

# Attendants, participants, and activists: Profiles in online political behavior during electoral campaigns.

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## Abstract

*This article reports on the results of two online surveys conducted during the week after the 2008 Spanish general elections. A typology of campaign Internet users is suggested, classifying political web surfers according to their level of campaign involvement and technopolitical sophistication: Attendants, participants, and activists. The socio-demographic features and online behavior of these three groups are compared to the avoidants, those Internet users who did not follow the campaign very closely. Web-based political activities were found to be closely related to the degree of interest in the electoral contest, and education explained the most pro-active behavior. Right-wing voters are becoming more important among the most engaged, whereas political centrism rules among the less mobilized. Online political activism is positively related to trust in institutions, self-efficacy and multi-media consumption.*

**Keywords:** *Cyber-campaigns, democracy, elections, Spain, Internet users.*

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## Introduction

The literature on the Internet and citizens' political participation in politics has brought into a new light the mass culture debates so aptly summarized by Eco (2004). The clash between the 'apocalyptic' and the 'integrated' has been updated to the Internet age, with some authors welcoming the new technopolitical practices that came along with the web (Barber, 1998; Budge, 1996), whereas others have voiced their concern over the negative consequences of new media for politics (Golding, 1996; Weber et al. 2003). Beyond any normative evaluation, empirical

research has shown that those institutions linked to traditional politics, such as parties and trade unions, do not exploit all the possibilities of new Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) (Smith, 1997; Bennett, 2003a). Which begs for a basic question that must be addressed: What is the threshold of political participation that authors deem optimal or reasonable?

Most studies dealing with technopolitical activism adopt, in general terms, the optimistic/pessimistic dichotomy referred above, opposing the 'reinforcement' and 'mobilization' theses. According to the first, Internet only works to reinforce the extant imbalances in participation (Hill and Hughes, 1998; Norris, 2000; Weber et al. 2003; Curtice and Norris, 2004). This thesis implies that cyber-activists have a similar profile and display similar activities both inside and outside the web, or that the Internet only complements traditional political behavior. The contending thesis holds that the Internet allows for the mobilization of formerly infra-represented or inactive groups (Delli Carpini, 2000; Ward et al. 2003; Tolbert and McNeal, 2003; Stanley and Weare, 2004), especially with tools such as Web 2.0 (Gibson and Ward, 2009).

Without proving true or false any of the contending sides, we see our contribution as a previous step to test the theoretical approaches on the present and future of cyber-activism, which insofar have not been grounded in enough empirical evidence. The study of Internet users during electoral periods is crucial to find out whether new media reinforce or weaken the barriers to participation experienced by citizens, be them because of inertias and institutional controls by classic political actors, or because of their socio-structural conditions. Our work aims at providing a first stepping stone into that avenue of research: We suggest a typology of campaign cyber-activists, describing their socio-demographic profiles and their political behavior. Our use of term 'activist' is distinct from Bennett's (2003b), since we use the term to label some individuals that engage with a high frequency in a number of activities on the web, while Bennett refers to the organized activity on the Web.

We base our claims on the results of two online surveys conducted during the week after the 2008 Spanish general elections. The first was concerned with general Internet users (hereafter, GIU) and the second with intensive Internet users (hereafter, IIU), that is, those who accessed the web with more frequency. Combining both data bases we built a new one to study the highly intensive Internet

users (hereafter, HIIU), which included those citizens who reported the highest frequencies of online activity (not necessarily of political nature) during the electoral campaign. After dealing with the levels of political use of the Internet in Spain in comparison to other countries, we propose a typology of Internet users and Internet activists based on their degree of involvement and the type of technopolitical activities displayed.

First, we talk about *campaign attendants*, defined as those citizens who browsed for information on political sites (e.g. candidate or social movement web pages) without pursuing any kind of political activity beyond information consumption. Second, we talk about *campaign participants*, who performed some of the more pro-active activities on the Internet (participated in blogs, forums or chats; signed petitions; sent e-mails to parties and candidates). Third, we suggest the term *campaign activists* to name those citizens who displayed all the activities referred above, using all the online resources available during the campaign. Fourth, we talk about *campaign avoidants*, those who never used the Internet for political purposes in the days leading to the general election. This latter group was the biggest of all four. Hence the pressing need of addressing the debate over the differences in online participation among countries.

Two arguments can be suggested to explain the consumption of political information online and the technopolitical uses of the web during elections. The first argument deals with the demand side, that is to say, the degree of technological diffusion (e.g. number of households with Internet access) and a population willing to make use of the possibilities offered by the web. The second argument is focused on the offer side and explains technopolitical practices by the popular appeal of online services and resources. As we shall see, our data shows that Internet users are more interested in political information than the general population, but such interest is not satisfied by the current offer, probably because the political websites in offer do not take advantage of all the interactive features allowed by the Internet.

### **Survey procedures**

Two surveys were conducted among Internet users in Spain. The first one was distributed among general Internet users (GIU, with 1,205 cases). The second was administered to those Internet users who went online at least twice a day, a group

we call intensive Internet users (IIU, with 1,005 cases). Participants in both surveys were selected by a quota sampling stratified by sex, age, education level and autonomous community of residence<sup>1</sup>, according to data from the *Asociación para la Investigación de Medios de Comunicación-Estudio General de Medios* (AIMC-EGM), the benchmark institution in Spain for the study of media audiences. Our universe is not that of the general population but that of Internet users. The results of both surveys (GIU and IIU) are quite similar (which reinforces internal validity) and the differences with the results of other surveys conducted among the general population<sup>2</sup> are explained by the differences between the two universes.

Internet users (both GIU and IIU) differ from the rest of Spaniards in their younger age<sup>3</sup>, their higher level of education<sup>4</sup>, and in the higher presence of males. They also differ in their geographical location (residents from Catalonia and Madrid were over-represented in our sample, whereas Andalusians were under-represented)<sup>5</sup>, as well as in their income levels, which are higher than the general population average. Our findings are consistent with the socio-demographic characteristics of American blog readers –younger and more educated than the non readers- reported by Lawrence et al. (2010: 146).

There were no significant differences in political leanings. The percentages of those Internet users who identify themselves as right-wingers and centrists do not differ from those of the general population. However, among Internet users there is a bigger presence of left-wingers and those who do not declare their political

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<sup>1</sup> Spain is divided into 17 autonomous communities, each with their own regional government and parliament.

<sup>2</sup> See INE 2008a, INE 2008b, and CIS 2008 as examples of surveys on Internet use that were administered to a sample of the general population.

<sup>3</sup> 86% of respondents were below 44 years old, whereas in the CIS Barometer respondents below that age comprised 51% of the sample. Those older than 55 years of age represented 4% of our respondents, and 33% of the CIS participants.

<sup>4</sup> Nearly half of the surveyed Internet users (49%) have completed some University studies (as compared to 19% in the CIS Barometer). They are even more numerous than those who have completed secondary education only, 43% (28% in the CIS Barometer). Those who did not go beyond primary studies were a minority, approaching 8% (44% in the CIS survey).

<sup>5</sup> Catalonia comprises 23% of our sample (whereas it represents 16% of the Spanish population), Madrid 18% (its real weight, in population terms, is 14%) and Andalusia 13% (its actual weight is 18%).

inclinations (this trend is more acute among general than among intensive Internet users)<sup>6</sup>. On vote recall, the percentage of those who voted for the conservative *Partido Popular* is almost the same between intensive Internet users and those Internet users surveyed by the *Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas* (CIS)<sup>7</sup>. As compared to the general population, our respondents were less supportive of the Spanish Socialists and more supportive of left-wing nationalist parties, something explained by the bigger weight of Catalan residents in our sample.

Although differences are not big, IIU are more trustful of their ability to communicate with politicians than GIU, a feature that could enhance their online activity. Nevertheless, both groups agree in their opinion over the low esteem that politicians confer to the views of common people. Disappointment and disillusionment with politics are similar between the two groups of Internet users and the general population.<sup>8</sup>

In sum, our survey respondents differ from the general population in terms of sex (there is a higher presence of males) age (they are younger), and education level (higher among our participants). Regarding their political leanings, we hardly appreciate any differences that could not be attributable to geographical biases in our sample, which themselves are explained by the over-representation of some regions like Catalonia or Madrid. It is remarkable that Internet users are more likely to declare their political inclinations than the general population. This may have to do with their socio-demographic characteristics: The younger and the more educated, the more likely are respondents to express their political preferences.

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<sup>6</sup> As compared to the CIS survey, a higher percentage of respondents to our survey self-identify as left-voters (8% more among GIU and 7% among IIU). Non-respondents to the question on political leanings increase their numbers in a similar proportion (8% and 7% more among GIU and IIU respectively).

<sup>7</sup> 34% of GIU and 32% of IIU claims to have voted for the PSOE (social democrat voters were 37% in the CIS survey cited above), whereas 21% and 23% respectively say they have chosen the PP (the figure of conservative voters was 24% in the CIS survey).

<sup>8</sup> According to the CIS' October 2007 Barometer, 70% of respondents agreed with the sentence "Politicians do not care much about what people like me think" (CIS, 2007). In our surveys, the percentage of GIU and IIU who say politicians do not care about the opinions from common people is 71% and 70%, respectively.

### **Offer and demand of political information**

The differences among countries regarding Internet use as a means for electoral information are important, but they cannot be explained by their differences in technological diffusion alone. As a matter of fact, in 2007 almost two-thirds (62%) of US households were online, whereas in Spain less than half (45%) had access to the Internet, a similar figure to France (49%) and Italy (43%) (OECD, 2008). However, the US presidential campaign was followed online by 42% percent of the population (Smith and Rainie, 2008; Winneg et al. 2008), whereas in Spain this proportion was below 10% (CIS post-electoral survey, 2008).

The Spanish case is by no means unique in Southern Europe. In Spain 39% of its Internet connections are broadband; in France this type of connection is available to 43% of the population, in Italy to 25%. The USA is not that far ahead on these measures, as broadband connections barely surpass 50% (OECD, 2008). Some similarities can be found as well when comparing Internet users. According to a survey conducted among French web surfers (TNS-Sofres 2007), a similar proportion of users followed the national electoral campaign in France (64% according to Sofres) and Spain (61% of our GIU sample), and visited blogs or forums during the campaign (26% in France and 21% in Spain, according to Sofres and our GIU survey).

There exist relevant similarities on the demand side, but also on the offer side. The latest studies on the online activity of political parties in Spain, France, Italy and United Kingdom, report analogous evaluations. Candidates use the Internet to facilitate communication between the elites (Gibson and Ward, 2009), ignore the most participatory features enabled by the web and favour 'managerial' uses instead (Casero, 2007), replicating online the same information they would offer offline (Padró-Solanet and Cardenal, 2008; Vaccari, 2008a, 2008b; Vedel and Michalska, 2007; Sudulich, 2009). Differences in Internet diffusion are therefore a relevant explanatory factor, but not the only one, of citizens' technopolitical behavior during electoral campaigns. In Southern Europe the quality of the offer is poor (Vaccari, 2008c), even in countries that score high on the indicator WWP (Party Web Penetration) (Calderaro 2009: 13), and this can also explain a lower political use of the Internet.

In any case, US studies have shown that, in a relatively short period of time, the proportion of those using the Internet for getting campaign information is growing exponentially, as it went from 16% to 42% in eight years (Smith and Rainie, 2008). Shall something similar happen in Southern European countries? If we take into account the fact that interest in the campaign is higher among the online population (61% of GIU followed the campaign somewhat or very closely) than among the general population (49% of voters followed the campaign according to the CIS), such evolution is foreseeable, provided that both Internet access and quality of the offer increase.

**Table 1. General Internet Users (GIU) survey and CIS Post-electoral survey (on the general population) compared.**

	CIS		GIU
	%	Population size (estimate) <sup>9</sup>	%
Used the Internet to get campaign information <sup>10</sup>	9.9% (599)	3,324,878	68,1% (821)
Visited websites of <sup>11</sup> :			
Parties/candidates	23.4%	778,021	45%
Citizen organizations/social movements	5.4%	179,543	41%
Blogs, forums, chats	22.2%	738,123	31%

Sources: CIS (Post-electoral survey 2008), INE (Electoral Census 2008) and GIU survey 2008 (n=1,205)

<sup>9</sup> The estimation of population size was done using data from the CIS post-electoral survey (Study No. 2757) and, according to its technical data, from the 2008 electoral census excluding the census of non-residents (known as CERA), and the populations of the autonomous cities of Ceuta and Melilla. Quantities are drawn from the average values of confidence intervals, calculated according sample error and confidence levels.

<sup>10</sup> Percentage calculated from the 6,083 cases in the CIS post-electoral survey and the 1,205 in the GIU survey.

<sup>11</sup> In the following three categories, the percentages are calculated from the total number of those who reported getting political information from the Internet on the CIS post-electoral survey, 599 cases, and from the total number of those who checked some sort of political information on the Web during the campaign with a frequency above once per month (which allows for a comparison with the CIS survey) in the GIU survey, 821 cases. The percentages calculated from the total number of Internet users interviewed in the GIU survey would be 20% (visited political party or candidate websites), 17% (citizen organizations or civic movement websites) and 17% (visited blogs, forums, and chats).

Those consuming political information and using techno-political resources constitute a minority. Indeed, as Table 1 shows, less than 10% of the total population got political information on the Internet, of which 23% visited political party or candidate websites, 22% entered forums, chats or blogs, and 5% sought alternative information at civic organization or social movement websites (CIS Postelectoral Survey, 2008). Among GIU, political party websites served as a source of campaign information for one in five Internet users (20%), whereas social movement and civic organization websites, along with blogs, were visited by 16% of respondents. But if we focus only on those Internet users who effectively sought campaign information on the web, percentages vary significantly, as 45% of them accessed the official websites of political parties, and 41% visited social movement websites, and 31% blogs, forums or chats dealing with the campaign. The group of those who used the Internet for getting campaign information is a minority, but a highly active one. Their online political behavior is described next.

### **Online activism and politics**

No significant differences were found between general and intensive Internet users regarding online campaign activities (Table 2).

Both kinds of Internet users, regular surfers and those who went online at least twice a day, made a very similar use of the web. No relevant differences are found between their frequencies of Internet use, as these differences range between 5 and 2 percent. The higher frequencies reported by IIU, specifically in those activities that distinguish the Internet from other media (such as consuming alternative information provided by non-mainstream political actors), are understandable given the time they spend online. But, all in all, none of the groups engaged intensively in the most participatory and pro-active activities.

Our data show there is a gradation in the divide to be bridged in order to become politically active online. The various possibilities for participation require different degrees of difficulty. The differentiation between more or less pro-active activities can be found in other typologies of new modes of collective action, as the one presented by Van Laer and Van Aelst (2010). These authors distinguish off line activities -that can be supported or facilitated by the Internet- from the new forms of on line activities -that are genuinely Internet based-, and then they consider the

differences due to the higher or lower thresholds of involvement of each activity. For this reason we decided to differentiate, on the one hand, those activities that do not require much action on the side of the Internet user, who basically remains an information receiver. On the other hand, we have considered those other activities where Internet surfers adopt a more active role, building a communicative action of their own and displaying web-specific political practices.

**Table 2. Less and more pro-active campaign activities by general and intensive Internet users (in percentages)**

		<b>General Internet Users (GIU)</b>	<b>Intensive Internet Users (IIU)</b>
	N	1205	1005
<b>Less pro-active activities</b>	<b>Search campaign information</b>		
	Low freq. (Max. once a month)	69.4	67.4
	Medium freq (Max. several times a week)	24.4	24.7
	High freq. (everyday/several times a day)	6.2	7.9
	Total	100	100
	<b>Visit candidate websites</b>		
	Low freq. (Max. once a month)	81.9	80.5
	Medium freq (Max. several times a week)	15.1	15.6
	High freq. (everyday/several times a day)	3.0	3.8
	Total	100	100
	<b>Visit social movement websites</b>		
	Low freq. (Max. once a month)	84.6	82.4
	Medium freq (Max. several times a week)	11.9	13.3
	High freq. (everyday/several times a day)	3.5	4.2
	Total	100	100
<b>More pro-active activities</b>	<b>Exchange e-mails</b>		
	Low freq. (Max. once a month)	65.1	63.0
	Medium freq (Max. several times a week)	28.1	29.8
	High freq. (everyday/several times a day)	6.7	7.2
	Total	100	100
	<b>Participate in forums or chats</b>		
	Low freq. (Max. once a month)	85.6	81.5
	Medium freq (Max. several times a week)	12.0	14.0
	High freq. (everyday/several times a day)	2.4	4.5
	Total	100	100
	<b>Sign petitions</b>		
	Low freq. (Max. once a month)	85.3	84.7
	Medium freq (Max. several times a week)	11.6	12.8
	High freq. (everyday/several times a day)	3.1	2.5
	Total	100	100
<b>Send e-mails to parties/candidates</b>			
Low freq. (Max. once a month)	90.3	91.8	

	Medium freq (Max. several times a week)	7.5	6.0
	High freq. (everyday/several times a day)	2.2	2.1
	Total	100	100

*Sources:* GIU survey (2008) y IIU survey (2008).

Searching for political information is among the less demanding activities. If we sum up medium and high frequencies, we can say that one in three Internet users sought information about the campaign. Almost one in five users visited candidate websites, and, between 15 per cent of GIU and 17 per cent of IIU browsed social movement websites quite frequently. These figures tell us about the existence of motivated citizens who want to get information about electoral strategies, who want to know first-hand about the opinions held by the competing candidates and by civic organizations (to whom they may also send their own opinions). The order of preference expressed reflects the growing specialization of online content (general, party, and social movement websites) and the degree of personalization in the individual search for online information.

Among the most pro-active behavior, the most frequent activity was the exchange of e-mails with political information, of which more than half (64%) had a humorous component. In any case, more than one third of Internet users sent political messages several times a day or several times a week. Their kidding mood, in the form of verbal or visual jokes, Youtube videos or Power Point presentations is revealing of the complicity and informality of the communication codes employed by many politicized Internet users.

Participation in online forums and chats is as frequent as petition signing. But these activities are far less important than e-mail exchanges. 14 per cent of GIU and 18 per cent of IIU uploaded commentaries or chatted several times a day and several times a week. 14 and 15 per cent, respectively, signed petitions. These low frequencies and their decreasing progression would be explained by the increasing cost and personal involvement required by these activities: One can post anonymous comments (hence their higher frequency), but signatures cannot be anonymous by definition. Lastly, with almost 10% of GIU and 8% of IIU, were the e-mails sent to parties and candidates to express opinions. Internet users do not expect politicians to pay much attention to their concerns, even when they are more trustful of politicians than the general population.

In any case, these limitations to participation were more effective among GIU than among IIU, given the higher predisposition of the second to participate in practically all the aforementioned activities.<sup>12</sup>

### **Participants and activists**

Since there were no substantial differences between intensive and general Internet users regarding their online campaign behavior, we paid attention to those users within any of the two groups who engaged frequently or very frequently in a set of selected Internet activities. These new group was labeled as ‘highly intensive Internet users’ (HIIU)<sup>13</sup>. Depending on the intensity of their online political behavior, the members of this subsample were subdivided into three groups: *attendants*, *participants*, and *activists*. The first are those highly intensive users who engaged in *all* those campaign activities of a more passive character—searching for information, visiting candidate and social movement websites—with a medium or high frequency. The second were those HIIU who performed *all* the most pro-active activities—exchanging e-mails, participating in forums and chats, signing petitions and sending e-mails to parties/candidates—with a medium or high frequency. These *participants* are fewer in number than the previous group (96 individuals compared to 164), as expected.

Taking into account that the two groups referred so far are not mutually exclusive, we also considered those users who engaged in all the activities described above with a medium or high frequency (a total of 78 individuals). We have named them *activists*, because they were the most engaged in the campaign, displaying all the technopolitical activities enabled by the web during the campaign. On the

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<sup>12</sup> The only categories where GIU are ahead of IIU is on sending of e-mails to parties or candidates, but the percent difference between the two groups is less than 2%.

<sup>13</sup> Taking into account the selection of cases in the two referred surveys was done following the same criteria, and considering that there are no differences between them as regards to the socio-demographic features, we deem the resulting database as adequate for the analysis of a series of categories that would otherwise have too small sample sizes. The combined file includes the intensive Internet users and those general users who can also be regarded as “intensive”, as they perform several times a day some of the following activities: Search information on engines like Google; Check e-mail; Use Instant Messaging services (e.g. Messenger); Visit specialized webs on personal hobbies (music, movies, humor and puzzles, computers, literature, adult entertainment, photography...); Download music or movies using peer-to-peer applications (e.g. E-mule, Bit Torrent); Go shopping (e.g. books, plane tickets).

opposite side, we find those Internet users who have not participated in any of the activities discussed with a medium or high frequency (869 cases), who could be labeled as *avoidants*.

**Table 3. “Presential” campaign activities performed by attendants, participants, activists and avoidants (in percentages)**

	Attendants	Participants	Activists	Avoidants
n <sup>14</sup>	104	55	47	476
Wrote an e-mail or letter to a public official	19.2	25.5	27.7	0.8
Wrote an e-mail or letter to a news media editor	18.3	21.8	21.3	-
Tried to convince a friend or relative to vote for a particular party	44.2	34.5	36.2	12.2
Sent an e-mail or mobile phone message to a friend or relative suggesting a party to vote for	26.9	29.1	29.8	1.5
Attended a political rally or demonstration	39.4	29.1	29.8	4.4
Attended a gathering of a civic organization	28.8	25.5	23.4	5.5
Is a member or a former member of a political pressure group	18.3	14.5	12.8	1.7
Worked as volunteer for a political party	16.3	14.5	17.0	1.3
Subscribed to the content of a political website	15.4	14.5	17.0	0.6
Befriended a political group using a social networking site	16.3	14.5	17.0	0.6
Did not engage in any of the above activities	22.1	29.1	29.8	76.9

Source: IIU survey (2008).

Although the sizes of these sub-samples are reduced, the data obtained brings valuable new information that must be carefully analyzed in order to understand the online and offline participation of the most politically involved citizens.

Regarding traditional or “presential” activities (see Table 3)<sup>15</sup>, more than three in four avoidants (77%) did not engage in any of them, a percentage that comes down to 30% among participants and activists, and even to 22% among attendants.

<sup>14</sup> For sample size specifications, please see endnote xi.

<sup>15</sup> The following discussion and the data shown on Table 3 have been drawn from our sample of intensive Internet users (n= 1005), as it is only in the questionnaire used with group that questions related to these activities were asked. It is for this reason that the groups of attendants (n=104),

The most frequent activity in all groups was that of trying to convince friends to vote, although this was far more common among attendants (44%) than among activists (36%) and participants (35%). This was also the most frequent activity among avoidants, but with a far lower percentage (12%) to those of the groups described. No other action goes beyond 2% among avoidants except attending a gathering of a civic or social organization (6%) and attending a political rally or demonstration (4%).

It was precisely going to a political rally or demonstration the second most frequent presential activity among attendants (39% of the cases). This activity was also the second most important for participants and activists (29% and 30% respectively), although within these groups another activity shares identical percentages: sending an e-mail or a mobile phone message to a friend suggesting a candidate to vote for. Such activity was performed by a slightly lower percentage of attendants (27%).

On the contrary, attendants went to gatherings organized by civic or social organizations (29%) with some more frequency than participants (26%) and activists (23%). These latter two groups are ahead of attendants when it comes to writing a letter or an e-mail to a public official (28% activists, 26% participants and 19% attendants) and, to a lesser extent, when it comes to writing a letter or an e-mail to a news media editor (22% participants, 21% activists, 18% attendants). Other campaign activities are performed by between 13 and 18% of all the groups analyzed, except the avoidants.

These results are clearly consonant with the differences in political participation – voting, donating to a candidate, and trying to persuade someone to vote for a particular candidate- among readers of political blogs, readers of non-political blogs and non readers, reported by Lawrence et al. (2010: 149-150): political participation increases in the same direction as activities of information searching in the web.

### **Socio-demographic profiles**

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participants (n=55), activists (n=47) and avoidants (n=476) have smaller sample sizes than the combined file of highly intensive Internet users (HIIU).

We now describe the socio-demographic features of attendants, participants, activists and avoidants (Table 4).

**Table 4. Socio-demographic profiles of attendants, participants, activists and avoidants**

	Attendants	Participants	Activists	Avoidants
n	164	96	78	869
<b>Gender</b>				
Male	77.4	76.0	74.4	66.2
Female	22.6	24.0	25.6	33.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<b>Age by groups</b>				
Less than 20 years old	4.9	4.2	3.8	8.2
20-24 years old	22.6	21.9	23.1	16.5
25-34 years old	45.7	54.2	52.6	41.3
35-44 years old	14.0	12.5	14.1	20.9
45-54 years old	8.5	6.3	5.1	9.6
55-64 years old	3.7	1.0	1.3	2.9
65 years old or above	0.6	0.0	0.0	0.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<b>Civil status</b>				
Married	32.3	30.2	29.5	32.9
Single	62.8	63.5	64.1	60.9
Widow/er	-	1.0	-	1.0
Separated	2.4	3.1	3.8	1.8
Divorced	2.4	2.1	2.6	3.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<b>Education level</b>				
Primary education	6.1	4.2	3.8	9.0
Secondary education (BUP/Bachillerato/FP)	42.1	42.7	44.9	42.0
Some University studies	51.8	53.1	51.3	49.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<b>Income level</b>				
900 € or less	23.9	21.7	27.3	23.0
Between 901 and 1,200 €	23.2	25.3	22.7	22.1
Between 1,201 and 1,800 €	26.1	28.9	28.8	25.6
Between 1,801 and 2,400 €	12.7	8.4	9.1	14.7
2,401 € or more	14.1	15.7	12.1	14.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<b>Ideological self-placement</b>				
Left	46.5	37.4	39.7	48.8

Center	25.5	27.5	24.7	37.3
Right	28.0	35.2	35.6	13.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<b>Party voted on 9 March 2008 (Spanish general elections)</b>				
PSOE (social democrats)	37.8	34.1	32.9	40.1
PP (conservatives)	38.5	47.1	48.6	25.1
IU-ICV (post-communist left/greens)	8.8	5.9	5.7	6.4
PNV (Right-wing Basque nationalists)	1.4	1.2	1.4	1.2
CiU (Right-wing Catalan nationalists)	2.0	1.2	1.4	3.6
ERC (Left-wing Catalan nationalists)	2.0	1.2		3.1
BNG (Left-wing Galician nationalists)	0.7	-	-	1.1
Others	8.8	9.4	10.0	19.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Sources: GIU survey (2008) and IIU survey (2008)

Among attendants there is a high percentage of males, more than three in four respondents. This proportion is also true among participants and activists. Within the group of avoidants a more even distribution between males and females is observed (66% and 34% respectively), even more balanced than within the group of HIIU (69% and 31%).

As for age, among avoidants, the groups with a higher relative weight, as compared to the other groups of Internet users, are the young: Those below 20 years of age (8%), and the groups between 35 and 44 years (21%) and between 45 and 54 years (close to 10%). Almost 70% of all Internet users is found among the young, that is, those whose ages range between 20 and 24 years (23%) and between 25 and 34 years (48%). A similar distribution is observed for participants (with 54% and 22% in the referred age groups) and for activists (53% and 23% respectively).

There are few differences regarding civil status, although there is a slightly higher percentage of singles among the three active groups as compared to the group of avoidants.

Education level is higher among participants, and the percentage in the “Primary education” category (4%) is half as that among avoidants (9%), a difference that turns bigger in the “Some University studies” category. Nevertheless, differences in income level are so reduced (generally inferior to 5%) that no different profiles can be discerned on this category. These results contrast partially with the ones offered

by Scholzman et al. (2010) that show that there is a strong positive relationship between socioeconomic status and Internet-based political engagement among Internet users.

Regarding ideological self-placement, the percentage of those leaning to the left is similar between avoidants and attendants (49% and 47%). It is striking to find that, among avoidants, the percentage of centrists is clearly superior to any of the other groups (37% as compared to 25% in the other groups). Also surprising is the right-leaning among attendants and, especially, among participants and activists. This same pattern is observed as regards to electoral behavior, with 40% of avoidants declaring a vote for the PSOE (social democrats) in the 9 March 2008 elections, with percentages of left-leaning vote decreasing among attendants (38%), participants (34%) and activists (33%). This trend is reverted when the percentages of vote for the PP (conservatives) are compared: From the 25% of right-wing voters among avoidants we go to a 39% of right-wing vote among attendants, 47% among participants, and 49% among activists.

Attendants and participants agree in their trust towards political institutions (Table 5), with an average score of 6 points, slightly higher than that among activists, whereas avoidants score an average of 4.5 points.

The three active groups give even lower scores to the chances of ordinary people to make their voices heard among politicians, with an average score of 5 points. Again, avoidants are far more pessimistic on this respect (with an average score 3.5 points). Similar scores are given to the relevance that politicians give to the opinions of ordinary citizens.

The most popular medium to follow campaign news among all the groups analyzed was TV (news broadcasts), with minor differences in percentages (Table 6). Second and third in importance were other TV shows and the digital versions of newspapers. This is where the similarities in order of preference for campaign information outlets end. For attendants, participants and activists the fourth, fifth, and sixth positions are occupied by the country-wide print press, the party or candidate websites and the regional or local print press; whereas for the avoidants the order of preference is: Regional or local print press, country-wide newspapers, and friends, acquaintances or personal contacts. That is to say, for the most active Internet users, campaign websites are one of the five most utilized media for the

following of campaign news, whereas among avoidants this means of keeping up with the elections falls down to the tenth position.

**Table 5. Scales of politico-institutional trust among attendants, participants, activists and avoidants (in percentages)**

<b>How much do you trust on political institutions? (0 = no trust at all and 10 = completely trust)</b>													
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total	Average
Attendants	5.0	5.6	6.9	11.3	4.4	26.9	16.3	11.9	9.4	1.9	0.6	100.0	5.8
Participants	5.4	7.5	5.4	10.8	4.3	26.9	17.2	12.9	7.5	1.1	1.1	100.0	5.8
Activists	5.3	6.6	6.6	6.6	3.9	28.9	19.7	13.2	7.9	-	1.3	100.0	5.9
Avoidants	15.1	8.2	14.5	13.0	9.9	18.4	10.9	7.0	2.0	0.5	0.6	100.0	4.5
<b>How likely are common people to make their opinions heard by politicians? (0 to 10)</b>													
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total	Average
Attendants	8.8	8.1	12.5	11.3	12.5	23.1	7.5	11.9	3.1	-	1.3	100.0	5.0
Participants	11.8	5.4	15.1	4.3	14.0	19.4	8.6	16.1	3.2	-	2.2	100.0	5.1
Activists	10.5	3.9	13.2	3.9	14.5	22.4	7.9	18.4	3.9	-	1.3	100.0	5.3
Avoidants	23.6	15.1	17.5	14.5	8.7	9.9	5.7	3.7	0.5	0.2	0.5	100.0	3.5
<b>How much importance do politicians give to the opinions from common people? (0 to 10)</b>													
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total	Average
Attendants	11.8	7.5	9.9	14.3	14.3	14.9	9.3	9.9	5.0	2.5	0.6	100.0	5.0
Participants	12.8	3.2	8.5	12.8	10.6	17.0	11.7	13.8	6.4	2.1	1.1	100.0	5.3
Activists	11.8	2.6	3.9	10.5	13.2	19.7	14.5	13.2	7.9	1.3	1.3	100.0	5.6

Avoidants	24.9	13.0	16.7	15.6	10.8	9.2	5.6	3.0	0.7	0.1	0.4	100.0	3.5
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Sources: GIU survey (2008) and IIU survey (2008).

The media chosen in seventh, eighth and ninth place by the more active groups are, with little variation in rank order, social movement websites, journalist-authored blogs, and friends or acquaintances. On the contrary, among the avoidants these positions are occupied by several radio shows.

**Table 6. Campaign media consumption by attendants, participants, activists, and avoidants (in percentages)**

	Attendants	Participants	Activists	Avoidants
n	164	96	78	869
Television (Newscasts)	71.3	66.7	65.4	65.4
Television (Other shows)	65.2	58.3	65.4	47.8
Newspapers (Country-wide)	54.3	46.9	47.4	28.4
Newspapers (Regional or local)	52.4	42.7	41.0	32.1
Radio (Newscasts)	36.6	32.3	30.8	23.6
Radio (Talk radio)	36.0	34.4	29.5	21.3
Radio (Other)	32.9	29.2	30.8	14.5
Internet (Digital versions of print newspapers)	65.2	55.2	53.8	33.1
Internet (Journalist-authored blogs)	41.5	40.6	41.0	10.5
Internet (Party or candidate websites)	53.0	46.9	47.4	8.5
Internet (Social movement websites)	46.3	36.5	37.2	8.6
Friends, acquaintances, and personal contacts	39.0	40.6	38.5	26.1
Other	0.6	-	-	0.6
None of the above	1.2	1.0	1.3	10.7

Sources: GIU survey (2008) and IIU survey (2008).

Also worth mentioning is that eleven of every hundred avoidants report not having used any of the media referred above for following campaign news, whereas among the active Internet users this proportion is reduced to one in a hundred.

## Conclusions

There is a clear relationship between the intensity of Internet use and the display of the most pro-active technopolitical activities. However, this relationship is still too weak to assert that more Internet diffusion equals to an increased electoral use of the web. Instead, we think this result points out to limitations related to the

contents in offer and the resources available on the Internet rather than to a lack of political interest among Internet users. The scarce technopolitical uses of the web in Southern Europe are not attributable to a lesser technological diffusion or to a lack of digital literacy only. Internet users profess a far higher interest in elections than the general population, while agreeing with citizens at large in their skepticism over the receptiveness of candidates to the opinions of the common man. There is little doubt that more open and participatory contents would encourage a more extensive diffusion of cyber-political behavior.

The distribution of the different technopolitical activities during the campaign is related to the level of commitment they imply. The preference for the mere consumption of information—the most relevant category—goes hand in hand with the degree of specificity in the messages, giving priority to mainstream news media, then to party websites, and then to social movement websites. Following in importance are the forwarding of interpersonal messages of humorous tone, and participation in forums and chats. The last positions are occupied by the sending of messages to candidates and parties, along with the signing of petitions.

The level of commitment depends itself on the communicative effort required (from the forwarding of a message elaborated by others to the creation of own content) and on the degree of anonymity between sender and receivers (from the forwarding of non-authored messages to known receivers, to the personal signing of petitions, by way of commenting on blogs or chats, using a pseudonym or not). These are variables that remind us of similar ones that have been used in classic studies on political participation, although the personal costs of participation are considerably lowered by ICTs.

As for the kind of political behavior, attendants are more active in offline activities than participants. The more intensive the levels of online political activism, the less common are face-to-face activities like convincing friends or acquaintances to vote for a given candidate, or attendance to political rallies or demonstrations. These latter activities are less present in those groups that are more pro-active online. This notwithstanding, traditional and Internet-based activism remain complementary, given that the three groups of active Internet users show similar percentages on the different activities under study.

As regards to socio-demographic profiles, those citizens who were more indifferent and less committed in technopolitical terms approached a balanced gender distribution. Perhaps because of the availability of more spare time and the enjoyment of the necessary competences and skills, those who were not married and those Internet users with better education displayed the most pro-active behavior. Income level does not predict any relevant differences among the groups, as they all enjoy a medium to high socio-economic status.

When considering ideology, it is noticeable that right-wing voters are becoming more important among the more politically engaged, whereas centrism rules among avoidants. The social democratic vote reaches 40% among avoidants and descends as the level of political involvement increases. In fact, only a third of activists are socialist voters. Just the opposite happens with the PP (the conservative party), which was voted by one in four avoidants, but was the party of preference for nearly half of participants and activists. This is in clear contrast with the former digital hegemony enjoyed by the social left in the previous Spanish general elections of 2004 (Sampedro, 2005, 2008).

A higher trust in institutions and in the ability of regular citizens to make their opinions heard among the political class is a fixture of the most active Internet users. Cyber-activism is also positively related to a more intense multi-media consumption, in which electoral websites are among the first five campaign resources employed by the most active Internet users. Only one in a hundred activists reported no interest on any online medium whatsoever, as compared to one in ten attendants who were indifferent to any form of online campaign activity. The persistent relevance of mainstream media among the most engaged online makes of activists one of the most interesting profiles in terms of mobilization and electoral strategy.

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