al principio, lo percibía como una cuestión más de entre cuates, más chavos y como que todavía no le encontraba la veta, yo creo que fue por ahí del 2010-2011 que empecé a entrar y me empecé a dar cuenta que se podía hacer un buen ejercicio. O una vez que empecé a involucrarme lo consideré como un buen foro para exponer ideas, para conocer ideas de otras personas, lo empecé a ver más o menos un panorama, yo no soy

1418 des...
 1419 Consid...
 141...
 141...

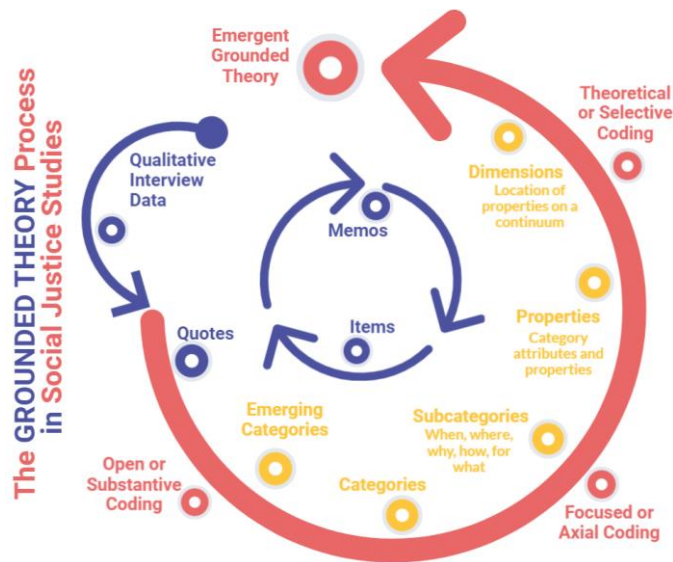
- Abrió mi cuenta sin saber qué e...
- Antes el ciudadano común era...
- En cuestión de información bu...
- Abrió mi cuenta sin saber qué e...
- Que mis ideas lleguen a otras...
- Twitter es un agora, me gusta...
- Empecé a ver a Twitter más o...
- Yo quiero aprender y saber de...

Detail of an open document in Atlas.ti. The right column shows coding with quotes in an interview transcription document

It can be seen that, in addition to this, other codes that begin with the words "Before, the common citizen was...", "In terms of information...", "May my ideas reach others...", "Twitter is an agora, I like ..." and "I want to learn and know...", are related to the fragment of the interview shown in the image above.

Once the substantive coding is finished, focused or axial coding begins, which consists of identifying transversal lines between the codes to form subcategories and categories. The following image shows the spiral process that Constructivist Grounded Theory follows.

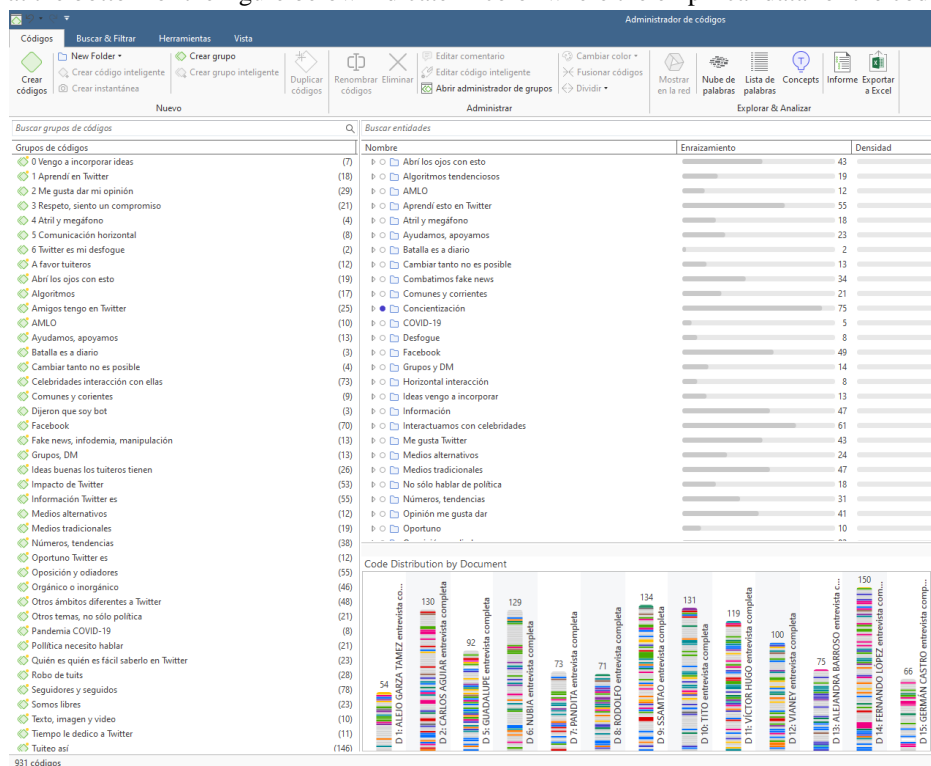
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The Grounded Theory Process in Social Justice Studies

At the time of the analysis reviewed here, the right column of the image below shows the subcategories that were identified in the software (at the top of the column it is possible to notice that Atlas.ti calls them "entities"). The phrasing of some codes and subcategories can be confusing because grammar was ignored and names were written starting with main words so that it was easy to find the groups of codes and entities in the alphabetical lists that the software displays by default.

During the first days of coding, the names of groups of codes and subcategories are kept in mind, but as the analysis progresses, these names begin to become confused or their qualities are forgotten, and a classification strategy is required. This is another reason why memos are essential in theory construction: they help keep in mind the reasons why it was coded the way it was. And it also happens that as the categories begin to form concepts that trigger the theory, a point is reached where they are not forgotten. The distribution bars at the bottom of the figure below indicate in color where the empirical data for the code groups are located.

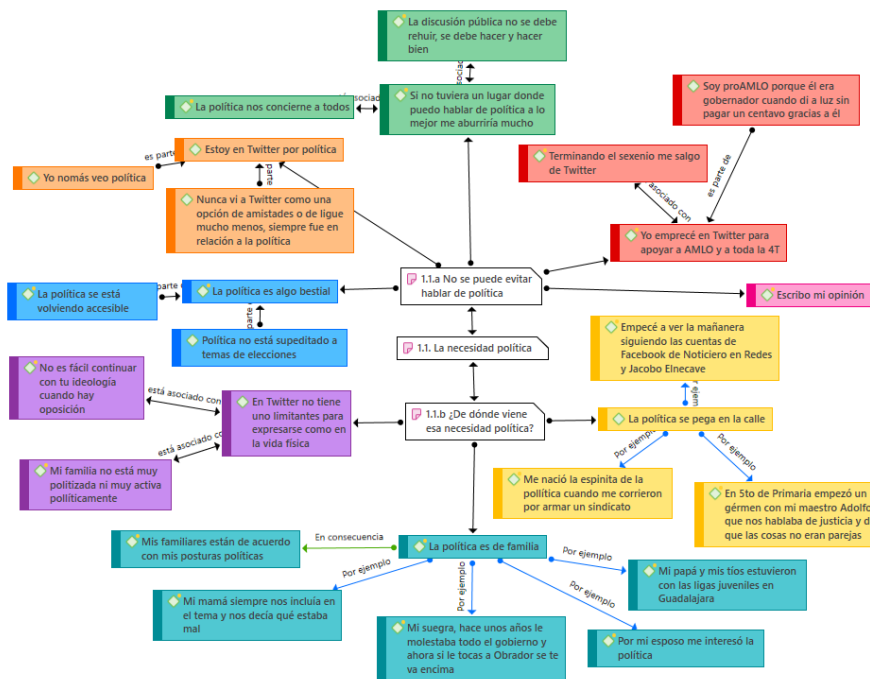


Atlas.ti screen display where groups of codes can be seen, subcategories or entities and distribution of substantive codes

In Atlas.ti, it is possible to make semantic networks with code groups and entities. They are visual aids that help in the formation of increasingly abstract categories, necessary to integrate the resulting theory. The image below is a semantic network called "Political Necessity" that was formed directly as a map when working with one of the subcategories listed above. When the

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exercise was done to form the semantic network of the subcategory "I opened my eyes with this" that appears at the beginning of the list in the figure above, nodes were eliminated—in the semantic network, the nodes are the identified codes or categories in the software—that did not allow it to be related to other concepts. In this process, a point was reached where it was decided to change the name of the network to give meaning to the relationship between some of the nodes of the same group of codes, and it was named "Politics is family" (nodes in turquoise on the net).



Semantic Network of the Code "Political Necessity"

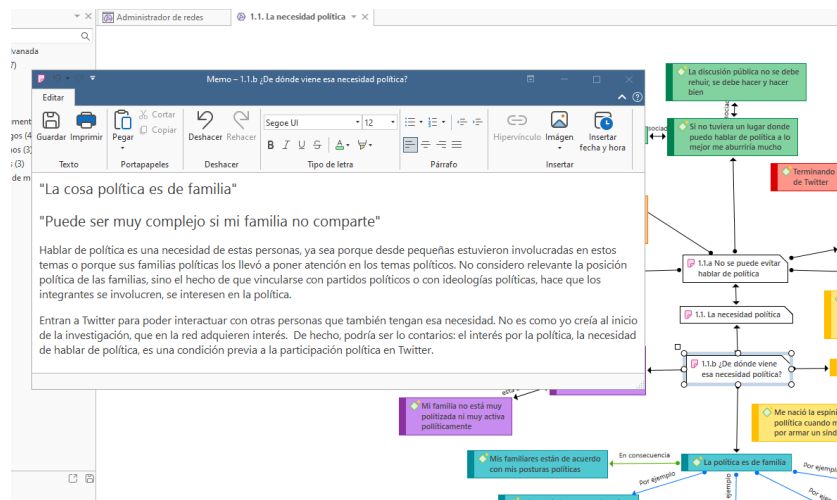
Originally, the group of codes "I opened my eyes with this" referred to the events, in the experience of the interviewees, that contributed to their interest in participating politically on Twitter; but when making the semantic network, no relationship was found between the nodes that had to do with family relationships ("My mother always included us in the topic and told us what was wrong" or "My father and my uncles were with the youth leagues in Guadalajara"), with the nodes that originally belonged to that group of codes, but that did not correspond to familiar areas ("I had a thorn when they fired me for forming a union" or "I am pro-AMLO because he was governor when I gave birth without pay a penny").

The experience of working with semantic networks is much more transcendent than what can be said in these lines, and is suggested as the most pertinent strategy to establish relationships between codes, in the process of forming theoretical categories that allow the construction of substantive theories, because it allows us to see "with the eyes" what otherwise has to be abstracted.

It was expressed above that, when reading the codes with the label that groups them and the subcategories, they made sense, they expressed ideas that, by themselves, seemed to make an appearance. However, until the exercise of relating with vectors and selecting the labels of the type of relationship that links one node with another was carried out, in the exercise of mapping the semantic network of codes and subcategories, it was observed that on occasions, where apparently there was relevance between the elements of a group, it is not necessarily maintained; and furthermore, that in the process of creating the network, new categories appear that were not detected in the formation of groups of codes. This suggests that the integration of groups or lists of categories from codes is an initial or basic abstraction exercise compared to the mapping of semantic networks from codes and categories, which leads to more complex conceptual relationships. The goal in the process of abstraction of Grounded Theory categories is to arrive at increasingly general concepts that can be incorporated into all codes, categories and memoranda.

In the image above, the nodes "The political need", "You can't avoid talking about politics" and "Where does that political need come from?" are memos that can be selected with the right mouse button to remind the researcher what they refer to and why they were named that way, and also to add new reflections in that same memo when one is in the process of forming semantic networks. An example of what was written for the memo of the subcategory "Where does this political need come from?" is in the image below.

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Detail of an Open Memo of a Subcategory

As seen in the The Grounded Theory Process in social justice studies figure, lines above, the Grounded Theory culminates with a social theory that emerges from the analysis, consisting of taking the categories to increasingly general abstractions in which the memoranda and even the items from the interview script can be incorporated.

From the procedure briefly described, various theoretical categories were obtained about the detached political interaction on Twitter, which allude to the practices that ordinary citizens carry out on that social network on ordinary days of the week, when talking about politics. These categories describe and explain the practices that collaborators carry out when participating politically on Twitter. For reasons of meaning, the argument was built from the nodes in the semantic networks. The data were coded with action verbs in the first person singular, following the reflections of Kathy Charmaz, who emphasizes the importance of coding with verbs—which she calls “action codes”—which help keep in mind that the object of research is the interactions carried out by collaborators (2014).

The action codes were very useful in the analysis. The concept 'narrative' was used to refer to the argument built with the confluence of the quotes, their codes, subcategories, categories and the experiences of the researcher, which supported the final theorization, taken from the article by Dr. Amaral and others (2022), who carried out research on anti-vaccine movements on Twitter, with Grounded Theory strategies. Some of the emerging theoretical categories refer to the need to talk about politics, to the podium and voice that common users acquire on social networks, to the editorial decisions that these users make and to a concept categorized as “political apriorism” that is explained in the following section, where the meanings of these categories are elaborated.

V. THE THEORETICAL CATEGORIES OF THE DETACHED

This research allowed us to visualize a social group that had not been observed in studies that analyze political participation on Twitter, because (those studies) use common threads or political arenas such as electoral contexts, activisms and other forms of political participation organized or financed to collect their data. The community studied here is formed by ordinary people from that social network, who talk on ordinary days of the week, not because they are linked to a formal or informal group or organizational strategy or because they receive some type of financing, but because talking about politics is their taste and their personal need. For these reasons they were called “detached,” because they are people who talk about politics on Twitter every day because that is their favorite topic, without relating to the immediate political environment used by researchers as a common thread to collect data—although of course, in electoral political contexts, for example, their participation may be increased.

The political conversation of the detached on Twitter is not conditioned by any variable used in scientific data collection. And if it weren't on Twitter or another social network, the detached would talk about politics with the neighbor or the gardener or the taxi driver: they don't go on Twitter to find out about politics or to defend the political entity of their choice or to learn about politics, as was believed at the beginning of the investigation.

Although these people are ordinary people, unknown to the media, on Twitter they have an average of at least 3.000 followers and follow an equivalent number of accounts, because they value the interaction they make on the network and invest time in increasing their numbers of followers. Although in other studies the number of followers can be related to a variety of variables such as ego, social projection, influence, recognition, fame or media relevance, in the case of the detached, their numbers are indicators of their taste for talking about politics: when they post, they hope that more people will be interested in their topic, and they feel flattered when their posts are replicated, even when they have been copied verbatim and published as if the one who copied them had written them. The priority of the detached is that the content they post is disseminated, not that they are

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recognized as the author of the text. In this aspect, the motivations of the detached are similar to those of meme creators: their interest is for their text to be replicated, reproduced and dispersed throughout the digital ecosystem, regardless (or purposely looking for that to happen) of whether it is modified or altered (Shifman, 2014). The detached do not increase their number of interactants seeking to become influencers or digital leaders; they increase their numbers because in this way their political opinion is more dispersed.

The detached enter Twitter because they need to talk about politics. Political topics are their favorites above any other topic, and for the same reason, they are more aware of politics than other people. Since they like to analyze politics, they can interpret political signs better than other users. The detached use Twitter because it is a political network and they need to talk about politics. This need to talk about politics can be the cause of various consequences, but here it is observed that the detached are busy discussing politics on Twitter; who intuitively and voluntarily assume the duty of defending the political entity of their choice and speaking out in favor of it, and who learn politics from their interlocutors.

Once they know and master the dynamics on Twitter, the detached become convinced that political discussion is something that should be done and that, in addition, they have to defend their political affiliations. They are convictions related to the belief that politics is something transcendent. Talking about politics is neither frivolous nor superficial, and consequently, Twitter is neither frivolous nor superficial. The detached are on Twitter, not Facebook, and they find that on Twitter, unlike any other Web 2.0 network, there are more algorithms trying to spread political propaganda and manipulation compared to other social networks, which could be correct if considers Twitter to be the main political social network in the West.

A. The Need to Talk About the Politics of the Detached

The theoretical category that alludes to the need of detached people to talk about politics has to do with the experiences that precede their participation on Twitter and that explain why they access the network, why they interact the way they do, and why they value the activity they carry out there. In general, the reasons are found in experiences from their childhood or adolescence. They are children of activists or political activists or they had teachers in high school who talked to them about politics or gave them readings that sparked their interest in politics. In some cases, as adults, they are people who had experiences that led them to care about political issues; such as bad experiences with their union or their boss; or displeasure when detecting conflicting frames between what is disseminated by corporate media and what is discussed on social networks; or invitations from neighbors, friends, or relatives that led them to think about political issues. In all cases, detached people are Twitter users whose passion for political issues is outside the social network and prior to their participation on the platform.

The category also refers to the convictions of the detached by politics, which are different from the 'political convictions' that indicate the determined political position of a person. Convictions for politics refer to the outstanding value that detached people give to having a clear political position because that allows them or makes it easier for them to talk about politics.

The category, finally, also refers to the political learning that the detached acquire by participating in the network. The conversations they have with other users help them improve their argument. Through discussion, they gain ideas and find new ways to communicate their preferences.

B. The Podium and The Megaphone of The Detached

Political participation on Twitter is a form of interaction unlike anything political science has described and analyzed before. And among the new forms of political participation, the detached one is especially unknown. The most relevant difference in political participation from Web 2.0 lies in the variable the podium and the megaphone. For analysts in communication and political participation from before, citizens were public, audience or mass. Meneses Rocha says: "today democracy cannot rest in a single public sphere. In times of the Internet, counter-publics increasingly have affordable technological tools to participate in the creation of public opinion and the agenda" (2020). Here it is not stated that detached political participation is found in all social networks: this research was substantive and was only enough to observe the phenomenon on Twitter, but the category on the podium and the megaphone that detached people acquire by participating politically on Twitter, refers to the possibility of expressing oneself politically with a multiplying and extended effect that citizens did not have before social networks.

Social networks give projection to the public opinion of ordinary citizens who were previously invisible or crowded and who now use new tools to spread their ideas. These are opinions that transcend the sphere of social networks in the same way that before people who had not directly seen a news item on television or in the press, found out about it through their loved ones or through other means, and this means that even people who do not have a Twitter account or do not have access to the internet, find out what is said on Twitter.

In this category, the issue of social polarization is also observed, which is currently analyzed both in social studies and in journalistic articles. I wonder how correct the statement is that polarization is a new phenomenon when before social media, ordinary people did not have access to media that made public their discontent. On Twitter, people get and share content and political opinions that are not available anywhere else. Twitter opens the opportunity to contrast and also counteract media framing. It allows completely different narratives to be said and heard than those that politicians, government bodies, celebrities or

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well-known figures disseminate in traditional media. Public opinion no longer points where the press says. Or perhaps there is no longer a singular public opinion because today public opinions are multiple and diverse. And in this new environment, the detached ones are strengthened because their interaction results in other data, or in novel perspectives or in actioned political positions. The public opinion of citizens who were previously invisible or crowded and who now use the podium and the megaphone to spread their ideas, acquire projection. The content disseminated by traditional media can be publicly questioned on social networks by ordinary citizens who are perfect strangers in media terms.

C. The Editorial Decisions of The Detached

The theoretical category on the editorial decisions made by the detached refers to the choices they make when publishing on Twitter, equivalent to those made by newspapers, magazines and, in general, publishing companies. In social studies, I have most frequently encountered the perspective that considers social media users as automatons who, by clicking on publications spread messages without intending to, or as manipulated by algorithms that need an institution to verify the authenticity of the messages because they are incapable of deducing it, or as thoughtless subjects who by using easy digital tools distort reality without realizing it, than studies that analyze the autonomy, reflexivity or critical capacity of users.

In the codes, it is observed that the detached, intuitively, make decisions that can be compared with those made by companies dedicated to the publication or dissemination of content: they ask themselves questions about their participation in the network from which they determine the forms and the contents of what they are going to publish, the people to whom they are going to address and the criteria that are going to govern them. They even consider strategies to improve the dispersion of their messages and their engagement. The category has to do with the objectives, the form of the content, the editorial line and the marketing criteria, which the detached users carry out as their knowledge of how the network works improves. They are skills and strategies that they develop and use in intuitive ways.

D. The political apriorism of the detached

There is something that happens on Twitter that doesn't happen in any other area of human life: strangers converse with advance knowledge of their respective political positions. Twitter fosters and facilitates, in an a priori manner—prior to a first interaction—a knowledge of the political preferences and interests of the interlocutors, as doesn't occur in any other sphere of social life. And this information about the political positions of the interlocutors that is established prior to any conversation confers a certainty and trust comparable to that which occurs when one knows people intimately. No ordinary person goes through life carrying an advertisement about their political affiliations. Political interaction on Twitter is not only preponderant and central compared to other networks and physical life, in addition the participants converse with their political positions previously established expressly like in no other space of human interaction, with the exception, of course, of the contexts of public service or political parties.

In the daily interactions that people carry out, only when it comes to political issues, with certain restrictions and considerations, expressly delimit and define their positions; but on Twitter, regardless of the topic that the interactants address, political positions are visible even before the exchange begins, and regardless of whether that exchange actually occurs. It only takes to access the user's profile or read some of their publications, to have an idea as clear as each one expresses, of their political inclination, and this advance knowledge becomes a factor that promotes or prevents interaction.

This doesn't indicate that the detached people are naive or candidly believe that their interlocutors honestly hold the political position they express. They understand that their interlocutors can fake their position, but even intentionally expressed lies allow participants to get an idea of what their interlocutors' inclination is. In all human interactions, people freely choose the aspects to show and hide, and even in physical life, can express positions and ideas as own, which don't actually share. Derived from this, I find it natural that people who enjoy political interaction feel comfortable on Twitter, since this network establishes an arena where the cards of political positions are open before an interaction occurs. Twitter constitutes the ideal space to expand politically where those who share the political position form a protected environment or safety zone. This political apriorism that Twitter facilitates has a double advantage. On the one hand, it establishes an environment of communion and trust prior to interaction, and on the other, it offers a safe and alternative space for political exchange for people who in other areas choose to hide their political positions so as not to affect their personal, work and other types of relationships.

CONCLUSIONS

If qualitative interviews constitute the cornerstone of constructivist grounded theory empirical data collection, then the selection of research participants has to be done by hand. This reflection, based on the social justice perspective of the methodology, is consistent with the research question asked from my experience as a political participant on Twitter, where I observe ordinary citizens who daily post or retweet or fave tweets in favor or against President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, not because they are linked to the thematic axes used in social studies, but because—as has been discovered in this research—for them talking about politics is a pleasure and a necessity prior and independent to his political foray into Twitter.

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The common threads usually used by social researchers in collecting data on Twitter are generally hashtags or viral topics, electoral contexts, conversations with visible personalities in public life, or social movements, for example. In the absence of these elements, I formed a list of conditions from which I selected the collaborators of this study and integrated the empirical base that supports the theory that arises from the analysis of the interactions of citizens not linked to the variables usually used in the collection of data from social research and, consequently, they carry out detached political participation on Twitter.

When Grounded Theory is used to distinguish the interaction of invisible or unrecognized people, the research question guides the conditions that must be satisfied by the participants who best account for the communicative practices they carry out in their social group. It is not possible to affirm that all tweets with similar characteristics that are observed in the timeline indicate the same thing; it is necessary to establish validity and reliability criteria that have nothing to do with statistics. There are those who post a political tweet daily but do not even participate in the conversations generated by their own publications; and there are those who exceed five- or six-digit numbers in the number of followers, but their number of followed does not reach three digits. I mention these two cases as an example to point out that political apathy or a lack of appreciation for the horizontal interaction of some users on Twitter doesn't necessarily indicate frivolity or superficiality in the political conversations that occur on social networks.

In their randomized experiment investigating the effects of an election campaign that used Twitter in Japan, Kobayashi and Ichifuji (2015) looked for the participant to have only one account, to tweet publicly, to read the timeline more than once a week, to read all the tweets on the timeline, to display all the tweets on their timeline, to have less than 5 thousand followers and not to follow the prime minister or the general secretary of the Democratic Party of Japan. These authors observed that when people read the Twitter timeline, they do not read only the tweets published by politicians, but a mixture of posts from friends and celebrities. I also made a list of characteristics that the potential interviewees for this study had to satisfy and I did not find that any of the detached ones chatted with friends on the Internet. The detached do interact with politicians and celebrities, but not with friends in the social sense in which the concept is understood; however, the detached, due to the regularity of their political participation on the network, end up identifying certain followers and considering these users as their friends, although their interaction with them always happens only within Twitter.

This research cannot propose conclusions regarding how political conversations on Twitter affect government agendas. The political influence that interaction on social networks has, until today, has only been able to be studied in political arenas or specific contexts that serve as a common thread in data collection and that necessarily impose an analysis perspective. Paradoxically, these studies do not allow us to observe the interaction that happens in this social network between ordinary citizens who are not interacting politically because they are in an electoral context or because they subscribe to a social mobilization or a hashtag, but simply because they get involved in conversations on Twitter due to because they like and need to talk about politics in a detached way.

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